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Section 1: Introductory Themes

Chapter One: The Arabian Peninsula; its Geographical, Social and Cultural Status

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Chapter Three: Sects and Religions in the Arabian Peninsula and its Surroundings

Chapter 1: The Arabian Peninsula; its Geographical, Social and Cultural Status

The Arabian Peninsula, located in the south-west of Asia, is the world's largest Peninsula. Extended from the north-west towards southeast, it resembles an irregular trapezoid¹ with an area of three million and two hundred thousand square kilometers². The present Saudi Arabia covers nearly four-fifths of this Peninsula;³ the rest, in accordance with the present political demarcation, is occupied by six political states of Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait.

It borders the Aden Gulf, Bab al-Mandab Strait, the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman. It borders the Red Sea on the west, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf and Iraq on the east; and on the north borders a widespread desert extending to the valley of the Euphrates on one side, and Syria on the other. Since there are no natural borders, such as rivers or mountains, in this Peninsula, geographers have not been able so far to mark its northern border.⁴

The Arabian Peninsula is surrounded by the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean except for its southern sections. Nevertheless, it suffers from severe lack of water and is considered one of the driest and hottest areas of the world. It even lacks a large river or a navigable waterway. Instead, it has lands which are sometimes flooded with rainfalls.

The existence of a mountain range, which starts from the Sinai Peninsula and extends all over the western border of Arabia, acting as a lofty wall, and which winds around the southwest corner of the

peninsula to go around the southern and eastern sectors of Arabia as far as the Persian Gulf is the main reason for the extreme dryness of this Peninsula. Thus, Arabia is surrounded, on three sides, with this lofty mountain-wall and this hinders humidity of the seas from entering this land.[5](#)

On the other hand, the extent of the neighboring water is so insufficient that it could not modify the warmth and dryness of these vast African-Asian lands which are low in receiving humidity. This is worsened by the blowing of the poisoning Monsoon winds inside Arabia which stops the rain-carrying winds from the Indian Ocean coming from the south from entering the Arabian Peninsula.[6](#)

Divisions of the Arabian Peninsula

Both Arab and non-Arab geographers have divided the Arabian Peninsula on the basis of the natural elements (such as weather) and on the basis of races and tribes.[7](#) Some contemporary scientists have divided it into three main sections in the following manner:

The central section, which is called the Arab Desert;

The northern section, which is called Hijaz;

The southern section, which is called Yemen.[8](#)

Division on the Basis of Natural Conditions (The south and the North)

Besides these divisions, there has been, in recent years, another division proposed for Arabia which fits in well with the purposes of this book. This division is based on the life sustaining conditions which have had a tremendous effect on the lives of people, living things and plants of this region. These conditions have influenced the individual and social traits of these people and have brought forth some changes which were in existence up to the advent of Islam. There exist two drastic conditions in the Arabian Peninsula: either there is water, or there is no water. This parameter has had tremendous effects on life patterns of people: it sets apart the southern section, i.e. Yemen, from the central and northern sections.

Life Conditions in the Southern Section (Yemen)

Looking at the map of this land, we find a triangle-shaped territory in the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula. The Arab Sea forms the eastern side of this triangle, while the Red Sea forms the western border. A line drawn from Dhahran (in the west) to Khadhra' Mount (in the east) forms the third side of this triangle. Inside this huge triangle lies a territory, called Yemen since old times.

Due to the abundance of water and the regular rainfall, this region has enjoyed lucrative agriculture and dense population; in this regard, it contrasts with both the north and central part of the Peninsula.

On the other hand, a dense population needs a permanent residence. For this very reason, villages and cities came to existence. The concentration of people in cities and villages creates interaction among

people which is unavoidable. These modes of interaction bring forth laws and regulations (even the primitive ones), and, as we know, the establishment of laws causes the creation of government.

For this reason, centuries prior to the birth of Jesus Christ (a.s.), governments had in this region and established some civilizations.⁹ The governments which have been established in this region are:

(1) The Ma'in State: This government was in existence between 1400 and 850 BC and fell with the creation of the Saba' State.

(2) The Hadhramawt State: This state existed between 1020 and 65 BC and fell to the Saba' State.

(3) The Saba' State: This state was in existence between 850 and 115 BC and ended due to the establishment of the Himyari Saba' and Ridan government.

(4) The Qataban State: This state existed between 865 and 540 BC and came to an end with the establishment of the Saba' State.

(5) The States of Saba', Ridan, Hadhramawt and the vicinity of Yemen, whose vocal dynasties were called Tubba' and lived between 115 BC and 523 AD, their capital was ²afar.¹⁰

A Prosperous Civilization in the South of Arabia

Historians have admired the Yemeni bright civilization. An example is Herodotus, the great Greek historian of the fifth century BC, who mentions the civilization of this land which embodied lofty castles in Saba' with doors engraved with precious stones; these castles contained golden-ware and silver-ware and beds made of precious metals.¹¹ Some historians refer to a glorious, twenty-floor castle, called Qur'an in Sana'a, which consisted of one hundred rooms with externally high walls and mirror-decorated ceilings.¹² Strabonn, a famous Roman tourist, paid a visit to this city. Referring to the civilization in this land, he writes:

The city of Ma'rib was a strange city because the ceilings of its castles were made of ivory with gilded scripts and jewels. The elegant Kitchenware made any human being wonder.¹³

Likewise, the Islamic historians and geographers, Mas'udi (died 346 AH), and Ibn Rustah (one of the scholars of the third century AH) talk of the luxurious life of people in this region and of its prosperous life patterns prior to the advent of Islam.¹⁴

Archeological investigations in the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the research of historians, have all located valid documents concerning the glorious civilization in this ancient land. The remaining ruins in Aden, Sana'a, Ma'rib and Hadhramawt all attest to an Arab civilization in the south, i.e. in Yemen, and the neighboring lands. This civilization had been a rival for the Phoenician and Babylonian civilizations. One of the features of the ancient civilization in Yemen was a huge dam, called Ma'rib.¹⁵

Being constructed in accordance with rigorous geometrical calculations, this dam attests to a profound knowledge on the part of the engineers and constructors of this dam. This dam could make agriculture prosper in that area. [16](#)

Besides agriculture, the Yemenis were engaged in trade. The Sabaeans were trade agents between the east and the west because in those days the country of Yemen rested among several civilized countries. The Indian traders used to take their merchandise to Yemen and Hadhramawt through the Indian Ocean and then the Yemeni traders used to take them to Ethiopia, Egypt, Phoenicia, Palestine, The cities of Madyan, Adwam, Al-'Amaliqah and the western lands and the Meccan Arabs used to take the same merchandise and carry them over land to the then advanced cities of the world. [17](#)

The Yemenis used to carry out trade with the Far East for a long time. [18](#) The navigation problems and hardships on the Red Sea had led the Sabaeans follow land routes. For this reason, they used to travel between Yemen and Damascus along the western shore of the Arabian Peninsula. This road, crossing Mecca and Petra, used to divide towards Egypt, Damascus and Iraq. [19](#)

The Destruction of Ma'rib Dam

Due to the spread of corruption among the southerners and because of the internal turmoil, the star of Yemenite civilization gradually declined and the Yemenis and their kings could not repair the Ma'rib Dam which was in terrible need of repair, and then through the destruction of this dam, a devastating flood inundated all the villages and the farms and drought prevailed in the surrounding regions, destroying agriculture. This led people to emigrate from their land [20](#).

The Holy Qur'an refers to the nation of Saba' in two occasions: once, on the occasion of mentioning the Queen of Saba' (Sheba) and Solomon's letter to her:

And he tarried not long, and then said: I comprehend that which you do not comprehend and I have brought to you sure information from Sheba. Surely, I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given abundance and she has a mighty throne. (27:22-23)

On another occasion the Qur'an refers to Sheba in connection with the destruction of the Ma'rib Dam and the flow of a devastating flood due to the corruption of that tribe:

Certainly, there was a sign for Saba' in their abode; two gardens on the right and the left; eat of the sustenance of your Lord and give thanks to Him: A good land and a Forgiving lord! But they turned aside, so We sent upon them a torrent of which the rush could not be withstood and in place of their two gardens We gave to them, two gardens yielding bitter fruit and growing tamarisk and a few lute-trees. This We requited them with because they disbelieved; and We do not punish any but the ungrateful. And We made between them and the town which We had blessed other towns to be easily seen, and We apportioned the journey therein: Travel through them nights and days, secure. And they said: O our lord! Make spaces to be longer between our

journeys; and they were unjust to themselves; so We made them stories and scattered them with an utter scattering; most surely there are signs in this for every patient, grateful one. (34: 15–19)

The destruction of this dam is reported by Hamzah Izfahani to have taken place in 400 before Islam.²¹ According to Abu-Rayhan al-Bayruni, it took place 500 years prior to the advent of Islam.²² And Yaqut al-Hamawi mentions the destruction of this dam to be the result of Abyssinian domination. Some historians consider it to have occurred between the years 542 and 570 AH because the Abyssinian's domination was highest during the middle of the sixth century.²³ But the destruction of the dam must have been gradual: it fell apart after several repairs. In the Holy Qur'an, reference is made to the nation of Tubba' and their final days on two occasions:

Are they better or the people of Tubba'²⁴ and those before them? We destroyed them, for surely they were guilty. (44:37)

Others before them rejected prophets: the people of Noah and the dwellers of al-Rass and Thamud, and 'Ad and Pharaoh and Lut's brethren and the dwellers of the grove and the people of Tubba'; all rejected the apostles; so, My threat came to pass. (50: 12–14)

The Effects of the fall of the Southern Civilization on Arabia

The fall of states in the southern sections, the decline of the civilization in this part of the Arabian Peninsula, and the destruction of the Ma'rib dam—all had their effects on the social changes in this region, because the southern section of the Arabian Peninsula lost its glamour and the fields died away due to drought and a group of the dwellers on the vicinity of this dam had to emigrate from their land.

Due to these dispersions, the Tanukh branch of the Yemenite tribe, called Azd, emigrated to Hirah (Iraq) and established the government of Lakhmian there. The branch called Al-Jafnah went to Damascus and established a government at a place to the east of Jordan. They called themselves the Ghassanians.²⁵ The tribe Aws and Khazraj emigrated to Yathrib (Medina), and Khuza'ah went to Mecca and its suburbs; the tribes Bujaylah and Khath'am and some other groups went to the region of Sarawat and dwelt there,²⁶ each initiating a series of events.

The Conditions of the Northern Section of the Arabian Peninsula (Hijaz)

Hijaz is a dry land, receiving only sporadic rains and except for the mountainous terrain and the narrow shore-areas, it has extremely hot weather. These climatic conditions have had tremendous effects over the life-pattern of its dwellers. This is because the Arab residents of this region, contrary to the southerners, due to small numbers of pastures could not keep cattle except for tiny animals and camels which are tolerant beings. They prepared their food and clothing mainly from camels. Because this cattle raising and husbandry was based on wandering life-patterns, the establishment of a stable political institution seemed to be impossible. For this reason, contrary to the southerners who were city-dwellers and farmers, the dwellers of the north of the Peninsula lacked civilization and were mainly nomadic

wanderers, and the cities there (except for Mecca which, for reasons we will present later, was a little advanced at the advent of Islam) did not carry any significance.

Due to these natural hardships and communication problems, the people of Hijaz did not communicate with the civilized world at those days. These natural and geographical hardships caused this land to remain immune against the aggressions of conquerors. This fact attested the lack of interest on the part of Ramses II in the 14th century BC, Alexander of Macedonia in the 4th century BC, and Gallous at the time of August, the Roman Emperor, in the first century AD, to conquer this land nor did the Iranian kings show any interest to conquer this region. For this very reason, the people of Hijaz continued their nomadic life without any external interference.[27](#) Concerning this, a historian writes:

When Demetrius, the Greek army-general (after Alexander) arrived at Petra to conquer it, the Arab desert-dwellers said to him, “O great Prince, why have you come to fight us? We are living on a desert with no comfort of life whatsoever. We have chosen life here to remain our own masters, not to receive orders from anybody. Now accept our gifts and return home from where you have come. If you do so, we shall remain your most devoted friends. However, if you decide to fight us and refuse to accept our peace proposal, you have to destroy your life-comforts. You cannot change our life-modes to which we have grown accustomed since our childhood. You would not benefit, either, to take some of us as prisoners-of-war. This is because those captured ones shall never become your slaves.”

Having considered this, Demetrius accepted their gifts and returned home, refusing to partake in a war which did not offer anything except for hardships and nuisances.[28](#)

A scientist has observed:

“The Arab Island is a complete example of dependence of man over land. Inside countries such as India, Greece, Italy, England, and the United States, we have always seen some adventurous conquerors who have ventured to defeat the native dwellers and to make them obedient. There has never occurred in the history of Arabia any conqueror who has decided to occupy this land.[29](#)

Nomads

Since the major sections of the northern territory of the Arabian Peninsula (Hijaz) consists of deserts, most Arabs were desert-dwellers and nomads prior to the advent of Islam. The nomads, being deprived of assets of life due to the severe conditions under which they lived, continued to live mainly on animal husbandry on a very limited scale. They used to live under tents woven out of goat's hair and camel's wool; they would inhabit anywhere they could locate some water or pastures; and they would move to other regions as soon as they were out of provisions.

The nomadic Arabs could not raise cattle, except for small herds and a few camels at most, due to the shortage of pastures and plants. There is a maxim to the effect that “in a desert, the nomadic power, camels and dates rule.” If we added the power of sands to these three powers, we would get four main

factors which play a significant role in desert life. Shortage of water, extreme heat, difficult roads, and scarcity of foods and supplies, which are man's great enemies under normal conditions, would turn into man's closest friends at times of war.

Thus, when we observe that an Arab and his desert have never bowed to the enemy's power, we would not be amazed that the continuous dryness of the desert had had its permanent effect on the Arab's body and mental abilities. Nomadic Arabs considered it beyond their dignity to be involved in either agriculture or other crafts and industries.³⁰ They would belittle the civilized states and their regulations; they used to prefer desert life to city life.³¹

The desert Arab was the son of nature and the infinite and borderless desert. No building could ever interfere with the clean air of his environment; the sun's everlasting rays fell over him without the hindrance of the clouds. He had erected no dam against rain or torrents. Everything was kept in the form it was created by God. Thus, the desert's son was as free as his environment.

Neither farming nor engagement in any industry could deter him from his freedom; nor could the city crowds bother him in any way. He cared for freedom because he had lived in it. No rules or regulations could mar his freedom. He used to fight with anybody who tried to deprive him of his freedom. He was bound by two things only: the principles of idolatry and its ceremonies on the one hand and his tribal customs on the other. However, his commitment towards his tribal customs had deep roots.³²

La Mense, the Belgian Orientalist, writes:

The Arab was an example of democracy and freedom, but an extreme form which had no limits. The Arab rebellion against any power which intended to limit his freedom (even when this limit was in his favor) reveals the roots of the crimes which fill most of Arab history.³³

The Tribal Order

Prior to the advent of Islam, the Arabs of Hijaz obeyed neither a government nor a political institution. For this reason, their social life differed greatly from that of the Iranians and Romans. This is because in these two countries, i.e. Iran and Rome which bordered Arabia, there were unified central governments which ruled all over the country. However, there was no central power in Hijaz or in any other city (in the north or center of the Arabian Peninsula as a whole).

