

Compensation and its Effect on Collecting Zakat and the Duties of the Zakat Collector

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Abstract

This article examines the concept of compensation (al-jabrān) in the zakat of camels and its impact on the practice of zakat collection and the duties of zakat officials. It focuses on situations where the prescribed age of camels for zakat is unavailable, and compensation is used to balance the rights of people with low incomes against the capacity of owners of zakat-liable livestock. Using a descriptive–inductive method, the study analyses classical juristic discussions on zakat compensation, clarifies its linguistic and technical meanings, and reviews the differing positions of the major Sunni schools of law regarding its ruling and modalities. The findings show that compensation, grounded in prophetic practice and the Book of Sadaqah, serves as a legally sanctioned means to alleviate hardship and facilitate the collection of zakat on camels, while maintaining fairness between the zakat payer and the beneficiaries.

Keywords: Compensation, Zakat, Camels, Zakat Collector, Islamic Jurisprudence

Introduction

Zakat is one of the fundamental obligations of Islam established by the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and it plays a central role in achieving social balance and solidarity among members of the Muslim community. Classical jurists have therefore devoted significant attention to explaining its rulings, including the types of wealth subject to zakat, the minimum thresholds (nuṣub), and the amounts due from each category, such as livestock, crops, and monetary assets (Abu Habib, 1988; Qal'aji, 1988). Among the livestock categories, zakat on camels occupies a distinctive position because its threshold and rates are precisely defined in prophetic texts, and because it involves specific age-based requirements that may not always be easy to fulfil in practice (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Ibn Rushd, 2004).

The juristic problem addressed in this article arises when the owner of camels is obliged to pay zakat on a specific age of the animal. However, that age is not available in his herd,

creating practical difficulties for both the owner and the zakat collector. In such situations, the Sunnah and juristic literature discuss the principle of compensation (al-jabrān), whereby an animal of a higher or lower age may be given, together with a compensatory payment in sheep or dirhams, or through adjustment of value (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Ibn Qudamah, 1968). This principle reflects Islamic law's concern to remove hardship and facilitate the performance of zakat while preserving the rights of people with low incomes and maintaining the integrity of the prescribed system (Al-Ghazali, 1993; Abu Habib, 1988).

This article therefore addresses the following research questions:

1. What is meant by “compensation” in zakat on camels?
2. What are the reasons for applying compensation in zakat funds?
3. What are the duties of the zakat collector when compensation is applied?

In line with these questions, the study aims to:

1. demonstrate the importance of fulfilling the obligation of zakat on camels;
2. clarify the ruling and mechanisms of compensation in cases of over- or under-payment;
3. highlight how the Sharī'ah seeks to relieve hardship for those obliged to pay zakat and to facilitate its implementation (Abu Habib, 1988; Qal'aji, 1988).

Literature Review

Linguistic and Technical Roots of Compensation

Lexicographical works describe the root j-b-r as carrying meanings such as mending a fracture, doing good to someone, compelling or forcing, and completing or perfecting something (Rida, 1960; Al-Fayumi, n.d.). Ibn Manẓūr explains that al-jabr can mean repairing a broken bone, enriching someone after poverty, or compelling a person to act, and that al-jabrān refers to the amount by which a deficiency is rectified, including in the context of zakat thresholds (Ibn Manzur, s.v. jabr, cited in Rida, 1960). These meanings align with broader lexical discussions of completion (tamām) and perfection (kamāl), where completion refers to the removal of an original deficiency and perfection to the enhancement of qualities after completion (Al-Fayumi, n.d.; Abu Habib, 1988).

In juristic terminology, compensation (al-jabrān) is used to denote the completion or rectification of an obligation due to a deficiency or violation, particularly in contexts such as ḥajj and zakat (Abu Habib, 1988; Al-Ghazali, 1993; Al-Rukbi, n.d.; Qal'aji, 1988). It appears in fiqh manuals as a technical term referring to additional payments or acts that compensate for shortcomings in the performance of an obligatory duty, such as blood sacrifice in ḥajj or monetary adjustment in zakat (Abu Habib, 1988; Al-Ghazali, 1993). This conceptual link between linguistic and juristic meanings underpins the use of compensation in the specific case of zakat on camels.

