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Annotation: This article provides an overview of the socio-political and religious-spiritual atmosphere on the eve of the spread of Islam in Korea, the history and stages of the initial relationships between the Korean and Muslim peoples, the formation of Islamic communities in the country, and their assimilation into the local culture.

Key words: Unified Silla, Old Testament, Goryeo dynasty, chronicle of Goryeosa, Yuan dynasty, hui, Joseon dynasty, Neo-Confucianism.

The history of Korean statehood has its own characteristics and aspects that have had a decisive impact on the general landscape of the region's culture. In Korean sources, the relations between the Korean peninsula and the Muslim world began in the 11th century, and in Arabic sources, the relations of Muslims with this peninsula began during the period of the Unified Silla Kingdom (661-935 AD). Korean merchants who came to China for trade had business dealings with Muslims. In turn, Muslim merchants were able to expand their trade routes to the Korean Peninsula with the support of their Korean counterparts in China. Certainly, trade was the main factor in the relations between the two sides, but at the same time, some of the symbols of Islamic culture entered the Korean peninsula. Information about this period can be found in the works of Muslim scholars who lived in the 9th-16th centuries on history and geography. Ibn Khurdazbih, Abul Fazl and other scholars wrote about the geographical location and cultural environment of Silla [6:24].

In addition to reporting on the geographical location and structure of the Korean peninsula, Muslim scholars paid special attention to the history of the origin of the Korean people. Sources regarding the origin of the Korean race include the "Guide-book of China and India" written by Sulayman al-Tajir in 851 and Mas'udi's "Knowledge and General Observations". Both authors claimed that the Silla people belonged to the white race: "Silla people, along with those from China and from around China, belong to the seventh community. They are descendants of Noah's son Japhet and Japhet's son Amur. They all serve one king and use one tongue" [5:24]. Mas'udi, influenced by the opinions of his predecessors, mentions the Korean nation as Amur descendants. Amur is the equivalent of the name Homer in European languages, and according to the Old Testament he was the firstborn son of Noah's son Japhet. Mas'udi divides the peoples of the world into seven groups and includes the Silla people together with the Chinese in the seventh group.

Mas'udi recorded in detail and clearly what he heard from some Muslim foreigners living in Silla, particularly Iraqis, about the description of the place: "A group of islands known as Silla can be seen off the coast of China. Iraqis and other foreigners settled there and accepted it as their homeland. They did not think of leaving Silla because of its clean air, clear water, fertile soil, rich in minerals and precious stones. Except for some, most of them lived there permanently" [4:155-156].

In addition to the works written by scholars who flourished in the Islamic world, Sino-Korean historical chronicles are also counted among the ancient sources reporting the entry of Muslims into the Korean Peninsula. The first collection of official documents reflecting the past relations between Koreans and Muslims on the Korean Peninsula was the Koryosa Chronicle of the Koryo Dynasty

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(936-1392). It provides information about the arrival of Muslims in the country and their trade activities in the following years: "1024, Ar-Razi and about a hundred people visited Korea from the state of Tashi (the name of the Muslim-Arab caliphate in medieval Chinese sources) and presented the king with the products they brought with them. In September 1025, Hasan and Razi and a hundred other people came from the state of Tashi and weighed the products they brought with them to the king" [3].

After the Mongols established complete control over Korea in 1270, many Muslims who served the government of the Yuan-Mongol Empire in China, demonstrated their potential and skill in administrative affairs and rose to high positions in this regard entered Korea together with the Mongols. These Muslims included representatives of various peoples, especially Central Asians. One of them was the helper of a Mongolian princess who was given to King Chungnyool of Koryo. His original name was Samga, and when he decided to settle in Korea, the king gave him the Korean name Jang Sunnyong. Jang married a Korean woman and became the founder of the Deoksu Jang clan. His descendants held many official government positions and were respected by Confucians in Korea for centuries [1:195].

In the middle of the 13th century, due to the transformation of Koryo into an autonomous state under the Mongol Empire, the concept of "hui" (in the form of "huihui" in China) was used for the Muslims of the Korean Peninsula, as in China. The emphasis on changing the relationship between Koreans and Muslims over the years, as exemplified by this term, shows that the status of Muslims in the Yuan-Mongol Empire was stable and significant, and that they actively participated in local life. So, in the first stage, relations between Muslims and Koreans began on the basis of trade, and Muslims were accordingly called "daesik". At the next stage, the term "hoehoe" was used in relation to Muslims, and this name expressed the general content of foreign peoples who live in a single geographical area, cooperate with the local population in the way of personal development and, in turn, enter into competition.

The conquest of various lands by the Mongol Empire shows that local knowledge and cultural signs were also the basis for spreading to wide areas. Since Koryo became a colonial territory of the Yuan-Mongol Empire, some Muslims in the Korean peninsula performed the role of "darugachi"¹ as the official representative of the Mongols in the conquered lands.

