

Rethinking Assets in Islamic Law: Understanding the Logic of Camels as Authorized-Value in Socio-Economic Context

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Abstract: Early Islamic legal tradition reveals the recurrent appearance of camels in a range of normative provisions, including *diyyāt* (blood money), livestock zakat, sacrifice, and dowry. This pattern has often been read literally as the final legal designation of a specific object, thereby obscuring the relationship between normative texts and the socio-economic context of classical Arab society. This article demonstrates that the prominence of camels did not derive from any intrinsic theological quality, but rather from their socio-economic and symbolic status as the most valuable asset of the time. By reading hadith as part of a discursive tradition, camels are understood as a medium of value that integrates productive economic functions, mobility as moving capital, survival in a desert environment, and symbols of social status and honor. An analysis of clusters of hadith concerning *diyyāt*, zakat, sacrifice, and dowry reveals a consistent logic of value, namely the articulation of obligations and compensations through wealth that was socially recognized as the highest surplus. These practices were subsequently adopted and rationalized in the construction of early *fiqh* through mechanisms of selection, *taqwīm* (legal valuation), and the stabilization of norms by the *fuqahā'*. The principal novelty of this article lies in the formulation of an analytical framework that shifts the focus of *fiqh* from the material form of objects to the functional logic of assets, positioning the social authorization of value as the foundation of legal normativity. This finding has significant implications for *fiqh al-mu'āmalāt* and contemporary Islamic jurisprudence more broadly, as it provides a methodological basis for evaluating modern assets (unknown in the classical *turāth*) according to the logics and criteria of *mal*, including economic utility, capacity for possession, recognition by *'urf*, and rational valuation, without resorting to reductive form-based analogies.

Keywords: Camels; Islamic Law; Assets in Fiqh; Contemporary Fiqh.

Abstrak: Tradisi hukum Islam awal memperlihatkan kemunculan unta secara berulang dalam berbagai ketentuan normatif, seperti *diyyat*, zakat ternak, kurban, dan mahar. Pola ini kerap dibaca secara literal sebagai penetapan objek hukum yang bersifat final, sehingga mengaburkan relasi antara teks normatif dan konteks sosial-ekonomi masyarakat Arab klasik. Artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa dominasi unta tidak bersumber dari kualitas teologis intrinsik objeknya, melainkan dari kedudukan sosial-ekonomi dan simboliknya sebagai aset paling bernilai pada masa itu. Melalui pembacaan hadis sebagai bagian dari tradisi diskursif, unta dipahami sebagai medium nilai yang menautkan fungsi ekonomi produktif, mobilitas sebagai modal yang bergerak, peran bertahan hidup di wilayah gurun, serta simbol status dan kehormatan sosial. Analisis terhadap kluster hadis *diyyat*, zakat, kurban, dan mahar memperlihatkan konsistensi logika nilai, yakni penetapan kewajiban dan kompensasi melalui harta yang secara sosial diakui sebagai surplus tertinggi. Praktik-praktik tersebut kemudian diadopsi dan dirasionalisasi dalam konstruksi fikih awal melalui mekanisme seleksi, *taqvim* (legal valuation), dan stabilisasi norma oleh para *fuqahā'*. Kebaruan utama artikel ini terletak pada perumusan kerangka analitis yang menggeser fokus fikih dari bentuk objek ke fungsi aset, dengan menempatkan otorisasi nilai sosial sebagai dasar normativitas hukum. Temuan ini berpengaruh langsung pada pengembangan fikih muamalat dan fikih kontemporer secara umum, karena menyediakan landasan metodologis untuk menilai aset modern (yang tidak dikenal dalam *turās*) berdasarkan logika dan kriteria *mal* berupa manfaat ekonomi, kemampuan penguasaan, pengakuan *'urf*, dan rasionalitas nilai, tanpa terjebak pada analogi formal yang reduksionis.

Kata kunci: Unta; Hukum Islam; Aset dalam Fikih; Fikih Kontemporer.

Introduction

Early Islamic legal tradition demonstrates the dominant role of camels in various normative provisions. In the hadiths, a camel is frequently used as a standard of value, such as *diyyāt* (blood money) or the compensation for a life is set at a hundred camels, livestock zakat is detailed with specific thresholds for camels, the most preferred sacrificial animal is the camel, and even in some reports, the dowry during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) involved camels as part of the valuable gift. Traditional readings often take these references to camels as a final legal category, as if the object (camel) is obligatory in a literal sense in every context.¹ However, the appearance of camels in these early texts is not random, their presence is closely tied to the socio-economic realities of the Arab society of that time. Social practices and norms during the Prophet's era were intertwined, and the references in the hadiths reflect a medium of value that was prevalent in classical Arab society.² If *fīqh* readings

¹ Rafael Yusupovich Rakhmatullin et al., "Meaning of Sunnah in Islam: Quranism vs Hadithism," *Manuscript* 14, no. 6 (2021): 1209–12, <https://doi.org/10.30853/mns210195>; Amr Osman, "The Qur'an and the Hadith as Sources of Islamic Law," in *Routledge Handbook of Islamic Law*, 1st ed., ed. Khaled Abou El Fadl et al. (Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315753881-8>.

² Talal Asad, "Thinking About Tradition, Religion, and Politics in Egypt Today," *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 1 (2015): 166–214, <https://doi.org/10.1086/683002>; Johanna Pink, "Tradition, Authority and Innovation in Contemporary Sunnī Tafsīr: Towards a Typology of Qur'an Commentaries from the Arab World, Indonesia

bypass this historical reality and immediately reduce the camel to a fixed object, the meaning may be overly simplified. The social, economic, and symbolic dimensions of camels can be lost when the texts are viewed merely as static formal rules. In other words, there is a problem in interpreting tradition: the dominance of camels in legal sources should be seen as a socio-normative phenomenon of that time, not just as a formal legal provision.

This article stems from a concern about the way hadiths are often interpreted too quickly, treating the form of the object as absolute and ignoring the process by which a measure and practice become valid as a normative reference. The proposed reading places *fiqh* as a discursive tradition, so hadiths about camels are treated as authoritative points that continue to be refined through argumentation, correction, and regulation by scholarly communities and legal authorities, not as a direct mirror of social reality, nor as an arbitrary conclusion based on form. Camels are chosen as a focal point because their presence in the legal categories of *diyāt*, zakat, dowry (*mahr*), and sacrifice (*qurbān*) opens a path to explore the relationship between the medium of value, social practices, symbols of honor, and how legal tradition stabilizes these relationships into norms that can be justified.³ A key question arises at this point is, “does the dominance of camels in the texts stem from any intrinsic theological quality inherent in the object, or is it better understood as a result of a tradition that connects the socio-economic and symbolic functions of camels with the normative need to set measures of value and mechanisms of restitution?” The focus of the analysis is directed at examining this tension between the two possibilities, while also evaluating how sensitivity to the logic of value and the authorization process within the *fiqh* tradition can enrich the interpretation of Islamic law, preventing it from stopping at the form of the object alone.

Based on the above, the main research question is, why did camels hold such a high socio-economic-cultural position in early Arab society, leading to their repeated appearance as a medium of value in early Islamic normative practices? This main question is broken down into several sub-questions. (1) What social functions made camels so important in Arab traditions? (2) How were these social practices involving camels later adopted and rationalized within the construction of *fiqh* in the early Islamic era? (3) What implications does this finding have for the concept of “assets” in the methodology of contemporary *fiqh*? These questions emphasize that this study is analytical, seeking to explore the logic behind historical data and texts, and link it to the formulation of broader legal concepts.

Recent studies on camels often approach the subject from cultural and linguistic perspectives, stopping short of addressing how the value of camels works as a legal standard. Al Hammadi, Exell, and El Menshawry (2020) show how camels appear as a historical memory and collective symbol in museum representations in Qatar, portraying camels as a social meaning-making device, rather than simply livestock.⁴ A similar approach is seen in AlSulami’s (2025) semantic study, which places camel-related terms within a field of meaning that transcends their biological referent, so that language also stores traces of value and status

and Turkey,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, ahead of print, October 2010, <https://doi.org/10.3366/E1465359110000963>.

