

# **Social justice in a traditional Muslim built environment: the case of non-Muslim communities in Cordoba, Spain**

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## **Abstract**

Relying on *Shariah's* (the legal system of Islam) sources such as the Qur'an and Prophet's tradition (*Sunna*), this paper explores the points of view of Islam on treatment of as well as dealing with non-Muslims. These points of view have physically been exhibited in the traditional city of early Muslims, Cordoba. As the paper discusses toward its end, the stand of Islam on non-Muslim communities has not only provided them with the peaceful atmosphere they needed for their advancement, but also inspired them to heavily contribute to Islamic civilisation.

*Keywords: religious tolerance, Islamic city, Jews in Islam, Christians in Islam, Cordoba, Andalusia, non-Muslims in Islam, Islam in Spain, socio-religious unit.*

## **1 Introduction**

Throughout history, traditional societies believed in principles that called for respect, tolerance and acceptance of those who differed in faith. Early Muslims co-existed and lived side by side with Christian and Jewish communities in peace and harmony. This has indeed led to the creation of a remarkable civilisation collectively established by a solid society of Muslims, Christians and Jews. To early Muslims, the presence of those of other faiths in their territory was part of their presence/destiny. Accordingly, to many philosophers and religious scholars, the tradition of Islam was an extension of the two previous traditions: Christianity and Judaism Lou'abi [1]. Such a socio-religious integration was demonstrated in the traditional Islamic built environment.



Although history included some unfortunate incidents of tension between various religious groups, this paper explores the bright side of strong relationship between Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities in the old Islamic World, with some focus on Cordoba, Spain. The paper begins with a discussion of the stand of the tradition of Islam on non-Muslims. This stand is embodied in the concept of unity of humanity and faith as well as the nature of the relationship with non-Muslims. The relationship is manifested in various morals: equity, freedom of religious belief, protection, and tolerance. Analysing the socio-cultural and urban aspects of old Cordoba, the paper relates the Islamic teachings regarding non-Muslims to the built environment of the city.

## 2 Islamic teachings toward non-Muslims

### 2.1 The oneness of humanity and belief

The tradition of Islam makes it absolutely clear that all mankind is but one great family, and the origin of people is one as all human beings were created from a single soul. In this respect, the Qur'an (the major source of Islamic legal system/*Shariah*) says, 'O mankind, revere your Guardian-Lord Who created you from a single Person, created of like nature, [His] mate, and from them twain scattered countless men and women' (Qur'an, Su. 4:1). As all people form this one family, Islam insists that there is an absolute human equity and respect between all human beings. Neither race, colour, ethnicity, nor privilege, but only righteousness, can be the sole standard of value in Islam Kufaro [2].

The universal nature of Islam is also reflected in its embracing of all previous divinely-inspired messages and religions. According to Islam, just as God is one, so is the essential message of faith He sent all His prophets and messengers. The Qur'an says, 'The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah -that which we have sent by inspiration to you- and that which we enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus' (Qur'an, Su. 42:13).

To Islam, Prophet Mohammed has been sent to all mankind and not to a specific ethnic or geographic group, and his message does not contradict those of earlier prophets and messengers. This is repeatedly made clear in the Qur'an, which says, 'We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not' (Qur'an, Su. 34:28).

Despite considering all mankind equal and as one family, God has deliberately made human beings of religious diversity. The Qur'an says, 'If God so willed, He could make you all one people: But He leaves straying whom He pleases, and He guides whom He pleases: but ye shall certainly be called to account for all your actions' (Qur'an, Su. 16:93). God addresses all humanity with the words: 'O humankind! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you' (Qur'an, Su. 49:13).



This religious diversity should not be viewed as a means for argument or dispute between believers of various faiths. Indeed, the Qur'an says that the message of faith God sent all His prophets and messengers is one. It says, 'The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah - that which we have sent by inspiration to you-and that which we enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: Namely, that ye should remain steadfast in Religion, and make no divisions therein' (Qur'an, Su. 42:13).

It should be noted here that 40% of the Qur'an is largely devoted to exhortations to believers in God and His prophet, and to transcriptions of and additions to the stories in the Torah and Gospel, as the Judaic and Christian scriptures are termed *Kuftar* [2]. Also in the Qur'an, God orders Muslims to believe in Jesus and Moses and all the Biblical prophets as all were sent by Him as a mercy to humankind. It says, 'Say Ye: 'We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord; We make no difference between one and another of them and we bow to Allah in adherence and submission' (Qur'an, Su. 2:136).

