

THE AFRICAN BERBER CONQUEST OF SPAIN

BACKGROUND

In 640 AD Islam spread into northern Africa and most African berbers converted to the new religion and later this also spread into western Africa. By 700 AD a combination of Africans and Arabs made up the majority of the population of northern Africa. They are also known collectively as 'The Moors' and this term was used by Europeans to describe, Africans of Mali and Niger, Berber Africans and Arabs who were a unified group together under the religion of Islam at the time in northern Africa.



THE WAR

In 711 AD an African Berber named Tariq Ibn Ziyad who was the governor of the north-western African state of Mauritania led an army of 7000 African soldiers and 300 Arabs into southern Spain in Gibraltar and launched a full scale invasion and constructed a fortress within Spain itself. The Africans then increased the army to a total of 14,000 troops with reinforcements from Africa. The ruler of Spain at this time was King Roderic who led a Spanish army of 60,000 soldiers against the Muslim Africans. The African and Arab Islamic force after taking Gibraltar, then took Cordoba, moved into central Spain and overtook Toledo, then spread west into Lisdon and east into Valencia. The Muslim army then overran northern Spain and took Zaragoza and by 713 AD the Spanish were defeated and King Roderic was dead. The Africans and the Arabs then divided up the territory amongst themselves with the Africans controlling the northern and central Spanish territory and the Arabs taking the southern regions. In accordance with Islamic Law, Christians and Jews were allowed to continue to practice their faith however some Spanish residents also converted to Islam. This period of time is termed by historians as the Islamic Golden Age. The cultivation of agriculture, canals and irrigation were introduced. Palm trees, lemon trees and orange groves were planted transforming the landscape of Spain into a beautiful region.