³ Geoffrey King, “Camels and Arabian *Balḥa* and Other Forms of Sacrifice: A Review of Archaeological and Literary Evidence,” *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 20, no. 1 (2009): 81–93, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0471.2008.00305.x>.

⁴ M. Al-Hammadi et al., “Camel, Blockade and a Historical Memory Perspective: A Theme of Historical Memory Portrayed at Qatar National Museum,” *STUDIA ANTIQUA ET ARCHAEOLOGICA* 26, no. 2 (2020): 185–98, <https://doi.org/10.47743/saa-2020-26-2-4>.

attached to camels.⁵ Other studies document camel care knowledge as a local heritage and intergenerational transmission, emphasizing the position of camels as living assets in the economies of certain communities, although their focus is not on the *fiqh* debate. These studies are strong in demonstrating the resilience of the cultural value of camels, but they have yet to examine how this value became a binding measure through the *fiqh* debates of *muāmalāt* and *jināyāt*.

Another current trend within contemporary *fiqh* emphasizes the adaptation of instruments and methods of *istinbāt* (legal derivation) when economic structures change. Jamaludin, Pauzi, Syed Jaafar, and Daud (2023) discuss *talfiq* (combining juristic opinions) as a strategy employed by some later scholars to address new issues, marking the flexibility of *fiqh* traditions at the level of reconciling differing opinions.⁶ Bains and Manjoo (2022) emphasize that the shift from a real economy to a financial economy prompts a redefinition of *māl mutaqaawwim* (legally valued property) and demands a restructuring of the principles of *istinbāt mu'āmalāt*.⁷ Contemporary studies on *jināyah* (criminal law) also show that the formulation of norms occurs through intense debate and socio-political readiness, as demonstrated in the history of the formation of the Qanun Jināyah of Aceh, which selects types of penalties and their areas of implementation.⁸ These studies are rich in exploring the dynamics of adaptation and the authorization of norms, but they rarely revisit a very concrete classical point: the role of camels as a medium of value in the recurring issues of *diyyāt*, *zakat* on livestock, dowry (*mahr*), and *qurban*.

A gap in the research arises at the intersection of these two currents. Studies on camels are strong in their cultural dimensions, while modern *fiqh* research focuses on methodological adaptation, but few examine the classical debates surrounding the value of camels as a cohesive argument that links the determination of compensation standards, obligations, and transactions, and then extracts the logic of its value to test the conceptualization of modern assets. This article fills that gap by positioning hadiths and the debates of the *fuqahā'* (jurists) as part of a discursive tradition, thus reading the dominance of camels as the result of stabilizing value standards through argumentation and mechanisms of authority, and testing its implications for the reading of *māl* (a legal economic asset) in contemporary *fiqh*. This article does not aim to propose a new normative doctrine in Islamic law, but provides an analytical clarification of how early *fiqh* operationalized socially recognized objects as assets through a process that can be understood as the authorization of value.

The conceptual framework of this study is structured to ensure the analysis does not fall into the error of reading the past through the lens of the present, while maintaining coherence. This framework is based on the discursive tradition approach as formulated by Talal Asad, which views normative texts not as a direct reflection of social reality, but as a discursive node that operates through reasoning, transmission, and authorization in a specific

⁵ Abdullah AlSulami, "Camel-Related Terms Beyond the Animal Itself: A Linguistic and Semantic Study," *Dragoman Journal of Translation Studies*, no. 17 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.63132/ati.2025.camelr.67520292>.

⁶ Mohd Hafiz Jamaludin et al., "Talfiq as A Method for Legal Solutions in Contemporary Islamic Law," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 24, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v24i1.33608>.

⁷ Sheikh Ricky Bains and Sheikh Faizal Ahmad Manjoo, "Impact of the Shift from Real Economy Toward the Financial Economy in Deriving New Rules (Istinbāt) in Mu'āmalāt," in *Teaching and Research Methods for Islamic Economics and Finance*, 1st ed., by Mohd Ma'Sum Billah (Routledge, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003252764-9>.

⁸ Salma Salma et al., "The Other Side of the History of the Formulation of Aceh Jinayat Qanun," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v22i1.21000>.

historical context. First, hadiths are positioned as initial authoritative nodes that record practices, shape the language of value, and provide normative references for the Muslim community, but these nodes are read as part of a discursive tradition, not as a singular window into social reality.⁹ The reading of hadiths in this study is not directed at the critique of the *sanad* (chain of transmission) in the classical science of hadith, but at analyzing their normative function and socio-economic implications, as developed in the socio-historical critique of religious texts. Consequently, the words and determinations of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) regarding camels are interpreted with consideration of the socio-economic conditions that made camels functional as a medium of value, while refraining from projecting later *fiqh* sectarian categories onto the first century Hijri. Hadiths are treated as early normative data, which then enter into the arena of argumentation and practice regulation in subsequent generations, so their relationship with the historical context is not deterministic, but mediated through reasoning and authorization.

Second, the *fiqh* is understood as a discursive tradition that produces, negotiates, and stabilizes norms through argumentation tools, teaching practices, and correction mechanisms.¹⁰ This reading shifts the focus from the appropriation of social practices to how the *fuqahā'* (jurists) build reasoning, make *tarjih* (juristic preference), establish *taqwim* (legal valuation), and regulate implementation through social institutions that give binding force. Normativity in *fiqh* books is not treated as a passive reflection of customs, nor as a starting point detached from history, but as an outcome of debates that always link evidence, reality, and the goal of restoring social order.¹¹ This framework allows for the reading of camel-related hadiths on *diyāt* and *mu'āmalāt* (transactions) as work in stabilizing value standards, while certain clusters, such as sacrifice (*qurbān*), are read with caution due to their *ta'abbudi* (devotional) dimension that limits the expansiveness of rationalization.

Third, the concept of assets or *māl* (a legal economic asset) is not approached solely through a list of objects, but through the discursive criteria used by *fiqh* tradition to recognize and evaluate something as wealth.¹² These criteria include accountable economic utility, the capacity for possession and effective transfer, social recognition through *'urf* (customary recognition), and the process of *taqwim* that converts social value into legal value.¹³ In this conceptual framework, *'urf* is not understood as a spontaneous habit that exists in isolation, but as a result of interactions between social structure, economic practices, and symbolic recognition, which are then institutionalized through legal mechanisms. This approach allows for the reading of *'urf* both as a social construct formed through repeated practices and as a normative structure stabilized by legal authority, without reducing it to any one specific sociological theory. This method enables more focused contemporary discussions, as

⁹ Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009): 1–30.

¹⁰ Frank Peter, "The Discursive Tradition Framework," in *Conceptualizing Islam*, 1st ed., by Frank Peter et al. (Routledge, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003259350-24>.

¹¹ Paula Schrode, "Global and Vernacular Patterns of Islamic Orthodoxy – A Discursive Perspective," in *Conceptualizing Islam*, 1st ed., by Frank Peter et al. (Routledge, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003259350-22>.

¹² Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India and Abdul Majid Khan, "Concept of Wealth and Poverty in the Light of Islamic Tradition," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 05, no. 01 (2015): 01–13, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.51.01>.

¹³ Muhammad Amin Ibnu 'Abidin, *Nasyru Al-Urfi fi Binā'i Al-Ahkām 'alā Al-Urfi World League of Hanafi Scholars* 2020, 1st ed. (World League of Hanafi Scholars, 2020); M.A. Gadhoum, "Wealth from the Shariah Perspective," in *Islamic Wealth Management: Theory and Practice* (2017), Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781786439390.00008>.

modern assets such as stocks or electronic money are not evaluated with the question of whether their form has a precedent, but rather through how tradition assigns value, rights, and responsibilities to these different mediums.

