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Cultural Diversity and Religious Beliefs in Festivals and Occasions of Pre-Islamic Arab Society

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Abstract

Before the emergence of Islam, the Arab tribes exhibited a diverse array of cultures and religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Idolism, Hanifism, Zoroastrianism, Mandeism, and others. Despite this diversity, the Arab civilization displayed numerous festivals and occasions that reflected their religious and cultural beliefs. This study underscored major festivals and occasions prevalent among the Arabs before Islam. It also aims to explain the pre-Islamic Arab culture and key religious beliefs that shaped these festivities, helping to understand Arab civilization and its influence on Islamic culture and religion. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to identify and analyze the festivals, occasions, and religious beliefs prominent in pre-Islamic Arab society. The study reveals a rich tapestry of festivals and occasions that played a significant role in pre-Islamic Arab culture, reflecting the times diverse religious beliefs and cultural practices. Religious festivals and seasonal celebrations revealed ancient Arab society's social, religious, and cultural dynamics. The findings emphasize the necessity of knowing pre-Islamic Arab culture and its impact on Islamic customs. The history of Arab civilization and its influence on Islamic culture and religion could be better understood by examining the pre-Islamic festivals, events, and religious beliefs.

Keywords: *Pre-Islamic era; Arab culture; Social events; Festivals; Religious beliefs; Cultural history*

1. Introduction

The belief system of the Arabs was based on Paganism before Islam, and when the Muslims entered Mecca, they found around three hundred idols surrounding the Kaaba, representing the pre-Islamic era known as the *Age of Ignorance* in Arab religious life. The Arabian Peninsula knew only a few people who embraced Judaism, Christianity, or the religion of Hanifism. Among the many customs in Arab life, they used to hang talismans, believing that they ward off harm and envy. They also practiced divination, interpreted omens, and revered soothsayers and fortune-tellers, believing they possessed knowledge of the unseen. They sought refuge in jinn and attributed great importance to them, especially when descending into a valley, as some would say: *We seek refuge with the lord of this valley*. This behavior is reflected in the Quranic verse: *And there were men from mankind who sought refuge in men from the jinn, so they [only] increased them in burden*[2].

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[2] Quran, Surah Al-Jinn, Verse 6.

The Arabs were known for certain ethics and virtues, such as generosity, hospitality, and Arab chivalry. It was well known among many Arabs to honor and show kindness to guests and honor those who came to the House of Allah, the Sacred Mosque. Leadership in providing hospitality and serving pilgrims was a subject of dispute and competition among them due to its association with a good reputation and great honor. However, there were also negative ethics present. When Islam emerged, it perfected noble ethics and encouraged the highest standards of moral excellence. The Arabs were renowned for their eloquence, literature, and linguistic fluency. They were known for their poetry gatherings and their poetry markets, such as the Seven Suspended Odes, the markets of Ukaz, and Dhul-Majaz, as examples of this. Islam came to refine their manners and purify their tongues from indecent and foul speech. The result of these beliefs and cultures was the emergence of numerous festivals and occasions that brought together many Arab tribes in their observance and celebration.

Exploring pre-Islamic Arab culture offers an intriguing insight into the social structure and customs of a civilization that served as a precursor to the rise of Islam. Holidays and social events held considerable importance in pre-Islamic Arabian society due to their capacity to influence community identity, facilitate cultural interchange, and signify momentous junctures in the lives of individuals. Understanding the characteristics and importance of these festivities provides invaluable knowledge regarding the Arabian Peninsulas social, religious, and cultural interactions before the arrival of Islam. Pre-Islamic Arabia refers to the Arabian peninsula in the centuries leading up to the Prophet Muhammads first revelation in 610 C.E. (Horovitz, 2013a). The socio-political structure of pre-Islamic Arabia was made up of different tribes who were constantly at war. Two main tribes out of them were Bedouin (nomadic) tribes and Hadari (settled) tribes. Mecca was the financial and cultural center of western Arabia and possibly of the whole Arabian Peninsula at the time of Muhammads (PUBH) birth. Most Arab tribes had a polytheistic, pagan religious culture. However, monotheism did exist in pre-Islamic Arabia, primarily through Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian communities (Donner, 1977). is a peninsula in the southwestern tip of Asia, bounded north by Jordan and Iraq, west by the Red Sea, south by the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and east by the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf. It consists of the modern states of Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, the Island state of Bahrain, and Kuwait. Currently, Arabs are a majority in many countries, including Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, and the countries of North Africa (Mineta et al., 2021).

