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## Women's prohibitions during hajj season in Sabaic inscriptions

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### Abstract

This article explores the role of women during Hajj season as depicted in Sabaic inscriptions and Arabic sources. Prior to Islam, women were restricted from participating in Hajj if they were impure. However, Sabaic inscriptions suggest that women did partake in Hajj during the pre-Islamic era, albeit with lesser involvement than men. This discrepancy could be due to the challenging nature of the rituals involved. Additionally, the article covers some of the prohibitions that must be observed during the Hajj, such as refraining from hunting and not harming those carrying weapons. In summary, this article examines the participation of women in Hajj based on Sabaic inscriptions and Arabic sources. It reveals that women were restricted from Hajj if they were impure during the pre-Islamic era, but Sabaic inscriptions suggest that they still participated to some extent. The article also highlights some prohibitions during the Hajj, such as refraining from hunting and not harming those carrying weapons.

**Keywords:** Hajj, women, prohibitions, pre-islamic, sabaic inscriptions, rituals

### Introduction

#### Mention of women's pilgrimage in Arabic sources

Hajj is "the intention absolutely," and the arguments of so-and-so "I meant," and the Hajj is "the intention of most," and the Hajj is "the abundance of difference and hesitation." The pilgrimage of the sons of so-and-so is considered valid "if they prolong the difference to him," and the arguments of so-and-so if you come to him time after time, "it was said the pilgrimage of the house because they come to him every year <sup>[1]</sup>."

(Al-Mankhal Al-Saadi said: Wa ash-hadu min 'Awf huloolan kathiran  
 Yahjounu sabba al-zubruqani al-muz'afaran.)

"I witness from Aouf many arrivals

They visit the Zabraqan and Al-Muzaffarah during Hajj", "In Arabic sources, the mention of women's pilgrimage":

The Hajj in pre-Islamic Arabic tradition is mentioned with regard to the prohibition on women's participation in the Hajj rituals if they are in a state of impurity. This is consistent with the intense reverence of the pre-Islamic Arabs for their idols, as women in a state of menstruation were not allowed to approach them or perform purification with them, but rather stood next to them.

The strongest evidence of this prohibition when committing immorality and its consequent impurity in the houses of worship, especially with regard to the sanctity of the Hajj rituals, is what the narrators reported happened to Asaf and Na'ila with what they committed of immorality inside the Kaaba during their Hajj, and the divine punishment that befell them, as they were transformed as a punishment for their sin." <sup>[2]</sup> So that the pre-Islamic Arab could be assured of purity, he did not allow himself to indulge with women, and this was affirmed by pre-Islamic poetry. Perhaps what Al-Nabigha meant by "religion" in this poem was Hajj. Al-Nabigha Al-Dhubyani said: "hayyāka waddun <sup>[3]</sup> fa-innā lā yahillu lanā / lahū an-nisā'i

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1 Al-Zubaidi, Muhammad Murtada (d. 1205 AH) in Taj al-'Arus. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr. (Taj: HJ)

2 Al-Kalbil: 19; Ibn Hisham, Abdullah 1995, Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiyah, Vol. 1, edited by Mustafa al-Saqqa and others, Beirut. (Al-Sirah, Ibn Hisham, Vol. 1, 1995: 117).

3 In another reading, "My Lord" (Diwan al-Nayigah al-Thubian, Beirut, al-Maktabah al-Thaqafiyah, Karam al-Bustani. (Diwan al-Nabighah: 101).

wa-inna d-dīnu <sup>[4]</sup> qad 'azamā <sup>[5]</sup>. "(Salute to you, O Wadd,) for it is not permissible for us to indulge with women, and religion (has determined so)."

The pre-Islamic Arab also played music about women and pleasures during times of war, as mentioned by Al-Akhtal Al-Tghlibi:<sup>6</sup>(Qawmun idha harabu shaddu ma'azirahum 'an al-nisaa'i walaw baatat bi-ath-haar). "People, when they go to war, tighten their belts (abstain) from women, even if they are the purest." This reflects the pre-Islamic Arab's concern with purity during religious rituals and times of conflict.

After discussing women's participation in Hajj during the pre-Islamic era, we will now turn to what the Sabaic Inscriptions tell us about women's participation in Hajj. In a previous study, three words were mentioned in the Sabaic Inscriptions that were understood to have implications for Hajj. These words are "H-W-F-R," "H-D-R," and "H-J."

