

Abbasid Decline and the Spread of Islamic Civilization to South and Southeast Asia

Islamic Heartlands in the Middle and Late Abbasid Eras

- The Abbasid leadership's **excess** and sumptuous living (as exemplified by **Harun al-Rashid**) was apparent from early in the **caliphate**. This led to the **gradual disintegration** of the vast empire between the 9th and 13th centuries.
- **Civil wars** drained the treasury, and **revolts** against the ensuing taxes spread among the peasants.
- Slavery increased, and the position of women was further eroded.
- Divisions within the empire (brought by groups like the **Buyids** and **Seljuk Turks**) opened the way for **Christian crusaders** from western Europe to invade, and for a short time, establish warrior kingdoms in the Muslim heartlands.
- Political decline and social turmoil were offset for many by the urban affluence, inventiveness, and artistic creativity of the Abbasid Age.

An Age of Learning and Artistic Refinements

- As the Abbasid dynasty fell politically, **trade links** and **intellectual creativity** grew dramatically.
- An expansion of the **professional and artisan classes** demonstrated increasing **urban prosperity**.
- **Persian** gradually replaced Arabic as the court language, and many great works of **literature** were authored.
- Scientists and doctors also made many important advances in chemistry, astronomy, and human biology.
- Islam saw an increase in both mysticism (the **Sufis**) and orthodox religious scholars (the **ulama**).
- The Abbasid caliphate eventually fell to the **Mogols**, then the forces of **Tamerlane**.

The Coming of Islam to South Asia

- From the 7th century onward, successive waves of **Muslim invaders, traders, and migrants** carried the Islamic faith and elements of Islamic civilization to much of the vast south Asian subcontinent.
- The first wave of influence occurred as a result of **Muhammad ibn Qasim's**

incursions. The second occurred when **Muhammad of Ghazni** conquered much of the Indus River Valley and north central India.

- Conversion to Islam was peaceful; in particular, many Indian Buddhists became Muslim. However, the once-egalitarian Islam generally succumbed to the caste system. Hindus took many **measures to maintain dominance**, including emphasizing devotional cults, and as a result Islam did not spread in India as it had elsewhere.

The Spread of Islam to Southeast Asia

- The spread of Islam to India set the stage for its further expansion. Arab traders and sailors regularly visited the “middle ground” ports of southeast Asia.
- From the 13th century, traders and Sufi mystics spread Islam to Java and the islands of modern **Indonesia**. As was the case in India, conversion was generally peaceful, and the new believers combined Islamic teachings and rituals with elements of local religions that had spread to the area in preceding centuries.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The decline of the Abbasid power was due to all of these reasons EXCEPT:
(A) the difficulty of governing a widespread empire.
(B) invasions of European crusaders.
(C) regional loyalties.
(D) Shi'ia dissenters and slave revolts.
(E) rebellious governors and new dynasties.
2. During the Abbasid period, women
(A) were at the center of the Shia opposition to Abbasid rule.
(B) frequently became Sufi mystics because of the freedoms allowed them.
(C) acquired rights to own land and engage in business.
(D) became increasingly isolated in the harem and behind the veil.
(E) exercised no influence in palace and harem politics.
3. During the Abbasid period, the use of slaves
(A) began to gradually die out as economically profitless.
(B) spread throughout the region and came to dominate agriculture.
(C) was legally curtailed by the Muslim courts.
(D) was confined to the royal court.
(E) expanded as male and female slaves were valued for their beauty, intelligence and strength.
4. The Seljuks
(A) conquered the Abbasid caliphate and Byzantine Empire.
(B) favored the Shi'a sect and became its protector.
(C) settled in the lands of modern Turkey and became the Abbasids' protector.
(D) were unable to stop the Crusades or end crusader control of Jerusalem.
(E) became a sect of Islam devoted to learning, mysticism, and medicine.
5. The greatest beneficiaries of the sustained urban prosperity during the rule of the Abbasids were
(A) women, who acquired rights to own property.
(B) slaves, when the caliphs emancipated them and gave them lands to farm.
(C) poor workers, who were freed from taxes.
(D) artisans, artists, architects, and merchants.
(E) foreigners, especially non-Muslims, who ran the empire's bureaucracy.

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6. During the Abbasid caliphate, the language associated with administration and scholarship was
(A) Arabic.
(B) Turkish.
(C) Hebrew.
(D) Armenian.
(E) Persian.
7. The Sufis
(A) condemned scientific and cultural borrowing from non-Muslim sources.
(B) helped spread Islam.
(C) objected to the violence and social strife, which befell the Abbasid world.
(D) led religious wars against Christians in Europe and the Middle East.
(E) attempted to blend Islam with Judaism and Christianity.
8. The Abbasid reign ended when
(A) Mongol soldiers sacked Baghdad.
(B) the Seljuk Turks overran the empire.
(C) Christian crusaders took Jerusalem.
(D) the Mameluks invaded the empire.
(E) Shi'a governors and troops revolted and murdered the last caliph.
9. All of these Indian groups were attracted to Islam and converted EXCEPT:
(A) people who lived in the Indus and Ganges River plains.
(B) Buddhists.
(C) Untouchables.
(D) low-caste Hindus.
(E) high-caste Hindus.
10. Contacts between Hindus and Muslims led to
(A) the seclusion of Hindu women.
(B) constant warfare between the two groups.
(C) the absorption by the Muslims of many Hindu social practices.
(D) mass conversion of Hindus to Islam.
(E) decreased trade opportunities.

Free-Response Question

To what extent did urban quality of life mirror political developments during the Abbasid Empire?

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

- **1. (B) is correct.** The Seljuk Turks, not the Abbasids, were the principal opponents of the Christian crusaders.
- **2. (D) is correct.** The harem was a creation of the Abbasid court, and women were required to wear the veil in public places.
- **3. (E) is correct.** Slaves were often well-educated, and Abbasid leaders often preferred concubines to their own wives.
- **4. (C) is correct.** The Seljuks, staunch Sunnis, ruled in the name of the caliphs. Their defeat of the Byzantines opened the way for Turkic settlement of Asia Minor.
- **5. (D) is correct.** As urban prosperity continued and expanded, the reputations of artisans, artists, architects, and merchants grew considerably.
- **6. (E) is correct.** As members of the court came increasingly from Persian extraction, Persian became the language of Abbasid literature, administration, and scholarship.

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- **7. (B) is correct.** Sufi mystics, who used a variety of conversion methods, were major forces in the spread of Islam.
 - **8. (A) is correct.** Mongol warriors crushed Baghdad in 1258.
 - **9. (E) is correct.** High-caste Hindus had little incentive to convert to the more egalitarian Islam.
 - **10. (C) is correct.** Hindu tradition proved a strong opponent to Muslim practices. Among other things, Islam succumbed to the caste system in India.

Free-Response Essay Sample Response

To what extent did urban quality of life mirror political developments during the Abbasid Empire?

Despite the gradual political demise of the caliphate, urban prosperity during the Abbasid Empire increased significantly. Urban affluence came in large part from merchant entrepreneurs who supplied cities with both necessities and luxuries. Accompanying the affluence was an inventive spirit that created scientific advances and promoted artistic imagination. Only late in the Abbasid era did the quality of life in many cities decline.