To achieve this objective, this study uses a qualitative method based on library research with measured procedures. Primary data is compiled through the mapping of hadith clusters related to camels in the themes of *diyāt* (blood money), zakat on livestock, dowry, and sacrifice, with each cluster being read as a normative node that contains measures, types of obligations, and forms of compensation. The clustering in this study is not intended as a statistical quantification technique but rather as a thematic analysis strategy to group hadiths based on their legal function and the role of the value attributed to them, in line with the thematic analysis approach in the study of normative texts. Through this method, the hadith clusters are treated as units of discursive analysis, allowing for the tracing of legal reasoning patterns across different normative contexts. Secondary data is gathered from sources on the socio-economic history of classical Arab society and classical *fiqh* works that record *ikhtilāf* (disagreement), *‘āqilah* (family liability structure), and *taqwīm* practices regarding livestock. The analysis is carried out in three stages. The first stage is thematic clustering to map the patterns of camel appearances and the variations in their legal functions. The second stage is the relational reading between clusters to trace the consistency of the logic of value, such as the correlation between one hundred camels in *diyāt* and the status of camels as a medium of value in dowry or compensation. The third stage is conceptual analysis, extracting the discursive mechanisms of standard stabilization, i.e., how measures are articulated, maintained, and given binding force through *fiqh* argumentation.

The inferences in this research are built gradually, from the repetition of normative patterns in the hadith clusters to relational reasoning between clusters, and then to the formulation of discursive mechanisms that explain how value standards are produced and maintained in *fiqh*. The results are used to test the boundaries of analogy in contemporary issues, especially in the determination of value, the distribution of responsibility, and the recognition of *māl* in non-physical mediums, so that the expansion of law proceeds through the logic of value and the process of authorization, not through hasty form-based analogies. The reinterpretation of this logic in the context of other Muslim societies is not done through generalizing forms but through testing the mechanisms of valuation, authorization, and the distribution of legal responsibility, which can work differently within different social structures.

Results and Discussion

Revisiting Camels in the Hadiths as Empirical Data

As an initial step, attention must be drawn to the presence of various hadiths that treat camels as a medium of value in early Islamic periods. There are several key clusters of hadiths that highlight the central role of camels: (1) hadiths about *diyāt* (blood money), (2) hadiths about zakat on livestock, specifically camels, (3) hadiths about sacrifice (*qurban*), and (4) hadiths about dowry (*mahr*). These clusters are not isolated lists, but rather form a consistent pattern, where camels are treated as the highest unit of value or the most valuable asset in various aspects of life, ranging from criminal matters, social worship, to personal transactions. Understanding these hadith clusters will serve as the empirical basis for further socio-historical analysis.

The first is hadiths on *diyyāt* (blood money). *Diyyāt* refers to the compensation paid to the family of a victim of murder or unintentional killing, set at a hundred camels for the life of a free male victim. This decree refers to a practice approved by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and continued by his companions. For example, in his letter to the people of Yemen, the Prophet set the *diyyāt* at a hundred camels for a male life. The number “one hundred camels” is not an arbitrary figure, instead, it reflects the highest measure of value in Arab society at that time.¹⁴ One hundred camels represented a vast fortune, as a small tribe might only own dozens of camels, so this compensation was the maximum for a human life. Historically, this *diyyāt* tradition with camels adopted practices from pre-Islamic Arab tribes. It is even said that the Prophet’s grandfather, ‘Abdul Muṭalib, paid a ransom of 100 camels for his son (‘Abdullah, the Prophet’s father), as a vow to sacrifice him. Since then, the number one hundred camels became the standard *diyyāt* among the Quraysh.¹⁵ The camel-based *diyyāt* reflects an implicit normative model, that the social value of camels was recognized through *‘urf* (customary recognition), their utility supported economic functions, their value was determined through *taqwīm* (legal valuation), and was then stabilized through *fiqh* codification. This model explains how camels functioned as a primary legal asset, as well as a benchmark for the highest respect for life and collective honor in early Islamic law.

The second is the hadiths on zakat for livestock, specifically camels. Islam mandate zakat on growing wealth, and livestock is one of the wealth categories specifically mentioned in the zakat hadiths.¹⁶ The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) provided detailed guidance on zakat for camels in several narrations. For example, for the ownership of 5 camels, one must pay the zakat equivalent of 1 goat, for 10 camels is 2 goats, and so on, until 25 camels, when the zakat becomes one young female camel (*bintu makhad*) over one year old.¹⁷ This detailed explanation shows that camels were viewed as an important and reproductive economic asset, thus requiring social duty (zakat) when their numbers exceed a certain threshold. The rationale behind this rule can be understood that camels have reproductive capacity, long lifespan, and productivity (milk, transport), meaning that ownership of camels naturally grows over time. Therefore, Islam regarded those who owned a considerable number of camels as required to share part of their wealth for the welfare of society. Interestingly, the minimum zakat threshold for camels is 5 camels (higher than the threshold for goats, which is 40), suggesting that the value of one camel was considered equivalent to dozens of goats. A common comparison used in the time of the Prophet was 1 camel = 10 goats.¹⁸ This was also reflected in the practice of war booty distribution, where one camel was valued equal to ten sheep. Hence, the appearance of camels in zakat regulations indicates a pure economic logic, that camels were productive and valuable assets whose value movement was significant

¹⁴ Seyed Kazem Sadr, *The Economic System of the Early Islamic Period* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-50733-4>.

¹⁵ Sadr, *The Economic System of the Early Islamic Period*; Ayman Reda, *Prophecy, Piety, and Profits: A Conceptual and Comparative History of Islamic Economic Thought*, Palgrave Studies in Islamic Banking, Finance, and Economics (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56825-0>.

¹⁶ Muhamad Ulul Albab Musaffa et al., “Study the Philosophy of Islamic Law in Determination Percentage of Zakat Mal,” *Az-Zarqa’: Jurnal Hukum Bisnis Islam* 14, no. 1 (2022): 19–40, <https://doi.org/10.14421/azzarqa.v14i1.2589>; Mohammad Daud Ali, *Sistem ekonomi Islam: zakat dan wakaf*, Cet. 1 (Penerbit Universitas Indonesia, 1988).

¹⁷ Muḥammad Ibn al-Qāsim al-Gāzī, *Fath al-Qarib al-Mujib fi Syarḥ Alfāz at-Taqrīb au al-Qawl al-Mukhtār fi Syarḥ Gayat al-Iḥtiṣār* (Dar Ibn Hazm, 2005).

¹⁸ A. Udovitch, “Islamic Law and the Social Context of Exchange in the Medieval Middle East,” *History and Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (1985): 445–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.1985.9960751>.

for social justice. The emphasis is not merely on the “camel” itself but on its representation of actual wealth in that era.

Thirdly, Camels also appear as a special sacrificial animal in the ‘Id al-Adḥa ritual. Alongside goats and cattle, camels were the designated sacrificial animals for those who could afford them. One camel could represent the sacrifice of seven people due to the large quantity and quality of meat it produced.¹⁹ During the Farewell Pilgrimage (Hajj al-Wadā’), the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself slaughtered a large number of camels as sacrifices. One narration mentions that he slaughtered 63 camels with his own hands, and ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib continued slaughtering the rest, completing the sacrifice of 100 camels for Allah.²⁰ This event demonstrates that camels were positioned as the most prestigious and valuable sacrificial animal. From a social perspective, sacrificing a camel during ‘Id al-Adḥa symbolizes the highest level of generosity and gratitude, as it means relinquishing one’s most valuable wealth for religious devotion and feeding others.²¹ Furthermore, the act of sacrificing a camel has a collective dimension, that a single camel can be witnessed and shared by many people, making its social impact larger. Additionally, there is symbolic value in the camel, as it was considered a noble animal by the Arabs, and its sacrifice represented the submission of all wealth and status to the command of Allah. In other words, within the context of sacrifice, camels functioned as the greatest material sacrifice an individual could offer. This is consistent with the social structure of Arab society at the time, where wealth was partially measured by the number of livestock one owned.

Camels also appear in the context of *mahr* (dowry), the mandatory gift given by the groom to the bride during marriage.²² Although the Quran and hadith do not strictly define the form or amount of *mahr*, classical Arab culture often used camels as one of the forms of dowry, especially among the aristocracy or prominent families. For instance, when the Prophet Muhammad married Khadijah binti Khuwailid (before his prophethood), he gave a dowry equivalent to 20 young camels to Khadijah.²³ Another narration mentions that the dowry was given in dirhams, but the value was still equivalent to a number of camels at that time. Despite variations in the narration, it is clear that camels were considered one of the most fitting forms of *mahr*, particularly for marriages involving noble families. This practice reflects the tradition in Arab society, where social status was often measured by how many camels one could offer in marriage. Even historical sources note that among Bedouin communities, the dowry was often set at a certain number of camels, depending on the status of the bride’s family.²⁴ The higher the social status of the bride’s family, the more camels were required as dowry. Giving camels as *mahr* was not merely a transaction but carried significant meaning in terms of respect and the solidification of family ties. By offering

¹⁹ Muhyiddin bin Syaraf An-Nawawī, *Al-Majmū’ Syarḥ Al-Mubaḥḥah*, vol. 4 (Kairo, n.d.), <https://app.turath.io/book/2186>; al-Gāzī, *Faṭḥ al-Qarib*.