The first word, "H-W-F-R," appears in various forms in the Sabaic Inscriptions, including as an active verb meaning "performed Hajj, celebrated a feast," as an infinitive form "performing Hajj," and as a noun "pilgrimage."<sup>7</sup>

The second word, "H-D-R," appears in several forms in the Sabaic Inscriptions, including as two active verbs "performed Hajj or visit, celebrated a feast, established a festival for the god," and as a noun "Hajj, visit, celebration." "H-D-R" can also have another meaning, "presented or brought near."<sup>8</sup>

The third word, "H-J," appears in the Sabaic Inscriptions as a noun meaning "pilgrimage, the Hajj" and as an active verb "performed the Hajj."

Another phrase worth noting is "H-R-M H-M-W," which means "the period of Ihram" or "the period of prohibition," which may also refer to Hajj<sup>9</sup>.

In summary, the Sabaic Inscriptions suggest that women participated in Hajj during the pre-Islamic era, and the words used in these inscriptions imply that Hajj was an important ritual for the Sabaeans people.

The northern part of the Arabian Peninsula is not isolated from its southern region, as the culture of the Arabian Peninsula is consistent in religious aspects. The cultural model reminds us of the limited role that women played in Hajj rituals. Hajj held a sacred position for the Sabaeans, and they established instructions that no one could violate in performing the Hajj rituals or indulge in activities that went against these instructions. Anyone who violated these instructions would face a specific punishment for their actions. These prohibitions took various forms, some of which pertained to women.

4 Interpreted here to mean "Hajj" (Diwan al-Nabighah: 101, note 5).

5 Abd al-Rahman, Nasrat 1985, Reality and Myth in the Poetry of Abu Dhu'aib al-Jahili, Amman-Jordan, Dar al-Fikr for Publishing and Distribution). (Abd al-Rahman 1985: 129).

6 Quraishi, Abu Zaid Muhammad ibn Abi al-Khattab (d. 170 AH) 1978, Jamharat Ash'ar al-Arab, Beirut, Dar al-Masira. (Quraishi 1978: 172).

7 The Sabaean Dictionary: 157; compare Lundin, A. 1987, Sabaean Dictionary Some Lexical Notes, Tayhadica, Research on Pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions offered by his colleagues to Professor A.F.L. Beeston, Paul Geuthner Orientalist Library, edited by Christian Robin and Muhammad Bafaqih, pp. 49-56. (Lundin 1987: 55-56).

8 The Sabaean Dictionary: 66.

9 The Sabaean Dictionary: 71.

We did not come across any inscriptions that clearly indicate that women were specifically obligated to perform the Hajj rituals, except in one inscription. It is likely that the person who made the offering in this inscription ordered his wives and sons to perform the Hajj to "Ilmuqahim" in al-Muharram. This inscription mentions the people who are obliged to perform Hajj, including women and their children. Perhaps this inscription, Ja 669/14-16, is the only one that pertains to women and orders them to perform the Hajj among the inscriptions. This falls under the reasons for Hajj in the context of gratitude and appreciation to God <sup>[10]</sup>.

### Ja 669 <sup>[11]</sup> Lines 9-16

#### Transliteration

mw/ bn m/ dkr m/ wšft w/ 'l  
mqh/ km h n m w/ yldn/ lh  
mw/ bn m/ wyhyn/ fyh qny  
nn/ šlm m/ wmsnd m/ šrf m/ w  
šlm m/ dđ hb n/ wyh sl nn  
tn y/ twrn <sup>12</sup> / bk lwn m/ w lh  
wfrn n/ 'tt hm w/ wbnhm w  
'dy/ mħrmn/ . . . . .

#### Translation

A male child was born, and they made a vow  
To Ilmuqah when a child is born to him,  
A son will come to life and offer  
A statue and a supporting structure from the section  
A gilded statue and they shall come close to him in devotion  
Two bulls, according to the ritual, and  
His wives and sons must perform the Hajj  
To the temple <sup>[13]</sup> (. . . . .).  
In the inscription RES 4176, there is an indication of the presence of women in the Hajj ritual when the deity T'LB ordered his followers to perform the Hajj for him in Al-Mahram <sup>[14]</sup>. This inscription confirms the prohibition of touching women and the order for their seclusion during the Hajj in two specific locations: "MT" and "'TM". They were known as the group of "'LB" <sup>[15]</sup>, perhaps distinguished by

<sup>10</sup> See Al-Qudra and Sadaqa 2004, The Hajj Ceremony in the Sabaean Inscriptions, Studies, Humanities and Social Sciences, Volume 31, Issue 1: 232-254. (Al-Qudra and Sadaqa 2004: 237-238).

