

The Spread of Islam

To understand how medicine developed in the middle ages, we must look back at the history and find out the important things that happened during the Seventh Century.

In 570 A.D., a man was born in a small city in the Arabian Peninsula, called Mecca (Haykal 1976), his name was Mohammed. In 610 A.D. he declared a new religion, Islam. In 632 A.D., he died after uniting the Arab tribes who had been torn by revenge, rivalry, and internal fights. Out of these mostly illiterate nomadic people, he produced a strong nation that encountered and conquered, simultaneously, the two known empires at that time, namely, the Persian and Byzantine Empires.

In a man's life-time, the Islamic Empire extended from the Atlantic Ocean on the West, to the borders of China on the East. In 711 A.D., only 80 years after the death of their prophet, the Arabs crossed to Europe to rule Spain for more than 700 years. In 732 A.D., they threatened Paris and their thrust was stopped at Tours and Poiter (Egeland 1976). In 831 A.D., the Moslems of North Africa invaded Sicily and ruled it for 200 years. By 846 A.D., they controlled the southern part of Italy and encountered Rome (Hitti 1977).

The hold of the Moslems over Italy remained so firm that Pope John VIII (872–882 A.D.) deemed it prudent to pay tribute for two years (Hitti 1977) In 869 A.D., the Arabs captured Malta (Ibn-Khaldun). In the tenth century, from Italy and Spain, the Arabs extended their raids through the Alpine passages into mid-Europe.

In the Alps, there are several castles and walls which tourists guides attribute to the invasion of the Moslems of Sicily. In the southern part of Italy and in Sicily, a great civilization was established and through which the torch of knowledge spread to Europe, mainly through the University of Salerno in the southern part of Italy (Hitti 1977, Parente 1967).

The expansion of the Moslems in Europe was not limited to those from North Africa and Spain. The Moslems, under the Ottoman Empire, invaded Europe from the East. They occupied a good part of Middle Europe and besieged Vienna twice, once during the reign of Sulayman 1 (1520–1566 A.D.) and the other during the reign of Mohammed IV (1648–1687 A.D.) (Hitti 1977).

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