Prior to the advent of Islam, Arabia was a heterogeneous region populated by numerous clans and tribes, each with its own set of rituals, customs, and beliefs (Grasso, 2023). Social gatherings and festivals were pivotal in preserving unity among these communities and facilitating communication and interaction between various factions (Duffy et al., 2018). These assemblies afforded occasions for narrative retelling, poetic recitation, and the exhibition of traditional artistic forms; each activity contributed to safeguarding and disseminating cultural heritage (Brownett & Evans, 2020). In pre-Islamic Arabia, social gatherings and holidays were intricately intertwined with religious practices and beliefs (Jassim, 2021). Most of these celebrations originated in polytheistic traditions, wherein each tribe held its deities in esteem. Occasional commemorations were held in their honor, accompanied by elaborate rituals and offerings intended to gain the favor of celestial beings (Mafraji, 2022). Religious observances served not only as expressions of devotion but also as reinforcements of hierarchical structures and communal social cohesion.

The present study explored the wide range of festivities and social gatherings that defined pre-Islamic Arab society through analyzing literary sources, archaeological findings, and historical accounts. Moreover, it underscores the cultural importance of these festivities and their influence on the composition and character of Arabian societies before Islam. The main objective of the current work is to acquire a more comprehensive comprehension of the economic, religious, and social existence of early Arab society and its lasting impact on subsequent historical progressions in the area.

2. Cultural Dynamics in Pre-Islamic Arab Society

The culture of the Arabs is the product of their history, which extends back thousands of years before Christ (Mackie, 2019). This culture consists of theoretical and scientific knowledge acquired by the Arabs from their life experiences and practices of various forms of practical social activities. It also emerges from their dialectical interaction with nature and people (Mostofa, 2022). The Arabs have a long history of integrated knowledge, as evidenced by their advanced meteorological observations and rain prediction methods in the pre-Islamic era (Alfajjawi, 2020). Moreover, language is the primary means of expression within this culture due to its origins in social history. Complementary to writing in that it preserves or transmits language across space and time, it functions as a conduit for exchanging ideas and emotions and as a means of fostering acquaintance and understanding among various societal groups (Coulmas, 2022). For the Arabs of the Hijaz, their pre-Islamic writing can be traced back to two main scripts. The first is the Musnad script, or the Himyaritic script, used in various parts of the Arab lands (Azabi, 2017). The second is the Nabatean script, derived from the late Aramaic script, which they developed and from which the first Arabic script originated, used by the people of the Hijaz before and after Islam (Little, 2024). The Arabs of the Hijaz used Nabatean writing in their commercial transactions, then spread this writing by the end of the 3rd century and the beginning of the 4th century A.D. throughout the Arab lands. Nabatean writing in the Hijaz developed rapidly due to the rapid growth of both commercial and literary movements. Writing evolved within these two spheres, acquiring the explicit character that emerged since the early fifth century A.D. (Alzahrani, 2020).

Pre-Islamic writings originating from the Bilad al-Sham region serve to reassert the Arab identity of the region that is linked to the Arabic language utilized in the Quran. They were hand-written alongside the Musnad script (Marsham, 2020). However, these writings are few and short, mainly dealing with personal matters, yet they possess distinctive qualities that allow us to trace the transition of Arabic writing from its ancient Nabatean Aramaic script to its advanced script. The oldest of these inscriptions is the Umm al-Jamal inscription, followed in antiquity by the Namara inscription. Alongside the economic and social development of the Arabian Peninsula in the sixth century A.D., there was a cultural development, leading to the rapid growth of the language and script of the northern Arabs, as depicted by the Zabad inscription (Grasso, 2023). Following it is the Haran al-Lajat inscription, which closely resembles the Arabic of the Quran, and its Nabatean script resembles the ancient Islamic script. It is more indicative in its language and writing of the beginning of the independence of the classical Arabic dialect and its writing from the Nabatean dialect (Alzahrani, 2020). There is a fifth text, the Second Umm al-Jamal Inscription, which can be counted among the texts written in the language of the Quran and pre-Islamic poetry (Alajmi, 2021). Its language and writing also take a new step towards the independence of the classical Arabic dialect and its writing from the Nabatean dialect and its writing. Nevertheless, any text other than the Quran cannot be considered a pure and fluent Arabic language because the Arabic language is the language of the Arabs; it was named after them and became known by their name (Ediyani, 2020).

