

## The City of Cordoba

**Task One—Read the following two passages and answer the questions on the back of the page:**

Passage 1:

“Before the Muslim conquest of Spain, Romans created an extensive infrastructure of roads, bridges, aqueducts, and urban centers in various parts of Iberia. They also grew crops such as cereal grains, olives, and grapes on large estates in the region. These crops were harvested and exported to other regions of the vast Roman Empire. Spain quickly acquired a reputation for plentiful harvests and rich natural resources.

The Muslim conquest of Iberia prompted the introduction of new agricultural technology, innovative irrigation practices, and many new crops to Al-Andalus. This dramatic agricultural transformation was known as "The Green Revolution."

...These innovations increased the amount of water available for irrigation throughout the year and overcame the limits of previously used gravity-fed irrigation. During the height of Umayyad rule, historic sources indicate over 5,000 waterwheels were built along the Guadalquivir River alone.

The use of precise water management techniques, coupled with multi-seasonal planting and harvesting, increased agricultural output. Rulers and merchants alike sponsored the introduction of a vast new array of crops that originated in such countries as China, India, and Persia. The Andalusi people enjoyed many foods previously unknown in Iberia, including sugarcane, citrus, melons, figs, spinach, eggplant, and rice.

This agricultural explosion served as a foundation for an expanding population and greater prosperity throughout Al-Andalus.” Cities of Light (2007), Sumptuous Living, retrieved from:  
[http://www.islamicspain.tv/Islamic-Spain/sumptuous\\_living.htm](http://www.islamicspain.tv/Islamic-Spain/sumptuous_living.htm)

Passage 2:

As a Mozarab bishop, Recemundus, described [Cordoba] in March 961:

‘Fig trees are grafted in the manner called *targi*; the winter corn grows up; and most of the fruit trees break into leaf. It is now that the falcons of Valencia lay eggs on the island of the river and incubate them for a month. Sugarcane is planted. The first roses and lilies appear. In kitchen gardens, the beans begin to shoot. Quails are seen; silkworms hatch; grey mullet and shad ascend the rivers from the sea. Cucumbers are planted and cotton, saffron and aubergines sown...Locusts appear and must be destroyed. Mint and marjoram are sown...’

Saudi Aramco World, Sept/Oct 1976, The Golden Caliphate, pgs 12-16, retrieved from:  
<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/197605/the.golden.caliphate.htm>

### Vocabulary:

~Infrastructure: The basic physical and organizational structures needed for the operation of a society (buildings, roads, bridges, etc).

~Innovation: a new idea, method, or device

Questions:

a. How did the innovation of the Romans help Cordoba? What innovative contributions came from the Muslims?

b. How did agriculture support population growth in Cordoba?

**Task Two—Read the following passages and sketch a map of what Cordoba might have looked like in the space below:**

Passage 1:

Al-Idraisi, the great medieval geographer, wrote:

‘Cordoba is made up of fine continuous cities, each surrounded by walls that divide it from the rest, and possessing enough markets, hostelrys, baths, and buildings for the different professions. From east to west the city covers a distance of five kilometers (three miles). From the Gate of the Jews in the north to the Gate of the Bridge in the south is a little over one and a half kilometers (just under one mile).’

Saudi Aramco World, Sept/Oct 1976, The Golden Caliphate, pgs 12-16,  
retrieved from:

<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/197605/the.golden.caliphate.htm>

Vocabulary:

