

# History of Islam

An encyclopedia of Islamic history

## The African, and Muslim, Discovery of America – Before Columbus

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(Adopted with permission from the book, *Deeper Roots, Muslims in the Americas and the Caribbean from before Columbus to the Present*, by Dr. Abdullah Hakim Quick, DPB Printers and Booksellers, Cape Town, South Africa. Those interested in further research are strongly urged to read Dr. Quik's book.)

Ancient America was not isolated from the old world as many historians and anthropologists would have us believe. People from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean traveled great distances, mingled with each other and exchanged knowledge and products. Long before Columbus became aware of the possibility of land in the west, Muslims, among other people, had made contact with the Americas and had already left an impression on the Native culture<sup>13</sup>. Knowledge, agricultural products, livestock, metals, and other commercial items were exchanged between the two worlds. Evidence leading to establishing the presence of Muslims in ancient America comes from a number of sculptures, oral traditions, eye-witness reports, artifacts, Arabic documents, coins, and inscriptions. In Meso-American art, we see Africans and Semites in positions of power and prestige, especially in trading communities of Mexico.<sup>14</sup>

A report in *Before Columbus* by Cyrus Gordon describes coins found in the southern Caribbean region:

“.....off the coast of Venezuela was discovered a hoard of Mediterranean coins with so many duplicates that it cannot well be a numismatist's collection but rather a supply of cash. Nearly all the coins are Roman, from the reign of Augustus to the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. Two of the coins however, are Arabic of the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. It is the latter that gives us the *terminus a quo* (i.e. time after which) of the collection as a whole (which cannot be earlier than the latest coins in the collection). Roman coins continued in use as currency into the medieval times. A Moorish ship, perhaps from Spain or North Africa, seems to have crossed the Atlantic around 800 CE<sup>15</sup>.”

The discovery of these coins adds validity to the reports, recorded by Muslim historians and geographers, concerning the journeys of Muslim adventurers and navigators across the Atlantic Ocean. In *Muruj adh-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar* (The Meadows of Gold and Quarries of Jewels) written around the year 956 CE, Abul Hassan Ali ibn al-Hussain ibn Ali al-Masudi, a historian, geographer,

philosopher, and natural scientist, wrote about a young man of Cordoba named Khashkhash ibn Saeed ibn Aswad who crossed the Atlantic Ocean, made contact with people on the other side, and returned in the year 889 CE. Al Masudi wrote:

“Some people feel that this ocean is the source of all oceans and in it there have been many strange happenings. We have reported some of them in our book Akhbar az-Zaman. Adventurers have penetrated it at the risk of their lives, some returning safely, others perishing in the attempt. One such man was an inhabitant of Andalusia named Khashkhash. He was a young man of Cordoba who gathered a group of young men and went on a voyage on this ocean. After a long time, he returned with a fabulous booty. Every Spaniard (Andalusian) knows his story. 17”

A narration by Abu Bakr ibn Umar al-Qutiyya (not to be confused with the author of Tarikh Iftitah al-Andalus, Ibn al-Qutiyya) relates the story of Ibn Farrukh who landed in February 999 CE in Gando (Great Canary), visited King Guanariga and continued his journey westwards till he found islands he called Capraria and Pluitana. In May of that year he arrived back in Spain.

Abu Abd Allah Muhammad al-Idrisi (1090-1180), the famous Arab physician and geographer who established himself in the Arabised court of King Roger II of Sicily, reported in his extensive work Kitab al-Mamalik wa-l-Masalik, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century on the journey of a group of seamen who reached the isles of the Americas. Al Idrisi wrote:

“A group of seafarers sailed into the sea of darkness and fog (the Atlantic Ocean) from Lisbon in order to discover what was in it and to what extent were its limits. They were a party of eight and they took a boat which was loaded with supplies to last them for months. They sailed for eleven days until they reached turbulent waters with great waves and little light. They thought that they would perish so they turned their boat southward and travelled for twelve days. They finally reached an island that had people and civilization but they were captured and chained for three days. On the fourth day, a translator came speaking the Arabic language! He translated for the King and asked them about their mission. They informed him about themselves, then they were returned to their confinement. When the westerly wind began to blow they were put in a canoe blindfolded, and brought to land after three days sailing. They were left on the shore with their hands tied behind their backs. When the next day came another tribe appeared, freeing them and informing them that between them and their lands was a journey of two months. 19”

This astonishing historical report not only describes contact between Muslim seamen and the Native people of the Americas, but it also describes travel between islands, probably the Bahamas chain or the Lesser Antilles. The islanders had developed the ability to speak Arabic, a language that cannot be mastered by a single contact. They must have been regularly visited by Arabic speaking Muslim merchants or adventurers, or they had lived in Muslim territory.

In October, 1929 CE, Khalid Edhem Bey discovered by chance in the library of Serallo, in the city of Istanbul, a map of parchment made in the month of Muharram in the year 919 AH (March 1513). The rare and valuable geographical letter contained, among other legends, the following note:

“This chapter explains how this map has been made. Such a map nobody owns at present. By the hands of this poor man it has been composed and now elaborated.”