3. Religious Beliefs in Pre-Islamic Arabian Culture

Various pre-Islamic societies on the Arabian Peninsula adhered to diverse religious and philosophical systems. Some of these primordial beliefs are examined in the subsequent section.

3.1. Paganism

Researchers indicate that Paganism initially revolved around the worship of celestial bodies. Although varied and numerous, the names of the idols and gods all trace back to a celestial trinity: the sun, the moon, and Venus (Ossendrijver, 2020). This trinity symbolized a small family composed of the father (the moon), the mother (the sun), and the son (Venus). Most of the names of the deities were attributes assigned to them (Surpi et al., 2021). There is a connection between the worship of these celestial bodies and that people crafted idols to remind or symbolize the deity they worshipped. They turned these idols into objects of worship, viewing them as representations of a higher,

supernatural power. The worshippers believed that the sacred spirit of their gods resided within these idols (Ališauskienė, 2023).

Among the prominent idols worshipped by most Arabs at the advent of Islam were Hubal, al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat. Hubal was considered one of the greatest of these idols, and the Arabs believed he was associated with provisions and fertility. It is worth noting that the Quran mentioned the Arabs worship of al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat and criticized their belief that these idols were daughters of God, as stated in the Quranic verse: *Have you seen al-Lat and al-Uzza and Manat, the third, the other? Is the male for you and for Him the female?*[3]. The Arabs idol worship was not limited to these idols alone; sources also indicate their worship of other idols such as Asaf, Naila, Matam al-Tayr, Manaf, and Qozah, as well as the existence of other idols worshipped by the people of Noah, which continued among the Arabs, such as Suwa, Yaghuth, Yauq, and Nasr (Ashifa, 2022).

Arabs were predominantly pagan prior to the advent of Islam, as evidenced by their veneration of the earth, planets, stars, and sky. Due to the Arabs conviction that these forces dictated their existence, they endeavored to obtain their favor by appeasing them (Ibrahim, 2018). They, therefore, fashioned various forms for them in houses, trees, and stones, some of which were depicted as human or animal figures, while others were not. They viewed these representations as symbols of nature and eventually began to worship them. They would circumambulate around them, conduct trade near them, and consider the place where the idol was located as a sacred sanctuary where specific actions were forbidden. They would sacrifice sheep to their idols and pour libations on them and the altar where they sacrificed was called al-atir. These idols were present in their wars, where they sought inspiration from them for victory. In one of the significant battles during the War of Fijar, Al-Lat was set up before the battle as a sanctuary or temple to serve as a place for their tribal deity. The sanctuarys circumference represented an inviolable boundary that could not be breached, providing a haven for refugees. Thaqif tribe attempted to make their idol a competitor to the Kaaba, even giving the idol the name al-Rabba (Lecker, 2022).

Manat was considered the eldest among the three idols, highly respected among the Arabs, particularly among the Aws and Khazraj tribes and the people of Yathrib (Medina). They showed their respect for Manat through offerings and sacrifices. It was frequently referred to as Abd Manat and Zaid Manat. (Pamungkas, 2022). Manat, a term originating from the term al-maniyah, which signifies the fate deity, is one of the most ancient religious expressions. It persisted until the Prophet Muhammads (PBUH) migration to Mecca in 8 A.H. (Kenoussi, 2020).

The Arabs believed these idols brought abundant goodness to their worshippers, providing them with sustenance and provisions. Moreover, they were believed to possess great power, fighting alongside their followers and leading them to victory in wars. The Arabs before Islam believed in the benefits of their idols and also believed in their ability to cause harm. Therefore, they offered vows, sacrifices, and gifts to seek their favor. According to their belief, the deities could pour out their wrath and curse those who wronged or violated their sanctity (Lecker, 2021). The Quraysh tribe worshipped all the idols of the Arab tribes, which was to encourage the Bedouins to sanctify their idols and to encourage them to visit the Kaaba. This ensured the continuation of Qurayshs material interests, trade, and acquisition of spiritual and social status to dominate all Arabs religiously. Despite the geographical superiority of Yathrib and Taif, the presence of the Kaaba granted the people of Mecca many social and religious privileges. This, in turn, reflected in the unity of the Meccan community, the emergence of internal stability, and the spread of security and tranquility. The people of Mecca agreed on a unified religious concept, which was the cornerstone of the Kaaba (Nagel, 2020).