The tribe was the social unit of the Arabs and the tribal system prevailed everywhere. In such a system, the identity of individuals was determined only through their affiliation with a tribe. The tribal elements could be observed among not only the desert dwellers but also the city-dwellers. In that region, every tribe looked like an independent country and the interrelations among them resembled those among nations in the new world.

Racial Affiliation

In those days, nationality was not based on factors such as unity of religion, language or history. A tribe was defined as a collection of some affiliated families and the bonds which brought relatedness among them were the familial bonds, and the unity of common ancestors. This is because the members of a tribe considered themselves as of the same blood.[34](#)

The combination of some families would create a tent and a combination of several tents would bring forth a tribe. Even the composition of big association, such as that of the Jews, was based on consanguinity and common ancestors. These groups would set up their tents in such a way as to form tribes of several thousand people each. Then, they would migrate from one place to another, following their cattle.[35](#)

The Tribal Chief

The head or representative of the tribe was called Shaykh.[36](#) This Shaykh was usually the most advanced in age. He had this position because of his personality, experience, bravery, defense of the tribe's interests and sometimes because of the abundance of his wealth.[37](#) In the election of the Shaykh, some traits, such as generosity, bravery, patience, wisdom, humility and eloquence, were taken into consideration.[38](#)

The Shaykh did not use force or coercion in judicial, military and other general affairs. He used to consult with the tribal consultative committees. This latter managerial body elected the Shaykh who continued to keep his job as long as his electorates were happy with him.[39](#) However, in accordance with the tribal tradition, everybody had to obey the head of the tribe. When a Shaykh died, either his eldest son or another elderly man who possessed the same traits would be the tribal leader.

Islam fought against the tribal system and did away with it. It did not consider race or clan as significant as it built the newly established Islamic society on the basis of "unity of faith," which is the strongest social bond. In this way, Islam substituted common faith for consanguinity. Islam called all the believers as brethren (the Holy Qur'an, 49:10). In this way, the foundation of the Arab social structure was changed.

Tribal Zeal and Devotion

Extreme zeal was considered as the very soul of the tribe and showed that an individual was devoted to the tribal interests. As a general rule, tribal devotion among the desert-dwellers resembled extreme nationalism in the modern world.[40](#) Whatever a civilized man does for his country, religion or race, a nomadic Arab did for his tribe. He would do anything possible for his tribe; he would even sacrifice his own life for it.[41](#)

An Arab used to be over-protective of his family members, such as brothers, nephews and other

relatives. He used to protect his relative be he good or tyrant. In the Arab's ideology, if anybody refrained from helping his brother or nephew, his honor would be marred and damaged. Regarding this, they would say:

Help out your brother whether he is an oppressor or oppressed.

An Arab has written the following poem in this regard:

When a man is asked by his brothers to help them, he would not delay helping them out.[42](#)

In this way, if a tribal member was insulted, the whole tribe would feel this insult. Therefore, all tribal members had to participate in obliterating this spot of dishonor.[43](#)

Islam has condemned this kind of nonsensical prejudice, dogmatism and harmful zeal and has called it irrational:

When those who disbelieved harbored in their hearts feelings of disdain; distain of the days of ignorance. (48:26)

The Holy Prophet has stated:

“Anybody who invites others to engage in a dogmatic piece of affair or bears prejudice stays out of Islam.”[44](#)

“Anybody who engages in prejudice or is shown irrational sympathy stays out of religion.”[45](#)

The Holy Prophet once said, “Help out your brother, whether he is an aggressor or is an oppressed.” People remarked, “It is evident that an oppressed one should be helped out? How should we help out an oppressor?” The Holy Prophet replied, “Stop his aggression.”[46](#)

Tribal Revenge

Since there was neither central government, nor any judicial system in those days in Arabia to settle people's conflicts and to establish justice anybody who was the victim of an injustice had the right to engage in the act of taking–revenge. If the offender belonged to another tribe, the oppressed had the right to take revenge on any member of the other tribe and this was a common practice with the Arabs of those days.[47](#) This was because one member's sin was considered collective, belonging to the whole tribe, and because of the whole clan and consanguinity. The act of taking revenge was carried out first by close relatives, and later on by the whole members of the tribe if it was felt urgent.

If anybody was killed, the act of taking revenge would fall upon the shoulders of the closest relative[48](#) and if the murdered one belonged to another tribe, the custom of revenge–taking would be carried out and any one of the murderer's tribal member was at the risk of losing his life. This was because the

dominating dictum of the desert would say: "Blood is washed off only with blood." No blood-money was accepted.

Once, a nomadic Arab was asked, "Are you ready to let go of anybody who has wronged you?" He replied, "I will take revenge and then go to hell."⁴⁹

Tribal Rivalries and Boastings

Another feature of the Arab's life in those dark days was rivalry and boasting. An Arab would bask in the dominant values of those days which were generally absurd. Besides bravery in the war-fields, other traits, such as generosity, loyalty, wealth, number of children and dependency towards tribal values, were considered significant. The Holy Qur'an re-states their statements, condemning them at the same time:

And they say: we have more wealth and children, and we shall not be punished. Say: surely my Lord amplifies the means of Subsistence for whom He pleases and straitens (for whom He pleases), but most men do not know. And not your wealth nor your children are the things which bring you near Us in station, but whoever believes and does good, these it is for whom is a double reward for what they do, and they shall be secure in the highest places. (34:35-37)

Once, Khosrow, the Iranian king, asked al-Nu'man Ibn al-Mundhir, the king of Hirah, "Is there a tribe among the Arab tribes, which is superior to others in dignity and honor? He answered, "Yes, there is." When he was asked for the reason, al-Nu'man replied, "Anybody who has three of his ancestors as the tribal chiefs consecutively and the fourth chief from his own tribe will have the next chief from his own tribe as well."⁵⁰

The Arabs at the time of ignorance used to boast about the numbers of their tribe members; in this way, they disheartened rival tribes.

One day, there was an argument between two tribes; each enumerated his tribal points of honor and claimed that the number of the dignified persons and the sheer number of the members was superior to that of the rival tribe. They started calling heads of all tribal members. The counting of the living members did not help. So, they went to the cemetery to count the dead.⁵¹ The Holy Qur'an has condemned such ignorant and irrational boastings:

Abundance diverts you, until you come to the graves, Nay! You shall soon know. (102:1-3)

The Significance of Parentage

Two of the most significant criteria among the Arabs during the period of ignorance were parentage and kinship relations. These were the very basis of many other criteria.⁵² Boasting on one's race was prevalent among the Arab tribes. A typical example was the rivalry between the 'Adnanite Arabs (in the

north) and the Qahtanite Arab (in the south).⁵³ For this very reason, an Arab gave great significance to his parentage. Al-Nu'man ibn al-Mundhir said to Khosrow:

The members of other nations do not care about their parentage; if they are asked about their ancestors, they will lack the necessary knowledge. This was completely different in the case of Arabs, who recognized their ancestors fully. The Arabs would not accept foreigners as members of their clans. They would not enter any interaction with strangers. An Arab is not called by any other name than his father's.⁵⁴

Thus, it is not surprising to see the science of genealogy, which was one of the limited sciences in those days, receiving a prominent significance. Genealogists received lots of respect, as well. Alusi, a prominent researcher on Arab issues, writes:

“Arabs in the Age of Ignorance put a lot of emphasis on their parentage because this kind of recognition was one of the means to cooperate with others. They really needed this sort of recognition, because they lived in separate locations and the fire of war was always blazing. Plunder was a common practice. Since they were reluctant to accept anybody's help in order to defeat their enemies, they had to stick to their parentage, because the love and caring for ones' relatives would result in mutual cooperation and would prevent disunity.⁵⁵

Islam, however, rejected any concept of racial superiority. Although the verses of the Holy Qur'an were revealed among the Arabs and the tribe of Quraysh, they were never addressed to any Qurayshite or any Arab. Rather, these sacred verses are addressed to people in general. When Muslims are reminded of their duties, they are referred to as believers. According to the Holy Qur'an, racial differences are natural things. However, it rejects boasting about one's race, and recognizes the criterion of piety as the base for values:

O you men! Surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other, surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful of his duty, surely Allah is Knowing, Aware. (49: 13)⁵⁶

The Holy Prophet emphatically rejected boasting about one's race or parentage. Examples are the following:

(1) On the Conquest of Mecca when the Quraysh's main stronghold fell, people of Quraysh considered themselves superior; hence, the Holy Prophet remarked:

O people: God, through Islam, has strongly rejected taking pride in one's parentage which existed at the age of Ignorance. Remember, you are not at the Age of Ignorance. Remember, you are the offspring of Adam, and Adam was created of dust. The best of God's servants are the most pious. Arabism could not possibly be the father of anybody. But Arabic is an eloquent language. One who is a loser in life could not be saved through racial or ancestral privileges.⁵⁷

(2) During his last pilgrimage (hijjat al-wada'; Farewell Pilgrimage) and through a detailed discourse, the Holy Prophet warned the attendants, saying:

“No Arab has any superiority over any non-Arab except for piety.”[58](#)

While confirming Salman in his discussion with Quraysh and his condemnation of the Arab's wrong ideology in believing in racism, the Holy Prophet (S), said:

“O People of Quraysh; one's honor rests on one's religion; one's manhood and honor rest on one's behavior; one's true origin is one's wisdom and understanding.”[59](#)

Tribal Wars

If a murder occurred among the Arabs, the murderer's closest relative would be responsible; and since the murderer's family used to support him, a bloody war would be inevitable. These wars would start over minor things and usually lasted for years. An example was the Basus War between the two tribes of Banu-Bakr and Banu-Taghlib both of whom belonged to Rabi'ah. This war lasted for forty years. The source of the conflict was the arrival of a camel of the former tribe into the reserved pastureland of the other tribe who slaughtered it. The camel owner, a lady named Basus, belonged to the former tribe.[60](#)

Another war of the same nature broke out between Qays ibn Zuhayr, the chief of Banu-Fazarah over a horse race. Dahis and al-Ghabra' were the names of two horses which took part in this competition. The former belonged to Qays and the latter to Hudhayfah. Both Qays and Hudhayfah claimed that their horses won. This minor event culminated in a disaster in which many lives were lost.[61](#) These kinds of calamities have been termed Ayyam al-'Arab on which numerous books have been written.

Of course, on some occasions, camels would be paid to the family of the diseased one as blood money. In every tribe, it was up to the elderly people to solve such conflicts. Solutions were offered, but not imposed and the tribes would accept such peaceful solutions due to their involvement in the tiring wars. If the murderer's tribe submitted the murderer to the other tribe who had lost a member, wars could be prevented. However, such submission was not honorable. Therefore, they preferred to punish the wrongdoer. In the conceptualization of the desert dweller, keeping one's face was the very essence of ethics.

These desert rules and regulations were carried out in the cities of Hijaz, i.e. Ta'if, Mecca and Medina. This is because these citizens resembled the desert dwellers in many ways: they were independent and free, as they obeyed nobody whatsoever. However, these prestige-keeping behaviors which manifested themselves in extremity within the desert were somehow moderated in Mecca due to the respect that they showed towards the Kaaba and because of the trade, contracts which were held in that holy place.[62](#)

The Holy Qur'an has condemned this sort of revenge-taking and stipulated justice as the basis for the

protection of people. It emphasized the fact that Muslims should maintain justice even if this justice might endanger themselves or their parents.

O You who believe! Be maintainers and justify bearers of witness of Allah's sake, though it may be against your own selves or your parents or near relatives; if he be rich or poor, Allah is nearer to them both in compassion; therefore do not follow your low desires, lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn aside, then surely Allah is aware of what you do. (4: 135)

Manslaughter and Plunder

The desert-dwelling Arab did not show any love or sympathy towards anybody outside his own tribe. This kind of affection did not go beyond one's own family and tribe the members of which were close relatives. An Arab's field of thinking and understanding was within the narrow range of the tribe. The desert-dwelling Arab, like extremist nationalists of our time, cared for his own interests and those of his close relatives. This behavior was manifested by one Arab, who was still under the influence of his previous culture after the advent of Islam and said at the time of praying, "O God, bless me and bless Muhammad; but do not bless anybody else."⁶³

The deprivation imposed by the severe conditions of the desert on the desert-dwelling Arabs forced them to engage in plundering. This was due to the fact that their land lacked the common assets of other lands. They used to compensate for this deprivation through plundering. They considered engagement in plundering the caravans a kind of bravery and honor in the same way that capture and besiegement of a city is considered honorable at our own time.⁶⁴

Of course, one of the causes for plundering and wars was rivalry among tribes to capture the pastures. At times, bloody conflicts occurred for the attainment of chief ship. For instance, at the time of the death of an elder brother who used to be the chief, the younger brothers desired for that position, and the deceased chief's sons, too, wanted to get their father's position. Under such conditions, fight and struggles for power were inevitable. In such moments, poets also agitated people to be involved for more bloodshed. They chanted tribal prides, criticized other rival tribes and mobilized people to take revenge. Minor issues were the usual causes for such bloody conflicts, it was then up to the two antagonistic tribes to annihilate one another mercilessly.⁶⁵ Savagery and avoidance of civilized ways was among the reasons for their plundering. In the opinion of Ibn Khaldun, this nation was savage. Plundering and savagery were embedded in their very morale. For instance, when they needed stones to build a fireplace, they used to destroy buildings; they used to destroy buildings and castles in order to prepare woods required for erecting tents. They got their sustenance by means of swords; they would not be satisfied easily; they showed greed for plunder; they would grab any piece of wealth they could put their hands on.⁶⁶

Plundering was one of their sources of income. When they attacked a tribe, they would confiscate their camels and enslave their wives and children. Still another tribe would carry out the same pernicious acts

in a later time. When they could not locate an enemy, they would destroy one another. This is made clear through the poem of al-Qattami, a poet in the reign of the Umayyad rulers, who composed:

“It is our job to attack our neighbors and our enemies, and in those moments when we cannot locate anybody else except for our brother, we will attack him.”⁶⁷

The revenge-based wars between the two tribes of Aws and Khazraj in Yathrib (Medina) were so severe and widespread that nobody dared to leave his home. These wars had destroyed the lives of the Arabs. God mentions in the Holy Qur'an their catastrophic condition and emphasizes the brotherhood among people which was the result of Islam:

Remember the favor of Allah on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favor you became brethren; and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then he saved you from it; thus does Allah make clear to you His communications that you may follow the right way.
(3: 103)

The Forbidden Months

A ceasefire (called sacred peace) was held among Arabs only during the Sacred Months (i.e. Dhu'l-Qa'dah, Dhu'l-Hijjah, Muharram, and Rajab) out of their respect for a tradition left from the time of Prophet Abraham and Prophet Ishmael.⁶⁸ During these tranquil times, Arabs could have peace of mind and engage in trades or pilgrimage.⁶⁹

If any war occurred during these sacred months, they would be called Harb al-Fujjar or a sinful fight. (The Holy Qur'an 9:37)

Women in the Arab Society

Arabs' outlook towards women was one of the manifestations and outcomes of ignorance during the period of Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic ignorance). Women were denied their human rights and independence. The very existence of women and girls at home was a sign of inferiority and shame for a family.⁷⁰ They would deprive girls of inheritance and believed those who defend their tribes (i.e. boys) who use their swords are entitled to inheritance.⁷¹ In accordance with a narration, women were considered as merchandise. Upon her husband's death, the wife, if she did not have a son, would be transferred, along with the husband's other commodities, to the son of her husband from other wives.⁷²

In accordance with some pieces of evidence, upon the death of one's husband, a woman would become the wife of her eldest son who would draw a piece of cloth on her step-mother's face and consider her item of inheritance and would marry her without any dowry. If he was reluctant to marry his stepmother, he would then ask another man to marry her and make use of her dowry for himself. If he preferred, he could deprive her stepmother of any future marriages so that after her death he could possess her wealth.

