

Socio-Historical Approach in Qur'anic Studies: Tribal Structure, Trade Systems, and Religious Beliefs in Pre-Islamic Arabia

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Abstract:

This study examines the socio-historical approach to Qur'anic studies, emphasizing that the Qur'anic revelation was conveyed within specific social and historical contexts. The study focuses on pre-Islamic Arabian society, including its tribal structure, trade system, and religious beliefs. This approach facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the background of revelation, enabling Qur'anic interpretation to be connected with the social, economic, and religious conditions of the time. Pre-Islamic Arab society was characterized by a strong tribal system in which solidarity (*'ashabiyyah*) served as the foundation of identity and authority. Trade played a significant role in shaping social stratification and intertribal relations, while diverse religious traditions—including polytheism, Jewish and Christian influences, and the *hanīf* tradition—formed the backdrop against which the Qur'anic message emerged. This research employs a literature review and socio-historical analysis. The findings demonstrate that the pre-Islamic context significantly influenced the content of the revelation, particularly in relation to themes of brotherhood, social justice, and ethical reform. The socio-historical approach is therefore essential for producing contextual, critical, and relevant interpretations of the Qur'an.

Keywords: *Qur'an, socio-historical approach, tribal organization, trade, pre-Islamic Arabia.*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji pendekatan sosial-historis dalam studi Al-Qur'an, dengan menekankan bahwa wahyu turun dalam konteks sosial dan sejarah tertentu. Fokusnya pada masyarakat Arab pra-Islam, meliputi struktur kabilah, sistem perdagangan, dan kepercayaan. Pendekatan ini membantu memahami latar turunya ayat secara lebih utuh, sehingga tafsir dapat dikaitkan dengan kondisi sosial, ekonomi, dan keagamaan saat itu. Masyarakat Arab pra-Islam hidup dalam sistem kesukuan kuat dengan solidaritas (*'ashabiyah*) sebagai dasar identitas dan kekuasaan. Perdagangan membentuk stratifikasi sosial dan relasi antar-suku, sementara tradisi keagamaan yang beragam—politeisme, pengaruh Yahudi dan Nasrani, serta hanif—menjadi latar pesan Al-Qur'an. Metode penelitian berupa

kajian literatur dan analisis historis-sosial. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa konteks pra-Islam berpengaruh signifikan terhadap isi wahyu, terutama terkait persaudaraan, keadilan sosial, dan reformasi etika. Pendekatan ini penting untuk menghasilkan tafsir yang kontekstual, kritis, dan relevan.

Kata kunci: *Al-Qur'an, pendekatan sosial historis, kabilah, perdagangan, Arab pra-Islam*

INTRODUCTION

The socio-historical approach is one important way to study the Qur'an, aiming to understand the text of revelation by taking into account the social and historical context of the society where the revelation was delivered. This approach emphasizes that the Qur'an didn't come into a social vacuum but interacted with the realities of 7th-century Arab society, which had its own social structures, economic systems, and religious practices. (Qasim, 2025) Therefore, reconstructing the social conditions of pre-Islamic Arab society is an important step to better understand the message of the Qur'an. (Saepudin, Khaerani, & Burhanuddin, 2025)

The socio-historical approach is an important methodological framework in Islamic studies for understanding Islamic teachings comprehensively through the context of time and place. In Qur'an studies, this approach is relevant because revelation did not occur in a vacuum, separate from society, but rather within specific social and historical contexts. Understanding the Qur'anic verses, therefore, needs to take into account the social, cultural, economic, and political conditions of Arab society at the time the revelation was revealed. Analyzing the structure of society, tribal systems, trading practices, and pre-Islamic religious traditions helps explain the background of the verses and the issues the Qur'an addressed. By understanding this context, interpreting the Qur'an can be done more comprehensively and remains connected to the historical reality behind it. (Donner, 2010)

This study aims to reconstruct the social context of pre-Islamic Arab society through an analysis of three main aspects: tribal structure, trade networks, and belief systems. These three aspects are integrated as a framework to understand how the Qur'an responded to the social realities of the people at the time the revelations were revealed, so it is hoped that it can contribute to the development of more contextual tafsir studies. The urgency of this research lies in the need to understand the Qur'an not only textually, but also in its socio-historical context, because the conditions of pre-Islamic Arab society are key to grasping the meaning of the verses in a more complete and contextual way.