[3]. "The Holy Quran, Surah An-Najm, Verse 53.

3.2. Hanifism

Mentioning Allah was a common practice before Islam, as evidenced by the saying of Al-Asha: *Allah seized loyalty and justice and left blame on the man* (A'sha & Qays, 2005). Hanifism refers to following the religion of Abraham (peace be upon him), and before Islam, Arabs used to consider that whoever circumcises himself and performs the pilgrimage to the Kaaba is Hanif (Idoko, 2022). The reason for this is that Arabs did not have anything left of the religion of Abraham except for these two practices. During the pre-Islamic era, the Hanif would perform pilgrimage to the Kaaba, cleanse themselves from major impurities, and circumcise. When Islam came, the Muslim Hanif adhered to Islam (Manzur & Mukarram, 2005) . Abu Ubaydah mentions that among the Arabs, Hanifism referred to performing pilgrimage to the Kaaba and some matters related to natural disposition (Elias, 2022).

3.3. Judaism

The entry of Jews into the Arabian Peninsula occurred in successive waves, contributing to the settlement in fertile oases in the Hijaz region, such as Wadi Al-Qura, Teima, Khaybar, Fadak, and Yathrib. Additionally, groups spread to Yemen, Yamama, and Bahrain, but the exact time and method of entry remain unclear (Morony, 2020). Yathrib (later known as Medina after the migration of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him) became the central habitat for Judaism at the advent of Islam. Meanwhile, the Jews of Yemen faced pressure from the Abyssinians. There is no mention of Jews in the Najd Plateau (Klasova, 2023).

The Arabs, in their customs and traditions, leading them to form tribes and clans and adopt Arabic names, influenced Jews. Their poetry also bore Arab characteristics, and their thoughts reflected Arab ideas. Living in the Arabian Peninsula, they adopted the lifestyle of its people, dressing like them and intermarrying with them. They were free to practice their religion, teach their children religious matters and their Hebrew language, and write using it (Wasserstrom, 2014) . Despite the interaction and co-existence between Jews and Arabs, their religion did not spread widely in Arab lands. This is because they kept their religion confined to themselves, showing no interest in proselytizing or allowing outsiders to enter it, and their real efforts were focused on accumulating wealth and valuable possessions (Horovitz, 2013b).

3.4. Christianity

Christianity had its fair share of spread among the Arabs before Islam. Many indications of its spread among several Arab tribes are found in pre-Islamic poetry. However, this spread was limited in some regions, as we do not see much presence in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula (Atchison-Day, 2020). The role of monks and monks in preaching the Christian religion played a role in the entry and spread of Christianity among the Arabs. The trade between the two parties was optimal in informing the Arabs about the Christian religion through the rituals performed by these monks. Monasteries also played an essential role in Christian evangelism, as they were places of worship. The monks established several monasteries in remote places in the Arab lands, where some were found in Najd, the Hijaz, and the south and east of the Arabian Peninsula. These monasteries relied on assistance from Christian churches in Iraq, Syria, and the Byzantine Empire (Fowden, 2004). The Christian presence on the periphery of the Arabian Peninsula can be attributed to the spread of trade routes (Wood, 2015).

Christian centers, including Al-Hirah, were important in spreading Christianity across Arab territories. In the same way that Syrian missionaries, such as Phemion the Recluse, were influential in the dissemination of Christianity throughout Yemen and the Hijaz, Abyssinia was a pivotal hub for the churchs expansion (Jimenez & Toral-Niehoff, 2018). According to reports, Saleh, a Syrian native, engaged in correspondence with Phemion, a distinguished ascetic. They ventured into the Arab lands and were abducted by Arab raiders who sold them to a slave trader. Phemion persuaded its people to embrace Christianity and established a Jacobite church. In 356 AD, the Byzantine Emperor Constantius sent a mission to the southern Arab lands led by Theophilus the Arian, who followed the Arius doctrine,

which denied Christs divinity. Theophilus succeeded in establishing a church in Aden and two churches in Himyar (Al-Mas'uḍi, 2021).