Thus, at the time of Arab Ignorance, marrying one's stepmother was not illegal. For this reason, the Holy Qur'an has prohibited it.⁷³ According to some interpreters, when a man called Abu-Qays ibn al-Aslat died and his eldest son wanted to marry his mother, the following verse was revealed:

It is not lawful for you that you should take women as heritage against their will. (4:22)⁷⁴

In those dark days, polygamy was very prevalent.⁷⁵

The Tragedy of Women

As it is well-known, one of the Arabs' worst habits at the time of Ignorance was the practice of burying daughters alive. They would bury their daughters alive because they were thought to be unable to defend the tribal interests. Such men also feared that their daughters could be enslaved by their enemies, be married to them and give birth to children. This, they assumed, would be a sign of shame for them.⁷⁶ Some others buried their daughters alive due to severe poverty and wretchedness. (6: 151)⁷⁷ as a whole, daughters were received as nasty beings. They were held as a sign of disgrace. The Holy Qur'an describes them in the following manner:

And when a daughter is announced to one of them, his face becomes black and he is full of wrath. He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that which is announced to him. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it alive in the dust? Now surely evil is what they judge. (16:58-59)

Women's deprivation and conviction are reflected amply in the Arab literature of those days. It was a custom for the Arab men to sympathize with a man who became a father to a daughter. They would tell him, "May God keeps you from her disgrace. May God provide you with the expenses that she would create for you. May God turn her bridegroom's house into grave."

Regarding this, an Arab poet has written the following poem:

"For any father who has a daughter and wishes to keep her, there are three kinds of bridegrooms: A house where she can shelter; a husband who can keep her, and a grave to protect her; but the best the grave."

A story is told that a man, called Abu-Hamzah, stayed with the neighbors because his wife had given birth to a girl. His wife playfully said the following piece of poetry for her child:

"What has happened to Abu-Hamzah who has left us, living with the neighbors. He is angry because I have not given birth to a son. By God I swear, it is not upon us to decide on the sex of the child. We will receive what we are given."

This mother's speech is in fact a revolt against the tyrant social conditions prevailing over the Arab community in those days, and depicts the tragedy of women then. The first tribe to establish such a

nasty institution was the tribe of Banu–Tamim. It is said that upon their refusal to pay tribunes to al–Nu'man ibn al–Mundhir, there broke out a severe war in which the women and girls of Tamim were taken prisoners. When Tamim's representatives went to al–Nu'man's court to receive the prisoners, the women were given option to either stay at al–Hirah or return home among the Tamimi people. The daughter of Qays ibn 'Azim, the chief of the tribe, who was among the prisoners and had married a courtier, chose to stay at the court. Qays became utterly upset and decided to kill his daughters from then on.⁷⁸ This custom gradually became widespread and it is said that the tribes Qays, Asad, Hudhayl, and Bakr ibn Wa'il committed this crime from then on.⁷⁹ Of course, not everybody or tribe performed such nasty crimes. Some tribes and dignified people, such as 'Abd al–Muttalib, the Holy Prophet's grandfather, opposed it.⁸⁰ Individuals such as Zayd ibn 'Amr ibn Nufayl and Sa'za'ah ibn Najiyah would take those girls who were supposed to be buried alive due to their parents' poverty and keep them safe.⁸¹ Sometimes, they provided their parents with some camels.⁸² However, there is a lot of evidence which indicates that this keeping of such girls was common:

1. Sa'za'ah ibn Najiyah once told the Holy Prophet that he had saved 280 girls from being buried alive.⁸³
2. Qays ibn 'Azim killed twelve or thirteen of his daughters after he had taken the decision to do so.⁸⁴
3. In the first treaty at al–'Aqabah (12 years after the Holy Prophet's Divine Mission) which the Holy Prophet held with some groups of Yathrib, one paragraph concerned the avoidance of burying daughters alive.⁸⁵
4. After the Conquest of Mecca, one of the items of the treaty with the women of this city stipulated that they should refrain from killing their children.
5. The Holy Qur'an has condemned the practice of burying daughters alive on several occasions:

And do not kill your children for fear of poverty; We give them sustenance and yourselves too; surely to kill them is a great wrong. (17:31)

And thus their associates have made fair seeming to most of the polytheists the killing of their children, that they may cause them to perish and obscure for them their religion. (6: 137)

They are lost indeed who kill their children foolishly without knowledge, and forbid what Allah has given to them, forging a lie against Allah. (6: 140)

And do not slay your children for fear of poverty–We provide for you and for them. (6: 151)

And when the female infant buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed. (81:8–9)

Chapter 2: Moral Features of the Arabs

Opposing Traits

Despite the savage nature and plundering inclinations, the nomadic Arab possessed some good traits such as generosity, hospitality and bravery. He strongly stuck to his promises and kept his word so much so that at times he even endangered his wellbeing to keep his promises; and this loyalty to his promises was his most distinguishing feature. The presence of such differing traits in the nomadic Arabs makes us wonder.

If the Arabs had not lived in such a hostile land, it would have been difficult for us to know the reason for such contrasts. The same Arab who desired for plundering and did not hesitate to commit the most vicious crimes showed sympathy, emotions and hospitality inside his tent. If a needy person referred to him for help, he would assist him generously and at times would endanger his own life for their wellbeing.⁸⁶ A nomadic Arab considered it the highest point of honor and dignity to show bravery on the battlefield, to be extremely generous, to be loyal to his tribal interests, and to be harsh in taking revenge against those who have wronged him or his relatives or tribe.⁸⁷

The Roots for the Arab's Good Manners

Despite the fact that Arabs were most often engaged in bloody fights over the possession of pastures, they had come to understand this truism that they should engage in the highest form of hospitality towards others since they lived in a hostile land in which resting-places or hotels were not available to provide travelers with shelters. Poets at the Ignorance Era, who acted like journalists of our time, used to emphasize the notion of hospitality and admire this human trait more than other human traits.⁸⁸

It should be however noted that the roots of most of their good traits, such as bravery, hospitality, generosity, and protecting the needy, did not rest in their human and spiritual values; rather, these traits had their roots in the culture of the Ignorance Era. They performed these human traits out of their rivalry and competition with other members of society. This is because that harsh environment called for bravery and audacity. Love for a good name and leadership and fear of poets' criticism and wish to avoid being called misers and mean persons led Arabs to show great signs of generosity and protection towards those in trouble.⁸⁹

Ignorance and Superstition

The nomadic Arab of Hijaz who lived mostly in the desert lacked true civilization; he was dominated by extreme fanatics and incapable of comprehending the relations of nature. He could not analyze the phenomena in nature critically and was unable to understand cause and effect relations. When a sick man received some drugs, he was incapable of analyzing critically the relationship between pain and disease. The only thing he knew was the fact that his clan-mates used to take this medicine under

similar conditions. For instance, he naively accepted that the tribal chief's blood would remedy the disease of rabies, which was the result of a dog's bite. In the same way, he was under the illusion that the cause of sickness was a malicious spirit which entered the sick man's body.

For this reason, attempts were made to expel this intruder from the sick man's body. In the case of mental sickness, they used to put the dead men's stones over the ill person's body so that illness might be cured. They strongly believed in spirits; they believed these creatures loomed in deserted places at night or they trouble travelers at night. When cows were taken to the river to drink water and a cow refused to drink, they thought the reason for her refusal was the presence of a devil inside the bull's horns. In order to drive the devil away, they used to strike the head of the bull.⁹⁰ Such funny events were very common among them.

The Arabs would not show any sign of doubt regarding these superstitious acts so far as they were carried out by others, because the source of doubt and skepticism lies in one's critical thinking. They lacked such sophistications in those days. Of course, at times some bright signs of clear thinking and bright ideas could be observed in their poems, proverbs and tales. However, even these lacked deep thought or analytic aspects. This inability of analysis of phenomena was the root of all sorts of superstitions in which they strongly believed and books of the history of the Arabs contain a lot of them.⁹¹

Arab Sciences and Arts

Some scholars have tried to prove that the nomadic Arabs were in command of such sciences as medicine, astronomy and physiognomy.⁹² However, this is an exaggeration. The Arab's knowledge in these domains was sporadic, unorganized and mostly based on lucky guesses. This sort of knowledge came down to them through elderly women and men of the tribe. It could not be termed science. For instance, the Arabs' knowledge of astronomy was limited to the recognition of some stars and the time of their rising and setting. This kind of knowledge was necessary for the navigation of their camels on the vast expanses of the deserts or the recognition of the time for prayers. Ibn Khaldun states,

Their knowledge of medicine was based, most often, on short-lived and narrow experiences. This sort of medicine was inherited from elderly men and women from one generation to another. Some sick people might haphazardly be cured, but these treatments were not based on any laws.⁹³

The medical treatment of some physicians such as Harith ibn Kildah was of this sort.

An illiterate nation

In the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, people of Hijaz were illiterate. They had remained as illiterate as when they were born. They could neither write nor read. Al-Buladhari states:

At the advent of Islam, only seventeen persons in Quraysh and Yathrib and eleven others from the tribes

of Aws and Khazraj could read or write.⁹⁴

This situation existed in spite of the fact that people of Quraysh were affluent in Mecca and business and trade naturally asked for a trader to be literate. Thus, how is it possible for such an advanced stage of science?

Poetry

At the Ignorance Era, the only privilege the nomadic Arabs possessed was their skill in poetry and rhetoric. Poetry, in particular, had reached its climax. Poets played the roles of historians, genealogists, satirists, moralists, journalists, fortune-tellers and war-announcers.⁹⁵ In those days, the great Arab poets used to present their poems at season-bazaars, such as the bazaar of 'Uka', Dhi'l-Majaz, and al-Majannah,⁹⁶ which were held in the form of trade, literary and general exhibitions. The selection of any poem as a masterpiece was a great sign for the poet and his tribe and his poem was hung on the Kaaba's walls.⁹⁷ For this reason, they were called al-Mu'allaqat (the suspensions). Arab poems, despite their superficial eloquence, lacked sublime thoughts and richness due to the fact that this nation lacked proper culture and civilization. The contents of this poetry relied heavily on the topics of love, wine, women, epics, and tribal issues and their beauty lay in the superficial glamour of language and literary subtleties.

Arabs and the Neighboring Civilizations

When we study Arab sciences and arts, we may ask the following question: Did the Arabs of the Ignorance Era benefit from the two civilized nations of those days: namely, Iran and Rome? Did their trade transactions with these two states change their way of life in any way? To answer these questions, we should be reminded that people of Hijaz, due to their geopolitical status, were not only away from the political domination of the neighboring lands but also stayed away from their cultural influences. Arabs could have the influences of the neighboring civilizations and cultures only in three ways: trade, the Iranians, and the Jews and Christians.

We should however see to what degree this influence was active. Some remarks made by certain historians considering this topic have been exaggerative. For instance, some say:

The relations of the Arab tribes with both Iran and Rome to a certain degree made them familiar with these two civilizations: Those Arabs who traveled between Iran and Rome for trade purposes observed the manifestations of civilization in these two centers. These influences could be vividly observed in the poems left from the Ignorance Era. Furthermore, many travelers and traders took with them many words and stories from Iran and Rome to the Arabian Peninsula; in this way, some of the ideologies of Iranians and Romans entered Arab culture.⁹⁸

However, it should be noted that these trade transactions between traders of Hijaz and the Iranian or Roman merchants did not have any significant influence over the cultural or intellectual advancement of

these people. This is because information was hard to pass through mental sieves of these nomads. Most often, what they passed on to others contained a lot of distortions. This is shown in many Arab axioms whose sources are either Solomon's tales or Iranian stories. In general, the Arabs in those days did not receive science from others systematically. The obstacles in the way of such receptions were the following:

- (1) Natural barriers, such as mountains, seas, and deserts; these barriers created problems for Arab's connection with the outside world.
- (2) Huge mental, intellectual and social differences between the Romans and Iranians on one hand and the Arabs on the other hand.
- (3) Illiteracy among the Arabs had caused those who came in contact with both Iranians and Romans to memorize and narrate the axioms or the tales in such a way as to be comprehensible to ordinary people.

Thus, it could be concluded that the Arab's relationships with the neighboring lands had effects only on their financial, material and literary life.[99](#)

On the Jews' influences too, it is said that they emigrated to Hijaz since the time of Prophet Moses due to the Romans' aggressions after the destruction of Jerusalem.[100](#) The arrival of Jews in Hijaz had a tremendous effect on the social life of the whole region and the stories of the Old Testament and Talmud became known to the Arabs of Hijaz.[101](#)

Of course, the influence of Jewish culture on the people of the Arabian Peninsula cannot be denied and there are documents revealing the fact that the Jews were superior to the Arabs in the intellectual and religious domains. Even after the advent of Islam, many Muslims used to ask them religious questions.[102](#) Since Judaism, like Christianity, had been severely distorted, the thoughts that the Arabs received from the Jews were extremely disturbed and distorted. Not only were Jewish instructions unhelpful but also they added to the Arabs' confusion.

The Arab's Inferiority vis-à-vis Iran and Rome

As we have already noted, people of Hijaz used to have a tribal life in the desert, lacking central government to unite them. They were mostly involved in tribal conflicts. For this reason, they were wretched and backward and were not noticed by the people of the world.

The Arabs were so entangled in the narrow sphere of their tribal atmosphere and were so involved in the prejudices and dogmas. They were also so deprived and disorganized that they could never think about affairs occurring outside their immediate surroundings. They could never think of defeating their neighboring powerful states of Iran and Rome; rather, they felt extremely powerless, wretched and inferior towards these two civilizations. An Arab person, namely Qatadah, introduced the Arabs of those days as the most miserable, wretched, backward, misguided, begging and hungry people in the world.

