

Good term paper about the history and spread of islam in africa

[Parts of the World, Africa](#)



Islam is one of the fastest growing and the second largest religion in the world judging by the number of followers and conversion each year (Ezzati, 26). The religion is known to be strict in its doctrines and observing the teaching of Prophet Muhammad, who is said to be the last prophet sent by God. Islam basically started when the prophet began relaying God's message that was revealed to him by way of visions and dreams. This was from the year 613 CE when according to the Muslims, the prophet formed the first Ummah or the community of Muslims, which continued to grow throughout his life and beyond. Although it was initially started in Arabia, the Muslim community later got a significant boost several years after the death of Prophet Muhammad through the growth of the then Arab empire. The expansion of the empire to other regions meant the introduction of the practice of Islam.

The creation of the first caliphates by the fast expanding Arab empire resulted in massive conversions to Islam. This was aided by a large number of missionaries who were dedicated to teaching people the doctrines of the religion. For instance, one group known as the Sufis was devoted to making the religion popular among the masses and as a result they would freely mix with other people and learn their language and way of life while introducing the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. According to Levtzion & Pouwels (390) the stable economic status of the Arabs was also a significant boost to the spread of the religion. Early Arab traders helped in the creation of the Muslim world by spreading the religion to regions outside of Mecca across the Pacific as well as the Atlantic oceans where they mainly engaged in trade. They also set up Muslim centers which were popular in equipping people with the Islam

teachings. Subsequently, powerful empires and the Muslim dynasties were established in various parts of the world further cementing the presence of the religion.

The spread of Islam in Africa was mainly boosted by the Arab traders who frequented the northern part of Tunisia, Morocco, as well as Egypt. The establishment of powerful empires which ruled the region led to the dominance of the religion. The invasion of North Africa between 647 and 648 by the Arabs who were keen in spreading the power of Islam as a religion and rule led to the fall of the Byzantine rule and thereafter massive conversions. Islam became the dominant religion, and the community grew in Tunisia and Morocco. Uqba Ibn Nafi, the Arab general who led to the fall of the Byzantine rule oversaw the establishment of the Kairouan, one of the first urban establishments in Tunisia. He also commissioned the biggest mosque in the city known as the mosque of Uqba. Up to date the mosque remains an essential infrastructure in the history of Islam in Africa as it is one of the biggest in the western Muslim world.

The conquering of the Berbers was a significant boost to the spread of Islam in Africa. The conquest started with the conversion of the inhabitants of the coastal towns and later spread inward where more Berbers were converted. With their help, the Arabs were able to conquer Andalusia and incorporate it as one of the Islamic states. The Arabs were appealing to the African communities through their eloquent speech and intelligence of language. The conquering of the city of Alexandria in Egypt helped in the growth of the Arab and Muslim community. This meant that more Arabs were welcome to the town in their conquest to expand the religion. The then regime was

friendly and more accessible to the people compared to the previous Byzantine rule resulting in a great support from the people. The confidence in the influence and spread of the religion was so high that the then ruler of the city granted the freedom of religion to the inhabitant Christian community.

The spread of Islam into the horn of Africa region was as a result of contact with the early Arab traders and the caliphs who dedicated their lives to the dissemination of the religion. This explains the dominance of Islam in Somalia and the large numbers of the Muslim community. The spread of the religion in the region was met with serious resistance from the then ruling regime of the Quraysh. This led to a large number of Muslims running to the nearby city of Zeila to seek refuge and, as a result, they were incorporated into the community and transverse the country spreading the religion. The growth in trade along the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea coastline promoted the religion because most merchants were Muslims and converting to the religion boosted trade and raised the confidence in the parties involved. Some, therefore, converted for convenience purpose. A major boost however came after instability was experienced in the Arab peninsula leading to migration of Muslim families to the Somalia region.

The early Arab traders had frequented the eastern coast of Africa in their trade expeditions where they mainly dealt with slaves and ivory. This constant visits led to the formation of permanent colonies in the major islands in the region such as the Zanzibar, Pemba, Lamu among others translating to the growth of Islam. In the 10th century, Ali Ibn Al-Hassan Shirazi founded the Kilwa sultanate on the east African coast. Ali was one of

the seven sons of the Persian ruler in Shiraz and had been chased away from home by his brothers after his father's death because his mother was a slave. The Kilwa sultanate grew to become one of the most powerful regimes. It spread northwards to Malindi and Lamu in Kenya and constructed some of the most sophisticated mosques using corals as noted by Ibn Battuta, a 13th century Muslim traveler. The sultanate rule in these islands led to intermarriage with the local Bantus creating the Swahili community that inhabit the east African coast.

The slave trade was rampant along the Swahili coast in eastern Africa with slaves being taken from the mainland and transported to other parts of the world. Converting to Islam was taken to be a way of shielding people from being sold away as slaves. This fact led to numerous conversions of the communities living along the coastline as well as the adjacent communities of the present coastal province in Kenya and the Dar-es-salaam area in Tanzania. The conversion of the coastal communities led to the traders moving to the mainland in search of non-Muslim slaves further spreading the religion. Currently, communities in the coastal regions in east African countries are Muslims with some towns such as Lamu and Zanzibar recording as high as 98% of the total population. The number of Muslims in the region has increased considerably through conversion as well as birth.

In the western part of Africa, the Islamic teachings were spread by the caliphates from the north. The dominance of the religion in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco saw it spread to other parts such as Sudan where people converted and helped in spreading it further to Mali, Ghana as well as Chad and Nigeria. The merchants who visited major towns in these countries led to

the establishment of the religion by facilitating the building of mosques. They also promoted the spread of Arabic in the region. Just like in east Africa, people in the sub-Saharan region converted to Islam to boost their trading relations with the Arabs as well as prevent themselves from being sold out as slaves. On the other hand, the rulers in this part of Africa promoted Islam as a way of collaborating with the Arabs who were a key factor in the economy. They also wanted to maintain a strong bond to boost their political power especially after the conquering of the resistant regimes in North Africa.

The spread of Islam in Africa was mainly aided by the early Arab traders who visited the African coastline and mainland in search of slaves and ivory. Their presence in the areas brought the need to have mosques build for their prayers while in the region and in the process the local communities became acquainted with the doctrines of the religion. The infiltration of this religion into the local community led to the formation of afro Arabic cultures such as the Swahili of the east Africa. In the 20th century, the Muslim community in Africa grew from 20 to 40% and by the year 2000, it stood at 315 million up from 34. 5 in 1900 (Tayob, 228).

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