²⁰ Brannon Wheeler, “Gift of the Body in Islam: The Prophet Muhammad’s Camel Sacrifice and Distribution of Hair and Nails at His Farewell Pilgrimage,” *Numen* 57, nos. 3–4 (2010): 341–88, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852710X501342>; ‘Abdussalām ‘Alūsī et al., *Ibānatul Aḥkām Syarḥ Bulūghul Marām*, vol. 1 (Dārul ‘Ilmiyyah, 2018).

²¹ Reda, *Prophecy, Piety, and Profits*.

²² al-Gāzī, *Faṭḥ al-Qarib*; ‘Alūsī et al., *Ibānatul Aḥkām Syarḥ Bulūghul Marām*, vol. 1.

²³ M. Quraish Shihab, *Membaca Sirah Nabi Muhammad dalam Sorotan Al-Qur’an dan Hadis-Hadis Shahih*, New 1. (Penerbit Lentera Hati, 2018).

²⁴ Manisha Choudhary, “Changing Area, Shrinking Spaces and Struggling Species: History of Camels,” *History and Sociology of South Asia* 13, no. 2 (2019): 93–111, <https://doi.org/10.1177/22308075211043285>; Albert Hourani, *A History of The Arab Peoples* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

camels, the groom was seen as showing deep respect for the bride and her family, as he was giving real, valuable wealth that would support their livelihood. From the perspective of early Islamic law, the Prophet did not restrict the form of *mahr* to camels. In fact, he demonstrated that a simple *mahr* could be given, such as teaching the Quran to a poor companion.²⁵ However, the fact that many dowries at that time involved camels reflects the economic reality that camels were considered living capital, making their use in marriage both logical and beneficial for both parties.

From the explanation of these hadith clusters, it is clear that camels repeatedly appear as the highest standard of value in socio-religious interactions. Whether in the realm of *diyyāt*, wealth-related worship (*zakat* and *qurbān*), or marriage (*mahr*), camels held a special position. This pattern strongly suggests that the presence of camels in legal texts is not because “the law exclusively privileges camels dogmatically,” but because camels were, at that time, the most valuable and versatile commodity known to society. When these hadiths are read as data, they provide a window into classical Arab life, where camels were the backbone of the economy, a measure of wealth, a symbol of honor, and a guarantee of community survival. This understanding helps prevent modern interpretations from falling into rigid literalism. Instead, we are encouraged to explore the values behind camels that led the law to make them a reference. The empirical findings from these hadith clusters will be further analyzed in the next section, by connecting them to the deeper socio-economic conditions of Arab society in early Islamic period.

Classical Arab Socio-Economic Analysis: Why Camels?

To answer the main question of why camels were so valuable in classical Arab society, the functions of camels must be examined within the socio-economic framework of that time. There are at least four key functions that made camels an outstanding asset, (1) camels as productive assets, (2) as mobile capital, (3) as survival tools, and (4) as symbols of status and honor. These four aspects complement each other in establishing the special position of camels. The following socio-economic explanation will show that the dominance of camels in various early Islamic normative practices aligns closely with their strategic role in pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arab society.

First, camels are productive assets. Economically, camels were extraordinary productive assets for desert societies. Unlike other livestock such as goats or cattle, camels offered a wide range of products and benefits. Camels produced milk with high volume and nutritional content, which became a primary food source for Bedouin families. Female camels could be milked throughout the year with a substantial milk yield. Additionally, camel hair and wool could be used for textiles (tents, warm clothing, ropes, etc.), their hides were used for water containers or goods, and their meat was, of course, a valuable source of protein. Every part of the camel's body was useful, and even its dry manure was used as fuel in the desert.²⁶ From the perspective of economic sustainability, camels had a favorable reproductive cycle, with a long lifespan (a camel can live for 40 years or more), they could give birth to several offspring, allowing the owner's wealth to grow over time. This is why camels were considered living capital that continued to grow. Furthermore, camels had the ability to survive on minimal feed, camels could consume dry grass, thorny shrubs, and desert

²⁵ Alūsī et al., *Ibānatul Ahkām Syarh Bulughul Marām*, vol. 1.

²⁶ Al-Hammadi et al., “Camel, Blockade and a Historical Memory Perspective”; King, “Camels and Arabian *Baliya* and Other Forms of Sacrifice.”

plants that other livestock could not use.²⁷ Camels' ability to stay healthy and productive even with limited feed made them a reliable asset in the harsh desert environment. Compared to cattle, which require abundant fresh grass, or goats, which are more vulnerable, camels had much greater survival ability. The cost of maintaining camels was relatively low because they could survive on minimal water and food, while their output (milk, labor, offspring) was quite high.²⁸ With all these advantages, it is no surprise that camels became the backbone of the Arab tribes' economy. Camels were a guarantee of continuity, as long as a family had productive breeding camels, they had a living savings that could be passed down to the next generation. This is the logic behind the zakat on camels that was discussed earlier, that camel owners tended to grow their wealth, making it reasonable to impose zakat on them. Overall, as a productive asset, camels formed the economic foundation for Arab families, acting like mobile factories that produced food, clothing, and wealth year after year.

Second, camels are mobile capital. In addition to producing various commodities, camels functioned as literal mobile capital. Camels' ability as a long-distance transport tool was unmatched in their time. Camels could carry hundreds of kilograms across vast expanses of desert, walk for days without water, and endure extreme heat.²⁹ With this advantage, camels became the primary means of transport for long-distance trade in Arabia. The Quraysh trading caravans from Mecca to Syria and Yemen (as mentioned in the Qur'an, Surah Quraysh) could only operate efficiently due to the camels used to carry goods. Historically, the domestication of camels around the first millennium BCE opened up new trade routes across the Arabian desert, advancing oasis cities like Petra, Palmyra, and Mecca.³⁰ Camels were dubbed *safinatul barr* (ships of the land) by ancient Arab poets,³¹ as their role resembled ships linking isolated points across the sea of sand. This mobility made camels a type of "venture capital" for the tribes, owning many camels allowed a tribe to send out trading caravans, profiting from buying and selling between regions. The profits from these trade ventures contributed to the prosperity and power of the tribe.³² Thus, camels were truly mobile capital. Camels moved the wheels of the economy by carrying goods, people, and information across the land. Beyond trade, camel mobility was also important in warfare and expansion. Camel cavalry provided a tactical advantage in the desert, soldiers could move quickly, carry more supplies, and retreat into the depths of the desert that enemies without camels could not reach. This mobility advantage made desert tribes difficult to conquer by Roman or Persian forces, which relied on horses and roads. Camels as mobile capital also meant that camel-based wealth was easily moved and secured. If a tribe faced danger, they could move all their wealth (in the form of camels) to safety, something that could not be done with settled farmland.³³ This flexibility gave the Arabs economic resilience and security, as their wealth was not tied to a single location. Therefore, each camel was not just seen as an animal but as a nimble unit of capital that could be moved to any market, anytime, and also served as a means of exchange. In that era, the value of goods and services was often measured in camels, for example, the price of an item would be expressed in the number of

²⁷ Sadr, *The Economic System of the Early Islamic Period*; Hourani, *A History of The Arab Peoples.*, 90.

²⁸ Hourani, *A History of The Arab Peoples.*

²⁹ Michael Cook, *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East* (Taylor and Francis, 2013).

³⁰ Anthony Cutler, "Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and Related Economies," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 247, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1291821>.

³¹ Ariny Syahidah, "Keistimewaan Morfologi Unta Perspektif Al-Qur'an Dan Sains," *Jurnal Cakrawala Akademika* 1, no. 5 (2025): 1784–97, <https://doi.org/10.70182/JCA.v1i5.23>.

