



The Social Hierarchy of Arab and Non-Arab Peoples in Classical Islamic History: A Historical and Sociological Analysis

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Abstract:

Islam, brought by the Prophet Muhammad, upholds the principle of human equality, but in classical Islamic history, there were dynamics and tensions between normative ideals and social reality. This study aims to examine the social stratification of Arab and non-Arab due to cultural, political, and power policy factors from the time of the Prophet Muhammad to the Abbasid Dynasty. This study uses a historical and sociological approach, focusing on the concepts of social stratification and social status. The methods used are historical research methods, including heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The results of this study are, first, that classical Islamic society formed its social hierarchy based on status and stratification, consisting of Arabs, *mawali*, *dhimmi*, and enslaved people. Second, the social order in classical Islamic society, shaped by social stratification, was influenced by political, religious, and cultural policies guided by two key elements: the royal elite as the highest authority and the religious elite as the theological authority.

Keywords: Social Hierarchy, Arab and Non-Arab Peoples, Classical Islamic History

Abstrak:

Islam yang di bawa oleh Nabi Muhammad membawa prinsip persamaan derajat manusia, namun dalam praktik sejarah Islam klasik terjadi dinamika dan ketegangan antara ideal normatif dan realitas sosial. Penelitian ini mengkaji munculnya stratifikasi sosial Bangsa Arab dan non-Arab akibat faktor budaya, politik, dan kebijakan kekuasaan sejak Nabi Muhammad hingga Dinasti Abbasiyah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan sejarah dan sosiologi yang bertumpu pada konsep stratifikasi dan status sosial. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode penelitian sejarah yang meliputi Heuristik, Kritik, Interpretasi, dan Historiografi. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah, pertama, masyarakat Islam klasik membentuk hierarki sosialnya berdasar status sosial dan stratifikasi sosial yang terdiri dari bangsa Arab, *mawali*, *dzimmi*, dan Budak. Kedua, tatanan sosial yang terbentuk melalui stratifikasi sosial masyarakat Islam klasik dipengaruhi oleh kebijakan politik, agama, dan budaya yang dibentuk oleh dua elemen penting yaitu elite kerajaan sebagai pemegang kekuasaan tertinggi dan elite keagamaan sebagai pemegang kekuasaan teologis.

Keywords: Hierarki Sosial, Bangsa Arab dan non-arab, Sejarah Islam Klasik

INTRODUCTION

Prophet Muhammad culturally transformed the social order of the Arabian Peninsula by emphasizing the equality of all human beings through multiculturalism.¹ This change disturbed some local rulers, who were accustomed to occupying a higher position than ordinary people. As a result, several tribes in Mecca, such as the Quraysh, opposed Prophet Muhammad and attempted to hinder his preaching.

This social change is illustrated in a story found in the *Kitab Al-Ghani* about *Jabalah ibn al-Ayham*, a prince of the Ghassanids, who struck a Bedouin during the pilgrimage

¹ Dudung Abdurrahman, "Fenomena Mutlikulturalisme Dalam Sejarah Islam Klasik," *Thaqofiyat* 17, no. 1 (June 2016): 36, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/thaq.2016.%25x>.

because he felt disrespected.² When the case was brought before Umar ibn al-Khattab, Umar ordered that the Bedouin be allowed to retaliate with the same treatment. This decision demonstrated that all humans possess equal status and must not act arbitrarily, in accordance with the teaching of the *Qur'an* in *Surah Al-Hujurat* verse 13 about the equality of people before the law.

However, the principle of equality taught by Prophet Muhammad was not always upheld after his time. Family ties to the Prophet, descent from the Quraysh, and Arab lineage were often considered superior to other ethnic groups when Islam began to spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula. In fact, Prophet Muhammad emphasized that Arabs should not take excessive pride in their lineage, because Islam promotes equality so that the Muslim community can unite without distinctions of social status.³

During the time of Abu Bakr, the principle of equality was still evident, for example in the distribution of *ghanimah* (war booty), which was shared fairly among all those who participated in the battle.⁴ However, during the time of Umar ibn al-Khattab, the distribution of *ghanimah* changed by giving additional shares to Muslims who had embraced Islam earlier.⁵ This led Muslims to begin accepting certain differences in social practices.

Later, some Arab Bedouins who had converted to Islam considered their status to be higher than that of non-Arab Muslims because they felt closer to the Prophet Muhammad.⁶ This debate continued for two to three centuries and reached its peak during the Umayyad Dynasty, when the process of Arabization within the governmental structure caused the *mawali* (non-Arab Muslims) to be excluded from important positions.⁷

During the reign of Umar II (717-720), the position of Muslims and the *mawali* began to move toward the rights they deserved.⁸ During his rule, Umar appointed two *mawali* as *qadis* (judges) in Cairo.⁹ Although this decision faced considerable opposition, Umar II firmly upheld the fundamental teachings of the *Qur'an*, particularly the principle of equality. After Umar II was succeeded by the next caliphs, discriminatory practices continued.¹⁰ Arabs who had been educated in the old cultural traditions were generally unwilling to acknowledge equality with non-Arab Muslims, whom they regarded as having a lower status.¹¹

During the Abbasid Dynasty, tolerance and pluralism became strategic issues that enabled the *mawali* to develop and occupy important positions, especially under the

² Reuben Levy, *Susunan Masyarakat Islam* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1986). 59.

³ Levy, *Susunan Masyarakat Islam*. 60.

⁴ Levy, *Susunan Masyarakat Islam*.

⁵ Levy, *Susunan Masyarakat Islam*. 61.

⁶ Muhamad Yusrul Hana and Muhammad Nur Ichsan Azis, "Dinamika Inklusi Sosial Masyarakat Islam: Posisi Kaum Mawali Dalam Pembangunan Umat Islam Di Jazirah Arab," *El Tarikh: Journal of History, Culture and Islamic Civilization* 4, no. 1 (May 20, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.24042/jhcc.v4i1.16766>.

⁷ Tiara Istighfari and Tenny Sudjatnika, "Gerakan Arabisasi Pada Masa Dinasti Umayyah: Dampak Terhadap Masyarakat Islam Dan Non-Islam," *Jejak Digital: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin* 1, no. 4b (June 28, 2025): 1694–1703, <https://doi.org/10.63822/kkzpx337>.

⁸ Albert Hourani, *Sejarah Bangsa-Bangsa Arab* (Bandung: Mizan, 2004). 82-83.

⁹ Levy, *Susunan Masyarakat Islam*. 64

¹⁰ Maysaroh Maysaroh, "Analisis Dampak Arabisasi Pada Masa Dinasti Umayyah Di Timur: Perspektif Sosial Dan Politik (661-750 M)," *Hijaz: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 3, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 57–61, <https://doi.org/10.57251/hij.v3i2.1466>.

