

Lesson 2 A Golden Age in the East

MAIN IDEAS

Government The Abbasids built a powerful empire with Baghdad as their capital.

Culture Muslim culture under the Abbasids was highly advanced.

Government Internal revolts and external challenges led to the decline of Abbasid rule.

Abbasid Rule

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did the Abbasids build a powerful empire?

Abbasid Power

- Abbasids mainly held power by using force
- **Standing army**—fighting force maintained in times of war and peace
 - stationed throughout empire to put down any trouble, rebellion
- Abbasids used inclusion to encourage acceptance of their rule
 - all Muslims (Arab, non-Arab) were considered equals
 - Jews, Christians were encouraged to serve in government

A New Capital

- To be closer to their supporters, Abbasids moved capital to Baghdad
 - located on old east-west trade routes; became capital in 762
 - “marketplace for the world” offered valuables from around the world

A Prosperous City

- Baghdad prospered from trade, population grew to over 900,000 by 800
- Repair, expansion of ancient irrigation canals increased farm output
- Textile, ironwork, carpet industries fueled booming trade center

REVIEW QUESTION

How did the Abbasids make sure that they held onto power?

Abbasid Advances

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What cultural advances were made by the Abbasids?

Art and Design

- Abbasids grew wealthy, invested in arts and learning
- After 800, Muslim culture enjoyed **golden age**—peak period for a society
- Muslims believed artistic images of human forms distracted from faith
- Most art reflected plant life, geometric patterns, Arabic script
 - **calligraphy**—the art of fine handwriting—flourished
 - calligraphers decorated Qur'an text, armor, buildings

Bookmaking

- Abbasids learned to make paper from Chinese
 - Baghdad became major paper, bookmaking center by early 800s
- Abbasids opened House of Wisdom, international learning center and library

Literature

- *The Thousand and One Nights* mixed fantasy, Abbasid court adventures
- Poetry flourished; quatrain form (four lines) popular with Persians
 - Persian-born **Omar Khayyam**—mastered quatrain, wrote *Rubaiyat*

Mathematics and Astronomy

- Muslim scholars borrowed ideas of ancient Greeks, Egyptians, Indians
- Al-Khwarizmi developed Arabic number system we use today
 - also published math calculations titled *Hisab al-jabr* (algebra)
- Poet Omar Khayyam was also a great mathematician, astronomer
 - developed accurate calendar
- Astronomer al-Biruni fixed direction of Mecca from any location

Medicine

- Persian doctor al-Razi identified, described smallpox, measles
- Scholars wrote books combining ancient works and recent Muslim medicine
 - In 1000, Ibn Sina wrote *Canon of Medicine*, text used for over 600 years
- Hospitals across empire treated poor free of charge
 - Baghdad hospital served as teaching center for young doctors

REVIEW QUESTION

How did Muslim scholars advance world civilization?

The Decline of the Abbasids

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: What challenges led to the decline of Abbasid rule?

Poor Leadership

- **Factions**—opposing groups—challenged Abbasid rule
 - charged that caliphs were irresponsible, fond of easy living, selfish
- Abbasid caliphs did little to protect merchants from bandit attacks
 - attacks hurt trade, source of caliphs' wealth
- Abbasid caliphs raised taxes; people revolted

Fatimid Revolt

- Fatamids—Shi'a Muslims, claimed descent from a daughter of Muhammad
 - angered by Sunni Abbasids' luxurious lifestyle
- Drove Abbasids from Egypt, Tunisia; established caliphate in Cairo

The Seljuk Turks

- Internal revolts left Abbasids open to outside attacks
- In 1055, Central Asian Seljuk Turks captured Baghdad
- Seljuks eventually converted to Islam, conquered territory
- By 1090s, Seljuks threatened to invade Constantinople
 - European Christians drove back Seljuks (start of The Crusades)
- 1258, Mongols destroyed Baghdad, killed caliph, ended Abbasid dynasty

REVIEW QUESTION

Why did Abbasid rule come to an end?

Lesson Summary

- The Abbasids strengthened central control of the Muslim Empire and made Baghdad a great city.
- For more than 200 years, Muslims led the world in scholarship and science.
- Internal and external challenges led to the decline of the Abbasids.

Why It Matters Now . . .

Muslim scholars provided the foundation for much of the mathematical and scientific knowledge that we take for granted today.