³² Choudhary, "Changing Area, Shrinking Spaces and Struggling Species."

³³ Hourani, *A History of The Arab Peoples.*

camels. This made camels function like currency in the desert. Even into the early 20th century, some Bedouin communities measured everything in camel units. This is why a hundred camels became the standard for *diyyāt*, because camels were the unit of account understood by all.³⁴ In short, camels provided economic infrastructure, from transport and distribution to pricing. This is the logic that made camels so valuable, camels were portable economic capital.

Thirdly, another vital function of camels is their role as a survival tool in the harsh desert environment. The Arabian Peninsula is known for its barren desert landscapes, scorching daytime temperatures, cold nights, and minimal water sources. In such conditions, camels were truly lifesaving. They could travel for over a week without drinking, and when they found water, they could drink dozens of liters in one go to survive the next leg of the journey.³⁵ This extraordinary endurance allowed caravans to cross the “sea of sand” that was previously considered impassable. For nomadic Bedouin communities, camels were a lifeline, as they could provide fresh milk daily, offering both hydration and nourishment during times of water scarcity. Camel milk could be consumed directly, processed into cheese or desert butter, and used to sustain life when other food was unavailable. In extreme cases, Bedouins would sometimes drink camel blood in small quantities to prevent dehydration (though this practice was not ideal for health). Camels could also be slaughtered in emergencies to extract water from their stomachs as a last resort. Metaphorically, camels were the “walking storehouses of water and food” for desert people. Furthermore, camels facilitated the mobility of the Bedouin’s lifestyle.³⁶ The Bedouin people lived nomadically, moving with the seasons and grazing lands, and camels carried their tents, supplies, and even their children. Without camels, nomadic life in such vast, resource-poor areas would have been nearly impossible. As Arab ethnographer Jabbur once said, “The Bedouin are inseparable from camels, just as camels are inseparable from the desert. The desert is like a vast ocean, and camels are the ships that allow people to cross it.”³⁷ This statement emphasizes that, without camels, the Arab nomadic society might have perished or at least been severely restricted in its movement. Camels also provided warmth and protection, during cold desert nights, the camel’s body could shield from the wind, its dry dung could serve as fuel for campfires, and its fur could be made into thick blankets to protect against the cold.³⁸ With all these uses, camels were not just an economic commodity but the cornerstone of survival. The value of a camel was often considered greater than a life in pre-Islamic Arab culture, as they were essential for survival. The famous War of Al-Basus, which lasted for 40 years, was triggered by the killing of a female camel owned by a guest of the Bakr tribe. This action was seen as a grave insult and a serious threat because it represented the loss of a life-sustaining resource

³⁴ SADIK KIRAZLI, “Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Pre-Islamic Arab Society,” *Islamic Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 25–53.

³⁵ R. Sharma and R.K. Manhas, “Ethnoveterinary Plants for the Treatment of Camels in Shiwalik Regions of Kathua District of Jammu & Kashmir, India,” *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 169 (July 2015): 170–75, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jep.2015.04.018>.

³⁶ Richard W. Bulliet, “Afterword: Camels and Deserts,” in *Camels in Asia and North Africa: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Their Past and Present Significance*, ed. Knoll Eva-Maria and Pamela Burger, vol. 18 (Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2012), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fgkpz.29>.

³⁷ Matthias Oster, “The Camel - the critical Pillar of Bedouin Life,” Research, Bedouin Heritage, 2022, <https://www.bedouin-heritage.com/animals>.

³⁸ Steven A. Rosen and Benjamin A. Saidel, “The Camel and the Tent: An Exploration of Technological Change among Early Pastoralists,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 69, no. 1 (2010): 63–77, <https://doi.org/10.1086/654940>.

and the owner's honor.³⁹ The prolonged war was fought to avenge the death of one camel. Although this might sound extreme, it symbolized how a camel could represent the dignity and continuity of a tribe's life. Therefore, in the mindset of classical Arabs, camels were the lifeline, and cutting this lifeline could spell disaster for a community.⁴⁰ This is the fundamental reason why Islamic law frequently references camels, because camels were indeed the center of life.

In addition to their material functions, camels held a powerful social symbolic dimension. Ownership of camels symbolized status, wealth, and honor for an individual or tribe in the eyes of society. Many ancient Arab expressions used camels as metaphors for wealth. A person who owned one hundred camels was seen as someone of high standing, no longer needing to perform menial labor. There is even a proverb, "The owner of one hundred camels does not need to carry firewood," meaning the wealthy (those with many camels) are freed from humble work because their wealth "works" for them.⁴¹ This "hundred camels" benchmark is consistent with the *diyyat* standard discussed earlier, where one hundred camels were considered an extraordinary amount of wealth, becoming a measure of an individual's economic capacity. Bedouin society categorized family status in part by the number of camels they owned. The more camels, the higher their social prestige. The quality of camels also mattered, with superior camels that could run fast or produce more milk being more expensive and typically owned by tribal leaders or wealthy individuals. Such prized camels often became collective symbols of the tribe.⁴² For example, there are stories in Arab poetry about legendary camels owned by tribe leaders, often praised by poets or even symbolizing the entire tribe (similar to how thoroughbred racehorses are revered in other cultures). Even the Quraysh leaders in Mecca were known to own dozens of camels each, as they were successful camel traders.⁴³ So, when Islam introduced the concepts of zakat and *qurban* (sacrifice), it also addressed this aspect, with a deep moral message, that obedience and generosity were measured by one's willingness to relinquish the highest symbols of status. Those who gave up their best camels for zakat or sacrificed a fat camel for *qurban* showed their strong faith, as they were relinquishing their pride for the command of Allah. This is evident, for example, in the actions of wealthy companions, who often gave camels in charity. On the battlefield, those who contributed the most camels to the logistics of the army were regarded as highly praiseworthy (like Uthman bin 'Affan, who contributed hundreds of camels for the Tabuk expedition and was praised by the Prophet).⁴⁴ Even in diplomacy, one of the most precious gifts that could be given to foreign kings was a selection of camels.⁴⁵ These phenomena all reinforce the place of camels in the social imagination of the Arabs, where camels were seen as the icons of wealth and glory. Touching someone else's camels carelessly could be seen as violating their honor. Returning to the example of the War of Al-

³⁹ Hourani, *A History of The Arab Peoples*; Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Memory Inflamed: Muhalhil Ibn Rabi'ah and the War of al-Basūs," in *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Cornell University Press, 1993), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctvrf8bxk.10>.

⁴⁰ KIRAZLI, "Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Pre-Islamic Arab Society."

⁴¹ C. J. Lyall, "Ancient Arabian Poetry as a Source of Historical Information," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1914, 61–73.

⁴² KIRAZLI, "Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Pre-Islamic Arab Society"; Al-Hammadi et al., "Camel, Blockade and a Historical Memory Perspective."

⁴³ Sadr, *The Economic System of the Early Islamic Period*; Cook, *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*.

⁴⁴ Ibnu Hajar Al-'Asqalanī, *Bulughul Marām* (Dāruṣṣadiq, 2002); 'Alūsy et al., *Ibānatul Ahkām Syarh Bulughul Marām*, vol. 1.

⁴⁵ KIRAZLI, "Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Pre-Islamic Arab Society."

Basus, killing a guest's female camel (even though it was "just" an animal) was seen as equivalent to an insult to the life and dignity of the host, which led to prolonged revenge. By understanding this symbolic dimension, we can appreciate why Islamic teachings did not disregard the reality of camels. In fact, Islam came to redirect this symbol of status toward submission to Allah, transforming camels, once symbols of worldly pride and glory, into tools for worship (zakat, qurbān, charity, transportation for jihad, etc.). This symbolic dimension of camels would be reduced if we read religious texts without considering the social context. It is not about "why camels?" but rather, for the early Muslim society, camels were clearly among the "most valuable wealth" that was most logically referenced, understood, and practiced.

