

تاریخ و فرهنگ، سال چهل و نهم، شماره پیاپی ۹۸،
بهار و تابستان ۱۳۹۶، ص ۱۴۶-۱۲۳

Early Muslims in America*

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Abstract

The available scholarship does not agree on the exact date of Muslim arrival to America. Early Islam in America could have been a Pre-Columbian presence, while some scholars suggested a Columbian or even a post-Columbian contact. None of the three views discuss the idea of Muslim minorities among early Muslims to America. (West) Africa was the origin of many free and slave Africans who later made it to America. Given the influence of various Muslim dynasties (e.g. Fatimids and Idrisids in North, and later in other parts of Africa), some questions are raised: were there any religious minorities among early Muslims who came (or were brought) to America; when did early Muslims enter America? Contact theories were briefly reviewed to show early presence of Islam in America was multi-faceted. I traced the very first moments of Islam in America from among (West) African slaves. Interestingly, some slaves practiced Islam differently. It was suggested that since not much has been left from early Islam in America, in all probability early Muslims were slaves who did not have the power to establish their presence and practice their religion. Religious differences in early Islam in America seemed to be a matter of culture and choice, of which many Muslims might have been unaware. The paper concluded that the current literature on the history of (Shii) Muslim minorities in America focused on immigrants and did not cover periods of slavery. That might indicate why some scholars opined minorities like Shias came during the late nineteenth century.

Keywords: Contact theories; early Muslims; America; slavery; (West) Africa; Shia

* Received: 06/21/2017 - Accepted: 01/16/2018

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DOI: 10.22067/jhc.v49i1.65284

Introduction

“There has never been an America without Muslims” (Hussain, 2016). When Islam first came into the United States, it surely comprised various ethnicities and minorities. It would be naïve to imagine Islam entered a land and it expressed no ethnic and cultural diversities. Same is true for various Muslim schools. Wherever the origins of early Muslims to America were, minorities of different backgrounds practiced Islam differently.

Some historical accounts showed early Muslims were slaves brought to this land during several transatlantic slave trades. Some other accounts assumed that Early Muslims to America were non-slave (African) seafarers who arrived in America years before Columbus (see below). Either slaves or non-slaves, available literature inform us some of those people were Muslims.

Slave trades played a significant role in bringing a high number of Muslims to America. Millions of people were forced to leave their homeland behind. For almost four hundred years, between fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, various “cargos” of slaves landed in America from various parts of Africa, including East Africa. Some slaves passed some connections, which meant they were owned by some Europeans, and spend some time in Europe before being brought to America for a number of purposes including (sugar) plantation.

On the other hand, history of Islam in Africa clearly indicates African Muslims followed different schools. While east African Khoja immigrants preferred a Shii mode of practice, south and west Africans followed Shafii and Maliki schools. In north, Fatimids, and Idrisids preferred an Ismaili version of Islam, which later influenced some northwest and west African

regions (see below). Only neo-Orientalists would assume early Islam in America, which in all probability had its roots in transatlantic slave trades, was a monolithic entity in terms of belief and practice.

Neglecting the mosaic nature of Islam in any land it entered can only reinforce power narratives of some sectarian groups who would favor a univocal echo of puritan *orthodox* Islam. This dualistic version of centralizing an ethnic Islam as authentic, and putting the rest of Muslims minorities on peripheries, I would argue, is a biased approach. This approach prefers to highlight the unequal voice of some extremist groups at the price of marginalizing other Muslim minority groups. Periphery groups, in this ideology, would become unorthodoxies, the views of whom remain futile if not heretic.

Unfortunately, few studies have focused on minorities among early Muslims. Even today, some people (both inside and outside the US) assume any discussions on Muslims and their difference is essentially a sectarian discussion.

