

Notes

1. The word 'Saracen' comes from the Arabic 'sharqiyun', meaning easterner ('sharq' – East). Since sibilants are non-existent in Middle Greek, it took the form 'Saracen.' In Europe, the word was in use as a synonym for 'Muslim' until the 18th century.
2. Prelate (Latin: *praelatus*) means 'set above', i.e. a high-ranking member of the Catholic Church's clergy.
3. Limbo (Latin: *limbus*) means 'boundary' or 'edge'; it is the first circle of hell in the Divine Comedy.
4. Italian census does not record religious affiliation. Since it does not include a religious identity question, precise estimation of the number of Muslims is impossible. Moreover, some migrants prefer to remain discreet about their religious affiliation.

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KSENIA ATAMALI. THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN ICELAND TODAY

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Abstract. The article examines the current state of the Muslim community in Iceland and provides an overview of contacts between Muslims and Icelanders throughout history. The main emphasis is on Muslim religious organizations, their activities, and their place in the society of Iceland. The paper also discusses the issue of migration and Islamophobia.

Islam – one of the world religions – has expanded far beyond its birthplace, spreading among peoples of various countries, including those located in northern latitudes. There are large Muslim communities in the three countries on the Scandinavian Peninsula: Denmark,

Norway, and Sweden; they have been the subject of multiple research papers and publications by scholars from all around the world. However, the same cannot be said about Iceland, an island nation with close historical and cultural ties to Denmark and Norway. Iceland is sometimes classified as a Scandinavian country. Although the Muslim community of Iceland is one of the smallest in the world, the history of contacts between Icelanders and Muslims dates back hundreds of years.

Icelanders came into contact with the Islamic world shortly after Iceland officially adopted Christianity around 1000, when first pilgrims set out on their journey to Jerusalem. In Muslim sources, Iceland was first mentioned in 1154 in the Book of Roger¹ by the renowned Arab geographer and scholar Muhammad al-Idrisi (1100–1165). It was not until the 17th century that the contacts between Muslims and Icelanders were no longer a rare occurrence. Despite this, a fantastical version of the Muslim world is rather popular in Icelandic chivalric sagas, influenced by the tales of pilgrims and crusaders. As in the Medieval European literature, Icelandic image of Islam was rife with misconceptions, portraying Muslims as ‘heathens.’ The post-medieval literature, however, tends to romanticize the Islamic world, making it a bastion of wisdom and nobility. One of the most well-known conflicts between Icelanders and Muslims occurred in 1627, when a group of Barbary corsairs under the command of the Dutch Muslim Murat Reis (né Jan Janszoon) raided the coast of Iceland, capturing and selling about 400 people into slavery. Most of them died, about a quarter converted to Islam, while ransoms for the release of 50 individuals were eventually paid many years later. This incident went down in the history of Iceland as the Turkish Abductions (Icelandic: *Tyrkjaránið*), since at the time all Mediterranean Muslims were referred to as ‘Turks’ as most of them were subjects of the Ottoman Empire [1, p. 118–119].

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The number of Muslims living outside the Muslim states varies. According to Pew Research Center, in 2010, the three Scandinavian countries together were home to over 820,000 Muslims: 226,000 in Denmark, 144,000 in Norway, and 451,000 in Sweden. By 2025, this number had grown considerably, surpassing 700,000 people in Sweden, 317,000 in Denmark, and 175,000 in Norway. The surge in Muslim population can be attributed to the influx of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, and other countries. In Iceland, the proportion of immigrants has increased significantly in the 21st century, going from