

Al-Andalus as a Symbol of Islamic Religious Tolerance

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Received: April 27, 2022

Accepted: July 5, 2022

Online Published: September 2, 2023

doi:10.5430/elr.v12n2p28

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/elr.v12n2p28>

Abstract

The Research examines the history of religious tolerance and coexistence between Muslims and Christians in Al-Andalus (Iberian Peninsula) since Muslims first arrived in the Peninsula, and how Muslims, during their reign, fostered and promoted justice, equality and tolerance among Andalusian society's diverse demographic segments. Furthermore, the Research addresses the question of how Muslims dealt with Dhimmis (non-Muslims living in an Islamic State with legal protection), granting them full rights, including the freedom to profess their faith and worship in their churches and temples, as well as permit them to construct new churches away from religious persecution? In fact, Muslims went far than that, as they participated in Christian religious feasts and social events. Moreover, the Research draws on vivid examples that demonstrate Muslims' righteousness in ruling an Andalusian community, which included Muslims, Christians, Jews, and people of various ethnicities. It also highlights how the aforementioned ethnicities were granted complete freedom to innovate in all realms of innovation; therefore, there were physicians, philosophers, poets, engineers, writers, diplomats, translators, and custodians of State secrets among them.

Keywords: Al-Andalus, co-existence, Islam, symbol, tolerance

1. Introduction

In 91 AH/710 AD, Muslims conquered Al-Andalus, deploying reconnaissance companies and conducting swift military campaigns that accomplished their objectives. In the year 92 AH/ 711 AD, Musa bin Nusair, Wali (Governor) of Africa, dispatched a huge army, led by Tariq bin Ziyad, to conquer Al-Andalus; which he conquered and settled on a mountain, that would eventually be known as Gibraltar.

When the King of the Goths, who ruled Spain at the time, learnt of Tariq's army's arrival and settlement in south of Al-Andalus, he assembled a massive army at Toledo, his State's Capital. The King did not wait the arrival of Tariq's army; instead, he marched his army to confront the Muslim's. The two armies, then, met in the Valley of (Guadalete), and the combat concluded with the Muslims achieving victory and the Goths being defeated.

Tariq bin Ziyad did not stop there; rather, he continued his conquests of Al-Andalus, conquering Cordoba, Granada, Malaga, and other Andalusian cities, until he reached Toledo, the Goths' Capital, where he launched his campaign to expand the Muslims control and authority.

In 93 AH / 712 AD, Musa bin Nusair reached Al-Andalus at the head of a vast army of Arab tribes, where he settled at Algeciras. From there, Musa marched to the north, towards cities and regions where Tariq's army had not marched nor conquered. Consequently, he reached and conquered Seville, as well as Medina-Sidonia and Mérida, before reaching Toledo.

Thus, Tariq bin Ziyad and Musa bin Nusair were able to extend the Islamic State's control on this island, and it came under Muslim rule during the Umayyad era (Al-Qoutiah 1982).

Al-Andalus began as a State under the rule of Wali of Africa, before becoming an independent State. Later, when the Umayyad Emir, Abd al-Rahman, reached Al-Andalus in the year 138 AH, he established an autonomous Emirate, which later became an Umayyad Caliphate. Following the fall of the Caliphate in the year 400 AH, a new era started, the Taifa "Kings of the territorial divisions" era, which was followed by the rule of the Almoravids of Al-Andalus, and then the Almohad Caliphate. The last rulers of Andalusia were Banu Al-Ahmar, who ruled Granada, the last Muslim stronghold on the island, and it was at their hands that Al-Andalus fell. In the year 898 AH / 1492 AD, a treaty was signed between the Spanish and the last monarch of Banu Al-Ahmar, Abu Abdullah Al-Saghir, followed by the fall of Granada.

Ultimately, Muslim rule in that region ended after eight centuries of spreading culture, knowledge and numerous

sciences, as well as constructing mosques, universities, centers of learning and places of worship, as well as palaces, in addition to establishing a civilization that subsequently served as a gateway to the European Renaissance. Furthermore, Muslims promoted a positive image of Islam in Europe as a religion of tolerance, compassion, and coexistence among various human races, based on the Islamic teachings and as exemplified by the Almighty's words in the Holy Qur'an: "Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly (*). Allah only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion - [forbids] that you make allies of them. And whoever makes allies of them, then it is those who are the wrongdoers. (Al Mumtahanah, verses 8-9). It was not recorded nor documented that the Muslims compelled anyone to convert to Islam when they conquered Al-Andalus and other conquered nations; rather, they gave people the option of paying the Jizyah or embracing the Islamic faith. Originally, the Jizyah was a tax paid by the dhimmi in exchange for rights, corresponding to duties imposed by the contract signed with Muslims. Based on the occurrence of offer and acceptance, the Muslim Imam (Ruler), or his representative, signs this contract with the dhimmis (Tritton 1949).