¹¹ Levy, *Susunan Masyarakat Islam*. 65.

leadership of Caliph Al-Mansur.¹² Religious tolerance became one of the main characteristics reflected in many of Al-Mansur's political policies.

The Researcher is interested in this topic because it examines the dynamics of the implementation of the principle of equality in Islamic history, which has often experienced turbulence due to political policies and strong cultural boundaries among the Islamic elite. This raises questions regarding the factors that caused inconsistencies in the principle of equality and the extent to which social status and social stratification were formed in classical Islamic society whether they were more influenced by religion or by political and economic interests.

Several previous studies are related to this topic. These include Isna (2023), which discusses social mobility in the classical Islamic period,¹³ Surma (2020), which examines the leadership of Caliph Abdul Malik and the use of the Arabic language in government administration,¹⁴ Faiz (2025), which analyzes the concept of tolerance during the Abbasid administration,¹⁵ and the research of Hana and Azis (2020), which explores the process of social inclusion that enabled the *mawali* to play a role in Islamic civilization.¹⁶ From these previous studies, it can be seen that they differ from the present research, as this study seeks to elaborate on the dynamics of social classes between Arabs and non-Arabs in classical Islamic society as a form of scholarly novelty. Therefore, this research offers a new contribution to discussions on the social classes of Arab and non-Arab communities.

This research focuses on two main issues. First, what was the typology of Islamic society during the classical period? Second, what was the social structure of Islamic society in that period? Based on these problem descriptions, this study aims to understand the social classes of Arab and non-Arab communities in the classical era. Thus, it seeks to clarify the extent to which the social lives of Arabs and non-Arabs were shaped by the policies of rulers when viewed through a diachronic historical perspective.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a social history research that uses both a historical approach and a sociological approach. The historical approach is used to examine unique and meaningful events that occurred within a certain period of time, so that the aspects of change in human life can be revealed. Meanwhile, the sociological approach is used to understand the phenomena experienced by society related to social stratification and social status.¹⁷

¹² Getar Rahmi Pertiwi and Devi Nirmayuni, "Tinjauan Kritis Peradaban Islam Pada Masa Bani Abbasiyah," *Jurnal Qosim: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial & Humaniora* 2, no. 1 (May 15, 2024): 43–52, <https://doi.org/10.61104/jq.v2i1.297>.

¹³ Isna Zakiya Nurul Muftaza dan Muhammad Ilham Azis et al., "Volume 2 Nomor 1 Mei 2023 Kelas Sosial Dalam Masyarakat Islam Periode Klasik (Dari Masa Khulafaur Rasyidin Hingga Dinasti Abbasiyah) Isna Zakiya Nurul Muftaza," <https://ejournal.uinsaizu.ac.id/index.php/jsij/article/view/7908>.

¹⁴ Surma Hayani and Nurhasanah Bakhtiar, "Arabisasi Pemerintahan Islam Pada Masa Khalifah Abdul Malik Bin Marwan," *Juspi (Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam)* 3, no. 2 (January 17, 2020): 204, <https://doi.org/10.30829/juspi.v3i2.6509>.

¹⁵ Faiz Fikri Al Fahmi and Annisa 'ulfadilah, "Islam Dan Plurarisme Budaya (Toleransi Beragama Di Era Abbasiyah)," *Al-Mikraj: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora (E-ISSN 2745-4584)* 5, no. 2 (January 10, 2025): 94–109, <https://doi.org/10.37680/almikraj.v5i2.6765>.

¹⁶ Hana and Azis, "Dinamika Inklusi Sosial Masyarakat Islam: Posisi Kaum Mawali Dalam Pembangunan Umat Islam Di Jazirah Arab."

¹⁷ Sanderson Stephen K, *Makro Sosiologi Sebuah Pendekatan Terhadap Realitas Sosiologi* (Jakarta: PT

This research employs the historical method. The use of this method is intended to critically examine and analyze various events and historical remains that occurred in society in the past.¹⁸ First, heuristics. At this stage, the author collects sources obtained from personal library collections such as *History of the Arabs*, *Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldun, *Khilafah and Kerajaan*, *Susunan Masyarakat Arab* Volumes 1 and 2, *Sejarah Bangsa-Bangsa Muslim*, *Sejarah Sosial Umat Islam*, and *Islam dan Politik*. In addition, this research also utilizes other sources in the form of scientific journals, which function as supporting data in analyzing the concepts discussed. Second, source criticism, which consists of external criticism and internal criticism, is conducted by the author to test the credibility and authenticity of the sources. In this case, external criticism is carried out by examining the physical form of the books that have been collected.¹⁹ Meanwhile, internal criticism is conducted by analyzing the narrative content of these books to assess the accuracy and validity of the information contained within them. Third, interpretation.²⁰ This process of interpretation is developed alongside the analysis, supported by theories relevant to the research. Fourth, historiography.²¹ At this stage, the author composes the narrative of the research findings in a systematic and chronological manner.

The first concept used in this research is social stratification. Social stratification in classical Islamic society can be analyzed within the scope of the distribution of privileges based on social position and the solidarity between individuals or groups occupying different positions within the social system.²² This element is further narrowed down into an analysis of the similarities and differences in belief systems, attitudes, and values upheld by social groups, as well as their awareness of their respective positions within society.²³

The second concept is social status, which refers to a person's position in society in relation to others concerning their rights and obligations.²⁴ Social status can take two forms. First, ascribed status, which means a person's position in society is obtained by birth. This type of status is usually found in closed social systems. Second, achieved status, which means a position can be attained by individuals through deliberate efforts.²⁵ This type of status is open in nature, allowing anyone who strives for it to reach the highest levels in society. This concept is used to examine the social status of Arabs and non-Arabs within closed or open elements in the process of fulfilling their social status in society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Typology of Islamic Society in the Arabian Peninsula during the Classical Period

The harsh natural conditions of the Arabian Peninsula played a significant role in

Raja Garfindo Persada, 2011). 146.

¹⁸ Louis Gottschalk, *Mengerti Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Universitas Indonesia Press/UI-Press, 1985). 32.

¹⁹ Abd Rahman Hamid dan Muhammad Saleh Madjid, *Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2015). 47.

²⁰ Kuntowijoyo, *Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Benteng Budaya, 2001). 102.

²¹ Dudung Abdurrahman, *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah Islam*, ed. Turatea Kreatif (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Ombak, 2011). 65.

²² Sanderson Stephen K.

²³ Soerjono Soekanto, *Sosiologi Suatu Pengantar* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 1990).

²⁴ Soerjono Soekanto. 264.

²⁵ Soerjono Soekanto. 266-267.

shaping the character of its society, making them resilient, especially in their efforts to survive and to defend the honor of their tribes. Such an environment also encouraged Arab society to live in groups based on tribal ties founded on blood relations, known as *ashabiyah*.²⁶ Within this social structure, disputes that initially occurred at an individual level could develop into intergroup conflicts, because each individual was under the protection and identity of a particular tribe.

