

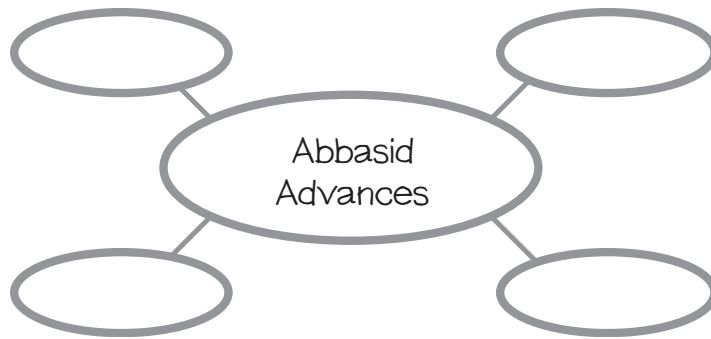
CHAPTER 4 | LESSON 2 A Golden Age in the East

Lesson 2 A Golden Age in the East**BEFORE YOU READ**

In Lesson 1, you read about the rise and fall of the Umayyads and how the Muslim Empire split into eastern and western sections. In this lesson you will learn about the years of Abbasid rule in the east.

AS YOU READ

Use a cluster diagram like the one below to help you form and support an opinion about Abbasid culture. Use the diagram to record information on Abbasid cultural achievements.

**TERMS & NAMES**

- **standing army** a fighting force that is maintained in times of peace as well as war
- **Baghdad** city on the Tigris River that became the Abbasid capital in 762
- **golden age** a period during which a country and its culture are at their peak
- **calligraphy** art of fine handwriting
- **Omar Khayyam** Persian-born Muslim poet during the Abbasid period
- **faction** group opposed to the ruling party

Abbasid Rule

(pages 119–120)

How did the Abbasids build a powerful empire?

The main way the Abbasids kept control of their empire was by force. They built a huge **standing army**—a fighting force that is kept in times of peace as well as war. Abbasid leaders put army units at military posts throughout the empire.

They also strengthened and united the empire by including different religious groups in the economic and political life of the empire. All Muslims whether Arab or non-Arab were treated equally. Christians and Jews were encouraged to serve in government.

The Abbasids also strengthened the empire by moving the capital from Damascus to **Baghdad**. The new capital was closer to the area of their most loyal supporters. It was also on old trade routes linking east and west. Baghdad became a major trade center.

Merchants there bought and sold goods not only from all parts of the empire but also from China, India, northern Europe, and Africa.

As trade grew, Baghdad prospered and expanded. By the early 800s, it had more than 900,000 residents. Agriculture and industry thrived. Newly irrigated lands helped farmers grow more crops. Craftworkers made fine goods sold throughout Europe.

1. How did the Abbasids make sure they held onto power?

Abbasid Advances

(pages 121–123)

What cultural advances did the Abbasids make?

The Abbasids became rich. Some used their wealth to support the arts and learning. In the

READING STUDY GUIDE CONTINUED

800s Muslim culture enjoyed a **golden age**. A golden age is a period during which a country and its culture are at their peak.

During this time, Abbasid artists became famous for beautiful designs in pottery and wood. Their designs were often drawings of plants, flowers, or geometric patterns. Many artists also became skilled at **calligraphy**, or the art of fine handwriting. Calligraphers decorated everything from buildings to books.

During the golden age, Baghdad also became a center of bookmaking and literature. In the 750s, the Abbasids learned to make paper from the Chinese. This advance made it easier to make books and sparked interest in learning. Muslim scholars translated the works of Greek thinkers into Arabic. Muslim writers also created original works. Among the most popular were the tales of *The Thousand and One Nights* and the poems of Persian-born **Omar Khayyam**, author of the *Rubaiyat*.

At this time, Muslim scholars also made advances in mathematics. They built on the ideas of ancient Greeks, Egyptians, and Indians. Al-Khwarizmi drew on Indian ideas to create the Arabic numbering system still used today. Our word *algebra* comes from a set of mathematical calculations he published. The poet Omar Khayyam used his knowledge of mathematics and astronomy to create an accurate calendar.

Muslim scholars also made advances in medicine. A doctor named al-Razi analyzed old medical studies to identify and describe diseases. The Persian doctor Ibn Sina wrote a medical reference book that combined ancient works with recent Muslim discoveries. This book remained a key reference for more than 600 years. The Abbasids also set up hospitals throughout the empire. Unlike most other hospitals at that time, these hospitals treated poor people who couldn't pay.

- Why is the Abbasid period considered a golden age for Muslim culture?

The Decline of the Abbasids

(pages 124–125)

What problems led to the decline of Abbasid rule?

The Abbasids faced challenges from within and from outside the empire. **Factions**, or opposing groups, within the empire first challenged Abbasid rule in the 800s. They disliked the Abbasid rulers for several reasons. Some Abbasid rulers were fond of easy living. They ignored their government duties. They failed to protect merchants from attacks by robbers. This hurt trade, which was a major source of wealth for the empire. When trade declined, the Abbasid caliphs raised taxes. This made people angrier.

A group called the Fatimids decided to revolt. The Fatimids claimed to be descended from Fatima, a daughter of Muhammad. They belonged to the Shi'a branch of Islam. The Abbasids belonged to the Sunni branch. The two groups had major religious differences. The Fatimids disliked the Abbasids' fancy lifestyle. They believed in living more simply.

In time the Fatimids revolted and drove the Abbasids out of what is today Egypt and Tunisia. They set up their own government, making Cairo their capital. By the late 960s they controlled much of North Africa.

Fighting with the Fatimids and other factions hurt the Abbasids. These problems made them more open to attack by foreigners. In 1055, the Seljuk Turks from Central Asia captured Baghdad. A Seljuk leader became the ruler of the empire. He allowed the Abbasid caliph to stay on as religious leader.

In time, the Seljuks converted to Islam. They expanded the lands under their control and captured Jerusalem. In 1258 a warrior tribe called the Mongols captured and destroyed Baghdad. They killed the Abbasid caliph, ending Abbasid rule and the Seljuk-Abbasid Empire.

- Why did Abbasid rule end?