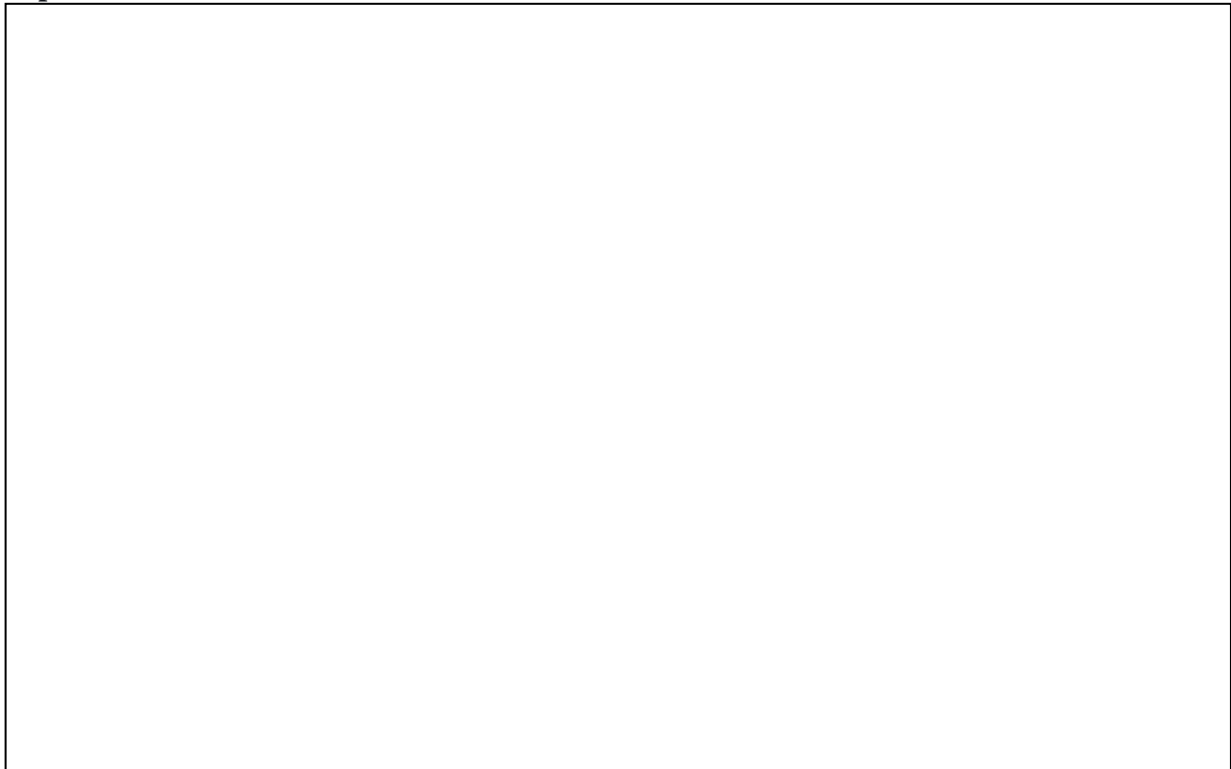
~Hostelry: An inn

~Maraud: to raid and  
plunder

Passage 2:

Cordova was an ancient city before the advent of Islam. When the Visigoths came storming across the Pyrenees after the fall of the Roman Empire, they made straight for the lush terrain to the south. They found a strategic spot on the Guadalquivir River from which they could control the area. It was far enough from the mountains to be defended against other...tribes, and far enough from the Mediterranean to be safe from marauding pirates. The river gave access to the sea. Armies could quickly be dispatched to every part of the province, and the land was fertile enough to support a large population. Saudi Aramco (April 1963) Cultured Cordova, pages 11-13. Retrieved from <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/196304/cultured.cordova.htm>”

**Map of Cordoba:**



**Task Three—Read the descriptions of the city of Cordoba below:**

Passage 1:

Another writer of the time once counted all the houses in the city and suburbs and found that they came to a total of 213,077. [He explained that]

“This figure includes the dwellings of the common people such as workmen and artisans, but excludes the rested attics, inns, baths and taverns. The palaces of the nobles, viziers, officials of the royal household, generals and wealthy citizens, the barracks, hospitals, colleges and other public buildings come to a total of 60,300.”

The population of Cordoba was about 500,000 compared to about 40,000 for Paris at the same time...The most impressive buildings, of course, were the mosques—especially the Great Mosque, which still stands in Cordoba. Saudi Aramco World, Sept/Oct 1976, The Golden Caliphate, pgs 12-16, retrieved from:

<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/197605/the.golden.caliphate.htm>

Passage 2:

“There were hundreds of mosques and public baths in Cordova. More striking to visitors, for whom books were rare and precious things, were the city's 70 major libraries—including one collection of 400,000 volumes gathered by the Caliph Al Hakam II. The paved streets contrasted with the dust and mud that would remain familiar irritations in Paris and London for centuries to come.

...Dominating the Cordovan skyline stood the Great Mosque. Begun by Abd Al Rahman I in 785 and added to by subsequent rulers of Iberian Islam, the Great Mosque grew into the wonderful structure known today as the Cathedral of Cordova. Several modern writers have used the word "forest" in referring to the interior columns, an apt term since there are over a thousand of them supporting the huge roof.” Saudi Aramco (April 1963) Cultured Cordova, pages 11-13. Retrieved from <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/196304/cultured.cordova.htm>”

**Make a list of buildings and institutions that were in Cordoba.**

- |    |     |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6.  |
| 2. | 7.  |
| 3. | 8.  |
| 4. | 9.  |
| 5. | 10. |