During the Koryo era, Muslims took an active part in the life of society and adapted to local traditions, which is also visible on their tombstones. In 1985, as a result of construction work on Muslim cemeteries located in one of the districts of Guangzhou, tombstones with a unique construction were found. Although their shape and structure are reminiscent of the East Asian style, they are distinguished by their calligraphic inscriptions in Arabic and Chinese languages. In Arabic script, verse 255 of Surah "Baqara" of the Holy Qur'an was written on the tombstone, while Chinese script served as a pattern on the edge of the tombstone, and it recorded the name "Ramadan", which was popular among Korean Muslims during the Koryo period. It was also written on his tombstone that he worked as a "druggist" in Guangxi province².

The fact that Muslims acted as representatives of different social strata during the Koryo period indicates that there was an interaction and historical connection between the two cultures. At the same time, this atmosphere of solidarity, which lasted until the early years of the Joseon dynasty, became the first stage for the formation of Korean Muslim identity. The second stage was relatively

¹ "Daruga", "darugabek", "darugachi" is the name of the official position controlling the personal property of the khan in the medieval Central Asian khanates. His main task was to manage tax affairs in the territory of the khanate. "Darugachi" had a great influence in Bukhara and Khiva khanates and even participated in the control of military operations.

² For the first time, Korean scientist Park Hyun-gyu conducted research on this tomb during his 2003 scientific trip to southern China.

intense, and under the assimilation policy of the Joseon Empire (1392-1910)³, Muslims with a high social and economic status in Korea were forced to abandon their previously observed national clothes, customs and ceremonies.

During the Joseon Empire, Confucianism served as the ideological basis for society, and the Korean people tried to understand existence and religion through the concepts and views related to this philosophical doctrine. In fact, Koreans have had some knowledge of Confucianism since the 4th century. By the time of the Joseon Empire, these doctrines had gained a dominant position in Korean society. Two factors played a fundamental role in this: First, Confucianism was officially declared the state religion. Second, the new form of Confucianism, which was formed in China during the Song dynasty (960-1279), spread widely in Korea in the early years of the Choson period [7]. Called "Neo-Confucianism"⁴, this doctrine, in addition to providing moral guidance and advice on government administration, defined the scope of other religions, including the rites that could be performed and who could participate in them.

In 1427, King Sejong (King Sejong, 1397-1450/1418-1450) signed the Decree "Regulating the Customs of Religious Minority Groups in the Joseon Territory" drafted by the Ministry of Rituals (Yejo), creating a more unfavorable environment for Muslims in Korea. In this decision, the difference in the way Muslims dress from that of the local population was condemned as a factor that hinders the establishment of mutual marriage ties with representatives of other nationalities, and it was noted that they should eliminate this difference by switching to the traditional way of dressing and stop performing prayers related to their faith [8]. On the other hand, it can be assumed that Muslims gained their place and influence in the country through this decision on religious minority. Because requiring Muslims to intermarry with the local population means that they are recognized as "permanent citizens" and not "temporary community" on the Korean Peninsula. Also, during this period, as a result of the adaptation of Muslims to the lifestyle of the indigenous people, a characteristic feature of the Islamic religion in the region, the tradition of translating religious concepts according to the local language was spread. For example, among Muslims, scholars with mature religious knowledge were called "hui-samun", that is, "Muslim imam" and "daro" meaning the leader in performing prayers.

In the face of the policy directed against cultural identity, Muslims adopted the Confucian views and knowledge spread among the native population, lived a life based on the Joseon lifestyle, changed their names and started the process of assimilation and became a full member of the Korean society. Civilizations influencing each other, undergoing changes and mutual synthesis of cultures is a normal historical process. In this sense, Islam also served as a kind of bridge between Eastern and Western civilizations. For example, the celestial globe, water clock, sundial, astronomical clock, and rainfall gauge devices discovered during this period, as well as Islamic art, medicine, and literature, were introduced to the peoples of East Asia [2:57-75].

Therefore, cultural relations between the Islamic world and the Korean peninsula, which date back more than a thousand years, did not encounter serious conflicts and wars, except for the policy of religious acculturation during the reign of the Joseon Empire. The process of the spread of Islam to the peninsula took place in the conditions of peaceful, open and tolerant dialogue with the local population.

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³ The Joseon Kingdom was established in 1392 by Yi Seongge and lasted until approximately 1897. In October 1897, it was officially named the Korean Empire.

⁴ Although Neo-Confucians believed in the existence of supernatural entities such as ancestral spirits, they did not accept the belief in an "Absolute Power" - God. Also, in this teaching there is no belief in the "Creator" who created all existence. According to Neo-Confucianism, the world not only creates itself, but also creates its own moral codes in the process.

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