

# **The Spread of Islam, From its beginning to the 14th Century**

# **The Spread of Islam, From its beginning to the 14th Century**



**Mansour Leghaei**

**Al-Islam.org**

**Article**

## Authors(s):

[Mansour Leghaei](#) [1]

### The Spread of Islam, From its beginning to the 14th Century

Sh. Mansour Leghaei

\*\*\*\*\*

*The present text presents in a short and succinct manner the historical and geographical spread of the religion of Islam.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## Dimensions of the Resources

1. Books on the biography of the Prophet of Islam: such as *سيرة ابن هشام المتوفى 151* which is the revised version of the Seerah of Ibn Ishaq.

Seerah of Ibn Ishaq is translated under 'The Life of Muhammad' by A. Guillaume, 1955.

Also, the work of Ayatollah Sobhani 'The Message' is a scholarly record of the life of Prophet Muhammad.

2. The history of the major Islamic cities: Such as "The History of Baghdad" written by Khatib Baghdadi, died in 463 A.H or 'the History of Dameshq' by Ibn Asakar, died in 571A.H.

3. Travel Accounts: Such as the travel account of Ibn Battuta, a Muslim traveler of the 14th century A.D. His travel lasted for about 30 years. He is the only medieval traveler who is known to have visited the lands of every Muslim ruler of his time. The mere extent of his travels is estimated at no less than 150,000 k. His book is of great historical value and is translated by Ross Dunn.

4. General History of Islam: Such as 'The History of the Nations and the Kings' by al-Tabari. 'Cambridge History of Islam' edited by P.H. Holt 2 vols. which is the most comprehensive book in English. And 'Muslim History' (570-1950) by Akram Zahoor.

5. Geographers such as Ibn Hawqal, the Muslim geographer of the 10th century and the author of *المسالك و الممالك* translated by H. Kramer as "The Legacy of Islam".

6. Accounts of the Conquered countries, such as *Futuh al-Buldan*, by Balazuri; the Muslim historian of the 9th century.

## Introduction

In the barren city of Mecca about 610 AD the Almighty God appointed Muhammad, the trustworthy (al-Amin), with no official education to be His last Messenger to mankind. The message and the religion that was introduced to man through Muhammad, was called ISLAM.

Islam completely changed the intellectual outlook of Arabia, so much so that it divided the history of Arabs into pre-Islamic era known as the era of Ignorance, and the post Islamic era. Within a span of 23 years Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.w) transformed the barbarous and impious Arabs into a civilized and religious nation. During his life and also after his death, Muslims took the message of Islam to every corner of the world and within a few years Muslims became the super power of the era.

In its early stages when Prophet Muhammad, his wife Khadija and his cousin Ali were the only monotheists on earth, Prophet Muhammad prophesized that “a time shall come when there will be no house on earth whether made of mod or wool but the Almighty Allah will admit the Word of Islam into it.”<sup>1</sup>

The rise of Islam was the most amazing event in human history. It sprang from a barren desert amidst illiterate people with no civilization, yet within a century built the then most advanced and vast human civilization.

Islam, like Christianity, is a proselytizing religion. This means that followers of these religions believe that it is their duty to share their religion and try to convert others to their religion.

It is one of the striking facts of human history that within half a century after the advent of Islam, Islam had already conquered the whole of North Africa from Egypt to Morocco, all the Middle Eastern lands from Yemen to Caucasia and from Egypt to the lands beyond Transoxiana in Central Asia.

It was during the reign of the third Caliph Othman that the Muslim envoys, lead by one of the companions of the Prophet, reached the Chinese Palace, where they were welcomed enthusiastically, an important event marking, according to the historians, the beginning of Islam’s entry into this country.

Most striking of all, Islam spread within a century over half of the Earth, shattering great empires, ousting long-established religions, remoulding the souls of human races and building up a whole new world; “the World of Islam”. This phenomena becomes more striking when the history of the spread of Islam is compared for instance with that of the Christianity.

Early Christians for a few centuries were facing scorn at best and persecution at worst, depending on Emperor and the era, and hence they were forced to blend in with their Pagan counterparts. It was until early 4th century with the apparent conversion of the Constantine that Christianity started to become an official religion.

If we were to draw a map of the political condition of Europe, Africa and Western Asia about the middle of the tenth century A.D. we would see that by far the greatest part of that “inhabited world”, which the Greeks called “Oikoumene” meaning ‘the whole inhabited earth’, was occupied by countries possessed by Muslim rulers and inhabited mainly by Muslim people. It is perhaps due to this fast spread of Islam that Prof. Clifford Geertz; the famous American anthropologist in his ‘The Near East in the Far East’ states: “Islam is a religion designed for export.”

The development and the vast spread of Islam took place mainly in only three centuries. Islam once was the main religion, or at least the religion of the majority of the people in an area covering more than half of the civilised world stretching over three continents.

It was from Pyrenees and Siberia in West and North Europe to the furthest end of Asia, up to China and southern tip of Africa, covering two thirds of the African continent. Harun al-Rashid; the fifth Abbasid Caliph in the 8th century, used to address the clouds: “You rain wherever you wish; you drop but on my land!”