The purpose of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches the study of Qur'anic interpretation through a socio-historical approach that integrates text and context, and it strengthens the understanding of the Qur'an as a contextual text, as developed by Fazlur Rahman. Practically, this research serves as a reference for academics and the general public in understanding and applying Qur'anic values in a relevant way. This study uses a socio-historical approach as the main basis for understanding the Qur'an as a text that is inseparable from the social and historical context of Arab society at the time of the revelation. This approach assumes that the Qur'an is a response to concrete social realities, making it important to understand the social structure, economic system, and religious practices of pre-Islamic Arab society in order to comprehensively

uncover the meaning of the verses.

The socio-historical approach in Qur'an studies has gotten attention from Angelika Neuwirth (Neuwirth, 2019) which emphasizes the importance of reading the Qur'an in the context of the history and culture of Arab society at the time the revelation was given. According to him, understanding the historical context allows researchers to see how the Qur'an interacted with the religious traditions and culture that were developing at that time. This approach also helps distinguish between universal messages and particular contexts in the Qur'an. In addition, Fazlur Rahman developed the concept of double movement, which is an interpretation method that starts with understanding the historical context of a verse, and then derives moral principles that can be applied in the context of modern society.

Studies on the socio-historical context of the Qur'an have grown rapidly in contemporary research, emphasizing the importance of understanding the revelation within the social and historical environment of Arab society at the time of its revelation. Angelika Neuwirth's research in Farida (Afifah & Niam, 2024) showing that the Qur'an needs to be understood in the cultural and religious context of the Late Antiquity world. Gabriel Said Reynolds' research (Reynolds, 2018) showing the existence of a relationship between the Qur'an's narratives and Jewish and Christian traditions highlights the connection of the Qur'an's narratives with Jewish and Christian traditions as part of the theological dialogue of that time. Meanwhile, Fred M. Donner (Donner, 2003) highlighting tribal structures as the basis of social solidarity among Arab communities. Patricia Crone examines the role of Mecca's trade networks in regional economic dynamics regarding tribal structures as the foundation of social solidarity, as well as Patricia Crone's research (Crone, 2007) emphasizing the importance of Mecca's trade networks in shaping the economic dynamics of pre-Islamic Arab society. In the religious aspect, Nicolai Sinai (Sinai, 2011) and G.R. Hawting (Hawting, 1997) highlight the religious transformation of Arab society as reflected in the Qur'anic texts.

Even so, most of these studies still discuss social, economic, and religious aspects separately. Therefore, studies that integrate these three aspects into a single socio-historical framework are still relatively limited. This shows a research gap as well as the urgency to re-examine the context of pre-Islamic Arab society more comprehensively. The urgency of this research lies in the need to understand the Qur'an not just textually, but also in its socio-historical context, because the condition of pre-Islamic Arab society is key to grasping the meaning of the verses more fully and contextually.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with the type of library research, which is research aimed at examining and analyzing various written sources relevant to the topic of study. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on understanding the Qur'an text in the social and historical context of pre-Islamic Arab society through the available literature analysis. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data include the

Qur'an text as the main source of study, as well as scholarly works that directly discuss the social context of pre-Islamic Arab society. Meanwhile, the secondary data cover academic books, scientific journal articles, and previous research results related to socio-historical approaches, the social structure of Arab society, trade systems, and pre-Islamic belief systems.