He says,

“The Arabs were caught between two lions, from both of whom they feared.” [103](#)

A piece of evidence for this feeling of inferiority comes from the Holy Prophet's dialogue with the Arabs in Mecca. When he was trying to spread his ideologies among the Arabs, he encountered a group of distinguished Arab individuals. He recited to them some of the verses of the Holy Qur'an which were concerned with native and ethical instructions. All of them were highly moved; they began to admire the verses. However, their chief, al-Muthanna ibn Harithah, remarked:

“We are caught between two stretches of water. On one side lie the Arab shores; on the other lie Iran and Khosrow rivers. We have pledged to Khosrow not to create any problem and not to protect or shelter any wrongdoer. Perhaps your ideologies are not palatable to the kings. If we do anything wrong here, it would be pardoned, but such mistakes and errors in the Iranian borders are not pardonable by Khosrow, the king of Iran. [104](#)

Imaginary Pride

Regarding the Arab inferiority complex, historians have written:

The Tamim tribe faced a drought, but Khosrow did not allow them to make use of the fertile lands of Iraq. Then, one of their noblemen, named Hajib ibn Zurarah, came to Khosrow's court as a representative of his tribe. Khosrow said, “You, Arabs, are traitors. If I let you use these fertile lands, you will agitate and excite people against me and make me worried.” Hajib replied, “I assure you such a thing would never happen.” Khosrow then asked, “How would you guarantee this?” Hajib answered, “I pledge my bow with you.” Khosrow accepted. Thus, Hajib's bow was kept by Khosrow as a pledge (Hajib's bow was a symbol of his bravery, chivalry and manhood). After Hajib's death, his son 'Utarad received his father's bow from Khosrow. [105](#) After this event and for a long time, people of the Tamim tribe considered this pledge high point of honor. [106](#)

On the other hand, since the Banu-Shayban, with the assistance of Banu-'Ujal and Banu-Yashkur, had overcome Khosrow Parviz in the Battle of Dhi-Qar, [107](#) this victory was a point of honor for them; they looked at it unbelievably. Whenever they remembered it, they would take pride in it. They did not dare to call it the victory of Arabs over the Persians; they considered it an accident, but not as point of honor. They would recognize it as the pride of three Arab tribes and not just one. Their self-admiration reached such a point that Abu-Tammam, a poet, composed a poem in the honor of Abu-Dulaf al-'Ajali in spite of the fact that the Tamim tribe had one day taken pride in having asked Khosrow to accept Hajib's bow as a sign of his pledge for loyalty:

Once Tamim took honor in having pledged his bow and considered this as a point of honor;

However, your swords at the war of Dhi-Qar overthrew the thrones of those who had taken Hajib's bow

as a pledge. [108](#)

The Ignorance Era

In our discussions so far, we have referred to the people of the Arabian Peninsula prior to the advent of Islam as an ignorant people, living in an era of ignorance. There are documents showing that this idiomatic expression was taken from the Holy Qur'an and was used by Muslims to describe this specific era and had taken on a special meaning and flavor. [109](#) Some contemporary historians estimate the time interval of 150–200 years prior to Prophet Muhammad's prophethood for the existence of the Ignorance Era. [110](#)

Although the word Jahiliyyah is taken from Jahl (meaning ignorance), the word Jahl here is not taken to be the opposite of science or knowledge; rather, it the opposite of wisdom and logic.

Having lacked knowledge, the people of the Arabian Peninsula were illiterate at that time. They were given the name ignorant not due to their lack of knowledge, but because of their wrong and negative attitudes and illogical thinking and because of their prejudice, selfishness, false pride and vengeful attitude. Islam, however, strongly opposed these negative and destructive inclinations. [111](#) Perhaps, under such conditions, jahl connotes the meaning of being stupid, which is not based on illiteracy. [112](#)

In the Holy Qur'an, the word ignorance or Jahiliyyah has been used with the meanings we have already referred to. Some of those cases are referred to below:

(1) The unfounded expectations of some superficial believers who wanted the Holy Prophet to do things in accordance with their whimsical wishes were termed Ignorant. (Qur'an 5: 50)

(2) God has referred to the blind tribal prejudices of the idol-worshipping Arab as ignorance. (Qur'an 48: 26)

(3) The Holy Prophet's wives were warned not to appear among community with the ornaments of the women of the earlier times. (Qur'an 33:33)

(4) God refers to the feeble-minded who, after the defeat of Muslims in the Battle of Uhud, had lost their faith and their morale as ignorant. (Qur'an 3: 154)

(5) God tells the story of the nation of Prophet Moses who had refused his orders to sacrifice a cow by replying, "Do you make fun of us?" Then, Prophet Moses remarked, "I take shelter in God not to be one of the ignorant ones." (Qur'an 2: 67)

Depicting the miserable life of the idol-worshipping Arabs, Imam 'Ali (a.s) refers to their stupidity. [113](#)

Chapter 3: Sects and Religions in the Arabian Peninsula and its Surroundings

Despite the fact that at the advent of Islam the prevailing belief of the Arabs involved idol-worshipping, there were different religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Hanifiyyah, Manawiyyah, Sabian and other schools practiced in different localities of Arabia. Thus, the Arabs did not follow a specific sect. For this reason, there was a sort of fatigue and delusion among the followers of these sects. We will hereinafter deal with each of these sects, yet briefly:

Monotheists

Monotheists or Hanifiyyah¹¹⁴ were those who, despite the infidels and atheists, believed in One and Only God and probably believed in the punishment of the Doomsday. Some members of this group believed in Christianity; but historians have included them with the Hanifiyyah. Among the Hanifiyyah are the following individuals: Waraqah ibn Nawfal, ‘Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh, ‘Uthman ibn Huwayrith, Zayd ibn ‘Amr ibn Nufayl,¹¹⁵ al-Nabighah al-Ja’di (Qays ibn ‘Abdullah), Umayyah ibn Abil-Salt, Qiss ibn Sa’idah al-Iyadi, Abu-Qays Surmah ibn Abi-Anas, Zuhayr ibn Abi-Sulma, Abu-’Amir al-Awsi (‘Abd ‘Amr ibn Sayfi), ‘Addas (the servant of ‘Utbah ibn Rabi’ah), Ri’ab al-Shanni, and Bahira the monk.¹¹⁶ Some of these people were among the distinguished philosophers or poets.

Of course, the secret behind their inclinations towards monotheism lay in their pure and clean human nature and their bright thoughts. The prevalent ill-ominous sects of those days could not satisfy their spiritual needs. These distinguished individuals deeply believed in Almighty God and refrained from following an illogical set of beliefs such as those of idol-worshippers. Christianity and Judaism, too, had lost their vigor and spirituality with the passage of time and could not offer any means of tranquility to those men. For this reason, we observe that some of these God-seekers suffered the pains of journeys to find the truth. They had long discussions with Christian and Jewish scholars.¹¹⁷ They impatiently looked for the signs of prophethood of the Holy Prophet to which there were numerous references in the Holy Books. Since they could not reach any accomplishment, they accepted the very first principle of monotheism. However, we do not know anything about the way they carried out their religious ceremonies.

It should be noted, however, that contrary to the view of some scholars, Hanifiyyah did not play any role in guiding the Arab society towards monotheism; rather, as some other historians have stated, they spent their lives in seclusion. They spent their time in deliberation and contemplation, as they were never well-organized. They did not possess any sect with preset commandments or principles. What they were fond of was their seclusion and staying away from the population and refraining from worshipping idols. They were convinced that the prevalent ideology was a corrupt one. They did not give themselves the trouble of propagating their right ideas. For this very reason, they did not have any conflict with people of their own time.¹¹⁸

Christianity

There were some followers of Christianity, too, at some locations of Arabia. This religion had entered Arabia from the south via Ethiopia, and from the north via Syria (The dominated areas by Byzantine) and also from the Sinai Peninsula. However, Christianity achieved no progress in that land. [119](#) In the northern parts of the Arabian Peninsula, Christianity had found its way among the members of the tribe of Taghlib (a branch of the tribe of Rabi'ah), Ghassan and some members of the tribe of Qudha'ah. [120](#) Qiss ibn Sa'idah, Han'alah al-Ta'i and Umayyah ibn al-Salt have been enumerated as Christians. Some of these had left their cities and communities and joined monasteries in the deserts. [121](#)

Christianity in Yemen

Christianity entered Yemen during the fourth century AD. Phillip Hatti, a Christian author, writes:

The first Christian missionary headed by Theofilus Endus Erius who arrived at southern Arabia was the one sent by Emperor Constantius in 356 AD. The dispatch of the abovementioned missionary was motivated by the world diplomacy of those days and the rivalry between Iran and Rome over the domination of territories in southern Arabia. Theofilus established a church [122](#) in Aden and two in the country of Himyar. The people of Najran accepted the new religion in 500 AD.

At the dawn of Islam, Christianity was prevalent in the tribes of Tayy, Majhadh, Bahra', Sulayh, Tanukh, Ghassan, Lakhm and Yemen. [123](#) The most important center for Christianity in Yemen was Najran, an advanced city. People used to engage in farming, weaving silky cloth, trading hides and weapon making, this city was located at the trade route which extended up to Hirah. [124](#)

Christianity was prevalent in Yemen until the reign of Dhu-Nuwas who came to power and forced people to put aside their religion. When Christians refused to do so, they were put in fire-pits and burned alive. [125](#) Finally, Dhu-Nuwas was defeated in 525 AD by the intervention of Ethiopia and Christians came to power once again.

Christianity in Hirah

Another city where Christianity was prevalent was Hirah, to the east of Arabia. This religion had entered the region through Roman slaves. Since the time of Hormoz I, the government of Iran had built some colonies the inhabitants of which were Roman slaves. Some of them lived in Hirah. In the view of many, the source of Christian influence in this area was these slaves. Christian missionaries used to live in Hirah, promulgating Christianity. They started propagating and spreading Christianity in the Arab markets, discussing the issues of heaven, hell and chastisement. Due to their efforts, some accepted this religion; even Hind, the wife of al-Nu'man X, accepted this religion, building a monastery called Hind's convent. This building was in existence up to the time of al-Tabari. Han'alah al-Ta'i, Qiss ibn Sa'idah and Umayyah ibn al-Salt were from Hirah. [126](#) Al-Nu'man ibn al-Mundhir, the king of Hirah, due to the encouragement of 'Adi ibn Zayd, accepted Christianity. [127](#)

Numerous Qur'anic verses deal with Christian ideas and the weak points in their beliefs and actions, especially their assumptions concerning Christ's divinity. [128](#) This is the best piece of evidence for the existence of this religion in the Arabian Peninsula at the time of the revelation of the Holy Qur'an. The issue of Mubalahah; mutual cursing, which is well-known in the history of Islam, took place with the Najran priests. [129](#)

However, Christianity had lost its spirituality and authenticity and had been subject to a lot of distortions. Thus, it could not fill the intellectual and religious vacuum which existed in the mind of people in those days nor could it give any peace of mind anymore.

Judaism

Many centuries prior to the advent of Islam, Judaism had entered certain regions of Arabia. Yathrib was one of the most famous of these regions, which later came to be called Medina. There were Jewish communities in Tayma', [130](#) Fadak [131](#), and Khaybar. [132](#) The Jews of Yathrib belonged to three tribes: Banu- Nadhir, Banu-Qaynuqa' and Banu-Quray'ah. [133](#)

Besides these three Jewish settlements, there were in Medina two other Jewish tribes; Aws and Khazaraj, during the third century AD. Upon the establishment of the Jews in Yathrib, these two tribes came from Yemen to live in this city. They were originally idolaters and due to their association with the Jews, some of them embraced Judaism. It is said that there were some Jews living in Ta'if who had been driven out of Yemen and Yathrib by force and they started their engagement in trade. [134](#)

Wherever they lived in Arabia, the Jews were well-known for farming due to their skills in this activity. In Medina too, they were famous due to their skills in blacksmithing, dyeing, and weaponry. [135](#) Judaism had some followers among the tribes of Himyar, Banu- Kinanah, Banu-Harith ibn Ka'b, Kindah, [136](#) Ghassan and Judham. [137](#)

Jews in Yemen

Any region in which Jews lived; they propagated the Law of Moses. Yemen, too, was under the influence of the Jews for some time, and Dhu-Nuwas, the king of Yemen, who had accepted Judaism, started suppressing Christians and announced Judaism as the official religion.

In view of some researchers and historians, Dhu-Nuwas had some national and patriotic motives rather than religious sentiments, in announcing Judaism as an official religion; that is to say, Christians in Najran had friendly relations with Ethiopia and its government. Relying heavily on Najran's Christians, they tried to interfere with the internal affairs of Yemen to achieve political objectives. For this reason, by suppressing the Christians, Dhu-Nuwas and his supporters tried to deprive Ethiopia of this stronghold. After the massacre of Najran's Christians, one of them escaped to Ethiopia and begged the Ethiopian emperor for help. This led to a war between two countries in which Dhu-Nuwas was easily defeated in 525 AD and Najran continued to remain an important center for Christianity up to the Holy Prophet

prophethood. [138](#)

The Sabians

Historians believe that this sect came into being at the time of the kingdom of Tahmurath by Budhasif as its founder. After introducing the history of this sect, Abu-Rayhan al-Bayruni (360–440 AH) writes:

We do not know much about them except for the fact that in their opinion, God has no associate and is void of inappropriate epithets (negative attributes). For instance, they declare: God is not limited; He cannot be seen nor does He engage in injustice. They think the universe is managed by the heavens and that celestial bodies have influence upon us. They believe in life, speech, hearing and sight of the heavenly bodies that have control over rays. Believing in the great influences of the stars and their movement on the earthly creatures, Sabians used to keep the statues of these heavenly bodies in their temples. Examples are the statue of the sun in Baalbek, the statue of the moon in Harran and the statue of Venus in a village. [139](#)

The center of Sabian activities was the city of Harran. [140](#) This sect used to have followers in Rome, Greece, Babel and other places of the world. [141](#) The Holy Qur'an refers to them on three occasions. [142](#) This sect is now disintegrating and only a few of them live in Khuzestan [143](#) and Iraq. [144](#)

Manichaeism

The sects of Zoroastrianism, Mazdak and Manichaeism all originated in Iran. However, there is no consensus of opinion concerning the influences of these sects over Hijaz prior to Islam. Some contemporary historians believe these sects were present in Arabia in those years. Historical documents attest to the presence of Manichaeism in Arabia in those days. Ya'qubi writes:

Some Arabs adopted Judaism as their religion, others accepted Christianity, and some others became heretic and believed in dualism. [145](#) Although the word zindiq (miscreant) originally refers to atheist and denier of God, in the opinion of the scholars, this was used for a group of believers in Manichaeism and gradually included all followers of this sect. Later on, it included infidels and atheists in general. Thus, in the ancient sources, the word zindiq was used to include the followers of Manichaeism. [146](#) Now we know that Manichaeism is a combination of Christianity and Zoroastrianism. [147](#)

A group of historians have confirmed that heresy or Manichean heresy was prevalent among the people of Quraysh who had received it from the people of Hirah. [148](#) This clarifies the fact that by heresy, we mean dualism, because Hirah used to be a protégé and neighbor of Iran and Iranian sects which were based on dualism.