## City of Baghdad

**Task One--Read the following two passages and answer the questions below:**

Passage 1:

When Mansur was planning to build Baghdad, he received the following advice from locals already living in the area:

“We are of the opinion that you should found the city here between the four districts of Buk and Kalwadha on the eastern bank, and of Katrabbul and Badaraya, on the western bank [of the Tigris]: then you will live among palms and near water, so that if one district fails you in its crops or be late in its harvest, in another will the remedy be found. Also your city being on the Sarat Canal, provisions will be brought forth by the boats of the Euphrates, and by the caravans through the plains, even from Egypt and Syria. Hither, up from the sea, will come the wares of China, while down the Tigris from Mosul will be brought goods from the Byzantine lands. Thus shall your city be safe standing between all these streams, and your enemy shall not reach you, except it be by a boat or by a bridge, and across the Tigris or the Euphrates.” Adapted from Le Strange, G. (1900), Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate, page 14

Passage 2:

“At the riverbank, the Caliph ordered his companions to halt...carefully he surveyed the Tigris upstream and down with the practiced eye of a military man and monarch. The swiftly flowing river, he saw, was a natural defense, a hazardous obstacle for any invading army. The few farms in the area could easily be multiplied throughout the surrounding fields to meet the needs of an expanding population. In short, here might stand a metropolis in peace and a citadel in war.”

Saudi Aramco World, Nov 1962, Builder of Baghdad, pgs 14-16, retrieved from:  
<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/196209/builder.of.baghdad.htm>

### Vocabulary:

- ~ Mosul: a city north of Baghdad
- ~ Caliph: head of state/ruler of the dynasty
- ~ Metropolis: city
- ~ Citadel: a fortress protecting a city

Questions:

- a. Why did the locals think that the location would be good for Mansur's capital city?

- b. What are the benefits of being by the Tigris River and the Sarat Canal?

**Task Two—Read the following passage and sketch a map of what Baghdad might have looked like in the space below:**

Passage 1:

“The Round City in Western Baghdad...was founded by Mansur in the year 762 CE, formed the nucleus of the great metropolis which afterwards, radiating from this centre, spread itself over both banks of the Tigris. This [city]...was built with a double wall and four gates, it was exactly circular in outline, and stood close to the right bank of the river, at the angle formed by the inflowing of the Sarat Canal.” Adapted from Le Strange (1900), Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate, page 15

Vocabulary:

Nucleus: center

Metropolis: city

Garrison: troops

Sentry: soldier

Passage 2:

“Four years in the building, the Round City was based on the plans of traditional Roman military camps and designed with security uppermost in al-Mansur’s mind. It was surrounded by a double set of immense brick walls...and then by a broad moat that was fed by the Tigris. Four gates pierced these fortifications, from which roads radiated to the far corners of the empire. The Khurasan Gate in the north-east was the gateway to Persia, while the Basra Gate in the south-east, the Kufa Gate in the south-west and the Damascus Gate in the north-west each led to the city after which it was named. Each gate had also been carefully designed so as to secure the inner city against invasion, with a complex series of curved passageways, ramps and chambers.” Al-Khalili, J. (2011) The House of Wisdom, p28-29