The data collection technique was carried out through a documentation study, which involved identifying, collecting, reading, and reviewing various literature relevant to the research focus. The collected data were then classified according to the study themes, namely the aspects of tribal structure, trade systems, and the belief systems of pre-Islamic Arab society. The data analysis technique in this study used a descriptive-analytical method. In the descriptive stage, the researcher presented the social conditions of pre-Islamic Arab society based on the obtained data. Next, in the analytical stage, the data were analyzed using a socio-historical approach to understand the relationship between the Quranic text and the socio-historical context of the society at the time the revelation was sent. The analysis was carried out integratively by connecting the three main aspects, namely tribal structure, trade network dynamics, and belief systems, in order to reconstruct the socio-historical background behind the revelation of the verses. To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses a source triangulation technique, which involves comparing various relevant literature sources to get a more comprehensive and objective understanding. This way, the analysis results are expected to have strong academic validity and be able to provide a complete picture of the socio-historical context of pre-Islamic Arab society in relation to the study of the Qur'an.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Social Conditions of Pre-Islamic Arab Society

Tribal Structure in Pre-Islamic Arab Society

Historians like Abu Syuhbah (Syuhbah, 1996) dividing Arab origins based on their lineage into three parts (Amri et al., 2022) , That is: the al-Ba'idah Arabs. They consisted of the tribes of 'Ad, Thamud, al-'Amaliqah, Thasm, Jadis, Umain, Jurhum, Hadhramaut, and other tribes still related to these groups. These were the tribes that had been identified and flourished before Islam came. They had rulers whose territories stretched from Sham to Egypt. Then there are the al'Aribah Arabs (the original Arabs). They are Arabs descended from Ya'rub bin Yasyjuj bin Qahthan, also known as al-Arab al-Qahthaniyah. They are known to have come from the south (Yahya: 98). Among their rulers were the kings of Yemen, and the kingdoms of Ma'in, Saba', and Himyar.

Adnani Arabs. This name is attributed to a person named Adnan, whose lineage traces back to Ismail bin Ibrahim (peace be upon him). They are known as al-Arab al-Musta'rabah (the Arab newcomers), meaning a community that originally had no Arab blood and later encountered the original Arabs. They are a community that grew in the northern regions. Their original homeland is Mecca. They are Ismail and his descendants. Among Ismail's descendants, the most prominent is Adnan, the great-grandfather of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) at the top of the lineage. And from Adnan, the Arab tribes grew and

developed. So, both the Adnani and Qahthani Arabs are descendants of Ismail (peace be upon him). It was from this third Arab nation that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was born, specifically from the Quraysh tribe, which comes from Kinanah. The descendants of Fihir bin Malik bin Nadhar bin Kinanah. From ancient times, the Arab lands have seen the rise of several original civilizations, among the most famous are:

1. The Saba civilization in Yemen. The Qur'an has mentioned this civilization. The people of Yemen tried to make use of rainwater and floodwater that would otherwise go to waste into the sea. They then built reservoirs and dams with techniques that were very advanced for that time. One of the most famous is the Ma'rib Dam. This was to irrigate fields and plantations filled with beautiful and enticing plants.
2. The 'Aad civilization in Ahqaf. This civilization grew and developed in the northern part of Hadhramaut, and this is where Prophet Hud was sent. The 'Aad people had sturdy houses, various buildings, gardens, fields, and many springs.
3. The Tsamud civilization in Hijaz. The Qur'an confirms the existence of this civilization, specifically in the land of Hijr. The Qur'an also explained their skill in building houses in the mountains by carving them out. In that area, there were several springs, gardens, and fields. Now, those people are gone, and only traces and ruins remain. Villages, towns, residential buildings, palaces, springs, shady trees, gardens, and fields have all been swallowed by the earth.