American author Louis L’Amour, summarised the spread of Islam as follows: “in the space of one hundred years following the death of Mohammed in 632, the empire of the Arabs (he means Muslims) was larger than that of Alexander the Great of Rome” (The Walking Drum, 1984, p.171)

In modern times, Islam is the fastest growing religion and the second largest religion in the world. The Muslim community consists of both the people in over 51 Muslim countries as well as the Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries. According to CIA ‘The World Fact Book’

(<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook> [2]) among every four human on earth, one of them is Muslim.

In the last fifty years Muslims have increased by over 235% (257.01% in Australia) up to over 1.6 billion. By comparison, Christians have increased by only 47%, Hinduism, 117 %, and Buddhism by 63 %. Islam is the second largest religious group in France, Great Britain and U.S.A. (There are 10 millions Muslims in U.S.A compared with 6 millions Jews).

The range of the Muslim world is as wide as the human race. Indeed, although most Arabs are Muslims, no longer are most Muslims Arab. Indonesia with nearly 200 million is the most Muslim populated country. Both coming second are China and India with about 135 million. The third most populated is Pakistan with nearly 125 million none of which are Arabs. Today, at the most, only up to 15% of Muslims speak Arabic.

## **1. Spread of Islam at the time of the Prophet Muhammad**

When Muhammad was entrusted by the Almighty Allah with the task of guiding people, idolatry was predominant in the Arabian Peninsula. In the beginning the only Muslims on earth were Muhammad, his

wife Khadijah and his cousin Ali. Amongst the idolaters of Qoraysh they were the only monotheists. For the first three years Prophet Muhammad was privately and individually inviting the idolaters of Mecca to the worshipping of One Unique God; ALLAH.

After three years had passed from the advent of Islam, Muhammad (s.a.w.w) invited the general public openly to the religion of worshipping Allah. The main struggle of Prophet Muhammad and his companions began. The pagans of Qoraysh utilised every means in every possible way to stop the spread of Islam but to no avail. On the contrary the number of Muslims was increasing daily.

Amazingly some of the chief members of Qoraysh who aimed at torturing new Muslims upon listening to the miraculous Words of God, were so marvelled that they themselves could not but embrace Islam. The story of the conversion of Omar Ibn Khattab is a famous example.

In about five years after the advent of Islam, a group of Muslims consisting of six men and four women fleeing from the severe torture of the pagans of Qoraysh sought asylum to Ethiopia. That marked the first migration of Muslims and the spread of Islam out of the land of Arabia.

Ten years had passed from the advent of Islam that the Prophet Muhammad travelled to the nearest city called 'Ta'if' to invite people of that town to the worshipping of Allah. Unfortunately, the chiefs of Ta'if did not receive the Messenger of Allah well. The Prophet Muhammad was attacked by the loafers and simpletons.

The Prophet of Islam used to send many envoys to various tribes and towns inviting them to Islam. As'as, a new Muslim from the city of Yathrib, requested the Prophet of Islam to send one of his teachers of the Quran to Yathrib to invite people to Islam. Prophet Muhammad sent Mos'ab who was an eloquent preacher of Islam. Within a few weeks after the arrival of Mos'ad in Yathrib, the entire tribe of Bani-Abdul-Ash-hal embraced Islam.

Thirteen years after the rise of Islam due to the intolerable situation in Mecca, the Prophet of Islam and most of his companions were forced to migrate to the city of Yathrib which was later called 'Madinatu-Nabi' or 'Madina' in short which means the 'City of the Prophet'.

Immigration of the Prophet to Madina, was indeed a turning point in the history of Islam and hence marked the commencement of the Islamic calendar.

During his stay in Madina, the Prophet of Islam dispatched many ambassadors to various tribes in the Arabian Peninsula hence inviting them to Islam. Of all the letters that the Prophet of Islam has sent to the heads of various tribes and countries, 185 of them are still preserved to this date.<sup>2</sup> Eight years after the migration of the Prophet to Madina, nearly the entire Arabian Peninsula had embraced Islam and idolatry was almost eradicated.

## The International Ambassadors of Islam

Only seven years after his migration to Madina, the Prophet of Islam, dispatched his envoys to the then greatest emperors and kingdoms of the world.

Ibn Hisham narrated: "After Muslims offered the dawn prayer with the Prophet, the Messenger of Allah said to them: "Exhort the servants of Allah to do good. Allah has disallowed Paradise to one, who becomes the guardian of the affairs of the people, but does not endeavour to guide them and show them the right path. You should rise and convey the message of Islam to far-off regions and should make mankind hear the voice of monotheism. However, you should not oppose me in the manner in which the disciples of Prophet 'Isa opposed him".

The Prophet was asked as to how the disciples of Prophet 'Isa opposed him. He replied: "Like me, he also deputed some persons to act as his messengers in different areas. From amongst them those who had to cover a short distance obeyed his command but those who had to travel a long distance disobeyed him".<sup>3</sup>

Prophet Muhammad sent six most proficient people to different places along with letters in which his universal prophethood was reflected. The ambassadors of guidance proceeded to Iran, Byzantium, Ethiopia, Egypt, Yamamah, Bahrain and Hira (Jordan) on the same day.

