The Role of Trade Transport Routes in Economic Growth throughout History in Bisha Province: A Historical and Analytical Study

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: To identify the role of trade transport routes in economic growth throughout history in Bisha Province. Methods/Statistical Analysis: The study followed two approaches; the first one is the historical approach, which seeks to study the ancient and historical phenomena and linking them with the current problems. The second approach is the analytical approach to analyze the documents that related to the subject matter of the study, and data extraction that may contribute in answering the main question of the study. The study concluded that ‘Asir Region publically and Bisha Province privately were linked together with a strong cultural linkage with the kingdoms of South Arabian Peninsula. Bisha Province has an important historical presence, as it is one of the richest places with heritage and archaeological places. Two trade routes were famous in Arabian Peninsula that connects eastern and western sides of Asia; these trade routes are Incense trade route and Al Hareer Route. Bisha was one of the most important trade routes passages that came from south to north in its way to the civilization of Mesopotamia, The Levant, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea. The paper used 26 of previous studies as references.

Findings: We found on the sides of the trade routes of Wadi Bisha the emergence of stations and trade centers that have been developed into villages and cities where people were aggregated along the trade route to provide service to the conveys in terms of food and drink also they act as a trade guide. Researchers mentioned that Bisha Province and its villages and cities, were an old and thriving Arab town, because it is located along the southern sector of the path of the historical Incense pathway that was linking the cultural centers at the south and the north of Arabian Peninsula together. The region seems to get a great benefit from this trade so markets are spread. People got rich and they got benefit from this in reclamation and cultivation of their lands. They build dams and facilitate the methods to get benefits from valleys' water, however most of them extinct as a result of time factors where future archaeological scans may result in a clearer picture of these sites. Bisha has an important role in successive Islamic ages due to its strategic location on the trade routes and on Yemeni Hajj routes, it is known by highest Yemeni Hajj route or known by Najdian Hajj route that links between San’a in Yemen with Makkah in Hejaz. Bisha and its cities related closely to transportation and tribe’s movement even it is a trade tribe or a Hajj tribe, the fertile soil and abundant water in the tribe stations had been helped in the flourishing of these routes. Improvements/Applications: The study had recommended the importance of studying historical economic diversity in Bisha Province, as well as the possibility of benefiting from this study in the future planning of the railway lines that could be operated in the region, based on the old routes that have been tracked according to its facility and simplicity.

Keywords: ‘Asir Region, Bisha Province, Historical Approach, Trade in Ancient Times, Trade Routes, Wadi Bisha
1. **Introduction**

The nations depended at ancient times on the fields of trade and economy on route and maritime transport throughout the primary route transport that were commonly used at this time, which has the effect in the presence of the human being in many regions of Earth without others. Also it had produced human societies that based on these routes even these routes are maritime pathways, ports or land routes that pass across cities.

One of the most important effects of the prosperity of trade and economy in the ancient world is land routes that were used to transport merchandise between human societies at this time, and that affects these societies and converts them from just a human aggregation to cities and villages that are more organized and more developed.

Perhaps one of the most important cities that affected by transport routs is Bisha Province, where its location had contributed too much in its importance growing within the history in the fields of trade and economy, where it was a crossing point of trade according to its site that link between north of Arabian Peninsula and Hejaz.

A brief will be reviewed about Bisha Province, also talking about the importance of ancient transport routes will took place, in addition to reviewing some of it, in addition to talk about Bisha Province at ancient times throughout its location and its routes that leading to it, and also talking about the importance of these routes in the fields of trade and economy at ancient times and its role in the prosperity of commerce and economy in Bisha Province will took place.

2. **Study Problems**

Throughout the researcher specialization in the field of history, and throughout her going through about many literature reviews in the field of history of land transport and its effects in economy and trade, in addition to the importance that Bisha Province had got over the history as a crossing point to the trade routes at ancient times, the researcher feels the importance of studying the history of the province from the side of ancient trade routes throughout the examination of the role of these routes in trade and economic growth of Bisha Province along its history, so the study seeks to answer the main question which stated that the role of trade transport routes in economic growth throughout history in Bisha province.

3. **Methodology**

Based on the study problem, its main question and its aims, the researcher used two approaches the first one is the historical approach which seeks to study the ancient and historical phenomena and linking them with the current problems, the second approach is the analytical approach that analyzes the content to analyze the documents that related to the subject matter of the study and data extraction that may contribute in answering the main question of the study.