The tribe functioned as a familial institution that strengthened internal solidarity, where its members cooperated with and protected one another as a unified social entity. The selection of a tribal leader was generally based on the recognition of individuals who possessed certain advantages, such as intelligence, strength, wealth, and wisdom in resolving the various issues faced by their group.²⁷

The population of the Arabian Peninsula can generally be divided into two main groups, people who live in desert regions and those who settle in cities. The desert inhabitants are known for having a strong sense of tribal solidarity called the *ashabiyah* system. This group is commonly known as the Bedouin, referring to tribes that live in arid and barren areas. In their daily lives, they move from one place to another to herd their livestock and search for water sources in order to sustain their lives and the lives of their animals.²⁸

According to Ibn Khaldun, the Bedouin community is a group characterized by high perseverance and a strong respect for social solidarity.²⁹ They help one another in fulfilling various needs of life, creating close social relationships among members of the tribe. To meet their daily needs, the Bedouin rely on farming and herding activities, especially raising camels, which serve as one of their main sources of livelihood.³⁰ Farming activities are carried out by searching for new water sources that allow them to cultivate crops, while livestock herding is adjusted according to seasonal changes that affect the availability of grazing land.³¹

In terms of characteristics, the Bedouin are often described as strong individuals who live simple lives and possess a high level of loyalty to their tribe and clan.³² The harsh and barren environmental conditions shape their character to be firm and resilient. However, from the perspective of outsiders, the Bedouin are sometimes perceived as harsh or even cruel. This perception arises from the frequent intertribal conflicts that occurred, such as raids or plundering, which at that time were considered one of the ways to ensure survival amid limited natural resources.³³

Meanwhile, the inhabitants of the towns lived in urban areas dominated by merchants

²⁶ Muhamad Yusrul Hana, "Perubahan Sosial Masyarakat Di Jazirah Arab: Transformasi Kultural Ashabiyah Dalam Menunjang Kekuasaan Nabi Muhammad," *Al-Izzah: Jurnal Hasil-Hasil Penelitian*, November 27, 2020, 35, <https://doi.org/10.31332/ai.v0i0.2064>.

²⁷ Hana.

²⁸ Badri Yatim, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam: Dirasah Islamiyah II*, 22nd ed. (Jakarta: PT RajaGrafindo Persada, 2010). 10-11.

²⁹ Ibnu Khaldun, *Muqoddimah* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 2000). 151-152.

³⁰ Hana, "Perubahan Sosial Masyarakat Di Jazirah Arab: Transformasi Kultural Ashabiyah Dalam Menunjang Kekuasaan Nabi Muhammad."

³¹ Khaldun, *Muqoddimah*. 141.

³² Khaldun, *Muqoddimah*. 142-143.

³³ Philip K. Hitti, *History of Arabs* (Jakarta: PT. Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2006). 31.

who obtained supplies from the villages to be distributed to traders from overseas.³⁴ They collected economic commodities such as textiles, glass, porcelain from China, and spices. Until the 11th century CE, the ports of Sifara, Basra, Egypt, and other regions under Islamic rule became busy transit ports.³⁵ Eventually, the rise of Europe made the ports of Western Europe, China, and India more important than those of the Red Sea. This development later diminished the importance of the maritime trade routes in the Arabian Peninsula.

Culturally, the urban inhabitants greatly contributed to the emergence of civilization in the Arabian Peninsula during the Classical Islamic period.³⁶ They sustained their lives through craft production and trade. Their lives were more organized because they settled permanently in certain areas in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, which enabled them to build urban civilizations. Their tribal ties were not very strong, since they were not entirely based on blood relations or family lineage.³⁷ This was because many of the urban inhabitants married people from outside the Arabian Peninsula who stopped there for trade.³⁸

In essence, the urban inhabitants represented a group of society that had moved beyond the nomadic stage toward the development of a more advanced civilization. Their socio-economic and socio-political systems had already become organized within an organic structural framework. The division of labor was implemented for efficiency, covering roles assigned to individuals, groups, structures, or institutions.

This division of labor caused societies characterized by organic solidarity, such as urban inhabitants, to have a much weaker collective conscience compared to societies with mechanical solidarity, such as the Bedouin community. However, in reality, both the Bedouin and the urban inhabitants maintained social solidarity through the bond of *ashabiyah*.

The social dynamics that occurred in the Arabian Peninsula through the two types of inhabitants mentioned above can be further classified by identifying the groups that held power in the Arabian Peninsula based on their social stratification and social status.

The Arab Nation

The Arab people were the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula who possessed a strong sense of tribal loyalty that was manifested in their allegiance to a particular leader. Tribal pride, in fact, could not be completely eliminated even after Islam entered the Arabian region. In his preaching, Prophet Muhammad began to teach that in Islam a person should not take pride in their ancestors or lineage. This is because such pride can actually damage the social order within society. The existence of social classes and castes can separate the status of one person from another not based on their piety to Allah, but on worldly matters such as lineage, wealth, and political position.

A *hadith* narrated by Ahmad bin Hanbal states: “O mankind, indeed your Lord is One, and indeed your father is also one. Know that an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have superiority over an Arab. A person with red skin has no superiority over one with black skin, nor does a black-skinned person have superiority over a red-

³⁴ Hourani, *Sejarah Bangsa-Bangsa Arab*. 240-241.

³⁵ Hourani.

³⁶ Abbas Sofwan Matlail Fajar, “Perspektif Ibnu Khaldun Tentang Perubahan Sosial,” *Salam: Jurnal Sosial Dan Budaya Syar-I* 6, no. 1 (2019): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sjsbs.v6i1.10460>.

³⁷ Hana, “Perubahan Sosial Masyarakat Di Jazirah Arab: Transformasi Kultural Ashabiyah Dalam Menunjang Kekuasaan Nabi Muhammad.”

³⁸ Hana.

skinned person, except through piety.”³⁹

The *Qur'an*, *Surah Al-Hujurat* verse 13, also emphasizes the essence of equality. God considers His servants noble based on their piety, their hearts, and their deeds. It is clear that, in Islam, there is no superiority based on lineage. Prophet Muhammad also emphasized this so that the Muslim community would not live within different social statuses and stratifications that could eventually lead to division. Prophet Muhammad also had several companions who came from non-Arab backgrounds, such as Salman al-Farisi from Persia, Bilal bin Rabbah from Abyssinia, and Suhaib ar-Rumi from Rome.