Discussions on early Muslim minorities and their probable differences are for several reasons important. They can inform us how early Muslims in America (and elsewhere) negotiated their differences. Lack of evidence on sectarian issues in early Islam in America does not mean there were no minorities. Quite the opposite, it is an indication of peaceful co-existence among different Muslim groups. Moreover, it shows how various Islamic minorities congregated under one umbrella term; i.e. American Islam. More importantly, if the early model of Islam in America ended up being a peaceful model, can this model be replicated in modern times? Could this model be applied to other milieus in which Muslims are minority groups?

I try to show early Islam came to America before Columbus as a result of slave trades. These slaves were most probably carried out by African rulers, or other Muslim nations. More slaves were traded to America the time Columbus entered the land, and later by the Europeans.

Although there might have been some free people among the first African Muslims who made it to America, the majority of Africans were slaves. Later, I discuss reasons why early Islam in America was the Islam of slaves.

Given the differences in various Islamic schools in Africa from the advent of Islam to the time of Columbus, I try to show Muslim slaves followed different versions of Islam. In other words, Muslim slaves were of different schools, and they most probably practiced Islam differently. I would heavily build my argument based on the historical literature of early Islam in (west) Africa, and the different regions from which slaves were traded into America.

Before elaborating on the background to Islam in the United States, it must be mentioned that in this paper I use the term America to refer to the south/-eastern parts of the United States via which early Muslims reached the continent.

Presence of Islam in America

Questions regarding how and when Islam entered America remain a mystery to this date. Was Islam a fruit of transatlantic slave trades, or was it simply the result of transoceanic travels by free explorers? Given the origins and geographies of Islam, there is no doubt that that Islamic presence in America was a transoceanic phenomenon. Stated differently, Islam was brought to America by explorers, seafarers, or traders. Obviously, either the

explorers themselves or the people they carried, were Muslim. The available literature indicated there were three takes on the arrival of Islam to America.

The first groups of scholars suggested Islam entered America prior to Columbus. These scholars formed are of different opinions. Pre-Columbian contacts were: i. the results of West African (e.g. Mali) explorations; ii. Arab explorations; iii. Chinese explorations. The second groups of scholars suggested that Muslims were among the travelers and explorers who accompanied Christopher Columbus (in 1492, or before 1500). The third group assumed Islam was a later phenomenon to America, and it was between seventeenth and nineteenth centuries that Muslims first arrived at this land.

Several proofs corroborate the possibility of west African contact, which I discuss in detail. Prior to that discussion, I like to refer to some politically loaded discussions which can put the discussion on early Islam at risk.

Recently, there has been much debate on “who” first “discovered” America. Though it is evident that America was not *discovered* (rather it was globalized, popularized and somewhat Europeanized by new explorations), some sensations outside academic circles like to politicize the discussion. Though this trend serves some peoples and parties it does not contribute to our academic debate. The current paper does not favor any single narrative of discovery since it is reasonably unsafe to assume a vast land was discovered. The author tries to suggest how competing visions can provide a big picture of *possibilities* of early Islamic presence in America. Any of these possibilities can surely be furthered explored.

Pre-Columbian Contact(s) of Early Muslims

Some scholars opined that Muslims arrived in America some years (and

probably some centuries) prior to Christopher Columbus. One scholar mentioned the discovery of a coin hoard near the Caribbean. There were two eighth century CE coins with Arabic inscriptions, probably of *African* origins. This convinced McNeil to conclude,

The location of this discovery is on the southern route from Europe to America, the same route that Columbus followed in 1492. It is possible that a Moorish ship from Spain or North Africa preceded Columbus along this route by 700 years. (McNeil, 2004, pp. 242-243)

Gordon seems to have accepted this view, where he mentioned the two coins, and concluded, “[a] Moorish ship, perhaps from Spain or North Africa seems to have crossed the Atlantic around 800 A.D.” (Gordon, 1971, p. 68). Jabbar, quoting Gordon, also accepted the idea of Muslims coming to the Caribbean prior to Columbus and ultimately wrote, “the history of Islam and the Muslims in the Caribbean stretches back over thousand years, predating European contact by over six centuries” (Jabbar, 1999).

