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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Socio-Economic Conditions of the Arabian Peninsula Before Islam

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research is to analyze the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Arabian Peninsula Before Islam. This type of research is qualitative. The data sources used secondary data from books and scientific articles. The data analysis technique was by using qualitative data analysis techniques. The Arabian peninsula's economy relies on trade and agriculture. Their expertise in trading cannot be separated from the location of their region, which is very strategic in international trade routes. It's just that before Islam came, the people of the Arabian peninsula, especially in business transactions, were still steeped in the practice of usury.

**Keywords :** socio, economic, arabian peninsula

## 1. Introduction

Long before the mission of Prophet Muhammad saw, the Arabian peninsula was already known as a trading area (Almazroui, Islam, et al., 2020; Patlakas et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2023). The region, characterized by its barren and arid desert landscape, with only a small amount of land that can be used for gardening or farming (Almazroui & Saeed, 2020; Onley et al., 2020; Wehbe et al., 2021). For the Arabs, buying and selling or trade was their main element in sustaining life. Even though the Arabian peninsula is a desert area, its location is geographically right in the middle of the world. In this area, world trade routes between east and west (Almazroui & Saeed, 2020; Horan et al., 2023; Saeed et al., 2023; Shibl et al., 2012).

Allah SWT. stated in the Qur'an surah al-Quraish describes an example of the Quraysh (ancestors of the Prophet and high-ranking Arabs) who were able to become global players with all the limited natural resources in their country. Allah said, "*Because of the habits of the Quraysh. (That is) the habit of making trade trips in winter and summer.*" Commentators or interpreters, both classical and contemporary, in interpreting this verse, explain that winter trade trips were made to the north, such as Syria, Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, and parts of Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, summer trips were made to the south, around Yemen, Oman, or working with Chinese and Indian traders who stopped at the international port of Aden.

Philip K Hitti in the History of the Arabs even mentioned the Arabs as the earliest actors in international relations. According to him, the Arabian peninsula was well known to the Greeks and Romans as its location was on their trade route to India and China. The inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula were intermediary traders in the southern seas, such the Mediterranean peoples. Because of this strategic location, the rulers of the world, Romans always wanted to expand Arab lands. This aims to control trade routes that were monopolized by the Arabs. Nevertheless, they were never able to control the Arabs (Antonius et al., 1938).



Historians write that many ancient Arab nations controlled international trade routes, among them, 'Tadmur, Saba', Nabath, Himyar, and so on. For example, the Palmyrene people in Sham (now Syria). They are known as rulers of international business. In the city of Tadmur, trade from East to West met, from Europe to Mesopotamia. Likewise, trade from South to North, namely traders from the East (China, India), to the West (Europe) via Yemen. This international trade all meets in Palmyra. In other words, the City of Tadmur became the "Pearl of the Desert" and a city where commercial caravans coming from the four corners of the world that were famous at that time met and returned (Yahya, 1985).

Besides being known as a commercial area, the Arabian peninsula also has a place that is often visited by people from all over the world, known as "*Baitullah*" (house of Allah), which is in the city of Makkah or also called Bakkah. Apart from being a center of worship, the city of Makkah is also a center of commerce and social interaction across countries, races, ethnicities, cultures, and religions. During the time of his son, *Prophet Ibrahim*, Ismail *alaihi salam* and his mother, they reached Mecca, the area was already known as the "perfume route" because it was passed by traders carrying perfume, incense, and other goods brought from South Arabia to the Mediterranean region (Lings, 1983).

One city apart from Mecca, which also does not escape attention is Yathrib. Makkah and Yathrib both became prosperous trading cities. Philip K. Hitti mentioned that long before the "spice route" crossed, Mecca had long been a stopover for trade travelers from Ma'rib to Gaza. The progressive people of Makkah and their commercial instincts succeeded in turning the city into a center of prosperity. This prosperity occurred, especially when Mecca was ruled by the Quraysh tribe, the ancestors of the Prophet Muhammad. Likewise, Yathrib, which is currently known as Medina, is a city that connects the trade route between Yemen and Syria. The date palm plantations that flourished there, have made the city even more famous (Antonius et al., 1938).