Star Worshipping

During the Ignorance Era, a group of the people of the Arabian Peninsula, like many of other areas,

worshipped celestial bodies, such as the moon and some stars. They believed in a special power embedded in these bodies which could exert energy over the population of the world, controlling their destiny in this way. For instance, the tribes of Khuza'ah and Himyar worshipped a star called Shi'ra, which is one of the stationary stars. Abu-Kabshah, one of the maternal ancestors of the Holy Prophet, was one of the worshippers of this star. [149](#) A group of Tayy tribe used to worship a star called Thurayya or the Pleiades. [150](#) The worship of skies and stars was so prevalent that its repercussions are visible in the Arab literature, romance and superstitions. [151](#) Besides the Sebiens who worshipped the sun and the moon, these two heavenly bodies were sanctified and worshipped by all idolaters in general. [152](#)

Prohibiting and condemning the worshipping of celestial bodies, the Holy Qur'an considers this limited group of celestial bodies creations of God that are dominated by His power and worshipping Him. Thus, they could be regarded as guides for man and directors towards God, the All-great. This is because these heavenly bodies are just signs for His power:

And He has made subservient for you the night, the day, the sun, and the moon and the stars are made subservient by His commandment; most surely, there are signs in this for a people who ponder. (16: 12)

And among His signs are the night and the day and the sun and the moon; do not make obeisance to the sun nor to the moon; and make obeisance to Allah who created them, if Him it is that you serve. (41:37)

And that He is the Lord of the Sirius. (53:49)

These sacred verses depict the fact that at the time of the Holy Prophet, the worshipping of these celestial bodies was a common practice.

The Worshipping of Jinn and Angels

Besides the abovementioned sects, some people of Arabia used to worship Jinn and angels. 'Abdullah ibn al-Zuba'ri, a tribal chief in Mecca, used to say, "We are the worshippers of the angels; the Jews worship Ezra, and the Christians worship the Christ! Now ask Muhammad: Would we go to hell when we worship so many beloved ones?" [153](#)

Banu-Malih, a branch of the Khuza'ah tribe, used to worship Jinn. [154](#) It is said that the first people who started worshipping jinn were a group of Yemenis; then it was the Banu-Hanifah tribe; then it was spread among the Arabs. [155](#) In the words of interpreters, some people believed that God has married the Jinn and the angels are the offspring of such a marriage. [156](#) In the Holy Qur'an, God has condemned the worshipping of Jinn and angels and the wrong assumptions about them:

And they made the jinn associates with Allah, while He created them, and they falsely attributed to Him, and highly exalted is He above what they ascribe to Him. (6: 100)

And on the day when He will gather them all together, and then He will say to the angels: Did these worship you? They shall say: Glory be to Thee! Thou art our Guardian, not they; nay! The worshippers become abashed. (34:41)

It also becomes clear through the answers offered by the angels that they are not satisfied with people who worship them. (34:41)

It is evident that this question is not asking for any information; neither does it unveil any ambiguity. This is because God is All-knowing. God intends that the angels reveal the truth so that their worshippers become abased. However, the jinn were content in this respect.

Thus, the worshipping of these two sets of invisible creatures on the part of some worshippers was not unlike the dualism-bided sect, because the worshipper considered the jinn as the source of light, benevolence and abundance. When entering a valley at night, some Arabs used to say, "I ask the protection of the chief of the ignorant ones in order to be safe against those ignorant ones who live in this land."¹⁵⁷ By chanting such slogans, they believed the jinn would protect them for the truth of this claim comes from the Holy Qur'an:

And persons from among men used to seek refuge with persons from among jinn, so they increased them in wrongdoing. (72:6)

The Appearance of Mecca

The building of Mecca goes back to the time of Prophet Abraham who was ordered by God to bring his wife Hajar and his infant Isma'il from Syria to live in a dry climate. (14:37)

Upon the appearance of Zamzam by God to water these two,¹⁵⁸ Jurhum, a southern tribe whose individuals had moved towards the north due to famine and drought, came to settle there.¹⁵⁹ Reaching the age of adulthood, Isma'il married a girl from this tribe.¹⁶⁰

Prophet Abraham was commanded by Allah to build up the Kaaba with the assistance of his son, Isma'il. (2: 127)

When it was built, the city of Mecca came into being and Isma'il's offspring gradually settled therein.

The Remnants of Abraham's Religion: Hanifiyyah

'Adnan was the great ancestor of the 'Adnani Arabs and the twentieth ancestor of the Holy Prophet from Isma'il's generation. Living in Hijaz, Najd, and Tihamah,¹⁶¹ the 'Adnanis followed Prophet Abraham's religion. In the words of Ya'qubi:

"Quraysh and 'Adnan's children in general believed in some principles of Prophet Abraham's religion. They used to perform their pious pilgrimage; they observed the Hajj ceremonies; they were hospitable;

they observed the prohibited months; they abhorred nasty deeds, the severing of relations with relatives and injustice or tyranny; they used to punish the wrongdoers. [162](#)

The remnants of Prophet Abraham's traditions, such as belief in God, avoidance of marrying one's mother or daughter, ceremonies of Hajj and Sacrifice, nocturnal pollution, [163](#) circumcision, and shrouding and burying the dead [164](#) were all carried out up to the advent of Islam: they carried the ten rules of cleansing the body and removing the unwanted hairs and the like. [165](#) They believed, as well, in the prohibitions imposed on the four months which was one of Prophet Abraham's traditions. [166](#) If for any reason, there occurred a fight among them; they called it a sinful and obnoxious war. [167](#) Thus, monotheism had a long history with the Arabs of that region and their idolatry entered there only later and drove them astray from monotheism.

The Beginning of Idolatry among Arabs

In accordance with numerous documents, two factors have been effective in the propagation of idolatry among Arabs:

First: 'Amr ibn Luhayy, the chief of Khuza'ah, an influential man and custodian of the Kaaba, [168](#) made a trip to Syria where he could visit a group at 'Amaliqah [169](#) who were engaged in idolatry. When he asked why they worshipped those idols, they replied, "They cause the rain to fall and help us in many ways." He asked them for an idol, and they gave him an idol called Hubal. Later, he took it to the Kaaba and stuck it on it asking people to worship it. [170](#) Besides this, there are two other idols next to the Kaaba: Asaf and Na'ilah. [171](#) These two were also worshipped upon his recommendation. In this way, he laid the foundation of idolatry. The Holy Prophet is reported to have said:

'Amr ibn Luhayy was the one who transformed Isma'il's religion and laid the foundation of idolatry. I have seen him in the fire of Hell. [172](#)

Second: When Isma'il's children grew in numbers in Mecca, they decided to go to different cities and locations to continue with their life. Due to their extreme respect and love for Mecca, everybody used to take away a piece of stone and put it on the ground wherever they went and started going around it like the ceremony around the Kaaba. Little by little, the motive behind this practice was forgotten and each stone transformed into an idol. People then would worship any stone they liked. In this way, they completely forgot their precious customs and religion: they transformed the religion of Prophet Abraham and Prophet Isma'il, accepting idolatry. [173](#)

Of course, these two factors were the basic reasons for the spread of idolatry. Naturally, there were other factors in this process, such as ignorance, human fondness of sensation (according to which man prefers God to be tangible), zeal for being the chief or among the prominent figures of the tribe who preferred people to be stuck in ignorance so that they could carry on with their domination, and imitating their ancestors that caused the spread of idolatry in different forms. [174](#) The number of idols gradually

increased to such an extent that there was an idol in every home. On their trips, they used to caress it with their hands and ask for blessing. [175](#) At the time of the conquest of Mecca, there were three hundred and sixty idols in this city. [176](#)

Did Idolaters Believe in Allah?

The idolaters did not deny the existence of Allah; they considered Him as the Creator of the skies, the earth and the universe—a fact established in the Holy Qur'an. [177](#) However, they committed two huge mistakes which were the very root of their misleading.

(1) A false recognition of Allah and His Attributes; they had puzzling attitudes towards Allah. This is witnessed by the fact that they assumed a wife and children for God. They thought that angels were Allah's daughters. They erroneously assumed that Allah was like men and other creatures that had the power of sexual reproduction. However, in different verses, God has reprimanded them for these attitudes:

And he made the angels – those who are the servants of the Beneficent God – female divinities.

What! Did they witness their creation? Their evidence shall be written down and they shall be questioned. (43:19)

Most surely, they who do not believe in the hereafter name the angels with female names. (53:27)

And they say: The Beneficent God has taken to Himself a son. Glory be to Him. Nay! They are honored servants. (21:16)

And they made the Jinn Associates with Allah, while He created them, and they falsely attributed to Him sons and daughters without knowledge; glory be to Him, and Highly exalted is He above what they ascribe to Him. And that He – exalted be the majesty of our Lord – has not taken a consort, or a son. (6:100–101)

In different verses, God has reprimanded the disbelievers for their ascribing to God the existence of girls, which were considered to be evil, while ascribing boys to themselves:

Or has He daughters while you have sons. (52:39)

Then ask them whether your Lord has daughters and they have sons. Or did we create the angels females while they were witnesses. (37:149–150)

Have you then considered Lat, 'Uzza, and Manat the third, the last? What! For you the males. And for Him the females! This indeed is an unjust division! They are naught but names which you have named, you and your fathers; Allah has not sent for them any authority. They follow naught but conjecture and the low desires which their souls incline to; and certainly, the guidance has

come to them from their Lord. (37: 149–150)

What! Has He taken daughters to Himself of what He himself creates and chosen you to have sons? (43: 16)

And they assert a relationship between Him and the jinn; and certainly, the jinn do know that they shall surely be brought up. Glory be to Allah for freedom from what they describe. (37: 158–159)

In accordance with an interpretation, by the relation of God to Jinn was meant to be their assumption of God's relation with Jinn, the consequence of which was the angels. [178](#)

2. They used to think of the idols as petty Gods, intermediate between themselves and Allah. Worshipping these petty Gods was supposed to satisfy Him. This assumption was irrational since worship belongs to Allah alone.

Despite the fact that these small gods were not supposed to be the creators of the world, their worshippers assumed some divine roles for them, considering them influential on man's fate and future. ***They looked for these Gods' assistance to solve their worldly problems. However, in Islam, Allah is considered to be both the Creator of the universe and it's Manager. (17: 111)***

The idols are lifeless entities, lacking perception. The Holy Qur'an depicts their baseless assumptions in the following manner:

And they serve beside Allah what can neither harm them nor profit them, and they say: These are our intercessors with Allah. Say: Do you presume to inform Allah of what He knows not in the heavens and the earth? Glory be to Him, and supremely exalted is He above what they set up with Him. (10: 18)

Now, surely, sincere obedience is due to Allah alone and as for those who take guardians besides Him, saying, We do not serve them save that they may make us nearer to Allah, Surely Allah will judge between them in that about which they differ; Surely Allah does not guide him aright who is a liar, ungrateful. (39:3)

And they have taken Gods besides Allah that they should be to them a source of strength. (19:81)

And they have taken Gods besides Allah that they may be helped. (36:74)

The Holy Qur'an calls the idolaters liars and ungrateful ones because they considered the idols as helpers to Allah in the management of worldly affairs.

[The Chaotic State of Religion](#)

When Islam appeared, idolatry had distorted and transformed the Hanifiyyah through its widespread

customs and ceremonies. The disbelievers were in a state of chaos regarding religion. They severely adhered to their idolatry and carried out its customs. They carried out Prophet Abraham's ceremonies, such as Hajj and sacrifice in a defective, distorted way, and mingled it with superstitions. For instance, besides bowing to and worshipping the Kaaba, they had built other temples around which they performed their ceremonies. They even took sacrifices to those temples, slaughtering them on the spot. [179](#)

Their prayers beside the Kaaba were nothing more than whistling and hand-clapping. During Hajj time and at the time of uttering the expression at Thy service, they used to call the names of their idols besides Allah's name. [180](#) In this way, they mingled the Hajj of Prophet Abraham, which is one of the most sublime manifestations of monotheism, with polytheism. The two tribes, Aws and Khazraj, instead of head-shaving at the land of Mina, carried out this ceremony on their way back to Medina at the foot of Manat (an idol), which was at the seashore [181](#) on the route between Mecca and Yathrib. [182](#)

The disbelievers, both men and women, used to circumambulate the Kaaba naked; [183](#) it is apparent what a horrible scene could be seen around the Kaaba!

People of Quraysh used to put musk and ambergris on their idols next to the Kaaba and bow to them; they used to gather around them uttering at Thy service. [184](#) Although they believed in the reverence of those four sacred months not to be involved in wars, they used to change the names of the month and postpone the sacred months so that they could be involved in wars. [185](#)

Drastic Changes in the Light of the Appearance of Islam

The advent of Islam brought forth drastic changes in the lifestyle of the people of Hijaz; a complete revolution took place the effects of which could be observed in the entirety of the Arabian Peninsula. With a resolute and strong struggle against idolatry, the Holy Prophet rooted out idolatry, replacing it with the principle of monotheism. Islam demolished the system of tribal life and its wrong and hazardous customs. It annulled the tribal prejudices and established a zeal for justice in society. Islam changed vengeance, plunder and homicide into peace and tranquility. It called all Muslims brethren of one another. It rescued women from misery and gave them sublime human dignity. Islam turned an ignorant nation into a knowing one. It established the systems of ummah (community) and imamate to replace tribal systems. It made a unified nation out of the scattered tribes. Islam prepared them for a universal government transcending the limited tribal life. Due to Islam, the Arab nation became so powerful that it could overthrow the great empires of those days, namely Iran and Rome. This point is so obvious that even non-Muslim scholars have witnessed to its authenticity. As some examples, we will present the views of three of them.

