Africa in the Time of Al-Rashideen

Al Rashidden in Islamic history and literature are the four immediate successors of prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) who were entitled as Rashideen that means the well-directed Khalifas, their reign extended from the year A.H.111, to the year A.H. 40, that is to say from 632 up to 661. This short period is considered in Islamic history as a golden age by excellence, due to the historical achievements wisely accomplished by the four Khalifas in complete absence of "Al wahi" 'inspiration' and the 'Issma' immunity that was their during the life of prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). In this time, the newly borned state in Medinna started to face a number of causalities, the most serious of them was (alRida) or Apostary of some tribes out of Hijaz in addition to the expected threats of the two big powers of that time, Persia and Byzantine.

The Kalifas as soon as they insured the integrity of Medinna state, they arranged to expand the Islamic call externally so as to meet the prerequisites of Islam as a universal religion as it is stated in Holy Quran addressing prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) (and we have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds)- Surah 21, Alanbiya., verse 107. In this context, Islamization of Africa in particular took a priority due to some multiple considerations. Among these the fact that the relationship between Arab lands and d Africa dates back to prehistory,

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so for Arabs Africa was not an unknown continent as it was fore others. Africa is said to have known Arabisme before knowing Islam, it was from about the seventh century B.C, and even before, Semitic immigrants from South Arabia settled in the highlands of Abyssinia and intermingled with the Hamatics, the basic ethnic stock of the country. Those immigrants, who were originally traders, eventually formed a kingdom with its capital at Aksum. The coming immigrants gave their name to the area so it was called (AlHabasha) up to a recent time. So this part of Africa became so familiar to Arabs and Muslims later and according to this intimacy Ethiopia was chosen as a convenient exile for the companions of prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) during their first Muslim immigration or (Hijra).

Egypt, was the first place in Africa designed to be opened soon after the conquest of Syria.

By the year 640 Muslim forces occupied Egypt under the leadership of ‘Amr Ibn Al- As’. Here also many reasons were behind the desire of occupying this particular part of Africa, of these reasons are:

1- The particularity of the chosen country:
Egypt was first known for its deep and sound history. It remained the world's most important kingdom for a long time.

2- Egypt was the country that been mentioned several times in Holy Quran.

3- Egypt was reputable for its prosperity and many Arab traders before Islam used to be frequent visitors to its markets. The future leader of the conquest was one of them.
4- Egypt in addition to that had a certain intimacy with the legacy of Islam through prophet Ibrahim (P.B.U.H) and his wife Hajir, who gave birth to Ismail (P.B.U.H) the grandfather of the Arabs. In Islam, Mariya, mother of Ibrahiem, the son of prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was an Egyptian Copt. On the other hand, the prophet (P.B.U.H) from his part directed his companions to trade kindly the Egyptian Copts.

5- Being in Syria, Muslim army found itself within an easy reach of Egypt, this obviously encouraged Muslim fighters to continue their advance on.

6- According to some authentic sources, some Copte archbishops contacted Muslim leaders in Palestine welcoming the coming of Muslim army so as to rescue Egyptian people and free them from the detestable Byzantine regime.

**Spread of Islam in Africa during the time of Rashideen**

Certain groups came to be however in direct contact with Islam in this short period, of these groups are:

1- Egyptian population (Copts and Romans)

2- Nubians or ancient Kushites of both upper and lower Nubia (Aswan- Dongola Area)

3- Berber people mainly in (Libya and Tunisia.)
4- Few groups living along the East African Coast and Red Sea shores.

1st group. Egypt

Once Syria had been overrun (634-6) Egypt for all that has been mentioned, became a desirable target for Muslim conquerors. Furthermore, Muslim position in Syria could not be secure as along as Byzantine forces supplied by Sea through Alexandria remained on their flank. Therefore Muslim force leader (Amr Ibn As) advanced with a few thousand men towards Egypt. The conquest was successful, first Muslim forces were fighting for a supreme cause, secondly, the Byzantine rulers of Egypt, aliens exploiting the land of indigenous people for their own and their empire's benefit, were not backed by the native Copts, so these factors facilitated Muslim mission in opening Egypt. Once the main Byzantine army in Egypt had been defeated in 640, the leader of Muslim army (Amr Ibn Al As) quickly concluded a treaty with the Copts who agreed to pay some light taxes against their freedom to practice their Christian creed, and protection of their possessions. In 641 Babylon, the strong Byzantine fortress at the head of Nile delta fell to Muslim groups. Muslim power was composed from about 4000 men followed Ibn Al As from Palestine to Egypt and they were later supported by other 8000 sent from Madina under Zubair. In following year, after the fall of Babylon, Byzantine forces evacuated Alexandria, the
former capital. Capturing Alexandria took about 4 months and the 12,000 Muslim fighters came to face 50,000 Roman soldiers well trained and highly equipped, yet Muslim groups depending on Almighty God gained the battle and defeated their enemies. Muslim forces started mastering the whole country and began building a new capital- Al-fustat- not far from Babylon.