Another scholar referred to *Al-Masudi* (ca. 896-956 CE) that wrote the land on which *Said b. Aswad* set foot in 889 CE was America (Mroueh, 1996). Aswad called this land *Ardh Majhula* (unknown land). While views like that of Mroueh are not mainstream views, some scholars seem to have accepted it. Abdo (2006, p. 65), and Ahmed (1991, p. 22), to name a few, have accepted the idea of pre-Columbian Islam. Serhan (2014, p. 31) also accepted the pre-Columbian arrival of Muslims based on the arguments of Gomez (1994).

Another famous reference of pre-Columbian contact is to Mansa Musa I. Turner-Sadier, noted *al-Omari*, who believed first voyages to Americas took place as early as the fourteenth century. This was the time the then ruler of Mali, Abubakari II, asked Mansa Musa I to lead the country so the king was

able to start his cross-Atlantic trip (Turner-Sadler, 2009, p. 20). The view that the Atlantic voyages of Columbus “had African predecessors” has been accepted by other scholars (Freeman-Grenville, 1992).

Some historians like Leo Weiner (1971) and Ivan Setima (1976) dedicated entire books to the African presence (of Muslims) before Columbus. In *They Came Before Columbus* the latter documented ample evidence to prove the presence of Muslims before Columbus (Sertima, 1976). Ahmad also discussed the pre-Columbian possibility of Muslim presence in America (Ahmad, 2014).

Although scholars like Fyle doubted if such trips like that of Abubakari II had ever happened (1999, p. 65), and Francaviglia tried to reject any pre-Columbian contacts (2014), to ignore ample documents available in the literature remains unconvincing. Francaviglia accepted that “[t]he Mandinka and other peoples from Africa were part of the broader Muslims world that had rapidly spread from Arabia and Spain by about 950 CE. Islam was the religion of many Africans arriving in the Americas during the slave trade.” However, he remained skeptic about the available linguistic, numismatic, cartographic, cultural, agricultural, and biological proofs on pre-Columbian contact on the grounds that they came from people whose main fields of expertise “are often not directly related to the exploration-related subject that they so passionately research” (Francaviglia, 2014).

In a world of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies, it seems very odd to reject opposing views on the ground that they might have been proposed by a scholar from a different field of study. It is a false argument that pre-Columbian contacts need historians only. Historical narratives would surely benefit from any of the above-mentioned fields in re-

constructing their arguments, as it was the case for pre-Columbian cases of, say, linguistic similarities, numismatic proofs, or the introduction of maize.

Columbian Contact(s) of Early Muslims

The second group of scholars posited that Muslims entered America the same time as Columbus or some years after him. One scholar opined that “Muslim Arabs accompanied Columbus” (Younis, 1984), while other researchers postulated “the earliest known Muslims arrived in America during the slave trade of the 16th century” (Pupcenoks, 2015, p. 44). Curtis cautiously referred to the possibility of Muslims accompanying Columbus: “In fact, some Muslims, or Muslims who had converted to Christianity, may have been aboard Columbus’s first expedition in 1492” (Curtis, 2009, p. 4).

Although Knight did not mention any Muslims, he provided a detailed account of the people who accompanied Columbus:

The first Africans who accompanied the early Spanish explorers fell in that ambiguous penumbra between slaves and servants. Some may even have been free (such as Pedro Alonso Niño and Juan Garrido who accompanied Christopher Columbus); and others were servants. Nuflo de Olano, who accompanied Vasco Nuñez de Balboa across the Isthmus of Panama, was, however, a slave. So were Juan Valiente and several others who traveled and fought with Hernán Cortés in Mexico, the Pizarro brothers in Peru, and Pánfilo de Narváez in Florida. Those blacks who sailed with Columbus on his first voyage to the Americas in 1492 were free men. Their descendants presumably were as free as any other Spanish colonist in the Americas. Other blacks who accompanied the early Spanish conquistadores might have been servile but were not true slaves as the term was later understood.”