Dr. Eustan Le Bon, a French author, says:

“It was the great miracle of the Prophet of Islam to unite all the wandering Arabs into a nation prior to his

demise. He made every Muslim obedient to one leader. Without doubt, Prophet Muhammad had some tangible results that none of the previous religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, could have achieved. For this, the Arab nation owes him a lot. If we desire to evaluate people with their feats and deeds, definitely Muhammad is the greatest man in the history of mankind. We consider the religion which he brought for mankind as a great Divine asset.” [186](#)

Thomas Carlyle, an English author, writes:

“Through Islam, God led the Arabs from darkness into light. Islam enlivened the dead and silenced Arabs. From the very beginning of man's life, Arabs were nothing but wandering desert-dwelling groups of people. They had nothing to present to the world. Through the prophet hood of a great Prophet, God changed the unknown Arab people into a well-known nation, a wandering nation into a settled one, a miserable nation into a prosperous one, a weak nation into a powerful one, and a spark into a great fire. The Prophet's rays spread everywhere; his light scattered at every corner of the earth, the south, the east and the west so much so that only one century after its advent, the Islamic government could establish its power from India to Andalusia.” [187](#)

Will Durant writes:

“In those days, nobody could dream and believe that wandering desert-dwelling people could, after only one century, capture half of the Roman territories in Asia, the whole territory of Iran and Egypt and most of the northern territories of Africa, and be on its way towards Spain. This historic event which started from Arabia and through which the Arabs could capture half of the Mediterranean territories and could establish Islam is no doubt the strangest historical event in the Middle Ages.” [188](#)

The Development and Significance of Mecca

The majority of the Arabian Peninsula people during the Ignorance Era were desert-dwellers living in tents. Civil life did not exist in the territory of Hijaz. What is referred to as a city was in fact minor villages with small populations. Some historians have estimated that only one-sixth of the population was city-dwellers; some have estimated that seventeen percent of the whole population was living in cities. [189](#) The basis for these estimations is not clear. The percentage of city dwellers was small. Being located eighty-three kilometers away from the Red Sea, the city of Mecca, in the south of Hijaz, was the most important in the region; it had attracted a lot of settlers some decades prior to the advent of Islam. There were two reasons for the development of Mecca:

The commercial position

Located in a rough and dry territory, the city of Mecca lacked agricultural or other productive means of life. In order to survive, its people had to engage in trades, yet extremely limited. [190](#) Non-Arab merchants used to carry their merchandise to either buy or sell inside the city or in the seasonal markets of the Arabian Peninsula. This continued until the reign of Hashim, the Holy Prophet's great grandfather,

who entered into a treaty with the Roman Empire, according to which the Meccan traders could freely enter this country. [191](#)

He had a contract with the tribes on the way to Damascus to protect the Meccan merchants on their journey. [192](#) In return, he had to carry their merchandise to Damascus free of charge. [193](#) His brothers, ‘Abd Shams, Nawfal, and al-Muttalib, had similar contracts with the governor of Ethiopia and the kings of Iran [194](#) and Yemen. [195](#)

Upon achieving the security of routes, Hashim established the trade route between Yemen and Damascus [196](#) passing through Mecca which was between these two trade-centers. [197](#) In this way, the trade of Quraysh outside the country was established. [198](#) Since then, Meccan merchants, besides partaking in seasonal markets, such as ‘Uka”, Dhu’l-Majaz, and al-Majannah, made their journey to Yemen and Ethiopia in winter and to Damascus and Gaza in summer. In this way, they could buy silky cloths, hides and other merchandise which had come from India or China into Yemen and take them to Mecca through the Arabian lands parallel to the Red Sea [199](#) to take them again to Gaza, Jerusalem, Damascus and the ports on the Mediterranean. They could then buy wheat, oil, olives, wood and other produce from Damascus. They could also enter Ethiopia, through the Red Sea and Jeddah Port, which is located eight hundred kilometers away from Mecca. In this way, they could take their local merchandise from one place to another. [200](#)

The establishment of such a merchant route changed the city of Mecca into a lucrative center for trade and had a tremendous effect on the life of its people. God mentions this route as a means for prosperity for the people of Quraysh:

For the protection of the Quraysh—their protection during their trading caravans in the winter and the summer; so, let them serve the Lord to this house, Who feeds them against hunger and gives them security against fear. (106: 1–4)

[The Holy Kaaba](#)

The very existence of the Kaaba was considered a significant factor for the development of the city and for the prosperity of its people. This is because the Arabs used to arrive to this city twice for the observance of Hajj ceremonies. People of Quraysh, being responsible sponsors for the Kaaba’s affairs, provided the pilgrims with water and food. Trade transactions were carried out between the pilgrims and the Meccan merchants during the Hajj ceremonies. [201](#) These two factors played major roles in the trade prosperity of the city.

Of course, the sanctity of Mecca which brought forth the required security for the trade transactions was of utmost importance for the trade prosperity of Mecca. This fact is mentioned by Allah:

And they say: If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country. What! Have We not settled them in a safe, sacred territory to which fruits of every kind shall be drawn—

sustenance from Us? But most of them do not know. (38:57)

Upon the settlement of his wife and child beside the Kaaba, Prophet Abraham asked his God for such an asset:

O Our Lord! Surely, I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Thy Sacred House, our Lord! That they may keep up prayer; therefore make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them either fruits; haply they may be grateful. (14:37)

My Lord, make it a secure town and provide its people with fruits, such of them as believe in Allah and the last day. (2: 126)

Trade and Custodianship of Quraysh

The two factors of trade and the existence of the Kaaba, which had played their roles in the prosperity of Mecca, had their role in increasing the power of the people of Quraysh in Mecca, because they had the trade and religious initiatives in their hands:

(1) People of Quraysh could amass tremendous amounts of wealth thorough trade. The share of one of these traders in one caravan was more than thirty thousand Dinars.²⁰² The Quraysh nobles had a lot of gardens.²⁰³ in the summer quarters of Ta'if, which, in good weather, was called a part of Damascus.²⁰⁴ Al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib had a vineyard in Ta'if the produce of which was carried to Mecca to be made wine.²⁰⁵ He was one of the great usurers of Mecca.²⁰⁶ Upon his death, his body was enshrouded in two pieces of Yemeni cloth which cost the value of five thousand grams of gold.²⁰⁷ It is said his daughter, Hind, manumitted forty slaves in one day.²⁰⁸ Al-Walid ibn Mughirah, the elder chief of the Banu-Makhzum, had a great wealth and a great number of children; he was quite famous²⁰⁹ and later reprimanded by the Holy Qur'an because of his false pride and ambition.²¹⁰ The wealth of 'Abdullah ibn Jad'an Tamimi and his luxurious parties were considered fabulous.²¹¹ Poets composed eulogies to receive prizes.²¹² A poet likened him to Caesar.²¹³ It is said that at one tribal war, he gave a thousand camels to a thousand warriors²¹⁴ and armed a hundred warriors at his cost.²¹⁵ He was the custodian and seller of female slaves.²¹⁶ He used to drink out of golden ware.²¹⁷ Upon the seizure of Mecca and when he was on the way to the Battle of Hunayn, the Holy Prophets borrowed one hundred sets of shields and the required ammunitions from Safwan ibn Umayyah, one of the infidels of Mecca.²¹⁸

(2) Quraysh, who had taken away the position of the Kaaba's custodianship from Qudha'ah²¹⁹ since the time of Quzayy, the fourth generation away from the Holy Prophet, had distributed among the chiefs of the different Quraysh clans the different responsibilities related to the Kaaba, such as watering the pilgrims, guest-affairs, curtain-management and services of the Kaaba; they had in this way secured a religious position for itself. Besides, the Quraysh had distributed among the heads of its different branches the municipal affairs, such as the control of the reception of blood-money and the like.²²⁰

Quraysh's Power and Influences

Quraysh, who was a small, insignificant and impoverished tribe at the southern part of Hijaz and later became a strong and famous tribe due to its religious and economic power, turned out to be superior to other tribes in honesty, decency and creditability. In the words of contemporary historians, the Quraysh had some special privileges among other Arab tribes in the same way that priests had special privileges among Christians on those days.[221](#)

After the event of the Elephant Army and the defeat of Abrahah, the significance of the people of Quraysh raised drastically among the other tribes.[222](#) This was due to the fact that its members were the custodians of the Kaaba. They took advantage of this event in their own benefit and called themselves al-Allah (Family of Allah), jiran allah (the neighbors of Allah) and sukkan haram allah (Inhabitants of Allah's Precinct).[223](#) In this way, they could strengthen their religious basis and due to their power, they showed inclination towards corruption and monopoly.[224](#) This sense of power caused them to impose some new regulations over other tribes.

Quraysh had the special privilege of marrying any daughter from other tribes with the condition that they should accept the religious innovations that they had fabricated concerning the special Hajj ceremonies.[225](#) They received taxes from the pilgrims who would enter Mecca,[226](#) and called such tributes as special privileges of Quraysh.[227](#) They had monopolized the management of the Hajj ceremonies and forced the pilgrims to follow their regulations. This was so severe that the pilgrims' movement from Mina or participation in stone-throwing was authorized by special order of Quraysh.[228](#) Quraysh even forced non-Meccan pilgrims to either buy their costumes or carry out the ceremonies naked. These pilgrims had to throw away their costumes if they refused to buy them from the Quraysh.[229](#) This would force them to buy their costumes from the Quraysh, anyhow.[230](#) In the ninth year of Hegira, in which the Holy Prophet sent Imam 'Ali to Mecca to take part in the ceremony of acquaintance, one of the items of 'Ali's resolution was the prohibition of performing Hajj naked.[231](#)

Recognition of the Quraysh's power and influence is necessary in order to find out the problems that the Holy Prophet had to face and what powerful enemy he had to confront. With few sources of power that the Holy Prophet had at his disposal, he had to struggle against a powerful opponent.

[1.](#) Husayn Qarachanlu, Haramayn Sharifayn, pp. 9.

[2.](#) This equals one third of Europe, six times the area of France, nine times the total areas of west Germany and East Germany put together, ten times the area of Italy, eighty times the area of Switzerland, and twice the area of Iran.

[3.](#) Cosmological Institution, the cosmology of countries, pp. 205.

[4.](#) Phillip Khalil Hitti, History of the Arabs.

[5.](#) 'Ali Akbar Fayyadh, Tarikh Islam, pp. 2; Alber Male and Joel Isaac, History of the Middle Ages up to the One-Hundred Year War, pp. 95.

[6.](#) Phillip Hitti, Op cit, pp. 24.

[7.](#) Al-Maqdisi, a Muslim scientist of the fourth century, considers the Arabian Peninsula to contain four large sections: Hijaz, Yemen, Oman and Hajr; see Ahsan al-Taqaqim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim, pp. 102. However, others state that it includes five sections: Tihamah, Hijaz, Najd, Yemen and 'Arudh; see Abu'l-Fida, Taqwim al-Buldan, pp. 104; Yaqt al-Hamawi, Mu'jam

al-Buldan, pp. 101 & 214; Shukri al-Alusi al-Baghdadi, *Bulugh al-Irab fi Ma'rifat Ahwal al-'Arab*, 1:187; Jawad 'Ali, al-Mufazzal fi Tarikh al-'Arab Qabl al-Islam, 1:167.

There are other subdivisions, the descriptions of which are not useful now; see Gustav Le Bon: *The Civilization of Islam and Arabs*, pp. 31.

- [8.](#) Yahya Nuri, *Islam wa 'Aqa'id wa Ara' Bashari (Islam, Doctrines and Human Beliefs)*, pp. 231–234.
- [9.](#) Sayyid Ja'far Shahidi, *Tarikh Tahlili Islam*, pp. 3.
- [10.](#) Ahmad Husayn Sharaf al-Din, al-Yaman 'Ibr al-Tarikh (The Yemen in History), pp. 53.
- [11.](#) Gustav Le Bon: *The Civilization Of Islam And Arabs*, pp. 92.
- [12.](#) Mahmud Shukri Al-Alusi al-Baghdadi, *Bulugh al-Irab fi Ma'rifat Ahwal al-'Arab*, 1:204.
- [13.](#) Georgi Zaydan, *the History of the Islamic Civilization*, pp. 3.
- [14.](#) Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*, 2:89, pp. 132.
- [15.](#) The Ma'rib Dam is located 192 Kilometers on the eastern section of Sana'a, the present capital of Yemen.
- [16.](#) For further knowledge concerning the features of the scientific plan for this dam, see *Dictionary of the Qur'anic Tales* by Sadr Balaghi, pp. 82–88; Ahmad Husayn Sharaf al-Din, al-Yaman 'Ibr al-Tarikh, pp. 122–132.
- [17.](#) Georgie Zaydan, *the History of the Islamic Civilization*, 1:11.
- [18.](#) Will Durant, *the History of Civilization*, 1: 341.
- [19.](#) Phillip Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, pp. 64; Gustav Le Bon, *The Civilization of Islam and the Arabs*, pp. 94; Ahmad Husayn Sharaf al-Din, al-Yaman 'Ibr al-Tarikh, pp. 105; al-Alusi, *Bulugh al-Irab*, 1:203.
- [20.](#) Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, *The Political History of Islam* 1:32.
- [21.](#) Hamzah Izfahani, *Tarikh Muluk al-Ardh wa'l-Anbiya' (the History of the Prophets and the Kings)*, pp. 120 & 132.
- [22.](#) Abu-Rayhan al-Bayruni: *Al-Athar al-Baqiyah*, pp. 181.
- [23.](#) Mu'jam al-Buldan 7:355.
- [24.](#) Tubba' (plural of which is Tababi'ah) was the title of the Himyarite Kings in Yemen. These were two classes: the first class included the kings of Saba and Ridan who rules from 115 BC to 275 AD. The second class included the kings of Saba, Ridan, Hadhramawt and Shahr who ruled from 275 to 533 AD: Ahmad Husayn Sharaf al-Din, *Al-Yaman 'Ibr al-Tarikh*, pp. 90–97.
- [25.](#) Hamzah Izfahani, *The History of the Prophets and Kings*, pp. 99, 119; Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, *the Political History of Islam*, pp. 44; Abu-Rayhan al-Bayruni, *al-Athar al-Baqiyah*, pp. 181, 183.
- [26.](#) Carl Brockleman, *the History of Nations and Islamic States*, pp. 5.
- [27.](#) Georgie Zaydan, *History Of The Islamic Civilization* 1:15.
- [28.](#) Gustav Le Bon, *History Of The Islamic Civilization* 1:88.
- [29.](#) Phillip Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, pp. 14.
- [30.](#) Phillip Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, pp. 33–35.
- [31.](#) Gustav Le Bon, *History Of The Islamic Civilization* 1:65; Will Durant, *The Story Of Civilization; The Age of Faith* 4:201.
- [32.](#) Ahmad Amin, *Fajr al-Islam*, pp. 46.
- [33.](#) Ibid, pp. 33–34. al-Nu'man ibn al-Mundhir, king of al-Hirah, in reply to Khosrow the Persian king who asked him why the Arab nation does not live under a unified governmental system, answered, "Other nations who feel weak and fear the enemy's attacks submit their control under one family, submitting to them their affairs. But all the Arabs want to be kings and hate paying taxes or tributes." See al-Alusi, *Bulugh al-Irab*... 1:150.
- [34.](#) Ahmad Amin, *Fajr al-Islam*, pp. 225; 'Abd al-Mun'im Majid: *al-Tarikh al-Siyasi li'l-Dawlah al-'Arabiyyah (Political History of the Arab State)*, pp. 48.
- [35.](#) Karl Brockelman, *History of The Islamic States and Peoples*.
- [36.](#) He was also called ra'is (chief), amir (prince), and sayyid (master). See 'Abd al-Mun'im Majid, *al-Tarikh al-Siyasi li'l-Dawlah al-'Arabiyyah*, pp. 49.
- [37.](#) 'Abd al-Mun'im Majid, *al-Tarikh al-Siyasi li'l-Dawlah al-'Arabiyyah*, pp. 49.
- [38.](#) Al-Alusi, *Bulugh al-Irab*... 1:187.
- [39.](#) Phillip Hitti, *The Arab History*, pp. 39.
- [40.](#) Phillip Hitti, *The Arab History*, pp. 38.