Although the *Qur'an* and *hadith* convey the principle of equality, claims of pride in lineage remained strong among the Arabs during the Classical Islamic period.⁴⁰ Especially after the death of Prophet Muhammad, family ties with him were considered a measure of pure nobility. Even a child adopted by the Quraysh tribe was regarded as more noble than the family of an elderly Bedouin *sheikh*. It is therefore not surprising that none of the women from the tribe of Prophet Muhammad became slaves.⁴¹

The dynamics of the claim that people of Arab descent are superior to other nations had been ongoing for a long time, nearly three centuries after the death of Prophet Muhammad. The Quraysh came to be regarded as a new aristocracy in Islamic society after his passing.⁴² Meanwhile, other Arab communities had to determine their own social standing.⁴³ The first social stratum consisted of the Arabs themselves, namely the *sheikhs*, who were tribal leaders, along with their families. The second group included Arabs who held high social status, particularly those who had connections with merchants and possessed significant economic wealth. The third group consisted of palace officials and religious figures. The fourth group comprised ordinary merchants, farmers, and laborers. Meanwhile, slaves tended to be viewed as the lowest social class and were often undervalued.⁴⁴

Arab society also maintained a very narrow tribal perspective. Loyalty to one's family and tribe was considered non-negotiable. Arabs also placed great importance on lineage. They believed that Arabs held the most noble status. They often limited social interaction with other tribes, even during the performance of the Hajj pilgrimage.

During the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, a new aristocratic class emerged, consisting of Islamic rulers and members of the royal family. They considered their descendants to hold a high status within the social structure of Islamic society. Politically, both dynasties also acknowledged this claim. During the Umayyad period, Arab Muslims were given a subsidy of 45,000 *dinars* as a recognition of the nobility of their people.⁴⁵ Members of the royal family and other aristocrats even received pensions, were exempted from the obligation to give *shadaqah*, and were provided with their own judges who were

³⁹ Musnad Ahmad, “Hadits No. 23489,” <https://www.prophetmuhammad.com/ahmad/23489>, n.d.

⁴⁰ Levy, *Susunan Masyarakat Islam*. 59.

⁴¹ Levy. 60.

⁴² Selva Susila Oktoberia, “Kepemimpinan Pendidikan Islam Perspektif Suku,” *Multidisciplinary Journal and Islamic Studies*, Universitas Islam Negeri Palangka Raya 1, no. 1 (2025): 11–24, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.64131/6v0yt149>.

⁴³ Levy. 60-61.

⁴⁴ Muhamad Yusrul et al., “Kedudukan Perempuan Dalam Islam,” *Fihros* 6, no. 1 (2022).

⁴⁵ Hitti, *History of Arabs*. 289.

appointed directly by the caliph.⁴⁶

The social stratification that developed during the era of the kingdoms, based on existing social realities, was actually more focused on the control of political power and wealth. In fact, these were the main measures of aristocratic status at that time. Ultimately, it was power that led the Arab people to feel that they held the highest rank. Even the classical aristocratic groups considered their own tribes to be superior to other Arab tribes when they were in power. The rulers or kings who served as political leaders during that period possessed vast lands and gained profits from those holdings.

Mawali

After Islam experienced territorial expansion and an increasing number of people embraced the religion, social groupings began to emerge within Muslim society. In this context, the terms Arab Bedouins and non-Arab communities who had newly converted to Islam became known. In the social structure of the Muslim community during the Classical period, these non-Arab converts were referred to as *mawali*. They were inhabitants of the regions conquered by the Muslims, especially since the reign of Umar ibn al-Khattab, who later embraced Islam as part of the process of social and political integration within the expanding Islamic rule of that time.

During the period of the Rashidun Caliphate, the *mawali* enjoyed a relatively equal position with other Muslims in social and political life. This is reflected in several leadership policies of that era. For example, Usama ibn Zayd, the son of Zayd ibn Harithah, was appointed by the Caliph Abu Bakr as a military commander in an expedition to Syria, even though a number of senior companions served under his command. In addition, the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab also appointed Ammar ibn Yasir as the governor of Kufa. These policies demonstrate that during the Rashidun period, a person's social background was not considered an obstacle to gaining trust and holding positions within the structure of the Islamic government.⁴⁷

The *mawali* were non-Arab converts to Islam, generally originating from regions outside the Arabian Peninsula. In some cases, their conversion to Islam was also associated with their emancipation from slavery by Arab masters. However, this freedom did not completely eliminate their dependence on those who had freed them. Nevertheless, the treatment of the *mawali* was not uniform, as it largely depended on the policies and attitudes of the tribe that served as their patron, as well as the contributions they made to that tribe.⁴⁸

During the rule of the Umayyad Dynasty, the social position of the *mawali* tended to be placed below that of Arab communities within the socio-political structure. One figure often associated with policies that disadvantaged the *mawali* was Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, a governor who ruled the region of Iraq around 694 CE.⁴⁹ At that time, his authority covered a vast territory, including major cities such as Kufa and Basra, as well as eastern regions including Khurasan.

⁴⁶ Levy, *Susunan Masyarakat Islam*. 70.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Ikhsan, "Jejak Kegemilangan Intelektualisme Islam Dalam Pentas Sejarah Dunia (Kontribusi Ilmiah Kaum Mawali Persia Pada Periode Klasik)," *Jurnal Al-Ta'dib* 8, no. 1 (2015): 141–54, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31332/str.v21i2.371>.

⁴⁸ Levy. 61.

⁴⁹ Levy. 62.

One of the controversial policies was the imposition of the *jizyah* tax on the *mawali*. In Islamic legal practice at that time, *jizyah* was essentially levied on non-Muslim groups who held the status of *dhimmi*, meaning non-Muslim residents living under the protection of an Islamic government. Therefore, the policy of continuing to impose *jizyah* on the *mawali* despite their conversion to Islam was viewed by some members of society as a form of injustice.

This policy triggered dissatisfaction and resistance in several areas of Iraq. However, these resistance efforts were eventually suppressed by forces led by Qutaybah ibn Muslim, a military commander who played an important role in military operations in the region of Khurasan. After the rebellion was successfully crushed, many *mawali* were expelled from the cities where they had been living. Subsequently, under the policy of Al-Hajjaj, some of them were relocated to remote villages and given special marks on their hands as identifiers of their identity and origin.

Social inequality was very visible among fellow Muslims. When Muslim soldiers conquered territories, none of them were willing to walk side by side with the *mawali*. In addition, Arabs often addressed the *mawali* using childhood nicknames or informal names. In contrast, Arabs had to be addressed by their family names. During public events, the *mawali* were also placed at the very back and given the simplest seats.

The *mawali* used many ways to make their social status equal to that of the Arabs during the Umayyad period. For example, Persian *mawali* married Arabs, and some even changed their original names to Arabic names. Others created family lineages that traced their origins back to Arab ancestry, such as the Kurds and Berbers, hoping that they and their rulers would be considered descendants of Arabs.⁵⁰

Marriage between Persian *mawali* and Arabs turned out to have positive effects. After marrying Arabs, they were able to participate in politics. This confidence arose because they were considered part of the Arab Muslim community. However, these mixed marriages also led to a decrease in “pure” Arab lineage in the conquered regions.