(Knight, 2011, pp. 147-148)

Knight does not see names of Muslims among the ones listed by Knight. However, according to Lovell, “[s]ome authors say that the first Muslims came to North America with the early Spanish explorers” (Lovell, 1983, p. 94). She continued that Kettani identified Estavanico who came in 1539 accompanying Marcos de Niza. A stronger argument suggested, “Speculation aside, we find Muslims among the early Spanish explorers. African Muslims, either enslaves or hired, worked as navigators, guides, and sailors for the Christian conquistadors. Some of these Muslim pioneers opened new avenues to the New World” (Westerlund & Svanberg, 2012, p. 491).

Post-Columbian Contact(s) of Early Muslims

There are several views on the Post-Columbian presence of Islam. Most scholars in this category follow the Columbian premise of discovery or see not to question it. Available literature including biographies is the base of the early history of Islam in America. Jane Smith, for instance, corroborated that,

They [Muslims] were unaware, as were most Americans, that Muslims had touched the shore of the continent generations earlier when slave ships unloaded their human cargo to work in the plantations of the South in the slave trade of the seventeenth to nineteenth Centuries. Records are scanty, but scholars argue that a significant portion of the slaves, perhaps more than 10 percent, were Muslim.” (2009, p. 363)

There are some important observations in her argument. Muslims

immigrants, similar to Americans, were “unaware” of any Islamic presence in the States. Being unaware does not mean Islam or Muslims were necessarily absent in the American society. It could prove a much longer presence of Islam, and it indicates how marginalizing and ignoring a major socio-cultural, as well as religious, factor from the host and immigrant community led to an obscure early history.

For Lapidus “[t]he first Muslims in America were African slaves transported to the West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Lapidus, 2014, p. 802). Given the available literature, this view seems flawed. It is probable that Lapidus and other scholars in this category opined that early Islam in America was the result of the *institution* of slavery. This idea means only major waves of slaves could establish a new religion in America. This view could only be accepted if one agrees public manifestation of Islam was the base for early days of Islam in America. As would be shown later, Islam might have been in America for many years before people had the chance to express it publicly.

Islam in (West) Africa

A brief review of the history of Islam in Africa, clearly indicates African Muslims followed a number of schools. For instance, while east African Khoja immigrants preferred a Shii mode of practice, south and west Africans followed Shafii and Maliki schools. This religious diversity among African Muslims is significantly important since it is expected to manifest itself in the new land of slaves (i.e. America).

Gomez reported that “Islam had penetrated the Savannah south of the Sahara Desert by the beginning of the ninth century as a consequence of

Berber and Arab commercial activity” (1994). He continued that in the case of the Senegal River, Islam came to the region in the tenth century. Further, he mentioned that “[I]n the middle Senegal valley a strong Muslim polity was established as early as the eleventh century.” Gomez’s, as well as many other historical accounts clearly show Islam was present in West Africa as early as the ninth century.

Discussion: Early Muslims in America

In all probability, Columbus voyages were not the first successful cross-oceanic trip to the New World. Numerous historical accounts like that of Arabic coins, *al-Masudi*’s narration, Abubakari’s story, and several others well document the successful voyages of Africans to America. Although there is no single agreement on who the first African traveler was, a pre-Columbian African presence remains plausible.

Some Afrocentric myths, of course, could mystify the narratives of African presence. Afrocentric approaches could also lower the profile of historical facts. In a condition which historical facts get mixed with narratives of centrism, facts might appear invalid. It is important to note that as Eurocentric narratives of American discovery in which Columbus remains the sole discoverer are at stake, Afrocentric ideals needs questioning, too. It is crucial for scholars of various nations, ethnicities, and religions to stay away from centric narratives, particularly in dealing with historical accounts.