Islam's tolerance is manifested in this contract through comprehending the wisdom of its enactment, which is: "Avoiding dispute with non-Muslims, believers of other Divine Books, and their beliefs, and approach them with compassion, exhortation and good words in the hope and aspiration of their conversion to Islam" (Al-Kasani 1997, p. 33). This is derived from the Prophet Muhammad's words, Peace be upon him, when he said Beware, if anyone wrongs a contracting man, or diminishes his right, or forces him to work beyond his capacity, or takes from him anything without his consent, I shall plead for him on the Day of Judgment.

When a dhimmi accepts this contract, Islam's tolerance is manifested in the rights afforded to him/her, such as personal freedom of movement and travel while assuring their security and stability. Furthermore, the contract guaranteed the inviolability of their properties, blood, honor, and wealth, as well as freedom of faith, expression, assembly, and education within the confines of the Islamic State's laws.

In the court of law, a dhimmi sues a Muslim before a Muslim judge, and he/she has the right to request a judge from his/her faith. Muslims were able, in a record time, to merge with the human races in the new conquered territories, which comprised the indigenous population of Christians, Jews, Slavic, and others. This assimilation was aided by the arrival of Muslims as conquerors and warriors, without their families or wives, and it was natural for the intermarriage with the Spanish. Therefore, Muslims married Spanish women, and they started new families, as this became a typical occurrence among them. This is what "contributed to the Muslims long-standing rule on the one hand, and imprinting the nation with their character on the other, which was achieved promptly and impressively, despite the brief period of population contact." (Dakkak 1974, p. 102)

Al-Andalus symbolized the civilized confluence of East and West; a confluence in which numerous human races merged when Muslims entered the Peninsula, and the Andalusian civilization became a fabric comprised of Arabs, Berbers, Spanish, Slavic, Christians and Jews. Furthermore, reciprocal influence developed between all of these ethnicities, with all of their thoughts, inheritance, customs, traditions, and culture; so that Al-Andalus formed a civilization with a distinct character (Gharib 1987).

The new Andalusian civilization was a mixture of various demographic groups, "yet it retained a unified character in its whole, particularly when its most essential human elements arose; and it was the element in which Arab's blood was blended with Spanish's" (Haikal 1997, p. 18), that is, following marriage to Spanish women and the intermarriage that took place. Islam flourished swiftly in Al-Andalus, and many Spanish embraced it, particularly Jews and Slavic who endured constraints and persecution from the Goths' reign; as they took the initiative to convert to Islam, where they found redemption and liberation.

The tolerance of Islamic faith aided its expansion in that Peninsula, which was not forced upon the people of Al-Andalus; rather, as indicated earlier, they were offered the option of converting to Islam or paying Jizyah, as Muslims did in every nation they conquered. The vast majority of Spanish were Christians who willingly converted to Islam; as Muslims referred to them as "Musalimah". As for their descendants, Muslims eventually referred to them as "Muwallad", while the remainder of Andalusia's population, who adhered to their religion, paid Jizyah to the Muslims.

2. Discussion

2.1 Muslims' Tolerance and Treatment of Others in Al-Andalus

Muslims, as previously said, granted people the freedom of belief, religion, and worship, and they did not compel anyone to embrace the Islamic faith, in accordance with the Almighty's saying: "Let there be no compulsion in religion".

Indeed, Muslims pursued a similar approach throughout their conquests in the East and West, as well as in Al-Andalus; therefore, there were dhimmis who adhered to their faith and paid the Jizyah, and there were those who embraced Islamic faith. Muslims coexisted with them in a secure society; in which the spirit of justice, equality, religious tolerance and coexistence with the dhimmis prevailed, and they were allowed to worship freely in their churches and houses of worship. Thus “mosques and churches were built next to one other, and the calls of mosques’ minarets were blended with the ringing of churches’ bells, and Muslims and Christians coexisted together in Al-Andalus (Haikal 1997, p. 23).