Beyond those points, it is also important to recognize that the difference between the *niṣab* (minimum threshold) for zakat on camels and the *niṣab* for zakat on cattle (cow) can be read as a trace of differing economic ecologies within Arab society that shaped how Islamic legal reasoning measured "surplus wealth", rather than as a normative inconsistency. Findings in early Islamic economic history suggest that camels were superior in arid environments because they could survive on low-quality grazing, endure feed scarcity, live longer, and simultaneously function as transportation and as support for warfare. Cattle, by contrast, were not easily moved along demanding herding routes and were inefficient on low-quality pasture.⁴⁶ This indicates that owning even a small number of camels already represented a tangible and portable surplus in desert society, whereas cattle ownership only signaled surplus once it reached a larger number, since cattle husbandry required better pasture and a more settled mode of life. This difference in threshold is reflected in zakat provisions that set the camel *niṣab* beginning at five head, while the cattle *niṣab* begins at thirty.⁴⁷ Such numerical structuring is intelligible if zakat is understood as a mechanism for reading economic capacity in light of the composition of livestock that is "plausibly owned" and "meaningfully surplus" within a particular social environment, rather than as merely counting species as fixed legal objects. The equivalence of camels and cattle in sacrifice for seven people operates through a different logic, namely the logic of meat distribution and the capacity of large animals within a communal ritual. Here, the relevant measure is not the threshold of wealth accumulation but collective consumption capacity. The intersection of these two logics illustrates the discursive character of *fiqh*, where one ruling weighs-ownership structures and economic resilience, while another weighs the function of socially oriented worship that is directed toward distribution.

Through the socio-economic analysis above, a comprehensive answer emerges as to why camels were so valuable in classical Arab society. Camels constituted an integrated package of assets, economically productive, convertible into transport and trade capital, essential for survival in extreme environments, and saturated with meanings of social status. Accordingly, when Islamic teachings emerged in such a setting, it is unsurprising that camels served as the standard of value in many normative provisions. The use of camels as a reference point in *diyyāt* (blood money), zakat, *qurbān* (sacrifice), and *mahr* (dowry) consistently points toward a logic that can be expressed as follows, give or set aside from yourself what is most valuable by your own measure. In the Prophet's time, that measure was the camel. This matters because it prevents a superficial framing such as, "Why does Islam appear to privilege camels, are camels sacred animals." That is not the point. What is privileged is the

⁴⁶ Sadr, *The Economic System of the Early Islamic Period*; Cook, *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*.

⁴⁷ al-Gāzī, *Faṭḥ al-Qarīb*.

value logic behind the camel, while the camel itself functions as a concrete metric. On that basis, the analysis can move to a more precise question, how early jurists appropriated this high-value social practice into a legal structure, and what can be learned from that process for thinking about wealth in the modern era.

From Social Practice to The Formulation of *Fiqh*

After understanding the position of camels in the socio-economic landscape of classical Arab society, the next step is to examine how these social practices were adopted and formulated into early *fiqh*. The process of transforming social customs into legal rules is crucial, as this is where Islamic values give a new shape to old traditions. There are two main points in this transition, the first is the mechanism of adoption in early *fiqh*, that is, how the companions of the Prophet and the early scholars selected and absorbed camel-related practices, and second, the shift from form to function, that is, the potential of Islamic law to move according to the value logic behind the object (the camel), not just being fixated on the object itself.

Understanding the mechanism of adoption in the early development of *fiqh* requires recognizing that Islam did not emerge in a vacuum. Many pre-Islamic Arab social institutions were “embraced and renewed” within Islam.⁴⁸ An example is the concept of *diyyāt*, as mentioned earlier, which already existed before Islam with a standard of one hundred camels. When Islam arrived, Prophet Muhammad did not abolish the concept of *diyyāt*, but instead corrected it (for example, eliminating excessive discrimination and ensuring fair compensation) and made it part of Islamic criminal law (*fiqh al-jināyāt*). This shows a process of selection, that stable social practices that were valuable and did not contradict the principle of *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God) tended to be accommodated within the Sharia. Camels, as a medium for *diyyāt*, zakat, or *qurbān* (sacrifice), clearly met these criteria because they were among the best things one could give. The companions of the Prophet who became leaders after him also continued this camel-based policy. For instance, Abu Bakr and Umar continued to collect zakat from Arab tribes that had submitted and distributed it to the rightful recipients. Umar bin al-Khattab, when instituting administrative reforms, also established alternative *diyyāt* standards in the form of other equivalents (gold, silver) for regions that did not have many camels, but still maintained the equivalent value of one hundred camels.⁴⁹

This shows that early Islamic law was flexible within the corridor of its value logic. The Khulafā' Ar-Rashidūn understood the essence behind the Prophet's rulings, then adapted them to local conditions without removing their spirit. This can be seen, for example, in Umar bin al-Khattab's policy regarding agricultural lands in Iraq. Umar did not immediately give the land as *ghanimah* (war booty) to the troops, but rather made it the property of the state to be managed for the public good.⁵⁰ This shows a socio-economic *ijtihād* (juridical reasoning) that took into account the new value context (agrarian land, not camels).

⁴⁸ 'Ālī Jum'ah, *Tārīkh Uṣūl Al-Fiqh* (Dār Al-Muqattam Linnasyri wattawzi', 2015); Wael B. Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511818783>.

⁴⁹ Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 4 (Dar Al-Ma'arif, n.d.); Abdul Basit Ahmad, *Umar Bin Al-Khattab: The Second Caliph of Islam* (Darussalam, 2001).

⁵⁰ Sadr, *The Economic System of the Early Islamic Period*; Udovitch, “Islamic Law and the Social Context of Exchange in the Medieval Middle East”; Šiblī Nu'mānī, *Umar*, Abridged ed, Makers of Islamic Civilization (Tauris, 2004).

Returning to the issue of camels, this adoption mechanism confirms that the presence of camels in *fiqh* is not just a “mere imitation of custom” but a process of Islamizing values. Islamic law, for example, took camels and institutionalized them as a regular obligation with a fair proportion in zakat. Similarly, the law of *qurbān* (sacrifice) took the tradition of slaughtering large animals as an offering (previously done for idols) and purified it, making it an act of sincere worship to gain Allah’s pleasure. By understanding this mechanism, we can see the thread that connects everything, that early *fiqh* tended to stabilize high-value social practices into norms. Camels, which were socio-economically vital, had their status stabilized in Sharia as a commodity with both social and religious value.

The next point that must be understood from the logic of camels as assets is the movement from form to function. One of the most important lessons from this study is that some *fiqh* formulations, in fact, follow the value function behind an object, rather than merely its material form. The clearest example is the way *diyāt* developed beyond Arabia. As Islam spread into non-Arab regions such as Persia, Greater Syria, and Egypt, not everyone possessed camels with which to pay *diyāt*. Companions and the *tabi‘ūn* in those regions therefore allowed *diyāt* to be paid through an equivalent value in other forms, such as gold dinars, thousands of silver dirhams, cattle in farming communities, and so forth.⁵¹ The core idea was to pay a form of wealth that represented the highest value by local standards. In other words, the law of *diyāt* fundamentally attends to the function of maximal compensation, while camels were simply the concrete case in the Hijaz. A parallel can be seen in contemporary *fiqh* discussions of zakat. Scholars generally agree that what matters is the concept of wealth that grows. Today, in many countries, few people raise camels, yet they own factories, bank deposits, shares, and other forms of capital. Zakat is therefore extended by *qiyās* (analogical reasoning) to such modern assets by identifying the *‘illah* (legal rationale) of zakat, namely wealth that grows. Camels in the Prophet’s time fulfilled that *‘illah* and were therefore treated as zakatable property. The form may change, but the function remains the same. Another example is *mahr* (marital dower) in *fiqh*. It is not restricted to camels or gold, since its principle is a valuable gift as a sign of commitment. The Prophet provided examples in which *mahr* could be very simple, such as an iron ring or the service of teaching the Qur’an, if that was what one had.⁵² This indicates that the form of *mahr* is flexible as long as its function is realized, namely providing benefit and expressing respect for the bride. In many cases during the Prophet’s time, camels served as *mahr* because they were the most useful form of wealth, yet the Prophet did not impose a requirement that it must be camels. From this perspective, Islamic law contains an elastic space oriented toward function. It must be acknowledged, however, that there are legal domains in which the object is specified and cannot be substituted. Sacrificial animals, for instance, are restricted to particular kinds such as sheep or goats, cattle, and camels, and cannot be replaced with other animals such as deer even if they are also livestock, because the specification is fixed by *naṣṣ* (authoritative textual evidence). Such matters operate within the logic of *ta‘abbudī* (devotional) law through commands that are *qaṭ‘ī* (definitive). By contrast, in the social and transactional domain, *fiqh* is far more open to following the objectives behind the rule. The report that ‘Umar

⁵¹ Siti Zubaidah Ismail, “The Modern Interpretation of the Diyat Formula for the Quantum of Damages: The Case of Homicide and Personal Injuries,” *Arab Law Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2012): 361–79, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15730255-12341237>; MUHAMMAD MUSHTAQ AHMAD, “The Doctrine of Siyāsah in the Ḥanafī Criminal Law and Its Relevance for the Pakistani Legal System,” *Islamic Studies* 52, no. 1 (2013): 29–55.