## 2.2 Non-Muslims: the definition

Jews and Christians are never referred to within the Qur'an by the term '*mushrikun*' or '*kaferun*': infidels. They have a different status or title. When not addressing them as individual communities, the Qur'an often refers to the two groups together by the term '*ahl al-kitab*', or 'People of the Book', meaning the people who have been given a book or scripture by God other than the Muslims.

People of the Book, or people of the Torah and Bible as well as Muslims are viewed as kindred-people whose faiths are all based on divinely revealed scriptures and who share in a common prophetic tradition. In specific, the Qur'an emphasised the relationship of closeness between the followers of Islam and Christianity. It says, '... and nearest among them in love to the Believers wilt thou find those who say 'We are Christians'' (Qur'an, Su. 5:82).

## 2.3 Relationship with non-Muslims

Islam affirms a special bond between Muslims, Jews and Christians. Muslim jurists have made it clear that it is a relationship of peace, unity, compassion and care. The Qur'an states, 'God forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for God loveth those who are just. God only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for (your) Faith, and drive you out of your homes, and support (others) in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances), that do wrong' (Qur'an, Su. 60:9).

According to Islam, where religious differences exist, the followers of various religious traditions should engage one another on a basis of mutual respect and kindness. Islam enjoins Muslims to conduct any dialogue or even



disagreement about religious matters in a spirit of gentleness, sensitivity, and good will and never with hostility or violence. The Qur'an says, 'And dispute ye not with the People of the Book except with means better' (Qur'an, Su. 29:46).

Even when dealing with people who may be hostile to them or their faith, Muslims are requested to take the path of goodness, peace and unity, and to respond with patience and consideration. God says, 'Repel (Evil) with what is better; then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate! And no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint none but persons of the greatest good fortune' (Qur'an, Su. 41:34). Below is more insight on the nature of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims.

### 2.3.1 Equity and justice

The tradition of Islam stresses that justice is not limited by race, colour, belief or nationality. The Qur'an states, 'when you judge, between people, judge with justice: verily how excellent is the teaching which Allah giveth you!' (Qur'an, Su. 4:58). Speaking to all believers, God says, 'O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do' (Qur'an, Su. 5:8).

The justice of Islam was very visible in the lands which early Muslims entered and were originally inhabited by Christians and Jews. Discussing the justice of Islam in Spain, which was part of the old Islamic World for more than eight centuries and originally inhabited by Jews and Christians, B. Disraeli and Braun [3] say, 'In Spain, the children of Ishmael rewarded the children of Israel with equal rights and privileges with themselves. During these halcyon centuries, it is difficult to distinguish the followers of Moses from the votary of Mohammed. Both alike built palaces, gardens, and fountains; filled equally the highest offices of the state, competed in an extensive and enlightened commerce, and rivaled each other in renowned universities'.

### 2.3.2 Protection

Islam has given the People of the Book who lived in Islamic territories the status 'protected people' Sanua [4]. While Islam requested Muslims to pay a religious tax called *Zakah*, citizens of other faiths had to pay *Jizyah*, a poll tax collected in return for military protection and other benefits provided by the state. The *Zakah* rate was fixed but *Jizyah* was flexible, depending upon the ability to pay. It was several times more than *Jizyah*. In fact, when the Muslims discovered that they had withdrawn from the city of Homs, Syria, and no longer protected the locals, mostly Christians, as they had promised, they paid the *Jizyah* back to them Watt [5].

The obligation of protecting non-Muslims is indicated in the Prophet's saying, 'If anyone kills a man who had made a covenant (anyone who belongs to a non-Muslim community with whom a treaty of peace has been made, or a member of protected communities) will not experience the fragrance of paradise' Ahmed [6].



### 2.3.3 Freedom of religious belief

The tradition of Islam affirms that all people should enjoy freedom of religion. It considers sacred all religious places of worship, whether Jewish, Christian or Islamic, and asks Muslims to defend the right of liberty of worship for all. It seeks the establishment of a universal, liberal society in which all can live enjoying religious freedom in safety and equality. The Qur'an says, 'Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of God is commemorated in abundant measure' (Qur'an, Su. 22:40).

