

## Chapter 11 Viewpoint Activity



For about 600 years, Muslim Spain was a brilliant center of culture and learning (text-book pages 262–263), in contrast with much of the rest of Europe. Here two historians describe the Islamic culture in Spain and what other Europeans knew and believed about Islam during the Crusades. (The Spanish city of Cordoba, spelled Cordova in the first excerpt, was the Muslim capital and home of a great university.)

◆ *As you read, recall what you know about civilization in western Europe in this period. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

### Views of the Medieval Muslim World

**The Islamic Capital of Cordova** Cordova dazzled other than Moslem [Muslim] eyes. Though commenting on the martyrdom of Eulogius [a Christian], a contemporary nun in distant Germany referred to the city as the “jewel of the world, young and exquisite, proud in its might.” Centuries later eminent English scholars like Adelard of Bath and Roger Bacon were still advising European students to attend Moslem schools in preference to native ones. Besides the university library, Arab statisticians assure us the city boasted 37 libraries, numberless bookstores, 800 public schools, and 600 mosques. They add 150 hospitals, 900 public baths, 600 inns, 80,455 shops, 130,000 houses. . . and a total population of 300,000. Its people enjoyed a high standard of living and refinement and walked on paved streets reflecting at night light from bordering houses—all this at a time when hardly a town in Europe, Constantinople excepted, counted more than a few thousand inhabitants. Parisians and Londoners were still trudging on muddy, dark alleys, and scholars in Oxford and Paris were viewing bathing as a heathen practice.

“Its people enjoyed a high standard of living and refinement and walked on paved streets. . . .”

**Medieval European Views of Islam** [T]he Crusades created a huge market for a comprehensive, integral, entertaining, and satisfying image of the enemy’s [Islamic] ideology. . . .

An objective point of view was to be found only . . . in the sciences. . . . Beginning in the early tenth century, and relying on a few Latin volumes saved from the wreck of ancient civilization, small groups sought to add to the treasury of theoretical knowledge about man and his world. Some knew that the Muslims had Arabic translations of the important works of classical antiquity and that complete manuals of the basic sciences were at their disposal. . . . Muslim scientific knowledge acquired through Latin translations of Arabic works gradually began to find its way to England, Lorraine, Salerno [Italy], and above all, Spain. . . . Moreover, this helped establish a close link with translators who were either converts to Christianity, Mozarabs [Arab Christians], or Jews who had an extensive and first-hand knowledge of the Muslim world.

Sources: (1) *Capital Cities of Arab Islam*, by Philip K. Hitti (University of Minnesota Press, 1973); (2) *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, by Maxime Rodinson, trans. Roger Veinus (University of Washington Press, 1987).

### Questions to Discuss

1. In what ways was the Muslim city of Cordoba different from other European cities?
2. In both excerpts, what aspect of Islamic culture came to be admired by others in Europe?
3. How did Europeans come to gain more accurate knowledge of the Islamic world?
4. Using Reasoned Judgment What classes or groups of Europeans were the most likely to have an accurate impression of Islamic culture? What effect would the Crusades have had on popular images of Islam?