Rome and Iran were the then greatest empires. Dihyah bin Kalbi was the ambassador of the Prophet to the Cesar of Rome. The letter of the Prophet of Islam to the Cesar reads:

" In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

(This is a letter) from Muhammad bin Abdullah to the great Hercules of Rome. Peace be upon the followers of guidance. I invite you to the religion of Islam. Embrace Islam so that you may be safe. Allah will give you two rewards (reward for your own faith as well as reward for the faith of those who are your subordinates). In case, however, you turn away your face from Islam you will be responsible for the sins of your subjects as well. O people of the Scriptures! We invite you to a common basis i.e.: we should not worship anyone except Allah. We should not treat anyone to be His partner. Some of us too should not accept others as their gods. And (O Muhammad! As and when) they recalcitrate against the true religion say: "Be witness to the fact that we are Muslims".<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Spread of Islam After the demise of the Prophet Muhammad

### Islam in Syria

Syria was an important land for Christians. Damascus is where St. Paul escaped from the Jews by being dropped through a window in a basket in the Via Recta. To this date, the villagers in Maaloula still speak Aramean, a language believed to be the spoken language of Jesus.

With the rapid spread of Islam, the then empires of Rome and Persia developed a serious concern for their sovereignty. Syria at the border of the Arabian Peninsula, was a centre for early Christianity.

In the year 9 A.H. (after the Migration of the Prophet to Madina) the army of Byzantine launched the first war against Muslims and attacked the land of Arabia. Since then, there were several battles between the Muslims and the Byzantine armies until in the year 13 A.H. (636AD).

In the beginning of the reign of Omar, the battle of Yarmouk on the Syrian–Jordan border– led to the defeat of Byzantine armies. Muslim armies seized Syria, then Jerusalem and finally Damascus in 638 AD. Since then a rapid change in the religion of people of that region began. Since then Syria was ruled by the Umayyad dynasty (661–750 A.D).

Although the Umayyad gave little efforts to require conversion to Islam, and there was no resentment directed towards Islam, the spread of Islam in Syria was like a field on fire.

Today 80% of the population of Syria is Muslims while Christian communities constitute approx. 8% of the Syrian population.

## Islam in Iran

Until the third decade of the 7th century AD Iran was one of the two greatest empires of the world. When in 629 AD (7th AH) Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.w) sent a letter to Khosro Parviz, of Sassanian kings of Iran inviting him to embrace Islam, he could not possibly imagine that not merely his dynasty but the whole fabric of Iranian life will be engulfed and overwhelmed by Islam.

Therefore, the king of Iran, contemptuously refused the invitation pouring scorn on the Arabs for eating lizards and the practice of infanticide thus tore up the letter. Although Abdullah, the ambassador of Islam explained that Arabs were even worse than what the king had described, but by the Grace of Allah and under the divine teachings of Prophet Muhammad, they enjoy a sublime monotheist culture.

The arrival of Islam in Iran was a turning point in Iranian history, in which the pattern of the country's religious and cultural development was determined up to the present age. The conquest of Islam brought to an end the last national Iranian dynasty for nearly a thousand years.

About one thousand years before the arrival of Islam into Iran, Iran was conquered by Alexander the Great. Nevertheless, the influence of the Greek culture on Iran was rather shallow and temporary. The rise of Islam as a religion replacing Zoroastrianism is one of the greatest events in world history. Ever since, the history of Iran was divided into pre and post Islam.

## Early Stages of Conquest

Prior to the demise of the Prophet of Islam, the Arabic speaking tribes of Iraq and Bahrain who were at the neighbourhood of Iran had already embrace Islam. After the demise of the Prophet, they refused to

pay Zakat to the Islamic federal government in Madina. Abu-Bakr, the first Muslim Caliph who ruled from 632–634, dispatched his commander Khalid Ibn Walid to that area. The Arabian tribes sought the help of their neighbouring Iranian local government.

The first battle between the Iranian local government and the army of Khalid Ibn Walid was called 'The Battle of the Chains' ذات السلاسل which took place in 'Kathemah' كاظمة between Bahrain and Basrah. During the battle, Hormoz the Commander of the Iranian army was killed by Khalid and his army was defeated. Subsequently, several confrontations occurred between the two armies, until in the year 16 AH (637 AD) the battle of al-Qadesiyyah with the killing of Rostam; the Commander of the Iranian army, determined the conquest of Iran by Arab Muslims.

Consequently, Mada'en (known as the Constantinople of Khosro) was conquered. In the year 21 AH (642 AD) the Islamic army defeated the enemy in Nahawand. This battle was known as the 'Conquering of the Conquerors' (فتح الفتوح), for since then nearly the whole of Iran was conquered with no major obstacles.

Today 99% of the total population of Iran are Muslims. Christian, Zoroastrian, and Jewish communities constituted less than 1 % of the population.

## Islam in Russia and Central Asia

Islam entered on the Russian scene via Iran in the 7th century A.D. (1st century A.H.). In 642, Azerbaijan came under Muslim control. The Muslims also occupied the extreme border town of Darbund in 658. After the conquest of eastern Caucasia (Qafqaz) Islam began to spread in these areas without any resistance. The Muslim armies crossed the river Oxus in 673. Bukhara fell to the Muslims in 674.