<sup>11</sup> Ja 669/ 14-16 - and it is one of the last inscriptions in which the god "Ilmuqah" is mentioned in the temple of Awam, Von Wissmann, H. 1964 Himyar, Ancient History, Le Muséon, 77, 3-4, pp. 429-495. (Von Wissmann 1964: 491-492); Bafghi, Muhammad 1985, The History of Ancient Yemen, Beirut-Lebanon, Arab Institute for Studies. (Bafghi 1985: 149; Sadaqa 1994: 87).

<sup>12</sup> Dual form in the nominative case, and in this case, it matches the singular form with the article. The context in this case helps us distinguish that (Beeston 1995, Southern Arabic Inscription Rules, "Writings of Al-Musnad", Irbid-Jordan, translated by Rafat Hazeem. (Beeston 1995, paragraph 14, number 6).

<sup>13</sup> See Beeston, A.F.L. 1884b Sabaic Grammar. JSS, Monograph 6. Manchester: University of Manchester. (Beeston 1984b: 15)

<sup>14</sup> "The seclusion of women is meant for purification, and in pre-Islamic poetry, when the mention of women is associated with religion and the mention of deities, frivolity with women becomes illegitimate. As the poet al-Nabigha al-Dhubyani said, and others abstain from pleasures in times of war, as mentioned by al-Akhtal al-Taglabi."

<sup>15</sup> RES 4176/ 7.

wearing linen clothing, symbols of strength <sup>[16]</sup>, or being among the chosen ones <sup>[17]</sup>. Women were required to seclude themselves on the seventh day of the religious celebration "Dḥṣr <sup>[18]</sup>", while staying in the sanctuary, and this ban continued until the pilgrims left the sites of "TM" and "'TMN" <sup>[19]</sup>. The context of the prohibition of touching women in these locations indicates that leaving and standing in these places was a Hajj ritual for them, as the act of intercourse was prohibited even during their departure (the "Ifādah").

Among what confirms the continuation of such prohibition until the late Sabean period is what was mentioned in one of the expiatory inscriptions in the context of the Hajj ritual and confession of the sin "that a woman was approached (had intercourse) by a man on the third day of Hajj, and this is a sin for which she deserved confession and expiation <sup>[20]</sup>. In another inscription from the same period, one can draw inspiration from taking some unauthorized acts and attributing them to women as a participant in what the man committed, a man who approached a woman during the period of Ihram, and another who was menstruating with her sons, as well as entering a woman who is impure due to postpartum bleeding, and also soiling her clothes, and sprinkling her with semen. This required atonement and confession <sup>[21]</sup>, which falls under the category of prohibition and taboos for the ritual of Hajj; the prohibition of women from performing this ritual during menstruation <sup>[22]</sup>, and not performing the required ablution is considered a violation of the legitimacy of the Hajj <sup>[23]</sup>, and in that case, the expiatory and confession ritual must be performed for the deity to expiate for their sin <sup>[24]</sup>. And what the inscription shows is the period of Hajj, which is at least three days <sup>[25]</sup>. This confirms that purity is one of the conditions for the Hajj ritual for women, and here she shares with the man in this condition for the proper performance of the Hajj ritual.

16 Based on what is mentioned in Safaitic: "War'a bi Ruz, Wa Mudbir, Wa Ba'lub. Wara'a Bi Roud wa Sahra'a, Wa bi-Ardin Salibah" (WH 784). In Arabic, the word 'Alab' also refers to traces and marks (al-Athar wa al-Haz, al-Lisan al-Arabi).

17 "Sadakah, Ibrahim. (1994). The Gods of Saba as Appearing in the Marib Inscriptions. Unpublished master's thesis, Yarmouk University, Irbid. (Sadakah 1994: 89). Compare with Beeston, A.F.L. (1937). Sabaic Inscriptions. Oxford. (Beeston 1937: 68); Ghul, M. (1984). The Pilgrimage at Itwat. Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies, 14, 33-41. (Ghul 1984: 36).

18 Beeston 1956: 8.

19 RES 4176/7.

20 CIH 533/ 1-4. See Al-Ma'ani and Sadakah, "Al-Khatiyah Wal-Takfeer Fil-Nuqoosh Al-Saba'iyyah," *Dirasat Tarikhiyyah*, a refereed quarterly scientific journal specializing in Arab history, Issues 61-62, pp. 3-64. (Al-Ma'ani and Sadakah 1997: 18, 52).

<sup>21</sup> Haram 40 = CIH 523

<sup>22</sup> CIH 533/3; see RES 4176/7; Sadakah 1994 to show the sanctity of abstaining from sexual intercourse within holy places and considering it a violation of their sanctity. This is supported by the verse from the Qur'an, "And do not approach them while you are in retreat in the mosques. These are the limits of Allah, so do not approach them" (2:187). It is mentioned in the interpretation of the Qur'an that "Ali ibn Abi Talha reported from Ibn Abbas that this applies to a man who observes Itikaf in the mosque during Ramadan or at any other time. Allah has forbidden him to have sexual relations with women, whether by night or by day, until he has completed his Itikaf" (Ibn Kathir, vol. 1, 1980: 224).