During the Jahiliyah period, Arab society was made up of various tribes, each with its own identity, traditions, and rules, so social life tended to be fragmented. The lineage system was an important foundation, where blood relations determined social and political status. Each tribe was led by a respected sheikh, and competition between tribes often sparked conflicts to defend honor and power. In Jahiliyah poetry, it is mentioned that a person's tribe becomes their protector and support in life, reflecting a high level of respect and even fanaticism toward one's lineage. Loyalty to the tribe often took priority over differences in belief, showing how strong social bonds were at that time. (Yusuf, 2024).

Tribal structure was the foundation of social organization in pre-Islamic Arab society. A tribe wasn't just a lineage, but also a political and economic unit that determined social status, access to resources, and networks of solidarity. Tribal leadership was generally family-based, with the head of the tribe (ra'is or sayyid) playing a role in decision-making, conflict arbitration, and representing relationships between tribes. (Shryock, 2023) Big tribes like Quraisy, Tamim, Aus, and Khazraj controlled regional territories and major trade routes in the Arabian Peninsula, and they maintained a complex patron-client system (a mutually beneficial but unequal relationship between two parties) to strengthen the social order. (Hoyland, 2002) This solidarity network is active in various activities, including joint defense organizations, social compensation mechanisms in case of murder or blood feuds, and alliance structures for mobilizing troops during major conflicts (Donner, 2003). Several primary sources show that tribal identity is formed through rituals, oral agreements, and naming systems that honor common

ancestors. This bond serves as a basis for social legitimacy and a way to regulate the community's moral norms, which played a strong role in pre-Islamic collective life.

So, these findings show that tribal structures are not just genealogical frameworks, but social systems that simultaneously regulate power, economic, and cultural relations. This aligns with historians' findings that tribal solidarity creates informal norms that bind each individual in a tight social network. Tribal structures also influenced how pre-Islamic Arab societies responded to external changes. As trade networks grew and cross-regional economic routes became more important, large tribes were able to expand their influence through strategic alliances and control over key oasis cities like Yathrib, Ta'if, and Mecca. This shows that the internal dynamics of tribes are closely linked to external factors like trade and cultural contact. In a socio-historical context, tribal structures also provide a backdrop for understanding society's reactions to the early monotheistic message brought by Prophet Muhammad. The values of solidarity, justice, and social responsibility promoted by the revelation of the Qur'an can be seen as a normative response to tribal solidarity practices and the weaknesses of the tribal system—for example, endless blood feuds and discrimination between members of large and small tribes.

In a poem from the Jahiliyah era, it is said that "A person's tribe is their protector (shielding them from enemies) and their support in life (giving them backing)." Back then, Arabs held their tribes in very high regard, even to the point of fanaticism toward their ancestors. Every member saw their tribe as something sacred, putting loyalty to the tribe above differences or disputes in beliefs and religion. In modern literature, the concept of tribe goes beyond just describing traditional social structures; it's also often used as a metaphor for loyalty, conflict, and social identity in a broader context. So, analyzing the structure of tribes gives us two key insights: first, it maps out how pre-Islamic communities organized themselves; second, it helps explain the social context in which the values of the Qur'an began to be shaped and internalized. Without understanding the system of tribal solidarity and conflict, some of the moral teachings of the Qur'an will be difficult to fully grasp in the context of social acceptance.

In Islam, a tribe (قبيلة) refers to a tribe or clan that is larger in the social structure, consisting of several families or groups with the same lineage. Tribes, as part of the social order, were known in pre-Islamic Arab tradition and are also used in the Islamic context to describe larger groups in society. However, Islam teaches that differences in tribe or clan are not a reason to feel superior or inferior to others. In the Qur'an, the word 'kabila' (قبيلة) refers to a tribe or clan that is larger in the social structure, usually consisting of several families or groups that share the same lineage. One verse that uses the word 'kabila' is in Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13). In this verse, 'kabila' refers to the differences in tribes or clans among people, which God created for the purpose of getting to know and appreciating each other, not for boasting or belittling one another. This verse emphasizes that a person's status in the eyes of God is determined by their piety, not by their tribal or ethnic origin.