As Islam unequivocally affirms the right of each individual to freedom of thought and religion, earlier Muslims built a society based on love, lenience, justice and brotherhood. The acceptance of Islam by former Christians or Jews was a result of reasoning, conviction and satisfaction, not violence, compulsion or oppression. The Qur'an emphasizes that there should be no force in inviting people to Islam. It states, 'If it had been thy Lord's will, they would all have believed,- all who are on earth! wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe' (Qur'an, Su. 10:99). Also, 'Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy hand- hold, that never breaks' (Qur'an, Su. 2:256).

The freedom of religious belief provided Jews and Christians of Spain spiritual and psychological security. Most of the Jewish community of Cordoba lived close to the Caliph's palace Jewish [7]. There is no way that they could live safely next to the palace if they did not feel that they were safe and their civil rights were maintained.

Such freedom inspired non-Muslims in regions such as Spain, Syria and Palestine to convert to and accept Islam. Whole towns and districts willingly became Muslims without any pressure. N. Zernov [8] discusses the conversion of Christians of some parts of the former Byzantine Empire to Islam, saying, 'The chief attraction of Islam was that it was practical, it didn't demand seemingly superhuman efforts. The Christian East on the eve of the Islam conquest had forgotten the limitations of human nature. Many members of the Church desired to imitate the angles; hence the mass movements towards the sexless life of monks and nuns; hence the exodus from towns and villages into the desert hence the feats of self-mortification which showed the extent to which men could subdue their bodies at the dictates of the spirit. Some of these Eastern ascetics slept only in a standing position, other immured themselves in dark cells or lived on pillars, or ate only herbs, and even those not more than once a week'.

Islam stopped all these excesses. It swept away the exaggerated fear of sex, discarded asceticism, banished the fear of the hell for those who failed to reach perfection, quenched theological enquire Zernov [8].

Those who preferred practicing their own faith, devoted their life, skill and knowledge for their welfare and heavily contributed to the Islamic civilisation of that time. Describing the living conditions of the Jews who settled in 1791 in the Turkish region of the Ottoman Empire after being expelled from Spain and Portugal, W. Lempriere [9] says, 'Every part of the empire, more or less,



abounds with Jews. These people are not confined to towns, but are spread over the whole face of the country. The whole country depends on their industry and ingenuity and could hardly subsist as a nation without their assistance. They are the only mechanics in this part of the world, entrusted in the coinage of money, as I myself have witnessed'. The same scenario exhibited in Spain to which many Jews had migrated after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The Jewish population suffered severe persecution under the Visigothic kings, so the Muslim conquest of Spain was a release Wheatcroft [10] and Stillman [11].

### 2.3.4 Tolerance, mercy and support

Muslims are requested to deal kindly and justly with those who don't fight them for the sake of religion or land. The Qur'an says, 'The good deed and the evil deed are not equal. Repel [the evil deed] with one that is better. Then truly the one, between you and he is enmity, shall become as a bosom friend' (Qur'an, Su. 41:34). Islamic tolerance is not limited to the People of the Book but extends to all faithful, sincere, and righteous lovers of truth. God affirms in the Qur'an that: 'Those who believe (in the Qur'an) and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures) and the Christians and the Sabaeans, any who believe in Allah, and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve' (Qur'an, Su. 2:62).

Also according to the Qur'an, God asked the Prophet to be soft and kind with those of other faiths. It says, 'Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance' (Qur'an, Su. 16:125).

During his life, Prophet Mohammed showed great sensitivity and respect in dealing with the People of the Book. He forbade harming non-Muslims and asked Muslims to treat them well. He once said, 'He who harms a Jew or a Christian will find me his opponent on the Day of Judgment' Kufaro [2].

The first thing the Prophet did after settling in the Medina, to which he had been invited as leader, was to conclude a treaty between the Muslims and the People of the Book of that city. According to this treaty, the Muslims guaranteed them freedom of belief and granted them the same rights and duties as those enjoyed by the Muslims. Also, when a Christian delegation of Abyssinia came to Medina, the Prophet put them up in the mosque and personally took care of them. Upon serving them food, he said that they had been so generous and honourable to his companions who had emigrated earlier to Abyssinia, that he would like to honour them himself. Moreover, when a Christian delegation came to Medina from Najran, a town in Southwest Arabia, the Prophet received them in his mosque and invited them to perform their prayers inside the mosque. The Muslims with the Prophet prayed on one side of the mosque and the Christians on the other. During their visit, the Prophet discussed many ideas with them in a polite and gentle manner. Another incident revealing the Prophet's attitude toward the People of the Book is that he once stood in respect of a Jewish funeral which passed him Kufaro [2].