4. **Discussion**

4.1 **Brief about Bisha Province**

Bisha is a precious part that is rich with its civilization, its goodness and its people, Bisha the province located at far north-western of ‘Asir Region in the south-western of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it is fenced with the following administrative regions: Makkah at the north, Al Baha at the west, Tathlith Governorate at the east and Al-Namas Governorate and Khamis Mushait city at the south and these what gives it an additional value. From latitude and longitude, ‘Asir Region is located between the two latitudes of 1920 and 2015 at the north, and between the two longitudes of 4300 and 41400 at the east. Bisha located within ‘Asir where it forms an administrative unit within other administrative units, one of most known.

Bisha the province located at the northern part of the southern region, Bisha the city is carrying the name of Wadi Bisha that spreads over its banks and over the edges of the valleys, which are more than two hundred and fifty
villages, including. Bisha is located according to Global Positioning System between the latitude of 19°59′44″ and the longitude of 42°36′23″.

Bisha Province is bordered in the books of Muslim geographers from the north with the plateau of Najd as it is its southern border, Bisha and what it includes from villages and cities in some books of Muslim geographers are part of the plateau of as in the book of the characteristics of Arabian Peninsula for off five stages from Makkah and it has more palms and offsets.

Bisha Province climate is almost similar as it is a continental climate where the temperature increases in summer to reach 44 degree Celsius in some cases, while it decrease in winter to reach about ten degree Celsius, the province land publically is dry and this increases as we move to the east due to its descent towards the east and rain is little, Wadi Bisha is considered to be one of the largest valleys, as the valleys that pour its water reach twenty five valleys come from the mountains of.

4.2 Historical Importance of Bisha Province Location

Historical importance of Bisha Province location arises from that ‘Asir Region publically and Bisha Province privately were linked together with a strong cultural linkage with the kingdoms of South Arabian Peninsula like about twelve century that had been extended between the sixth century BC to the sixth century AD, it had the same strength of relations with the Kingdom of Kinda that founded by the Arab tribes from in the fourth century BC and it was continued till the fourth century AD.

Bisha Province represents an important historical presence as it has historical sites even before or after Islam like temples it also kept to us the archaeological Islamic masjids, tombs that came back to different ages, in addition to the residential houses and the military installations from castles, towers and fortresses, these villages on the banks of the valley were naturally fortified sites, in the various ages, human being get benefit from this natural fortified in the construction of military buildings, whose its architecture reflected the style of construction and the tools used during the construction process, these buildings had multiple floors where cedar wood had been used, and palms leaves had been used in the construction of roofs and non-trimmed stones in the construction of tenors (courses) and covered with mud that is mixed with straw, names of these fortresses includes fortress of castle and palaces like.

As for the religious architecture, there were religious establishments in Bisha that were established in both pre-Islamic and post-Islamic eras, such as temples in pre-Islamic era. The role of worship played a major role in the political, social and economic aspects in regard with its link to global trade. Moreover, one of the people interested in the archeology of Bisha Province believes that the most important and beautiful Arab temples are located on the trade and land routes, such as the temple of located in Tabala as most researchers believes so, in square-shaped mosques consisting of an open sky courtyard and a covered chapel with a semicircular niche. Islamic cemeteries are one of the religious buildings that represent pre-Islamic periods. Pre-Islamic cemeteries were characterized by having chambers that rise above ground level with varying heights ranging between half a meter to two meters, with openings to bring the dead from the side of the sunrise. In perhaps this is related to the worship of the stars and planets referred to by the Holy Quran in more than one location.

5. Importance of Trade Routes in the Arabian Peninsula

There is no doubt that trade comes at the forefront of the professions practiced by Arabs since ancient times, and the expansion of this activity after the emergence of several kingdoms and Arab countries, which dates back to the first half of the first century BC. This activity is reflected in the cultural activities practiced by the people of the region such as agriculture and industry. Arabs prefer land routes on sea routes and believe they are safer. However, there are seaports along the Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula. They occupy an important position in terms of location which enabled it to be a trade route with East and West in the trade convoys coming from
India and China, or those coming from Mesopotamia and Persia or the hyphen with Mediterranean.1

It is obvious that trade in the Arabian Peninsula was not only an economic status but closely related to the religious status during and after the prehistoric periods.2 The trade caravan travels in certain known months of the year. Such travel was from one of the temples that are specialized in trade seasons in the south of the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, the passage of the trade caravan in Asir region and the valleys of Bisha points above the economic indicator on the importance of the region religiously in the former periods of pre-Islamic era.