Trade Network

The geographical conditions of the Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic era greatly influenced the economic lifestyle of its people. The Arab region was dominated by vast deserts with limited water sources, so only a few areas had fertile land that allowed for the development of agricultural activities. Areas like Yemen and some oasis regions in Hijaz were known for having relatively advanced farming systems. (Crone, 1987) People in these areas grew wheat, dates, and various other crops, which became both food sources and trade commodities. On the other hand, communities living in the arid regions relied more on trading activities and the mobility of caravans connecting various economic centers in the Middle East. These geographical conditions shaped the economic structure of Arab society before the arrival of Islam.

Pre-Islamic Arab traders expanded into various regions to trade spices, dates, wheat, and luxury goods, creating a vast and layered economic network. Trade activities not only brought economic benefits but also served as a channel for spreading ideas, social norms, and cultural influences across regions (Donner, 2003). The major tribes that controlled trade routes, especially the Quraysh, used this network to strengthen their political and social power. Controlling strategic routes and oases allowed them to facilitate alliances, negotiate trade agreements, and manage security mechanisms in transit areas. Interactions between Arab traders and outside communities showed cultural exchanges, including religious practices, language, and customs.

At least, there are four (4) trade routes passing through Mecca (Wahyu & Irawan, 2020), including:

1. The first route started from Mecca to Canton (now Hong Kong), passing through Madain (the old Persian capital/Sasania), then to Kabul, Kashmir, to Singkiang (now Xinjiang), to Jaitun, and to Canton before finally reaching the Malay world via the sea route.
2. The second route starts from Mecca through Sana'a, then to Aden, Muscat, Raisut, Siraf, Guadar (a port in Pakistan), Daibul, to Malabar, India, and then to Cape Comorin (between Sri Lanka and southern India).
3. The third route starts from Mecca to Damascus, Aleppo (Halb), Anatolia, the Bosphorus Strait, and goes all the way to Constantinople. On the land route, the Silk Road also connects Xinjiang through Central Asia including Transoxiana (ma wara'a al-nahar) all the way to the ports in Kazan, New Sarai, and other cities in the Russian region.
4. The final route starts from Mecca to Jeddah passing through Aydzab, Habsyah (Ethiopia), the Nile River, then to ports in North Africa passing through Farama, Alexandria, Barkah, Tripoli, Tunis, Hodna, Ceuta and Tangier (Morocco), then through the Strait of Gibraltar to the ports in al-Andalus and up to Narbonne in southern France

This trade network shows that the economy couldn't be separated from pre-Islamic social dynamics. Trade networks allowed for social mobility, broadened contacts between tribes, and created new patterns of solidarity (Crone, 1987). Wealthy traders from certain tribes gained more influence in local and regional politics, while inland tribes that didn't control the main routes tended to be in

subordinate positions.

From a socio-historical perspective, trade also became a mechanism for spreading ideology and cultural practices. For example, concepts of morality, trade contracts, and social obligations reflected in the Qur'an related to business ethics (e.g., QS. Al-Baqarah: 282) can be understood as a normative response to the economic dynamics of pre-Islamic Arabia (Little, 1988). In addition, trade networks influenced interactions between tribes and reinforced social structures. Cross-regional trade encouraged the need for alliances and negotiations between tribes, reduced internal conflicts, and created an early model of economic cooperation based on social norms and trust (Donner, 2010). Trade was an important element in the economy of pre-Islamic Arab society. This activity not only involved fellow Arabs but also other nations such as Persia and India. The advancement of trade was supported by developments in the agricultural sector as well as export and import activities connecting various regions.

Trade routes in the Arabian Peninsula back then were split into two main paths: the eastern route that went through Oman to Iraq, and the western route that passed through Yemen and the markets in Hijaz before heading to Syria. In practice, some trade transactions were done through a barter system or silent trade, where goods were exchanged using certain signals without direct communication.