The series of such conquests went on up to the 10th century when Islam became the most popular religion in the entire central Asia. With the passage of time these very areas began to be considered as the main centres of Islamic civilization and culture. Thereafter Islam's popularity went on increasing in the whole of Russia. Such developments inspired and encouraged missionary activities of the Sufi saints of central Asia Qafqaz.

Islam entered Russia and Central Asia through Iran and Turkey and hence the region has been influenced by mainly Iranian and the Turkish culture.

Unfortunately, Russia had a tight grip over the Muslim territories from the middle of the 16th century to the beginning of the 20th. But despite her oppressive operations of Communism in USSR there was never any decline in the spread and popularity of Islam in Russia.

Today the majority of the population in the independent republics of the then Soviet Union are Muslims. 94% of Azerbaijan, 88% of Uzbekistan, 85% of Tajikistan, 76% of Kyrgyzstan, 52% of Kazakhstan and even 18% of Russia are the adherents of Islam.

## Islam in Africa

The spread of Islam throughout the African continent was neither simultaneous nor uniform, but followed a gradual and adaptive path. The best and the oldest documents available to us about the spread of Islam in Africa are the accounts of the geographer al-Bakri, and the great traveller Ibn Battuta<sup>6</sup>.

### Egypt

Egypt was the first African country to come under the influence of Islam.

People of ancient Egypt were polytheists. The Persian invasion of Egypt in 539 BC doesn't seem to have made any difference to Egyptian religion. The Egyptians just kept right on worshipping their gods.

When the Romans conquered Egypt in 30 BC, again the Egyptians kept on worshipping their gods, though adding on some Roman gods as well.

After the Roman Emperors became converted to Christianity in the 4th century, most of the Egyptians converted to Christianity. The famous conflict between Arius and Athanasius, took place mostly in Alexandria, in Egypt.

With the coming of Islam to Egypt, most Egyptians soon converted from Christianity to Islam. Some Jews living in Egypt remained Jewish and some of the Christians remained Christians.

The Muslim conquer of Egypt came about 20 A.H (641AH). At that time, Egyptians were unhappy with the Byzantine Empire's rule, which made it easier for the Islamic army to overrun Egypt.

An Arabian general named Amr Ibn El-Aas<sup>7</sup>, with a 4,000 cavalry, rode across the Sinai Desert, and attacked the fort of Babylon. Ibn El-Aas made his headquarters at Fustat, a new town located in what is now Old Cairo, which became afterwards the capital of Egypt instead of Alexandria. Under Muslim rule, most Egyptians in time converted to Islam. Islam in Egypt survived even the brutal attack of the crusaders which lasted for about 200 years.

Today about 94% of the population of Egypt are Muslims with about 1% Shia. Approximately 6 % of the population is composed of Christians, the majority of whom belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church.

### Sudan

"Africans are notoriously religious." This is a quote from John Mbiti a professor from Kenya who is recognized as one of the leading experts in the world on religion in Africa.

North and East Africa are separated from the Arabian Peninsula where Islam began by the narrow Red Sea. Consequently, it is not surprising that soon after its founding, Islam began to spread into nearby areas of Africa. The vast Sahara Desert and the Red Sea and Indian Ocean were not great barriers to

the spread of Islam. Arabs had lived, traveled and traded in desert conditions for centuries before the advent of Islam. Moreover, since the Arabian Peninsula is bordered on three sides by water, Arabs were experienced sea traders.

Between the 8th and the 9th centuries, Muslim traders and travellers, began to spread Islam along the eastern coast of Africa and to western and central Sudan. (Literally, 'the Land of Black people')

Egypt became an important gateway through which Islam spread to other parts of Africa. From Egypt, Arab traders introduced Islam to the West into an area called the Maghrib which includes the present day countries of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Islam was not automatically accepted by the local Berber speaking populations. Indeed, Islam did not become the predominant religion across North Africa until the Twelfth century A.D.

The spread of Islam in North Africa was accompanied by Arab rule. Arab traders who first facilitated the spread of Islam gradually gained political control of North Africa from the indigenous populations. Consequently, North Africa became Arabic as well as Islamic. Today, Arabic is the official language of Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

Arab traders had sailed down the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean and along the east coast of Africa for centuries before the rise of Islam. After Islam was established, in addition to material goods, Arab traders took with them their religion as they traded with Africans along the east coast.

However, the conversion to Islam was a slow process along the east coast of Africa. While Arab–Swahili Muslim communities formed along the coast as early as 780 A.D., it was not until the beginning of the 15th century that the majority of the coastal population in what is today Somalia, Kenya, and Tanzania were Muslim.

Islam was first introduced into West Africa south of the Sahara across the salt and gold trade routes. By the 12th Century A.D., many Berber traders had been converted to Islam. Although these Muslim traders did not actively try to convert West Africans to Islam, they did practice their religion during the time that they spent traveling in West Africa.

Moreover, as time passed Muslim traders were accompanied on their journeys by Moslem clerics and scholars. These men of religion interacted primarily with local rulers. As men of learning, they provided advice to local rulers on matters related to trade, security, and governing. Gradually, Muslim advisors became important to West African rulers.

Prior to the colonial era<sup>8</sup>, most of the Savannah region of West Africa from Senegal and Guinea through Mali, Bukina Faso, Niger and Northern Nigeria was under the control of Muslim rulers.

