

Impact of the islamic invasion on spain



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The history of Spain reflects the effect of certain cultures and religions on Spanish population, language, traditions and style of life. In the Middle Ages (about 411 AD) Spain was occupied by the German tribes and further the country was conquered by the Visigoths (416 AD) (Collins, 1995).

However, the aim of this essay is to analyse the impact of the Islamic invasion on Spain, as the Muslims has had a considerable effect on the country up to the present day. In 711-714 the Umayyad dynasty seized the Spanish area near Cordoba (Rahman, 1989); forty years later Abd al-Rahman I created an Umayyad Emirate. But it was in the tenth century under the ruling of Abd al-Rahman III (912-961) that the Muslims managed to intensify Spain's prosperity and wealth (Goodwin, 1990). Abdal-Rahman III united some areas of al-Andalus and improved military, tax and law systems.

In the eleventh century the Emirate was divided into several kingdoms with unique cultures and traditions. After the decay of the Umayyad dynasty, other Islamic dynasties took control over Spain, such as the Almoravides, the Almohades and the Nasrids (Taha, 1989).

At the end of the fifteenth century the Christian rulers seized the power in Granada and put an end to the Muslim ruling. Other Spanish places, such as Seville and Cordoba, were liberated from the Muslims by Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in the thirteenth century. But the Islamic influence has preserved in Spain till nowadays, though Isabella made everything to destroy Islam and eradicate any traces of the Muslims.

The Islamic invasion positively affected many areas of life in Spain, such as culture, education, religion, economics, science, society and family. Al-

Andalus, as the Muslims called Spain, had acquired the central position among other civilizations of the ancient world since the conquest of Cordoba by the Umayyad dynasty (Chejne, 1974). In particular, the Muslims created about two thousand public baths and mosques for different social groups and implemented some schools for poor children in Cordoba. Although some Spanish regions opposed the Muslim ruling, industry and trade were considerably advanced by the Umayyads (Harvey, 1990).

Spanish libraries contained more than 400, 000 books and the streets of Cordoba were illuminated, unlike such European capitals as Paris and London. As Hillenbrand (1999) puts it, Cordoba in its prime had no peer in Europe for the amenities of civilized life. Its houses were bountifully supplied with hot and cold running water, its streets were lit at night (p. 175).

Different religious groups, such as Christians, Muslims and Jews, successfully interacted with each other. According to Ghazanfar (2004), there existed no separation between science, wisdom, and faith; nor was East separated from the West, nor the Muslim from the Jew or the Christian (p. 2). Such religious tolerance can be explained by the fact that the Muslims did not act as oppressors, but, instead, they tried to improve the living conditions of all social classes in Spain. As a result, Christians and Jews occupied the leading positions during the Muslim ruling (Hopfe, 1998).

This peaceful co-existence of three religions had continued till the fifteenth century (Thomson, 1989), contributing to many aspects of life in Spain. For instance, in the eleventh century Arabic language was utilised in Spanish science and literature, while Spaniards began to learn the Muslims' language to acquaint with Arabic writings (Shubert, 1992).

Some Christians and Jews borrowed Arabic culture and religion, gradually transforming into Mozarabs, people who were Arabized (Watt, 1965). Many illiterate Spanish people learned to read and write, calculate and navigate (Houston, 1964). As the Muslims preserved some Roman and Greek literary works, Spanish Christians served as translators for these crucial manuscripts. Architecture, philosophy, mathematics and other sciences also prospered under the ruling of the Umayyad dynasty due to their belief in Allah and the laws of the Qur'an, the holy book of the Muslims that accentuated the power of knowledge (Fakhry, 1983).

As the Muslims made attempts to understand God, they also tried to uncover the truth about human nature by conducting different researches and scientific investigations (Saud, 1994). For instance, the Muslims substituted the Roman number system existed in Spain for the Arabic number system that has been widely utilised in algebra, arithmetic and business since then. In addition, astronomy, medicine, biology and chemistry began to thrive in Spain after the Islamic invasion (Lewis, 1993). Among the most famous Spanish philosophers, writers, artists and scientists of the Muslim era are Al-Kwarizmi, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Zuhr, Al-Razi and Ibn Sina (Chejne, 1974). Ibn Sina's medical treatise Al-Qanun had been studied in many European educational establishments for about three hundred years and had been regarded as one of the best medical works (Vernet, 1992).

