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Analysis of the Role of World Trade in the Cultural Evolution of Mecca (Fifth to Sixth Century AD)

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Abstract

One of the topics of the studies on the pre-Islamic history includes the reasons and the trend of development of the culture of ignorance in Hejaz, especially in Mecca, as the center of the Abrahamic religion. Muslim historians' accounts of this evolution are mainly the product of the analysis of events and interpretation of Quran verses rather than the stories and myths that reflect the method of this evolution. The present research, which was carried out based on references and textbooks using the descriptive and analytical method, aimed to explain the reason and the method of rejection of Islam by the habitants of Mecca in spite of their long history of worshipping Allah and believing in the values of the Hanif religion. According to the research findings, ignorance does not seem to have been an intellectual leap or depression influenced by regional changes. It has been rather driven by international changes, especially the growth of world trade, which has turned Arabia into an isolated safe country in charge of the relationship between eastern and western trade centers. This new role has played down monotheistic values by stressing new values.

Keywords: Mecca, Hanif religion, Paganism, World trade, Cultural structure, Age of Ignorance.

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1. Introduction:

1.1. Problem Statement:

One of the important topics of research on history and civilization includes the causes of the decline of civilizations and trend of religious and doctrinal changes in societies. Many monotheistic religions have undergone distortion, and people in the geographical scope of these religions have chosen another path that opposes the goals of their religions. Inhabitants of Hejaz were among the people who refrained from the Hanif religion they practiced and turned ignorant as put by Quran. To describe the causes of this shift in attitude historians of the early Islamic centuries have presented accounts that are mixed with stories and myths and are far from historical realities. These accounts reflect the form of the changes rather than their causes.

In this paper, by resorting to references and the descriptive-analytical method, the evolutions of Mecca were studied from the time of Qusai ibn Kilab to the advent of Islam and the conflicts between Iran and Rome, the effects of these conflicts on the world trade and changes of trade routes, and the exposure of Mecca to world trade were explored. The primary research goal was to explore the causes and factors of the changes of the cultural structure of Mecca and to answer the question that “What factors have substantially altered the cultural structure of Hejaz and Mecca? How?” The investigations into the possible factors of these changes, including climatic changes and political/cultural effects, revealed no evidence of these changes. Seemingly, these changes have been the fruits of a general evolution of the international system, especially world trade structural changes. A review of the evolutions occurring from the fifth century to the sixth century AD revealed that the main cause of these changes was the Iran-Rome conflict. This is because this conflict put the world trade at risk, and thus the merchants fell back on the only safe option, which was the Quraysh exclusive route that connected Yemen to Levant via Mecca. The concept of the exchange of commodities along this path was the first spark of the Hejaz evolutions that set the scene for subsequent extensive changes.

1.2. Research Background:

In spite of the numerous studies on the pre-Islamic history and culture of Arabia, especially Mecca, no study has examined the effect of global economic changes on the cultural changes in Mecca, which is the subject of this paper. Previous research has not projected an exact image of the trend of cultural changes in the pre-Islamic Mecca. Examples of these studies are listed in the following.

1- “Analysis of the effect of Iran-Byzantium wars on the change of Sassanid trade routes”, which was penned by Muhammad Taqi Imanpour, explored the business competition between the Sassanid and Byzantine empires and suggested that this competition and conflict led to the emergence of new trade routes. According to the author, the trade routes in Hejaz, especially the trade route from Yemen to Mecca and Palestine, were the results of this competition. However, he did not discuss the effect of the new economic and business atmosphere on the cultural evolutions of Hejaz (Imanipour, 2011: 33-48).

2- “The typology of worship in Hejaz in the Age of Ignorance” by Ali Qolami Dehaqi, is a scientific research that explores idolatry. However, as regards the causes of idolatry there are only quotes from the old historians and there is no reference to the effects of economic changes on the cultural and religious changes of Mecca in this research (Qolami Dehaqi, 2003: 207-254).

