

Overview of the fall of muslim spain history essay



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The green indicates the total amount of land captured by the Muslims. For my report, I am going to write about Islamic Spain because I was and am fascinated by the heights in which the Muslims reached but are far from today. At the start of the 7th century, much of Europe was in a state of darkness. While the people of Arabia and Africa were prospering, those of Spain were under the oppressive rule of tyrannical Visigoth ruler, Roderick. The traditional story is that in the year 711, an oppressed Christian chief, Julian, went to Musa ibn Nusair, the governor of North Africa, with a plea for help against the troublesome ruler.[1] The capturing of Spain was an easy task for the Muslims and they easily removed the tyrants from power. During the golden years of Islamic rule, Spain was thought to be a beacon of light in the then dark and formidable medieval Europe. Spain was a center of learning and wisdom. It is said that as many as 60,000 treatises, poems and compilations were published each year in Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain). In comparison, modern Spain published 46,330 books per year as of 1996. Muslims, Christians and Jews lived together side by side in harmony. However, it was not to last. Due to loss of faith, corruption and much injustice done to the non-Muslims of the land, the fall of Islam was hard and hefty.

The Conquest

By 711, the people of Iberia (present day Spain and Portugal) were fed up with their rulers, the Visigoths (meaning Goths of the West). Though the Visigoths were Christians, they were brutal and unjust. Stories were told of murder and other severe injustice, which only further enraged the people. It

is said that when the Muslim army came marching through towns and villages, the people of the land cheered for their new leaders.

Painting done by an unknown artist of a battle between Muslim and Christian forces When approached by the Christian Chief, Julian, Musa ibn Nusair, the then governor of North Africa, decided to send a young general, Tariq bin Ziyad.[2]Tariq led a force of seven thousand troops to the north. The spot where they landed on the Spanish coast, Gibraltar, was named after Tariq (Jabal At-Tariq meaning rock of Tariq). The Visigoth army was easily defeated, mostly due to the divisions amongst the Visigoths and their allies. This, in turn, led to the demoralization of the fighters themselves. During the battle, it is said that Roderick, the leader of the Visigoths, was killed but his body was never found.

The Muslim army went on to capture most of the Iberian Peninsula. This all went on during a seven year campaign. However when the Muslims attempted to conquer France, they were defeated by the Frankish Catholic King, Charles Martel in 732.[3]

The reasons for the Muslims rapid success in Spain were multiple. Firstly, When the North African army defeated the last Visigoth king, the central government fell apart. Also, the Muslims provided generous surrender terms in contrast to the harsh conditions under the Visigoths. Another reason could be that Mush of society was already demoralized and wanted change. At the time, the only ones who prospered and lived in luxury were the rich. Much of the poor lived as serfs (people bound to the land like slaves). The conquest proved to be a boon for the serfs, who were exploited for centuries by the

Goths and Romans before them.[4]However, the middle class were probably the worst off; not only did they make little money, but they also had to carry the burden of the taxes used to fund society. People lost hope in the clergy (church) who would use this tax money and spend it for themselves and not at all aid the people.

The Golden Age

Though some may deny this, the era in which the Muslims had control over Spain was one of knowledge and enlightenment. There were many libraries and centers of learning. People studied literature, philosophy, architecture, medicine, poetry and etc. Al Andalus was a center of learning for people of all backgrounds, Muslims, Jews and Christians. There were many libraries, universities, and other centers of learning. People studied the sciences, philosophy, architecture, literature, poetry and etc. People, for the most part, lived in peace and prosperity. They no longer worried about injustice and freedom. As stated by Stanley Lane-Poole in his book, Muslims in Spain, “The conquest did away with the overgrown estates of the great nobles and churchmen, and converted them into small proprietorships; it removed the heavy burden of the middle class and restricted taxations; land tax levied equally for Muslims and Christians; it induced a widespread emancipation of slaves and a radical improvement in the improvement of the unemancipated, who now became almost independent farmers in the service of their non-agricultural Muslim masters.”[5]

However, even though the Muslims (Arabs and Moors) overtook the land together, they were not united. The credit goes to Amir Abd Al-Rahman, who founded the emirate of Cordoba, and was able to get the various Muslim

groups who had conquered Europe to pull together in ruling it.[6]As a result, stability was established and lasted for centuries. This gave Al-Andalus a feeling of safety and peace not found in other parts of Europe at the time.