The Prophet's successors carried on his Qur'anic policy of religious tolerance. For example, on the day in the spring of 638 Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, the second Caliph, clad in his old and tattered robe, arrived Jerusalem to take the city under this protection. The Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius, watched him walk slowly through the Church of Holy Sepulcher. N. Zernov [8] elaborates on this story, saying, 'when Omar happened to be inside the greatest Christian church of Jerusalem at the time for the Muslim afternoon prayer he refused to perform his prayers in the church, for fear that it might give Muslims of future generations a reason to confiscate the church and make it into an Islamic mosque.

Several times, when Muslims took Jerusalem from Christians, one of their first acts was to allow the Jews back to the city. This started during Omar, who reconquered Jerusalem and permitted the Jews to return to the city Ahmend [12].

One day Caliph Omar saw an old man begging for alms in the street. Omar asked who he was and was told he was a Jew. Omar took him by the hand to his house, gave him food and money and sent him to the Muslim Treasury, saying, 'Give this man from the Muslim money. Is it fair to take the poll tax [the *Jizyah*] from him when he was young and strong, and neglect him when he is old and weak? This is not possible in Islam'. Furthermore, when Omar was on his death bed, he reminded the Muslims to provide the Jews and Christians their civil rights, as long as they remain loyal citizens of the state Kufaro [2].

The tradition Islam makes it a duty for its adherents to respect the places of worship of other faiths. Such respect was shown to Christian churches such as those in Syria, Iraq and the surrounding regions of the Fertile Crescent, which was ruled by the Byzantines and Sasanis before Islam. Native population were Aramies and Christian Arabs, who later had a great influence in the Islamic civilisation due to their sophisticated skill in art, painting, sculpting, etc. Regarding the Muslim's respect of the Roman Temple of Damascus, B. Keenan [13] says, 'The Lord was safe in the temple of Jupiter for the three hundred years of Byzantine rule until Damascus was captured by the Arabs in AD 635. Even then, a deal was worked out by which the Christians and Muslims shared the sacred space: on entering the basilica by the Christian gate, Muslims turned to the right to pray in their mosque of the Companions of the Prophet, while Christians turned to the left to pray in their church. This happy situation lasted for more than fifty years'.

In addition to respecting places of worship of non-Muslims, large-scale pious endowments and charitable institutions were established by officials in Islamic states for the benefit of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Throughout history, Muslims showed extreme support to those non-Muslims who were in need. In 1236 Cordoba was reconquered by the Christians and the local community was labeled a 'scandal against Christianity'. Ferdinand and Isabella used Cordoba as their headquarters when they waged war against the remaining Moors in Granada, and the tribunal of the inquisition established in Cordoba was especially cruel. In 1483 Jews were exiled from Andalusia, when Granada fell to Christians. The Muslims and Jews were ferociously persecuted and given three choices: either they became Christians, leave the country or face the sword. Most



of the Muslims and Jews left Andalusia for Morocco, where vibrant populations of Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews coexisted in harmony with their Christian and Muslim neighbours The Center for Jewish Art [14]. Around 50,000-80,000 Jews were expelled from the Spanish regions of Castile and Aragon Wheatcroft [10].

Muslims of other parts of the old Islamic World, particularly Turkey welcomed the Jews fleeing the victorious Ferdinand and Isabella. V. Mann [15] says, 'Many emigrated to the Ottoman Empire, whose Sultan Bayezid (1481-1512) took pity on them, and wrote letters and sent emissaries to proclaim throughout his kingdom that none of his city rulers may refuse entry to the Jews. Instead, there were to be given a gracious welcome'.

### **3 Cordoba: a traditional urban environment of prosperity and religious tolerance**

The teachings of Islam toward non-Muslims were reflected in the daily life and urban characteristics of the traditional Islamic built environment. In cities like Damascus, Tunis, Fez, Cordoba, Aleppo, Toledo, Granada, etc., Muslims, Christians and Jews lived together in harmony and peace.

