

The Geopolitical and Religious Conditions of the Arabian Peninsula Prior to the Prophethood of Muhammad SAW: an Anthropological and Historical Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines the condition of Arab society during the time of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH with a focus on social, political, economic, cultural, and religious aspects. Through a historical-sociological approach, this study aims to analyze the characteristics, structure, and dynamics of pre-Islamic Arab society to the early period of Islamic development. The research method used is a literature study by analyzing primary and secondary sources about the history of Arab society. The results of the study show that pre-Islamic Arab societies had a social structure based on a tribal system (qabilah) with values such as group solidarity ('asabiyyah), courage (muru'ah), and generosity (karam). Politically, there is no central authority that binds the entire Arabian peninsula, but rather is divided into autonomous tribal powers. Economically, Arab society relied on limited trade, livestock, and agriculture, with Mecca being an important trading center. In the religious aspect, the majority of Arabs adhere to polytheism, although there are also Jewish, Christian, and hanif (monotheistic) communities. The transformation of Arab society through the da'wah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) took place gradually, with fundamental changes in the value system, social structure, law, and culture. This research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the sociohistorical context of the emergence of Islam and the resulting societal transformation.

Keywords: Arab Society, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Jahiliyah, Social Transformation, Islamic History.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji kondisi masyarakat Arab pada masa Nabi Muhammad SAW dengan fokus pada aspek sosial, politik, ekonomi, budaya, dan keagamaan. Melalui pendekatan historis-sosiologis, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis karakteristik, struktur, dan dinamika masyarakat Arab pra-Islam hingga masa awal perkembangan Islam. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah studi kepustakaan dengan menganalisis sumber-sumber primer dan sekunder tentang sejarah masyarakat Arab. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa masyarakat Arab pra-Islam memiliki struktur sosial yang berbasis pada sistem kesukuan (qabilah) dengan nilai-nilai seperti solidaritas kelompok ('asabiyyah), keberanian (muru'ah), dan kemurahan hati (karam). Secara politik, tidak terdapat otoritas pusat yang mengikat seluruh semenanjung Arab, melainkan terbagi dalam kekuasaan kesukuan yang otonom. Dari segi ekonomi, masyarakat Arab bergantung pada perdagangan, peternakan, dan pertanian terbatas, dengan Makkah menjadi pusat perdagangan penting. Dalam aspek keagamaan, mayoritas masyarakat Arab menganut politeisme, meski terdapat juga komunitas-komunitas Yahudi, Kristen, dan hanif (monoteisme). Transformasi masyarakat Arab melalui dakwah Nabi Muhammad SAW berlangsung secara bertahap, dengan perubahan fundamental pada sistem nilai, struktur sosial, hukum, dan budaya. Penelitian ini



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berkontribusi pada pemahaman komprehensif tentang konteks sosiohistoris kemunculan Islam dan transformasi masyarakat yang diakibatkannya.

Kata Kunci: Masyarakat Arab, Nabi Muhammad SAW, Jahiliyah, Transformasi Sosial, Sejarah Islam.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the condition of Arab society during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a fundamental aspect in studying the history of Islam and its development.¹ Arab society, with all its social, political, economic, and religious complexities, was the background for the birth and early development of Islam. This in-depth analysis of the structure and characteristics of society not only provides insight into the historical context of the emergence of Islam, but also helps to understand the transformations that occurred through the da'wah of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.²

The Arabian Peninsula in the 6th and early 7th centuries AD was a region with geographical and cultural distinctions. Located at the crossroads of trade routes between Byzantium, Persia, Abyssinia (Ethiopia), and India, the region has strategic significance for international trade.³ Arab society itself is divided into various tribes (*qabilah*) spread across desert (*badiyah*), agriculture (*rif*), and urban (*hadar*) areas, with diverse social and cultural structures.⁴

In traditional Islamic historiography, the period before the arrival of Islam is often referred to as the period *of jahiliyah* (ignorance or ignorance).⁵ Although the term is often interpreted normatively as a period of barbarism and ignorance, contemporary studies suggest that pre-Islamic Arab societies had a complex civilization and value system. They have a rich literary tradition, a thriving economic system, and a sophisticated socio-political structure albeit in a different form from other contemporary societies.⁶

The transformation brought by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH through the teachings of Islam did not occur in a revolutionary manner that completely broke with the past. Instead, the transformation process is selective and gradual, modifying some existing practices, removing others, and introducing new values and institutions.⁷ Understanding these dynamics requires an in-depth analysis of the conditions of Arab society before and during the time of the prophethood of Muhammad.