Juristic Discussions on Zakat of Camels

Classical jurists agree that the minimum threshold for zakat on camels is five, based on the prophetic report that there is no zakat due on fewer than five camels, five awsaq of dates or grain, or five uqiyahs of silver (Ibn Battal, 1988). They also agree on the schedule of obligations: for five camels one sheep is due; for ten, two sheep; for fifteen, three sheep; for twenty, four sheep; and at twenty-five camels the obligation shifts from sheep to camels,

beginning with a one-year-old female (bint makhād), followed by higher ages according to established thresholds (Ibn Battal, 1988). This schedule is documented in the so-called “Book of Sadaqah,” which the Prophet wrote and that Abū Bakr and ‘Umar implemented after him (Ibn Rushd, 2004; Ibn Qudamah, 1968).

However, jurists differed on how to proceed when the required age is not available in the owner’s herd. Some, such as Mālik (as interpreted by Ibn al-Qāsim and Ashhab), held that the owner is obliged to purchase the required amount and present it to the zakat collector, treating absence as equivalent to presence for obligation (Al-Lakhmi, 2011; Ibn Rushd, 2004). Others, including the Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanbalī schools, allowed substitution with an older or younger camel accompanied by a fixed compensation of two sheep or twenty dirhams, as specified in the prophetic texts (Abu al-Khattab, n.d.; Ibn Qudamah, 1968). The Ḥanafī school, by contrast, permitted substitution but treated the difference as a matter of market value rather than fixed compensatory amounts, arguing that the Prophet’s mention of two sheep or twenty dirhams reflected the value difference at his time rather than an eternally fixed figure (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993).

Previous Studies on Compensation in Zakat

Modern critical editions and analytical works have revisited these juristic discussions, focusing on the evidence, conceptual underpinnings, and practical implications of zakat compensation (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Ibn Rushd, 2004; Ibn Qudamah, 1968). These studies emphasise that compensation for zakat on camels is grounded in the Sunnah, particularly in the hadith recorded by Al-Daraqutni and others, which outlines multiple scenarios in which a higher or lower age is accepted with a compensatory payment in sheep or dirhams (Al-Daraqutni, 2004; Ibn Hanbal, 1995). They also highlight the diversity of juristic opinion on whether such compensation is fixed by revelation or left to valuation in light of changing circumstances (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Ibn Qudamah, 1968).

Despite this rich juristic heritage, detailed studies linking theoretical discussions of compensation directly to the practical duties of contemporary zakat collectors remain relatively limited. The present research contributes to this area by synthesising classical positions and clarifying the operational role of compensation in modern zakat administration.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive–inductive approach to analyse the concept of compensation in zakat on camels and its implications for zakat collection. The descriptive dimension involves presenting the relevant juristic concepts, definitions, and rulings as articulated in classical and modern sources, while the inductive dimension consists of gathering textual evidence, critically examining juristic arguments, and deriving conclusions from the collected material (Abu Habib, 1988; Qal’aji, 1988).

Primary data consist of classical fiqh texts and hadith collections that address the thresholds and obligations of zakat on camels, including works by Al-Sarakhsi, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Qudamah, and Al-Ghazali (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Ibn Rushd, 2004; Ibn Qudamah, 1968; Al-Ghazali, 1993). These texts are complemented by lexicographical sources such as Al-Fayumi, Rida, and Ibn Manzūr, which clarify the linguistic roots of al-jabr and related concepts (Rida, 1960; Al-

Fayumi, n.d.; Abu Habib, 1988). Secondary data include modern critical editions and studies on jurisprudential terminology and legal theory (Abu Habib, 1988; Ibn Rajab, 1989).

The researcher documents all texts from reliable editions, compares variant readings where necessary, and organises the material thematically around:

1. the definition and reality of compensation;
2. the ruling and points of juristic agreement and disagreement;
3. and the methods of compensation and the duties of the zakat collector (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Ibn Rushd, 2004; Ibn Qudamah, 1968).

