100521 - Why did the Muslims conquer Andalusia?

the question

A Jewish man understood from one verse of the Quraan, that Islam forbids attacking people in their homes. Why then did the Muslims conquer many lands?
Taariq Ben Ziyad, the Muslim knight, conquered Andalusia, although its people where in their homes. Taariq Ben Ziyad said to his soldiers: “the sea is behind you and the enemy is before you”. Please clarify this.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Andalusia was one of the greatest periods of Islamic history, indeed it is a beacon in the history of mankind as a whole, because it was a source of knowledge on earth for many centuries, from which Europe learned all its lessons of civilization and civility. Its conquest, beyond a doubt, was one of the greatest incidents of the first Hijri century (92 AH/711 CE). That period was the greatest and most prosperous in the history of Andalusia from the beginning of history and perhaps until the end of time.

Because of the importance of this topic, it is essential to explain a number of important matters that have to do with this great event.

Firstly:

The most important aim for which jihad has been prescribed is to convey the message of Tawheed by eliminating all suppressive powers which come between the people and Tawheed, and calling people to Islam without compulsion or force, rather they should come to it willingly and by choice.

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And fight them until there is no more Fitnah (disbelief and worshipping of others along with

Allaah) and (all and every kind of) worship is for Allaah (Alone). But if they cease, let there be no transgression except against Az-Zaalimoon (the polytheists, and wrong-doers)”

[al-Baqarah 2:193]

Qataadah (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: Until there is no more shirk, “and (all and every kind of) worship is for Allaah (Alone)” means, until it is said Laa ilaaha ill-Allaah (there is no god but Allaah). It is for this that the Prophet of Allaah fought and it is to this that he called. Tafseer al-Tabari (3/567).

Secondly:

Andalusia, the ancient name for which is Iberia, was under the rule of the Roman Empire. At the dawn of the fifth century CE, in around 410 CE, it was overrun by the Gothic tribes (Visigoths) whose religion was Arianism, during which they established a Gothic state, the capital of which was Toledo.

Hence we can understand that the original peoples of Andalusia – Catholic Canaanites – were, before the Islamic conquest, subject to Gothic rule. The inhabitants formed four classes which were in conflict with one another: the ruling, colonialist class of Goths; the Roman elite, which also included feudal lords and clergymen; the Jews; and a working class composed of indigenous inhabitants of the land.

It was a land under occupation and persecution, which was not under the rule of its indigenous inhabitants. It was not the Muslims who initiated the idea of conquering it, rather they rid the land of an unjust occupation and it turned into a Muslim land whose inhabitants chose to follow Islam and become part of this Islamic state.

Thirdly:

In addition to the occupation that the Visigoth tribes imposed on Andalusia, domination, oppression and persecution were prominent features of their period of rule which lasted for approximately three centuries.

Husayn Mu’nis says in his book Fajr al-Andalus (p. 8, 18-19):

But their authority was not well established in the land at first, because of the religious conflicts that occurred between them and the original people, and because of the disputes that occurred among their rulers. Hence throughout the sixth century the land was subjected to civil wars and the chaos and problems that resulted from them, until the time of the last Visigoth ruler, whose name was Roderic (in Arabic, Ludhreeq). What is clear and indisputable is that the man felt that he was not fully in control and all his life he feared an attack from his many enemies. These enemies were not only the sons of Wittiza, whose kingdom Roderic had usurped, rather they included most of the Iberian, Roman and Jewish people, i.e., most of the people of the land which the Goths had invaded. End quote.

Many Spanish historians have tried to defend the Gothic state – out of resentment and rejection of the Islamic presence in that land – but the history books are filled with evidence of what Professor Husayn Mu’nis mentioned of the local people’s rejection of Gothic rule. On p. 10 he quotes Rafael Balasteros, the Spanish historian, as saying “If the Arabs had not interfered in the Peninsula’s affairs in 711 CE and put an end to this age of turmoil, the Goths would have inflicted unimaginable harm on Spain.”

Fourthly:

When the Goths’ oppression of that land intensified and its people could not longer put up with it, they sent word to the Muslims, asking them to help them and save them. The Arabic sources are agreed that the ruler of Ceutah, whose name was Julian, sent word to Moosa ibn Nusayr, asking him to enter the land and rid it of the evil of Roderic. Many sources also state that the sons of Wittiza sent word to Moosa ibn Nusayr asking him for help against the one who had usurped their father’s kingdom. Even Western historical sources state that the Jews in Andalusia who were being persecuted by the Goths sought help from those who were across the sea in Africa, or the Muslims, to save them from the oppression of Roderic and his helpers. Although this is denied by some historians, they are all agreed that the Jews, during that period, were subject to persecution that almost destroyed them and would have left no trace of them. See Fajr al-Andalus by Husayn

Mu’nis (p. 14).