Inside the gardens of the Alhambra Palace Al- Andalus had many great cities, one of which was the city of Cordoba. This great city boasted a population of about 500, 000, compared to 38, 000 in Paris, France.[7]It was the biggest and most prosperous city in all of Europe. Cordoba was a leading literary and educational center in the Islamic world since many important and influential scientists and philosophers came from Cordoba, such as Averroes (ibn Rushd), Abulcasis and Avicenna (ibn Sina), they may have had a huge impact on the start of the European renaissance. The economy of Cordoba was booming and many different industries were invigorated after the conquest. Such industries included agriculture, ceramics, metalwork, textiles and etc., Tariffs and taxes were a source of income for the affluent city.

Great Mosque of Cordoba Spain, now a Cathedral

Islam also greatly influenced the architecture and buildings of Spain. Today you could find many cathedrals and churches that were once mosques. An example of such would be the La Mezquita (meaning The Mosque). This great cathedral was once a great mosque in the city of Cordoba. It was considered an architectural feat at its time. Another amazing structure is the Alhambra in Granada. Alhambra comes from the Arabic word, Al-Hamra, meaning The Red One. It is a beautiful palace with flowing gardens. You can find many such structures and feats in Spain which show the influences of Islam and the Arabs.

Society and Religion

Before the Muslims came, Spain was home to other groups of people, mostly Christians, but also Jews. Since the Visigoths who ruled before the Muslims were devout Christians, many Jews had to live in hiding to avoid their wrath. Also, the Visigoths imposed their version of Christianity, which was sometimes on the brink of cruelty. In the beginning, the Visigoths were good Christian rulers; yet, they then became corrupt, using tax money to reinforce the church. Fortunately, this was all to change.

Islamic Spain is sometimes described as a “golden age” of religious ethnic tolerance and interfaith harmony between Muslims, Christians and Jews.

[8]Non- Muslims were not forced to live in poor areas in town nor in any other specific locations. They were not forced into any form of slavery. Also, unlike many other nations, the Christians and Jews were not forced to abandon their religion nor were they stopped from practicing their religions.

Illustration of Muslims and Jews fighting together side by side in battle Jews and Christians were not stopped or prevented from earning money, but usually, they would have jobs disliked by Muslims, such as tanning and butchery. But these jobs were not necessarily distasteful; there were jobs in banking and dealing with gold and silver.

However, Non-Muslims had to follow the rules set by the state. Some of these rules were:

They had to accept Islamic power

They had to pay a tax called Jizya to the Muslim rulers and sometimes paid higher rates of other taxes

They avoided blasphemy

They Could not try to convert Muslims

There were restrictions on building synagogues and churches

They could not receive an inheritance from a Muslim

They could not bequeath anything to a Muslim

They could not own a Muslim slave

A Non-Muslim man could not marry a Muslim woman (but the reverse was acceptable)

A Non-Muslim could not give evidence in an Islamic court

A Non-Muslim would get lower compensation than Muslims for the same injury[9]

Many Non-Muslims became part of the Muslim culture in Al- Andalus. They began to dress and look like Muslims (some women even wore hijab) and began to speak Arabic and take Arabic names. Christians and Jews were tolerated for many reasons, One of which main reasons is that in Islam it is decreed that Muslims must treat the people of the book (Christians and Jews) with respect.

Quran (29: 46): Be courteous when you argue with the People of the Book [Christians and Jews), except with those among them who do evil. Say: We believe in that which is revealed to us and which was revealed to you. Our God and your God is one.[10]

Also, treating them nicely also proved to be advantageous to the Muslims. They proved to be loyal because they had no affiliations with other Muslims groups they provided the government with workers who could easily be trained and removed if necessary.

Unfortunately, there were periods of time in which this was not always the case and Non- Muslims were treated harshly due to unjust leaders. But overall, Minorities were treated much worse after the fall of the Islamic empire and under the control of Spain by the Christianity.

The Decline

Sadly, the era of Al-Andalus was not to last. Slowly, yet surely, the great kingdom was broken into small bits and new rulers were looking after their princedoms.[11]By the early 1000s, there were many divisions between the Muslim rulers. As a result, when the Christian army began to infiltrate the split up lands, many rulers betrayed each other and turned against one another.