- [41.](#) Will Durant, Op cit, 4:200.
- [42.](#) Ahmad Amin, Op cit, pp. 10.
- [43.](#) Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, The Political History of Islam 1:37–8.
- [44.](#) Shaykh al–Saduq, Thawab al–A‘mal wa ‘Iqab al–A‘mal, pp. 263; Shaykh al–Kulayni, al–Uzul min al–Kafi, 2:308.
- [45.](#) Sunan Abi–Dawud, Ch. Al–Adab, S. fi al–‘Azabiyah, pp. 332, H. 512.
- [46.](#) Sahih al–Bukhari, Ch. Al–Ma‘alim, 2:66; Musnad Ahmad, 3:201.
- [47.](#) Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, the Political History of Islam, pp. 39.
- [48.](#) Brockleman, op cit, pp. 6–7.
- [49.](#) Al–Nuwayri, Nihayat al–Irab fi Funun al–Adab 6:67.
- [50.](#) Al–Alusi, op cit, 1:281.
- [51.](#) Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba‘i, al–Mizan fi Tafsir al–Qur‘an 30:353; al–Alusi, op cit, 1:279.
- [52.](#) For instance, if one’s father was Arab, but his mother was non–Arab, he was insultingly referred to as hajin, which indicated the concept of inferiority; in the reverse situation, he used to be called mudharra’. Hajin was deprived of inheritance. See Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih al–Andalusi, al–‘Iqd al–Farid 6:129. A hajin male had to marry a woman of his own standing. See Muhammad ibn Habib, al–Muhabbar, pp. 310; al–Shahristani, al–Milal wa’l–Nihal, pp. 254. In Islam, when he was asked about the blood–money of a hajin, the Holy Prophet replied, “The blood money of all followers of Islam is the same.” See Ibn Shahrashub, al–Manaqib 1:113.
- [53.](#) Jawad ‘Ali, al–Mufazzal fi Tarikh al–‘Arab Qabl al–Islam 1:493; Shawqi @ayf, Tarikh al–Adab al–‘Arabi, al–‘Azr al–Jahili, pp. 55.
- [54.](#) Al–Alusi, op cit, 1:149. At the beginning of Islam, ‘Umar Ibn al–Khattab, who was strongly influenced by this kind of thinking, and who showed his dissatisfaction towards the Iraqi Nabataean who used to refer to their locations in their names, told them: Always remember your familial bonds and parentage and stop being like the Iraqi Nabataean who, when asked about their families, would refer to their place of birth or to the location of their residence. See Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldun, pp. 162; Al–Andalusi, op cit, 3:312.
- [55.](#) Bulugh al–Irab... 3:182; also refer to al–Mufazzal fi Tarikh al–‘Arab Qabl al–Islam 1:466–4667.
- [56.](#) On the word of a narration reported from Imam al–Sadiq (a.s) and some books of exegesis of the Holy Qur‘an, the Arabic word qaba‘il mentioned in the aforementioned holy verse refers to the Arab tribes, while the word shu‘ub refers to the non–Arabs. (See al–Tabrisi, Majma‘ al–Bayan fi Tafsir al–Qur‘an, Exegesis of Surah al–Hujurat, verse 13)
- [57.](#) Shaykh al–Kulayni, al–Rawdah min al–Kafi, pp. 246; al–Majlisi, Bihar al–Anwar 21:137–8; Sirat Ibn Husham 4:54.
- [58.](#) Ibn Shu‘bah al–Harrani: Tuhaf al–‘Uqul, pp. 34.
- [59.](#) Shaykh al–Kulayni, op cit, p. 181.
- [60.](#) Muhammad Ahmad Jad al–Mawla Bek, ‘Ali Muhammad al–Bajjawi, Muhammad Abu’l–Fadhl Ibrahim: Ayyam al–‘Arab fi al–Jahiliyyah, pp. 142–168; Ibn al–Athir: al–Kamil fi’l–Tarikh 1:523–539.
- [61.](#) Ibn Husham: Sirat al–Nabi 1:307; Yaqt al–Hamawi: Mu‘jam al–Buldan 1:268. Ibn al–Athir (in al–Kamil fi’l–Tarikh 1:566–582) and Jad al–Mawla Beck (in Ayyam al–‘Arab pp. 246–277) consider the owner of the two horses to be one person namely, Qays.
- [62.](#) Brockleman, op cit, pp. 8.
- [63.](#) Sahih al–Bukhari 8:327–8, H. 893. Similar to this is mentioned in Sunan Abi–Dawud 4:271.
- [64.](#) Gustav Le Bon, op cit, pp. 63,
- [65.](#) Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, op cit, 1:38.
- [66.](#) Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldun 1:285–286.
- [67.](#) Ahmad Amin, op cit, pp. 9; Phillip Hitti, op cit, pp. 35; Hamasat Abi–Tammam, pp. 32, Calcutta: Leisi Publishing House, 1895 AD.
- [68.](#) Tabataba‘i: al–Mizan fi Tafsir al–Qur‘an 9:272.
- [69.](#) By exchanging the names of the months and through postponing and procrastinating the forbidden months, the Arabs were engaged in wars during these months. For this very reason, God said:

“Postponing of the sacred month is only an addition in unbelief, where with those who disbelieve are led astray, violating it one year and keeping it sacred another, that they may agree in numb of months that Allah has made sacred, and thus

violate what Allah has made sacred; the evil of their doings is made fair-seeming to them; and Allah does not guide the unbelieving people.”(9:37)

[70.](#) Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, 2:267.

[71.](#) Abu'l-'Abbas al-Mubarrad: *al-Kamil fi al-Lughah wa'l-Adab* 1:393. Muhammad ibn Habib, *al-Muhabbar*, pp. 324.

[72.](#) Shaykh al-Kulayni, *al-Furu' min al-Kafi* 6:406.

[73.](#) Tabataba'i, *op cit* 4:254–258; al-Suyuti, *al-Durr al-Manthur* 2: 131–132; al-Shahristani, *al-Milal wa'l-Nihal* 2:254; Hasan, *Women's Rights in Islam and Europe*, pp. 34. The one who married his stepmother after his father's death was named @ayzan. (Muhammad ibn Habib, *al-Muhabbar*, pp. 325) Ibn Qutaybah *al-Daynawari* has named some these women who married their stepsons upon their husbands' death (*al-Ma'arif*, p112.)

[74.](#) Tabataba'i, *op cit*, 4:258; *Tafsir al-Tabari* 4:207.

[75.](#) Tabataba'i, *op cit*, 2: 267.

[76.](#) Shaykh 'Abbas al-Qummi, *Safinat al-Bihar* 1: 197; Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah* 13: 174; Shaykh al-Kulayni, *al-Uzul min al-Kafi* 18: 163; al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir Jami' al-Ahkam* 19:232.

[77.](#) Al-Qurtubi, *op cit* pp. 232.

[78.](#) Al-Mubarrad, *op cit*, 1:392; Ibn Abi'l-Hadid *op cit*, 13: 179.

[79.](#) Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, *op cit*, 13: 174.

[80.](#) Al-Alusi, *op cit*, 1:324; *Tarikh al-Ya'qubi*, 2: 10.

[81.](#) Al-Alusi, *op cit*, 3:45; Ibn Husham, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah*, 1:240.

[82.](#) Muhammad Abu'l-Fadhl Ibrahim, et al, *Qizaz al-'Arab* 2:31, Abu'l-'Abbas al-Mubarrad, *op cit*, pp. 394.

Al-Farazdaq, a Muslim poet, took pride in his grandfather, Sa'za'ah, for he had objected to burying newborn girls alive. See al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir Jami' al-Ahkam*, 19:232.

[83.](#) Abu'l-'Abbas al-Mubarrad, *op cit*, 1:394.

[84.](#) Ibn al-Athir, *Usd al-Ghabah*, 4:220.

It is narrated that Qays ibn 'Azim converted to Islam and came to the Prophet, saying, "Before Islam, I buried eight of my daughters alive. How could I make up for it now?" The Prophet replied, "Free eight slaves for what you have done." He said, "I have many camels." The Prophet replied, "If you wish, you may slaughter eight camels." See al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir Jami' al-Ahkam* 19:233.

[85.](#) Ibn Husham, *op cit*, 2:75.

[86.](#) Gustav le Bon, *the civilization of Islam and the Arabs*, pp. 64–65. Will Durant writes concerning this topic, "The nomad was kind, generous and savage; he was Jealous, miser and traitor; he was and dissolute and conservative. Despite his poverty, he was generous; he faced the world with elegance." See *The Story of Civilization* 4:201.

[87.](#) Ahmad Amin, *Fajr al-Islam*, pp. 76.

[88.](#) Phillip Hitti, *the Arab History*, pp. 33–35.

[89.](#) Murtadha al-'Amili, *al-Sahih mi Sirat al-Rasul al-A'm*, 1:50–54.

[90.](#) Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi, *Bulugh al-Irab* 2:303.

[91.](#) For further information for the superstitions of the Arabs before Islam, see *Bulugh al-Irab* 2:303–367; Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah* 19:382–429.

[92.](#) al-Alusi, *op cit*, 3: 182, 223, 261, and 327.

[93.](#) *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldun* 2: 1034.

[94.](#) *Futuh al-Buldan*, pp. 457–454.

[95.](#) Will Durant, *the Story of Civilization* 4:202.

[96.](#) *Al-Mu'allaqat al-Sab'ah*.

[97.](#) Concerning these marts, see *Bulugh al-Irab* 2:264–270.

[98.](#) Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, *the political History of Islam* 1:24.

[99.](#) *Fajr al-Islam*, pp. 29.

[100.](#) The Jews mostly lived in Yathrib, Fadak and Tayma. A few of them lived in Ta'if. However, there is no indication of any Jew population in Mecca.

[101.](#) Georgi Zaydan, *the History of the Islamic civilization*, 1: 16.

- [102.](#) Sahih al-Bukhari 9:136.
- [103.](#) Tafsir al-Tabari 4:25; Zahiyyah Qaddurah, Al-Shu'ubiyah, pp. 24; Ahmad Amin, *ʿuhr al-Islam* 1:18.
- [104.](#) Qizaz al-'Arab 2:358; Ibn Kathir, al-Bidayah wa'l-Nihayah 3:144.
- [105.](#) al-Alusi, Bulugh al-Irab 1:311-313; Muhammad Ibn 'Abd-Rabbih, al-'Iqd al-Farid 2:20; Ibn Qutaybah, al-Ma'arif, 608.
- [106.](#) Ahmad Amin, *ʿuhr al-Islam* 1:19.
- [107.](#) The direct reason for this war was the following: Khosrow willed to marry the daughter of al-Nu'man ibn al-Mundhir, the king of al-Hirah. Upon his refusal, he was called to the Iranian court and was put in prison where he died. Khosrow ordered Hani ibn Mas'ud al-Shaybani to submit al-Nu'man's wealth to him. He, however, refused to do so. Later, Khosrow dispatched an army to fight Banu-Shayban. Khosrow lost that war. See Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh 1:485-484; al-Maqdisi: al-Bad' wa'l-Tarikh 3:26.
- [108.](#) Ahmad Amin, *ʿuhr al-Islam* 1:19; Mas'udi, al-Tanbih wa'l-Ishraf, pp. 209; Jalal al-Din Homayi, Shu'ubiyah, pp. 11-12.
- [109.](#) Jawad 'Ali, al-Mufazzal 1:41-42.
- [110.](#) 'Umar Farrukh, Sadr al-Islam wa'l-Dawlah al-Umawiyah, pp. 39.
- [111.](#) Tabataba'i, Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an 4:151-155; Ahmad Amin, Fajr al-Islam, pp. 74-78; al-Alusi, Bulugh al-Irab 1:15-18; Shawqi @ayf, Tarikh al-Adab al-'Arabi 1:39.
- Confirming this piece of information, jahl is the opposite of hikmah (wisdom) according to some narrations reported in reliable reference books like al-Kafi.
- [112.](#) Jawad 'Ali says: "In my view, jahiliyyah is stemmed from stupidity, pride, anger, arrogance and stubbornness towards God's commands. These features are strongly condemned by Islam. In our days, we rebuke a stupid person who utters taboo or nasty words by the following expression: Go away, you ignorant and silly one. This does not mean that he is illiterate." See al-Mufazzal, 1:40.
- [113.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 95.
- [114.](#) Hanif (pl. Hunafa') is one following the religion of Prophet Abraham. See Tabarsi, Majma' al-Bayan 1:216.
- [115.](#) Muhammad Ibn Habib, al-Muhabbar, pp. 171.
- [116.](#) Mas'udi, Muruj al-Dhahab 1:60-68; Ibn Husham, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah 1:237; Ibn Kathir, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah 1:122-165; Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, al-Maghazi, pp. 115-116; Muhammad Ibn Habib, al-Munammaq fi Akhbar Quraysh, pp. 152-153; Muhammad Ibrahim Ayati, the History of the Prophet of Islam, pp. 13-19.
- [117.](#) Ibn Kathir, op cit, pp. 156; Qizaz al-'Arab 1:72.
- [118.](#) Jawad 'Ali, al-Mufazzal 6:449. Husayn Tabataba'i, Committing Treasons In Preparing Historical Accounts 1:120; Ibn Husham, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah 1:237.
- [119.](#) Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, The Political History Of Islam 1:64.
2 Ibid, pp. 64; Shihab al-Din al-Abshahi, al-Mustatraf fi kulli fannin Musta'raf 2:88; Ibn Qutaybah, al-Ma'arif, pp. 621; al-Himyari, al-Hur al-'In, pp. 136.
- [120.](#) 'Uthman ibn Huwayrith and Waraqah ibn Nawfal, belonging to the tribe of Banu-Asad, were following Hanifiyyah. See Tarikh al-Ya'qubi 1:225.
- [121.](#) Ahmad Amin, Fajr Al-Islam, pp. 27.
- [122.](#) Tarikh al-'Arab, pp. 78. Some historians ascribe the indoctrination and introduction of Christianity into Yemen to a Syrian saint called Faymiyin. See Ibn Husham, op cit, 1:32-35; Yaqut al-Hamawi, Mu'jam al-Buldan 5:266. However, this seems to be a myth since it is not in agreement with what is narrated by Hetti.
- [123.](#) Tarikh al-Ya'qubi 1:224.
- [124.](#) Ahmad Amin, op cit, pp. 26.
- [125.](#) Some exegetes of the Holy Qur'an say that the verses 4-9 of Surah al-Buruj were revealed in connection with the slaughter of the Christians. This might be a referent of those verses. See al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an 20:251-257: Cursed be the makers of the pit, of the fire kept burning with fuel, when they sat by it. And they were witnesses of what they did with the believers. And they did not take vengeance on them for aught except that they believed in Allah, the Mighty, the praised. Whose is the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is a Witness of all things (Qur'an 85: 8-9).
- [126.](#) Ahmad Amin, op cit, pp. 18,25, 26, 28.

[127.](#) Qizaz al-ʿArab 1:73; Ahmad Amin, op cit, pp. 27.

[128.](#) Qurʿan 5: 18, 72, 73; 4:171; 9:30; 5:82.

[129.](#) Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qurʿan 3:228, 233.

[130.](#) In the words of Yaqt al-Hamawi, Tayma' was a small city between Syria and Wadi al-Qura. See Muʿjam al-Buldan 2:67. Wadi al-Qura is situated between Medina and Syria; it was one of the provinces of Medina. Thus, Tayma' was located between Medina and Syria. Al-Maqdisi, a scholar of the fourth century, writes: "Tayma' is an ancient city located in a wide-spread land, full of palm trees, with a lot of orchards and numerous rivers, with a spring of limpid water, which runs from an iron-grid into the pond and then runs into the orchards. There are some fresh water wells therein. However, most of them are ruined." See Ahsan al-Taqasim.

[131.](#) Fadak is a village of two or three day distance away from Medina. Muʿjam al-Buldan 4:238.

[132.](#) Khaybar is a region 96 miles north of Medina; it included seven strongholds with numerous farmlands and palm-groves. (Muʿjam al-Buldan 2:404). The distance between Khaybar and Medina is recorded with different numbers. (Taqwim al-Buldan, pp. 123).