The pottery remains found in trade stations or along trade routes indicate links with the slavery civilization of Mesopotamia dating back to the seventh and sixth millennium BC.3 The trade routes reflect not only the economic and religious status, but also the social and cultural dimensions. The pottery of the slaves and the pearl trade are signs of the existence of slavery civilization in the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula. The disappearance of this pottery and pearl trade indicates the decline of this civilization in the east of the Arabian Peninsula and its transformation into southern Mesopotamia. This refers to the issue of migrations between the ancient nations of the Arabian Peninsula from its south towards north.6 Such trade caravan left important indicators of civilization reflect trade interaction in the region with the caravans of different nations. Meanwhile, drawings and rock inscriptions are considered as indicators of this interaction in prehistoric periods.4

Trade in the Arabian Peninsula was largely dependent on land routes as it was divided into two parts:

- **Main routes.**
- **Sub-routes.**

This has led to the linkage between parts of the Arabian Peninsula and a network of transportation, such routes have factors that contributed to its prosperity, including:

- **Water availability.**
- **Availability of feed needed by trade convoys.**
- **Ease of routes and roads.**
- **Provision of security through guides and guards who guard and protect the convoys as they cross their land in exchange for in-kind or material wages from the convicts.**

The province of Bisha had a great share in embracing some of these routes, whether major or subsidiary. As Bisha has played a historical role by its geographical and strategic location.8

6. **Old Trade Route Passing through Asir**

In the history of the Arabian Peninsula, there are two trade routes that link the continent Asia in its eastern and western parts: Incense route and Silk route.

The trade routes passing through the Arabian Peninsula, as we mentioned earlier, were related to the trade of incense, frankincense, spices and silk. These routes were named after their popularity and high prices, in addition to their material value and religious and social status. As they were used in the burial of the dead such as incense and in the social appearance and events such as perfume and silk. These goods held an important value as they linked between the parts of the Arabian Peninsula, the Arabian Peninsula, ancient Iraq, the Egyptian civilization, the civilizations of the Levant and the civilizations of the Mediterranean basin.6

Asir region was part of the south of the Arabian Peninsula in early prehistoric times. It was one of the important cross trade routes from south to north to the civilizations of Mesopotamia, the Levant, Egypt and the Mediterranean.6

There are vital trade routes in Asir, including; the route that pass through the eastern side of South Dhahran. Those routes never stop in the winter due to its distance from valleys routes. Some of them were Tiled floor with stones on either side and had rest areas for travelers and Merchants along of the same, where water, food, shelter, the safe place and all convoy’s needs of camel care requirements is available. Also, it had wells and some of it
remains still can be founded now. The trade routes which passed through Bisha especially and Asir generally and linked between Hijaz and Yemen was used by pilgrims who are coming from Yemen, which give it prosperity, movement and modernization. Thus, some Industries have been flourished in the villages and rest areas which passed by convoys that depended on palm leaf like baskets, mats, brooms, etc.

7. Trade Routes at Pre-Islamic Period in Bisha

Trade routes have been flourished in pre-Islamic period, and affected the life of Arabs in Asir, as it has affected the life of Arabs in all Arabian Peninsula. And there were trade stations and centers in the trade routes of Bisha valley have been developed to villages and cities, where people were gathering to supply services to convoys as food, water, and guidance. Residents were acknowledging of the routes and dangerous areas which qualified them to work as Guides for convoys and its goods. Other benefits has been earned by the Local residents were protecting the convoys from attacks and looting for amount of money. Also they provides services as shelters, food, water, supplies, guidance, and encourage people to settle down in the trade routes sides. Over time, villages and towns with more than 250 villages have been emerged, some of them return to those ancient periods and there remains if the same referred to its existence in the sides of trade routes. This was not limited to Bisha, but the routes were elements of prosperity of some Arabic civilizations in south and north of Arabian Peninsula; in south were kingdoms as Sheba, Ma'in, Himjar, and Hadramaut and in north were as Dedan, Lahyan, Qedarite, and Nabataean. The trade and trade routes were had an important role in kingdoms prosperity; furthermore, the trade played a main role in people lives in pre-Islamic era and becomes a trade station on the route of Hijaz and Yemen. As it knows with trade, the ideas and civilizations emerge.

