

CLASS SET

Muslim Spain (711-1492)

Islamic Spain was a multi-cultural mix of the people of three great monotheistic religions: Muslims, Christians, and Jews.



Although Christians and Jews lived under restrictions, for much of the time the three groups managed to get along together, and to some extent, to benefit from the presence of each other. It brought a degree of civilization to Europe that matched the heights of the Roman Empire and the Italian Renaissance.

In 711 Muslim forces invaded and in seven years conquered the Iberian peninsula. It became one of the great Muslim civilizations; reaching its summit with the Umayyad caliphate of Cordova in the tenth century. Muslim rule declined after that and ended in 1492 when Granada was conquered. The heartland of Muslim rule was Southern Spain or Andalusia.

Andalusia

The heartland of Muslim rule was Southern Spain or Andalusia. The name Andalusia comes from the term Al-Andalus used by the Arabs meaning "to become green at the end of the summer". Stability in Muslim Spain came with the establishment of the Andalusian Umayyad dynasty, which lasted from 756 to 1031. The credit goes to Amir Abd al-Rahman, who founded the Emirate of Cordoba, and was able to get the various different Muslim groups who had conquered Spain to pull together in ruling it.

The Golden Age

The Muslim period in Spain is often described as a 'golden age' of learning where libraries, colleges, and public baths were established and literature, poetry and architecture flourished. Both Muslims and non-Muslims made major contributions to this flowering of culture.

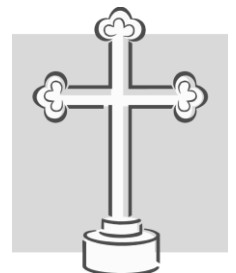


In the 900s, the capital of Muslim Spain, Cordoba, had paved roads, hospitals, and street lights throughout the city. At the time, Christian Europe's largest library had only 600 books, while Cordoba's calligraphers were producing 6000 books *per year*. The society was a peaceful mixture of European and African cultures, represented by Muslims, Jews, and Christians living in harmony side by side.

Some historians believe this idea of a golden age is false and might lead modern readers to believe, wrongly, that Muslim Spain was tolerant by the standards of 21st century. The true position is more complicated.

Life for non-Muslims in Islamic Spain

Jews and Christians did retain some freedom under Muslim rule, providing they obeyed certain rules. Although these rules would now be considered completely unacceptable, they were not much of a burden by the standards of the time, and in many ways the non-Muslims of Islamic Spain (at least before 1050) were treated better than conquered peoples might have expected during that period of history. The Jews and Christian populations were not forced to convert to Islam, work as slaves or live in special locations. They were not banned from any particular ways of earning a living. They often took on jobs shunned by Muslims; these included unpleasant work such as tanning and butchery, but also pleasant jobs such as banking and dealing in gold and silver. They could work in the civil service of the Islamic rulers



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The alternative view to the Golden Age of Tolerance is that Jews and Christians were severely restricted in Muslim Spain, by being forced to live in a state of 'dhimmitude'. (A dhimmi is a non-Muslim living in an Islamic state who is not a slave, but does not have the same rights as a Muslim living in the same state.) In Islamic Spain, Jews and Christians were tolerated if they acknowledged Islamic superiority and accepted Islamic power. They also paid a tax called Jizya to the Muslim rulers. They were also subject to restrictions on clothing and they needed to wear a special badge. They could not build new synagogues and churches, were not allowed to carry weapons, and could not own a Muslim slave.

Many Christians in Spain assimilated parts of the Muslim culture. Some learned Arabic, some adopted the same clothes as their rulers (some Christian women even started wearing the veil); some took Arabic names. Christians who did this were known as Mozarabs. The Muslim rulers didn't give their non-Muslim subjects equal status; as Bat Ye'or has stated, the non-Muslims came definitely at the bottom of society. The Muslims did not explicitly hate or persecute the non-Muslims.

Decline and Fall of Andalusia

The position of non-Muslims in Spain deteriorated substantially from the middle of the 11th century as the rulers became more strict and Islam came under greater pressure from outside. Christians were not allowed taller houses than Muslims, could not employ Muslim servants, and had to give way to Muslims on the street. Christians could not display any sign of their faith outside, not even carrying a Bible. There were persecutions and executions. One notorious event was a pogrom in Granada in 1066, and this was followed by further violence and discrimination as the Islamic empire itself came under pressure.

The collapse of Islamic rule in Spain was due not only to increasing aggression on the part of Christian states, but to divisions among the Muslim rulers. The rot came from both the centre and the extremities. Early in the eleventh century, the single Islamic Caliphate had shattered into a score of small kingdoms, ripe for picking-off. The first big Islamic centre to fall to Christianity was Toledo in 1085. The Muslims replied with forces from Africa which under the general Yusuf bin Tashfin defeated the Christians resoundingly in 1086, and by 1102 had recaptured most of Andalusia. The general was able to reunite much of Muslim Spain.

It didn't last. Yusuf died in 1106, and, as one historian puts it, the "rulers of Muslim states began cutting each other's throats again". Internal rebellions in 1144 and 1145 further shattered Islamic unity, and despite intermittent military successes, Islam's domination of Spain was ended for good. The Muslims finally lost all power in Spain in 1492. By 1502 the Christian rulers issued an order requiring all Muslims to convert to Christianity, and when this didn't work, they imposed brutal restrictions on the remaining Spanish Muslims.

In 1492, there was a mass exodus from Spain, due to the inquisition ordered by Queen Isabella. Many Muslims and Jews left Andalusia because their rights were taken from them. However, they were very fortunate if they were able to escape with their lives from their own land. Muslims were ordered to convert or be killed. Many stayed behind and secretly remained Muslim, while others who resisted were burned at the stake. An estimated 3 million were expelled from Spain, along with all of Spain's skilled workers and masterminds.

Adapted from the following sources: www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/spain_1.shtml
<http://lostislamichistory.com/tag/al-andalus/>
<http://www.hispanicmuslims.com/andalusia/andalusia.html>