3- “The Quraysh tribe and its impact on the pre-Islamic socioeconomic life of Mecca” by Ali Nazemianfard is another article investigating into the role of Quraysh tribe in the evolution of the socioeconomic life of Mecca. However, this article does not discuss the effect of trade on the cultural and religious changes of Mecca (Nazemianfard, 2009: 103-126).

2. Research Goal:

2.1. The Political, Economic, and Religious Evolution of Mecca by 400 AD:

Mecca, which is situated in Tihamah in a crescent-shaped valley between Abu Qobays and Qaeqan mounts, is referred to as Mecca, Becca, Um al-Qara, and Balad al-Amin in the Noble Quran (Fath: 24; An’am: 92; Shora: 7; Al Imran: 96; and Al-Teyn: 1-2). Prophet Abraham (PBUH) also prayed for Mecca (Qazvini, 1994, 1: 162-164). His prayers were answered and Mecca turned into a haven and the destination of heavenly blessings (Qesas, 57). According to the existing narratives, the first residents of this valley were Hadrat Ismael and his mother, Hagar. Two groups of Amalekites (Jorham and Qatura) moved to this place from Yemen (Masoudi, 1977). Johram tribe was in control of the north of Mecca and Qatura tribe was in control of the south of this land (Ibn Hesham, 1989, 1: 72-73). The residents of Mecca lived in the highlands to be protected from floods (Javad Ali, Bit, 4: 6), but due to the shortage of water and uncultivable lands of the region (Salem, No date: 353) they lived as nomads by herding (Masoudi, 1977, 1: 410) and hunting (Yaqubi, 2003, 1: 275-276). They partially relied on other tribes for food and they used to bring food from Ta’if and Sarah (Salem, No date: 353). The descendants of Ismael were governed by the spirit of war, gunfire, migration, and circulation (Javad Ali, 1988, 1: 370).

Mecca attained a religious status following the construction of Kaaba and the establishment of the institution of hajj by Hadrat Abraham. Most of the caravans that entered this city in the early days were initially religious groups of people who traveled to this city to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Following the death of Ismael and his son Nebaioth, Maza (the maternal grandfather of Nebaioth's offspring) became the head of Mecca because Nebaioth's descendants were underage (Masoudi, 1977, 1: 411). He respected Kaaba and protected it against war and bloodshed. Ismael's descendants grew in number and thus they started to immigrate to other lands. They promoted their religion in every country they moved to and took the control of their lands (Ibn Hesham, 1989, 1: 73-75). The immigration of different tribes, promotion of Abraham's religion, and the safety of the Mecca (and its outskirts) that was secured by the people of Jorham improved the religious status of this city.

This part of the history of Mecca coincided with the gradual decline of trade in the south of Arabia (Zargarinezhad, 2006: 30-31). Many precious and rare products were provided by this region to the west (Hatta, 1987: 63-64). The threat to trade in the south of Arabia, which was caused by the predicted failure of Marib Dam, led to the immigration of these tribes to the north. Meanwhile, Khuza'ah tribe chose to reside in the outskirts of Mecca (Ibn Hesham, 1989, 1: 63-64). Concerning the possible effects of trade in the south of Arabia on Mecca it could be stated that Mecca was the intersection connecting four important regions, namely Arabia, Yemen, Palestine, and Levant. Because of embracing several springs, this place was the resting place of caravans that traveled to Arabia from the north and the south (Heikel, 1996: 127-128). However, the role of Mecca in this special business position was not solely limited to the traffic of caravans, and it was not an important trade base during that period. The benefit of trade in this region for people of Mecca was limited to the taxes paid by the caravans entering Mecca, and taxes were one of the most important sources of sustenance for the inhabitants of Mecca. Some researchers believe the survival of Mecca and its residents has been dependent on its geographical position, which was the inevitable resting place for the caravans that travelled from the south of Arabia to Levant or from Levant to the south of Arabia (Javad Ali, No date, 4: 5).