Further to the south along the coast of East Africa, Arab traders had established a system of city–states including Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa, Dar–es–Salaam, and Kilwa by the 18th Century. In addition, Arab

traders gained control of the Pemba and Zanzibar, two islands off the coast of Tanzania. Between the 17th and 19th centuries, a new vibrant culture developed as a result of the integration of Arabic and indigenous African peoples and cultures. The new culture and people are the Swahili who developed a new language Swahili (or KiSwahili, as it is called by its people) which is a mixture of Arabic and several African languages. Today, Swahili is the most widely spoken language in East Africa.

## Southern Africa

Islam was most recently introduced into Southern Africa. The demand for cheap labor was responsible for the introduction of Islam into this region.

The southern tip of Africa was the first area of Africa to be colonized by Europeans. In 1652, Dutch colonial settlers arrived at what is today known as Cape Town. The Dutch settler-farmers needed cheap labor to work on their farms. In response to this demand, the Dutch began to import slaves from Dutch colonies in South East Asia (Malaysia and Indonesia). Most of these slaves were Muslims.

Throughout the years of slavery and after emancipation in the early 19th Century, the descendents of these slaves maintained their strong religious affiliation with Islam. Today, there are nearly one million Muslims living in the area around Cape Town.

A second group of Muslims came to South Africa in the 19th Century. At this time, British settler-farmers had developed huge sugar plantations in the province of Natal. Slavery had been abolished, but these farmers were able to recruit inexpensive labor from India. Today, there are more than one million people of Indian heritage living in South Africa. Approximately half of the population belongs to the Islamic faith.

Although a large majority of South Africans are Christians, Islam continues to be an important religion in contemporary South Africa. Today nearly half of all Africans are the adherents of Islam, with the rest being Christians and of indigenous African religions.<sup>9</sup>

## Islam in the Subcontinent and the South-Asia

### China

China is mentioned in a Prophetic saying as an expression for the then remotest place for learning. It is narrated from the Prophet of Islam: "Seek knowledge even if it were in China."

The Ancient Record of the Tang Dynasty describes a landmark visit to China by Saad ibn Abi Waqqas (ra), one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad (s) in 650 A.D. This event is considered to be the birth of Islam in China. The Chinese Emperor Yung-Wei respected the teachings of Islam and considered it to be compatible with the teachings of Confucius.

To show his admiration for Islam, the emperor approved the establishment of China's first mosque at Ch'ang-an. The mosque still stands today, after fourteen centuries.

Muslims virtually dominated the import/export business in China during the Sung Dynasty (960 – 1279 A.D.). The office of the Director General of Shipping was consistently held by a Muslim during this period. During the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644 A.D), a period considered to be the golden age of Islam in China, Muslims fully integrated into Han society by adopting their name and some customs while retaining their Islamic mode of dress and dietary restrictions.

Anti-Muslim sentiments took root in China during the Ch'ing Dynasty (1644 – 1911 CE), which was established by the Manchus who were a minority in China.

Today more than 11% of the Chinese are Muslims which makes about 134 million people.

### Sub-continent

Trade relations between Arabia and the sub-continent date back to ancient times. Long before the advent of Islam in Arabia, the Arabs used to visit the coast of Southern India, which then provided the link between the ports of South and South East Asia. After the Arab traders became Muslim, they brought Islam to South Asia. A number of local Indians living in the coastal areas embraced Islam.

However, it was the Muslim conquests in Persia, including the provinces of Kirman and Makran, which brought the Arabs face to face with the then ruler of Sindh, who had allied with the ruler of Makran against the Muslims.

During the reign of the Umayyad Caliph Walid bin Abdul Malik, Hajjaj bin Yousaf was appointed as the governor of the Eastern Provinces. At that time, Raja Dahir, a Brahman, ruled Sindh. In one of the business trips, an eight-ship caravan of Arab traders passed by the seaport of Daibul. Sindhi pirates looted it and took the women and children as prisoners.

When news of this attack reached Hajjaj, he demanded that Dahir return the Muslim captives and the looted items. He also demanded that the culprits be punished. Dahir replied that he had no control over the pirates and was, therefore, powerless to rebuke them. On this Hajjaj decided to invade Sindh. In 712, Hajjaj sent 6,000 selected Syrian and Iraqi soldiers, a camel corps of equal strength and a baggage train of 3,000 camels to Sindh under the command of his nephew and son-in-law, Imad-ud-din Muhammad bin Qasim, a young boy of just seventeen years of age. After a fierce struggle Sindh was conquered by Muslims.

The spread of Islam in the Subcontinent is also the result of the untiring efforts of numerous saints and Sufis.

Another contributing factor for the spread of Islam in Pakistan and India was the conquest of those regions by Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi (979–1030 AD); one of the greatest conquerors the world has ever seen. Mahmud was one of the Sultans (kings) of the Ghaznavid dynasty with a Turkish background who ruled in Khurasan, an area covering most of today's Khurasan province in Iran and most of Afghanistan.

Their capital was in Ghazna (in today's Afghanistan). During the reign of his father, Subuktigin, Ghazna was attacked by the neighbouring Hindu Raja Jaipal.