The discovery was very significant. As already stated, it had to do with a parchment in Turkish writing, painted in several colors, with dimensions 1.85×0.60<sup>20</sup>. It comprises the Atlantic Ocean with America and the western rim of the world. The other parts of the world, which the map probably included, have been lost.<sup>21</sup>

The author of the map, Piri Muhyi'd-Din Re'is was a famous navigator and map maker who died about 1554-55 CE. He wrote a handbook on navigation in the Aegean and the Mediterranean Seas, which was known as *Piri Re'is Behriye*. Perhaps the map found by Khalil Edhem Bey was part of this handbook, which was presented to Sultan Selim I in 1517 CE, and which would explain how the mysterious parchment was found in Serallo. What is most important to this study, however, is that this map is one of the most conclusive pieces of hard evidence to show the validity of Muslim exploration in the Western hemisphere. Piri Re'is, a Turkish navigator, wrote that he used twenty source-maps, among them eight maps dating from the time of Alexander the Great, an Arab map of India, four Portuguese maps of the Indian Ocean and China, and a map by Columbus of the western area. But Piri's map contains information that could not have been known by Columbus. It contains the correct relative longitude across Africa, and across the Atlantic, all the way from the meridian of Alexandria, Egypt, to Brazil. The mid-Atlantic islands are shown with remarkable accuracy. The Cape Verde islands, Madeira Islands, and the Azores are shown in perfect longitude. The Canary Islands are off by one degree latitude. The Andes are shown on this map of 1513 CE. The Andes were not "discovered" by Europeans until 1527 CE with the coming of Pizarro. The Atrato River (in present day Columbia) is shown for a distance of 300 miles from the sea. Its eastward bend at latitude 5 degrees north is correct. The Amazon is shown twice, once on the equator of the main grid and once on the equator of the small grid. The island of Marajo is shown at the mouth of the Amazon, but this island was not officially discovered by Europeans until 1543 CE. Someone must have travelled throughout the upper part of the South America exploring rivers and recording information.<sup>22</sup>

The Haji Ahmed map of 1559 CE, also supports the validity of a Muslim presence in the Americas long before Columbus. He was also a Turkish map-maker who, in the tradition of Islamic scientists and technicians of his age benefited from the knowledge of the ancient Egyptians, Hindus, Greeks, Romans, and Phoenicians, and took it to a higher level of development. Muslims had led the world in Astronomy, Mathematics, Chemistry, Medicine, History, Geography, Navigation, etc. for hundreds of years before the 16th century, and Haji Ahmed followed in their footsteps. The Eastern Hemisphere, on his map, is poorly done and probably was based on the sources of Ptolemy. The Western side, however, was mapped so well that it is hard to believe that anyone could have drawn this map who did not have access to maps of people well-travelled in the Americas. The shapes of North and South America are surprisingly modern, especially the western coasts<sup>23</sup>. Their drawing on a highly sophisticated spherical projection puts the map about two centuries ahead of the cartography of that time.<sup>24</sup>

Another map of Florida, based on a French expedition of the 1564, shows three names that demonstrate an earlier Muslim settlement in that area. They were written as follows:

Mayarca (Majorca)

Cadica (Cadiz)

Marracou (Marrakesh)<sup>25</sup>

How could these names have been used by people if they had not made contact with North African or Andalusian Muslims?

Anti-diffusionist scholars have countered earlier claims to a pre-Columbian presence in the Americas by casting doubt on the nautical ability of Muslim or African seamen, and by citing the difficulty of crossing the Atlantic Ocean. In 1969 CE, the Scandinavian scientist, Thor Heyerdahl crossed the Atlantic for the second time, starting from the North African port, Safi, and arriving in Barbados, West Indies. His craft was made by Africans of indigenous papyrus, thereby proving that not only could North African or West African sailors have crossed the Atlantic Ocean, but that even the ancient Egyptians could have done so<sup>26</sup>. It is now well known that the currents coming off the Iberian Peninsula and western coastline of Africa will take a ship easily into the Caribbean or to the east coast of South America (present day Brazil).<sup>27</sup>

### **Mandinka (Manding) Voyages and Exploration**

One of the most significant waves of Muslim explorers and merchants came from the West African, Islamic Empire of Mali. When Mansa Musa, the world-renowned ruler of Mali, was enroute to Makkah during his famous pilgrimage in 1324 CE, he informed the Governor of Cairo that his predecessor had undertaken two expeditions into the Atlantic Ocean in order to discover its limits. Shihab ad-Din al-Umari, a famous Arab geographer, in his *Masalik al-Absar fi Mamalik al-Amsar*, reported from his informant the following:

“I asked the Sultan Musa, says Ibn Amir Hajib, how it was that power came into his hands. “We are”, he told me, “from a house that transmits power by heritage. The ruler who preceded me would not believe that it was impossible to discover the limits of the neighboring sea. He wanted to find out and persisted in his plan. He had two hundred ships equipped and filled with men, and others in the same number filled with gold, water, and supplies in sufficient quantity to last for years. He told those who commanded them: “Return only when you have reached the extremity of the ocean, or when you have exhausted your food and water.” They went away, their absence was long, before any of them returned. Finally, a sole ship reappeared. We asked the captain about their adventures. “Prince”, he replied, “We sailed a long time, up to the moment when we encountered in mid-ocean something like a river with a violent current. My ship was lost. The others sailed on, and gradually as each one entered the place, they disappeared and did not come back. We did not know what had happened to them. As for me, I returned to where I was and did not enter the current.” “But the emperor did not want to believe him. He equipped two thousand vessels, a thousand for himself and the men who accompanied him and a thousand for water and supplies. He conferred power on me and left with his companions on the ocean. This was the last time that I saw him and the others, and I remained the absolute master of the empire.”