Since Kaaba was built by Hadrat Abraham, Mecca was revered by the Christians and the Jews and the hajj ritual substantially contributed to the increasing growth of this city. To describe the security and sacredness of this city it is enough to say that there was no fortress in Mecca to protect it from Bedouins (Javad Ali, No date, 4: 7). The Jorham tribe gradually distanced themselves from their early beliefs and thought of abusing the extraordinary position of the city. The number of the pilgrims of Kaaba (Mecca) increased over time. They would bring the authorities of Kaaba gifts which tempted the Jorham people. "The Jorham tribe started to

impose tyranny. Its members would hurt the pilgrims by their unreligious deeds and would steal the gifts they would bring to Kaaba. As a result of this situation, they lost their power and awe” (Ibn Hesham, 1989, 1: 75). The acts of oppression and tyranny by the people of Jorham ruined their charismatic image, special place, and influence over the other tribes. Two Arab tribes, namely Banu Bakr ibn Kananeh and Qobeshan (affiliated with Khuza’ah tribe) attacked the Jorham tribe, defeated them and drove them out of the city (Ibn Hesham, 1989, 1: 75) and Amr ibn Luhay became the trustee of Kaaba (Masoudi, 1977, 1: 418).

Amr ibn Luhay, who had discovered the two main centers of trade in the south and north of Arabia, brought the Hubal idol (which was significantly respect in Levant) to Mecca to attract the people of this region to Mecca. He made the people worship this idol (Al-Baqdadi, 1985: 328; Ibn Kalbi, 1985: 149; Al-Soheili, 1420 AH: 100) to preserve and foster the sacredness of this city for the monotheists of Hejaz and the pagans of the two trade hubs (i.e. Yemen and Levant). The worship of the idols, which was first used to become closer to God, gradually influenced the beliefs of the people of Mecca. According to the reports by Ibn Issac the very first people to worship idols were the descendants of Ismael (PBUH) (Ibn Hesham, 1989, 1: 52). Amr ibn Luhay was most likely aware of the special place of Prophet Ismael’s descendants among the people of Mecca, as the offspring of the founder of monotheism in Mecca, and thus he forced them to worship the idols to make others follow them. According to Isaac’s account, whenever one of Ismael’s children was out of the city to do something, he would take a rock from the shrine to keep respecting the shrine. They had to go round the rock as they would go round Kaaba after entering a new house or place. Consequently, the worship of the shrine rocks turned into a habit over time and the next generations also adopted this habit to the extent that this act of paganism became part of the Talbiyah (Ibn Hesham, 1989, 1: 52-53).

2.2. Political, Economic, and Religious Evolutions of Mecca from the Fifth to the Seventh Century:

The Khuza’ah tribe ruled Mecca for several centuries. The last member of this tribe to rule Mecca was Halil ibn Habashiyeh, during whose reign Qusai took part in the political competitions in Mecca. Quasi, who belonged to the Bani Nazr family, lost his father when he was a child and migrated to Levant (Ibn Sa’d, 1986, 1: 55). He returned to Mecca when he was young (Ibn Hesham, 1989, 1: 77), and shortly after entering Mecca he progressed so quickly that he married the daughter of the highest city officials. These achievements reflect the effective actions taken by Quasi to prove his competency to the people of this city. Qusai was raised in Levant and witnessed the drastic growth and development of Levant and its

cities. He had probably great goals for his homeland when he first entered Mecca. He had realized that he had to take the key positions in Mecca to attain his goals. To defeat his rivals and dominate Mecca he entered a war with the Sufi tribe during the hajj rituals and defeated them with the support of Qazaeh, Kananeh, and Bani Nazr tribes. The defeat of the Sufis was a wake-up-call for Khuza'ah tribe (Ibn Hesham, 1989, 1: 78-81). Afterwards, Qusai took part in an uprising with Bani Nazr to take control of Mecca which had not been surrendered by Khuza'ah tribe. Qusai considered himself to be more competent and qualified for ruling Mecca and handling Kaaba affairs. He also believed Quraysh was superior to Khuza'ah (Ibn Hesham, 1980, 1: 77).