In the surviving texts there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the Andalusians welcomed the Muslims as saviours. For example:

The author of the book Akhbaar Majmoo’ah fi Fath al-Andalus (p. 24) says, describing the services that some of the Spaniards offered to Moosa ibn Nusayr:

When he reached the Peninsula, it was said to him: Follow this route. He said: I will not proceed by this route. The non-Muslim guides said to him: We will show you a way that is better than his way, and cities that are of greater importance than his cities, that have not been conquered yet, but Allaah will grant you victory over them if Allaah wills. End quote.

He also says:

Then he travelled to the city of Qarmoonah. He sent ahead to it the non-Muslims who were with him. There was no more strongly fortified city in Andalusia than this, and none that was less likely to be conquered by means of fighting or siege. It was said to him when he drew close to it: It will not be taken except with diplomacy. He sent ahead to it non-Muslims to whom he had granted safety and who he felt could be trusted, such as Julian, and they may have been companions of Julian. They came to them, bearing arms, and they admitted them to their city. When they entered it, he sent the cavalry to them by night, and they opened the gate for them, and attacked the guards, and the Muslims entered Qarmoonah. End quote.

Some of the Christian bishops also helped the Muslims in their conquest, such as Awbaas the bishop of Seville, as it says in the book al-‘Arab lam yaghzu al-Andalus (p. 187).

The author of Tareekh al-Nasaara fi’l-Andalus (p. 45) reports what happened during the life of Saint Theodard, the head bishop of Narbonne, who lived around 266 AH. When the Muslims entered the Languedoc for the first time, the Jews sided with them and opened the gates of the city of Toulouse to them.

The Muslims believe that supporting the oppressed and achieving justice and peace are among

the greatest aims of jihad in Islamic sharee'ah. The evidence for that is what happened during the life of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), namely Hilf al-Fudool (the treaty of al-Fudool), where the tribes agreed to restrain the wrongdoer and support the one who was wronged, even if he was a kaafir.

Shaykh Muhammad Abu Zahrah said in his book al-'Alaaqaat al-Duwaliyyah fi'l-Islam (83):

Islam looks at the people who are being ruled unjustly and whose freedoms are being restricted with compassion and kindness, and it supports them if they ask for support, and relieves them of the harshness of the tyrants if they ask them for help. End quote.

This is what some of the Jews bore witness to when they realized the great favour that the Muslims did to them by providing them with a life of dignity and freedom, the like of which they had not experienced throughout the history of their presence in Europe.

The Jewish writer Chaim al-Za'faraani says in his book Alf Sanah min Hayaat al-Yahood fi'l-Maghreb (A thousand years of Jewish life in the Maghreb) (p. 13): The Jews of Andalusia in general knew a life of the greatest ease and security, such as they had never known anywhere else. End quote.

Naseem Rajwaan – Editor-in-chief of the Israeli newspaper Israel haYom:

The Jews had suffered for many centuries in misery, as the hardhearted tyrant kings of Spain knew nothing of pity and compassion. When the Muslims entered Spain, they did not only liberate the Jews from persecution, but they also encouraged them to establish a civilization that parallels in its richness and depth the most famous civilizations of all ages. End quote from Ahl al-Kitaab fi'l-Mujatama' al-Islami (p. 49).

Sixthly:

What has been mentioned above may be crowned with certainty when we bear in mind that the conquest of that land took no more than approximately three years (92-95 AH), during which the Muslims reached France, and no more than a few thousand troops took part in this conquest, which shows you definitively that it was not so much a military conquest as an intellectual and

ideological conquest in which the inhabitants of Andalusia came to believe in the ‘aqeedah of the Muslims, and they chose – out of love and voluntarily – to submit to this new religion and rid themselves of the tyranny of the church and the feudal system that had been prevalent before the Muslims came. One of the most famous historians of Spain, Ignacio Olagi, wrote a book which became famous in the 70s, which was called The Islamic Revolution in the West, which was summarized and translated into Arabic by the historian Ismaa’eel Ameen, under the title al-‘Arab lam yaghzu al-Andalus, which was published by Riyaadh al-Rayyis li’l-Kutub wa’l-Nashr. In this book, the author sought to demonstrate that conversion to Islam in Andalusia only took place because of the spread of ideas and a conflict between ideas, then the domination of what the author calls the strongest idea, which formed the basis of the Islamic Arab civilizations in three quarters of the known world at that time. Despite the exaggerated criticism in the book of everything that is well known about the history of Andalusia, what concerns us here are a few texts which show that the introduction of Islam to Andalusia was not done by force, rather it was an opening of hearts and an illumination of minds. I hope the reader will put up with the length of the text that is quoted here, because it is one of the most brilliant texts that have been written by the enemies of Islam concerning a matter that those who bear grudges keep stirring up.

It says on pp. 55-66:

“Thus the foreign invasion is reduced to a passing incident in a civil war. Is there any connection at all between this military event, on the one hand, and the fact that the Iberians embraced Islam, then developed an Islamic civilization in Iberia, on the other?

“With regard to the myth of invasion, we have accurate figures. Taariq, along with seven thousand men, arrived to defeat Roderic, and Moosa ibn Nusayr arrived at the head of eighteen thousand men to subjugate the Iberians to his rule. Twenty-five thousand men introduced this huge change to the Latin language, Christianity and monogamy. In one fell swoop the Iberians changed their customs, traditions and religion. After this great achievement, the Muslims hastened without bringing in any reinforcements or consolidating their gains, to invade France.