This research aims to comprehensively analyze the characteristics, structure, and dynamics of Arab society during the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Specifically, this research will examine the social, political, economic, cultural, and religious aspects of the Arab society, as well as the transformations that occurred through the da'wah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to a more holistic

¹ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), hal. 7.

² Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), hal. 18.

³ Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), hal. 87-88.

⁴ Jawad Ali, *Al-Mufasssal fi Tarikh al-'Arab Qabl al-Islam* (Baghdad: Jami'at Baghdad, 1993), jilid 1, hal. 207-210.

⁵ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Jathiyah (45): 23; Surah Al-Ahzab (33): 33.

⁶ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), hal. 12-14.

⁷ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), hal. 33.

understanding of the sociohistorical context of the emergence of Islam and impact on Arab society.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a historical-sociological approach through the library *research method*. This approach was chosen in order to be able to analyze in depth the social structure, institutions, and dynamics of Arab society in its historical context.⁸ By not only emphasizing the chronology of events, this approach allows a broader understanding of social relations, power systems, economic structures, and various social changes that occurred during the time of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

The data in this study is sourced from primary and secondary literature.⁹ Primary sources include classic works such as *Sirah Ibn Hisham*, *Tarikh al-Tabari*, *Kitab al-Maghazi* by Al-Waqidi, as well as hadith books such as *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, as well as classical commentaries that provide historical context to the verses of the Qur'an. Secondary sources include relevant contemporary books, journals, and scholarly works, with selection based on their contributions and depth of analysis to early Arab societies. Data is collected through the stages of identification, selection, and documentation of the literature with an emphasis on recording important information and relevant citations.

The analysis process is carried out with a descriptive-analytical approach through content analysis techniques. The data obtained are categorized according to social, political, economic, cultural, and religious aspects, then interpreted in the appropriate socio-historical context. Comparisons between sources are carried out to enrich understanding, which is then synthesized into holistic conclusions. In all stages of analysis, a critical approach is applied to identify biases, assumptions, and resource limitations, so that the results of the research remain objective and in-depth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Geographical and Demographic Conditions of the Arabian Peninsula

The Arabian Peninsula is a region that consists mostly of deserts, with an area of about 3 million square kilometers. It is bounded by the Red Sea to the west, the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to the east, the Arabian Sea to the south, and Syria and Mesopotamia to the north.¹⁰ These geographical conditions have a significant influence on the lifestyle, economy, and social structure of Arab society.

Based on their geographical characteristics and life patterns, Arab societies in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times can be divided into three groups:

- a) Bedouin Arabs (*A'rab*): Nomadic people who live on mobile in desert areas, with their main livelihood being camel and goat farming. Their lives are greatly influenced by harsh environmental conditions, thus forming a character that tends to be harsh, independent, and strongly upholds tribal solidarity.¹¹

⁸ Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), jilid 1, hal. 29-30.

⁹ Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1978), hal. 5-7.

¹⁰ Salih Ahmad Al-'Ali, *Muhadarat fi Tarikh al-'Arab* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Ma'arif, 1955), hal. 14-16.

¹¹ Jawad Ali, *Al-Mufassal fi Tarikh al-'Arab Qabl al-Islam*, jilid 4, hal. 302-305.