Belief System

The belief system of pre-Islamic Arab society was pluralistic and based on polytheism, although there were monotheistic influences from Judaism and Christianity in some areas (Putri & Yati, 2025). Arabs practiced rituals such as idol worship at the Kaaba, reverence for local gods, and respect for ancestors and natural forces. Tribal structures influenced religious practices, where each tribe had a protective god or idol that served as a symbol of social identity. The pre-Islamic period was an era of diversity for the Arab people, reflected in various aspects such as religion, society, economy, ethnicity, culture, and law, and it significantly shaped the way of life of the Arabs. Before the advent of Islam, Arabs had a highly diverse belief system, including Jewish and Christian traditions. Most Jewish residents lived in cities like Yathrib, Khaibar, and Yemen, while Christian communities were mainly found in the southern regions of the peninsula.

Most people in the Arabian Peninsula during the Jahiliyyah period followed polytheism with practices of idol worship. However, there were also small groups who practiced Judaism, Christianity, and Hanif. Many Jews lived in Yathrib, Khaybar, and Yemen, while Christian communities grew in the Najran region in the south and in the northern parts of the Arabian Peninsula under the influence of the Byzantines and the Abyssinian kingdom. Meanwhile, the Hanif religion, which taught the oneness of God, was followed by a few individuals in Mecca, one of whom was Waraqah ibn Nawfal, who was known to understand the teachings of the Gospel and believe in prophethood. (Hasan, 2020)

The practice of idol worship in Mecca is believed to have been introduced by 'Amru bin Luhay from the Bani Khuza'ah after he brought the tradition from Sham. Since then, the Ka'bah, which was originally built by Prophet Ibrahim and

Ismail as a center for monotheistic worship, turned into a place of idol veneration for various Arab tribes. Among the well-known idols were Hubal in the Ka'bah, considered the most sacred by the Quraysh, as well as Al-Lata in Thaif, Al-Uzza in Nakhlah, and Al-Manat in Yatsrib, which are also mentioned in the Qur'an in Surah An-Najm verses 19–23. In addition, some Bedouin communities also believed in natural forces like trees, the moon, and stars, thinking they could influence their lives. This diversity of beliefs reflects the religious state of Arabian society before the advent of Islam. (Muhammad Barry Mahmudi, Muhammad Furqan, Duski Samad, & Zulheldi, 2024).

Some sacred sites, especially the Kaaba in Mecca, served as both religious centers and economic hubs, since they were destinations for pilgrimage and trade. Ritual practices and religious celebrations strengthened internal tribal solidarity, regulated moral norms, and reinforced social hierarchy. In addition, interactions with merchants and communities from outside the region led to the exchange of religious ideas, influencing how people understood and responded to the later emerging monotheistic teachings. Analyzing these belief systems shows that religious pluralism was an important social context for the revelation of the Qur'an. The moral values, rituals, and beliefs of pre-Islamic Arab society formed a complex cultural backdrop, which influenced how the revelation was received and interpreted. Polytheism, idol worship, and belief in natural powers provided a social framework that allowed the Qur'an to highlight monotheism, social justice, and moral responsibility in contrast.

The relationship between tribal structure and belief systems is also seen in how rituals and moral norms support group solidarity. Religious practices become a tool to maintain tribal identity, regulate members' behavior, and enforce social obligations. In this way, the moral and spiritual reforms brought by the Qur'an can be understood as a response to already established socio-religious practices. Moreover, pre-Islamic belief systems also provided informal mechanisms for conflict resolution and strengthening solidarity. For example, sacrificial rituals or joint pilgrimages served as a means to reinforce inter-tribal relationships, which then interacted with trade networks and social structures. The interaction of these three aspects—tribes, trade, and belief—shows a close connection between economy, politics, and religiosity in pre-Islamic Arab society, which is the socio-historical context of the revelation.