The Historic Resources noted that Bisha and its villages and cities as Tebala were old and flourished Arabic towns due to its location which was along in southern sector from the ancient Incense trade route which linked between civilized centers in south and north of Arabian Peninsula. Tebala was an important town in Bisha; it was an ancient and historical city famous of literature and historical books. It located in the banks of valley of Tabala among mountains ranges of, and it was the oldest historically town in Bisha located at North West of Bisha. Also, it was flourished when Islam appears, and Tabala was the first Principality of.

The ancient remains of buildings, graves, instruments as pottery and tools from the ancient eras, inscriptions and writings has been contributed to recognize the extent of trade routes and its stations. The Arabic inscriptions have spread in north and south Arabic scripts which known as The Ancient South Arabian script (Musnad). Arabs had learned script from Al-Hirah people then they transferred to Makkah. Also, they quoted from seal industry and add it to Musnad writings. Land and sea Routes of Trading were having culture affects. The region has been had a huge benefit from this trade, which made her spread in markets and people got rich. Which in turn helps in the reclamation of their land and cultivation, build dams, used valleys water by easy ways. However, most of them have been vanished by time factors. Archaeological surveys have shown clearer view of those locations.

Trade routes from north to south of Arabian Peninsula and to Mediterranean coasts in late Roman and Byzantine eras, due to the increasing order of incense for its use in religious purposes and rituals of the dead. People began to interest in incense and its related routes after Alexander the Great has invasion the east. So, it was normal that the movement of different trading conveys has been increased including; the trading route passed through Bisha and its valleys.

8. Bisha Province Trade Routes in Islamic Eras

Studies indicate that the most important, shortest and easiest routes are in the province of Bisha. It played an
important role in the successive Islamic eras due to its strategic location on the trade routes and the routes of the Yemeni pilgrim. Bisha was known as the highest pilgrimage route of Yemen, or the pilgrimage route of Najdi that links between. The importance of this historic route is highlighted in the fact that it is linked to the year of the elephant, where the elephants and armies of Abraha al-Habashi took this route to Makkah to demolish the Kaaba in 570 A.D. Thus, such route was named after the incident, the elephant route. Some researchers point out that this name is incorrect, as this route is older than the date of the incident. It dates back to the reign of King Abi Kerb As‘ad, who ruled between 415-420 A.D or 425-430 A.D. It starts from Shabwa and reaches Najran, then Bir Him. The route is divided up into two branches, one of them leads to Tathlith then Jerash then follow the paths. The evidence of this route still exists in the southern Dhahran.

This route was traveled by Abraha al-Habashi in his campaign against the tribes of Ma‘ad in 537 A.D, as were the armies of Abu Kerb As‘ad, just before Abraha’s army, for nearly a century in his campaign against.

God Almighty has blessed the people of Bisha of entering Islam, as Bisha became under the banner of Islam after the expedition of Qutbah ibn Amir, sent by the prophet Muhammed (PBUH), against the Banu Khath'am tribe in the ninth year of Hijra. The expeditions continued to the Banu Khath'am tribe in Bisha and other neighboring provinces. It was reached by the expedition of Jarir bin Abdullah al-Bagali in the 11th year of Hijra 632 A.D. The routes of the trade caravan of Bbeisha remained in Islamic times as well. Another important role was added to it as a route for pilgrims to the Holy Land. These routes were numerous and varied. Three routes were most known among these routes, which are:

- The mountain route that starts from Sana‘a to Saada, and the convoys take this route passing through the following cities and locations: Al-Araqa, Al-Mugharah, Arenab, Sroum Al-Tiph, Al-Thajah and Bisha from which it travels to Tabala, Qaryah and Kari till it reaches the pilgrimage route of.