2- Nubian groups:

Nubians or ancient Kushites, in southern Egypt, both in upper and lower Egypt soon came to be in direct contact with Islam. with lower Egypt firmly in their hands. Muslim groups soon re-established their southern frontier at the first cataract garrisoning Aswan against Nubian raids. According to Ibn ( Abdel Hakam, 'Amr Ib Al-As, so as to stop these Nubian raids, sent out Uqba Ibn Nafi with a company but was soon defeated. This encouraged the Nubians to continue Raiding over the border, here ( Abdallahi Ibn Abi Sarh) who succeeded Ibn AlAs as governor of Egypt in A.H. 25 ( A.D. 646-7) decided to put an end to these raids, so in 651/52 he led a well equipped company into Nubia and advanced as far as Dongola and succeeded in capturing the town.

Historians of that time depicted the Nubian fighters as ( pupil- smitters) being excellent archers. The battle between the two parts ended by a peace treaty on a yearly payment known as " Baqt" these early contacts opened the door for Islam to penetrate consecutively in later times.
**Berber People**

Berber are a widely dispersed ethnic group living in North Africa. This group of people came to be in contact with Islam during this Rashiden period. As an identifiable people, Berber existed in a state of tribal self-government long before the Muslim conquest in the seventh century. The name probably comes from barbari that means barbarians applied to them by the Romans, yet they have no one name for themselves as a people. Berber people in North Africa were under Byzantine colonization like other neighboring peoples. Muslim forces after dominating Egypt, found it necessary to move westwards in order to secure their residence in Egypt so they moved towards the land of Maghrib Cyrenaica was soon overrun in A.H.22, then they advanced deep in Barber land to capture Sabratha, then Tripoli and intended after that to push forwards but this decision was disapproved by Khalifah 'Umar' who was reluctant to disperse Muslim groups in such remote districts. Thus ‘Amr, Ibn As’, stopped advancing towards Tunisia and returned back to Egypt, naming (Uqba Ibn Nafi) as the governor opened regions.

In time of Khalifah Uthman, Abdu Allahi Ibn Abi Sarh, was appointed a governor in Egypt instead of Ibn AL-As. The new governor managed to send a company towards Tunisia in A.H. 26/27 (648). This army was known in Islamic literature as the army of (Abadilla) due to the participation of six celebrated companion's sons all named (Abdu Alhi) in this army. Abadilla's army crushed the Roman power and gained the last battle in the area south of Kairouan. in this way Berber peoples came to be in touch with Islam and Islamic culture. Therefore Rashideen era paved the way for the coming departure of Islam in Berber lands.
4- People of East African Coast and Red Sea Shores

As it is known, Abyssinia or Bilad Alhabasha, recent Ethiopia, was the place, chosen by prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) as an exile for his companions as early as the year 615.

In spite of their short stay in Abyssinia, those companions must have had implanted some Islamic vestiges in this part of the continent. Many small Islamic states burst out in later times in the area, some of them claimed direct relationship to those companions.

Worth mentioning, Rashidden Khalifas put the Red Sea under their firm control, and used to keep an eye on Ethiopian's sea piracy and similar activities. On the other hand the Eastern Coast took part in this process, in a way or another, in this period. The casualties that took place in Medina after the assassination of Khalifa Outhman compelled some Muslim groups to quit Hijaz far towards this remote coast. These foremost immigrations, seem to have played a role in the coming Islamization of the Coast and the inner parts communities as well.

Factors beyond the Successful growth of Islam in Africa during Rahshiden Era.

Multi-homogeneous factors caused the successful expansion of Islam in Africa during Rashideen period and Egypt will be, however, the core of our study. These factors could be classified as follows:

1- Religious factors: Quick expansion of Islam as a creed in this part of Africa as well as else where, drew the attention of many scholars. Quoting professor Baker of Cambridge who depicted the quick growth of Islam
religion in the seventh century as an electric current, stating that