People of Arab descent were willing to marry Persians because of their intellectual abilities. The Persians themselves wished to continue their ancestors’ strong tradition of scholarship and knowledge. In this case, an open system of social stratification existed, in which the *mawali* had the opportunity for upward mobility by participating in Arab political life through marital ties with Arabs.

A breath of fresh air for the Persian *mawali* to improve their social status emerged during the Abbasid Dynasty. The *mawali* from Persia became a group whose social standing was elevated through their proficiency in knowledge and scholarship. They seriously participated in the development of Islamic civilization from the Abbasid period until the era of the Ottoman Turks. Many of them became historians, theologians, philosophers, and experts in various other fields of knowledge. Therefore, it is not surprising that we know many non-Arab scholars from the golden age of Islam. With their intellectual abilities, the Persian *mawali* began to explore the foundations of equality found in the *Qur’an* and *Hadith* in order to strengthen the argument for pan-Islamism during the Abbasid era. This effort was made so that the remnants of Arabism hegemony from the Umayyad period could gradually

⁵⁰ Levy. 64.

fade in Abbasid civilization.

The emergence of non-Arab Muslims during the Abbasid era, particularly in the time of Caliph Al-Ma'mun, became one of the proofs that the *mawali* also played an important role in Islamic history. However, an irony occurred with the Black *mawali* originating from Africa. Those who initially came to the Arabian Peninsula to work as slaves were still viewed as a lower class by many Arabs. Some Arabs found it difficult to abandon old traditions and were reluctant to recognize equality with the Black *mawali*. Even though they had already embraced Islam, achieving such equality remained difficult.

Periodically, there are no clear records indicating that the Black *mawali* themselves demanded equality from the Arabs. However, there were *mawali* groups who were not Black who took part in advocating equality on behalf of the Black *mawali*. Levy notes an incident in which a Black *mawali* named Ibn Musajjih was mocked by a dancer and his master.⁵¹ They believed that Black people should not gather with Arabs. Al-Jahiz, a *mawali* from Basra, was one of those who defended the Black *mawali* and advocated for their equality with the Arabs.⁵² Nevertheless, the struggle for equality for the Black *mawali* was quite difficult to achieve due to perspectives deeply rooted in Arab culture that were hard to change.

Dhimmi

The *Dhimmi* were non-Muslim communities living in Islamic territories who were required to pay *jizya*, a protection tax, in order to reside under Islamic rule. Constitutionally, *Dhimmi* were those who intended to live permanently in Islamic lands or those who stayed for more than one year.⁵³ Their constitutional position did not allow them to enter the political sphere, such as becoming leaders of the people or members of representative or consultative councils.

During the period of the Umayyad Dynasty, *Dhimmi* were classified mainly as People of the Book, such as Jews, Christians, and the Sabaeans, who had agreements with Muslim rulers. Over time, the status of *Dhimmi*, which was initially limited to the People of the Book, expanded to include Zoroastrians, the idol-worshippers of Harran, and pagan barbarian groups. They were all subject to a poll tax and land tax. However, the state did not impose Islamic law on them. *Dhimmi* were granted legal authority according to the leadership of their own religious communities.

Before the rise of Caliph Umar II, *Dhimmi* often experienced discrimination. They were forbidden from holding political office and from wearing turbans. They were required to cut their hair in a fringe style, were prohibited from using horse saddles while riding, were not allowed to build places of worship, and were forbidden from raising their voices when the time for prayer arrived.⁵⁴ During the reign of Caliph Al-Walid I, he even executed the Christian tribal leader of *Bani Taghlib* for refusing to convert to Islam.⁵⁵

During the reign of Caliph Umar II, the government reduced the amount of taxes imposed on the *Dhimmi*. The government also prohibited the public humiliation of Christians.

⁵¹ Levy. 66.

⁵² Levy. 67.

⁵³ Umar Faruq Thohir et al., "Reinterpretasi Status Minoritas Dhimmi Di Tengah Mayoritas Muslim," *Jurnal Hukum Islam* 6, no. 2 (2020): 2548–5903, <https://doi.org/10.36835/assyah.v6i1.355>.

⁵⁴ Hitti, *History of Arabs*. 293.

⁵⁵ Hitti. 292.

The authority of Caliph Umar II made relations between Muslims and Christians appear closer compared to the early period of conquests carried out by the Umayyad Dynasty.

During the Abbasid Dynasty, the *Dhimmi* community often worked as farmers, and the taxes they paid contributed significantly to the state's revenue. They generally lived in rural areas and formed communities consisting of people from the same group. At that time, the grouping of settlements was common in order to distinguish social classes and also allowed the *Dhimmi* to preserve their own culture without interference from other cultures.

In urban areas, the *Dhimmi* were able to occupy important positions in the development of Islamic civilization during the Abbasid period. The construction of churches and the translation of the Bible into Arabic were largely carried out by members of the *Dhimmi* community.⁵⁶ During the reign of Al-Mu'tadid, there was even an appointment of a Christian as the head of the state defense institution. The close relationship between Muslim officials and Christians within the Abbasid government was also quite evident. This can be seen in the harmonious relations between Muslims and Jews in Al-Andalus, as well as between Muslims and Nestorian Christians in Baghdad.⁵⁷

During the Abbasid era, the *Dhimmi* population was dominated by Christians who followed the Syrian Church, commonly known as the Jacobite Christians and Nestorian Christians sects. Most of them lived in Iraq.⁵⁸ The Christian population of Egypt who followed the Jacobite sect was largely dominated by the Berber community of Egypt. At that time, Christians were granted considerable freedom to practice their religion and were seen contributing to political life.⁵⁹ They were even able to send missionaries to China and India in the 10th century.⁶⁰

The second-largest *dhimmi* population after Christians was the Jewish community. Their smaller numbers did not create significant conflict within the Abbasid state. Many Jews were involved in banking and finance. They operated money exchange services and worked as bankers in Syria.

The Jewish community in Baghdad experienced significant development. A Jewish leader enjoyed a prosperous and decent life and was regarded as a respected descendant of David. Religious leaders also held important responsibilities. They ensured that the protection agreement between the *dhimmi* and the Islamic state was carried out with obedience, peace, and order.

As a conquered community, the *dhimmi* were not burdened with military obligations, since they were prohibited from joining the Islamic army. They were also allowed to use their own religious laws. Interestingly, during the time of Umar ibn al-Khattab, he advised that the *dhimmi* should be supported, protected, and not forced or burdened with excessive taxes.⁶¹ Umar wanted them to be protected so that the stability of the state could be maintained. This was because he was concerned that they might rebel and cooperate with the rulers of the Catholic Church and Jewish authorities to attack Islam.

⁵⁶ Hitti. 388.

⁵⁷ Hourani, Sejarah Bangsa-Bangsa Arab. 250-253.

⁵⁸ Hitti, History of Arabs. 444.

⁵⁹ Al Fahmi and 'ulfadilah, "Islam Dan Plurarisme Budaya (Toleransi Beragama Di Era Abbasiyah)."

