

L E S S O N 3

Islamic Spain

Regularly perform thy prayer at the declension [descent] of the sun, at the first darkness of the night, and the prayer of daybreak; for the prayer of daybreak is borne witness unto by the angels.

Koran, 17:80

According to the Koran, faithful Muslims are directed to pray at not only these three times of day but also in the afternoon and

evening. Mosques were built by the Islamic rulers so that the faithful could answer the Koran's call to face Mecca and pray five times every day.

The Great Mosque of Cordoba, Spain, described in A Closer Look on page 97, was begun in 786 by Abd al Rahman. The mosque, completed nearly 200 years later in 976, was a religious, social, and educational center.

THINKING

FOCUS

How did Islamic culture influence Spain?

Key Term

- legacy

The Return of the Umayyads

When Abd al Rahman fled to Spain in 750, he discovered that since the time the Arabs and Berbers had invaded Spain from North Africa in 711, rival tribes had been competing for control. No group had succeeded for long. Although there were many Muslims in Spain, there was no unified Islamic government.

Uniting Islamic Spain

By 756, the Umayyad forces in Spain, who did not support the new Abbasid caliphate back in Baghdad, accepted Abd al Rahman as their leader. With this Umayyad help, Abd al Rahman was able to establish an independent Islamic kingdom. He made the ancient Roman city of Cordoba his new capital.



◀ *The arches of the Great Mosque of Cordoba are supported by more than 1,000 pillars of marble, jasper and alabaster.*

Abd al Rahman's goals were to unify Spain under a central government, and to protect his realm from Islamic invaders to the south and Christian forces to the north. He succeeded so well that until 1000, there were few invasions.

■ *How did the Umayyads unify and protect Spain?*

Strengthening Cordoba

The high point for Umayyad power in Spain came about 200

years after the first Abd al Rahman, during the 49-year reign of Abd al Rahman III, which was from 912 to 961. He was the first Umayyad ruler of Spain to adopt the title of caliph, rather than simply governor. He patterned his government after the Abbasids' strong, centralized caliphate in the east, in Baghdad.

During his reign, Abd al Rahman III increased the strength of the army. The caliph bought Scandinavian, African, and German slaves to serve in his forces. This vast army protected his kingdom from the same two forces that had threatened the first Abd al Rahman: Christians in the north and Muslim rivals to the south, especially the Fatimids who had started an empire in Africa. ■



► *Orchards of figs, almonds, and sweet cherries covered the countryside of the Islamic Empire of Spain. What Spanish cities were part of the Islamic Empire of Spain? What area of Spain was still controlled by the Christians?*



Glory of Cordoba

With his borders well protected, Abd al Rahman III turned his energies toward making Cordoba a thriving cultural center. Prosperous and well run, the city attracted scholars and artists. Many had come from the Abbasid cultural center of Baghdad. The

city's most famous attraction was the Great Mosque, the largest of the city's 3,000 mosques. For A Closer Look at the mosque, see page 97.

In the 900s, Cordoba was western Europe's largest city with a population of 200,000 people.

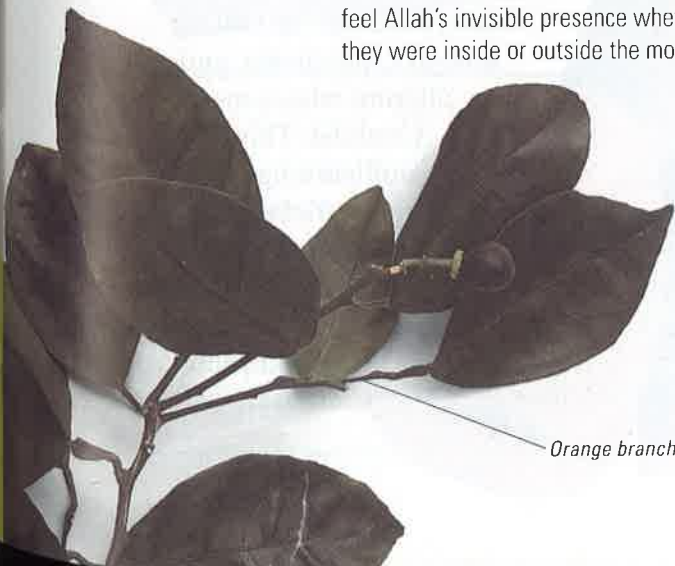
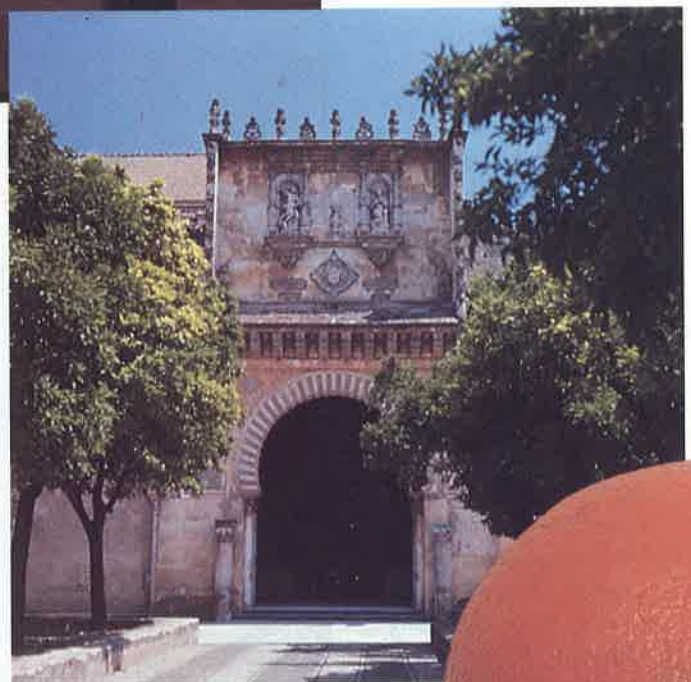
The Great Mosque at Cordoba