<sup>23</sup> CIH 533/ 3-5.

<sup>24</sup> CIH 533/ 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> CIH 533/ 3-4.

It is useful here to summarize what was mentioned in the article published by Al-Qudra and Saddiqah, which highlighted other prohibitions that should be adhered to, including not hunting and staining clothes with blood and impurities, and not hurting those who carry weapons <sup>[26]</sup>. The prohibition also extends to animals that are associated with the Hajj, such as hunting and chasing camels. The Quran also prohibits killing game, as Allah says, "O you who have believed, do not kill game while you are in the state of ihram. And whoever of you kills it intentionally, the penalty is an equivalent from sacrificial animals to what he killed, as judged by two just men among you as an offering [to Allah] delivered to the Ka'bah" (Quran 5:95) <sup>[27]</sup>. The god "Ta'lab" also strongly prohibited the sale of a pregnant camel <sup>[28]</sup> or a sacrificial camel <sup>[29]</sup> There are also hadiths that indicate the prohibition of selling livestock, as the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, forbade the sale of "mushyaa'ah" (sheep that are led and follow the herd) in sacrifice <sup>[30]</sup>, and in Tafsir al-Taj al-Arus, "mushyaa'ah" refers to sheep that need to be led by someone <sup>[31]</sup>. Setting hunting traps is also prohibited <sup>[32]</sup>.

In the atmosphere of worship during the pilgrimage, both the individual and the place have sanctity, and violating that sanctity is considered a sin. Therefore, those who harm someone carrying a weapon during the celebrations of Eid or Hajj have to pay a fine or swear an oath of expiation <sup>[33]</sup>. Similarly, those who defile their weapons and have blood on their clothes must also pay a fine. If someone repeats this offense, they are further sully the sanctity of the temple, and must spend money on food, as well as pay for sour milk, honey, and date paste as expiation <sup>[34]</sup>.

### Why didn't women show the same level of interest in Hajj as men did?

It is notable that women were not as involved in the Hajj ritual as men, and this may be due to the difficulties that accompany the practices of this rite. The inscription CIH 82 describes the difficulty of what the pilgrims go through during the Hajj rites, and the owner of the inscription was wounded in the temple due to violence from men <sup>[35]</sup>. This sheds light on the fact that the general characteristic of the Hajj ritual and perhaps the pilgrims is overcrowding and intensity <sup>[36]</sup>, which may explain the lack of mention of women in this inscription <sup>[37]</sup>. Another possibility is that the

26 See: As an Example in den altsüdarabischen Inschriften (mit dem Versuch ihrer Identifizierung und Lokalisierung), in *ABADYIV*. Mainz: Philipp von Zabern. pp. 1-62. (al-Sheiba 1987: 53; Arbach 1993: 87; RES .(2 /3535 ;1 /3022

27 Ghul, M. 1984 The Pilgrimage at Itwat, *PSAS* ,14 .pp. 33-41. (Ghul 1984: (34

28 Ghul, M. 1984 The Pilgrimage at Itwat, *PSAS* ,14 .pp. 33-41. (Ghul 1984: (34

29 RES .6 /4176

<sup>30</sup> "Sunan Abi Dawud, Hadith number 2421; Musnad Ahmad, Hadith number 16994."

<sup>31</sup> . Al-Zubaidi: Sh Ya A.

32 RES .7 /4176

33 CIH .2-1 /548

34 CIH :13 ,12 ,2 ,1 /548, see al-Ma'ani wa-Sadaqah. :29-27 :1997 .57-56

35 This indicates that the rituals and ceremonies of the Hajj are performed, at least in part, inside the temple.

36. This is apparent in the actions of the Muslim pilgrim during the Hajj.

37 CIH 82/ 6-8.

people referred to in the Hajj were not only men, but also the free men among them, as we see in a later inscription, Ja 669, which mentions that the wives there were free women. The point to consider is that perhaps the women mentioned were few, and they were servants of the temple and the deity.

Women were not as involved in the Hajj ritual as men, perhaps due to the challenges associated with the practices. The CIH 82 inscription describes the difficulty of the Hajj pilgrims in performing these rituals, and the author of the inscription was wounded in the temple due to the violence of the men. This sheds light on the general characteristic of the Hajj rituals and perhaps the pilgrims, which is overcrowding and harshness, and this may explain the absence of women in this inscription. Another possibility is that those involved in the Hajj were not only men but also free men, as we see in a later inscription. The wives in the Ja 669 inscription is free women, and this should be considered, as perhaps the women mentioned in it were few and were servants of the temple and the deity.