- b) Semi-Nomadic Arabs: A group that inhabits desert suburban areas or oases, with a lifestyle that combines livestock and simple agriculture. They have a semi-permanent residence and usually migrate seasonally.¹²
- c) Urban Arabs (*Hadar*): People who settled in cities such as Makkah, Medina (Yathrib), Ta'if, and other trading centers. This group has a more complex social structure, with more diverse economic activities, especially trade and crafts.¹³

In terms of demographics, the Arab population at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was estimated to be several million people, although it is difficult to get an exact figure. The largest populations are concentrated in water-rich areas such as Yemen in the south, the Hijaz in the west, and oases in various parts of the peninsula.¹⁴

The social structure of Arab society during the time of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH was greatly influenced by the tribal system (*qabilah*). Each individual identifies himself first of all with his tribe or clan, which is the main basis of social identity and collective protection.¹⁵

The hierarchy of social structures in the Arab tribal system can be described as follows:

- a) Sha'b (شعب): The largest group which is a combination of several qabilahs who are believed to be from the same ancestor.
- b) Qabilah (قبيلة): A large tribe or clan that is the main socio-political unit, led by a shaykh who is chosen based on seniority, wisdom, and leadership ability.
- c) Buthun (بطون): Sub-tribe or branch of the qabilah.
- d) Fakhidz (فخذ): A smaller group, usually consisting of several large families.
- e) Asīrah (عشيرة): A large family unit that spans several generations.
- f) Bayt (بيت): The nuclear family or household.¹⁶

In this social structure, there is also a stratification that distinguishes between the free group (*ahrar*), the client (*mawali*), and the slave (*'abid*). The system of slavery was an integral part of the Arab social structure, with slaves acquired through war, trade, or inability to pay debts.¹⁷

The social structure of the people of Makkah during the time of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH has its own peculiarities. There are several clans within the Quraysh tribe that dominate the social, political, and economic life of the city. These clans belong to an association known as *Mala'*. Among others, the Banu Hashim clan (the clan of the Prophet Muhammad SAW), the Umayyad Bones, the Banu Naufal, the Banu Asad, and others had different influences in the power structure of Makkah.¹⁸

In Medina (Yathrib), the social structure before the advent of Islam was dominated by the two main Arab tribes, the Aus and the Khazraj, as well as some Jewish tribes such

¹² Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), hal. 51-53.

¹³ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca: History in the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), hal. 35-37.

¹⁴ Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1960), volume 2, p. 254-256.

¹⁵ Hamilton A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), hal. 25-26.

¹⁶ Jawad Ali, *Al-Mufasssal fi Tarikh al-'Arab Qabl al-Islam*, jilid 4, hal. 309-312.

¹⁷ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, hal. 15-16.

¹⁸ Ibn Hishyam, *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah* (Kairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1955), jilid 1, hal. 130-131.

as the Banu Quraizah, the Banu Nadir, and the Banu Qainuqa. The relationship between these groups is often colored by conflict and competition, which shapes the socio-political dynamics of the city.¹⁹

Economic System and Livelihood

The economic system of the Arab society during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) varied according to the geographical conditions and lifestyle of each group. In general, there are several main economic activities:

- a) Trade: It is the dominant economic activity in urban areas, especially in Makkah which is the center of the caravan trade connecting Yemen in the south with Syria in the north. Makkah merchants, especially from the Quraysh tribe, organized large caravans carrying commodities such as spices, fabrics, perfumes, leathers, and precious metals. This trading system is supported by institutions such as the seasonal market (*suq*), the credit system, and the trade partnership (*mudarabah*).²⁰
- b) Livestock: Being the main livelihood for nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples. Camels and goats are the main livestock animals that are not only a source of food and transportation, but also a symbol of status and wealth. Products such as milk, meat, leather, and fur became important commodities in the local economy and trade.²¹
- c) Agriculture: Thrives in water-rich areas such as Yathrib (Medina), Ta'if, and Yemeni areas. Dates, wheat, barley, and grapes are the main crops cultivated. Simple irrigation systems such as wells and waterways (*qanat*) were developed to support these agricultural activities.²²
- d) Crafts and Home Industry: Includes the manufacture of weapons, jewelry, textiles, ceramics, and household appliances. This activity is mainly developed in urban and semi-urban areas.²³

In addition to these productive activities, there are also economic practices such as plundering (*ghazw*) among Bedouin tribes, which in their cultural context are not always seen as negative actions, but rather as a form of resource redistribution and manifestation of courage.²⁴