The Christian faith experienced a significant surge in expansion after the Abyssinian invasion of Yemen in 525 AD. Abraha, an individual of Najran descent, established the organization and spearheaded efforts to convert Yemeni Arabs to Christianity. Thoroughly monitoring its construction and embellishment, close attention was paid to every detail. After the construction was finished, Abraha composed a letter to the Negus containing the following boast that a church unlike any before has been built for the king, and until Arab pilgrims are drawn to it, efforts shall not rest (Malkiel, 2020; ul Habib & Nawaz, 2016).

3.5. Other Religions

The lands of the Arabs knew many religions, most of which came through the Persians, such as Zoroastrianism (Aleem et al., 2023), including its sects like Mazdakism and Manichaeism, adherents of light and darkness, known for their dualism. Among them were the adherents of Dahriyya, who believed in fate and denied the Creator and the resurrection, asserting the eternal existence of nature and time. Most of the Zoroastrians in the Arab lands were Persians residing in Bahrain, Yemen, and Oman (Daryaee, 2015). Also, the worship of stars and planets like the sun, moon, and Venus spread, known to their followers as the Saiba, divided into two parts such as Hanafiyya Saiba and Mushrikun Saiba (Gibb, 2017). The Mushrikun venerated the seven planets and the twelve zodiac signs, depicting them in their temples. They believed that these planets had specific temples and significant objects of worship, similar to churches for Christians and synagogues for Jews. Some tribes, such as Lakhm, Khazraj, and Quraysh, worshipped the Yamanite constellation Al-Abur, while others worshipped Tayy, Ath-Thurayya, Al-Mirzam, and Sohayl. Some historians mentioned that individuals from Tamim worshipped Ad-Dubran and Al-Abuq, and the Kinana tribe worshipped the moon (Khan, 2013).

4. Pre-Islamic Arabic Celebrations and Festivities

Public celebrations among the Arabs before Islam were held in Mecca, where drums and flutes were played, especially at weddings. Meccans were renowned for singing from early times, and the affluent in Mecca held social gatherings where they set up couches, laid out tables with the finest Taif fruits, and indulged in drinking sessions where they listened to poetry, stories, and singing (Urkevich, 2014). Several celebrations were held in the famous seasonal markets in Mecca, like Ukaz, Majnah, and Dhi al-Majaz, where people from noble families and poets gathered to boast. They boast about their lineage, honor, or noble qualities such as generosity, magnanimity, chivalry, and courage (Gilli-Elewy, 2017; SaudiPress, 2023). Arabs also gathered in these markets for competitions, meaning they would arbitrate disputes regarding lineage, as happened between the Umayyads and the Hashemites in competitions documented in sources of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry (Qutbuddin, 2005).

The House of Assembly, established by Qusay ibn Kilab, the leader of the Quraysh tribe, served as a political and social center where the nobles of Mecca gathered to consult on political and social issues. Sometimes, marriage contracts were conducted there, and celebrations were held on various occasions, inviting family, relatives, and friends. They celebrated their weddings at night, sometimes extending the festivities to the seventh day, with feasts usually held during the day. During the pre-Islamic era, they occasionally served drinks alongside meat. No specific venues were designated for celebrations, except some Quraysh men would hold their daughters weddings at the House of Assembly (Hoyland, 2002; Şahin, 2015).

People of Mecca celebrated the birth of a child by holding a ceremony on the day of circumcision in the pre-Islamic era. Circumcision was not tied to a specific day; some were circumcised on the seventh day, while others underwent the procedure before reaching puberty. These circumcision ceremonies lasted for more than a day, sometimes extending to three or seven days. Singers, both male and female, along with entertainers and children, attended these

celebrations. Sweets and dishes reflecting each familys economic status were served during these events. During the pre-Islamic celebrations of the people of Mecca, individuals would gather at various locations to watch the games performed by the youth of Mecca. They would also assemble to watch races involving horses in racecourses or foot races among people. This tradition largely continued into the Islamic period (Schadler, 2018). The people of Mecca and Medina would gather at several locations to celebrate racing events. Horse racing, known as sabaq or horse racing, was popular among Arabs during the pre-Islamic era (Watson, 2016). According to some research, the first person to tame horses, which were initially wild, was Ismail (peace be upon him) near Mecca (Katica et al., 2023).

