

## LIFE IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

The Islamic world was far ahead of the western world in the Middle Ages.



### Muslim science

- Muslim scholars knew of many books written, not only by ancient Greek and Roman writers, but by Persian, Indian and Chinese writers. A famous **caliph**, **al-Mamun**, set up a translating house in Baghdad which translated the books from all these countries into Arabic. Later on, in the 11th century, in Toledo in Spain, these Arabic translations were put into Latin and circulated all over Christian Europe.
- The first university in the world was in Egypt in AD970.
- **Al-Khwarazmi** discovered zero. The numerals (1, 2, 3, 4) used in the Arab world were much easier to use than Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV).
- **Al-Fazari** invented the **astrolabe** for navigation.
- The Muslims knew a lot about **astronomy**. Over a hundred stars in the sky have Arabic names.

### Medicine

- Muslim towns had hospitals with isolation units for **contagious** illnesses.
- Muslim doctors did post-mortems and human dissection. They noticed that blood circulated round the body 400 years before the West.

- Doctors had to pass an examination.
- Muslim surgeons anaesthetised patients with cannabis and opium, used mercury and alcohol as antiseptics, and had rules about hygiene.
- There were female doctors and nurses.
- Wounded crusaders preferred to go to a Muslim doctor than a Christian one because they were more knowledgeable.

### Everyday life

- Cordoba in Spain was a city of over half a million inhabitants with running water supplied by aqueducts. Its streets were lit at night and cleared of rubbish.
- There were wonderful palaces such as the Madinat al Zahra palace just outside Cordoba.
- Muslims were very religious. Every Muslim town had at least one mosque with a **muezzin**, who called people to prayer five times a day.
- Islam taught that it was wrong to draw human beings in religious art, so Muslim artists used beautiful patterns and writing in mosques and on copies of the Quran.
- Many Muslims were well-educated.
- A Muslim singer from Baghdad called Ziryab came to Cordoba bringing all kinds of trendy fashions from the east. He opened beauty parlours and popularised hairstyles, deodorants, toothpaste, the three-course meal, drinking from glasses and table manners.



1. Look in the dictionary the words highlighted
2. Find on the internet any other advantage of the Muslim science or medicine from the Middle Ages.

Extracted from

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks3/history/the\\_wider\\_world/medieval\\_islamic\\_world/revisio n/8/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks3/history/the_wider_world/medieval_islamic_world/revisio n/8/)