Qusai gathered all of the members of the Bani Nazr family who were scattered around Mecca (Ibn Habib, 2010: 81) and grouped them into the groups of "Bavaten" and "Zavaheer". Since then the Bani Nazr family has been known as Quraysh, which is derived from the word "Taqaarosh" (meaning gathering) (Ibn Saad, 1986, 1: 60-62). Qusai's attempts were aimed at turning Mecca into a city or a metropolis. He took control of the newly founded city and suppressed the opponents to establish security and unite its people. He prioritized his supporters and placed them near Kaaba. He also housed other tribes around Kaaba and met the need for water in Mecca by digging a well (Arzaqi, 1989: 92). The next step towards the development of this new metropolis was the establishment of a seminar hall for passing city rules and settling the disputes in Mecca (Ibn Saad, 1986, 1: 61). These innovative actions of Qusai resulted in the considerable growth of Mecca and its transformation from a pilgrimage-trade center to an important peerless metropolis in Hejaz. Qusai took over the important positions in Mecca (such as holding the key to Kaaba to welcome and provide water to the pilgrims) and became the flag bearer of the city. His children also inherited these positions after he passed away (Ibn Hesham, 1989, 1: 85). The efforts made by Qusai yielded fruit during the reign of his grandson Hashem ibn Abd Manaf. Changes of the international system of the day, including the relations between Iran and Rome as the two global powers, set the scene for these outcomes.

2.3. Conflicts between Iran and Rome and the Change of Trade Routes:

Immediately after establishing their government in 224 AD, the Sassanid claimed the ownership of Mesopotamia, Syria, Asia Minor, and Egypt and supervision of Arabia and the Red Sea. This policy, which involved the revival of the empire of the east which had been toppled by Alexander the Great (Christensen, 2008: 216) resulted in an inevitable conflict between the east and Rome (Masoudi, 1977: 239) and challenged the claims of the king of Rome over domination of the world. This conflict led to several military confrontations by the

seventh century (Winter and Dignas, 2007: 45). The discord between these two superpowers, which started with fights over lands, revealed their hidden economic intentions and their military actions were gradually influenced by regional trade. To exclusively gain benefits from trading opportunities, the Iranian government tried to fully dominate the route. To this end, it first entered a war with Rome and then Byzantium to conquer Armenia and Syria that had blocked the path to the Mediterranean Sea (Kasminsky, 1974: 49). The efforts made by Artaxerxes I to conquer the south of Mesopotamia, the western coast of the Persian Gulf, and the main part of the east Arabia proved his intentions for preserving and improving the business status of Iran. His attempts to conquer Kharasen and besiege Al-Hazr, which had a highly importance business role, also reflect this statement (Winter and Dignas, 2007: 11-12).

On the other hand, Rome was not willing to lose its benefits in Armenia, which had strong bonds with Rome because of the prevalence of Christianity. Therefore, there was no option other than to fight (Zarrinkub, 1985: 14). The civil conflicts in Armenia enabled Shapur I to declare a war against Rome and added Armenia to Iran with its glorious victory (History of Iran, Cambridge, 2011, 3: 22; Christensen, 2008: 228). Following the death of Shapur I, Sassanid kings signed a pact with Rome for over a century and surrendered the north of Mesopotamia and Armenia to Rome (Girshman, 1987: 252-253). As a result, the border between Iran and Rome was moved to Nusaybin (a city near Mosul) (Sheibani, 1932, 1: 322). In 532 AD, Khosrow I reached an agreement with Byzantium (History of Iran, Cambridge, 2011, 3: 58), but the expansion of Iran and the power and military growth of Khosrow I were serious threats to Byzantium. Hence, the Roman government conducted more political activities to form an anti-Iran union and besiege Iran (Procopius, 1968: 93-99). However, the Roman efforts were fruitless. Mesopotamia was invaded by Khosrow I troops and was ruined (Girshman, 1987: 365-366). Afterwards, this war continued by the end of the Sassanid dominance but the two parties did not score great victories (Christensen, 2008: 426-428).