Integration of Tribal Structures, Trade Networks, and Belief Systems in Understanding the Context of the Revelation of the Qur'an

Analyzing three main aspects—tribal structure, trade networks, and belief systems—shows that pre-Islamic Arab society had an interconnected and complex social system. Tribal structure shaped social identity, political hierarchy, and internal solidarity, while trade networks expanded interactions between tribes and allowed economic mobility that influenced social power. Meanwhile, belief systems served as a moral and ritual foundation that strengthened social bonds and gave meaning to those social and economic interactions.

These three aspects don't operate separately; instead, they form a complex social ecosystem. For example, a large tribe that controls major trade routes gains economic influence that boosts its political position while also becoming a hub for

spreading religious norms and social rituals. Religious rituals and moral practices strengthen the tribe's internal loyalty, which then affects trade alliances and economic negotiations with other tribes. In this way, the interaction between the economy, politics, and religiosity creates an adaptive social network, allowing pre-Islamic Arab societies to respond flexibly to both internal and external challenges.

The socio-historical approach emphasizes that the Qur'an emerged in this context. The moral values, social solidarity, and monotheistic principles taught by the Qur'anic revelation can be understood as a response to the social, economic, and religious dynamics of society at that time. For example, teachings about fairness in trade, protection of the weak, and enforcement of social responsibility can be seen as a normative effort to regulate interactions between tribes and improve economic practices that were sometimes unfair. In other words, understanding the context of tribal structure, trade, and beliefs allows for a more contextual and realistic interpretation of the Qur'an, in line with the social realities of pre-Islamic Arab society.

The integration of these three aspects also emphasizes that socio-historical studies are not just about social description or economic history, but are an important tool for understanding the Qur'an's revelation in the context of real life. Social, economic, and religious structures form the 'layers' of social reality that influence each other; every moral policy, warning, or guidance in the Qur'an can be traced back to its connection with these aspects, showing the relevance of its teachings for pre-Islamic Arab society and providing a basis for applying its universal values. The Connection of the Socio-Historical Approach to Qur'anic Studies The socio-historical approach emphasizes that the Qur'an did not appear separately from society, but always interacted with the social, economic, and religious realities at the time of the revelation. By analyzing tribal structures, trade networks, and belief systems, we can understand the context that shaped the message of the Qur'an, including

1. Tribal Structure → social and moral context The pre-Islamic Arab society was divided into tribes with a strict hierarchy. Tribes governed loyalty, justice, and solidarity. An example in the Qur'an: QS. Al-Maidah [5]:8 emphasizes the principle of justice: '...be just, for justice is closer to piety...'. This message is relevant for a society where loyalty to one's own tribe is very strong, and it calls for a balance between tribal loyalty and universal justice.
2. Trade Networks → economic and social context Trade routes allow economic mobility, contact between tribes, and cultural exchange. Economic inequality arises when certain tribes control main routes. An example in the Qur'an: QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:282 about documenting debts and fair transactions emphasizes transparent trade practices and protecting the rights of the weaker party, as a social response to pre-Islamic trade dynamics.
3. Belief Systems → religious and ethical context Pluralism and polytheism created different ritual and moral practices among tribes. The revelation of the Qur'an emphasizes monotheism and universal morality to guide society toward spiritual unity. An example in the Qur'an: QS. Al-An'am [6]:141

highlights the prohibition of idol worship and encourages maintaining moral balance and environmental ethics, which serves as a social correction to pre-Islamic religious practices.

Thus, these three aspects are interconnected and become key to the socio-historical approach: Tribal structure explains social dynamics and internal conflicts. Trade networks explain economic factors and cultural exchange. Belief systems explain the moral foundations, rituals, and ideology of society. This approach allows researchers of interpretation or Qur'an studies to see revelation as a response to real situations, rather than as an abstract text detached from historical context. In this way, interpretation becomes more contextual, realistic, and relevant. Here's a table of analysis using the socio-historical approach that integrates tribal structure, trade networks, and belief systems in understanding the Qur'an's context.