This report reveals that the Mandinka monarch made great preparation for the journey and had confidence in its success. His captain, who reported the violent river in the mid-Atlantic, must have encountered a mid-ocean current, but as the report shows us, he had little difficulty returning to the West African coast. This current was either the North Equatorial or the Antilles Current, either of whose distances from the West African coast at that latitude would place the fleet at the doorstep of the Americas.<sup>29</sup>

Examination of inscriptions found in Brazil, Peru and the United States, as well as linguistic, cultural and archaeological finds offer documentary evidence of the presence of these Mandinka Muslims in the early Americas. The Mandinka made contact with Brazil, the closest land mass to the West African Guinea coast. They appear to have used it as a base for exploration of the America. They travelled along rivers in

the dense jungles of South America, and moved overland until they reached Central America. Examination of inscriptions found in Brazil at Bahia and Minas Gerais, and on the coast of Peru at Ylo, reveal a definite presence of these African Muslims. The inscriptions were taken from ancient cities and stone tablets and were originally written in the Vai and related Manding scripts.<sup>30</sup>

Many of the Mandinka cities of stone and mortar have been reclaimed by the jungle but a large number of these cities were seen by the early Spanish explorers and bandeiristas (land pirates).<sup>31</sup> One of these bandeiristas, a native of Minas Gerais, has provided many examples of the Mandinka script and description of the cities in the interior of Brazil. In a document, written 1754, we are informed that a city in Minas Gerais near a river, was well laid out and had superb buildings, obelisks, and statues. On the statue of a young man, naked from the waist up without a beard, underneath the shield, were the following characters: "Aha-na we-fe-nge:, meaning (He is of the maternal aunt), the pure side, or in other words: He is the heir to the throne."<sup>32</sup>

In another part of the city, in a building probably used as a storehouse, the land pirates found the following characters: "Si-kye-du-nde-pe?", meaning there are abundant wild kidney beans fastened in small jars and thrust in a hole (or hiding place)<sup>33</sup>.

From Brazil, these Muslim explorers went to the west and the north. They left Brazil and travelled to Lake Titicaca (in present day Bolivia) where they were attacked. Many of these bearded explorers were killed, but they left a legacy of writing among the Indians of the Koatry Island of Lake Titicaca. Their ideograms are the same as the Manding inscriptions. The South American expeditions went as far as the Pacific coast, where, on a rock on the shore near Yin, are written the following characters: "Kye, Ngbe-gyo, gbe-su. Kye-nb=gbe-ta-wo-nde.", meaning: Man: To pursue worship, to mature, and become matter without life. Man pursues a cavernous place (i.e. a grave or hole in the ground).<sup>34</sup>

It appears that the Mandinka explorers, under the Mansa's instructions, explored Central America and parts of the United States. This is evident from linguistic findings and the appearance of mounds throughout the United States, especially in the vicinity of the Mississippi River which they must have used as central waterway for exploring America.

In Arizona, they left inscriptions which show that the Mandinka explorers also brought a number of elephants to America with them. Writings and pictographs found in a cave at Four Corners, Arizona discuss the characteristics of the desert. Below are the first two lines of the Arizona inscriptions: "ga-gya kpa-nde-ngbe-ka-go-ne", meaning: the desert is hot. Birds are numerous, white...(ka)...and called "go". Another inscription: "ga-ka, Bi-kpa" meaning, the elephants are sick and angry. At present sick elephants are considerable.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Witness of early European Explorers**

In 1920, a renowned American historian and linguist, Leo Weiner of Harvard University, wrote a controversial book entitled, *Africa and the Discovery of America*. He tried to prove in it that Columbus was well aware of the African, Muslim presence in the Americas. He based his argument on linguistic, agricultural, and cultural finds that he made in his study of the Native people of America and in the writings of the early European explorers. This early twentieth century work came as a surprise to many of the historians of America, but, on examination of the actual writings of the European explorers, clear

proof of their understanding is revealed. Weiner showed, through his research, that the early Mandinka not only penetrated Central and North America, but inter-married with the Iroquois and Algonquian people. He wrote:

“There were several foci from which the Negro traders spread in the two Americas. The eastern part of South America, where the Caribs are mentioned, seems to have been reached by them from the West Indies. Another stream, possibly from the same focus, radiated to the north along roads marked by the presence of mounds and reached as far as Canada. <sup>36</sup>”

