

Berber strongholds holding out, their hold on North Africa was such that their cultural influence began to be felt, and the country gradually turned to Islam, its religion and its institutions. The Berbers seemed to receive the new faith with as much ardour as they had displayed towards Christianity, but yet they gave it a character of their own, which they retain to this day. For despite all the invasions and the intermingling of populations, about 30% of the native population in Algeria is still of pure Berber descent and are readily distinguishable from the more soporific Arabs. In those areas where they have been long isolated from direct contact with the Arabs -- particularly in the Kabylie Mountains just South-east of Algiers, and in the Ahaggar, the mountain range in the far interior of the Sahara -- they retain their own customs, their own language, and even their own particularities of dress. The Touaregs of the Ahaggar, for instance, have a matriarchal organization in which the men wear the veils instead of the women, despite their very great war-like qualities. Throughout North Africa, too, Moslem orthodoxy, which opposes the establishment of a priestly order, is ignored in favour of large numbers of priests, saints -- both living and dead -- and a sort of animism which may have its roots among the many negro slaves who were brought into the country throughout the centuries.

During the period of Arab rule, there were many movements and dissidences among the Arabs themselves, and there was even formed the rather powerful Berber Empire of the Almoravids. This empire also invaded Spain to help the Spanish Moors, and this in turn introduced a great deal of Andalusian culture into Africa, particularly in Morocco, where many eleventh Century monuments show a distinct Spanish character.

In the sixteenth century the reverse movement occurred, and the Spaniards were the ones who formed an Empire in Algeria. The natives thereupon appealed to certain Turkish pirates who had established themselves among the coastal islands, and the latter quickly pushed the Spaniards out and then offered homage to the Sultan of Constantinople. The Turks were not loath to take advantage of this free gift, and soon managed to eject the somewhat independent pirate chiefs, appointing in their stead short-term administrators who carried out Turkish policy but whose chief concern was in lining their own pockets. In effect, therefore, the pirates, who became known as Corsairs, retained effective control and became exceedingly wealthy and therefore powerful. Mediterranean traffic became so unsafe that many attempts were made by European nations to annihilate the Corsairs -- the French made attempts against Algiers in 1661 and 1668, and the Spanish made a landing in 1775, but little success attended these attempts. Slowly, however, there grew certain financial relations between France and the Dey of Algiers, and this in turn brought about certain complications which finally determined the French to land in force in 1830. At first the official policy was that only the coastal towns should be occupied, but