In 711 Cordoba became part of the old Islamic World when Muslims conquered the Iberian Peninsula, which became the seat of the Islamic empire for eight centuries. Within a century of their activity, the Muslim Moors with the assistance of the Jews had developed a civilisation based in Cordoba that surpassed that of any in Europe. At the end of the eighth century, Cordoba became important not only as the capital of the Caliphate of Cordoba, but also as a centre of knowledge which produced numerous scholars, artists, poets, philosophers, scientists, architects, engineers and doctors. Among the famous names were Abu Walid Ibn Rushd, Averroes, and Musa Ibn Maimun Jewish Virtual Library [7].

#### **3.1 Socio-cultural aspects**

In 929 Andalusia declared its independence from the Caliphate of Baghdad. From this time on, Cordoba grew into becoming the largest and most populous, cultured and industrious city of Europe. Moreover, it played a vital role in the history of Jewish life in the middle ages. In the tenth century Cordoba became the seat of Jewish learning, scholarship and culture, gradually eclipsing the Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumbeditha.

Early rulers of Cordoba were extremely open to non-Muslim influences than their Almoravid or Almohad successors. Despite their ethnic and religious diversity, Cordoba's Muslims, Christians and Jews managed to live side by side. Over the first three centuries of Islamic rule, many Christians converted to Islam and the cultures acquired characteristics in common, while still maintaining their distinct and separate identities. During the following centuries, this model of socio-cultural integration worked, except for those who wished to accentuate religious differences.





Mozarabes (Arabized Christians living under Muslim rule) and Jews often adopted Arabic, while the Berbers, originally from North Africa, abandoned their native dialects for it. The communities remained distinct as they preserved their customs and observed their own laws. This was the unique and paradoxical Spanish accommodation to which Americo Castro later gave the name *convivencia*, 'living together' Dozy [16].

The influence Islamic culture injected into non-Muslims was significant. Jews accepted many customs and traditions of the Moors and interweaved them into their daily life. The Arabic language, instead of Spanish and Hebrew, was used for prayers. Ceremoniously washing of the hands and feet, which is an Islamic custom, became adopted by Jews before entering Synagogues. Moreover, Jewish music was sung to the tune of old Arabic melodies. Jews also adopted the clothing style of their Moorish neighbours Hume [17]. In some cases, Muslims and Christians used a shrine that attracted worshippers from both faiths Wheatcroft [10].

### 3.2 Urban aspects

Cities such as Damascus, Fez, Jerusalem, Aleppo, Tunis, and to a certain extent Cordoba, were an extension of the pre-existing ones, and some of their morphological features were inherited while others emerged through the process of convergence. Undoubtedly, the Roman street pattern and insulate layout had a great influence on the road network and building plots of these cities. Based on his reading of the history philosopher Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), Arab geographers and legal works, J. Dudley in 1928 described the Islamic city as essentially a city clustered around a congregational mosque, a chief market (suq), and a public bath Woodberry [18]. In other words, socio-religious forces have impacted the spatial pattern of the old Islamic city.

The division of the residential area into neighbourhoods was the outcome of clustering around mosques which should not be farther apart than the *muezzin's* call to prayer could reach. According to D. Gladney [19], many traditional Islamic cities were divided into quarters for Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Nonetheless, this segregation was often voluntary and not exclusive.

This should not lead to the belief that Cordoba was physically divided into quarters based on religious backgrounds. A. Wheatcroft [10] says, 'the topography of the city, town or village in Andalusia was divided along invisible lines. Each community had its own zone. Other areas [e.g., market place, roads, etc.] would be common ground'.

In the meantime, the daily life of inhabitants was integral. Cordoba with its hundreds of districts and quarters was a patchwork. Arab, Berber, Christian and Jewish zones were juxtaposed Castro [20]. In the 13th-14th centuries, Cordoba had a population of around 500,000 while Baghdad had approximately 1000,000 inhabitants before it was destroyed by the Mongols in 1258. It had 28 suburban centres each with thriving markets. Cultural life was enriched by 70 libraries, schools of architecture and translation of classic works into Arabic. There were 3,00 public baths, paved and illuminated streets, indoor plumbing in the more luxurious homes and hundreds of villas along the river landscaped with tropical



trees, fountains and waterfalls, ceramic tiled basins and reflective pools Cordoba [21].

