

CHAMBERS ḤUJURĀT, BUYŪT

Definitions and Usage

Chambers in this entry refer to the dwelling places of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, and his wives, Allah be well-pleased with them all. These are mentioned in the Qurʾān once as *ḥujurāt* (sing. *ḥujra*, *ḥujar* if referring to three) and three times as *buyūt* (“houses”). The former appears in Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt (Q 49) and the latter three times in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb: once (Q 33:53) as ascribed to the Prophet himself (*buyūt al-Nabī*, “houses of the Prophet”), and twice (Q 33:33-34) to his wives (*buyūtikumna*). The commentaries treat *ḥujurāt* and *buyūt* as synonymous, referring to the dwellings of the wives of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, which were constructed around his Mosque in Madina (cf. Bayḍāwī; Baghawī; Ālūsī). The root *ḥ-j-r* originally bears the meaning of prevention (*manʿ*) and enclosure (*iḥāṭa*) (Ibn Fāris; Fayrūzābādī). Derivatives of this root occur 21 times in the Qurʾān denoting (apart from the 16 with the meaning of “stone”) something forbidden or restricted (Q 6:138; 25:22, 53), someone under another’s guardianship (Q 4:23), or a person of discernment (Q 89:5).

The root *b-y-t* bears the meaning of “house, building, tent, apartment, abode (*q.v.*), place of return, and site of reunion (*majmaʿ al-shaml*),” whence the usage of *bayt* for a verse hemistich, “because it is a collection of utterances, letters, and meanings on a specific rhythm” (Ibn Fāris). Derivatives of this root occur 73 times in the Qurʾān.

Location and Description

Each of the Prophet’s wives had one chamber appended to his Mosque (cf. al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ* 2:13; Zamakhsharī; Ālūsī, *sub* Q 49:4). Two were built at the time of the initial construction of the Mosque, shortly after the Prophet’s arrival in Madina in Rabīʿ I 0/September 622. One of these two was for his wife Sawda bt. Zamʿa (d. 54/674), and the other for his betrothed, ʿĀisha bt. Abī Bakr (d. 58/678), whom he wed shortly after the completion of the Mosque. Both of these chambers were contiguous with the eastern wall of the Mosque (al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 2:52). Seven more were added later. Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd b. Manīʿ al-Zuhrī (d. 230/ca.845), the author of the *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, reports on the authority of ʿImrān b. Anas that of the nine, “four houses (*buyūt*)

were made of adobe (*labīn*) and included rooms made of palm fronds, and five houses were made of palm fronds but had no [separate] rooms... and they were three cubits [long] and one cubit [wide]” (Ibn Saʿd, 1:387). The cubits in this latter report are clearly different from those in al-Bukhārī, *Adab* p. 209-210; see below.

Regarding their size Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (194-256/810-870) reports on the authority of Dāwūd b. Qays who said: “I saw the chambers made of palm fronds covered by layers of animal hair. The width of the house from the door of the chamber to the door of the house was, I think, about six to seven cubits (approx. 3-3.5 meters), and they were about ten cubits (approx. 5.2 meters) from inside.” Al-Bukhārī also reports that Ḥurayth b. al-Sāʿib said he heard al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (21-110/642-728) say: “I used to enter the houses of the wives of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, during the Caliphate of ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (d. 35/656), and I could reach the ceiling with my hands” (al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab* p. 209-210; Suyūṭī, *Durr*, Ālūsī, *sub* Q 49:4; also in Ibn Saʿd, 1:388).

Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Khathʿamī al-Suhaylī (508-581/1114-1185) provides a detailed description: “As for his houses, there were nine of them. Some [were built] with palm fronds and mud, while the ceiling was made from palm fronds; others [were built] from stones put atop one another, with a palm-frond ceiling... his bed, upon him blessings and peace, was made of few timbers joined by fiber-thread” (al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ* 2:13-14). The doors of the chambers opened toward the Mosque. In addition to these nine dwellings, certain Companions (including Abū Bakr (d. 13/634), ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (13_{BEH}-40/609-660), Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī (d. 52/672), and al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 32/653) had houses with doors opening onto the Mosque. Shortly before his death, the Prophet ordered that all these doors be walled up, including those of the chambers, except for the door of Abū Bakr (cf. Ibn Saʿd, 2:175).

All of the chambers were incorporated into the Mosque during the reign of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik (50-668/96-715)—an act to which many of the Followers (*tābiʿūn*) objected. The Follower Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib (d. 94/713) is reported to have said on this occasion, “I wish they had left them as they were, for the people of Madina and people coming from other lands to see what the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, had been content