Makkah has a special position in the regional economic system due to several factors: (1) its status as a religious center with the presence of the Kaaba, which attracts pilgrims and increases economic activity; (2) its strategic location on trade routes; and (3) trade agreements (*ilaf*) developed by the Quraysh with regional powers such as Byzantium, Persia, Abyssinia, and the kingdoms of Yemen.²⁵

This economic system underwent a significant transformation with the arrival of Islam, especially through the regulations introduced by the Qur'an and Sunnah regarding practices such as *riba* (interest), monopoly, hoarding of goods (*ihthikar*), and

¹⁹ Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991), hal. 108-110.

²⁰ Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, hal. 114-116.

²¹ R.B. Serjeant, *South Arabian Hunt* (London: Luzac, 1976), hal. 76-78.

²² Jawad Ali, *Al-Mufasssal fi Tarikh al-'Arab Qabl al-Islam*, jilid 7, hal. 343-345.

²³ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, hal. 72-73.

²⁴ F.E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*, hal. 78-79.

²⁵ Al-Qur'an, Surah Quraish (106): 1-4; Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan Al-Buti, *Fiqh al-Sirah* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1996), p. 53-54.

standardization of scales. Islam also introduced new economic institutions such as zakat, which served as a mechanism for wealth redistribution.²⁶

Political System and Leadership

The political system of the Arab society during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was characterized by the absence of a centralized political authority that bound the entire peninsula. Instead, political power is spread among various tribes and tribal confederations, with varying leadership models.²⁷

Among the Bedouins, leadership is held by a *shaykh* (tribal chief) who is chosen on the basis of seniority, wisdom, and leadership ability, rather than on the basis of hereditary alone. The authority of the *shaykh* is more consultative than absolute, with important decisions usually taken by consensus (*shura*) with a tribal council (*majlis*) composed of family heads.²⁸

In urban areas such as Makkah, the political structure is more complex. Makkah was administered by a kind of aristocratic oligarchy through a council of leaders (*mala'*) consisting of the heads of the Quraysh clan. This council handles matters such as security, trade, and the administration of the Kaaba. Some of the important positions in the political structure of Makkah include:

- a) Siqayah: Responsible for providing water for pilgrims.
- b) Rifadah: Responsible for providing food for pilgrims.
- c) Hijabah: The keeper of the keys of the Kaaba.
- d) Liwa': Banner bearer in war.
- e) Qiyadah: Military leadership.
- f) Nadwah: Leadership in consultative meetings.
- g) Sifarat: Diplomatic affairs with external forces.²⁹

In Yathrib (Medina), the pre-Islamic political structure was characterized by an unstable balance of power between the Arab tribes (Aus and Khazraj) and the Jewish tribes. There is no central authority, with each tribe having autonomy in regulating its internal affairs.³⁰

In the southern (Yemen) and northern regions (bordering Byzantium and Persia), there were more centralized forms of government, with a system of kingdoms or emirates influenced by Persian, Byzantine, or Abyssinian models of government.³¹

This political system underwent a fundamental transformation with the arrival of Islam, especially through the formation of a political community in Medina (*ummah*) based on the Charter of Medina (*sahifah*). This charter was the first written constitution that united the various groups in Medina (Muslims, Jews, and pagans) in one political entity with defined rights and obligations, under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).³²

²⁶ Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), hal. 42-43.

²⁷ Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), hal. 28-30.

²⁸ Jawad Ali, *Al-Mufassal fi Tarikh al-'Arab Qabl al-Islam*, jilid 4, hal. 329-331.

²⁹ Ibn Hisyam, *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah*, jilid 1, hal. 141-142.

³⁰ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), hal. 192-193.

³¹ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), hal. 192-193.

³² Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Arabs, Byzantium, and Iran: Studies in Early Islamic History and Culture* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), hal. 23-25.

