

Changes in west african religion:1000- 1500ce

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The role of religion has changed over time in West Africa from the migration of Islam bringing its new faith, rituals, and establishment of a greater connection with the outside world through trade and cultural diffusion. However the unique African religion that existed beforehand was still retained; the African culture still believing in animism and polytheism even after the spread of Islam. From 1000-1500 CE the role of religion has seen changes and continuities influenced by the spread of foreign territories, economics, and political/social systems in West Africa. Religion in any time and has several profound influences on its society affecting the moral codes, gender relationships, and politics on that area.

Previously, Africa although not fully isolated from the centers of other civilizations, remained secluded from communication with them, slowing the indigenous religions to be the main belief system. West Africa's first major change begun around 1000 CE when followers of the prophet Muhammad came across Africa bringing its religion, Islam, and social changes. Due to its connection with the Islamic world Africa started to connect with other foreign territories through its new trading and long distance commerce system, exchanging new ideas and products. Furthermore, this new connection with the outside world brought occupants to the area, resulting in a population about 30 to 60 million by 1500 CE. These new economic effects deteriorated the native's beliefs role as the sole influence of its society, sharing that position with Islam.

Also, the Islamic influence brought on by merchants and travelers spread the new faith across West Africa bringing mixed results from new converts and those who remained with the original religion. In the 12th century around the <https://assignbuster.com/changes-in-west-african-religion1000-1500ce/>

Sudanic states lived a very powerful ruler, called Sundiata, who though never forcing Islam on the citizens encouraged the spread of Islam, attracting many converts. Around the 13th century in the Kingdom of Mali became an example of Islamicized Sudanic Kingdoms from the building of mosques, attendance of Muslim prayers, and emphasized obedience to kings. In addition, ruling leaders often took Islamic titles enforcing their authority and displaying the cultural diffusion connected with Islam. Though the role of religion in West Africa has been altered due to the spread Islam many of its traditional ethic concepts have been retained and practiced.

Despite the fact that Islam was introduced around 1000 CE, unlike in other countries, the new religion was not forced upon the people and some chose to convert, while others kept the traditional beliefs. One original concept of religion that has not changed in Africa is its monotheistic beliefs where there is one superior, all powerful deity who controls the course of the world and influences its population. Also, apart from the superior creator god there is animism, in which Africans recognize lesser deities often associated with natural forces, like water, wind, sun, etc, who are connected with the affairs of humans, good or bad. Many native rituals are focused on honoring these gods and other spirits for good fortune, including prayers, sacrifices, ceremonies marking important stages in life, like birth, marriage, and death. Furthermore, another religious practice that remained intact is the recognition of diviners, or individuals who were believed to be the bridge between mortality and the divine, who knew the causes of problems and their solutions spiritually.

Also, though Islam was a major change brought on by 1000 CE, throughout 500 years it remained a steadfast religion, which had some beliefs similar to that of the traditional religion. In addition Islam did not change African gender systems and supplanted original religions, rather than replace them. Although many changes were incorporated into its spiritual life, religion still determined the ethical/moral code of the population determining the social and cultural manner of West Africa. The Islamization that took place within West Africa from 1000 to 1500 CE brought a variety of religious, political, and economic changes in its society, contrary to the diversity and individuality that remained. With the spread of Islam came a broader trading network which brought Africa new ways of communication with the outside world, bringing new ideas of faith and migrants to the area.

Though the movement of new faiths traveled across the Sudanic states bringing new forms of worship, religion was still the main authority that determined the ethical/ social patterns of Africa. With this in mind much of African religion was retained, leading many people to live a life devoted to animism and several nature deities. Around the beginning of 1500 CE much of West Africa, especially Ghana, Mali, and the Sudanic kingdoms, became a fusion of African culture and Islamic influence, with greater connection to the outside world and Islam while great diversity remained.