



The Advent of Islam in North Africa

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Abstract ;

This research aims at discussing the emergence of Islam in North Africa, specifically elaborating on the factors responsible for the spread of Islam in the continent. A historical overview on the intellectual and social changes that Islam brought into the Continent were discussed. The Study reveals that North Africa is inhabited by 171.4 million people representing approximately 2.4 percent of the world's population and about 10.5 percent of the population of the 53-member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Currently, five countries make up the North African region; namely Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. The Study adopts descriptive and historical methods where the emergence, spread and the position of Islam in North Africa will be showcased, described and conveyed in a simple, clear manner. The Study concludes that with the advent of Islam in North Africa, good characters and sound behaviours were instilled in the area, people became more united, focused and supportive. In addition, more Islamic cities were established in North Africa, such as the city of Kairouan, which became the security base for Muslims. Additionally, Islamic empires were also founded such as Almoravids, the Almohads and the Hafsids. Similarly, a number of Mosques were built in the region which were largely regarded as centers of knowledge, such as the Al-Atiq Mosque in Fustat and the Al-Azhar Mosque both in Egypt, among others.

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Introduction

The term North Africa usually denotes the region that includes a number of countries such as Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania. The region corresponds to what Arab writers call the Magreb (the West). North Africa was in contact with all the great civilizations of antiquity and became an integral part of the Islamic world in the seventh century CE. Moreover, from the twelfth century, the vast of majority of the population has followed the Maliki legal tradition (madhhab). The researchers' discussion in this paper centers on the advent of Islam in



Almost 75 percent of the North Africa's region consists of deserts, semi-arid land, or small oases. Evidence suggests that about 130,000 years ago much of land mass that is now North Africa was filled with forests, lakes, rivers and oases.

North Africa is inhabited by 171.4 million people representing approximately 2.4 percent of the world's population and about 10.5 percent of the population of the 53-member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Currently, five countries make up the North African

the region, taking a cursory glance at some of the Islamic movements founded there as elaborated therein.

1.1 The Study Area

North Africa covers a geographic region stretching from the Atlantic shores of Morocco in the West to the Suez Canal and the Red Sea in the East. It also includes the countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt.

region. Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia (Habib, Richard).

1.2 Statement of the Problem:

There is no gainsaying that the orientalist's skepticism about the perception of the Islamic conquests, and their stigmatization of its leaders by citing false claims have motivated the researchers to conceptualise the idea of writing on this topic in a bid to shed light on the emergence of Islam in North Africa. So also, efforts are being made to elaborate on the factors responsible to its spread in order to identify the extent of the efforts of the Arab conquerors, and to rid them of the

appeals addressed to them by orientalists, in addition to seeing the most important effects left by their movements on the North African community.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study :

History is one of the mechanisms through which we can learn how the systems of the past societies, their ideologies, mode of governance and cultures were built and sustained. It also helps us to understand the present. For that reason, this research intends to analyze the emergence of Islam in North Africa as well as the factors responsible for the spread of Islam into the region in order to identify and appreciate the methods applied by the Muslim missionaries which led them to success towards the spread of Islam in North Africa. Similarly, the work also aims at exploring how Islam influenced the way and manner people lived and conduct their daily activities in all ramifications.

1.4 Method of Research

Research is viewed as the application of scientific method in solving the problems. It is a systematic, formal and intensive process of carrying on the scientific method of analysis. There are many ways of obtaining knowledge. They are intuition, revelation, and authority, logical manipulation of basic assumptions, informed guesses, observation, and reasoning by analogy. One of the branches of research known as empirical research is highly goal-oriented technique (Pandey and Mishra, 2015).

This research adopts qualitative method. This type of method is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It

consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In line with the above, this research further adopts descriptive and historical methods where the emergence, spread and the position of Islam in North Africa will be showcased, described and conveyed in a simple manner.

2.0 THE POSITION OF ISLAM IN NORTH AFRICA

2.1 The Advent of Islam In North Africa

History has proven that the inhabitants of North Africa, before the advent of Islam, embraced Christianity, Judaism and Paganism. Their civilization was a Pagan in nature, which made them exhibit low morals in their behavior and which led them to commit great injustice to their families to the extent of descending to a lower level than the status of animals (Daif, 1947).

Moreover, the historians unanimously agreed that, Islam as a comprehensive way of life, catering for all the fields of human existence; came into North Africa in 20 AH, during the reign of Caliph Umar bin

Khaddab. The Arab conquest of Egypt and North Africa begins with the arrival of an army led by the great companion Amr bin Al-Ass in front of the Byzantine fortified town Babylon (in the area which is now old Cairo). The Arabs captured it after a siege; and established their own garrison town called Alfustat (Camilo, 2020).