When Mahmud ascended the throne in 998 he began a long series of attacks against Jaipal in South Asia. According to most historians, Mahmud invaded India seventeen times to crush the power of the Hindu Rajas and Maharajas who were always busy planning conspiracies against him.

However, the major reason for mass settlement in India by Muslims was the invasion of the Mongols into Central Asia. Genghis Khan (1167–1227 AD), his grandsons and later Timurlane wreaked havoc in the Central Asian countries causing migration of a countless number of people seeking refuge in the relative safety of India.

Today 100% of the over 22 million population in Afghanistan and 97% of Pakistan with over 127 million and only 14% of India with over 133 million people constitute their Muslim population.

### **Malay and Burma**

Islam had not entered the Malay Archipelago until the 14th century when the northern coast Sumatra was occupied and Java became a Muslim mission field. Even today, Muslim and Christians are competing for the conquest of the remaining pagan tribes in these islands.

Islam entered Burma from India through Muslim traders.

### **Indonesia**

Indonesia is the world's biggest island chain. It is at the crossroads of the Pacific and Indian oceans. Indonesia has been on trading routes for as long as mankind has sailed the seven seas. The earliest Indonesians were animists. Similar to Australian indigenous people, they practised ancestor and spirit worship.

The actual timing and introduction of Islam to Indonesia is somewhat of a debate amongst the scholars. Whatever the case may be, the Muslim influence in Indonesia is at least six centuries old from 1400 A.D. Moreover, there is no doubt that Islamization of many peoples in present-day Malaysia, southern Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei, and the southern Philippines, occurred within a few hundred years of peaceful conversion.

Today 95% of Indonesians are the adherents of Islam. With nearly 200 million Muslims; Indonesia constitutes the most Muslim populated country in the world.

### **Islam in Europe: Spain (al-Andalus) (711-1492)**

Al-Andalus, which means, "to become green at the end of the summer" is referred to the territory occupied by the Muslim empire in Southern Spain.

Spain was conquered by Arab Muslims in 710 A.D. (91 A.H.) during the reign of Walid Ibn Abdul-Malik; the 6th Umayyad king. Tariq ibn Malik crossed the straight separating Africa and Europe with a group of Muslims and entered Spain. A year later 7000 Muslim men invaded Gibraltar. Al-Andalus was the name Arabs gave to that region. A few years later, Portugal was also conquered and formed a new province called 'Algarve' الغرب.

Unlike the conquest of Africa and subjugation of Berbers by Arab Muslims which took place over 50 years, the entire al-Andalus was conquered only over a few months.

Prior to the conquest of Muslims, Spain was ruled by Visigoths; a member of the western Goths that invaded the Roman Empire in the 4th Century A.D. and settled in France and Spain, establishing a monarchy which lasted until it fell onto the Muslim rulers in the early 8th Century.

The Goths were an East Germanic tribe which according to their own traditions originated in Scandinavia. They migrated southwards and conquered parts of the Roman empire.

There are two theories about the conquest of Spain by Muslims:

According to the first theory, King Roderick, the last Visigoth ruler had reportedly "kidnapped" and raped Count Julian's daughter, the Governor of Ceuta, (A Spanish city of northwest Africa) who was sent to be educated. Julian vowed to Roderick, "the next time I return to Spain, I promise to bring you some hawks the like of which your Majesty has never seen!" Julian, a Christian, appealed to Musa ibn Nusayr, (the Umayyad Governor of North Africa) for assistance in avenging Roderick for his crime, and hence had taken him out of rule. Musa did not commit to a full-scale invasion, but called upon his lieutenant to take charge. Because of the weakened Visigoth kingdom due to its internal conflicts, and the Muslims' organization, the Muslim army easily defeated Roderick's army of over 90,000 men almost without resistance and conquered Spain.

Another theory for the occupation of Spain by the Arab Muslims is that, because of their persecution, the Jews called upon their contacts in North Africa, who in turn encouraged the able Arabs to capture Spain. This allowed the Almoravid and the Almohad dynasties to establish themselves in Spain. Nevertheless, and without a doubt, the Jews supported and welcomed Muslims into Spain as they were great beneficiaries under Muslim rule.

Muslims entered Spain not as aggressors or oppressors, but as liberators. In this multicultural society, many Jews and Christians held government positions. Moreover, the Golden Age of Jewish history is in fact known as the period of Muslim rule in Spain. Islam allowed the Jews to flourish in Spain, with the example of the renowned philosopher Moses Maimonides, (Musa ibn Maymun) who wrote Guide to the Perplexed. "Judaism probably welcomed the conquest of Spain by the Muslims in 711.

With the Muslim conquest there began a Golden Age of freedom and tolerance for Jews. They freely entered the fields of government, science, medicine, and literature."<sup>10</sup>

Muslims ruled over Spain for roughly 800 years. By the late 15th Century A.D. the Almohad dynasty began to weaken and hence they were defeated by Christian forces in 1492 A.D.

لو لا ذنوب المسلمين و انهم ركبوا الكبائر ما لهن خفاء

ما كان ينصر النصرى فارس ابداء عليهم فالذنوب الداء

ابن عسال

In the period of the Inquisition, all the rights of the Muslims were withdrawn, their lives became difficult, and more were forced to become Christian or emigrate.

