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ARABIA BEFORE ISLAM





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A HIVE OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE

Note: The content of this book is based on the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic texts that have been written, verified, and approved by three scholars.

Before the emergence of Islam in the early 7th century, the Arabian Peninsula was a region of disparate cultures, beliefs, and social structures. The Arabian Peninsula is bordered by water on three sides and by land to the north.



To the west, there was the Red Sea and the Sinai area, creating a natural border. On the east side is the Persian Gulf, which has been important for trade and meeting other cultures for thousands of years.



The south opens to the Arabian Sea, which is part of the Indian Ocean, showing how the peninsula is connected to far-off places.



The term "Arab" traditionally refers to regions characterized by deserts and expanses of land with scarce vegetation. This name has been used for the Arabian Peninsula and its people for a very long time.



In terms of religion, pre-Islamic Arabia was a melting pot of polytheistic beliefs, with tribes worshiping a multitude of gods and goddesses, often associated with natural phenomena, such as the sun, moon, and stars.



Each tribe had its own set of deities, with Hubal, al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat being among the most prominent gods and goddesses worshiped in and around the Kaaba in Makkah.



The Kaaba was a central shrine and pilgrimage site, housing numerous idols that represented the tribal deities.



Makkah and Madinah, two cities in the Hijaz region of western Arabia, played pivotal roles in the economic and religious lives of the region.



Makkah, with its sacred Kaaba, was not only a religious centre but also a thriving trading hub. The annual pilgrimage, or Hajj, brought many tribes to Makkah, facilitating trade and cultural exchange.



Madinah, known as Yathrib before Islam, was an oasis town where agriculture flourished, thanks to its date palm plantations and irrigation systems.



Despite the prevalence of polytheism, there were also pockets of monotheistic belief in Arabia. Jewish and Christian communities existed in certain areas, particularly in the north near the Byzantine and Ethiopian borders, practicing their religions and contributing to the religious diversity of the region.



The linguistic landscape of pre-Islamic Arabia was dominated by the Arabic language, which existed in various dialects and was primarily transmitted through oral traditions.



Poetry held a special place in Arabian society, serving as a means of communication, a form of entertainment, and a way to immortalize the deeds and histories of tribes. Poets were highly respected, and poetry competitions were common during gatherings such as the annual fair at Ukaz.



The legal system in pre-Islamic Arabia was based on customary law, with tribal customs and traditions guiding the resolution of disputes.



The absence of a central governing authority meant that justice was often administered directly by the affected parties, leading to cycles of vengeance and tribal warfare.



In the 6th century, the decline of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires, due to their prolonged conflicts, created a power vacuum and dissatisfaction with the existing social, economic, and religious order, setting the stage for the emergence of a transformative movement.



Within this complex and dynamic context, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, a member of the Quraysh tribe of Makkah, began to receive revelations around 610 CE. These revelations challenged the prevailing social norms, religious practices, and power structures of Arabian society.



Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ message of monotheism, social justice, and community solidarity resonated with many, but also faced opposition from those who saw it as a threat to the established order.



His teachings called for an end to tribal divisions and idolatry. Instead, he proposed a new social and religious framework based on the worship of one God and the establishment of a community of believers, known as Ummah.

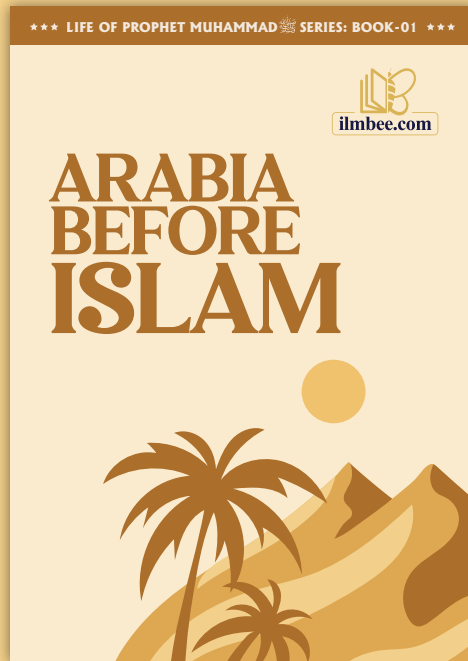


During a relatively short period, the rapid expansion of Islam transformed Arabian society, unifying the region under a single religious and political authority. The early Islamic caliphate, established after Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ death, continued this expansion, spreading the new faith beyond the Arabian Peninsula to the far corners of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires.



REVIEW YOUR READING

1. What type of beliefs were prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia?
2. What form of art held a special place in Arabian society?
3. What are the two famous cities of Arabia?



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