Columbus had recorded the fact that Africans were trading with the Americas. In *The Narrative of the Third Voyage*, he wrote:

“Certain principal inhabitants of the island of Santiago came to see him, and they said that to the south-west of the island of Huego, which is one of the Cape Verde, distant twelve league from this, may be seen an island, and that the King Don Juan was greatly inclined to send to make discoveries to the south-west and that canoes had been found which start from the coasts of Guinea and navigate to the west with merchandise. <sup>37</sup>”

Las Casas later wrote about Columbus saying:

“...That after he would navigate, the Lord pleasing, to the west, and from there would go to this Espanola in which route he would prove the theory of the King John aforesaid; and that he thought to investigate the report of the Indians of the Espanola (Haiti) who said that there had come to Espanola from the south and the south-east, a black people who have the tops of their spears made of a metal which they call “guanine” of which he had sent samples to the Sovereigns to have them assayed, when it was found that of 32 parts, 18 were of gold, 6 of silver and 8 of copper. <sup>38</sup>”

In Panama, the Mandinka, African Muslims had such an effect on the populace that they are classified as part of the indigenous people of the area. One expert of Central American traditions, D'Abbe de Bourbourg, wrote:

“It is thus that today we distinguish the indigenous people of Darien (Panama) under two names, the Mandingas and the Tule, whose difference perhaps recalls their distinct origin. <sup>39</sup>”

In 1513 CE, when Vasco Nunez de Balboa, the Spanish explorer, reached Panama, he and his party discovered the presence of African people. One of the recorders of the travels of Balboa, Gomara write:

“When Balboa entered the Province of Quateca, he found no gold but some black slaves belonging to the King of the place. Having asked the King where he obtained these slaves, he received as an answer that people of that color lived quite near to there and that they were constantly at war with them...These Black were entirely like the Blacks of Guinea. <sup>40</sup>”

Another recorder of Balboa, Peter Martyr, left an account that adds to our knowledge of this discovery. He stated:

“We found there (in Quareca) black slaves, having come from a region a distance of only two days march, and which produces people of that color, fierce, and above all cruel. He is believed that such Blacks came long ago from Africa with the intention of robbing and that, having shipwrecked, established residence in those mountains. <sup>41</sup>”

Writing on the same period, Rodrigo de Colmenares, in his Memorial against Balboa, write:

“.....a captain brought news of a black people located east of the Gulf of San Miguel.....*I que habia alii cerca gente negra..*<sup>42</sup>”

The reports of Martyr and Colmenares, although biased in their judgments of the purpose of the African exploratory voyages, are amazingly clear in their tracing the African presence. This type of obvious reporting, at such an early date in European colonial history, cannot be attributed to shipwrecked slaves, for the European colonies were not established at that time. Carlos Marques, correlating archeological finds with traditional native history, wrote:

“...But the people who live farther east (of Pointe Cavinas) as far as Cape Gracios a Dios, are almost black in color. They pierce a hole in their ears large enough to insert hen’s eggs<sup>44</sup>.”

To the south-west, near the Nicaraguan border at Tegulcigalpa, another group of Blacks were reported, possibly by Columbus. They were known as “Jaras and Guabas”,<sup>46</sup>. These names appear to be the same as Jarra in Gambia, and Diara in Senegal and Mali. Which represent a very ancient clan and territorial designation among the Mandinka Sarakoles. Kangala, one of the ancient capitals of Mali kings has frequently been shortened to Ka-ba; furthermore, Niani, another famous Malian capital, sometimes called Mali, after the empire, contained a district within its walls called “Niani Kaba”. The use of these names area another part of the legacy left by the early explorers. Both Kaba and Diara are still in use in West Africa and Central America today.

Some of the Muslim Africans of Honduras called themselves “Al-mamys” prior to the coming of the Spanish to Central America. They were probably related to the Africans seen by Ferdinand Columbus, or the Jaras and

Guabas of Tegulcigapla. Giles Cauvet in *Les Berberes de l’Amerique*, while making an ethnographic comparison between African and America, stated:

“...a tribe of Almamys inhabited Honduras....having preceded by a little the arrival of Columbus there.”

He also added that the title Almamy does not antedate the 12<sup>th</sup> century of our era, which is the earliest date the black Africa Muslims would have been conveyed to the American Isthmus.<sup>47</sup> In the Manding language “Almamy” was the designation of “Al-Imamu”, from the Arabic “Al-Imam”, the leader of the prayer or in some cases, the chief of the community.

Other evidences of early pre-Columbian presence in the Americas are found in the writings of Manuel Orozco y Berra (*Historia Antigua y de la Conquista de Mexico*) who traces early colonies of black people living in Central America and the southeastern parts of America. Father Francisco Garces in 1775 ran across a race of black people living beside the Zuni Indians in New Mexico. A. de Quatrefages in *Introduction a L’Etudes des Races Humaines*, noted that the Indians and Blacks spoke different languages, and according to the Indians they were the earliest inhabitants of the land.<sup>48</sup>

### **African Gold and Cotton Trade**

The early Mandinka explorers, who travelled with the Mansa of the empire of Mali or on subsequent voyages, were without doubt carrying large amounts of gold with them. On the famous pilgrimage of Mansa Musa, previously mentioned, the Malian Muslims were carrying so much gold with them that

they seriously affected the economy of every land they passed through. The gold trade with the Americas is established through gold analysis, linguistic findings, and eyewitness reports.

