**The Coming of Islam to the Maghrib**

Now we are going to go back in time again to the beginnings of and just prior to the Kingdom of Ghana, but this time we will be looking at a region called the Maghrib.

The region known as the Maghrib lies in North Africa, in what are now the countries of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Note on your map where the Maghrib lies in relation to the three West African kingdoms. Think about what relationship might have existed between these two regions as you read through the text below.

The Maghrib underwent significant changes beginning in the 7th century CE that led to a shift in its dominant religion to Islam. Before this time, the population consisted of a mix of Christians, Jews, and people practicing indigenous religions. Yet this began to change as Arabs gained more and more power in the region. The people living in the Maghrib at the time were called Berbers. Today their descendents still live in this region of Africa, and the majority of them follow Islam. During the period between the 7th century and 10th century CE (overlapping with the early days of the Kingdom of Ghana), Islam became accepted throughout this region. It remains the dominant religion there up to this day. How did this significant change occur?

Historians have explained that the Arabs brought Islam to the Maghrib as they moved into the area. The Arabs were a powerful political and military force in the region. At first, there was pressure for Berbers to join the Arab military and adopt Islam for reasons of political/economic advantage. However by the 8th century, Berbers were ready to adopt Islam as well as Arabic culture. They converted to Islam on a massive scale, but also continued to resent Arab domination in this region.

The Berbers developed their own unique expression of Islam in a doctrine called Kharidjism. This doctrine emphasized equality amongst Muslims and criticized the ruling authority of the Arabs. It became the Berber's ideology of struggle against Arab domination. Their resistance was aimed not at Muslim Arabs, but specifically targeted towards the ruling class.

Beginning in the late 8th century CE, the Idrisid dynasty strengthened the presence of Islam in the region through measures to convert the remainder of the non-Islamic population to Islam. By the 10th century, virtually the whole region known as the Maghrib had become Islamic.

During this time of the Arab conquest of the Maghrib in the 7th and 8th centuries, there was an influx of Muslim merchants who became involved in the trans-Saharan gold trade with the Great Kingdoms of West Africa that were just forming around this time.