⁶⁰ Hitti. 445.

⁶¹ Levy, Susunan Masyarakat Islam. 71.

Slavery

Slaves occupied the lowest social class in the structure of Islamic society during the Classical period. One of the social groups that was difficult to eliminate in Islamic society was the slave class. Slavery had already existed due to processes of conquest carried out by rulers before the emergence of Islam. In the pre-Islamic period, slaves were usually prisoners of war or the children born to enslaved parents.

Slavery also often arose from agreements to repay debts, including debts resulting from gambling. In several cases during the *Jahiliyyah* period, slavery occurred as a result of human trafficking. However, in the early Islamic period, slavery was generally imposed on non-Muslims who were captured for rebellion or after being defeated in war. Meanwhile, the practice of trading humans through the buying and selling of slaves still continued.

One story about the sale of slaves is mentioned in the book *Al-Aghani*. It tells of a female slave who was born to a woman who was herself a slave. When the girl was born, her father did not acknowledge her. She was later kidnapped and sold to a woman from the *Banu Hashim* clan.⁶² Although the buying and selling of slaves in the early Islamic period had actually been prohibited or considered illegal, the slave trade still developed widely and became a profitable business throughout many Islamic regions.⁶³

Some Islamic legal scholars argue that human beings are essentially free, except for those who claim themselves to be slaves or those who can prove that they are not slaves.⁶⁴ This opinion is based on interpretations derived from practices observed in society during the classical Islamic period. Legally, a baby born to a slave mother would have the status of a slave. In contrast, if a free woman gave birth to a child fathered by a slave man, the child would be considered free.

During his lifetime, Prophet Muhammad sought to reform the system of slavery and make it more humane. Slaves were required to be treated fairly and kindly. This indicates that Prophet Muhammad intended to improve the conditions of slaves at that time. He consistently emphasized the teaching of equality, stating that Arabs should no longer take pride in their ancestry.

If we look at the verses of the *Qur'an*, none explicitly declare the total abolition of slavery. It may be that slavery had already become a natural part of human history. However, the *Qur'an* repeatedly mentions the act of freeing slaves, for example in *Surah Al-Baqarah* verse 177, *An-Nisa* verse 92, *Al-Ma'idah* verse 89, *At-Taubah* verse 60, and *Al-Mujadilah* verses 3 and 4. These verses describe the characteristics of those who perform good deeds and present the freeing of slaves as an option for performing good deeds after committing mistakes or sins. Therefore, in Islam, one of the most visible efforts to reduce slavery is the placement of freeing slaves as a major act of worship with very high merit and as a form of social piety.

During the Umayyad Caliphate, slavery was quite widespread in the kingdom following numerous conquests. Musa ibn Nusayr, after conquering Al-Andalus, reportedly captured 300,000 slaves from North Africa, one-fifth of whom were handed over to the caliph Al-Walid I. Musa also captured about 30,000 noblewomen from the Visigothic Kingdom. In

⁶² Levy. 102.

⁶³ Hitti, *History of Arabs*. 426-427.

⁶⁴ Levy, *Susunan Masyarakat Islam*. 81.

another account, Zubayr ibn al-Awwam was said to have left an inheritance of 100,000 male and female slaves.⁶⁵ This illustrates how large the number of slaves owned by the Umayyad dynasty could be in just a single conquest. Such numbers would naturally accumulate given the many conquests carried out both before and after that period.

During the time of the Abbasid Caliphate, slavery also occurred on a massive scale. The Abbasids obtained slaves from non-Muslims captured in war or by purchasing them. These slaves came from various regions. Black slaves from Africa were mostly employed in agriculture, particularly in cultivating lands along the Nile River and other fertile areas. White slaves from regions such as Turkey, Greece, Slavic regions, Armenia, and other barbarian territories were typically employed as household servants and concubines in cities.⁶⁶ The Abbasid caliphs also recruited many slaves from Turkey to serve as military troops.

The number of slaves owned by the royal family was considerable. The palace of *Al-Muqtadir* reportedly had around 11,000 male slaves from Greece and Sudan who had been castrated. *Al-Mutawakkil* was also said to have had 4,000 concubines who accompanied him. On another occasion, *Al-Mutawakkil* received 100 slaves as a gift from a local ruler. Giving slaves as gifts to rulers, whether to a caliph or a vizier, was a common practice at that time. *Al-Ma'mun* himself gave slaves to local rulers with the intention of using them to spy on the movements of his subordinates.⁶⁷

Social Structure of Islamic Society in the Arabian Peninsula During the Classical Period.

Court Aristocracy

The royal elite had existed since the Umayyad period and underwent further development during the Abbasid era. In the early period of Islam, many scholars interpreted Islamic civilization through the lens of political elites. The royal court, in particular, played a significant role in shaping the fields of art, architecture, science, philosophy, poetry, theology, historiography, and Hellenistic perspectives that were influenced by Persian traditions.⁶⁸ Differences in ethnicity and religion among the political elites were gradually unified into a cohesive royal elite worldview.

The ruling elites used literature and philosophy to emphasize their authority and the vital role of the state in society. At that time, literature, philosophy, and architecture were regarded as symbols of prosperity and the advancement of the kingdom. Philosophy served as a foundation for interpreting the ruler's position within the divine plan and their function in society. This vision was further reinforced through Islamic religious terminology. As a result, religion was often utilized as a political tool to legitimize and maintain the power of the caliphs.

During the Umayyad period, the ruling elite favored poetic forms that blended pre-Islamic Arab traditions with the oral heritage of Arab culture. The Umayyad court also frequently hosted intellectual debates between Muslims and Christians, which encouraged the

⁶⁵ Hitti, *History of Arabs*. 294.

⁶⁶ Hitti. 426-427.

⁶⁷ Hitti.

⁶⁸ Ira M Lapidus, *Sejarah Sosial Ummat Islam Bagian Kesatu & Dua* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo, 1999). 126-127.

adoption of Hellenistic concepts.⁶⁹ The interaction between Greek culture and local Islamic traditions created a rich mosaic of thought and practice during the Umayyad era. A defining characteristic of Hellenism in this period was the dissolution of boundaries between nations and cultures, allowing them to unite without rigid divisions.⁷⁰

During the Abbasid period, the culture of poetry became increasingly widespread. The practice of translating Persian poetry, related to politics, history, writing conventions, and mythology, became a routine intellectual activity of the time. Classical Greek and Syriac literature was also translated into Arabic.⁷¹ At its peak, Caliph Al-Ma'mun established the *Bayt al-Hikmah* (House of Wisdom) as a center for the advancement of knowledge, particularly in translating works related to logic and philosophy into Arabic.

As a result of this translation movement, prominent young Muslim thinkers emerged, such as Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi, and Al-Kindi, who emphasized that Islamic thought should incorporate reason and rationality. Al-Kindi stated that Greek philosophy had provided Muslims with intellectual foundations and tools of thought, as well as opening pathways toward standards of truth. Through these Muslim scholars, the ideas of Aristotle and Hellenism began to develop further.