Concept of Compensation in Zakat

Linguistic Definition

Compensation (al-jabrān) in Arabic derives from the verb jabara, which can function in both transitive and intransitive forms and carries meanings such as mending, repairing, enriching, compelling, and completing (Rida, 1960). Lexicographers explain that al-jabr is the opposite of breaking (al-kasr), as in “he mended his bone” after it was broken; it can also mean doing good to someone by enriching him after poverty, compelling him to act, or completing a deficiency (Rida, 1960; Al-Fayumi, n.d.). The term al-jabrān is used for the amount or act through which such rectification takes place, including the adjustment of zakat thresholds in livestock (Rida, 1960).

Related lexical concepts such as tamām (completion) and kamāl (perfection) further illuminate the semantic field of compensation, as discussed in works like Al-Munir and Al-Şihāḥ (Al-Fayumi, n.d.; Abu Habib, 1988). Qur’anic exegesis on verses such as “Today I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favour upon you” (Al-Ma’idah 5:3) is also invoked by jurists to differentiate between completion and perfection in terms of legal obligations and divine favour (Abu Habib, 1988).

Technical Definition

In legal terminology, compensation (al-jabrān) retains these core meanings of rectification and completion, and is used to describe acts or payments that make up for deficiencies or violations in certain acts of worship, particularly ḥajj and zakat (Abu Habib, 1988; Al-Ghazali, 1993; Al-Rukbi, n.d.; Qal’aji, 1988). Jurists define compensation as a legally recognised adjustment by which an obligation is fulfilled despite a shortcoming in its usual form, such as making up for omitted rites in ḥajj through specific sacrifices or adjusting the age of animals in zakat through supplementary payments (Abu Habib, 1988; Al-Ghazali, 1993). In the context of zakat on camels, compensation refers specifically to substituting an animal of a different age and balancing the difference in value either in kind (sheep) or in cash (dirhams) (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Ibn Qudamah, 1968).

Ruling on Compensation in Zakat Funds

Areas of Agreement

Jurists agree that the minimum threshold for zakat on camels is five and that no zakat is due on fewer than this number, based on the well-known hadith reported by Al-Nasa’i and others, which also mentions thresholds for silver and awsaq (Ibn Battal, 1988). They further agree on the progression of obligations up to twenty-five camels, at which point the obligation shifts

from sheep to camels and specific ages become mandatory (Ibn Rushd, 2004). There is also consensus that if a zakat payer gives an animal of a higher age within the same category voluntarily, such as a two-year-old female instead of a one-year-old female, it is permissible and accepted as a valid fulfilment of zakat (Ibn Qudamah, 1968).

Areas of Disagreement

The main juristic disagreements concern whether a camel may be substituted for a sheep, and how to handle cases in which a specific age is required but unavailable. The Mālikī, Ḥanbalī, and Zāhirī schools generally do not permit giving a camel instead of a sheep as obligatory zakat, regardless of the difference in value (Ibn Qudamah, 1968). The Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī schools, however, allow giving a camel instead of a sheep within certain limits, particularly for twenty camels and under, subject to their broader principles regarding the payment of value in zakat (Ibn Qudamah, 1968; Ibn Rushd, 2004).

When the threshold reaches twenty-five or more, and a specific age is required, jurists differed on whether the owner must obtain that exact age, whether substitution with compensation is permissible, or whether the value must be paid instead (Ibn Rushd, 2004). The majority of Ḥanafī, Shāfi'ī, Ḥanbalī, and Zāhirī scholars allow substitution with compensation, either upward or downward, based on the prophetic hadiths that explicitly mention taking a higher or lower age with an accompanying payment of two sheep or twenty dirhams (Al-Daraqutni, 2004; Ibn Hanbal, 1995; Ibn Qudamah, 1968). Mālik, however, as interpreted by some of his followers, is reported to have required the owner to reach the required age, though Ibn Rushd suggests this may reflect an unawareness of the relevant hadith (Al-Lakhmi, 2011; Ibn Rushd, 2004).