Despite that, it remains to be explained how this transformation of the people of Iberia, which was

fortified geographically and naturally, was completed in such a speedy manner, by small numbers of people to whom many miracles are attributed, especially since the Iberians and the conquerors did not share a common origin.

It is obvious that an army of this type could have been absorbed into these multitudes (of indigenous people) when that army took this risk and penetrated deep into that land, let alone the fact that the Iberians, throughout their long history, had never been a peaceful people when confronted with such events. Was it not possible for them to launch a guerrilla campaign, the type of warfare that they introduced to the world?

What did the Iberians do at this time? After 711 CE, history does not tell us anything about them, even though ten million souls – according to the lowest estimate – did not disappear in one fell swoop during that blessed era when there were no means of mass destruction. It would have taken the conquerors a long time to butcher this number of people by the sword, and the small valleys of Asturias could not have absorbed this number of refugees. It is enough for these valleys that they served as fortresses for the few rebels who later formed the core of the Christian kingdom. Thus ten million Iberians disappeared from the pages of history. If the conquest of Christian land by the “heathens” (i.e., Muslims) started on such a huge scale, then how can we explain that its people converted to Islam, adopting Arabic, Islamic culture? Either all of them were killed or they were enslaved, or they fled to the mountains, or their existence was simply ignored by the historians. How and why did the human communities who were located in the Byzantine regions of Asia, Egypt, North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula embrace a new faith and a new concept of the universe? It may be easy to turn the myth of the Arab conquests, which are impossible in geographical and historical terms, into facts, but we cannot deny that Islamic, Arabic civilization spread in all these regions.

Some researchers may be astonished when they realize from the reports that the number of conquerors was only twenty-five thousand and they destroyed ten million!

In fact the process of embracing the Islamic religion continued and took between two and three centuries to complete. It was a complete conversion, which left only a few islands whose existence

is regarded as dubious. How can we explain this leaving of Christianity and this embrace of Islam as being by means of force?

What were its consequences?

Some historians accepted the traditional prepared answer to these questions, and some others were utterly confused.

They were unable to understand the way in which the peoples of Egypt and the Byzantine region submitted to what they call “Bedouin laws”. Kazafi Plan Hall stated in his book al-‘Aalam al-Islami (the Islamic World) that Islam was always a religion of the city, but let us assume nevertheless that they were subjugated forcefully by Bedouin groups. Why did they give up all their civilized ways for these Bedouins?

The Byzantine regions enjoyed an advanced civil life; their cities were prosperous and large. The number of inhabitants in Antioch was 300,000, and among the four hundred Byzantine dioceses, 371 were in Asia. Hence we see the importance of the Islamic victory at the intellectual level.

Do we have to imagine that the city-dwellers were dazzled by the culture of those who were coming in from that vast wilderness? It seems impossible if all that these Bedouin had was the sword.

Religious fanaticism and misunderstanding, resulting from lack of awareness and sometimes deliberate, concealed in the midst of lies and myths an important chapter in the history of thr spread of Islam along the eastern and southern coasts of the Mediterranean. In accordance with a primitive interpretation of history, they interpreted this giant spiritual, social and cultural transformation in the seventh and eighth centuries CE – in the eastern and Mediterranean worlds – as the result of military conquest that imposed language, culture and religion by means of a curved sword.

Force does not explain everything.

In fact the historians confused the spread of brilliant ideas that a certain civilization carries with

military abilities that do not lead to anything but the emergence of temporary empires that diminish with the passage of time. They confused intellectual power with material strength.

From the study of similar movements, we may conclude that the spread of Islam was the result of an idea combined with strength; it was not the result of the ability to launch a military attack. Just as Hellenic civilization was dominant in the past, and the West is dominant today, the domination of Islam could only be the result of this interaction between ideas and strength.

Continuing to believe that people could be invaded in their own country by a destructive civilization, and that they gave up their beliefs and changed their customs because a group of courageous horsemen defeated them militarily, does not indicate anything but a childish and foolish concept of how societies function and develop.

The military aspect of these events should be retracted and regarded merely as a minor issue that is no more than an interesting aspect of some individual lives. We should understand this problem from an intellectual and cultural perspective.

There was no military aggression, rather there was a revolutionary crisis, and a call conveyed by the scholars, not by the generals.

Scholars alone can understand the movement of peoples and are able to lead them. Military domination could not have lasted for eight centuries in Andalusia or forever in huge areas of the world. End quote.

Useful historical references include al-Bayaan al-Mugharrib fi Akhbaar al-Andalus wa'l-Maghrib by Ibn 'Adhaari al-Maraakishi (2-9) and Nafh al-Teeb by al-Muqari (1/229-263) etc.

On our site there are some questions dealing with the topic of jihad. Please see questions no. 21961, 26125, 34647 and 43087.

And Allaah knows best.