

Geographical factors and their impact on the distribution of Islamic regions: A historical perspective

M. M. M. Sabir¹, S. Sawjanya²

¹*Arabic and Islamic Civilisation Unit, Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

²*Department of Geography, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka*

The distribution of Islamic regions since the seventh century is one of the most significant processes in world history, encompassing the spread of the religion, sociopolitical state-building, and cultural integration across the continent. Although most of the literature has focused on the political and military aspects of the Islamic expansion, the geographical and ecological aspects have not been thoroughly explored. This paper examines the role of geographical location, water resources, climate, and trade routes in shaping the distribution, sustainability, and stability of Islamic territories. The objectives are: (1) to test ecological and historical factors influencing regional development, (2) to analyze terrain and trade routes as supports for expansion and stability, and (3) to evaluate the contribution of Islamic ecological ethics, especially *mizan* (balance), *khalifa* (stewardship), and *israf* (waste avoidance), to the development of resilient societies. The methodology employed is a qualitative and historical-geographical approach, utilizing descriptive content analysis. The primary sources include the Quran and passages of Hadith that address land stewardship, while secondary sources comprise scholarly articles, journals, and historical chronicles. The case studies focus on Baghdad, Mecca, Córdoba, Tunis, Cairo, and Timbuktu—cities chosen for their ecological diversity, political importance, and cultural significance. Results indicate that geography, water supply, and trade routes played crucial roles in shaping the growth and prosperity of regional centres, alongside political and military factors. The Silk Road, Indian Ocean routes, and Trans-Saharan caravans contributed to the movement of products, religion, and culture, significantly influencing the geographic distribution of Islamic expansion. The availability of water, climate-adaptive urban planning, and ecological ethics enabled cities to become hubs of learning, trade, and worship. The research concludes that the spread of Islam was not solely driven by conquest, but rather resulted from a combination of human activities, religious principles, and environmental factors. The tenets of *mizan*, *khalifa*, and *israf* for modern development can provide valuable lessons on ecological resilience and sustainable urban planning. Understanding these historical processes enhances insights into adaptation, cultural sustainability, and environmental governance in Muslim-majority regions, as well as in other areas.

Keywords: *Baghdad, Geography, Islamic expansion, Trade routes, Urban resilience*