

## Sub Saharan Africa

A group of people in North Africa called the Berbers converted to Islam during the Umayyad dynasty and greatly accelerated the spread of Islam across North Africa. It was primarily Berber armies who advanced Islam into southern Spain. However, Sub-Saharan Africa developed along different lines than northern Africa.

By 1000 CE Bantu people had migrated across most of sub-Saharan Africa. From 400 BCE to 1000 CE their population had grown from 3.5 million to over 22 million. This spread and growth was due to two developments: 1) iron metallurgy skills, and 2) the importation of bananas to Africa from Asia (via Madagascar). Although united by basic language and religious commonalities, these societies were extremely diverse.

Most Bantus set up stateless societies. Without a formal bureaucracy or hierarchy of officials, kinship and family units provide social controls at a very local level. The village ruling council was made up of males, with the most prominent being the chief. This was not always a permanent feature, but sometimes organized *ad hoc* as decisions needed to be made. After 1000 CE increased populations, wealth via trade, and military challenges led to more formal centralized states forming. The best example of a Bantu kingdom is Kongo, which reached its peak in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Bantu religion influenced the religious development of Sub-Saharan Africa. Basic African religion before Islam was animism, the belief that spirit inhabited objects. They also believed that one supreme god reigned over all the others. Ancestors were worshipped and esteemed as links between the physical and spiritual worlds.

When Africans learned to domesticate camels, the Sudanic states were able to make trade contacts with northern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa got plugged into the world trade system. Along with trade came Islam. Several came to dominate sub-Saharan Africa.

Effects of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa

1) It strengthened traditional notions of kingship, uniting political authority with religious authority. Thus only the kings and powerful members of the upper wealthy classes converted. Even so, in many cases Islam was mixed with local religious practices, a reality that spawned several reform movements.

2) It facilitated trade. Islam brought its concepts of the prestige of merchants, legal system in which disputes could be settled, trade laws, and sense of equality before the law, all of which greatly increased trade and wealth. Sharing a common religion, merchants developed bonds of trust and recourse to a common set of laws.

3) The slave trade increased. The slave trade was established before the coming of Islam. African societies had no concept of private property, so the number of slaves one owned became the measure of wealth. With Islam the slave trade increased. Islamic law approves the enslavement of non-Muslims and views it as a path to conversion. The slave trade focuses more on women and children; women were made part of harems, and

because Muslim laws often freed the children born to slave women, there was a continuing demand to enslave more children. Islam increased the slave trade also because it increased connections across the Islamic world in general. When Islam came, the slave trade increased dramatically.

3) It blended with African animistic religions. Allah was accepted as the supreme creator god and the Africans kept their belief in the various spirits that inhabited objects. In areas that remained in constant contact with Muslim traders from the Arab world, Islam remained more pure, but in most areas it blended with indigenous African beliefs. One major distinction between African societies and those of Muslim Arab societies was the impact of Islam on women. African women had higher positions in society relative to other societies at this time. Unlike in Middle Eastern societies, Islam did not alter the status of women and drive them into harsh submission to men. In fact, during the Songhay Arab travelers to Africa were often shocked at the familiar relations between men and women which existed despite the demands of *sharia*.

Ghana  
controlled gold trade across Sahara.

Replaced by Mali. (overhead).  
Originally, Mali when a group of people broke away from Ghana.  
Mansa Musa, hajj to Mecca. Gold trade. Mosque at Jenne.

Timbuktu Center of Islamic scholarship, trade—especially the book trade—was popular.

Songai  
Sunni Ali

Troops from Morocco, armed with muskets, came down in the 1590s and ended the Songhay.

Swahili Coast cities  
Combination of Bantu and Arabic  
Merchants and leaders converted to Islam, majority of population retained traditional African religions or syncretic versions.

Mogadishu  
Mombasa  
Mozambique  
Kilwa