Finally, in the early 17th century, most of the survivors were forcibly expelled. Since then, the Muslims were swiftly and thoroughly wiped out. According to Professor Thomas Irving (Talim Ali): “Never was the annihilation of a people more complete”. The similar ethnic cleansing, though in a smaller scale, was exercised by Christians on Tasmanian Aborigines who were totally exterminated in the 19th century in Australia.

For more in-depth study of the touching destiny of Muslims in Spain, I refer you to “Blood on the Cross” by Ahmad Thomson.

At one time 75% of the population of Spain were Muslims. Alas today, only 2% of Spain constitutes Muslims!

Those who would like to know how Muslims were forced out of Spain and how Andalus slipped back to Christian authority after being under Muslim administration for a long time, should study how in our modern time Zionists massacred the Palestinians and forced them out of their home-land and country. Also how international Zionism employed all inhumane means to occupy Palestine is also a good study. The Muslims in both cases did not abandon their religion; they were simply massacred and forced out of their homes.

## **Dynamics of the Spread of Islam**

One of the most amazing parts of human history is the rapid spread of Islam. As we already learnt within one century from its advent, Islam was the religion of half of the then civilized world. This has been an interesting issue for the scholars to search for the secret power of this new religion by which it was able to accomplish such marvelous result. Many have sought to answer the questions as to why the triumph of Islam was so quick and complete. Why have so many millions of different cultural backgrounds

embraced the religion of Islam?

Typically many non-Muslims, when they think about Islam, picture religious fanatics on camels with a sword in one hand and a Quran in the other. Thus, the myth that Islam spread by sword! Louis L'Amour in his 'Walking Drum' is an example of such a biased approach.

## Islamic Tolerance

We must bear in mind that in Islam "there is no compulsion in religion". Thus, no one can be forced to become a Muslim. It is true that Muslim rulers conquered the Persian Empire, Egypt, Spain and many other places but their ambition was, like many other kings, to expand their territories and conquer new lands. There is no historical record that the peoples of those countries were forced to accept Islam.

Hence, many churches and synagogues existed even after about 14 hundred years of Muslim rulers in Iran, Egypt and many other Muslim countries. Zoroastrian; the ancient religion in the pre-Islamic Iran is still even in the contemporary Islamic republic of Iran is recognised and its adherents constitute one of the religious minorities. Similar to the Christians and the Jewish people they have their representative in the Iranian Parliament.

Sir Henry M. Elliot in his '*History of India*' (vol. 1 p. 185) states: "In A.D. 712, the Arab leader, Muhammad bin Qasim, conquered Sind and set up Muslim rule; the earliest converts were mostly Hindus of low cast who left Hinduism believing that the Muslim faith offered them equality.

When Muhammad bin Qasim wrote to his uncle requesting guidance regarding the natives of Sind, this was the reply he received: "It appears that the chief inhabitants of Brahmanabad had petitioned to be allowed to repair the temple of Budh and pursue their religion. As they have made submission and agreed to pay taxes to the Caliph, nothing more can be properly required from them. They have been taken under our protection<sup>11</sup>, and we cannot in any way stretch out our hands upon their lives or property. Permission is given to them to worship their gods. Nobody must be forbidden or prevented from following his own religion."

It was due to this Islamic tolerance that the Orthodox Christians of Byzantium openly expressed their preference for the Ottoman turban in Istanbul to the hats of the Catholic cardinals. Elisee Reclus, a French traveler of the 19th Century, wrote that the Muslim Turks allowed all the followers of different religions to perform their religious duties and rituals, and that the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Sultan were more free to live their own lives than the Christians who lived in the lands under the rule of any rival Christian sect. (*Nouvelle Geographie Universelle*, Vol. IX)<sup>12</sup>

A sword may penetrate through the flesh of people but cannot change their hearts. The ancient Iran was conquered by Alexandria; the Great about a millennium prior to the conquest of Muslim Arabs. Yet, the influence of the Roman civilisation on Iran was rather temporarily and shallow.

During the post-Islamic era, Iran was twice conquered by the non-Muslims; the Suljuk in the 11th century, and the Mongols in the 13th century, and in each case amazingly the conquerors adopted the religion (Islam) of the conquered! This is certainly a unique occurrence in history. Since they were the victors, they certainly could not have been forced to become Muslims.

Ironically, it is more evident that violence has often been employed by non-Muslims to stop the spread of Islam rather than by Muslims to spread it. The touching homicide of Muslims in Spain is just one of its examples.

## **Islam, the main cause**

The fact is the only key to the mystery of the spread of Islam, is Islam and its comprehensive and instinctive humanitarian values. Islam is the divine response and prescription to all individual, social, political, educational and spiritual human demands. It is the sublime teachings of Islam that has been penetrating the hearts of mankind throughout its history.

A. J. Arberry has also pointed out that the reason for the spread of Islam is Islam itself and its religious values. (Aspects of Islamic Civilization, p. 12) He states: "The rapidity of the spread of Islam, noticeably through extensive provinces which had been long Christian, is a crucial fact of history... the sublime rhetoric of the Quran, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy".

## **Universalism of Islam**

Although various scientific discoveries and inventions may occur in a particular country, they do not belong nor limit to the geographical border of that country. Thus, the mathematical, chemical and biological laws are international no matter who has invented or discovered them.