In the description of Columbus, previously mentioned, it was recorded that the Indians called gold “guanine”. The gold was found to be of 32 parts, 18 were of gold, 6 of silver, and 8 of copper. This was a common West African gold alloy, which had identical proportions of silver and copper and dated back to at least the thirteenth century. William Bowsman who spent fourteen years in West Africa before 1705, noted that gold is frequently mixed with a third part, and sometimes, with half silver and copper. He found that the “artificial” gold was found all along the Guinea coast<sup>49</sup>. Columbus was well aware of the West African gold, for not only did it have a certain alloy but it even carried a particular odor.<sup>50</sup>

Linguistic research has uncovered a number of words having an Arabic or West African root which are found in the Native languages of the Caribbean and North America. The following are a few of the similarities:

Antilean (American)	Mandinka	Mandinka
Goanna, caona, guani, guanine	Ghana (Arabic Ghani) Kane, Kani, Kanine, Ghanin	gold
Nucay, nozay	Nucay, nozay	Metal iron or gold jewelry
Tuob, tumbaga	Tuob, tumbaga	Gold, a gold weight, A King’s title

The African gold words have an affinity to words that are used to describe gold, wealth, and riches. In Arabic, *Ghinaa* means wealth; *ghaneemah* means spoils or booty; *ghanee* means rich. These words are similar to Ghana and guanine. Also, *nuqud* means money or coins; *nuhans* means copper; *naqiy* means pure, clean. They are similar to *nucay* and *nuhkuh*. *Tibr* means raw metal, gold nuggets. This is similar to *truob* and *tubab*. Father Roman (Ramon Pane), one of the first twelve missionaries to visit the Americas after Columbus, stated that the African gold merchants who came to Hispaniola were called “black Guanini”.<sup>32</sup>

Gold was probably not the only item that the early Mandinka explorers brought with them. Columbus was surprised to find the Native people of the Americas bartering with a woven cloth, identical in design and style to that which he had seen in West Africa. In *The Journal of the Third Voyages*, he noted that the Indians “brought handkerchiefs of cotton, very symmetrically woven and worked in colors like those brought from Guinea, from the rivers of Sierra Leone, and of no difference.” He was so startled by this “discovery” that he remarked, “but they (the Indians) cannot communicate with the latter (West Africans), because from here to Guinea is a distance of more than 800 leagues (2400 miles).”<sup>53</sup>

Columbus made several references to “almaizar”, a cloth the Moors (Spanish or North African Muslims) imported from West Africa into Morocco, Spain and Portugal.<sup>54</sup>

Ferdinand Columbus called the Native cotton garments “breech cloths of the same design and cloth as the shawls worn by the Moorish women of Granada.”<sup>55</sup> Herman Cortes, another infamous Spanish conqueror, described the dress of the Indians as follows:

“The clothing which they wear is like long veils, very curiously worked. The men wear breech-cloths about their bodies, and large mantles, very thin, and painted in the style of Moorish draperies.”<sup>56</sup>

The “Moorish” usage here could have applied directly to the West African Mandinka Muslims also, as many of the same dress and cultural styles were shared throughout Spain, North and West Africa. As early as the eleventh century, the town of Silla on the Senegal River was a trading post under the control of the Empire of Ghana and used millet, salt, copper rings, gold cowry shells, euphorbium, and cotton breech cloths as currency. Al-Bakri reports that “almost every house had a cotton tree” and cotton was one of the most important mediums of exchange.<sup>57</sup>

Just as the trade in cotton goods was important in the Muslim World, they were also employed as a currency in the Caribbean and Central America. The consistent surprise at, and the testimony of the European explorers to, the remarkable similarity between the designs and the usage is just another proof of the connection of the two worlds.

Many more clear proofs would probably have been easily found among the native populations had it not been for the Spanish “scorched earth” policy of destroying all writings and remnants of Native culture.

Alexander Von Wuthenau, professor of Art History at Mexico City College from 1939-1965, was instrumental in the collection and display of a series of terracotta figures, masks, pottery, and other items which represent the many people who have visited the Americas before Columbus. His collection of actual materials from the period of Mandinka exploration gives us a graphic look at the faces of the people, themselves. Note in Appendix 7,8,9, the clear African features, facial scarification, and Islamic turban. Time and the search for truth are slowly bringing these faces back to life.