Belief Systems and Religious Practices

The religious landscape in the Arabian Peninsula during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was marked by the complexity and diversity of beliefs that coexisted in pre-Islamic societies. At that time, religion was not a homogeneous system, but a mosaic of beliefs consisting of various different religious systems and spiritual practices. The majority of the Arab population, especially the Quraysh who settled in Makkah, adheres to polytheism.³³ They worshipped various gods and goddesses symbolized through hundreds of idols placed around the Kaaba, which became the center of worship of the Arab people. Names such as Hubal, al-Lat, al-'Uzza, and Manat became spiritual representations of the powers they worshipped. This belief is not only based on the worship of the gods, but also includes the veneration of ancestors, the use of fortune teller practices (*kahin*), and traditional rituals such as Hajj, sacrificial slaughter, and tawaf around the Kaaba.

In the midst of the dominance of polytheism, there were also Jewish communities scattered in areas such as Yathrib (now Medina), Khaibar, and parts of Yemen. The community is known for upholding the principles of monotheism through the teachings of the Torah, as well as living a religious and social life based on Jewish laws. Their influence was felt not only in the religious aspect, but also in the economic and intellectual fields of the region where they lived. In addition to Jews, the presence of Christianity also marks the diversity of beliefs on the peninsula. Christians are found in the northern border areas with Syria and Iraq, in eastern areas such as Najran, as well as in parts of Yemen. They embraced various sects such as Monophysite, Nestorian, and Byzantine Orthodoxy, and formed communities that had churches and monasteries as centers of learning and worship.

Not only that, the influence of Zoroastrianism as the official religion of the Sasanid Persian Empire was also present, especially in the eastern region which was directly adjacent to Persia. Although its adherents are not as numerous as other religious communities, their existence shows the geopolitical and cultural influences of the surrounding region. In the midst of this diversity of formal religions, there are also individuals called *hunafa'*, that is, seekers of spiritual truth who reject Arab polytheism but do not officially adhere to any heavenly religion. Figures such as Waraqah ibn Nawfal, Zayd ibn 'Amr, and Umayyah ibn Abi al-Salt are representatives of this group. They were known as true seekers of God who craved a pure and rational form of monotheism, making them the forerunner of the spiritual spirit that would later be accommodated by Islam.

The variety of religious practices of pre-Islamic Arab societies also reflects complex religious dynamics. Hajj, for example, was known before the advent of Islam, although it was interpreted differently and associated with polytheistic rituals. Likewise, the practice of *qurbani* which was originally carried out as an offering to idols or gods, as well as consultation with *kahin* or shamans who were considered to have a relationship with the supernatural world. Respect for ancestors is also an important part of the spiritual traditions of Arab peoples, especially among Bedouin tribes who view ancestors as a source of strength and protection.

With the sending of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the arrival of Islamic teachings, there was a radical change in the religious landscape of the Arabian Peninsula.

³³ Abu al-Faraj Al-Isfahani, *Kitab al-Aghani* (Kairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, 1927), jilid 4, hal. 122-124.

Islam carries the teachings of pure monotheism, abolishing all forms of polytheism and belief in spiritual intermediaries between man and God. The Kaaba, which was previously filled with idols, was cleansed and returned as a center of worship to Allah alone. Previously known rituals, such as Hajj and Umrah, are retained but given new meanings in accordance with Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, practices such as idolatry, consultation with kahin, and ancestral cults were abolished because they were contrary to the principles of monotheism. This transformation marked the beginning of the formation of a new religious order based on revelation, a solid faith, and a structured system of worship.

Legal System and Moral Values

Before the advent of Islam, Arab society lived without a written or universal legal system. Social order is maintained through norms that are local and inherited orally. These rules are derived from customary laws or traditions known as 'urf and 'adat, which have their own peculiarities depending on the tribe or tribe from which they belong. This law covers various aspects of social life, such as marriage rules, inheritance distribution, forms of economic transactions, and how to resolve disputes. Each tribe has the freedom to determine its internal rules without any single legal authority that binds the entire Arab society as a whole.