- Another important trade route passes through Bisha Province from the Asir region is the lower Hadrami route, which is part of the upper Yemeni pilgrimage route. The geographer, Al Hamdani mentions that it is about eleven miles away from. Mentioned in Geography/Character of Arabic peninsula book by Al Hamdani, the rajaz poem by Al Radaey, in which he mentioned the route of Sana‘a – Makkah. Such route is separated after Najran as of 30 km of it, heading north-west and passing through Bakhsham Al Alani, Jabal Al Mutbaq, Ja‘fra, Hamdah, Jabal Al Rabood, Thalith valley, Jabal Al Farash and Bisha, where it meets with Sa‘ada route, and from there to Taif, Makkah.

On the routes of Asir that passed through Bisha also the routes of Tohamya. Sources indicate that the distance between this route and the Red Sea is a day or a half day, and so is between it and the.

Some of the stations, houses and fountains of the upper pilgrimage route of Yemen that are located on the south of the province of. Many of the remains were discovered along the route in the province of Bisha, in addition to the presence of Islamic writings and rock inscriptions. Through which we can identify the period from the first century until the fifth century A.H. In this context, Ibn Jubayr mentions that pilgrims who come from Bisha to Makkah through this route bring with them for sale various beans and other grains, wheat, cowpea, ghee, honey, raisins and almonds as they improve the lives of the people of the country and the neighboring countries and through which they are able to save some goods which in turn cheapens the prices and flourishes the utilities. Without this advantage, the people of Makkah would have had a hard time living their lives.

Thus, Bisha and its civilizations were closely related to the transportation and the traveling of convoys of both trade convoy and Hajj convoy. The fertile soil and the abundance of water in the convoy stations helped to flourish these routes. The route of was associated with the
Late/ Hussain bin Salama, who died in 402 A.H., where he served as a guide for the pilgrims for fifteen years. The books of newsmen, geographers and Muslim travelers described Bisha as a large-scale great province with a high percentage of population and abundance of water. Many of its palm orchards are in, a main station for pilgrims from the south and south-west of the Arabian Peninsula. Bisha is also known by the geographers as Bisha palm or, in the name of one of its valleys.

9. Results

By seeking to answer the main study question which states The role of trading transport routes in economic growth throughout history in the province of Bisha and the application of the two study approaches selected according to its nature, the study found that the province of Bisha is of great importance in the historical presence, The province of Bisha is of great importance in the historical presence, as it has historical sites both before and after Islam as temples, as well as the preservation of Islamic mosques and the tombs of different ages, in addition to residential homes and military installations of castles, towers and fortresses. These villages, located on the banks of the valley, were naturally fortified sites. They also found that the province of Bisha had a large share in embracing some of these routes, whether major or subsidiary. Bisha played a historical role because of its geographical and strategic location. The trade route passing through Bisha and Asir in general, which links between Hijaz and Yemen, is far from being used as a route for pilgrims coming from Yemen, which gave it the continuity of prosperity, movement and renewal. Therefore, some industries have flourished in the villages and stations passing by the convoys that depend on palm fronds, such as: mats and brooms.

Moreover, the study found that the stations and trade centers located at the sides of the upper routes of Besha valley have developed to be small villages and cities. Where people gather along the road to provide services for the convoy as of food and drinks and guide them to their right destination. In addition, other benefits have been gained by these people in favor of protecting the trade convoy from theft or attacks. Such services encouraged other people to live along the sides of these trade routes leading to establishing small villages and cities exceeding two hundred towns. Such towns still exist and there are some of archaeological remains of stations and villages indicating that they were located on both sides of these routes.

The study also found that the region benefited greatly from this trade. The markets spread and people got richer and they started to reclaim and cultivate their lands, built dams and facilitate the use of the valleys water, but most of them were destroyed by time factors as archaeological surveys have revealed a clearer picture of these sites.

Moreover, the study found that the most important and shortest and easiest route passes in the province of Bisha, as Bisha played an important role in successive Islamic eras because of its strategic location on the trade routes and roads of the upper Yemeni pilgrim route, or through the Hajj Najj pilgrimage route that links between Sanaa in Yemen and Makkah in the Hijaz. In addition, the pilgrims who came from Bisha to Makkah through this route brought with them for sale food and other grains, wheat, cowpea, ghee, honey, raisins and almonds.

10. Conclusions

The study recommends the importance of studying the economic diversity of the province of Bisha historically, as well as the possibility of benefiting from this study in the future planning of the railway lines that can be established in the region based on the old routes that were easy to follow.

11. Acknowledgement

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12. References