### **The Garifuna People – Descendants of the Early Mandinka**

Another part of the stolen pre-Columbian legacy that has been coming to light in the past few years is the origin of the Garifuna people, sometimes known as *Black Caribs*. The Carib people are usually identified with the Native (Indian) group that populates parts of South America and the Caribbean. It is from their name that we derive the word “Caribbean”. P.V. Ramos in an article that appeared in the Daily Clarion of Belize, Central America, on November 5, 1946, wrote:

“When Columbus discovered the West Indies about the year 1493 CE, he found there a race of white people (i.e. half breeds) with woolly hair whom he called Caribs. They were seafaring hunters and tillers of the soil, peaceful and united. They hated aggression. Their religion was Mohammedanism (Islam) and their language presumably Arabic.”<sup>59</sup>

The Black Caribs have maintained their own language and a set of rituals and cultural practices. The *British Honduras Handbook* states that the Black Caribs “are very clannish and speak a language of their own which they guard jealously. It appears to be basically an African dialect with a strong admixture of French, Spanish, and English words.”<sup>60</sup>

Many European scholars have tried to argue that the Black Caribs, as a distinct group, were formed as a result of African slaves mixing with the Native Indians of St. Vincent Island in the Caribbean region, and later being transported to Honduras by the British. A. Quatrefages, in his work, *Historie Generale des Races Humaines* observed the following:

“When the Europeans landed on this latter island (St. Vincent) they found there two populations, or better two distinct races. One part of the island had the ordinary reddish-yellow complexion, the others were Blacks. In order to explain this latter peculiarity, one has generally admitted that a ship carrying slaves had been wrecked on these shores and that the Blacks set free, in this manner, mixed in with the ancient inhabitants. It is possible that the hypothesis is true, but not necessarily the reason which explains the formation of this mixed race. It would appear more probably that the color of the Black Caribs holds the same analogical causes which gave rise to the complexion which characterizes the Charuas and the Yamasee. They (the Black Caribs) would very well be the descendants of the Africans who were conveyed to St. Vincent by the currents and winds, such as was the case of those who landed towards the mouth of the Orinoco, in Brazil, in Florida, and at the Isthmus of Darien. They might even be the descendants of those Black men, who during the time of Columbus were from time to time making incursions to Haiti, well before slavery had brought Negroes to America. It is useless to return on the manner which might have given birth to the population that Herrera cited by Brasseur (de Bourbourgh), calls *quento negra* and which he clearly distinguished from the Caribs whom he called *Caribales*.<sup>61</sup>”

The Black Caribs (Garifuna) had a number of clearly Islamic-based practices.

They did not eat the flesh of swine, in any form although they were aware of its food value. In fact, they had instituted among themselves a complete prohibition and taboo, calling it *coin-coin* or *bouirokou*. They ate no crab or lizard while out at sea for fear of not returning to land. The Handbook of South American Indians (62) describes the Black Caribs with the following:

“The most prized possession of the (Carib) men was the Caracoli, a crescent-shaped alloy of gold and copper framed in wood, which the warriors obtained during raids upon the continental (South American) Arawak. Some of the Caracoli were small and served as ear, nose, or mouth pendants; others were large enough to be worn on the chest. They were a sign of high rank, being passed down from generation to generation, and worn only upon a ceremonial occasion and during journeys.<sup>63</sup>”

The Garifuna have also maintained a strong sense of family, sexual morality, and belief in One Creator. In the past ten years, they have become a more out-spoken group of indigenous Caribbean people. They are now found especially along the Caribbean coastline of Central America. In Belize and Honduras, a number of Garifuna have come back openly to the fold of Islam and simple masjids are being constructed all along the coast. Much has yet to be done in order to trace the actual root of their African language.<sup>64</sup>

## **In Retrospect**

After surveying the growing number of archeological, linguistic, and historical proofs for the presence of Muslims in the Americas before Columbus, the researcher becomes totally aware of a massive cover-up. Not only was the presence of Muslims in the Americas known to the early Spanish and Portuguese explorers, but Muslim geographical and navigational information was actually the foundation of European expansion. Vasco de Gama is reported to have consulted Ahmad ibn Majid on the East Coast of Africa. Ibn Masjid is regarded as the author of handbook on navigation of the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Southern China and the waters around the West Indies.<sup>65</sup>

The colonization of the Americas by the Spanish was an extension of the *Reconquista* (reconquest) of the Iberian Peninsula. Muslims had ruled much of Spain for over 700 years, dominating Europe culturally, educationally, and economically. The early explorers were, in many cases, Spanish soldiers who had fought in Spain or Africa and sailed the seas to destroy the power of Islam. They recognized the influence of Islam wherever they journeyed and did everything in their power to convert the people to Catholicism. When Hernan Cortes (the conqueror of Mexico) arrived in the Yucatan, he named the area "El Cairo".<sup>66</sup> The men of Cortes and Juan Pizarro (the conqueror of Peru), some of whom had taken direct part in the struggle against Muslims, called the Indian temples "mesquitas" (Spanish for Masjid).<sup>67</sup> Ironically, the first Christian to see the American land, Rodrigo de Triana or Rodrigo de Lepe, on his return to Spain became a Muslim, abandoning his Christian allegiance. Columbus did not give him any credit, nor did the King give him any recompense.<sup>68</sup>

During the rule of Ferdinand, the Catholic, in spite of excesses against Islam in Spain, some of the Moriscoes,<sup>69</sup> who travelled to Americas as explorers, soldiers and laborers, began practicing their true faith and succeeded in propagating Islam among the Indians. A series of laws were decreed in order to stop the flow of Muslims, free or enslaved, to the Americas and to win back the Muslim native Indians.