The great city of Cordoba demanded a great mosque. The building begun by Abd al Rahman I in A.D. 785 eventually became the third largest mosque in the world. Twice the wall facing Mecca was pushed outward. With the third addition, the wall and its jewellike mihrab had almost reached the river, so the fourth extension had to be added onto one side.



Did you notice that the pillars don't match? The marble and alabaster pillars under the candy-striped arches came from many different Roman buildings. Above this "forest" sparkled a turquoise- and gold-enameled "sky."

Outside, through open arches, rows of fragrant orange trees repeated the rows of pillars inside. The courtyard and mosque, open to each other, allowed Muslims to feel Allah's invisible presence whether they were inside or outside the mosque.

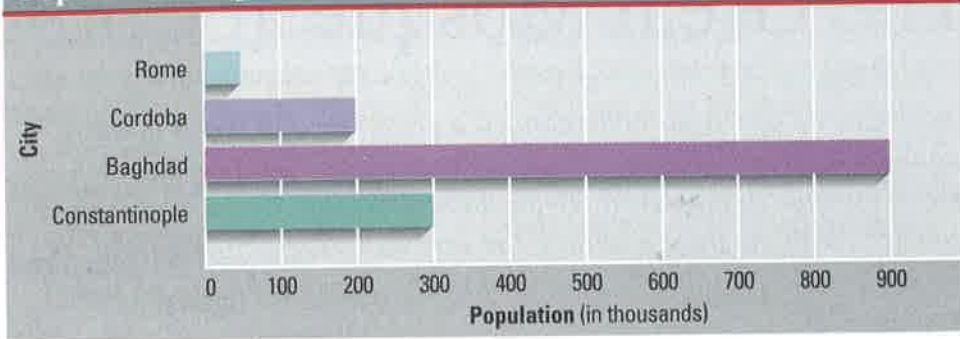


Orange branches



► In the 900s, there were two Islamic Empires, the Umayyads in the west and the Abbasids in the east. There were also two Christian empires, the Roman Catholics in the west and the Eastern Orthodox Church in the east.

Population Comparison of Major Cities, c. 900



The size and splendor of Cordoba, with its paved and lighted streets and public plumbing in 300 bath-houses, was truly remarkable for a European city of the Middle Ages. Over 100,000 shops and houses filled the city. But it was the 60,000 richly decorated palaces with gardens and fountains, public courtyards, and broad avenues that made Cordoba an urban jewel in Islamic Spain's crown.

A Center of Learning

Poetry and music thrived in Cordoba. Poets and musicians were regarded as important figures in the court of the caliphs, for they

produced poems and songs to glorify the empire and its rulers. Cordoba was the cultural and intellectual center of western Islam. The Muslims' interest in Greek learning ignited, and busy translators and copyists produced many volumes of Greek literature, philosophy, and science in Arabic. In the late 900s, the largest of the 70 libraries in Cordoba contained 500,000 volumes. This was at a time when a Christian monastery would have been proud to house several hundred books. A host of clerks, many of them women, carefully hand-copied 70,000 books a year to satisfy the citizens' literary appetites.

Thousands of men and women attended the university and the law school at Cordoba. Scholars from Baghdad traveled to Spain, bringing knowledge and seeking new ideas. Much of this learning was then shared with western Europe by visiting scholars, merchants, and pilgrims who came to Cordoba. This love of learning was Cordoba's greatest **legacy**, or gift, to cultures and civilizations of the future.

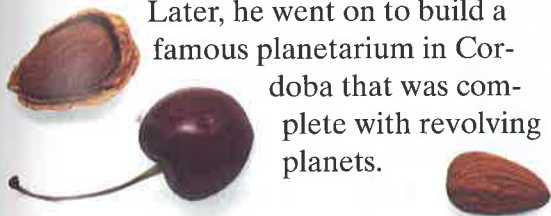
► The short-necked lute and the drum were two of the most popular instruments of Islamic music. They were often used to demonstrate and explain musical theory to young students.