⁵² ‘Alūsī et al., *Ibānatul Ahkām Syarḥ Bulughul Maram*, vol. 1.

considered minting currency from camel hide but abandoned the idea out of concern that camels would become scarce illustrates how *maṣlaḥah* (public interest) restrains flexibility in form. ‘Umar understood that money is merely a medium of value and that its form could, in principle, take many shapes, including leather, yet he also understood the larger function of camels as living assets. He therefore chose to protect the camel population rather than to cut their hides into currency.⁵³ The lesson is that analogy and innovation in law must consider *maṣlaḥah* and balance, not merely follow a narrow economic calculus.

On the basis of the discussion above, it becomes possible to bridge history and law, since many early *fiqh* provisions emerged from a dialogue between social value and Islamic moral principles. Camels provide a concrete example of how what a society regarded as most valuable was accommodated and given a normative frame. The task in the modern era is to read carefully which rules contain functional flexibility and which are bound by permanent textual stipulations. Thinking from form to function helps to avoid careless analogy. One would not, for example, hastily equate everything with camels simply because it is “equally expensive”, but would examine whether a new object plays a comparable role to camels within today’s economy, and what the consequences would be if it were treated similarly in law. With that lens, the concept of “asset” within contemporary *fiqh* methodology can be reconsidered. Not every modern asset has a direct counterpart in the past, yet if its economic function is comparable, *fiqh* can extend its rulings to new objects through a proper analogy. A constant boundary of caution must remain, namely that analogy should not undermine the principles of justice and *maṣlaḥah* that constitute the aims of Islamic law.

The Camels-Logic for The Contemporary *Fiqh* Methodology

Historical and conceptual findings on camels as valuable assets in early Islam carry several important implications for contemporary *fiqh* methodology, especially in how modern forms of wealth and assets are understood and developed. Three aspects can be highlighted, namely the need to reinterpret the concept of assets on the basis of value logic, the application of *fiqh* legal consequences such as zakat and *diyāt* to assets in the modern era, and the clarification of methodological limits and caution in drawing analogies to the present.

Reinterpreting the concept of assets in modern *fiqh* should take seriously the central lesson of this camel-based inquiry, namely that assets should be redefined according to their socio-economic function rather than merely through classical examples. In the Prophet’s era, core categories of wealth included gold and silver, livestock such as camels, cattle, and goats, agricultural produce, and trade goods. Today, economic structures have expanded far beyond those forms and include paper and electronic money, motor vehicles, real estate, securities such as shares and bonds, and even digital assets. The *Fiqh* methodology therefore needs to capture the essence of what criteria make something *māl* (a legally valued form of wealth) that is subject to *fiqh* rulings. Based on the value logic drawn from the camel case, the relevant criteria include possessing real economic value, being capable of growth or transfer, and being recognized as wealth within the customary practice of society, namely *‘urf* (customary recognition). On that basis, a reinterpretation of modern assets can proceed in a principled way.

Consider, for example, fiat money that is no longer backed by gold. It can still be treated as *māl* because its function as a medium of value is socially recognized, in a way that

⁵³ Cook, *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*; Udovitch, “Islamic Law and the Social Context of Exchange in the Medieval Middle East.”

parallels the view attributed to Imam Aḥmad that anything may serve as money so long as it is widely accepted. What about corporate shares.⁵⁴ Shares represent ownership in productive capital within a company, and in functional terms this resembles owning a herd of productive camels in the past, even though the form is different. Likewise, income-generating property such as a rented apartment produces recurring returns and can be compared, at the level of function, to agricultural land in earlier settings. The point is to identify “new camels” within the modern economy, that is, objects that play a vital role analogous to camels in their historical setting. This approach has in fact been applied by many contemporary scholars on a case-by-case basis, for instance in rulings on zakat for paper money, corporate zakat, and professional income zakat through analogies to trade zakat or agricultural zakat.⁵⁵ Yet articulating asset criteria explicitly would be highly beneficial, because it would allow *fiqh* to respond to changing conditions more systematically. By grasping the logic behind camels, one can frame a methodical question such as, which assets are subject to zakat. The answer would be assets that are productive or capable of growth and that exceed basic needs. This can include bank deposits and investment portfolios, even in the absence of a specific *naṣṣ* addressing them, because the *‘illah* (reasoning) is the same as that found in classical zakatable wealth. A similar move applies to inheritance law. The classification of inheritable property need not be restricted to what appears in classical manuals, since any item with inheritable economic value, including intellectual property and insurance-related benefits, must be incorporated into distribution with justice as the guiding principle. In short, reinterpreting the concept of assets returns *fiqh* to its animating spirit, regulating value and benefit rather than becoming trapped by material form. Such a step must be accompanied by caution, yet it is necessary if Islamic law is to remain relevant without losing its substance.

The legal consequences of *fiqh* for modern assets operate at the level of application. Once the concept of assets has been expanded or re-examined, the practical question becomes how *fiqh* rulings connected to wealth function operationally. The discussion of camels in early *fiqh* suggests that the application of rulings such as zakat, *ḍiyāt*, maintenance, charity, and *kafārat* (expiation) does not depend on the material form of an asset, but on the value function attached to it. For that reason, these rulings can in principle be applied proportionally to modern assets, as long as their socio-economic function is comparable. For example, classical *fiqh* did not recognize a corporation as a legal person, yet contemporary scholars extend *qiyās* to treat corporate shares as *māl mustafād* (acquired wealth resulting from growth) that is subject to zakat because they perform a function comparable to trade capital.⁵⁶ A similar pattern appears in modern practice of *ḍiyāt*, where payment is often made in cash assessed as equivalent to one hundred camels. Some Gulf states set a specific *ḍiyāt* benchmark, for example 100,000 Saudi riyals, which is claimed to represent the value of one hundred young camels.⁵⁷ Even in the presence of inflation, what is preserved is not the form but the normative value that the camel represents as a medium of compensation. In other countries, the amount of *ḍiyāt* is determined with reference to the offender’s capacity and the

⁵⁴ Cook, *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*; Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India and Khan, “Concept of Wealth and Poverty in the Light of Islamic Tradition.”

⁵⁵ Flavia Cortezzi and Alessandro Ferrari, eds., *Contemporary Issues in Islamic Law, Economics and Finance: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Routledge-Giappichelli Studies in Religion, Law and Economics in the Mediterranean Space (Routledge, 2023).

⁵⁶ Muhammad Ayub and M. Fahim Khan, “EVOLVING MONETARY ECONOMICS IN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE,” *Journal of Islamic Monetary Economics and Finance* 7, no. 2 (2021): 317–40, <https://doi.org/10.21098/jimf.v7i2.1372>.