After the conquest of Egypt and Alexandria, the conqueror Amr Bin Al-Aas decided to continue the conquest in the West, where he conquered Burqa in the year 22 AH, and sent Uqbah to conquer Zuweila, Fezzan and Wuddan which were the major cities in the Tripoli desert (Raitun, 1990), while during the reign of Caliph Usman bin Affan, as put forward by Assallabi (2005) Muslims expanded Islam to current Tunisia and Eastern Algeria.

Britannica (2020) revealed that in 681 CE, Uqba was granted command of the Arab forces again, where he invaded what is now called Tunisia in an attempt to take over the region from the Byzantine Empire. He founded the first Islamic province in North Africa in “Kirawan”, and built a mosque which was made a hub of knowledge and a meeting centre of mujahidun and scholars.. However, Kusaila escaped during the campaign and attacked Uqba on his return and killed him near Biskara currently located in Algeria.

After Uqbah’s death, the Arab Army retreated from Khairouan, which Kusaila took as his capital, and ruled there until he was defeated by an Arab army under Zuhair ibn Kays. Zuhair himself was killed in 688 CE while fighting against the Byzantine Empire which had reoccupied Cyrenaica

while he was busy in Tunisia (Abu-Nasr, 1987).

The conquest of North Africa continued under the Umayyad dynasty as posisted by Frank and Leaman, (2003). In 693 CE, Caliph Abd Al-Malik Ibn Marwan sent an army of 40,000 men, commanded by Hasan Ibn Al-Nu’man, into Cyrenaica and Tripolitania to remove the Byzantine threat to the Umayyads advance in North Africa. They met no resistance until they reached Tunisia where they captured Carthage and defeated the Byzantines and Berbers around Bizerte. (Abu-Nasr, 1987).

In the year 709 CE, the entire Northern Africa was firmly under Arab control which was as a result of the conversion of a greter percentage of Northern African Arabs to Islam.

It is worthnoting that during the 18th and 19th century, North Africa was colonized by France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy. During the 1950s and 1960s as well as some portions of the 1970s, all of the North African states gained independence from their colonial European rulers, except for a few small Spanish colonies on the far northern tip of Morocco, and parts of the Sahara region, which went from Spanish to Moroccan rule (Tom, 2021).

3.0 THE FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SPREAD OF ISLAM IN NORTH AFRICA

There are multiple roles and various factors contributed to the spread of Islam in North Africa. Famous among which are as follows:

3.1 MIGRATION OF ARAB MUSLIMS :

Thousands of people have migrated from one place to another in order to propagate Islam. Historians had recorded that thousands of Arabs had flown into North Africa and settled therein and played an important role in the spread of Islam in North Africa as well. There were some people who are called Banu Hilal, who migrated from Asia to North Africa in 11th century. According to Ibn Khadun, the Banu Hilal were accompanied by their wives and children when they came to the Maghreb. They settled in Tunisia after winning some battles against some Berber tribes. Their influx was a major factor in the linguistic, cultural Arabization of the Maghreb (Bitton, 2021).

3.2 TRADING :

Another factor responsible for the spread of Islam in the region in question is the fact that Arab traders came from Asia into North Africa. They moved across the Sahara into West Africa. Later on, other merchant traders came by boat to the east coast. Islam spread as ivory, salt, slaves, gold and many other items were traded and sold. Cities developed in the places where traders camped. Therefore and with trade activities, the Muslim scholars had extensively promoted the spread of Islam and its trailing to the larger area of North Africa (Ilori, 1978).

3.3 Jihadist and Islamic militant:

Jihadists were the ones who worked to spread Islam firstly in North Africa, and solidified paths with their conquest and established Islamic States after their

success. They were in the day of Amr Bin Ass, and those came after him. Below are some of the Islamic movements which contributed largely in the spread of Islam in North Africa:

3.3.1 AL MURABIDUN (Almoravid)

Almoravids was an imperial Berber Muslim dynasty centered in Morocco. The dynasty was founded by Abdallah bin Yasin who was Sanhajah religious scholar from southern Morocco . The Almoravid Capital was Marrakesh a city in Morocco as asserted by Abu Nasr (1987).

From the year 1053 CE, the dynasty began to spread their religious way to the Berber Areas of Sahara and to the regions south of the desert after winning over the Sonhaja Berber tribe, they quickly took control of the entire desert trade route, and a wide region of North West Africa including Modern Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, and part of Algeria. Yahya bin Umar was killed in a battle in 1057, but Abdullahi Ibn Yasin, whose influence as a religious teacher was paramount, named his brother Abu Bakr Ibn Umar as the Head. Under him, the Almoravids soon began to spread their power beyond the desert, and conquered the tribes of the Atlas Mountains (Daif, 1947).