The nineteenth-century historian of Islamic Spain R. Dozy [16] discussed Cordoba's prosperity, saying, 'The state of the country harmonised with the prosperity of the public treasury. Agriculture, manufactures, commerce, the arts, and sciences, all flourished. The traveller's eyes were gladdened on all sides by the well-cultivated fields, irrigated upon scientific principles, so that what seemed the most sterile soil was rendered fertile. Cordoba, with its half million inhabitants, its three thousand mosques, its splendid places, its hundred and thirteen thousand houses yielded in size and magnificence only to Baghdad. The fame of Cordoba preceded even distant Germany. It was the jewel of the world'.

Despite the social integration that featured the life of Cordoba's various faith groups, there were quarters mostly inhabited by a specific religious community. For instance, Cordoba's Jewish community was situated near the alcazar (the Caliph's palace), south of the city. The quarter of this community, which were rich and vibrant, dates back to the 10th century CE. This area, called *aljama* (Jewish quarter), was made up of closely aligned houses and cobblestone paths, and could only be traveled by foot Diaz [22]. It included various Jewish administration and communal facilities Epstein [23]. The legal court, known as the *Beit Din*, of this quarter, had its own rabbis as judges, who would render both religious and civil legal opinions pertaining to Jewish affairs inside the *aljama*.

As far as the architectural style of Cordoba buildings, it seems there was an introduction of Syrian building techniques and decorative elements as well as importation of vegetation native to Syria. These were among the many elements that aimed to the 'Syrianisation' of Andalusia towns and countryside. However, T. Glick [24] thought that this trend was natural due to the large rate of emigrants from Syria to Spain. He says, 'Seville (Ishbiliya), settled by Syrian contingents (*junds*), was customarily and affectionately referred to by Arab writers and poets of east and west alike as Hims [Homs] Andalusia, after the Syrian town of that name. In a similar vein, Ibn Sa'id, a thirteenth-century writer from Alcalá la Real (Granada), remarked that no eastern cities reminded him of home except for Damascus and Hama, a central Syrian town, and al-Shaqundi called Granada the Damascus of al-Andalus. Seville, a city generally acknowledged to resemble traditional Damascus more than Damascus itself'.

Despite the Syrian influence on the architectural styles of Cordoba, pre-Islamic Byzantine elements had equal domination. The combination of Syrian/Islamic and Byzantine/Christian styles has led to the creation of what was known 'Moorish' architecture. Many of the buildings of this style were created by Mozarabes Wheatcroft [10].

One of the well-known buildings of Cordoba was the Great Mosque or 'Mezquita'. Cordoba's greatest glory was when it became the capital of Andalusia and this was when work began on Cordoba's great mosque. After several centuries of additions and enlargements, this mosque became one of the largest in the world. The architectural origins of the mosque, which was built by Abdl al-Rahman I from 785-787 and extended later, were complex. It includes Byzantine forms but with strong echoes of Syria.



In structure, Cordoba Great Mosque resembled the mosques of the East, particularly those in Damascus; but its forest of columns, crowned with polychrome double arches whose wedge-shaped stones (*voussoirs*) radiated from the arch's centre, were found in no building in the East. This was a characteristic of Visigothic buildings, and was adapted and extended by Mozarabe craftsmen. At each stage of its elaboration, the mosque became more Hispanised, and less like the great religious buildings of the Muslim East. There was also a direct connection with the Christian East. In 965 Caliph Al-Hakam wrote to Constantinople asking for the services of a skilled mosaicist for the mosque. Not only did the caliph's envoys return with a craftsman, but with 320 *quintales* of mosaic squares that the king of the Rumi sent as a gift Dodds [25].

This Moorish or Hispanic style of Islamic architecture also appeared in many of the thirteenth century synagogues in Toledo and Segovia, where arcades of horseshoe arches were distinct elements Mann [15]. Such a style became more fashionable in the architecture of the nineteenth century synagogues all over Europe. One of them is the Hungarian Synagogue of Szeged Narkiss [26]. The Oranienburger Strasse Synagogue, Berlin, is also one of the most famous Moorish synagogues in Europe. These synagogues played a major role in familiarising Europe with Islamic architectural forms Sweetman [27].

#### 4 Summary and conclusions

During the presence of Muslims in Spain, Cordoba has witnessed a unique socio-cultural integration between Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities. This was resulted in the advancement of the Islamic Caliphate of Cordoba and prosperity of the society.

The socio-religious co-existence in an atmosphere of peace, harmony, tolerance and compassion of Cordoba should be a lesson for modern societies. It is a model that is still possible for all times and in any geographic context.

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