Among the ruling elite, the most prominent forms of expression were seen in the arts, ceremonial practices, and architecture, all of which symbolized the grandeur and progress of the state. These developments were closely intertwined with advancements in knowledge, as scientific achievements were often manifested in artistic and architectural works. The architectural patterns of Umayyad and Abbasid palaces in Damascus, Mushatta, and Baghdad reflect Hellenistic influences from the Roman, Byzantine, and Sasanian empires.⁷²

Historian Al-Baghdadi described the luxury of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Muqtadir, who always wore royal garments embroidered with gold. He sat on a black throne, adorned with a beautifully jeweled collar hanging on both his right and left sides.⁷³ Such magnificent attire became an inseparable part of the caliphs' appearance in the palace.

The palace decorations reflected the caliph's way of life, as well as his appearance, which symbolized the grandeur and authority he possessed. He sits on his throne and cannot be seen directly by everyone, because he is separated by a *satyr*. Anyone wishing to meet him had to pass through guards at each gate leading to the main entrance, and visitors were required to show respect and offer praises to him.⁷⁴

The caliph's authority was recognized not only by Muslims but also respected by non-Muslim communities across various parts of the world. He became a symbol of the greatness and majesty of an Islamic state with a universal form of governance. The caliph's palace was depicted as extraordinarily magnificent, almost resembling paradise on earth. Art and architecture served as clear evidence of the caliph's strong commitment to the splendor of his palace. Court poetry was constantly recited to glorify his name, while court poets praised him

⁶⁹ Lapidus. 135-137.

⁷⁰ Mohamad Anwar, "Kontribusi Aristoteles Dan Helenisme Terhadap Tradisi Filsafat Islam Dan Ilmu Pengetahuan Modern," vol. 1, 2025, <https://jurnal.fanshurinstitute.org/index.php/hermeneutics>.

⁷¹ Lapidus, *Sejarah Sosial Ummat Islam Bagian Kesatu & Dua*. 138-140.

⁷² Lapidus. 134-135.

⁷³ Hourani, *Sejarah Bangsa-Bangsa Arab*. 94.

⁷⁴ Lapidus, *Sejarah Sosial Ummat Islam Bagian Kesatu & Dua*. 126.

as the representative of God on earth.

Since the time of Prophet Muhammad until the era of the Abbasid Caliphate, Islamic leaders made efforts to build grand mosques as symbols of the religious identity of the Muslim community. This development also served as a declaration that Islam was believed to be the final and perfect religion with enduring glory. To fulfill the needs of prayer, mosques were established in various regions under Islamic rule, such as in Damascus, Aleppo, Jerusalem, Medina, Qairawan, and Cordoba. In terms of architecture, these mosques generally shared similar features, including an open courtyard (*sahn*), a covered main hall for prayer rows, a *mihrab* indicating the direction of the imam, and a minaret used to call the adhan when prayer time arrived.

During the reign of Caliph Abdul Malik, the Dome of the Rock Mosque was constructed in Jerusalem. The mosque was built on a site of historical significance to earlier religious communities, believed to be the place where Ibrahim sacrificed his son, Ismail.⁷⁵ The construction of this mosque marked a correlation between earlier religions and the present one, while also representing an effort to assert Islamic authority over Jewish influence in both political and religious spheres. This, in turn, strengthened the caliph's position within the imperial structure of power in the world.

The Umayyad Mosque reflects a fusion of various artistic traditions from across the world. The mosaics decorating the mosque were created by Greek artists and architects from Constantinople.⁷⁶ Their presence indicates a process of cultural transfer from the West to the East. For the Umayyad caliphs, this was interpreted as both an appropriation of culture and a symbol of Islamic success. The involvement of Greek craftsmen was viewed as an expression of Islam's victory and superiority over the Byzantine Empire.

The Prophet's Mosque in Medina was also elaborately decorated by the Umayyad caliphs as part of the splendor of Islam. Necklaces, crowns, and even rubies were placed in the mosque, symbolizing the submission of non-Muslims to Islam and the caliph's devotion to the religion.⁷⁷ For example, Caliph Al-Walid, when leading congregational prayers, would remove his royal robes and wear simple white garments. This practice served as a sign of the caliph's submission to God.

The mosque in Medina also included a *Maqsurah*,⁷⁸ a special enclosure for the caliph to perform prayers. This concept persisted into the Islamic kingdoms of Indonesia, where *Maqsurah* can still be found in ancient mosques built during the Islamic era. The enclosure served both to shield the caliph from direct view by the public and to provide protection while praying in a public space. It also symbolized the prestige of the caliph in comparison to ordinary people.

The glory of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs was largely built upon their palaces. However, the Umayyad caliphs positioned themselves differently than their Abbasid successors. Abbasid rulers such as Al-Mansur, Al-Mahdi, Al-Hadi, and Harun Al-Rashid presented themselves as God's representatives on earth, tasked with upholding justice among

⁷⁵ Lapidus. 127.

⁷⁶ Lapidus. 129.

⁷⁷ Lapidus. 131.

⁷⁸ Tempat ini biasanya ada di masjid kerajaan dan masjid kuno sebagai tempat khusus raja untuk beribadah.

the Muslim community.

Persian scholars of the time also promoted the idea that the king held authority in both religious and state matters, and that the two could not be separated in governance. Persian literature further emphasized social hierarchy and the government's duty to protect the rights of individuals according to their social position. This perspective was largely disagreed with by Arab scholars, who viewed it as perpetuating social stratification within Islamic society.

Religious Scholars

Religious elites emerged from military settlements established during the Islamic conquests. They were a middle class devoted to Islamic knowledge, consisting of teachers, merchants, artists, and scholars.⁷⁹ During the period when Islam was ruled by caliphs, from the 7th to the 13th century, these religious elites built reputations as authoritative figures in Islam, attracting many followers. They became role models for ordinary Muslims and were regarded as part of the legitimate Islamic authority.

Classical Muslim scholars primarily focused their thought on theological dimensions. Early theological debates arose largely from political disagreements, but over time, their focus shifted to purely theological matters.⁸⁰ This eventually gave rise to disputes over who was considered a *kafir* (unbeliever) and who was not within theological circles. The Khawarij, for example, regarded Ali, Muawiyah, Amr ibn al-As, and Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, who accepted arbitration, as *kafir*.

The Khawarij, based in Kufa, Iraq, later appointed Abdullah ibn Wahab al-Rasidi as their leader to replace Ali ibn Abi Talib. They continued to oppose the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, believing that caliphs after Ali had deviated from Islam and deserved to be opposed and removed.⁸¹

The Khawarij held that a caliph should be elected democratically by the Muslim community and could be re-elected as long as he acted justly and adhered to Islamic law (*sharia*). If a caliph deviated, he was considered subject to execution. This perspective directly conflicted with the political and theological views of the palace.