Abdallah ibn Yasin was killed in a battle in 1059, in Krifla, a village near Rommani, Morocco, and succeeded by Abu Bakr Ibn Umar who conquered the Berghouata and forced them to convert to orthodox Islam. Abu Bakr married a noble and wealthy Berber woman, Zaynab an-Nafzawiyyat, who eventually became very

influential in the development of the dynasty (Ibn abi zar, 1312).

In 1061, Abu Bakr Ibn Umar made a division of the power he had established, handing over the more-settled parts to his cousin Yusuf Ibn Tashfin as viceroy, and also assigning to him his favourite wife Zaynab. Ibn Umar kept the task of suppressing the revolts that had broken out in the desert. When he returned to resume control, he found his cousin too powerful to be superseded. Abu Bakr was killed in 1087 (op cit).

Thereafter, Yusuf Ibn Tashfin brought the large area of what is now known as Morocco, Western Sahara and Mauritania into complete subjection. In 1062 he founded the city of Marrakesh. In 1080, he conquered the kingdom of Tlemcen (in modern-day Algeria). (Chisholm, 1911).

The empire fell at the height of their power; when they failed to stop the Masmuda – led rebellion initiated by Ibn Tumart. As a result, their last king, Ishaq Ibn Ali, was killed in Marrakesh in April 1147, by the Almohad caliphate, who replaced them a ruling dynasty both in Morocco and Al- Andalus (Sallabi, 2012).

Their Rulers :

- Abdallah Ibn Yasin (1040-1059)
- Yahya Bin Ibrahim (1048)
- Yahya Bin Umar Al-Lamtuni (1050-1056)
- Abu Bakr Ibn Umar (1056-1087)
- Yusuf Bin Tashfin (1072-1106)

- Ali Ibn Ali (1106-1143)
- Tashfin Ibn Ali (1143-45)
- Ibrahim Ibn Tashfin (1145-1147)
- Ishaq Ibn Ali (1147).

3.3.2 ALMOHAD:

Al Muwahhidun, which professes the unity of God, was a North African Berber Muslim Empire, founded in the 12th Century. At its height, it controlled much of the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa (the Maghreb). (Frank, 2003).

The Almohad movement was founded by Ibn Tumart among the Berber Masmuda tribes in southern Morocco. Around 1120, the Almohads established a Berber State in Tinmel in the Atlas Mountains. They succeeded in overthrowing the ruling Almoravid dynasty governing Morocco by 1147, when Abd Al-mumin Al-Gumi conquered Marrakesh and declared himself Caliph (Camilo, 2020), and then subsequently extended their power over all of the Maghreb by 1159.

According to Sallabi (2012), they continued to rule in Africa until the piecemeal loss of territory through the revolt of tribes and districts enabled the rise of their most effective enemies, the Marinids, from northern Morocco in 1215. The last representative of the line, Idris al-Wathiq, was reduced to the possession of Marrakesh, where he was murdered by a slave in 1269; the Marinids seized Marrakesh, ending the Almohad domination of the Western Maghreb.

Their caliphs :

- Ibn Tumart 1121-1130
- Abd Al-Mumin 1130-1163
- Abu Ya'qub Yusuf I 1163-1184
- Abu Yusuf Ya'qub 'Al-Mansur' 1184-1199
- Muhammad al-Nasir 1199-1213
- Abu Ya'qub Yusuf II 1213-1224
- Abu Muhammad Abd Al-Wahid I 'Al-Makhlu' 1224
- Abdallah Al-Adil 1224-1227
- Yahya al-Mutasim 1227-1229
- Abu Al-Ala Idris I al-Ma'mun, 1229-1232
- Abu Muhammad Abd al-Wahid II al-Rashid 1232-1242
- Abu al-Hassan Ali 'Al-Said' 1242-1248
- Abu Hafs Umar 'al-Murtada 1248-1266
- Abu Al-Ula (Abu Dabbus) Idris II 'al-Wathiq' 1266-1269.

3.1.3 HAFSID:

The ancestor of the dynasty was Abu Hafs Umar Ibn Yahya Al-Hintati, a berber from the Hintata tribal confederation which belong to the greater Masmuda confederation of Morocco. He was a member of the council of ten and a close companion of Ibn Tumart. The Hafsids Dynasty ruled the area stretching from the west of Libya to the east of Algeria, known

as Ifriqiya. Muhammad bin Abu Hafs was appointed to the position of governor of Ifriqiya by the caliph of the Almohad Empire at the time, Muhammad an-Nasir. The Hafsids dynasty ruled from 1229 to 1574, during which time they were constantly under threat of attack by the Banu Ghaniya relatives of the Almoravids who had earlier been defeated and replaced by the Almohads (Wikipedia, 2021).