Methods of Compensation and Duties of the Zakat Collector

Voluntary Compensation

The first method involves voluntary compensation by the zakat payer, who may choose to give a higher-quality or older animal than the minimum required, without being compelled by the collector (Ibn Rushd, 2004; Ibn Qudamah, 1968). An example is a one-year-old female camel that is due, but the owner has only a larger, healthier camel and offers it voluntarily. The prophetic practice, as reported in the hadith of Ubayy ibn Ka'b, shows that such voluntary upgrades are accepted and rewarded, provided they are not imposed by the collector (Ibn Hanbal, 1995; Abu Dawud, cited in Ibn Qudamah, 1968). The duty of the zakat collector in this method is to ensure that no owner is coerced into giving more than what is obligatory, while also accepting voluntary enhancements that benefit people experiencing poverty.

Progressive (Upward) Compensation

The second method is progressive, or upward, compensation, where the required age is not available but a higher age is present, and a compensatory payment is substituted in favour of the zakat payer (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Abu al-Khattab, n.d.). For instance, if a two-year-old female camel (bint labūn) is required and the owner only has a three-year-old (ḥiqqah), the collector may accept the higher age and give the owner two sheep or twenty dirhams as compensation, in line with the prophetic prescriptions (Al-Daraqutni, 2004; Ibn Qudamah, 1968). According to the Shāfi'ī and Ḥanbalī schools, these compensatory amounts are fixed by the Sunnah, whereas the Ḥanafīs treat the difference as a matter of market valuation (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Abu al-Khattab, n.d.). The zakat collector must here ensure that any upward

substitution is either requested by the owner or agreed upon, and that the compensatory payment is delivered accurately.

Downward Compensation

The third method is downward compensation, in which the required age is not available but a lower age is available, and substitution is made with an additional payment in favour of people experiencing poverty (Ibn Rushd, 2004; Al-Juwayni, n.d.). In such cases, the owner gives a younger camel plus two sheep or twenty dirhams, as specified in the Book of Sadaqah and related hadiths (Al-Daraqutni, 2004; Ibn Hanbal, 1995). Jurists emphasise that the collector must not arbitrarily increase the number of compensations or impose arrangements that deviate from the prophetic pattern, such as multiple successive compensations that burden the owner or confuse the obligation (Al-Juwayni, n.d.; Ibn Rushd, 2004). The duty of the zakat collector is to apply downward compensation strictly within the bounds of the Sunnah and to avoid unjustified demands.

Findings

The study leads to several key findings:

1. Compensation as a reciprocal process: Compensation in zakat is a reciprocal and complementary process between the owner of zakat-liable wealth and the zakat collector, designed to adjust for differences in age and value while maintaining the integrity of the obligation (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Ibn Qudamah, 1968).
2. Restriction to camels: Compensation, in this technical sense, applies specifically to zakat on camels and does not extend to other types of zakat-eligible wealth, which follow different rules for adjustment and substitution (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Ibn Rushd, 2004).
3. Strong evidential basis: Compensation is a legally established principle accepted by the majority of jurists and is rooted in the prophetic Sunnah, particularly the Book of Zakat that the Prophet wrote for zakat collectors and which the Rightly Guided Caliphs implemented (Al-Daraqutni, 2004; Ibn Hanbal, 1995; Ibn Qudamah, 1968).
4. Three recognised forms: The study confirms that compensation has three main forms: voluntary, progressive (upward), and downward, each with its own conditions and implications for the owner and the zakat collector (Al-Sarakhsi, 1993; Ibn Rushd, 2004).
5. Instrument of facilitation: Compensation functions as a legitimate means of alleviating hardship and difficulty for both zakat payers and collectors, by enabling flexible yet principled adjustments when exact compliance with age requirements is impractical (Abu Habib, 1988; Al-Ghazali, 1993).

Conclusion

By examining the linguistic roots, juristic definitions, and detailed rulings on zakat compensation for camels, this study has shown that al-jabrān is a carefully structured mechanism that reconciles the precision of zakat obligations with the realities of livestock ownership. It plays a crucial role in ensuring that the rights of people with low incomes are upheld, while removing unnecessary hardship from zakat payers and collectors, in line with the broader objectives of Shari'ah (Al-Ghazali, 1993; Al-Sarakhsi, 1993). For contemporary zakat institutions, understanding and correctly applying the classical rules of compensation is essential to maintaining both legal fidelity and social justice in the collection and distribution of zakat on camels.

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