The Muslims, who ruled Al-Andalus, were interested in the Christians and the rest of the population, and there were several manifestations of this attention. Following the teachings of the Islamic faith, and since the arrival of Muslims on this peninsula, non-Muslims, known as dhimmis, had been guaranteed freedom of belief, the freedom to have places of worship, allowing them to establish their religious rituals and build houses of worship in Andalusian cities. For example, there are multiple churches built in Cordoba, and there are numerous monasteries in its outskirts (Luthfi Al-Badi', 1969, p. 27).

Furthermore, Muslim rulers permitted the Christians to build new churches in the Andalusian cities, as well as to ring their church bells, despite that the sounds of these church bells, sometimes, coincide with the call to prayer at mosques, causing Muslims to be disturbed. Ibn Hazm, for example, referred to this in a line of his poem, saying:

You came to me just before

the Christians rang their bells (Ibn Hazm, 1973, p. 173)

To offer Andalusian Christians more attention and care, the Andalusian Caliphs and Emirs appointed Christian figures as their counselors in Christian affairs, who referred to as (Gomez). Prince Abd Al-Rahman Al-Dakhil was the first to institute the position (Ibn Al-Qoutiah, 1962, p. 106), which was present in every Andalusian city, and the Prince or Ruler would refer to him in any matter concerning Christians.

The Gomez of Cordoba was called (the Higher Gomez); as it was the power base of the Caliphate, and the capital of the State. The Gomezes are elected by the Christians themselves, with no interference from the Caliph or Ruler. This demonstrates the true freedom granted to those ethnicities by Muslim Rulers, based on the teachings of our true faith, which enacted the laws and regulations that regulate the interaction between Muslims and dhimmis in the Islamic State.

In every Andalusian city, the dhimmis had a judge known as a (the Judge of Ajam), "Ajam refers to someone whose mother tongue is not Arabic", and if a dhimmi disputed with a Muslim, the recourse would be before the Muslim Army Judge, who was later known as the Judge of the Community (Wansharisi 1983, p. 48).

2.2 Participation of Muslims in Christian Religious Feasts

One manifestation of religious tolerance and coexistence among Muslims in Al-Andalus was their involvement with Christians in their religious feasts and festivities, particularly Nowruz or the Spring Festival, on which they shared greetings. Moreover, we learn from poets who compose poetry on greeting cards and send them to their friends (Khaqan 1983). In fact, Muslims exchange congratulations and greeting in accordance with Islamic Sharia, which "authorizes congratulating a dhimmi on his/her joys, such as marriage, success and others. In addition, Islamic Sharia permitted Muslims to share grieve with the dhimmis and allowed a Muslim to visit them when they are sick, and to pray for them for guidance and healing" (Ibn al-Qayyim 1997, p. 13). "Pentecost" was one of the other Christian feasts in which Muslims took part, with Christians sprinkling water in the streets, alleyways and markets, and children playing with door knockers and sticks in the streets. This refers to the freedom granted to Christians to perform their rituals and ceremonies as they see fit.

Muslims also participated in other Christians feasts, such as the Christ's birthday, peace be upon him, the New Year's Day feast, Maundy Thursday, and other feasts and events (Kamal, 1993).

As a result of religious tolerance, numerous Jews and Christians rose to positions of power in the Islamic State; taking over administrations and ministries. For example, at Cordoba, a Jew named Abu Yousuf Hasdai bin Shabrout served as a Minister under Caliph Abd Al-Rahman Al-Nasir (Enkhel 1955).

One of the outcomes of this freedom granted to everyone in Al-Andalus, along with religious tolerance by Muslims, and their moral engagement with the Andalusian Christians and Jews, was that these people began to learn Arabic, the conquering Muslims' language. The Arabic language became the language in which they wrote their literature and writings, and their enthusiasm for mastering "the language of the Arabs, since it is the language of civilization, grew" (Dakkak, 1974, p. 37).

