

Document 1

Source: This excerpt, from the textbook *World History: Patterns of Interaction* (Beck, Black, Naylor, Shabaka. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell, 1999), explains why Muslims both preserved existing knowledge and extended it.

Muslims had practical reasons for supporting the advancement of science. Rulers wanted qualified physicians treating their ills. The faithful... relied on mathematicians and astronomers to calculate the times of prayer and the direction of Mecca... Their attitude reflected a deep-seated curiosity about the world and a quest for truth that reached back to... Muhammad himself. After the fall of Rome in A.D. 476, Europe entered a period of upheaval and chaos, an era in which scholarship suffered... In the early 800's... the House of Wisdom opened in Baghdad. There, scholars of different cultures and beliefs worked... translating from Greece, India, Persia, and elsewhere into Arabic.

Student Analysis

What were the reasons for Muslim interest in learning?

Document 2

Source: The Islamic capital of Cordova was described by a contemporary as the "jewel of the world." The Islamic schools and universities were preferred by European scholars such as Abelard and Roger Bacon. Philip Hitti describes Cordova in *Capital Cities of Arab Islam* (University of Minnesota Press, 1973).

Besides the university library, Arab statisticians assure us the city boasted 37 libraries, numberless bookstores, 800 public schools... and a total population of 300,000. Its people enjoyed a high standard of living and refinement and walked on paved streets... — all this at a time when hardly a town in Europe, Constantinople excepted, counted more than a few thousand inhabitants. Parisians and Londoners were still trudging on muddy, dark alleys...

Student Analysis

What conditions in Cordova does this author cite as evidence of the high level of Islamic civilization and scholarship?

Document 3

Source: Physician al-Razi wrote a medical reference encyclopedia, the *Comprehensive Book and Treatise on Smallpox and Measles*. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) wrote the five-volume *The Canon of Medicine*. These books were translated into Latin and other languages and influenced doctors in Europe. The illustration below, from an Islamic medical book, and the explanation from the textbook *World History: Patterns of Interaction*, show the level of medical expertise of Islamic doctors.

Medical Reference Books

When Europeans learned that Muslims had preserved important medical texts, they wanted to translate the texts into Latin. In the eleventh century, scholars traveled to libraries in places such as Toledo, Spain, where they began translating — but only after they learned to read Arabic.

Through this process, European medical schools gained access to vital reference sources such as al-Razi's *Comprehensive Book* and Ibn Sina's *The Canon of Medicine*. Ibn Sina's five-volume encyclopedia guided doctors of Europe and Southwest Asia for six centuries. For nearly 500 years, al Qasim's work, *The Method*, which contained original drawings of some 200 medical tools, was the foremost textbook on surgery in Europe.

Student Analysis

How did Muslim medical knowledge impact Western civilization?