"Islam in the seventh century, spreading with the rapidity of an electric current from its power house in Mecca, it flashed into Syria, it traversed the whole breadth of Northern Africa and then leaping the straits of Gibralter, it ran to the gates of Pyrenees". This quick expansion has evidently its reasons. Islam presented a simple clear Creed fully concordant with human nature. Simplicity is one of its sound features as it is stated in Holy Quran (( And we have certainly made the Quran easy for remembrance, so is there any who will remember?)) Surah 54-AlQamar verst 17. To that, prophet Muhammad ( P.B.U.H) ordered his companions to facilitate Islamic issues and avoid making them difficult to practice. On the other hand people in Egypt suffered much from the drastic theological disputes in Christian credd that deeply separated them from their masters and caused them to endure a lot of troubles and persecutions. Thus the coming of Islam with its unprecedented tolerance put and end to all these prejudices by treating different sects equally. In addition to all that, Christianity started to looses its gleam in the seventh century. The North African church, quoting Trimmingham," died rather than was eliminated by Islam" since it had never rooted itself in the life of the country and its people .Same thing could be said in case of Nubia where the church their remained equally exotic and failed to become indigenous.

The high zeal of Muslim fighters together with their sincere desire to die for their religious cause, astonished the Coptic ruler of Egypt, in one of his reports he stated that although Muslim fighters were less in number
compared to Byzantine ones, yet they were more courageous and ready to die for their cause.

In this context, one should height light the blessings of Khalief 'Umar' and part of his wonders or (Karamat) in Egypt when the River Nile water went down. His message to the Nile and the immediate flood that followed due to that, showed clearly part of the hidden potencies of Islam.

Social Factors

The continual movement of Arab Muslim groups towards Egypt and other parts, helped much in Islamization of other groups in Egypt and elsewhere. The new policy of Khalifa 'Uthman' contrary to that of Khalifa 'Umar' that allowed free movement of Muslim groups out of Hijaz, increased the rate of immigration towards the newly opened regions. Immigrants as soon as they settled down, they used to intermingle with local groups and start expanding their belief through social contacts. The Arab's life style, their generosity and hospitality enabled them to be part of the new societies they reached. They used to roam about due to their bedawi's life-style, through the whole country in Egypt, starting from the far north up to the southern parts of Aswan. This free movement opened the way for the Arabization of the region down to Nuba lands in northern Sudan.

Muslim groups in Egypt during Rashideen period found themselves from the beginning in contact with three main categories:

1- indigenous Copts who were mainly farmers and artisans.
2- Remaining Roman groups.
3- Few Jewish groups, most of them were merchants and competitors.

Muslim groups intended to intensify their contacts within Coptic groups who welcomed from the beginning their coming to Egypt.

**Political Factors**

Egypt and parts of Berber lands were under the severe control of the detested Byzantine regime. The intense hatred of that regime from indigenous people in Egypt, caused them to welcome the Islamic conquest as mentioned above. It was stated that some Coptic groups helped Muslim forces to advance and offered them some logistic supports.

On the other hand, the annexation of Egypt to the control of Khalifa house in Medina from the time of Khalief 'Umar' assured a high degree of justice and political settlement. This in its self encouraged many people to adhere Islam in coming periods.

**Economic factors:**

In pre-Islamic times, Egypt used to be a Roman wheat store, in addition to that heavy taxations were imposed on farmers and other groups. The coming of Islam relived the Copts of Egypt from such economic oppression. Farmers with Islam, regained a complete control of their lands against paying a certain land tax known as (Haraj) while were allowed to practice their religious creed against paying (Jizya) or poll tax. The amount of this tax was very little and only capable adult males were required to pay against the security of their
life's and properties yet, the clergy, old men, females and poor men, were totally exempted. This shows clearly the high tolerance of Islamic process in interaction with non-Muslim groups. Similar attitudes drew many people to Islam.

**Effects of Islam on African peoples during the time of Rashideen**

African peoples affiliated to Islam during this period were mainly the Copts of Egypt, Nubians of lower Nubia and some Berber groups as explained above. Islam in its quick expansion, steadily re-formed almost the entire aspects of African life style and recasted them according to its own values. This in the areas where Islam succeeded to dominate.

To examine some different Islamic effects during this short period, on African life, we classify those effects as follows:

1- **Religiously**:

   Egypt across its long history was known to have changed its religious beliefs twice. First when it denied its pagan pharaonic creed and became Christian, the second when it moved from Christianity to Islam. This movement took a time but ended by making Islam the most predominant religion, mainly in Egypt, North Africa and Sudan. People of these mentioned parts found in Islam a self-satisfactory creed that stabilized their spiritual needs. In fact Islam is a complete way of life, it provides for each Muslim a guideline for each single subject in his life, belief, worship, moral cultural and social. Some famous western sociologists eulogized Islam for achieving a successful amalgam of the temporal with the spiritual into
a harmonious system of thought tied with a practical code of life. As for Christianity, it found itself unable to challenge or to compete with the new coming creed, so Islam found its way to people peacefully benefiting from the wide tolerance practices by Muslim groups. Worth to emphasize here, that Islam had set free the choice of creed with some certain procedures and did not enforce any one to adhere the Islam. This in itself opened the way for new comers to Islam.

