

## **2: Viewer's Guide for Cities of Light**

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NOTE: Lesson 5 suggests discussion questions on the content of the documentary for post-viewing.

### **Segment 1: Migration**

In the late 5<sup>th</sup> century, the once mighty and extensive Roman Empire is undergoing its final stages of collapse. Spain, once a Roman province, becomes the new home for the migrating Germanic Visigoths. They find that Spain is already a diverse mixture of cultures, including a long-established Jewish community. At first, the Visigoths are relatively tolerant of their Jewish subjects. But when the Visigoths are converted from Arian to Roman Catholic Christianity, they begin to harshly persecute the Jews. Meanwhile, in early 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia, the new religion of Islam is born. Islam unites the formerly fragmented tribes of Arabia resulting in a wave of conquest and migration across the Middle East and North Africa. Berbers of North Africa are among the converts to the new religion. It is they who cross the Strait of Gibraltar in 711 CE and defeat the Visigoth king of Spain.

### **Segment 2: Foundation**

The Jews of Spain, persecuted by the Visigoths, welcome Muslim leaders and help them in their conquest of the peninsula. By 732 CE, most of Iberia is in Muslim hands. They call their newly conquered territory al-Andalus. In keeping with Islamic law, Christians and Jews are considered *dhimmi*s, or protected people, and are allowed to practice their religion so long as they submit to Muslim authority and pay a head tax in exchange for protection. Tensions arise between Muslim factions, which soon lead to turmoil as Berbers revolt against Arab leaders. The conflict is brought to an end and al-Andalus is united by Abd al-Rahman, an Umayyad prince who has escaped the massacre of his family by the Abbasids, who overthrew the Umayyad dynasty in Damascus. Abd al-Rahman establishes his capital at Cordoba and begins a consolidated rule that lasts for centuries. A culture unique to al-Andalus emerges as Christians, Jews, and Muslims form an integrated, open society. The musician Ziryab migrates from Syria to Al-Andalus bringing many elements of sophisticated culture from the heart of the Islamic Empire to Spain. In spite of the prosperity and progress made in al-Andalus, some northern converts to Islam are upset by the fact that conversion to Islam has not resulted in the privileged status they expected. They rebel, forcing leaders in Cordoba to form an army. This leads to a series of civil wars that drag on through much of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Segment 3: Unity**

In 912 CE, Abd al-Rahman III manages to subdue rival forces and unite all of Al-Andalus, ushering in a new age of peace and prosperity. He makes the bold move of declaring himself Caliph – the rightful successor to the prophet Muhammad – in 926 CE. A tremendous economic and cultural expansion begins. Architectural wonders, such as the palace at Madinat al-Zahra, and a major library are constructed. Agriculture booms as a result of advanced irrigation technology. Knowledge from many civilizations is gathered, absorbed and added to in Al-Andalus. The Hebrew Golden Age begins under the patronage of the Jewish doctor, scientist, diplomat, and close advisor to the Caliph, Hasdai ibn Shaprut. Unfortunately, the death of Abd al-Rahman's son Hakim sparks a civil war beginning in 976 CE. The Berbers rebel and take Cordoba in 1013 CE, destroying much of its glory, including Madinat al-Zahra and the great library. This period of great upheaval is known as the time of *fitna*, or strife. Jews and Christians are more vulnerable during this violent time.

## Segment 4: Division

The upheavals of the time of *fitna* result in the break-up of al-Andalus into many small, independent kingdoms called *taifas*. The glory of Cordoba is gone and many of its large number of scholars become refugees. The Taifa kingdoms are rivals and are almost constantly at war with one another and with Christian kingdoms in the north. Paradoxically, the Taifa kingdoms foster a great deal of cultural advancement and splendor in an effort to outshine their rivals. The Jewish scholar Ibn Nagrela and the Muslim scholar Ibn Hazm are two examples of refugee scholars during this period. Ibn Nagrela is highly successful and becomes a high-ranking official in Granada. Ibn Hazm, on the other hand, is less fortunate and ends up being persecuted by rival Muslim factions for his political beliefs and support for a new caliphate. After undergoing many hardships, he eventually devotes his life to the comparative study of religions. But near the end of his life he is bitter and his writings turn to a criticism of Christianity and Judaism as a defense of Islam. Meanwhile, the fragmented Taifa kingdoms are politically weak and must often seek the protection of other kingdoms through alliances. It is not uncommon during this period for northern Taifa kingdoms to make alliances with Christian kingdoms in order to defend themselves from other, more powerful Taifa kingdoms.