The Intellectual Community

Cordoba was an open center of learning in which non-Muslims and Muslims from other lands were welcome to share in the intellectual community. One of the first of the visiting scholars was Abbas Ibn Firnas. He came to Cordoba from Baghdad in the early 900s to teach music at the court of Abd al Rahman III. His interests were diverse, however, and Ibn Firnas soon began to explore the mechanics of flight. He constructed a pair of wings out of feathers on a wooden frame and made an attempt at flight. Ibn Firnas survived his flight experiment with only a back injury.

Later, he went on to build a famous planetarium in Cordoba that was complete with revolving planets.



Also playing an important part in the intellectual community at Cordoba were many non-Muslims. For example, Hasdai ben-Sharput was a Jew who served as court physician, treasurer, and diplomat to the caliph, Abd al Rahman III. In fact, the Muslims treated Christians and Jews with such tolerance that some converted to Islam or at least adopted many of its customs.

A City of Merchants

If Cordoba was a center of culture and learning, it was also a city of merchants. Cordoba supported a great many workshops for the production of its famous leatherwork, prayer carpets, ivory boxes, and other handicrafts. Spanish leather goods and textiles were in great demand throughout Europe because of the craftsmanship with which they were made. The art of papermaking, brought from Baghdad, was practiced here also.

Agriculture also flourished under Abd al Rahman III. He encouraged the use of irrigation, which enabled farmers to grow new and exotic crops such as figs, almonds, cherries, bananas, and cotton. Over 4,000 thriving markets sold these agricultural and manufactured products. ■

◀ An artist carved this ivory box in Spain around 1000. The box is intricately decorated with animals, script, and foliage. The inscription around the lid wishes its owner peace and good luck. Craft items like this box, as well as farm products such as cherries and almonds, were all sold in the bazaars of Cordoba.

■ What were the greatest achievements of Cordoba?

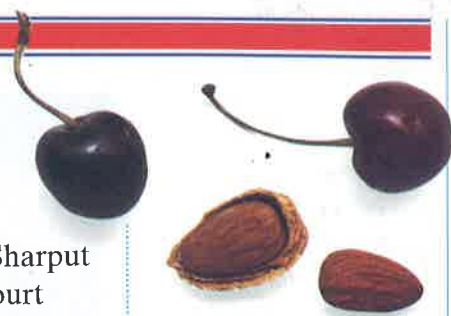
The Loss of Spain

By the 1000s, however, a small pocket of Christian resistance had begun to grow larger. Christian forces from the north of Spain began to move southward. The map on page 96 shows the strip of northern territory that remained

Christian throughout the first 250 years of Umayyad reign.

The Reconquest

The late 1000s mark the beginning of a period that Christians call the Reconquest. Knights and



► In 1492, King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile are on their way to the city of Granada to welcome it as part of their united kingdom.



adventurers from all over Europe journeyed to Spain to fight the Muslims. In 1085, the Spanish Christian ruler Alfonso VI seized the Muslim city of Toledo, whose king was friendly to the Christians. The loss of Toledo marked the point of no return in the battle for Spain.

An Empire Lost

After the attack on Toledo, the rest of Islamic Spain gradually fell to Christian soldiers. The Muslim government dissolved into

quarreling factions. Just as the Abbasid Empire had begun to collapse when it could no longer unite its parts, the Umayyad Empire in Spain began to die. The Muslims retreated farther and farther to the south as Christian forces invaded from the north.

Cordoba fell to the Christian forces in 1236, almost 500 years after Abd al Rahman had established it as the capital of his empire. In 1236, the last Islamic kingdom in Spain was that of the Berbers in Granada.

The Catholic kingdoms of Aragon and Castile ruled northern

and central Spain. When King Ferdinand of Aragon married Queen Isabella of Castile, their combined kingdoms had enough power to expel the Muslims from Spain entirely. In 1492, the forces of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain drove out the last Berbers.

Most refugees settled in North Africa, particularly in Morocco where the Berbers had originally come from in 711. Today, 98 percent of the Moroccans are Muslim. The official language is Arabic, but many people speak Spanish. ■

■ *What were the threats to the Islamic Empire in Spain?*

R E V I E W

1. **FOCUS** How did Islamic culture influence Spain?
2. **CONNECT** How did the Abbasid Empire influence the start and the development of the Umayyad government in Cordoba?
3. **POLITICAL SYSTEMS** What problems led to the fall of central Islamic governments?
4. **CRITICAL THINKING** How was Cordoba able to become the center of culture for western Europe in the 800s and 900s?
5. **ACTIVITY** Muslims translated many important books of Greek knowledge into Arabic. What English books would you suggest be translated into Arabic? Make a list of books that should be available in Arabic. Tell why each book is significant.