Priest Elbero Al-Qurtubi addressed the issue of Christians' interest in learning Arabic and their abandonment of their language during the Muslim reign of Al-Andalus, as he stated that: "My brothers in religion admire reading Arab poetry

and tales, and they study the beliefs of Muslim religious people and philosophers; not to respond to and refute them, but rather to learn a beautiful and correct Arabic style. Where do you now find a non-clergy who reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Gospels? Who - besides the clergy - studies the writings of the Apostles and the virtues of the prophets and messengers? Regrettably, today's talented young Christians only know Arab language and literature, believe in it, and enthusiastically accept it; they spend huge sums of money collecting its books, and they proclaim everywhere that these literature are worthy of appreciation. If you inform them about Christian literature, they will disregard them as unworthy of their attention. What a shame that the Christians have even forgotten their tongue. You'll be hard pressed to find a one, among a thousand of them, who can compose an error-free letter to a friend. When it comes to writing in Arabic, you'll discover a significant proportion of Christians who can do it elegantly. Rather, they compose Arabic poetry that outperforms Arab poets in terms of creativity and elegance" (Palencia 1955, p. 483).

Even Jews in Al-Andalus were intrigued by the Arabic language; as they acquired it, as well as accepted to study its literature and read its literary heritage, and we find them writing Hebrew sciences in Arabic. The earliest book on the grammar of the Hebrew language was published in Arabic by the Jewish Scholar Abu Zakariyya Hayyuj, and it bears evidence to Arabic's influence over the people and their infatuation with it. Furthermore, we learn that in the 5th century AH, one of the Jewish scholars, Ibn Gabirol, collected the rules of Hebrew grammar in an Arabic poetry, and put it in (400) lines of Bahr al-Rajz.

In the same way that the Priest Elbero Al-Qurtubi bemoaned his language, Ibn Gabirol also bemoaned the abandonment of his Jewish brethren, Jews of Zaragoza, their sacred language in this poem, referring to them as the "blind group". Ironically, this same scholar used to write his books and correspondence in Arabic.

3. Conclusion

One of the outcomes of this tolerance and coexistence between Muslims and the population of Al-Andalus was that the Christians embraced several of the characteristics, customs and traditions of the Muslims. Rather, they shared their etiquette in terms of food, drink and attire. Thus, Christians' practices became the same as those of Arab Muslims, and we noticed Spanish who abstained from eating pork despite their Christian faith, and they followed Muslims in circumcision of their children, along other traditions and customs.

Several prominent figures appeared in the fields of politics, diplomatic work as ambassadors, translation, science, military and Army command. It was among those who served as the Caliphs' ambassadors to the Spanish Kingdoms in north of Al-Andalus. Due to ambassadors' mastery of the language, customs, and political traditions, as well as their status as members of the Islamic State, they were messengers to these people, sending messages to them. Further, this indicates the Caliphs' and Princes' trust in those figures (Tritton 1949, p. 37).

In terms of the Army and battle, we learn that the Caliphs and Princes of Al-Andalus deployed Christians and Jews as regular troops in the Army, with some of them forming pure military divisions, all of which were Christians. An example of this was that Al-Mu'tamid bin Abbad, King of Seville, prepared an army to invade the City of Cordoba in (461) AH, in the ongoing wars between the Kings of the Sects; where a division of that Army was led by Khalaf bin Najah and Ibn Marteen (Ibn Al-Khatib 1959).

Prominent Christian religious figures had appeared in Al-Andalus, including Bishop Rabe Ibn Zayd, Bishop of Toledo Obaid Allah bin Qasim, and Bishop of Cordoba Isbagh bin Abdullah bin Nabil (Al-Sayyid 1980). Furthermore, there were Walid bin Heizoun, the Judge of the Christians in Cordoba (Al-Maqqari 1986), Abbas bin Al-Mundhir, Bishop of Seville, Walid bin Mughaith, the Judge of Ajam, and many others of the Christian clergy.

In the field of various sciences, there were physicians and experts in all disciplines among them, such as the physician Ibn Fartun (1956), Khalid bin Yazid bin Roman Al-Nasrani (Ibn Abi Uṣaybi'a 1956) and the physician Ibn Muluka Al-Nasrani (Ibn Abi Uṣaybi'a 1956).

Christians had a significant role in commerce in Spanish cities, and this contributed to the growth of Arab-Islamic civilization and the transfer of its sciences to the Christian kingdoms that these merchants visited (Al-Badi' 1969).

All of this brilliance in science, politics, and governance demonstrates the crucial role played by the Caliphs, Princes, and Muslim leaders in fostering a secure atmosphere, characterized by religious tolerance and acceptance of others; even if they stayed faithful to their religion. Consequently, these people arose in all disciplines of knowledge and served the Islamic State.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable

Authors contributions

Not applicable

Funding

Not applicable

Competing interests

Not applicable

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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