## 2. Research Methods and Materials

This type of research is qualitative. The data sources used secondary data from books and scientific articles. The data analysis technique was by using qualitative data analysis techniques.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Arabian Peninsula

Before discussing about the socio-economics of the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula, the author explains a little about the Arabian Peninsula geographically and demographically. Historians call the Arabian Peninsula with the term *شبه الجزيرة العربية*, which means the Arabian peninsula. It is shaped such a rectangle whose sides are not parallel. Located in the southwest of the Asian continent with an area of approximately 1.200.000 square miles or 3.000.000 square kilometers. To the south, it borders the Indian Ocean, to the east, the Persian Gulf, to the north, the Iraqi desert and the Syrian desert, and to the west, the Red Sea (Ismail, 1984).

Arab historical writers then categorized Arabia into North and South Arabia. This classification is to make it easier for readers to see the history of the Arab people (Table 1). The geographical differences between the southern Arabs and the Northern Arabs including the Najed people in Central Arabia are a desert that traces nothing into the North and South regions revealed in the character of the people who inhabited each region (Antonius et al., 1938).

Historians also divide Arab origins based on their lineage into three categories, namely the Arab al- Ba'idah nation. They consist of the tribes 'Ad, Thamud, Al-'Amaliqah, Thasm, Jadis, Umaim, Jurhum, Hadhramaut, and other tribes that still have relations with these tribes. This is a tribe that was identified and flourished before Islam came. They had rulers whose territory stretched from Syria to Egypt (Muhammad Abu Syuhbah, 1996). The Arabs

of Al'Arabah (native Arabs) are the Arabs who come from the descendants of Ya'rub bin Yasyuj bin Qahthan. They are also called Al-Arab Al- Qahthaniyah. They are known to come from the south. Among its rulers were the kings of Yemen, the kingdoms of Ma'in, Saba', and Himyar (Muhammad Abu Syuhbah, 1996). Arab Al-Adnaniyyah. This name is based on someone named Adnan whose lineage ends with Ismail bin Ibrahim AS. They were known as Al-Arab Al-Musta'rabah (migrant Arabs). It is a society that does not have Arab blood, then they meet real Arabs. They are a people who grew up in the north. Their original homeland is Mecca. They are Ismail and his children. Among Ismail's most prominent descendants was Adnan, the Prophet Muhammad's grandfather at the top of the line. It was from Adnan that the Arab tribe grew. So the Adnaniyyah and Qahthaniyyah Arabs are all descendants of Ismail *alaihi salam* (Muhammad Abu Syuhbah, 1996). It was from this third Arab nation that the Messenger of Allah was born, namely from the Quraysh tribe, originating from Kinanah, the grandson of Fihir bin Malik bin Nadhar bin Kinanah (Al-Ghadhban, nd).

**Table 1.** Arab historical writers

No.	Aspect	North Arabia	South Arabia
1	Location	Nomadic people living in “fur houses” in the Hijaz and Najd.	Urban people settled in Yemen, Hadramaut, and along the coast.
2	Communication	Qur’an language	Semitic language, Sabaea (Himyar), which is close to Ethiopian in Africa.
3	Body posture	Mediterranean dolichocephalic (long-headed)	The Mediterranean is dolichocephalic (long-headed) and has quite distinct coastal elements, namely brachycephalic (round-headed with a large jaw and hooked nose, flat temples and thick hair).
4	Geographic Conditions	Sahara Desert	Sea Coast
5	Economic Conditions	Nomadic, herder, looking for resources to survive.	Settle, farm, trade

Source: Hawwin Muzakki: Social Construction and Exploring Positive Values in the Pre-Islamic Arab Period

### 3.2. Social of Arabian Peninsula

As is known, Arab society lives in tribes. They did not have a good government system such the areas around them, such as the Roman, Persian, and Habshi territories. Arabs have their own rules according to their respective tribes. If a member of the tribe makes a mistake, then the tribe's customs are enforced. The customs between one tribe are different from those of another tribe.