The Khawarij accepted Caliphs Abu Bakr and Umar ibn al-Khattab because they were seen as faithful to Islamic law. However, during the reigns of Uthman, Ali, and subsequent caliphs, the Khawarij believed these leaders had violated Islamic teachings. Their strict views were often influenced by their origins as Bedouin Arabs, who were considered distant from formal scholarship.⁸²

The Mu'tazilah sect differed from the Khawarij, who were in opposition to the palace. The Mu'tazilah were able to coexist alongside the ruling elite, and their way of thinking was even employed by some palace figures, such as Caliph Al-Ma'mun, to advance knowledge during the Abbasid era.⁸³ Mu'tazilah scholars, such as Abu al-Huzail, were deeply engaged with Greek philosophy,⁸⁴ which made Mu'tazilah thought place a strong emphasis on human

⁷⁹ Lapidus, *Sejarah Sosial Ummat Islam Bagian Kesatu & Dua*. 149.

⁸⁰ Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam Aliran-Aliran Sejarah Analisis Perbandingan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Penerbitan Universitas Indonesia, 1972). 11-12.

⁸¹ Nasution.

⁸² Nasution. 13.

⁸³ Tsuruya Kiswati, *AL Juwaini Peletak Dasar Teologi Rasional Dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2005). 15.

⁸⁴ Nasution, *Teologi Islam Aliran-Aliran Sejarah Analisis Perbandingan*. 46-47.

rationality.

In the early Abbasid period, the Mu'tazilah were well-received and focused primarily on religious matters. However, over time, they became involved in politics by commenting on the leadership of the caliph. They argued that Muslims could freely choose their leaders, as the *Qur'an* does not specify a particular system or the qualities that a leader must possess.

The Mu'tazilah began to gain a special place among Muslim intellectuals during the reign of Caliph Al-Ma'mun. Although the Mu'tazilah had already existed and developed as a school of thought in Basra and Baghdad during the time of Al-Saffah, their position within the government and political influence was still limited at that time.

The Mu'tazilah's position strengthened when Al-Ma'mun officially recognized them as the state's theological school. This was largely due to Al-Ma'mun's interest in knowledge and philosophy. He was known as an educated leader well-versed in Greek intellectual traditions, which made him inclined toward rationalist thought. Consequently, he adopted the Mu'tazilah teachings, which emphasized reason, free will, and moral accountability, as a religious foundation for his governance system.

The official recognition of the Mu'tazilah as the state ideology caused unease among some Muslims. Tensions escalated further with the implementation of the *mihnah*, an inquisition that required scholars, the public, and government officials to declare their loyalty to Mu'tazilah doctrines. This policy was widely perceived as burdensome and oppressive.

The situation changed when Caliph Al-Mutawakkil ascended to the throne. During his reign, scholars and members of the public who had been imprisoned due to the *mihnah* were released. From the 9th century onward, the Sunni school of thought regained prominence and reestablished its influence within the Abbasid government.

During the reign of Caliph Al-Ma'mun, dissatisfaction arose among some Muslim scholars regarding the rationalist views of the Mu'tazilah, which they felt overemphasized the role of reason. Meanwhile, *hadith* scholars advocated for a return to the primary sources of Islam, the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, rather than relying solely on rationality.

In this context, Muslim scholars sought a middle ground through the thought of Al-Ash'ari. Al-Ash'ari's ideas represented a compromise: maintaining firm adherence to the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* as the foundational sources of Islamic teaching while still recognizing the role of human reason in addressing theological questions.

Essentially, Al-Ash'ari upheld a theological perspective that emphasized the supremacy of the *Qur'an* and the limitations of human reasoning.⁸⁵ He argued that the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* serve as the primary guides for strengthening belief in God, which can be understood through rational human reflection. As a result, Ash'ariyah became recognized as the first theological school (*madhhab*) of *Ahlus Sunnah* within Islamic tradition.⁸⁶

Al-Ash'ari was initially a devoted follower of the Mu'tazilah, but because his thinking conflicted with that of his teacher, Abu Ali al-Jubbai, regarding *Al-Ashlah*, he left the Mu'tazilah. He feared that the Mu'tazilah's emphasis on reason could divide the Muslim community. Al-Ash'ari then established a new theological school as a reaction against Mu'tazilah views.⁸⁷ He later studied under Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal to deepen his

⁸⁵ Lapidus, *Sejarah Sosial Ummat Islam Bagian Kesatu & Dua*. 165.

⁸⁶ Nasution, *Teologi Islam Aliran-Aliran Sejarah Analisis Perbandingan*. 65-71.

⁸⁷ Yogi Sulaeman, Zinul Almisri, and Kerwanto, "Teologi Asy'ariyah: Sejarah Dan Pemikirannya," *EL-*

understanding of *Ahlus Sunnah* teachings.

Al-Ash'ari's thought, widely adopted by Muslims, is most notable in two areas. First, the *kasb* theory, which holds that all human actions are free yet remain subject to God decree. Second, the theory of the relationship between reason and revelation, in which revelation takes precedence, and reason is used to interpret and explain it. This demonstrates that humans still play a role in determining moral and legal judgments.

Although religious elites had many followers, their authority remained limited. They were not part of the highest social class, as they were not members of the caliph's family, did not hold political office, and were not wealthy. Consequently, religious elites who remained apolitical and close to the government still adhered to the caliph's authority, even when his religious policies conflicted with the wishes of scholars and the majority of the general public.

CONCLUSION

The social structure of Arabian society in the early Islamic period was shaped by harsh geographical conditions and strong tribal traditions (*ashabiyah*). The Bedouin communities living in arid regions developed strong mechanical solidarity, a tough yet generous character, and relatively pure language and culture. In contrast, populations in fertile and urban areas had more advanced civilizations, more complex socio-economic structures, and looser organic solidarity due to intensive interactions with foreign peoples. This created differences in character, lifestyle, and social organization between desert and urban communities. The advent of Islam sought to reform the discriminatory tribal structure, though it did not entirely eliminate pride in lineage, especially after the death of Prophet Muhammad, when claims to Quraysh aristocracy regained influence.

Classical Islamic society perpetuated a more complex social stratification through the presence of three main groups, Arabs, *mawali*, and *dhimmi*. Arabs occupied the highest positions through political and military dominance, while the *mawali* (non-Arabs who converted to Islam) often faced discrimination, particularly during the Umayyad period, although they gained greater social mobility during the Abbasid era due to their contributions in knowledge and state administration. The *dhimmi*, as non-Muslims living under Islamic rule, enjoyed state protection in exchange for the *jizyah* tax, though their treatment varied depending on the political policies of each dynasty. The dynamics among these three groups demonstrate that, although Islam introduced the principle of equality, its socio-historical implementation was inevitably influenced by the complex political, economic, and cultural conditions of the Arabian Peninsula.

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