The reasons for Muslim weakness were multiple. Of these, the most important was that the leaders became corrupt and had lost their religion. Consequently, they were cruel, selfish and unjust. This led to the mistreatment of the Jews and Christians of Spain. They were not allowed to have taller houses than the Muslims and could not show nor practice their

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faith (any sign of religion was punishable by law). The result was distrust between Muslims and their Non-Muslim neighbors.

Rebellions and intrusions of Christians inside the country and from outside the nation were commonplace and led to the actual demise of Muslim Spain. The divisions between the people made it very easy for Christian states to take over the kingdoms, one by one. This gives a whole new meaning to the saying, Divide and Conquer.

The Reconquista

Drawing of Crusaders fighting against Muslims The Reconquista

(Reconquest) was the process by which the Catholic Kingdoms of northern Spain eventually managed to succeed in defeating and conquering the southern Muslim states of the Iberian Peninsula.[12]The first great city to fall was the city of Toledo in 1085. After, Toledo fell into the hands of the Christian powers; it wasn't difficult for the Christian crusaders to overtake the rest of Al-Andalus. This was because Toledo was almost in the center of the Spanish peninsula and its loss opened the flood-gates for further invasions from the north (were the Christian ruled).[13]

After Toledo fell, most of Al-Andalus was captured except for the Emirate of Granada. Later, in 1482, the Christian forces began the Granada War in an attempt to win over the city, the Alhambra and many other important landmarks. By 1492, the Catholic Monarchs, Queen Isabelle I and King Ferdinand II had complete control over the Emirate of Granada. There was a treaty signed, which allowed the Muslims some religious freedoms. However, these freedoms were granted by the municipality in the towns and the

interpreted these rights according to their wish and understanding. The first Archbishop of Granada after the Catholic conquest took a fairly tolerant view. [14]

Regretfully, this fleeting episode of tolerance did not last and was emphasized after the death of the Archbishop. Under the rule of the new Cardinal, mass conversions took place and thousands of Arabic texts were burned. Muslims were given one of two choices: either become a Christian or leave the land. The majority of the Andalusí people decided to become Christian, but secretly practiced Islam (Taqiyyah). To weed out the true Christians from the false ones, the Spanish Inquisition was formed. By observing what they called "suspicious behavior", such as not eating pork or drinking wine, the Christian people of Spain hunted down and killed the Muslims. As a result, a Grand Mufti passed a ruling stating that Muslims may do things that would otherwise give away their true religion, such as drinking and eating haram things. This protected the Muslims for a while.

However, no matter how authentic they seemed, the Arabs and Moors of Andalus were always deemed as second class citizens.[15] Eventually, all use of the Arabic language was banned and all Arabic texts were burned. People could not dress according to Muslim or Arab culture and they could not raise their children the Islamic way. When people rebelled, massive slaughtering was carried out and the majority of the Arabs and Moors were expelled from their homes. Consequently, the country lost much of its knowledgeable people and fell once again into the dark ages. When the Arabs and Moors were banished, Christian Spain shone, like the moon, with borrowed light;

then came the eclipse, and in that darkness, Spain has groveled ever since.

[16]

Muslims in Spain Today

Typical Muslim family in Spain Today, the majority of Muslims living in Spain are immigrants from North Africa, particularly Morocco. However there are still converts to Islam. Approximately, 2.5% of the population is Muslim making it the second largest religion in a predominantly Christian nation. Many Christians find that they had ancestors who were Muslim and begin to look at Islam in a new light. Also, some Spanish (and Portuguese) words could be found to have been derived from Arabic meanings. For example, the Spanish word "oxala" means if god wills, a lot like the Islamic inshallah.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Muslims have to learn from their mistakes of the past. If you look at the world today, you would realize that much of the leaders of the Muslim world are divided like the petty kingdoms of the great Al-Andalus. Muslims need to unite and go back to their roots. They must realize that on the inside, we are all Muslims; we are all the same, that we are one ummah, one nation. We have to work hard to aid our brothers and sisters in need and overcome all of our weaknesses. Unfortunately, though we all look back to the times of the great Islamic empires and reminisce, most of us do nothing to improve our situation. Al-Andalus was a great empire during times of religious scholarship and study, but when the people began to lose faith, it fell to our enemies, forever shadowed by the loss of wisdom, knowledge and enlightenment.