After the split of the Hafsids from Almohads under Abu Zakariya, Abu Zakariya organized the administration in Ifriqiya, built the city of Tunis up as the economic and cultural centre of the empire, conquered the Kingdom of Tlemcen in 1242 and made the Abdalwadids his vassals. His successor Muhammad One (1) Al-Mustansir took the title of Caliph and extended the boundaries of his state by subjugating the central Maghreb, going so far as to impose his overlordship over the Kingdom of Tlemcen, northern Morocco and the Nasrids of Granada Spain. The Hafsids became completely independent in 1264. The successor of Abu Zakariya' Yahya, Abu Abd Allah Muhammad Al-Mustansir, proclaimed himself Caliph in 1256 and continued the policies of his father. It was during his reign that the failed eighth Crusade took place, led by St. Louis (op cit).

At the end of the fifteenth century, the Hafsids dynasty was once again subjected to a period of political decline. The various sovereigns that succeeded one another on the throne clashed with the Turkish pirates settled in Algiers. Hafsids history was brought to an end by the Ottoman conquest of Tunis, which became in 1574 the

administrative centre of a new Ottoman province (Qantara, 2008).

Their rulers:

- Muhammad Al-Mustansir (1249-12770)
- Yahya II Al-Wathiq (1277-1279)
- Ibrahim I (1279-1283)
- Abd Al-Aziz I (1283)
- Abu Hafs Umar Bin Yahya (1284-1295)
- Abu Asida Muhammad II (1295-13090)
- Abu Yahya Abu Bakr Ash-Shahid (1309)
- Abu –Ibaqa Khalid an-Nasr (1309-1311)
- Abd Al-Wahid Zakariya Ibn Al-Lihyani (1311-1317)
- Abu Darba Muhammad Al-Mustansir (1317-1318)
- Abu Yahya Abu Bakr II (1346-7)
- Abu Al-Abbas Ahmad al-Fadl al-Mutawakkil (1350)
- Abu Ishaq Ibrahim II (1350-1369)
- Abu Ibaqa Khalid II (1369-1370)
- Ahmad II (1370-1394)
- Abd Al-Aziz II (1394-1434)
- Abu Abd Allah Muhammad al-Muntasir 91434-35)
- Abu Amr Uthman (1436-1488)
- Abu Zakariya Yahya II (1488-1489)
- Abd al-Mumin (1489-1490)

- Yahya Zakariya (1490-94)

- Abu Abdallah Muhammad IV Al-Mutawakkil (1494-1526)

- Muhammad V (1526-1543)

- Ahmad III (1543-1569)

- Muhammad VI (1573-1574)

4. THE MAJOR INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN NORTH AFRICA

Islam had a great impact on the culture of North Africa. It is not just a religion or mass of doctrines but rather a complete way of life, encompassing the entire way people lived including their government, trade and education. When Islam emerged in North Africa, the Roman despot was eventually removed from the hearts of the servants, melted their civilization, and reshaped them with Islamic morals, unity was emphasized and brotherhood among the inhabitants of the region was established and enhanced.

Similarly, Islamic cities were established in North Africa, such as the city of Kairouan. Moreover, the Islamic system of justice and taxation was adopted in their administrative system. Mosques were built as a religious and learning centres, famous among which are the Al-Atiq Mosque in Fustat, and the Al-Azhar Mosque both in Egypt.

5. CONCLUSION

This academic work has discussed the geographical location of North Africa, and elaborated on the emergence of Islam in North Africa. The factors responsible for the spread of Islam in the continent were studied, and also provided a historical information about the intellectual and social

changes that Islam brought in to the Continent.

In line with the above, the following findings are hereby arrived at:

- Before the advent of Islam, the inhabitants of North Africa embraced Christianity, Judaism and Paganism. Their civilization was a Pagan in nature, and that gave birth to a number of uncalled characters and behaviours being rampantly exhibited by all and sundry.
- With the advent of Islam in North Africa, good characters and sound behaviours were instilled in the area, people became more united, focused and supportive.
- In addition to the above, more Islamic cities were established in North Africa, such as the city of Kairouan, which became the security base for Muslims. Additionally, Islamic empires were also founded such as Almoravids, the Almohads and the Hafids.
- In the same vein, a number of Mosques were built in the region which were largely regarded as centers of knowledge, such as the Al-Atiq Mosque in Fustat and the Al-Azhar Mosque both in Egypt, among others.

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