In the Sassanid period trade was done through the old routes used by caravans, and marine trade was substantially important. Artaxerxes I put an extensive effort in repairing the old ports and constructing new ports (Christensen, 2008: 138-139). Intermediary trade brought about enormous profit to the Sassanid government and these dealings were exclusively controlled by Sassanid merchants in this period. Silk was the most important commodity transited through Iran, but since Iranians used a large portion of China's raw silk production, they were capable of selling their products at any price to the western states. The Iranians caused the economic dependence of the Eastern Rome by multiplying the price of silk (Christensen, 2008: 139; Shipman, 2005: 98).

The conflicts between the east and the west, as two superpowers, have had old economic reasons (Pigolevskaia, 2001: 141). Rather being two political enemies, these two empires were two business rivals. One of the areas of the competition between Rome and Iran was the possession of the cities influencing trade. Numerous attempts were made by these two powers for this purpose. The efforts they made to conquer Palmyra and Al-Hatr yielded adverse effects and the military actions resulted in the destruction and loss of these cities (Winter and Dignas, 2007: 139-148). Consequently, a waterway was developed in the Mediterranean Sea via the Nile River, Suez Canal, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean. To eliminate the intermediating role of the Sassanids, Romans were searching for new allies for taking the control of trade in the east. Establishment of diplomatic relations between the Eastern Rome and Turks in 568 AD and the attempts made to develop relationships with Ethiopia and Arabia were some of the actions taken to this end (Winter and Dignas, 2007: 169). The Eastern Rome was in need of friendly relationships with Ethiopia and southern Arabia to carry out trading activities on the route, because the merchants, trade centers, and ports had substantial shares of these activities (Shipman, 2005: 98). The Romans were encouraged to use the Red Sea and the trade route in Arabia instead of the routes in Iran and Mesopotamia because of the unavailability of these regions to Iranians and the higher safety of these routes. Another reason was the lower trading taxes (as compared to Iran) and the possibility of the exchange of Arabia's commodities with the caravans passing this region. There were severe risks to shipping in this region because the Red Sea lacked a proper port and the banks of the western Arabia are covered with coral reefs (Horani, 1959: 4). The route in the center of Arabia along the Red Sea, which was more suitable for the passage of business caravans, became more popular and economically successful than the marine route.

2.4. Introduction of Arabia to World Trade:

In the early sixth century AD, there were problems about the transportation of commodities via the well-known trade routes because of the long-term conflicts between Iran and eastern Rome (Al-Ali, 2005: 162; Qanavat, 2010: 24). The weakness of the Sassanid government but trading on the Silk Road at risks and endangered the business position of the southern Arabia (Zargarinezhad, 2006: 33-39). With the victory of the Christian Ethiopians, Rome entered the region and was attracted to Arabia and the possibility of transfer of commodities from this region via this old route (Qanavat, 2010: 24). The result of these Roman actions was a phenomenon known as the Trade Revolution in the near east. The arid regions of the west of Arabia accepted the great responsibility of transferring the commodities required by Romans. These commodities were sent from China and India to the ports of Yemen and were transited

from Yemen to Levant via trade stations and caravans on old routes. Therefore, the commodities were transferred to Rome by different means. The traffic of business caravans led to the growth of these cities over years (Arbery et al., 2006: 47-51). However, the characteristic that made the distinction between Mecca and other lands was its religious dimension that relied on the presence of Kaaba. The respect of Arabian Arabs for this sacred city was the reason for the safety and security of this city. The security of this city was essentially important to the merchants visiting this city, and thus Mecca soon joined business competitions.