⁵⁷ Ismail, “The Modern Interpretation of the Dīyat Formula for the Quantum of Damages.”

victim's circumstances, yet it still rests on the principle of maximal compensation.⁵⁸ Functional analogies of this kind enrich modern *fiqh* without severing its continuity with the early tradition. A comparable development can be seen in waqf. If in classical the *fiqh* of *waqf* was typically established through land or orchards and did not commonly involve camels because they are easily movable, contemporary practice has produced cash waqf, share-based waqf, and even insurance-related *waqf*. The validity of these newer forms is justified through the *maqāṣid* (objectives) of waqf, namely retaining the principal while channeling its benefits.⁵⁹ Taken together, these examples show that *fiqh* can respond to the complexity of modern social needs without losing its orientation toward the value commitments of the Sharia. They also underline those modern assets can be evaluated as *māl* not through their physical form but through their socio-economic function, in line with the camel-based asset logic within early Islamic law. At this point, the study does not remain a descriptive reflection on *fiqh*, but offers a methodological foundation. The extension of Islamic law into the domain of modern assets should proceed through analysis of value function and legal authorization, not through superficial resemblance of form. Even so, each analogy still requires collective *ijtihad* that is sensitive to context, so that such extensions do not depart from the spirit and aims of Islamic teaching.

The next consideration concerns methodological limits and caution. Even though opportunities for analogy are wide, this study also emphasizes the importance of boundaries and prudence. The camel example shows that while many matters can be generalized from function, some are not substitutable because of Islamic legal stipulation or because the situational differences are substantial. In sacrificial worship, for instance, Islamic teaching restricts sacrificial animals to camels, cattle, and goats. Even if the function of sacrifice is the distribution of meat and the celebration of Eid al-Adha, one cannot add animal types at will, such as buffalo or wild camels, without evidence, because the governing principle here is *ta'abbudī* (pure devotional obedience). Another example is that the classic *fiqh* obligates zakat on livestock only for camels, cattle, and goats. What about modern industrial livestock such as broiler chickens. Some scholars hold that they can be zakatable as trade goods if they are commercial commodities, but not as livestock zakat, because their characteristics differ. They are not pastured freely on common grazing land but are raised in enclosed facilities with operational costs such as feed and vaccines.⁶⁰ This highlights the need for careful scrutiny of the *'illah* (legal rationale), whether it is truly shared or not. Analogy cannot be careless simply because of outward resemblance. One must identify the substantive point of similarity that grounds the ruling. The classic *uṣūl al-fiqh* already provides the tools, since *qiyās* requires an *'illah* that is either *manṣūṣah* (anchored in the primary texts, the Qur'an or Hadith) or *mustanbatah* (strongly derived through legal reasoning).⁶¹ In the camel case, the *'illah* of livestock zakat is growth and reproduction, and grazing on unowned pasture, not the mere fact of being a camel. When these rationales are absent in another case, the analogy is not

⁵⁸ Muḥamad Ulul Albab Musaffa et al., "Study the Philosophy of Islamic Law in Determination Percentage of Zakat Mal," *Az-Zarqa': Jurnal Hukum Bisnis Islam* 14, no. 1 (2022): 19, <https://doi.org/10.14421/azzarqa.v14i1.2589>.

⁵⁹ Muh. Nashirudin et al., "Modernizing Zakat and Waqf Management in Indonesia: A Legal And Governance Perspective," *Maḥabib* 24, no. 1 (2025): 198–220, <https://doi.org/10.21093/mj.v24i1.9419>.

⁶⁰ Fakhruddin Fakhruddin et al., "From Fiqh Al-Ibadat to Muamalat: Repositioning Zakat Management in Indonesia in the Perspective of Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 1 (2024): 495, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjkh.v8i1.19637>.

⁶¹ Jum'ah, *Tārikh Uṣūl Al-Fiqh*.

appropriate. Consider, for instance, luxury private cars or vehicle collections. At first glance, a car is an expensive asset, yet a privately used car does not reproduce and is typically used for personal need rather than investment. For that reason, most scholars do not obligate zakat on personal vehicles because they do not fulfill the *'illah* of zakat on wealth, namely productive growth, unless the vehicles are used as income-generating assets or are held as investment for resale.⁶² This illustrates methodological caution. Not everything valuable is automatically subject to *qiyās*. The principles of justice and the *maqāṣid* of the Sharia must also be guarded in every analogy, so that the analogy does not create disproportionate burdens or deviate from the aims of the law. The maxim *lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār* (no harm and no reciprocating harm) functions as a limiting guide. For that reason, contemporary jurists often emphasize *ijtihād jamā'ī* (collective reasoning) through institutions such as the Bahtsul Masail body within NU and the fatwa processes of MUI, so that multiple dimensions can be considered when deciding rulings on modern assets.⁶³

Finally, a historically sensitive *fiqh* methodology attends to the substance behind texts. The history of camels within *fiqh* teaches that behind every legal object there are values being pursued, such as justice, welfare, resilience, and social stability. Contemporary *fiqh* needs to excavate those values and apply them to new contexts, while maintaining respect for textual limits and the authority of *ijtihād*. In this way, Islamic law remains relevant and flexible while still authentic and faithful to its spirit. Camels may no longer be dominant in the modern world, yet the value logic represented by camels continues to live within Islamic economic principles concerning assets, wealth, and social responsibility across Muslim societies in diverse settings.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study directly addresses the main question of why camels held such an exceptionally high socio-economic and cultural position in classical Arab society, to the extent that they repeatedly appeared as a medium of value in early Islamic legal practice. The answer lies in the camel's position as the most valuable and most functional asset within the structure of Arab life. Camels were economically productive assets, served as mobile capital, sustained survival in desert environments, and at the same time functioned as symbols of honor and social status. For that reason, the appearance of camels in normative hadith reports does not stem merely from their physical characteristics, but from their role as the highest standard of value that was recognized and understood by early Muslim society. The use of camels as a unit of valuation was a normative strategy that aligned with social realities at the moment when Islamic norm-setting took shape.

Social practices involving camels were then incorporated into the construction of early *fiqh* through a process of selective and rational appropriation. The Prophet Muḥammad and

⁶² Issam Tlemsani et al., "Revisiting Zakat with a Distribution of Weighted Shapley Value," *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 16, no. 6 (2023): 1141–58, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMEFM-11-2022-0430>.

⁶³ Ahmad Zahro, *Tradisi intelektual NU: Lajnah Bahtsul Masa'il, 1926-1999*, Cet. 1 (LKIS, 2004); Ansori Ansori, "Position of Fatwa in Islamic Law: The Effectiveness of MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah Fatwas," *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam Dan Kemanusiaan* 22, no. 1 (2022): 53–72, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v22i1.53-72>; Wahidul Anam and Mubaidi Sulaeman, "Law, Ethics, and Hadith Ahkam: An Analysis of Fatwa MUI in the Perspective of Progressive Interpretation," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 (2024): 1023–53, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i2.21594>.

the Companions did not abolish established local traditions such as camel-based *diyāt*, livestock charity, animal sacrifice, and high-value *mahr* (marital dower). Instead, they reorganized these practices within an Islamic framework of values. The legal orientation shifted from mere social custom toward worship and social responsibility, while preserving the relevance of the objects through which those obligations were carried out. This finding indicates that early *fiqh* was reformist rather than revolutionary in the sense of severing tradition entirely. It also underlines that many Islamic legal provisions emerged from specific contexts while carrying universal principles that operate behind them. A socio-historical reading of camels further shows that camels functioned as a kind of social currency in early Arab society. They became a measure of honor in *diyāt*, an indicator of wealth in zakat and almsgiving, a symbol of piety in sacrifice, and the finest form of gift in personal relations such as *mahr*. By affirming these functions, Islamic teaching emphasized that obligation and sacrifice should be directed toward what a community regards as most valuable within its social life. It is this standard of value that gave normative meaning to the use of camels in early Islamic law.

The concept of assets should be read through their socio-economic function rather than through their material form alone. This historical analysis provides a methodological basis for evaluating modern assets, such as financial instruments, investments, and digital assets, as *māl* when they perform value functions comparable to camels in their historical setting. Even so, such analogical reasoning must remain bounded by *naṣṣ* (authoritative textual evidence), *maqāṣid al-shari‘ah* (the objectives of Sharia), and collective *ijtihād* so that legal relevance does not expand in a careless or arbitrary manner. This study also has limitations, since it relies on literature-based inquiry and conceptual analysis without field research that could trace the continuity of similar value structures within contemporary Muslim communities. Its focus on camels likewise requires caution in generalizing to other cultural settings. Future research should broaden the object of analysis to other assets in Islamic history, such as gold, silver, or agrarian commodities, in order to enrich a more contextual and comparative methodology for legal analogy.

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