In pre-Islamic times, the people of Medina celebrated two specific days. One of these days was Saturday, which held significant importance for the Jewish community in Medina and served as a weekly holiday (Goitein, 2010). Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) arrived in Medina, he found them celebrating two specific days with festivities. He said, Allah has replaced these two days with something better for you: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha [4]. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: When the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) arrived in Medina, he found the Jews fasting on the Day of Ashura. He asked them, what is this? They replied, this is a righteous day, the day on which Allah saved the Children of Israel from their enemy, so Moses fasted on it. The Prophet responded, I have more right to Moses than you do, he fasted on that day and instructed others to do the same. The Jews of Medina treated this day like a festival, and the people of Khaybar would dress their children and women in their finest clothes [5].

5. The Hajj

The Hajj is considered one of the most important religious traditions among the Arabs before Islam for a long time. It had strong ties and a significant influence on their social lives, encompassing all Arabs regardless of their beliefs, worship practices, and environments (Peters, 2021). Due to the sanctity of the Haram (sanctuary) in the minds of the Arabs before Islam, they used to set boundaries around it, indicating its limits. Whoever entered these boundaries would be considered safe. Committing aggression within the sanctuary was regarded as a form of disbelief and immorality. Therefore, the Arabs marked the year as the Year of the Elephant due to the aggression within the sanctuary (Low, 2018). Quraysh guarded the sanctity of the Kaaba and the sanctuary, not allowing anyone to tamper with it. The Hajj season is one of the largest social gatherings in Mecca, in addition to its religious significance, as large numbers of Arabs and others flock to it to perform the rituals of Hajj and engage in economic activities through trade and earnings in the markets of Mecca associated with the Hajj season. Undoubtedly, many pilgrims who came to Mecca had social relationships with the people of Mecca, such as marriage alliances, friendships, treaties, and alliances. Some would stay as guests with their friends from Mecca for several days until the days of the Hajj season were over (Webb, 2023).

The people of Mecca used to stand in solidarity in fulfilling their duty towards the visitors by welcoming them, honoring them, and providing them with food and drink. The leaders of the Quraysh played a prominent role in opening their doors to the guests. In addition to their roles in providing hospitality, serving water, and assisting pilgrims, two significant traditions were deeply ingrained in the customs of Hajj, enhancing its splendor, security, and sanctity and indicating its profound impact on the Arabs social, religious, and economic lives. The first tradition is the sanctity of the Kaaba area, which includes Mecca, and the prohibition of fighting in it at all times, regardless of the reasons. The second tradition involves respecting the sacred months, during which fighting and shedding blood are prohibited (Hashmi, 2010; Webb, 2023).

Many verses in the Quran refer to Hajj and its rituals, including the verse: And [mention, O Muhammad], when We designated for Abraham the site of the House, [saying], Do not associate anything with Me and purify My House for

[4] Sunan Abi Dawud, Hadith 1134, within Book 2, Hadith 745. The English translation corresponds to Book 3, Hadith 1130

[5] Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 2004, within Book 30, Hadith 109, as per the USC-MSA web (English) reference, Volume 3, Book 31, Hadith 222.

those who perform Tawaf and those who stand [in prayer] and those who bow and prostrate. In addition, proclaim the Hajj [pilgrimage]; they will come to you on foot and every lean camel from every distant pass. They may witness benefits for themselves and mention the name of Allah on known days[6]. People used to come to Mecca from all directions during the Hajj season and its markets, especially during the sacred months, where they would meet, socialize, conduct business transactions, seek advice, exchange poetry, and hold gatherings for boasting and problem-solving. Besides being a prominent aspect of social life, it provided Arabs with an opportunity for political, social, intellectual, and literary movements. Arabs regarded the sanctity of the sacred months and their truces as a sacred and religious attribute, believing violating their sanctity would bring them harm and misfortune. The Arabs intended to limit fighting, wars, and animosities by prohibiting such activities during these months, aiming to strengthen the bonds of unity and solidarity among them, paving the way for general solidarity within a unified entity. This is reflected in the Quranic verse: Indeed, the number of months with Allah is twelve [lunar] months in the register of Allah [from] the day He created the heavens and the earth; of these, four are sacred. That is the correct religion, so do not wrong yourselves during them[7].