For instance, in *Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus*, in one part the translation reads, “Remarking on the position of the river and port, to which he [i.e. the admiral] gave the name of San Salvador, he describes its mountains as lofty and beautiful, like the Pena de las Enamoradas, and one

of them has another little hill on its summit, like a graceful mosque” (Columbus, Markham, & Toscanelli, 1900, pp. 62-63). Obviously, the reference to a “mosque” does not mean Columbus found a mosque in the meaning we know today. Rather, it could be a dome shape which Columbus described as a mosque.

Getting back to my main discussion, Islam is said to have been introduced to Africa as early as the ninth century. Moreover, social and cultural interactions with Spain colored the African Islam in North African regions like Morocco. It was from the north and east Africa that Islam spread to other areas of Africa including West Africa, where many slaves were traded from to America.

In the course of history, several Muslim rulers and dynasties ruled Africa. Some had Sunnis tendencies, and some were of Shii origins including Fatimids and Idrisids. Some Muslim kingdoms might have been under the influence of the Shias. An example could be Almoravids, who according to Leichtman, Senegalese Shias argue were influenced by Shii groups (Leichtman, 2014). Of note is that the Islam in Africa, either in early stages or in later periods, was not a monolithic version of Maliki or Shafii thought. From the early days of Islam, various Muslims groups entered Africa and they each had their own followers.

Naturally, when African Islam was a diverse version of religiosity, one expects to see this diversity among the exported Muslim slaves as well. Undoubtedly, this diversity formed major and minor groups. Yet, every group had its own proportion in the Muslims population of the day. Muslims of different schools of thought were present in almost all parts of Africa. The same was true for West Africa.

This very fact that West African Islam in ninth to fifteenth centuries comprised of different Muslims groups is the core of my argument. If West African Islam during these centuries was not monolithic, it could not be taken as monolithic in its new home; that is America.

There are numerous references in the literature to the West African contacts with America years, and even centuries, before the Columbus famous voyage of 1492. "Africans were world travelers, leaving a rich cultural legacy in North America long before the arrival of Columbus. When Balboa, Columbus, and Panfilo de Alvarado landed in North America, they were not alone: great seamen of African descent served as key members of their exploration parties" (Nelson, 2000, pp. 3-4). Some took a more modest take and wrote, "The Atlantic slave trade from sub-Saharan Africa began in 1444, more than half a century before Columbus "discovered" the Americas." (Hall, 2009, p. xiii). "Black contact with pre-Columbian America was apparently confirmed in 1970 by Alexander von Wuthenau, Professor of Art at the University of the Americas in Mexico City." (Wallace-Murphy & Hopkins, 2006, p. 62). David H. Kelly argued how Africans contacted America as early as fourteenth century (Kelly, 1995). "Evidence of linguistic ties between some West African languages and Native Americans in the Gulf area supports this idea of pre-Columbian outside contact also" (Kowtko, 2006, p. x).

According to Austin, at least ten percent of African slaves were Muslims (Austin, 1997). Abdurraqib followed Walker's estimation and wrote 15-20 percent of slaves brought to America were Muslims (Abdurraqib, 2010). This is important since it clearly indicates a sizeable portion of slaves, who were carried to America, were Muslims.

As discussed, Islam most probably came to America by Muslims of African origins. This does not mean the *first* Muslim who entered America was necessarily African because some accounts support the arrival of Arabs or even Chinese Muslims. I posit that early Islamic presence, which gave enough roots to later growth of Islam in America, was the result of African Muslims and their being traded to America.

Whether the early African Muslims were free men or slaves needs further research. However, I propose several reasons that early Islam was brought by the slaves. I assume if early African Muslims were non-slaves, they would have more opportunities to practice their religion freely and discuss it with native people. Narratives of forced conversion to Christianity negates their being free. Additionally, free Muslims should have established their own places of worship and would have left some works of art and/or architecture. History of Islamic architecture indicates whenever Muslims entered a new land, they started accommodating their religious needs by establishing several places of worship.

