



Alcazar Palace (top left);
courtyard fountain (top right);
Great Mosque (bottom)



A Love of Books

“Córdoba held more books than any other city of Spain, and its people were the most eager in caring for their libraries. They saw such collections as symbols of status and social leadership. Men who had no knowledge whatsoever would make it their business to have a library in their houses.”

—Muslim historian Ibn Said

Life in Córdoba

Córdoba had streets that were well paved and lit. The city had running water, sewers, and hospitals. Its people relaxed amid many gardens and fountains. Marketplaces bustled with trade in luxury items, such as linen, silk, gold, and silver. Córdoba’s craftsmen made fine paper and leather goods and beautiful carvings from rock crystal.

Ordinary citizens enjoyed their own private gardens. These were courtyard patios, shielded from the busy, twisting cobblestone streets. Multicolored tile mosaics decorated the garden walls. The smells of herbs, flowers, and orange blossoms mingled in the air. It was the Arabs who introduced oranges to Spain. They also brought rice, apricots, peaches, cotton, and sugarcane from the East to the West.

Córdoba was also a cultural crossroads. One Arab poet called it “the garden of the fruits of ideas.”

Perhaps most remarkable was Córdoba’s religious life. Under the Muslims, Córdoba was a city of various faiths. Jewish, Christian, and Islamic citizens lived together in peace. The Muslims allowed other religions to enforce their own laws, as long as they did not conflict with Islamic law. Moses Maimonides (mi-MON-ih-deez), an important Jewish scholar, was born in Córdoba. In his writings, he tried to bring together the ideas of Jews and Muslims.

► For more information on the spread of Islam and Muslim art and architecture, see pages 59 and 61.

WHY IT MATTERS TODAY

The Muslims of Spain created a great civilization. Tourists today visit cities such as Córdoba and Granada to explore Spain’s Islamic heritage.