The diversity in pre-Islamic Arabia pilgrimage practices and the variation in the idols they worshipped might have indicated political divisions and tribal conflicts. Each tribe had its unique pilgrimage rituals over time, reflecting the tribes social and economic reality, ranging from describing the journeys hardships to addressing the tribes problems (Dost, 2023). All of this could have had a significant social and literary impact on the Arabs, who dispersed to their homes filled with news, memories of poetry, speeches, and words, and their minds filled with various images and scenes, which helped bring the Arabs closer together and unify their language (Munt, 2015). It also sparked a lively movement from the evolution of Paganism to polytheism, describing the partners as intercessors with God, and from the Arabs disapproval of the differences and disputes between the two scriptures to the emergence of the monotheists (Lindstedt, 2018). This explains the progression of social customs and traditions, the advancement of economic and political systems, and hence the judgment of Islam on these traditions after canceling what contradicts the principles of the call and its ugliness, refining the rest to harmonize with those principles. The Quran confirms the relationships of evolution and progression in the universe, humanity, and values (Bouguenaya, 2018).

6. Important holidays among the Arabs before Islam

The Arabs in pre-Islamic times celebrated several holidays that Islam invalidated. The celebration of Dhat Anwat, the polytheists used to hang their weapons and circle a large tree near Mecca. Before the advent of Christianity in Najran, its people, along with the pagans, worshipped a palm tree and celebrated it annually (Al-Shomar, 2023). The Arabs also celebrated festivals at Lat, Al-Uzza, and Manat shrines. They would sacrifice animals there and distribute them among those present (Brzozowska, 2015).

The people of Yathrib had two days of celebration, which they adopted from the Persians: When the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, arrived in Medina and settled there after the Hijrah, he found the Ansar had two days of celebration. The Hadith states: They have two days on which they play. These two days were called the Day of Nairuz or Nowruz, as known in Arabic literature. It was originally a Persian holiday among the Persians, and the word Nairuz means the New Day, marking the first day when the sun moves into the Aries constellation called Nairuz (Sharma & Yosufi, 2018). The second day was called the Day of Mihraj or Mihirkan, also of Arabized Persian origin. This also marks the first day the sun moves into the Libra constellation. Thus, the Arabs had at least two holidays, Nairuz and Mihraj in Medina. Otherwise, it seems these days, they are not known in the same way in Mecca (Feener, 2017). A group of Arabs celebrated Yom al-Sabbasab, which sources indicate was the Epiphany holiday known among Christians (Hawting, 2011). It is mentioned in a poem by the poet al-Nabigha that there was a holiday called al-Sabbasab, and the people celebrated it with basil. The straps of the sandals, with their fragrant scents(Britannica,

[6]. The Holy Quran, Surah Al-Hajj, Verse 22.
[7]. The Holy Quran, Surah At-Tawbah, Verse 9.

2024), Yom al-Sabbasab was a holiday for the Christians, and they call it the day of the Epiphany. The Jewish holidays known to the pre-Islamic Arabs included the New Year, the Great Fast, the Festival of Mazal, and other holidays (Murtoff, 2023).

The Pre-Islamic Arab Christians celebrated their religious holidays, and in places where a large group of them were present, their celebrations were more evident and joyful. In Hira, where Christianity spread widely, people would adorn themselves and wear their best attire during their holidays, such as the Epiphany, and they would celebrate in markets, churches, and monasteries, rejoicing in the holiday commemorations and carrying their crosses. Among their celebrations is The Day of al-Sab (the seventh), as it was mentioned without further details. The Day of Sacrifice (Yawm al-Nahr) during the Hajj was the greatest celebration among the Arabs in the pre-Islamic era (Chekhab-Abudaya, 2023), which corresponds to Eid al-Adha among Muslims after Islam removed its pagan rituals, returning it to the tradition of the Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) during Hajj.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study attempts to provide elucidation for historians, researchers, and cultural analysts with an interest in delving into contemporary research themes. Key aspects of festivals and occasions among the Arabs before Islam have been succinctly and comprehensively delineated. The focus was on addressing all aspects and pertinent points, ensuring utmost accuracy so that all the research findings were confirmed and based on previous studies and valid references. Therefore, it is anticipated that the current research will constitute a comprehensive historical study, offering valuable insights for interested parties and facilitating ongoing exploration of its topics. This study thoroughly explores the festivals and occasions prevalent among the Arabs before the advent of Islam. All facets and pivotal points have been meticulously addressed through meticulous examination and analysis, ensuring accuracy and credible references.

Statements and Declarations

Acknowledgement: *I confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.*

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Hadeel G. Abbas devised the project, the main conceptual ideas and proof outline. Rawaa A. Ali worked out almost all of the technical details, and performed the compression for the previous studied, and Hadeel, and Rawaa wrote the manuscript.

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