Table 1: Integration of Tribal Structures, Trade Networks, and Belief Systems in Understanding the Context of the Revelation of the Qur'an

Socio-Historical Aspect	Characteristics of Pre-Islamic Arab Society	Implications in Understanding the Qur'an	Example Sentence
Tribal Structure (Tribal System)	Arab society is organized into tribes with strong loyalty to the clan, a system of protection, and solidarity ('ashabiyah). Conflicts between tribes often happen to maintain honor and power.	The Qur'an criticizes tribal fanaticism and emphasizes universal brotherhood and human equality before God. Islam tries to transform identity based on tribe into identity based on faith.	يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ O people, indeed We created you from a male and a female. Then, We made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honorable of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most God-conscious. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing and All-Aware. (QS al Hujurat: 13)
Trade Network	The strategic location of the Arabian Peninsula made it a trade route between Yemen, Hijaz, Sham, Persia, and India. Trade was carried out through	The Qur'an uses language and illustrations that are close to trading activities, like the concept of scales, fairness in transactions, and the prohibition of cheating in	وَيْلٌ لِّلْمُطَفِّفِينَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا اكْتَالُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ وَإِذَا كَالُوهُمْ أَوْ وَزَنُوهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ Woe to those who cheat in measuring. (That is) those who, when they receive a measure from others, ask for it to be full. But when they measure or weigh for

	caravans and seasonal markets like Ukaz.	buying and selling.	others, they reduce it. (QS Al-Mutaffifin verses 1-3)
Belief System	Most people followed polytheism with idol worship like Hubal, Al-Lata, Al-Uzza, and Al-Manat, although there were also Jewish, Christian, and Hanif communities.	The Qur'an emphasizes the concept of monotheism, criticizes idolatrous practices, and invites people to return to worshipping the One God.	أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ اللَّاتَ وَالْعُزَّىٰ Is it appropriate for you (polytheists) to consider (the two idols) al-Lat and al-'Uzza. (QS An-Najm: 19-23)

The socio-historical approach helps us understand that the messages in the Qur'an didn't come down in a vacuum, but interacted with the social realities of 7th-century Arab society. The tribal structure explains the Qur'an's emphasis on unity and social justice, trade networks explain the use of economic terms in its verses, while the community's belief system explains the strong emphasis on the concept of monotheism as a critique of idol worship.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that a socio-historical approach is important in understanding the Qur'an because the revelation came in the social, economic, and religious context of pre-Islamic Arab society. An analysis of tribal structures, trade networks, and belief systems reveals the dynamics of community life behind the Qur'an's message. Tribal structures shaped identity and social solidarity, so the values of justice and responsibility in the Qur'an can be understood as a response to the conflicts and social hierarchy of that time. Trade networks show the importance of economic activities and cross-regional interactions, so the principles of honesty, fair transactions, and protection of the vulnerable in the Qur'an act as a correction to pre-Islamic economic practices. The pluralistic belief system dominated by polytheism was responded to in the Qur'an through the affirmation of monotheism and universal ethics. The integration of these three aspects emphasizes that the socio-historical approach helps understand the Qur'an in a more contextual way and relevant to social realities.

Future research is recommended to develop studies on the socio-historical approach to the Qur'an with a broader and deeper scope. Firstly, researchers can expand the study objects by analyzing specific verses thematically (thematic tafsir) so that the connection between the text and social context can be traced more specifically. Secondly, the next researchers can integrate other approaches, such as linguistic or hermeneutical approaches, to enrich the analysis and produce a more comprehensive understanding. In addition, future research can also make use of more diverse historical sources, including classical manuscripts and archaeological studies, to strengthen the reconstruction of the social conditions of

pre-Islamic Arab society. Developing methods as formulated by Fazlur Rahman can also be an alternative in connecting historical context with contemporary relevance in a more practical way. Thus, it is hoped that future research will be able to provide a deeper contribution to understanding the Qur'an as a text that is contextual, dynamic, and relevant throughout time.

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