This leads us to look at some other Hajj inscriptions that do not mention women as participants in the Hajj rituals. For example, the Ja 651 inscription is a message from the king to Marib to monitor the Hajj, which involves the hardship of travel and the execution of related tasks. In a similar inscription, the Iryan 3 Supplement B, a mission is mentioned to the city of Yathrib to witness the Hajj of the deity Sin. In the Qatabani Doe 2 inscription of the Hajj, a person of high status is mentioned who came as a warrior and pilgrim to the temple of the deity Suna. He was accompanied by slaves and "Shamans." The slaves here are not involved in the Hajj as they are not involved in the war, as per reference to one of the Hajj inscriptions, the CIH 548, which refers to an armed campaign within the temple, and whoever harms them must perform the Hajj<sup>[38]</sup>. According to Abdullah Al-Shaybah's observation, it is not permissible for the followers to carry weapons, as their inscriptions do not indicate such a thing<sup>[39]</sup>.

This study shows that the performance of the Hajj ritual came in the form of a command from the head of the household, while in the other inscriptions it came in the form of past tense verbs or nominal forms. The ceremonies of this ritual are held when pilgrims go to the gods "Ilmuqah" and "Dhushamuy" and their temples during the season of "Abhiy".

Perhaps the Hajj ritual was performed by men, and maybe by women, but to a lesser extent. This may be due to the difficulties that pilgrims face in performing the Hajj rituals, which require strength that men possess more than women. The inscriptions that mention the terms "hazr" and "hawfr" do not mention women as participants in this ritual, except for Ja 669. It can be said that the early and middle period inscriptions almost lack this matter.

The study showed that there are some prohibitions on the pilgrim that must not be committed and their commission is considered sinful and a violation of the sanctity of the Hajj. Approaching women/sexual intercourse with women is forbidden, and menstruating women are prohibited from being present in the sacred precincts during the Hajj season, with expiation required for this sin.

<sup>38</sup> "See Al-Ma'ani and Sadaqa 1997: 27-29; Al-Qudrah and Sadaqa 2004: 237, 245."

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

It appears that the terms "حظر" and "هوفر" were used in different periods of the Sabaean inscriptions, while the term "حج" was used in the later inscriptions. The inscriptions that mention the god "نوس موي" come from the inscriptions of Himyar, as the previous study showed, as well as "حرم هو" which may have been used to refer to the Hajj. The CIH 548 inscription deviates from that as it dates back to the period when the royal title of the King of Saba was used.

## Conclusion

The study of the Sabaic inscriptions provides valuable insight into the participation of women in the Hajj during the pre-Islamic era. While there are no clear inscriptions that indicate that women were specifically obligated to perform the Hajj rituals, there is evidence of women participating in Hajj rituals, and the words used in these inscriptions imply that Hajj was an important ritual for the Sabaean people. However, women were not as involved in the Hajj ritual as men, which may be due to the difficulties associated with these rituals. The general characteristic of the Hajj rituals and pilgrims is overcrowding and intensity, which may explain the absence of women in some inscriptions.

The pre-Islamic Arab played music about women and pleasures during times of war, but the Sabaean inscriptions indicate that Hajj was a sacred ritual for the Sabaeans, and they established instructions that no one could violate in performing the Hajj rituals or indulge in activities that went against these instructions. These prohibitions took various forms, some of which pertained to women. The context of the prohibition of touching women in specific locations during Hajj indicates that leaving and standing in these places was a Hajj ritual for them, as the act of intercourse was prohibited even during their departure.

This study also reveals other prohibitions associated with the Hajj, such as not hunting and staining clothes with blood and impurities, and not hurting those who carry weapons. Animals that are associated with the Hajj, such as camels, were also not to be hunted or chased. The Quran prohibits killing game while in the state of Ihram, and the god "Ta'lab" strongly prohibited the sale of a pregnant camel or a sacrificial camel. It is clear that the Hajj is a sacred ritual that requires purity and devotion, and that those who violate its sanctity face punishment.

In conclusion, while there is evidence of women's participation in Hajj rituals during the pre-Islamic era, they were not as involved as men. The Sabaean inscriptions reveal that Hajj was a sacred ritual for the Sabaeans, and that strict instructions were established that no one could violate. The Hajj is a sacred ritual that requires purity and devotion, and those who violate its sanctity face punishment.

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