Hashem ibn Abd Manaf, who was in charge of providing water to the pilgrims and welcoming them, properly recognized the situation (Arzaqi, 1989: 90) and tried to utilize this exceptional opportunity. His objective was to expand trade with the areas outside of Mecca. He first prepared Mecca and provided for the establishment of the business status of Mecca. To this end, he took construction measures and secured the welfare of the residents of Mecca, merchants, and pilgrims visiting this city. During hajj days, he would encourage people to welcome the pilgrims. He also supplied properties with the aid of the Quraysh tribe to fill ponds (covered with leather) with the water from the wells around Mecca and provide water to the pilgrims (Yaqubi, 2003, 1: 312). His insistence on welcoming the visitors of Mecca was in line with his former policies for attracting the people of other regions to Mecca (Moones, 2007: 109). Therefore, the attempts made by Qusai to turn Mecca into a metropolis yielded fruit during the reign of his grandson Hashem when Mecca was relatively ready to welcome the large number of merchants and pilgrims.

Hashem tried to win the collaboration of the powerful states around Arabia in trading in Mecca and introduced this city as a trade base to those states. He signed pacts with the Romans, Ghassanids, Ethiopians, Iranians, and Himyarites (Tabri, 1973, 3: 114). These pacts were signed to guarantee the security of the Quraysh caravans travelling these paths (Ibn Saad, 1986, 1: 70). Hashem reached agreement with all of the tribes residing on these paths on the security of the caravans. The Quraysh tribe was not capable of dispatching its business caravans to trans-regional markets without charging the tribes and without the consent of the intermediary tribes which had to house the Quraysh caravan on its way to the markets (Ibn Habib, 1985: 33). Many of these tribes such as Tey, Khas'am, and Qazaeh were not revering the shrine and the residents (Jahez, 1991: 70), and the workers of the shrine were not respected by the Zo'ban al-Arab, Sa'alik al-Arab, Ashab al-Qarat, and Tolab al-Tavel families (Tha'alabi, 1965: 115). These pacts were known as the Ilaf⁴.

⁴ The Ilaf was an agreement between Quraysh and the heads of tribes that resided along the trade routes across Mecca (Javad Ali, 1980, 4:67).

He also organized trade in Mecca. Although it could not be claimed that the people of Mecca had no business caravan previously and used to contact the merchants only in Mecca, with the organization of foreign trades by Hashem the business became more serious and active. As a result of his efforts two types of business trips became prevalent: a winter trip to Levant, Gaza, and Ankara; and a summer trip to Ethiopia and Yemen (Ibn Saad, 1986, 1: 66). Hashem was very well aware of the need of Romans for luxurious commodities. He was mainly transferring frankincense and myrrh from Yemen, silk, sandal, incense, amber, and gemstones from India, elephant's tusk and animal skins from Asia and Africa, and fragrance, musk, and oils (Moones, 2007: 110).

Following Hashem's death in a business trip to Gaza (Ibn Hashem, 1989, 1: 91), his brother Motalleb assumed his duties. As a first step, he extended the pacts signed by Hashem (Ibn Habib, 2010: 44-45). Abdul Motalleb that was in charge of providing water to and welcoming the pilgrims after his uncle's death re-excavated the Zamzam Well that had been filled by the Jorham tribe before their departure. Excavation of Zamzam Well doubled his dignity and place among the Arabs. He was also a charismatic and influential person who was the head and chiefman of Quraysh by the end of his life. Abdul Motalleb gave his all to ensure the security of trading in Mecca, and these efforts also enhanced the dignity and economic growth of Mecca (Qanavat, 2010: 51). Mecca was only disgraced when it was defeated during the invasion by Abramus. This failure fostered the religious dignity and status of Mecca and improved its economic success (Ibn Hesham, 1989, 1: 31-42).