The very fact that to this date early African Muslims in America are perceived as one single community, and that little is known of their differences could prove those people did not have enough freedom to impact their new milieu and communicate enough with the host community to introduce themselves well. Surely, if the early Muslims were non-slaves they would run their businesses. Same is true for plantation, agriculture, and other activities. The absence of any proofs is enough reason that early African Muslims in America did not enjoy enough freedom to expand their desired legacy. It could also be argued that if the early Muslims had been free people, they most probably would have spread the word of Islam among

natives of America. As a result, one could expect a rise in the number of Muslims in early days.

Competing visions to know whether African Islam in early America was because of the arrival of free explorers or as the result of limited practices of a handful of traded slaves also inform us of how Islam would develop in proceeding years. It can be proposed that Islam of slavery, due to its limits, and some external forces to convert to the dominant religion of the time (Austin, 1997), would not be expected to flourish very soon, as was the case of White Europeans and their religion.

Obviously, if early Muslims were slaves (which seem to be the case for the majority of them), there should have been an assumption among the masters that they would one day revolt. Consequently, traders would have always thought of a controlling system to either suppress probable resistance or to predict ant *unruliness* from the slaves. This could explain why masters did their best to lessen the influence of Muslims whom they owned.

Future studies would surely help the reader know if early African Muslims in America were slaves or not. The conjectural reasons provided are only valid in the absence of any primary documents currently. Prior to concluding the paper, I would like to provide a short history of Shia Islam in America so to show that the existing literature would normally neglect possible diversities in regard to early Islam in America.

Early Shias in America?

History of Islam in America is intertwined with (West) African slave trades. Yet, very little is known about the history of African American Shias. Takim believed we had no documents that prove there were any Shias

among the first slaves who entered the US (2009, p. 11). He wrote the first wave of Muslim immigrants to the US arrived in 1875-1912, some of whom were Shias. There might have been some Shias among the first Lebanese who settled in Ross, North Dakota, in 1899 (Takim, 2009, p. 12). Takim talked of this probability based on observations of some graves by a friend of him.

A group of Muslims who entered the United States and settled in the city of Michigan, Indiana, were Lebanese and Syrian Arabs (Abdo, 2006, p. 71). Based on their origin, and some personal interviews, Takim concluded there must have been some Shia Muslims among this group of immigrants (Takim, 2009, pp. 12-13).

Another important region in which the early Shia Muslims settled was Dearborn, Michigan. Walbridge inserted, "... between 1900 and 1915, the days of the Ottoman Empire, anyone coming from the Levant region was known as a Syrian, but most of these early immigrants came from villages of the Bekka Valley and South Lebanon, the region from whence the Shi'a of Dearborn originate" (1997, p. 17). Takim also elaborated on further regions including Quincy Point, Massachusetts, whose immigrants in 1880-1925 might have included some Shias. He also referred to the Shias who settled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1895, or in New York, in 1908 (2009, pp. 17-18). Elsewhere, Takim wrote, "[a]mong the early migrants to America in the 1880s were Twelver Shi'is from what was then Greater Syrian" (2010).

Both Walbridge and Takim reported cases of Shias who came to the US between the years 1880-1915. This means the Shia presence in the United States goes back to the late 19th century. Their arguments mostly include immigrants who came to America in search of a more prosperous life.

Waves of Muslim immigration during the nineteenth century only cover a very small part of Islamic presence in America. It could be argued that immigrant just made the public expression of Islam.

Also, it could be that both Takim and Walbridge focused on the United States, in its modern geographical sense. In other words, their research did not cover Caribbean region, which remains a possible area of pre-Columbian contact by Africans.

Furthermore, the majority of early Muslims in the US seemingly did not have any slightest ideas about the differences between various Muslim schools. This does not necessarily mean they were not followers of different schools. It might only highlight their unawareness of their probable differences. That said, one can cautiously argue it is not improbable to posit that among the first African Muslim slaves who entered the United States, some were Shias.