Figure 1. Map of the Arabian Peninsula

Source: [www.antaraneews.com](http://www.antaraneews.com)

These customary law rules encounter problems when there is legal conflict between members of one tribe and members of another tribe. This often triggers war because of dissatisfaction with the sense of justice felt by one or both tribes. To resolve this problem, they usually appoint someone as a mediator (arbitration). This person was asked for a legal fatwa regarding the case that occurred between members of the two tribes. Globally, the social condition of Arab society can be described (Khairul Amri, 2022) by proud and prioritizing descent and lineage. Arab society is very protective of its lineage. They do not want to marry their children to people who are not from their lineage. Then, Islam came to erase this tradition. Proud of their prowess in poetry. Arab people are easily attracted by dazzling rhetoric and beautiful language styles. Through poetry, they sing about their greatness, and boast about their lineage. They also introduce their advantages and other things to make the audience sympathetic. Therefore, they do not like it if other tribes can compete with the beauty of their poetry. This is also one of the reasons why the Qur'an was revealed in a very beautiful language style that rivals their poetry. Arabian women are humiliated. It can be passed on to his sons. Women also have no right to inherit. Arab society looks down on women, considering them incapable of warfare and lacking the strength to defend themselves on those who intend harm. Prostitution was legalized, and parents at that time were very embarrassed if they had daughters. In fact, quite a few even buried him alive. They feel no guilt in killing their children because they are afraid of falling into poverty. As Allah describes their behavior in the Qur'an surah An-Nahl verses 58-59:

*"In fact, if one of them is told the news of (the birth of) a daughter, his face turns black (red), and he is very angry." (58), "He hid from the people, because of the bad news that was given to him. Will he nourish it with (bear) humiliation or will he plunge it into the ground (alive)? Remember how bad (the decision) they made was." (59).*

Wrong marriage practices, such as *mut'ah* marriage, *syigar* marriage, unlimited marriage, marriage between two sisters, *istibdha* marriage, and so on occurred in that time. It made easy divorce. Arab society can easily impose divorce. For them, there is no such thing as 1, 2, or 3 talaq. A person can give talaq to his wife, but at another time, he can refer back to it. This continued until the specified time. This practice happened in the early days of Islam, until the QS verse finally came down. Al-Baqarah: 229 of War and Robbery. Wars in the Jahiliyah Arab societies could be caused by trivial problems. They don't care about the cruelty of war and they don't hesitate to kill humans to defend their own tribe. They did it without consideration and only knew the tribe they were defending. Then, scientific tradition. The Arab people are not experts in the book and have insight such the Jews and Christians. They are dominated by a system of ignorance, stupidity, laziness, and blind

obedience to old traditions. They cannot read and count. That was the dominant characteristic of Arab society at that time.

### 3.3. *Economic system of the Arabian Peninsula*

In the pre-Islamic Arab period or what is often called the Jahiliyah period, Arab people were used to carrying out transactions using usury. Ath-Tabari stated: "During the period of ignorance the practice of usury consisted in doubling and exceeding the amount due by one year. For example, someone owed a debt. When it was due, the debtor came to collect it and said, 'You will pay your debt or will you give additional (interest) only to me? If he has something that he can pay then he pays it. If not, then he will complete it for the next year. If the debt is in the form of *ibnul makbadh* (one year old camel calf), then the payment goes to *ibnatu labun* (two year old camel calf) in the second year. Then, he will make him a *biqqah* (a three-year-old camel), then make him a *jadza'ah* (an adult camel). Next, multiples of four and above." Also in the case of gold or money debts, usury applied (An-Nadwi, 2015).