Hence, Mecca managed to establish an admirable transit system for approval of transited commodities (Michael and Laurent, 2002: 48). Afterwards, Quraysh took control of the trips in Arabia and trading in the adjacent countries exclusively, because other Arab tribes were not comparable to Quraysh in terms of dignity and influence. They were substantially revered by Arabs because of living near Kaaba and would take part in fewer battles and wars. The Quraysh caravans were travelling across Arabia under secure and safe conditions and were not opposed by others (Ibrahim Hassan, 1977: 56-58). The Quraysh people would charge foreign merchants and non-allies for various kinds of taxes. One of the taxes imposed by Quraysh was the "Ashur" tax, which required Roman merchants visiting Mecca to pay one tenth of their income. This type of tax had been prevalent previously in Mecca (Salem, No date: 360).

Another factor influencing trade in Arabia was the business markets that were available in certain months. Some of these markets were the Domeh al-Jandal, Moshager, Akaz, and Zi al-Majaz markets (Yaqubi, 2003, 1: 349-350). A number of these markets were held near Mecca during month Moharam and hajj season. The people of Quraysh and other Arabs believed that

no one must visit the Akaz, Majneh, and Zi al-Majaz markets unless after the hajj rituals (Zaryab, 1991: 65). These markets were being held during hajj season and in month Moharram to stress the dignity of the visitors of the markets and to use the spiritual state of the pilgrims to link religious affairs to business affairs and to guarantee the security and peace required for business actions in these markets.

2.5. The effect of Economic Evolutions on the Sociocultural Structure of Mecca:

The trade dynamics of Mecca started from the reign of Qusai in the early fifth century. The economic evolutions resulted from the growth of trade profoundly affected the people of Mecca and set the scene for emergence of new classes and professions in Mecca. These changes even influenced the worldview and viewpoints of the people of Mecca to the point that self-glorification was based on participation in trade rather than tribal achievements and relations. Non-merchant people were not valued by the people of Mecca. Trade was not solely limited to men, because women were also engaged in business (Al-Ali, 2005: 165-166). The main responsibility of the people of Mecca was to prepare business caravans (Tabatabai Ardakani, 1989: 63). Some merchants would choose partners on different conditions and they would divide the income under contractual terms. Therefore, each of the citizens of Mecca was involved in business and trade.

Business relations had influenced all of the social relationships of the residents of Mecca. New professions came to existence and some people started to pay loans to the poor to enable them take part in trade. Some people also were employed as guides or guardians of business caravans while some others were in the currency exchange business. Since there was no certain monetary unit in Arabia for dealings, the Arabs used the monetary units of Romans and Iranians for this purpose (Salem, No date, 364). The prevalence of words such as “Qantar”, “Oqieh”, “Nash”, and “Methqal” indicates that the Arabs used these weight units

Other groups that emerged in Mecca as a result of its economic growth were the groups of usurers, who robbed the poor classes of Mecca (Tabatabai Ardakani, 1989: 64). Usury had deep adverse effects on the society of Mecca. God Almighty forbids usury in many verses of Quran (Al-Baqareh: 280; Al-Imran: 130-131; Rome: 39) and recommends the interest-free loan institution to the poor, who are in need of loans, and the loaners who charge interests to protect their properties from loss (Al-Baqareh: 245; Hadid: 18).

Therefore, the economic growth of Mecca was accompanied by social and moral decline. In Mecca, people were valued by their income and wealth, which gradually resulted in social corruption and increased the social gaps. The Arab traders accumulated immense wealth, but

they were very fewer than the poor. Arabs such as Umayya ibn Abi Selat were known as the “gold drinkers” (Arabic: Hasizahab) because they drank water in golden cups (Salem, No date: 438). On the other hand, a group of people were known as the “steel owners” because they would pound bones and eat them after cooking (Zargarinezhad, 2006: 116). A group of poor people known as “Sa’alik” attacked and robbed business caravans (Salem, No date: 440).