## Segment 5: Purification

Pope Alexander II sees the collaborative relationships between Christians and Muslims as immoral and seeks to end such relationships and eventually purify Spain of all Muslims. Meanwhile, religious tensions flare in Granada where a Muslim religious leader, Abu Ishaq, incites a mob to attack that massacres a large number of the city's Jews. Christian kingdoms in the north begin offensives against neighboring Taifa kingdoms and in 1085 CE King Alfonso VI conquers Toledo. Alfonso, however, understands and appreciates the achievements of Andalusian culture and so preserves the knowledge he finds in Toledo's libraries. Toledo then becomes a transmitter of Islamic learning to Christendom through a translation effort spearheaded at Toledo. But Alfonso's conquest of Toledo convinces other Taifa kingdoms that they may soon suffer a similar fate. In desperation, they plead for help to the North African Berber Almoravid dynasty, with disastrous results. The Almoravid dynasty has been founded on a more rigid interpretation of Islam, so they are appalled by the more liberal lavish lifestyle they find in al-Andalus. They conclude that the decline of the once-powerful Al-Andalus is a result of corruption by Muslim Spain's tolerant diverse society. Taifa leaders are soon replaced with far less tolerant Berber regimes. Books are burned as the Berbers strive to reform Andalusian society. The Almoravids are replaced by the even more puritanical Almohads who seek to make al-Andalus a purely Muslim state. Facing severe persecution, many Christians and Jews flee to Christian lands. They take with them a great deal of knowledge and expertise, which further helps plant the seeds of Europe's Renaissance. Around the same time, the Pope launches the first of the Crusades, which leads to a hardening of positions on both sides and makes differences over religion the focus of conflict.

## Segment 6: Crossroads

Refugees flee the Almohads. One of the refugees is Moses Maimonides, a great Jewish philosopher. He studies Aristotle and is able to reconcile Aristotle's philosophy with religion. At the same time, a Muslim scholar in Cordoba, Ibn Rushd (or Averroes), is able to do the same thing for Islam. Both of these scholars greatly influence later thinking in Christendom, including the work of Thomas Aquinas. With an influx of refugees, Toledo continues its role as the transfer point between Islamic and Christian civilizations. Interfaith teams of scholars work to translate important works and make them available to scholars from all over Europe. Meanwhile, war rages all over the peninsula as Christian kingdoms continue their expansion. In 1207 CE, the Pope declares Spain a crusading zone and armies from across Europe join forces to fight the Almohads. Finally, in 1212 CE Christian forces defeat an Almohad army at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. The Almohads then abandon

Spain, leaving the weakened Taifa kingdoms to fend for themselves. Christian armies take one Muslim city after the other in quick succession. In 1236 CE, Cordoba, once the capital of al-Andalus, falls.

### **Segment 7: Survival**

Soon after the fall of Cordoba in 1236 CE, the rest of the peninsula comes under Christian rule, except the very southern tip where the Taifa kingdom of Granada survives under the Nasrid dynasty. Granada not only survives for another 200 years, it thrives as a diverse commercial center with an economy based on silk production and textiles. Christian rulers work to restructure and organize their newly conquered lands. Alfonso X, king of Castile and Leon, attempts to straddle the two conflicting worlds he rules. The master code of laws he establishes for his diverse population imposes strict rules with harsh penalties for Jews and Muslims. At the same time, there are laws that offer them some protections and privileges. Alfonso is also a lover of Arabic poetry and culture and promotes the understanding of Islamic knowledge in his kingdom. The Black Death plague strikes Spain in 1348 CE, bringing to a sudden halt any further Christian conquests. As in other areas of Europe, Jews become scapegoats and are mercilessly persecuted. The plague diverts Christian attention away from conquering further Muslim territories, allowing Granada to continue to survive and flourish. Great works of architecture, such as the expansion of the Alhambra, are completed in Granada. Christian kings hire Granadian craftsmen to build and transform palaces and other buildings, resulting in many remarkable buildings throughout Spain that contain elements of the diverse Andalusian cultural legacy that is rapidly fading.

### **Segment 8: Loss**

In 1453 CE, Constantinople falls to the Ottoman Turks. This event shocks Christian Europe and hardens the resolve of Spain's monarchs to make the peninsula a purely Christian land. In 1469 CE, the kingdoms of Castile and Leon and Aragon are united by the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella. Soon thereafter, the monarchs begin their campaign against Spain's last Muslim holdout, Granada. Meanwhile, the Pope authorizes the Inquisition, a bloody investigation into the religious lives of Spain's people. Jews and Muslims who have converted to Christianity but continue to hold on to Muslim or Jewish traditions are severely persecuted. In Granada, internal strife allows Christian forces to take lands around the city. Boabdil, an ambitious Granadian prince, then allies himself with the Christians in a civil war against his father. In the end, Boabdil breaks the alliance, but cannot prevent the fall of Granada to the Christians. He surrenders the city to Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492 CE. Upon the completion of this final conquest, the Catholic monarchs order all Jews to convert or face expulsion from Spain. Many leave. Some convert or pretend to convert. Eventually, the Muslims of Spain are given the same choice. As with the Jews earlier, many Muslims convert, but continue to practice Islam in secret. Finally, in 1609 CE all Muslims, including the Moriscos (converted Muslims) are expelled from Spain.