

# 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**

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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.