The following shows the attitude of the Spanish hierarchy to this pressing problem:

"The King: To our officials who reside in the city of Seville at the House of Trade of the Indies.

We are informed that because of the increase in the price of Negro slaves in Portugal and in the islands of Ginea and Cape Verde, some merchants and other persons who intend to have them for our Indies have gone or seen to buy Negroes in the islands of Sardinia, Majorca, Minorca and other parts of the Levanta in order to send them to our Indies because they say that they are cheaper. And because many of the Negroes in those parts of the Levant are of the race (casta) of the Moors and others trade with them and (since) in a new country, where at present our holy Catholic faith is being established, it is not fitting that people of this quality should go there, on account of the difficulties that could come from it. I order you that under no circumstance or by any means shall you consent to the passage to our Indies, islands or tierra firma of any Negro slaves who may be from the Levant or who may have grown up there, or of other Negroes who may have been reared with Moriscoes, even though they be of the race of Negroes of Guinea.<sup>11</sup>

Made in Valladolid, July 16, 1550

Maximilano, The Queen,

By Order of His Majesty, His Highness,

In his name, Juan de Samano, Seal of the Council.<sup>70</sup>

"You are informed that if such Moors are by their nationality and origin Moors, and if they should teach Muslim doctrines, or wage war against you or the Indians who may have adopted the Muslim religion, you shall not make them slave by any means whatsoever. On the contrary you shall try to convert them or persuade them by good and legitimate means to accept our holy Catholic faith.<sup>71</sup>"

Such was the plight of the early Muslims who braved the currents, visited new lands, learned new languages and cultures, traded with the peoples of the Americas, and became part of the already thriving civilizations. Yet despite all of these amazing achievements, very little information about their presence is being allowed out to the general public. World history will one day open its arms to all of its participants.

## Notes

<sup>13</sup> A number of linguists, historians, and archeologists have postulated that Arabic-speaking North African Muslims had made contact with the Americas in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. They traced the journey of a North African explorer, using a number of Libyan/Kufic inscriptions, from the North African coast to the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, the Pacific Ocean, and into the Southwest of the present United States. Inscriptions in Libyan or Kufic in the American arc also claimed to have been found. Much work is left to be done in order to verify these claims. Because of the tentative nature of this valuable area of research and the difficulty in tracing the primary documentation and materials, the chapter will focus on the Muslim exploration of the Atlantic side. For more information of the Pacific penetration see Barry Fell, *America B.C.* (New York, Times Books, 1976), and idem, *Saga America* (New York, Times Books, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> Ford, Barbara, "Semites First in America", *Science Digest*, January, 1972, 43-48; Clyde Ahmed Winters, *Al-Ittihad*, July-October, 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Cyrus Gordon, *Before Columbus* (New York, Crown Publishers, Inc. 1971), 68-70

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 2 for Al-Masudi's map in which the Americas appear and area referred to as "Ard Mahjoolah" (Unknown territory)

<sup>17</sup> Al Masudi, *Muruj adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 1, 138

<sup>18</sup> A summary of this story was translated into Spanish by Don Manuel Osunay Savinon in

*Resumen de la Geographia Fisica y Politica y de la Historia Natural y Civil de las Islas Canarias, Santa Cruz detenerife, 1844, See Rafael Bazan, "Some Notes for the History of the relations between Latin America, the Arabs and Islam" in the Muslim World Vol. XLI 291.*

<sup>19</sup> al-Idrisi, *Geographia al-Idrisi* (Dawzi Printing), 184 in *Athara al-Madinatil Islamiyyah fil Hadratil Gharbiyyah* by Dr. Mukhtar al-Qadi (Egypt, Pyramid Printing House, 1973), 335, or al-Idrisi, *Opus Geographicum* vol 5, 548

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 3

<sup>21</sup> Rafael Bazan, *The Muslim World*, 284, 285

<sup>22</sup> Joan Coay, "African Sea-kings in America? *Evidence from Early Maps*" in Ivan Van Sertima, *African Presence in Early America*, 162-`63

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix 4

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 164

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 166, 18

<sup>26</sup> See Appendix 5

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix 6

<sup>28</sup> Shihab ad-Din ibn Fadl al-'Umari, *Masalik al-Absar fi Mamalik al-Amsar*, traduit par Daudefroy Demomtoyenes (Paris: KLibrarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1927), 74-75

<sup>29</sup> Harold Lawrence, "Mandinga Voyages Across the Atlantic", in Ivan Van Sertima, *African Presence in Early America*, 238, Mohammed Hamidullah, "L'Afrique Decouvre l'Amerique avant Christophe Combe", *Presence Africaine*, XVIII-XIX, (Fev-Mai, 1958)

<sup>30</sup> Clyde Ahmed Winters, "Islam in Early North and South America", *Al-Ittihad*, 1977. For more information see Idem, "The Influence of the Mande Languages on America", a paper delivered at the 9<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Liberian Studies Association, (Panel: Historical Ethnographics), Western Illinois University, March-April, 1977.

