

972.87  
PA.C

Panama. National Institute of Culture

*1978*  
Cultural policy in the Republic of Panama /  
by National Institute of Culture.- Madrid:  
Unesco, 1978.

48 p., [4] p. of plates: ill.; 24 cm.-  
(Unesco. Studies and documents on cultural  
policies)

ISBN 92-3-101529-X

1. Culture, Panama I. Title II. (Series)

7303

**T**he first group of Muslims that came to Panama (Central America) came as slaves from Africa, brought by the Spaniards to work the gold mines. Not unlike the Africans in the other parts of the Americas, they refused to be slaves.

In 1552 a group from the Mandinka tribes arrived in Panama. They were always considered as intelligent, industrious slaves and with a higher degree of culture. Of this group, the Vais were the most outstanding Blacks of the continent because they had invented a writing system.

Since this famous Mandinka tribe was influenced by Islam, they were all Muslims and it was written in the Spanish Laws of the period that these were prohibited from being brought to the Americas. Yet this was violated, partly because of religious discrimination. "Mandinka" was among the colonies synonymous with the devil and evil spirits. There was another reason though. Islamic tradition had developed in them a high sense of pride which made them decisively refuse to be considered slaves of the White man. Many were captured and sold, but their spirit of

his faith and beliefs, they would be lenient with him; he refused the offer, and he was thrown in a hole with a pack of Great Dane dogs who tore him apart. He persisted in his refusal, and died with his faith, Alhamdulillah. Many more died defending Islam and Freedom.

As a Muslim, Bayano made many covenants with the Governor of Panama which allowed him and his brother Muslims to remain somewhat in peace. Bayano kept his word in all covenants made with the Spaniards; not so the Spaniards. An officer by the name of Ursua was sent to stop the rebellion. Seeing that he could not defeat them, he began to befriend them, and made some agreements with Bayano. These agreements were broken by Ursua by having forty of Bayano's men poisoned at a party he invited them to. Thirty-two died leaving Bayano and seven of his men. When they realized what was happening, some escaped. But, Bayano and his men were captured. He was then sent to Peru and from Peru to Spain where he died. It is a known fact that these men converted some of the natives to Islam which brought the love for freedom and justice. So the Spanish colonizers set out to kill them all to stop their growth and that of Islam. These Muslims established a society based on Islamic culture, religion and politics. After Bayano's death, efforts were made to destroy any trace of Islam during that period in Panama. These men lived in the area now known as Darien, San Miguel, Chepo, Pacora, San Blas and the area along the river Baayano, named after Bayano. There is no history as to what happened to the Muslims who remained in Panama.

Even the books that teach the history of Panama and Bayano have purposely omitted the fact that he was Muslim. Whenever we lecture on Islam at the various educational institutions and tell them this historical fact, even the professors of history are found lacking. Yet, no one has been able to disprove this historical fact. That is recorded by historian Dr. Fernando Romero in an article titled: El "Rey Bayano" y Los Negros Panamenos en los mediados del siglo xvi (The "King Bayano" and the Black Panamanians in the middle of the XVI century).

The second wave of Muslims did not come to Panama until the late 19th century when some came as travelers and remained. One such Muslim was a brother from Lebanon named Muhammad Majdob, who arrived in 1909, established himself as a merchant in the City of Colon on the Atlantic coast, and remained until 1935. From his family, he had a brother named Najiim Majdob who recently resettled in the United States of America.

During the years 1904-1913, the group that arrived and settled in Panama to become merchants came from the Indo-Pakistan area, from Lebanon and other Muslim countries. The major group from Indo-Pakistan came from Bengali, Punjab, Peshavir, and Kashmir. Brother's Abdul Jabbar Babu and Ali Akbar led these groups. They numbered 15 to 20 and they came without their families. Therefore, some

freedom led them to promote and lead slave uprisings. The Spaniards considered them bad people because they forcibly refused to be slaves.

The group of about 400-500 that arrived on the Atlantic coast of Panama in 1552, escaped from a sinking ship, and began to live and fight to maintain their freedom. This group did not arrive on the mainland as slaves. They elected one of their members called BAYANO or VAINO to be their leader. (My theory is that the name Bayano is a derivative of the Arabic word bayyan). Bayano led them in their fight against the colonizer.

These Muslims remained steadfast to Islam during the leadership of Bayano. They formed councils, and mosques were built where they held prayers and meetings. These men were steadfast in the faith and Islam, so much that it is related that a couple of them were captured in an ambush, One of the two men were one of the Imams of the group. He was sentenced to die by hanging. They then proposed to him that if he gave up

**COVER STORY 3**

*A Brief History of The Muslims In Panama*

By **Dr. Abdulkhabeer Muhammad**