The first effect of trade on culture was its effect on the religious texture of Mecca. As Khuza’ah people entered this city, Amr ibn Luhay introduced idolatry to Mecca to connect the northern and southern trade centers. As a result, the monotheist society of Mecca turned into one of the biggest pagan societies and Kaaba became an idol house. With the expansion of economy and trade in the west of Arabia in the sixth century, the people of Mecca went beyond their cities and tribes to perform business activities and make a living. The Arabs became familiar with the civilized nations and states of the time via their business trips. They also became familiar with the Roman and Iranian empires in the course of their dealings with Iraq and Levant. The immediate outcome of this information was the comparison between the cultures and civilizations and the effect of the dominant culture. Consequently, the Quraysh tribe was differentiated from other Arab tribes in terms of viewpoint and social class and the people of Quraysh became famous for their virtues in Arabia (Ibrahim Hassan, 1977: 57-58). The existence of Arab markets played a significant role in the cultural status of this tribe. Other being a business environment, the Akaz market was the place of storytelling, poem (and sonnet) reading, and presenting literary works (Hassani, 1994: 70).

The distinction between Quraysh and other civilized nations made them establish traditions for widening the gap between themselves and others. Some of these traditions were the “Hams” and “Heleh” traditions. In Mecca, all of the Quraysh people were part of the “Hams” group and all of the Khuza’ah people were part of the “Heleh” group. The former group had imposed strict religious regulations on themselves (Yaqubi, 2003, 1: 335). The number of these traditions increased following the Elephant event because this incident increased the Arabs’ respect for the Quraysh tribe. Another heresy established by the Quraysh tribe was that the pilgrims visiting Mecca for the hajj or Umrah rituals were not allowed to eat the food they brought from the outside of the shrine inside the shrine; otherwise they were not allowed to go round Kaaba unless they wore the clothes of Quraysh people. Without those clothes they had to take part in the ritual either naked or in their clothes, but they had to throw it away following ritual (Ibn Athir, No date, 5: 99-101). Therefore, by the late sixth century AD the society of Mecca had lost its monotheistic values which had been replaced by semi-monotheistic beliefs, which were introduced as the examples of ignorance by the Noble Quran (Fath: 26; Maedah: 50; Al-Imran: 154; Ahzab: 33). These traditions remained in this society

by the advent of Islam when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) eliminated these heresies by God's aid (Baqareh: 199; Araf: 31-32).

3. Conclusion

According to the research results it could be argued that the intellectual changes of Arabs in the northern Arabia were not influenced by climatic and environmental conditions and incidents and factors such as natural disasters (drought, flood, earthquake, etc.) had no effect on the intellectual system of this society. On the other hand, these changes were not also the results of military invasions and an internal revolution in this region, because this area was never targeted by great conquerors and never underwent a sociopolitical revolution because of its tribal structure. It must also be stated that difficult environmental conditions and the moral characteristics of Arabs never allowed cultural influence especially by monotheistic religions such as Judaism and Christianity while the followers of these religions resided in these regions.

The only hypothesis of this research was the role of the conflicts between Sassanid and Romans over dominance over trade stations on global trade routes of the time (i.e. Silk Road and Adooeyeh Road), and the above discussion suggests that these conflicts set the scene for the growth of Mecca as a commercial state. In this regard, the role of Quraysh as the only tribe capable of linking the east and west trade centers was essential in this stage. The long-term conflicts between Iran and Rome in the early sixth century undermined the security of the main trade routes in the north and south, and thus the merchants had to find new ways. One of these routes was the exclusive route that belonged to Quraysh and connected Levant to Mecca and Mecca to Yemen. This route was known as the best alternative route because its security was ensured by the Quraysh tribe. Moreover, Mecca City as a divine haven with utmost security was considered the best trade station. This new role of Mecca, as a free trade zone, made the society of Mecca reconstruct its intellectual system to adapt the new circumstances. The new system needs (i.e. competition, opportunism, and accumulation of wealth) challenged the Abrahamic school (Hanif School). The new economic conditions set the scene for new cultural changes. As part of the new cultural changes the teachings of the Hanif religion were played down and paganism was promoted. A precise understanding of the trend of changes enables the contemporary researchers to predict the intellectual changes of the societies based on historical changes and assess the factors of intellectual changes of societies more effectively.

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