2- Socially:
Africa's had been mentioned before, knew Arabisme before Islam. Here in Egypt some Arabic clans related to (Qahtanies) of south such as Arabia, Tai, Beli, and some other minor groups found their way to different parts of the country even before the Christian era. With the splendid up-surge of Islam and Islamization of the country, Arabicization of social life became a fact. Islam started its mission in recasting the archaic social patterns, simply because Islam is not a mere ideological vision. It is on the other hand, a practical system of life that fully appreciates all the genuine needs of mankind. In addition to that, Islam planted the sense of equality and human dignity in the opened regions. In same time it uprooted the previous aspects of human segregation widely practiced in pre-Islamic communities.

As an example for the equality that provided a high degree of social stability in opened regions we recite the famous decision of the Khalifeah 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab to whip the son of Amr Ibn Al As, the vicarious general and honoured governor of Egypt as he had beaten an Egyptian Copt, and to whip the governor himself. This shows the high degree of civil liberty enjoyed by the
subjects of the Islamic state during this Rashindeen period which witnessed the begging of the tremendous social change in Egypt and other regions. Urbanization process got to be one of the main state sound priorities. New cities were built together to the new capital in Egypt. In this way Egypt proved to be one of the most glorious Islamic countries.

3- Culturally:

The time Islamic culture brightly shined in the seventh century, Hellenic culture was awfully diminishing in the East. According to S. Trimingham, the North African church died Rather than was eliminated by Islam because it had never rooted its- self in the life of the church disintegrated and could not hold its adherent against the stimulating effect of the new vigorous Islam. Muslim groups as soon as they settled down in Egypt, started constructing their mosque, the mosque that came to be called ( Masjid Al Atieq) or Archaic mosque and sometimes known as the crown of mosques, and from there they started educating the new comers to Islam the fundamental bases of Islamic creed and culture. The mosque and later the( Madrasah) was an institution of higher education in which religious disciplines such as the study Holy Quran and jurisprudence were complemented by Arabic language and literature, poetry, arithmetic and other subjects. Students were only admitted after attending schools or study circles in mosques where lessons were given in Arabic. Worth mentioning here, that Muslim leaders did not enforce using of Arabic language, they rather left it to compete liberally. A lot of papyrus documents in Egypt during the first Islamic era were found written in Greek later in both Greek and Arabic and
finally in Arabic alone, this shows how Arabic language succeeded gradually in becoming a predominant language.

4- Politically:

Islam proved itself capable of providing a kind of unity and a greater political stability and economic security for diverse peoples. In Rashideen period Egypt used to be deliberately annexed to the main Khaliefate house of power in Median. This particularity enabled Egypt to participate in a lot of major events that took place in the Islamic metropolis. Egypt gradually gained a sound political reputation that made of this country in its following centuries, one of historical capitals of Islamic Khaliefate.

Economically:

Classical economy is known to be of three dimensions, agriculture, trade and light manual industry. Egypt was known in ancient history as the gift of the Nile, so agriculture in Egypt used to be the sound cornerstone in its economic development. Thus, Muslim leaders paid a considerable attention to the river Nile and its water levels through the known Nilo-meter, and as they were not farmers, Arab leaders decided to leave the lands under the control of its owners provided that they pay a land tax known in Arabic as (Kharaj). In this way Muslim policy liberated land property and abolished the former feudal system. Muslim governor in Egypt highly encouraged agricultural development in his state. He started digging new Canals with bridges for drainage and in order to revive commercial activities, he constructed a canal that linked between the river Nile and the Red Sea. Consequently commercial activities flourished, internal and external trade highly developed. This economic resort
rapidly vitalized the whole aspects of life, both civil and military. It was during this period that Muslim military power changed from being mere land or terra firma power to a great naval power as well. This enabled Muslim army to defeat the Roman navy near Alexanderia in A.H.34.

To sum-up, Islam recasted almost the whole aspects of life in Egypt and other neighboring regions according to its supreme religious concepts through its continual process of Islamicization. To conclude, Muslim groups who participated in the conquest of Egypt thoroughly preserved the supreme code of Almighty Allah, and thus attained His support as it is cited in Holy Quran “O-you who have believed, if you support Allah, he will support you and plant firmly your feet” verse 7. Surah 47 Muhammad.

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