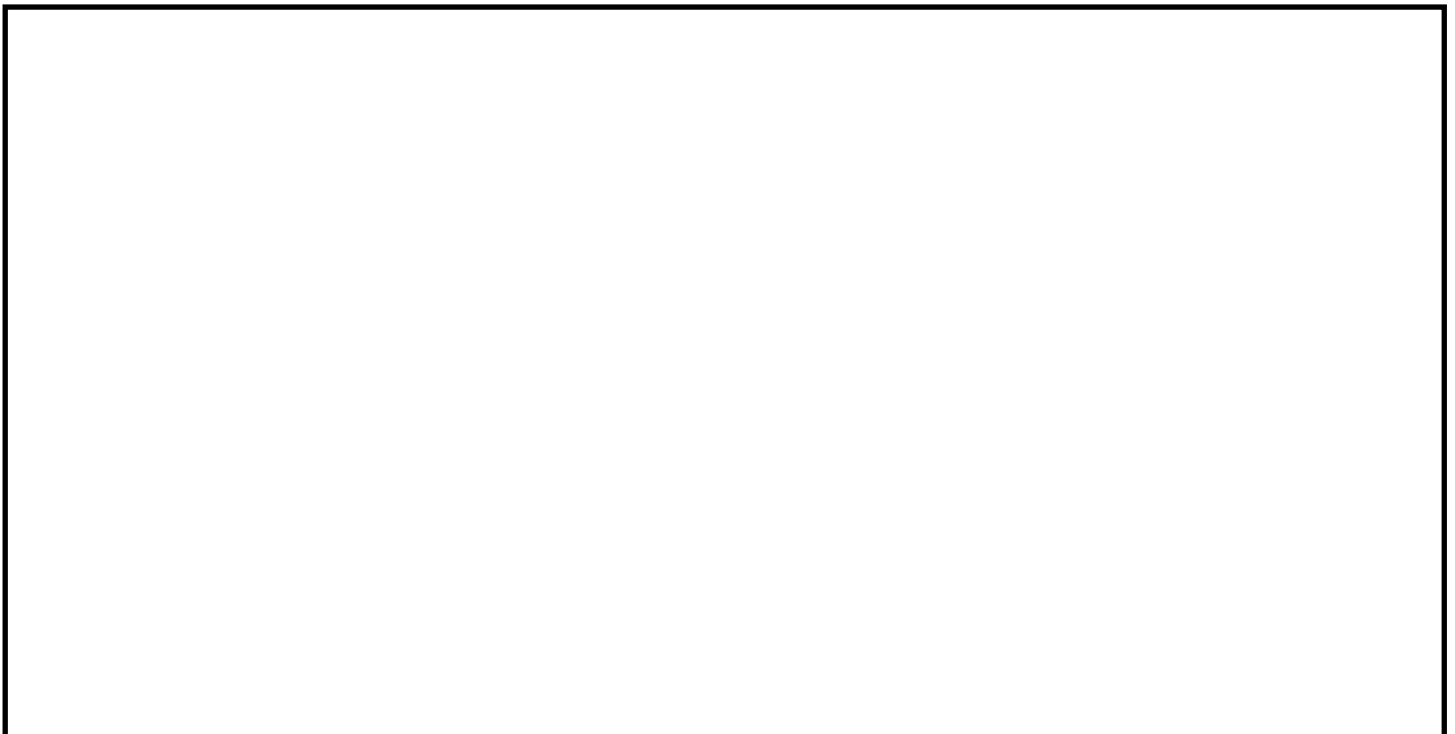
Passage 3:

“[The Caliph’s] metropolis was to look like a fort with broad, paved avenues radiating from the center [of the Round City] like the spokes of a wheel. He wanted his sentries on the walls, to spot an enemy outside or a disturbance inside, to have his garrison marching to the scene within minutes.”

Saudi Aramco World, Nov 1962, Builder of Baghdad, pgs 14-16, retrieved from:

<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/196209/builder.of.baghdad.htm>

**Map of Baghdad:**



**Task Three—Read the descriptions of the city of Baghdad below:**

Passage 1:

“The Caliph’s palace rose at the hub of the wheel, until its lofty, emerald colored dome, 130 feet high, dominated the city. The palace of Baghdad formed a labyrinth of rooms and corridors leading into alcoves, cloisters and courtyards. The gardens were laced with rose bowers, dotted with splashing fountains, and ornamented with strutting peacocks.”

Passage 2:

...The capital of an empire, Baghdad soon was filled with ordinary citizens. They build houses, practiced trades, farmed the surrounding fields and did the routine jobs of any big city. But Baghdad’s special flair prevented it from being just another city. After the toil of the day, the citizens might frequent his choice from a thousand public baths. He might go to a polo game, or a poetry recital, or perhaps he would attend meetings of metaphysicians or wander through the darker quarters of the city. And there were always the bazaars filled with teeming, chattering humanity in search of a loaf of bread or an Indian diamond. Merchants became wealthy by sending caravans to Egypt and Syria and commanding ships down the Tigris to the emporiums in the Persian Gulf.”

Saudi Aramco World, Nov 1962, Builder of Baghdad, pgs 14-16, retrieved from:

<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/196209/builder.of.baghdad.htm>

Passage 3:

In the city you could find “sprawling markets, wide avenues, mosques and municipal buildings..The shoemakers’ market might lead onto the bookseller’s market; the bird market alongside the flower market. Then there were the food markets and bakeries, which would have been set apart from the higher-class goldsmiths, moneychangers and elegant boutiques for the wealthy...Not only was Baghdad now the administrative hub of the Islamic world, it also became a centre for art, culture and trade.”

Al-Khalili, J. (2011) The House of Wisdom, p. 30-32

Vocabulary:

- ~ Labyrinth: Maze
- ~ Bazaar: a market

**Make a list of buildings and institutions that were in Baghdad.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.