God has sent His Messengers for humanity at large, not merely Arabs or the lost sheep of Israel! Thus, divine religions are international. The teachings of Islam is not like the constitution of Australia which aims at only serving the citizens of a particular country; i.e. Australia. You can not be simultaneously an Australian citizen and a Japanese citizen. But you can well be an Australian citizen and a loyal Muslim.

Although Islam appeared amidst the Arabian Peninsula nowhere in the Quran, Allah states: "O You Arabs!" The addressees of the Quran are either Mankind in general or the believers and the disbelievers irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. As a matter of fact, the holy Quran states that should Arabs turn away from Islam, Allah will replace them with those who practice Islam better than them. (Chapter 47: Ayah 38)

Most of the Umayyad rulers discriminated between Iranians; who were the new converts (or reverts), and Arabs giving the privilege to Arabs. As a result, many Iranian uprisings occurred against the federal government of the Umayyad. The uprising of Abu-Muslim Khorasani is an example of those uprising

against the Arab Muslims. Bloody wars took place between the Iranian new Muslims and the Arabic army of Umayyad.

Iranians defeated the Arabs in the same regions wherein their Zoroastrian ancestors were defeated about a century ago. Nevertheless, they never retreated to the religion of their ancestors. From the 9th century A.D. (3rd A.H.) Iranian dynasties beginning with 'Taherian' emerged in Iran marking the independence of Iranians from the Arab rulers. They disconnected themselves from the Arabic rulers, but not from Islam.

A similar situation occurred in Egypt when Ibn Tulun who had a Turkish background rose in the 9th A.D. Century (3rd A.H.) against the racist Umayyad government and formed an independent government in Egypt.

### The exemplary life-style of Muslim individuals

Besides many other reasons which are responsible for the spread of Islam, it is the exemplary life-style and unceasing efforts of individual Muslims to transmit the message of Islam throughout the world which lies at the root of the conquest of the hearts by Islam. Islamic universalism is closely associated with the principle of *Amr bi'l-ma'ruf* (enjoining the good) for Islam is to be spread by Muslims by means of *Amr bi'l-ma'ruf*. This principle seeks to convey the message of Islam to all human beings in the world and to establish a well modeled Islamic community on a world-wide basis.

The Islamic community is introduced by the Quran as a model community:

***"Thus, We have made of you an Ummah justly balanced, that you might be witnesses (models) for the peoples, and the Messenger has been a witness for you." (The Quran, 2: 143)***

Thus, a Muslim or the Muslim community as a whole has a goal to achieve: This is the spread of Islam, conveying the truth to the remotest corners of the world, the eradication of oppression and tyranny and the establishment of justice all over the world. This requires Muslims to live an exemplary life, and thus the moral and ethical values of Islam have usually played an important part in the spread of Islam.

اللهم كن لوليک الحجة ابن الحسن صلواتک علیه و علی آباءه فی هذه الساعة و فی کل ساعة ولیا و حافظا و قائدا  
و ناصرا و دليلا و عينا حتى تسکنه ارضک طوعا و تمتعه فیها طويلا

. برحمتک یا ارحم الراحمين

[1.](#) Rey-Shahri, Mizanul-Hikmah, vol.3 p. 1339

[2.](#) See: Prof. Muhammad Hamidullah Hyderabad; al-Wasa'iqus Siyasaah by Prof. Muhammad, Professor of Paris University. And Ali Ahmadi, Makatibur Rasul.

[3.](#) Ibn Hisham, As-Sirah vol2 p.606

4. Subhani, Forogh Abadiyat vol.2 p.214
5. The date is according to al-Waqedi and al-Balazeri.
6. "The Adventures of Ibn Battutah; a traveller of the 14th century" Trans. By Ross Dunn.
7. The first mosque built in Egypt is named after him. Amr Ibn El-Aas mosque is now considered the crown of the mosques (Tajul-Masajid) in Cairo.
8. From the beginning of the 19th century. Over the last two hundred years of the colonisation of Africa by European countries there has been a rapid expansion of Christianity in Africa. Today 40% of Africans identify themselves as Christians.
9. Main source: <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/curriculum/lm14/actthree14.html> [3]
10. Hopfe, Lewis. Religions of the World. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998. curtesy of: <http://www.hispanicmuslims.com/andalusia/andalusia.html> [4]
11. Thimmi; a title for a non-Muslim living in an Islamic state means 'Protected'.
12. Courtesy of <http://www.thewaytotruth.org/islam-humanity/rapidspreadofislam.html> [5]

[Get PDF](#) [6] [Get EPUB](#) [7] [Get MOBI](#) [8]

---

### Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/articles/spread-islam-its-beginning-14th-century-mansour-leghaei#comment-0>

### Links

- [1] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/shaykh-mansour-leghaei>
- [2] <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook>
- [3] <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/curriculum/lm14/actthree14.html>
- [4] <http://www.hispanicmuslims.com/andalusia/andalusia.html>
- [5] <http://www.thewaytotruth.org/islam-humanity/rapidspreadofislam.html>
- [6] <https://www.al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/44991>
- [7] <https://www.al-islam.org/printepub/book/export/html/44991>
- [8] <https://www.al-islam.org/printmobi/book/export/html/44991>