One of the important elements that supports the Arab economy besides agriculture is trade. Arabs have long known trade not only with fellow Arabs, but also with non-Arabs. The progress of pre-Islamic Arab trade was marked by the import and export activities they carried out. South Arabian and Yemeni traders in the 200 years before Islam came, had made transactions with India (now South Asia), African coastal countries, a number of Persian Gulf countries, Central Asia, and surrounding areas (Ali et al., 2022; Bhatt et al., 2023; Knight et al., 2011; Mariyam et al., 2022).

Their role in commerce and extensive interaction with the outside world (especially the people of Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Yemen and Ethiopia) not only brings huge material benefits, but also increases the level of knowledge, intelligence and wisdom, especially for the tribe. Quraysh. It is not surprising that they then became the tribe most skilled at trading, both in the form of *syirkah* and *mudharabah*, which brought them prosperity and power (Amalia, 2010).

In this case, the export commodities of South Arabia and Yemen are incense, frankincense, agarwood, perfume, animal skins, raisins, grapes and other goods. The commodities they import from East Africa include wood for building materials, ostrich feathers, precious metal alloys and rhinoceroses; from South Asia and China in the form of ivory, precious stones, silk, clothing, swords, and spices; as well as from other countries in the Persian Gulf they import diamonds (Wijdan, 2007).

Mecca is one of the important areas that is a link for global economic transactions for the Arab nation as well as being a crossroads for the international economy, namely connecting Mecca to Abyssinia onwards to Central Africa. From Mecca to Damascus onwards to mainland Europe. From Makkah to al-Machin (Persia) to Kabul, Kashmir, Singking (Sinjian) to Olive and Canton, then penetrating the Malay area. Moreover, from Mecca to Aden by sea to India, the archipelago, to Canton. This makes the people of Makkah to have a strategic role in participating in the world economy (Wijdan, 2007). The inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula have famous markets, including Ukazh, Majinnah, and Dzul Majaz. When Islam came, these markets continued to exist for several time, but then became extinct. These markets not only function as places for buying and selling, but also as gathering places for poets, writers, and orators (Khairul Amri, 2022).

From various historical sources, it is known that during the Jahiliyah period and at the beginning of Islam, it consisted of two types, namely: dinars and dirhams. The dirham currency is made of silver, consisting of three types: Bughliyah, Jaraqiyah, and Thabariyah. The sizes vary. Bughliyah weighs 4,66 grams, Jaraqiyah weighs 3,40 grams, and Thabariyah weighs 2,83 grams. Meanwhile, the dinar currency is made of gold. During the period of ignorance and at the beginning of Islam, Sham and Hijaz used the Dinar currency, which was all Roman currency. This currency was made in Rome, engraved with images of kings,

inscribed with Roman letters. At that time, one dinar was equivalent to 10 dirhams (An-Nadwi, 2015).

#### 4. Conclusion

The origins of the Arab nation can be classified into three types, namely: Arab Al-Ba'idah, Arab Al'Arabiah, and Arab Al-Adnaniyyah. The Prophet Muhammad saw. Originated from this third type, through the line of descent of the Prophet Ismail 'alaihi salam, son of the Prophet Ibrahim *kehalilullah, alaihi salam*. Socially, Arab society lives in tribes. Arabs have their own rules according to their respective tribes. The term of "jahiliyyah era", which is applied to Arab society in some literature does not mean that the Arab people at that time were really stupid, so it was called the age of stupidity. The Arab nation at that time was quite advanced in the fields of trade and literature. The term of "Jahiliyyah" refers to the culture of the Arab people at that time, which still followed many things that were considered "stupid", such as killing daughters, marrying or inheriting wives from fathers, carrying out dishonest trade transactions, engaging in usury practices, and so on. The most prominent stupidity is committing polytheism towards Allah SWT. Even though they lived near the house of Allah (Kaaba), which is very strong in the teachings of monotheism. The Arabian peninsula's economy relies on trade and agriculture. Their expertise in trading cannot be separated from the location of their region, which is very strategic in international trade routes. It's just that before Islam came, the people of the Arabian peninsula, especially in business transactions, were still steeped in the practice of usury.

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