

REASONS FOR CONVERSION TO ISLAM

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 6, 2020; updated Jul 7, 2020

As Elizabeth Savage reveals the Berbers of North Africa were also converted in large numbers to Islam by their Arab rulers in the later seventh century, “became Muslim, possibly not Muslims in a strictly religious sense, but rather in terms of throwing in their lot with Muslim leaders who seemed most likely to protect their interests. It is at any rate clear that Khariji Islam spread like wild fire from the early eighth century, when the motivation was less spiritual than a pragmatic, vigorous response to the Arab military invasion, political usurpation and regular enslavements. (p. 90).

As their conquests acquired a considerable number of Berber slaves, it led to a high demand for them in the East and the Arab commanders came under intense pressure to take slaves despite the Berber's status as Muslims and the subsequent contradictions in terms of religious law. (Elizabeth Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, A Gateway to Paradise: The North Africa Response to the Arab Conquest*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, Volume 7, Princeton, Darwin Press, 1977).

Nehemia Levtzion finds the same situation prevailing in other countries that came under Arab subjugation. The Muslim conquest eliminated the political military class in India, “but the Hindu religious hierarchy survived. The Muslim conquerors confirmed the superior and privileged status of the Brahmans. Even those Arabs that remained in Arabia “maintained their previous way of life, which was not very different from that of the pre-Islamic period. For some of them a meaningful conversion to Islam was delayed perhaps until the rise of the Wahhabi movement.” As regards the Berbers, he observes: “This nominal acceptance of Islam was only the beginning of a long process of Islamization”. He makes similar observations about conversions to Islam in various other countries. (*Conversion to Islam*, edited by Nehemiah Levtzion, Holmes and Meier Publishers, New York, London, 1979).