In addition, pre-Islamic Arab society also highly upheld the values of honor and morality that are manifested in the concept of muruah. This value becomes a kind of code of ethics that emphasizes the importance of courage, loyalty, generosity, and protection of the weak. Muruah not only regulates commendable actions, but also becomes the basis for judging a person's character in his community. When a conflict occurs, there are no formal courts or law enforcement apparatus. Instead, the community will appoint a hakam or mediator who is respected for his wisdom and honesty. Although hakam decisions do not have formal legal force, society generally obeys them because of the social and moral forces that accompany them.

The value system of pre-Islamic Arab society was also built on a number of deeply rooted cultural principles. One of the most important values is 'asabiyyah, which is group solidarity or loyalty to the tribe that is the source of identity and social protection. In addition, there are concepts of sharaf and 'ird related to the honor of the individual and the family. Honor is a value that is strictly guarded, and when it is tainted by despicable acts such as murder or harassment, then society will demand tha'r or revenge as a form of restoration of dignity. On the other hand, the community also emphasizes the importance of shipwreck or generosity, especially in welcoming guests or helping others, as well as hilm, which is a calm, patient attitude, and being able to restrain oneself in facing challenging situations.

With the advent of Islam, the social and legal systems of Arab society underwent fundamental changes. Islamic teachings through the Qur'an and Sunnah introduced an orderly and comprehensive legal system, known as shari'a. Islam recognizes and preserves the noble values of pre-Islamic traditions such as karam and hilm, because they are in harmony with Islamic moral teachings. However, some other values that are exclusive and destructive such as excessive 'asabiyyah or tha'r as a form of retributive justice are rejected or transformed into more rational and just within the framework of Islamic law. Thus, the arrival of Islam not only brought new rules, but also perfected and purified existing values to be in accordance with the principles of monotheism, justice, and humanity.

The Transformation of Arab Society in the Time of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH

The da'wah of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH resulted in a fundamental transformation in the structure and values of Arab society. This change did not occur revolutionarily and instantaneously, but through a gradual process during the periods of Makkah (610-622 M) and Medina (622-632 M).³⁴

- a) Theological Transformation: From polytheism and animism to pure monotheism (*monotheism*), with an emphasis on the direct relationship between man and God without intermediaries.³⁵
- b) Socio-Political Transformation: The formation of *an ummah* (community) that transcends tribal ties, with a new identity based on faith, not heredity. The Charter of Medina became the constitutional basis for this new socio-political model.³⁶
- c) Legal Transformation: The development of a comprehensive legal system based on revelation (the Qur'an) and the example of the Prophet (Sunnah), which includes aspects of worship (*'ibadat*) and social interaction (*mu'amalat*).³⁷
- d) Economic Transformation: Regulation of economic practices to ensure justice and redistribution of wealth, including the prohibition of usury, the introduction of zakat, and reforms in the inheritance and ownership system.³⁸
- e) Gender Transformation: Improvement of women's status and rights, including the right to own and manage property, inheritance rights, the right to choose a partner, and protection from exploitative practices such as burying girls alive (*wa'd*).³⁹
- f) Cultural Transformation: Reconstructing Arab cultural traditions and practices with Islamic values, including the reform of Arabic poetry, music, and art.⁴⁰

This transformation culminated in the Liberation of Makkah (*Fath Makkah*) in 630 AD, when the Prophet Muhammad returned to his hometown as the leader of a large Muslim community, destroyed the idols in the Kaaba, and integrated Makkah into *dar al-Islam* (Islamic territory). This event marked the victory of the new socio-political and religious paradigm over the old system based on tribalism and polytheism.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the transformation brought about by Islam did not completely erase the pre-Islamic Arab identity and values. On the contrary, Islam performs critical selection, preserves positive elements, modifies problematic ones, and rejects those that are contrary to the fundamental principles of Islam. This reflects the gradual and contextual approach to social change advocated by Islam.⁴²

Regional Context: Relations with Great Powers

³⁴ M.A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), hal. 11-12.

³⁵ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Ikhlās (112): 1-4; Surah Al-An'am (6): 136-137.

³⁶ Muhammad Hamidullah, *The First Written Constitution in the World*, hal. 44-45.

³⁷ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, p. 68-69.

³⁸ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah (2): 275-280; Surah Al-Nisa' (4): 11-12.