[133.](#) Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, op cit, pp. 64.

[134.](#) al-Buladhari, Futuh al-Buldan, pp. 67.

[135.](#) Ahmad Amin, Fajr al-Islam, pp. 24.

[136.](#) Ibn Qutaybah, al-Maʿarif, pp. 621; al-Hur al-ʿn, pp. 136.

[137.](#) Tarikh al-Yaʿqubi 1:257.

[138.](#) Ahmad Amin, op cot, pp. 23, 24, 37; Ibn Husham, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah 1:37. Yaqt al-Hamawi, Muʿjam al-Buldan 5:266.

[139.](#) Al-Athar al-Baqiyah, pp. 294-295.

[140.](#) Harran was a big city between the Tigris and Euphrates; today, it is a ruined village. At the Advent of Islam, it was a prosperous city in which famous scientists used to live. See Muʿjam al-Buldan 3:235-236; Taqwim al-Buldan, pp. 303, 307, 309; Muhammad Muʿin, Farhang Farsi 5:457.

[141.](#) Tabatabaʿi, Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qurʿan 10:279.

[142.](#) Qurʿan 2:62; 5:69; 22:17.

[143.](#) They live at the shores of the Karun River, Ahwaz, Khorramshahr, Abadan, Shadigan, and Dasht Mishan.

[144.](#) They live at the shores of the Tigris and Euphrates in Baghdad, Hillah, Naziriyah, ʿImarah, Kut, Diyala, Kirkuk, Mosul, Ramadi, Sulaymaniyyah and Karbala'. For the derivation of the word zab'i, whether it is Arabic or Hebrew, and for its meaning, see al-Alusi, Bulugh al-Irab 2:223-228; Yahya Nuri, Islam And Human Ideas, pp. 431-432; Shahristani, al-Milal wa'l-Nihal 1:230, 2:5.

[145.](#) Tarikh al-Yaʿqubi 1:226.

[146.](#) Ahmad Amin, Fajr al-Islam, pp. 108; Dawud Ilhami, Iran and Islam, pp. 392. Having referred to the fact that Manicheans came to be called zanadiqah due to their following of zand, al-Bayruni writes: "The Manicheans and the Batiniyyah (Esotericists) are figuratively termed zanadiqah in Islam. This is because these two groups are similar to Mazdakids in ascribing certain traits and features to God." See al-Athar al-Baqiyah, pp. 312. About this topic, ʿAbd al-Husayn Zarrinkub writes, "The word zandiq is derived from the Pahlavi word zandic. At this era, this word was used for the Manicheans and for those who believed in atheism of some sort.

[147.](#) Shahristani, op cit, pp. 244. An Orientalist says, "If we consider Manichaeism as Zoroastrianism mixed with Christianity, we are closer to the truth than considering Christianity mixed with Zoroastrianism." See Ahmad Amin, Fajr al-Islam, pp. 104. Concerning Mani and his sect, Manichaeism, see ʿAbd al-Husayn Zarrinkub, Neither Eastern nor Western but Human, pp. 72-76.

[148.](#) Ibn Qutaybah, al-Maʿarif, pp. 621; Al-Abshahi, al-Mustatrah 2:88; Ibn Rustah, al-Aʿlaq al-Al-Nafisah, pp. 264; Ahmad Amin, Fajr al-Islam, pp. 108.

Muhammad ibn Habib al-Baghdadi states that the following individuals from Quraysh belonged to this group: Abu-Sufyan, ʿAqabah ibn Abi-Muʿit, Ubay ibn Abi-Khalaf, Abu-ʿAzzah, al-Nadhr ibn Harith, Nubayh and Munabbih, sons of al-Hajjaj ibn Amir al-Sahmi, al-ʿAz ibn Waʿil, and al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah al-Makhzumi. See al-Muhabbar, pp. 161.

However, the speeches and sessions held by these individuals carry no single indication of this point. Rather, documents

prove that they were idol-worshippers. In his discussions on heresy, ‘Abd al-Husayn Zarrinkub remarks that the word *zandaqah* included Materialists as well. This latter group refrained from attributing the events of this world to a Creator. The *zanadiqah* of Quraysh, among whom were Abu-Sufyan, Ibn Abi-Mu’it, al-Nadhr ibn Harith, and al-Walid ibn Mughirah, were Materialists. It is understood from the news and poems related to the chiefs of Quraysh that their heresy stood for rejection of the Creator and disbelief in Resurrection”

[149.](#) al-Alusi, *Bulugh al-Irab* 2:240.

[150.](#) *Tabataba’i*, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur’an* 19:49.

[151.](#) *Ibid*, pp. 215, 220, 230, 237, 239 and 240; *Islam And Man's Ideologies*, pp. 295–247.

[152.](#) *Tabataba’i* op cit 17:393.

[153.](#) Ibn Husham, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* 1:385.

[154.](#) Husham Ibn Muhammad Kalbi, *Kitab al-Aznam*, pp. 42.

[155.](#) *Tabataba’i*, op cit, 2:42.

[156.](#) Tabarsi, *Majma’ al-Bayan* 8:46.

[157.](#) al-Alusi, op cit, 2:232.

[158.](#) Ibn Husham, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* 1:55, 116; al-Azraqi, *The History of Mecca* 1:55; *Tarikh al-Ya’qubi* 1:18; Ibn Rustah, *al-A’laq al-Nafisah*, pp. 51.

[159.](#) Azraqi, op cit. pp. 57; Mas’udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab* 2:20.

[160.](#) *Tarikh al-Ya’qubi* 1:19, 193; al-Azraqi, op cit, pp. 57.

[161.](#) An exegesis of the Holy Qur’an states that the holy verse, (...and the faith of your father Abraham,) refers to this meaning. See Tabarsi, *Majma’ al-Bayan* 7:97.

[162.](#) *Tarikh al-Ya’qubi* 1:224.

[163.](#) al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar* 15:170; Husham Kalbi, *al-Aznam*, pp. 6.

[164.](#) Al-Hurr al-’Amili, *Wasa’il al-Shi’ah*: 1465; Tabarsi, *al-Ihtijaj*, pp. 189.

[165.](#) Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa’l-Nihal* 2:257.

[166.](#) *Tabataba’i*, *al-Mizan* 9:272.

[167.](#) Shahrastani, op cit, pp. 255; *Tarikh al-Ya’qubi* 2:12

[168.](#) al-Azraqi, op cit, 1:88, 100, 101; Mahmud al-Alusi, *Bulugh al-Irab* 2:200; al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah 1:16.

[169.](#) Al-’amaliqah were the children of Prophet Noah. Their grandfather was named ‘imlaq or ‘imliq. See Ibn Husham, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* 2:188; al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah 1:17.

[170.](#) al-Alusi, op cit, 2:201; al-Shahrastani, op cit, pp. 243; al-Halabi, op cit, pp. 17; *Tarikh al-Ya’qubi* 2:224; al-Abshahi, *al-Mustatraf* 2:29; Kalbi, *al-Aznam*, pp. 6; Muhammad Ibn Habib, *al-Munammaq*, pp. 328.

In some records, it is said that he brought Hubal from Iraq. See al-Azraqi, *Akhbar Makkah* 1:79; Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa’l-Nihayah* 2:188.

A report says that the stone of the idol is one of the stones of Ma’zamayn. For this reason, when the Prophet crossed that place, he showed hatred. See *Wasa’il al-Shi’ah* by al-Hurr al-’Amili 10:36.

[171.](#) al-Azraqi, op cit, 1:88; Shahrastani, op cit, 2:242, 347.

[172.](#) Ibn Husham, op cit, pp. 79; al-Halabi, op cit, pp. 17; Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Isti’ab* 1:120; Ibn al-Athir, *Usd al-Ghabah* 4:390; al-Tustari, *al-Awa’il*, pp. 217; Ibn Kathir, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* 1:65; al-Azraqi, op cit, pp. 116.

[173.](#) al-Alusi, op cit, 2:200.

[174.](#) *Tabataba’i*, op cit, 1:272.

[175.](#) Kalbi, op cit, pp. 32.

[176.](#) Shaykh al-Tusi, *al-Amali*, pp. 336; al-Alusi, *Bulugh al-Irab* 2:211; al-Azraqi, op cit, 1:21; al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah 3:30; *al-Mizan* 26: 271, based on a narration by Imam al-Ridha.

[177.](#) Qur’an 31:25; 39:38; 43:9; 43:87; 10:3.

[178.](#) Al-Suyuti, *al-Durr al-Manthur* 4:23; Tabarsi, *Majma’ al-Bayan* 8:460.

[179.](#) Ibn Kathir, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* 1:7. Ibn Husham, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* 1:85.

[180.](#) Ibn Husham, op cit, pp. 80; Ibn Kathir, op cit, pp. 63; al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa’l-Nihal* 2:247. Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa’l-Nihayah* 2:88.

- [181.](#) Kalbi, al-Aznam, pp. 13; Ibn Husham, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah 1:8; al-Alusi, Bulugh al-Irab 2:202.
- [182.](#) Kalbi, op cit, pp. 14.
- [183.](#) al-Azraqi, Akhbar Makkah 1:178, 182; al-Alusi, op cit, 1:244; Sahih Muslim 18:162.
- [184.](#) Tabataba'i, Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an 14:414.
- [185.](#) Azraqi, Akhbar Makkah 1:183; Ibn Husham, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah 1:45.
- [186.](#) The Civilization Of Islam And Arab, pp. 138–130.
- [187.](#) Muhammad al-Siba'i, al-Abtal, pp. 9.
- [188.](#) Will Durant, the Story of Civilization 4:197.
- [189.](#) Ibn Wadhih, Tarikh al-Ya'qubi 1:215.
- [190.](#) Muhammad Ibn Habib al-Baghdadi, al-Munammaq, pp. 42.
- [191.](#) Ibn Wadhih, Ibid, 1:214.
- [192.](#) Op cit, pp. 213.
- [193.](#) Ibn Sa'd, al-Tabaqat al-Kubra 1:78.
- [194.](#) Ibn Wadhih, Ibid 1:215.
- [195.](#) Tabari, Tarikh al-Umam wa'l-Muluk 2:180; Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh 2:16.
- [196.](#) Tabari, op cit, pp. 180; Ibn Husham, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah, 1:143.
- [197.](#) Ahmad Amin, Fajr Al-Islam, pp. 13–14; Shawqi @ayf, Tarikh al-Adab al-'Arabi 1:49.
- [198.](#) Tabari, op cit, 2:180; Ibn al-Athir, op cit, pp. 16.
- [199.](#) Ahmad Amin, op cit, pp. 12; 'Abd al-Mun'im Majid, al-Tarikh al-Siyasi li'l-Dawlah al-'Arabiyyah, pp. 79.
- [200.](#) Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, The Political History Of Islam, pp. 56.
- [201.](#) 'Abbas Ziryab, Sirat Rasulillah, pp. 66–67.
- [202.](#) Jawad 'Ali, al-Mufazzal 1:114.

Probably, reference is made to Sa'id ibn al-'Az (Abu-Uhayhah) who had the largest share of the caravan of Quraysh that had to encounter the Muslim troops at Well Badr during their return from Damascus. However, al-Waqidi (in al-Maghazi 1:27) does not say it explicitly.

- [203.](#) Phillip Hitti, op cit, pp. 130.
- [204.](#) Tabari, op cit 2:221; al-Buladhari, Futuh al-Buldan, pp. 68.
- [205.](#) al-Buladhari, op cit, pp. 68.
- [206.](#) Ibn Husham, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah, pp. 25.
- [207.](#) Ibn Wadhih, op cit, 1:10.
- [208.](#) Shawqi @ayf, op cit, pp. 51, al-Jahii, al-Mahasin wa'l-Adhdad, pp. 62.
- [209.](#) An exegete of the Holy Qur'an states that the two great personalities mentioned in the holy verse (43:31) are al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah in Mecca and 'Urwah ibn Mas'ud al-Thaqafi in Ta'if. Because of their great wealth, they had been expected to be the promised prophet.
- [210.](#) Tabataba'i, Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an 2:43; Ibn Kathir, Tafsir 4:442.
- [211.](#) Ibn Kathir, al-Bidayah wa'l-Nihayah 2:229; al-Alusi, op cit, 1:89; Muhammad Ahmad Jad al-Mawla Beck et al, Ayyam al-'Arab fi'l-Jahiliyyah, pp. 248.
- [212.](#) al-Alusi, op cit, pp. 87; Ibn Kathir, op cit, pp. 220.
- [213.](#) Bakri, Mu'jam mastu'jim 2:444.
- [214.](#) Jad al-Mawla, op cit, pp. 334.
- [215.](#) Op cit, pp. 324.
- [216.](#) Ibn Qutaybah, al-Ma'arif, pp. 576; Mas'udi, Muruj al-Dhahab 2:284; Jawad 'Ali, op cit, pp. 96.
- [217.](#) al-Alusi, op cit, pp. 87.
- [218.](#) Ibn Husham, op cit, 4:83; al-Waqidi, al-Maghazi 3:890; Ibn Sa'd, al-Tabaqat al-Kubra 2:150; Halabi, al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah 3:63.
- The Holy Prophet borrowed three thousand spears from his cousin, Nawfal ibn al-Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib. (Halabi, op cit)
- [219.](#) al-Azraqi, Akhbar Makkah 1:107; Ibn Husham, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah 1:130.

[220.](#) Ibn ‘Abd–Rabbih, al–‘Iqd al–Farid 3:314; Ahmad Amin, op cit, pp. 237; al–Alusi, op cit, 1:145–150.

These institutes and organizations were not in the form of modern times as some historians, such as Georgie Zaydan and Lamens, had assumed; rather, they were very primitive and tribal.

[221.](#) Phillip Hatti, op cit, pp. 17.

[222.](#) Ibn Husham, al–Sirah al–Nabawiyah 1:59; al–Azraqi, op cit, pp. 176.

[223.](#) Ibn ‘Abd–Rabbih, op cit, 3:313; al–Azraqi, op cit, pp. 176.

[224.](#) al–Azraqi, op cit, 1:70.

[225.](#) Op cit, pp. 174; al–Alusi, op cit, 1:242.

[226.](#) Ibn Sa’d, op cit, 1:70.

[227.](#) Jawad ‘Ali, op cit, 4:21.

[228.](#) Ibn Sa’d, op cit, pp. 69; Ibn Husham, op cit, pp. 125, 130; Ibn Athir, al–Kamil fi’l–Tarikh 2:20; al–Azraqi, op cit, pp. 189.

[229.](#) Ibn Sa’d, op cit, pp. 72; al–Azraqi, op cit, pp. 178, 182. It was because of Quraysh’s power and control over these ceremonies, people used to circumambulate the Kaaba naked. In this respect, there is a story about a naked woman who performed the Hajj ceremony composing a shameful verse of poetry. See al–Azraqi, op cit, 1:178, 182; Ibn Husham, op cit, 4:190; al–Alusi, op cit, 1:244; Sahih Muslim 18:162.

[230.](#) Al–Azraqi, op cit, pp. 177.

[231.](#) Ibn Husham 4:190.

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