<sup>31</sup> H.T. Wilkins, *Mysteries of Ancient South America* (New York), 1974.

<sup>32</sup> Clyde Ahmed Winters, *Islam in America*, 60

<sup>33</sup> Ibid 60

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 60

<sup>35</sup> Ibid 60

<sup>37</sup> Lionel Cecil Jane, *The Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, taken from Clyde A Winters, *Islam in....America* 62

<sup>38</sup> John Boyd Thatcher, *Christopher Columbus, His Life, His Work, His Remains* 380

<sup>36</sup> Leo Weiner, *Africa and the Discovery of America*, (Philadelphia, Innes and Sons, 1920), Vol. 2, 365-366.

<sup>39</sup> H. Lawrence, *Mandinga Voyages*, 221, Taken from L'Abbe Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Popul-Veh: le Livre Sacre of loes Mysthes de l'Antiquite Americaine* (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1861).

<sup>40</sup> H. Lawrence, *Manding, Voyages*, 221

<sup>41</sup> Pedro Martir de Angeleriak, *Decades del Nuevo Mundo* (two volumes, Mexico: Jose Porruq e Hijos, Sucs, 1964, 29)

- <sup>42</sup> Charles L. G. Anderson, *Life and Letters of Vasco Nunuez de Balbao* (New York, Fleming H. Revel Co. 1941), 163
- <sup>43</sup> H. Lawrence, *Manding Voyages*, 221, 222 from Caralos C. Manquez, *Prehistoria y Viajes: Estudios Arguelogicos y Etnigraficos*, Segundo edicion, Corrigida y Aumuntada (Tomo I-Editorial America: Sociedad Espanola de Liberia, 1920), 27)
- <sup>44</sup> Piercing the ears and hanging heavy earrings is an ancient West African (especially Manding) custom among women. Mali was, of course, one of the richest gold producing areas in the world.
- <sup>45</sup> Ferdinand Columbus, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, translated and annotated by Benjamin Keen (U.S.A. Rutgers University Press, 1959), 234
- <sup>46</sup> C.S. Rafinesque, "Primitive Black Nations of America", *Atlantic Journal and Friend of Knowledge*, vol. 1, Sept. 1832, 86
- <sup>47</sup> H. Lawrence, *Manding Voyages*, 229-230, taken from Giles Cauvert, *Les Berberes en Amerique*, 100-101.
- <sup>48</sup> Clyde A Winters, *Islam in....America*, 63
- <sup>49</sup> William Bowman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (Liverpool: 1907), 73-74
- <sup>50</sup> Leo Weiner, *Africa and the Discovery*, 34
- <sup>51</sup> H. Lawrence, *Manding Voyages*, 239
- <sup>52</sup> Peter DeRoo, *History of America before Columbus* (London/Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott, 1900), 307
- <sup>53</sup> Thatcher, *Christopher Columbus*, 392-393
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 388, 393
- <sup>55</sup> Ferdinand Columbus, *The Life of Admiral....*232
- <sup>56</sup> Leo Weiner, *Africa and the Discovery...Vol. 2*, 37
- <sup>57</sup> Abu 'Ubaid al Bakri, *Description de l'Afrique Septentrionale*, traduit par MacGucken de Slane (Algiers: A. Jourdan, 1913, 325, 326)
- <sup>58</sup> Alexander Von Wuthenau, *Unexpected faces in Ancient America*, (New York, Crown Publishers, 1975)
- <sup>59</sup> P.V. Ramos, "History of the Caribs" in *The Daily Clarion*, Belize, Central America, November 5, 1946 taken from D. Taylor, *The Black Carib of Honduras*, 37
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 37

- <sup>61</sup> A. De Quatrefages, *Histoire Generale des Races Humaines*, Introduction a l'Etude des Races Humaines (Paris: A Hennuyer, 1889), 598
- <sup>62</sup> Charles de Rochefort, *The History of the Carriby Islands*, Translated by John Davis, two volumes (London: J.M. for Thos. Dring & John Starkey, 1966), 2, 273
- <sup>63</sup> Julian Steward (ed.), *Handbook of South American Indians*, 6 vols. (Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Institute Bulletin 143, 1950 vol. 1, 177
- <sup>64</sup> The present author while touring Beliz and delivering a lecture on "African/Muslim presence in the Americas before Columbus" in 1992, witnessed the re-acceptance of Islam of a number of Garifuna and visited their masjids along the coast.
- <sup>65</sup> R. Bazan, "Latin America, the Arabs and Islam", *The Muslim World*, vol. LXI, 285
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 286
- <sup>67</sup> *Idem*, "*The Muslim Immigration to Spanish America*", *The Muslim World*, vol. LXI, 173
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 289
- <sup>69</sup> Moriscoes were Muslims in Andalusia who were forced to accepted Catholicism.
- <sup>70</sup> R. Bazan, *Muslim Immigration*, 183, 184
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid* 286

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