³⁹ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Nisa' (4): 7; Surah Al-Nahl (16): 58-59.

⁴⁰ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, hal. 19-20.

⁴¹ Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah*, jilid 2, hal. 412-413.

⁴² Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, p. 32-33.

To comprehensively understand the dynamics of Arab society in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, it is important to consider the broader regional geopolitical context. The Arabian Peninsula in the 6th and early 7th centuries AD was between two great imperialist powers: the Byzantine Empire (Eastern Roman) to the north and northwest, and the Sassanid Empire (Persia) to the northeast.⁴³

The Byzantine Empire, with its seat of power in Constantinople, controlled the territories of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt bordering the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula. Through Arab allies and protectorates such as the Ghassanid kingdom in Syria, the Byzantines extended their influence into the peninsula.⁴⁴

The Sasanian Empire, with its headquarters at Ctesiphon (near modern Baghdad), controlled the territories of Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Persia, and had influence on the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen through allies such as the kingdom of Lakhmid and the governors of Yemen.⁴⁵

The protracted rivalry and conflict between these two empires (known as the Byzantine-Sasanian War) had a significant impact on the political and economic dynamics of the Arabian Peninsula. Regions such as the Hijaz, which are relatively isolated by geographical barriers, enjoy *de facto* independence, while remaining connected to regional trade and cultural networks.⁴⁶

The city of Makkah, as a center of trade and religion, had diplomatic and economic relations with these two empires as well as other regional powers such as the Kingdom of Aksum (Abyssinia/Ethiopia). This is reflected in the treaty system (*ilaf*) developed by the Quraysh to ensure the safety of their trading caravans.⁴⁷

The rise of Islam and the expansion of the Muslim community under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) occurred during a period when these two empires were weakened due to prolonged conflicts and internal problems. This created a regional power vacuum that allowed for the consolidation and expansion of new powers from the heart of the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

The results of the study can be concluded that Arab society during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) revealed the complexity and social, political, economic, and religious dynamics that formed the context of the emergence and early development of Islam. The social structure of pre-Islamic Arab society was based on a tribal system (*qabilah*) with values such as group solidarity (*'asabiyyah*), honor (*sharaf*), and revenge (*tha'r*) which became the pillars of identity, but underwent a fundamental transformation with the emergence of the concept of the *ummah* that offered a new identity based on faith; the Arab economy was characterized by diversity according to geographical conditions: trade in urban centers, livestock among nomadic peoples, and agriculture in aqueous regions, with Islam later introducing economic regulations that guaranteed justice and the redistribution of wealth; the religious landscape shows the diversity between dominant Arab polytheism, Jewish and Christian monotheism, and independent

⁴³ Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, hal. 21-23.

⁴⁴ Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Arabs, Byzantium, and Iran: Studies in Early Islamic History and Culture*, hal. 27-29.

⁴⁵ Jawad Ali, *Al-Mufasssal fi Tarikh al-'Arab Qabl al-Islam*, jilid 3, hal. 172-174.

⁴⁶ Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, hal. 243-245.

⁴⁷ Al-Qur'an, Surah Quraisy (106): 1-4; Safi al-Rahman Al-Mubarakfuri, *Al-Rahiq al-Makhtum* (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 1996), hal. 55-56.

⁴⁸ Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, jilid 1, hal. 145-147.

monotheism seekers (hunafa'), with Islam offering a theological synthesis that emphasizes monotheism and the direct human-God relationship; the transformation brought about by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) occurred through a selective and gradual process that modified, reformed, or discarded elements of pre-Islamic Arab culture according to Islamic principles; and the emergence of Islam occurred in a regional geopolitical context where the Arabian Peninsula was between two great empires (Byzantine and Sassanid) that were weakening, creating conditions that allowed the emergence of new powers from the heart of the peninsula. An in-depth understanding of Arab society during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) not only provides historical insight into the context of the emergence of Islam, but also helps to clarify the dynamics of the socio-religious transformation brought about by Islam. This kind of study has contemporary relevance in understanding the relationship between religion and social change, as well as in contextualizing Islamic teachings in various cultural settings.

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