As discussed in this paper, African slaves who were brought to America during fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were of different origins. Back in Africa, they followed different versions of Islam. For instance, discussing *Jawhar al-Siqilli*, Baker (2012, p. 202) wrote, “[h]is father, ‘Abd Allah, was likely a Fatimid slave.” Also, Powell provided some discussion on “black Fatimid slave soldiers” (2012, p. 14). It is now well-documented that Shias were present in Africa since the early days of Islam. For instance, Lodhi informed us that “[t]here is documented evidence of Indian Shia settlements along the Kenya coast during [the] 1400s” (1994). There is also other evidence of the presence of Shia Islam in West Africa, from where many Muslim slaves were traded to America. Several reports mentioned Sunni slaves in Africa.

The available literature gives further proof that African Islam, which included many followers from among slaves, was as diverse as other regions where Muslims resided. Naturally, this diversity should have been mirrored in any new lands slaves were brought into.

The preliminary opinion in this paper opens doors for further research. Given the diversity of African Muslim slaves, how did they relocate their practices of the homeland to their diasporic settings? What proportion of Muslim slaves kept following Islam? What challenges did they face from their masters? Moreover, future research can shed light on the issue whether Muslim minorities (including Shias) and their presence in America was a later phenomenon to Sunni Islam. Using new technological advancements like DNA mapping, or even future archeological discoveries, and possible genealogies can help researchers better understand about early history Islam in America.

Undoubtedly, perceiving ethnoreligious diversities of Muslim slaves and their modes of practice in the early days of Islam in America can provide an interesting model that would show how differences, with both fellow co-religionists and non-Muslims, were formulated and negotiated.

Concluding Remarks

The current paper was a modest effort to revisit the history of early Islam in America. Former President of the US once said, "Islam has been woven into the fabric of our country since its founding" (Obama, February 18, 2015). This quote made numerous controversies. It has a clever ambiguous reference that closes the sentence: "its founding." It refers to the country, yet it alludes to Islam itself. It clearly indicates one cannot imagine

Muslims as immigrants who joined America later.

We do not know how different early Muslims were in terms of practice and belief. Yet, I tried to indicate if the places of origin among early Muslims could give some clues to their probable varieties in terms of practice and culture.

Given that Islam must have entered America through some transoceanic contacts, I briefly reviewed pre-Columbian, Columbian, and post-Columbian contact theories on how Muslims might have reached this land. It was suggested that (west) Africa seem to remain the most plausible option for early Islam to contact America.

Muslims arrived at northern and eastern parts of Africa as early as eighth and ninth centuries and later spread Islam to western Africa. Available literature documented religious diversities among African Muslims and provided enough clues on how Shii and Sunni tendencies influenced polity in tenth-to-twelfth-century west Africa. Since Muslims in (west) Africa practiced Islam differently, the question raised was to see if this diversity could have been traded to America. If early Islam in Africa included a diversity in practice, why would that diversity be absent among slaves brought to America?

This paper argued that early Islam in America was a pre-Columbian or Columbian phenomenon. Several reasons, I assume, showed early Muslims were not free people (of power). If they were so, they would have left more of themselves, including arts, architecture, etc. As one journalist wrote, “[Muslims] left just enough to confirm that Islam in America is not an immigrant religion lately making itself known, but a tradition with deep roots here, despite being among the most suppressed in the nation’s history”

(Manseau, 2015).

I briefly discussed the history of Shia Islam in the US. Despite Takim and Walbridge's references to Shia immigrants in the late nineteenth century, it was argued that this date only referred to the arrival of some immigrants from Muslim-majority countries. This history did not take into account the history of slavery. Immigrants, I argued, were the public manifestation of the presence of Islam in America.

A final point raised was that academic discussions on early Islam in America need to disregard centrist ideologies. Discussions on "who discovered America" sound starkly un-academic as they only serve some political ideologies. Of note is to know how earlier generations of Muslim minorities, including early African slaves, negotiated their different identities and accommodated their multiple needs. That early model could probably reveal some undiscussed corners of Islam, slavery, and of course, America.

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