One of the greatest Muslim scholars of Spain was Abu Zakariyah al-Awwam Ishibili who created a procedure of grafting and gave names to more than five hundred plants (Ghazanfar, 2004). Pedro Alfonso, a Spanish Muslim scholar who was interested in astronomy, claimed that his wish was to raise <https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-the-islamic-invasion-on-spain/>

once more to life the knowledge of that science which is in such a deplorable state among those educated in the Latin manner (Hermes, 1977, p. 72). Due to such an advanced stage of scientific development, many European scientists arrived to Spain to receive knowledge in various sciences and to interpret Latin texts. In regard to economics, the Muslims created the silk industry in Al-Andalus, gradually transforming Spain into one of the largest countries for silk production. The country was also engaged in the production of satin, cotton, pepper, furs, clocks, paper, maps and soaps. Further Spain contributed to the fine fabrics manufacturing in Europe. Agriculture was poorly developed in Spain because of a primordial irrigation system (White, 1970; Semple, 1971); but the Muslims substituted this old system for a new improved irrigation method that resulted in the prosperity of orchards and the increase of rice crops in such areas as Granada and the Valenican huerta (Dickie, 1968).

The Muslims utilised the method of Syrianization to improve agriculture of Spanish towns, especially Valencia and Seville (Burns, 1973). The new system allowed Spaniards to intensify crops with the help of artificial water supply (Smith, 1966, p. 442). Up to the present day this irrigation system has been controlled by an old Muslim tribunal (Tribunal of the Waters); today this Tribunal is held once a week and is aimed at solving disputable agricultural issues. Due to these improvements, Spanish people began to cultivate various plants and trees, such as oranges, lemons, artichokes, apricots, olive and implemented an advanced system of nature protection (Imamuddin, 1965, p. 84). Before the Islamic invasion, Spanish grew winter crops, but the Muslims managed to implement Indian crops that were grown in a frost-free

season. As a result, many Arabic words were introduced in Spanish language to reflect different aspects of the irrigation system; for instance, alberca-albirka means a pool and acequia-al-saqiya means an irrigation ditch.

Nowadays some flowers bear the Arabic names, such asbellota-balluta for acorn, alazor-al-asfur for safflower and al-fasfasa foralfalfa. Other words reflect the impact of the Muslims on farming: tahona-tahuna (flour-mill), aldea-al-day's (village), and rabadan-rabb al-da'n (head-shepherd). As the Muslims were obsessed with nature, they utilised their artistic skills to create splendid gardens and buildings that have attracted attention of people till nowadays (Blair & Bloom, 1994). Such unusual places as the Alhambra of Granda, the Mosque of Cordoba and the Alcazar of Seville are the visual legacy of the Muslims in Spain (Barrucand & Bednorz, 1992; Ettinghausen & Grabar, 1987). These splendid architectural buildings clearly reveal the Muslims' innovations in the fields of architectural design and style(King, 1978; Grabar, 1978; Rodriguez, 1992).

Unfortunately, almost all Islamic architectural monuments were destroyed at the end of the fifteenth century; only the Alhambra remained undamaged (Fletcher, 1987). Many famous writers and artists depicted the Alhambra in their works (Ching, 1979). For instance, Washington Irving created *Tales of the Alhambra* when he visited this place in Spain. Despite the destruction of many Islamic buildings (Barrucand & Bednorz, 1992), a new Islamic mosque for Spanish Muslims hasbeen recently built in Granada as a result of Islam renewal in 1989. The Muslims are able to pray in the mosque and receive education in such sciences as medicine and law. Today the number of the Muslims in Spain approaches to onemillion people who strongly defend their

rights and their faith. Some Spanish Muslims continue to live in the Albaican quarter in Granada, where the Muslims lived in the 10-15 centuries.

However, the tensions between Spanish Muslims and Spanish Christians are rather complicated, although Spanish government realises that it is crucial to improve the relations between these two religious groups.

Analysing the impact of the Islamic invasion on the history of Spain, the essay suggests that the Muslims considerably affected such areas of Spanish life as economics, culture, science, architecture, art and religion. They managed to improve the country's agriculture and manufacturing, contributing to its prosperity and wealth; they implemented many advanced systems based on scientific findings, especially Arabic number system of calculation, the illumination system and the irrigation method. The Muslims transferred their knowledge in medicine, algebra, chemistry, astronomy, architecture, art, nature and technology to Spanish people who further imparted these valuable data to other European countries. Thus, the Islamic invasion on Spain paved the way for the period of Renaissance in Europe; as Ghazanfar (2004) puts it, Muslims not only occupied Spain but planted the roots of European Renaissance through unparalleled transfer of knowledge in almost every field known (p. 11). Today the Islamic influence is especially obvious in many Spanish words that reflect the Arabic roots, as well as in architectural monuments, literature, sciences, legal laws and cultural traditions. Although Islam was officially renewed in Spain at the end of the twentieth century, the Muslims continue to experience serious racial prejudices from the side of Spanish Christians.