

Abbasid Decline and the Spread of Islam

EQ: What factors brought down the Abbasid dynasty?
How did the spread of Islam impact India and SE Asia?

The Late Abbasid Era

- The Empire fully disintegrated between the 9th and 13th centuries
- The early warning signs of decline began during the rule of Caliph al-Mahdi (775-785, only the THIRD caliph)...he failed to reconcile with the Shiites, who continued to assassinate Abbasid rulers
- One the biggest factors in Abbasid decline was their extravagant and frugal behavior
 - The Abbasids liked to throw money around, built lavish unnecessary palaces, all the while taxing the lower classes immensely
- Another problem was solving the issue of succession
 - Caliphs had many sons, many sons wanted to be in power, sometimes they killed each other...those who had just daughters had to hope they married sensible men

The Late Abbasid Era

- Continued violence amongst the upper classes in the Abbasid dynasty put a significant strain on the treasury
- The peasant farmers, who were being burdening by high taxes, literally stopped farming...the agrarian system fell into disrepair as peasants fled into the desert to hide from tax collectors
- Peasants often formed dissident groups, many Shiites formed political factions bent on overthrowing the Sunni Abbasids (Persians)

The Declining Position of Women

- Women, who under early Arab rulers had greater freedom, saw their rights decline immensely
- The harem and the veil became the standard place and outfit for a woman (Assyrian/Persian practices)...veiling became paramount because women were regarded as a source of lust and distraction for men
- Wealthier women were generally subjects to these restrictions, kept at home as domestics and forced into child bearing...in the Abbasid elite, women were largely responsible for power brokering their sons' careers
- Most poorer women still had some rights, becoming more economically active

Forces that Kill the Abbasids

- **Nomadic Invasions**
 - By the mid-10th century, breakaway edge provinces challenged Abbasid rule (Buyids in Persia)...caliphs eventually became their puppet rulers
 - In 1055, the Seljuk Turks from central Asia took the remaining portions of the Abbasid Empire, capturing Baghdad
 - They were staunch Sunnis who persecuted the Shi'a and relocated the center of their empire (Ottoman) to Turkey (Istanbul, once Constantinople)
 - The Mongols finish off Baghdad in the 1250s, never to recover again
- **The Crusades**
 - The now organized kingdoms of Christian Europe began invading the Holy Lands in 1099, establishing kingdoms that rivaled remaining Abbasid Muslims (caliphates) and the Seljuks
 - This rivalry lasted until 1291 when the Seljuks finally recaptured all territory
 - None-the-less, the Crusades gave Europe a period of access to ancient Greek, Roman, Mesopotamian, Persian and other Muslim ideals and innovations

The "Invasion" of India

- **MEANWHILE...**
- Like the Aryans, Muslims find their way into the subcontinent (NW and by sea) in the 7th century CE
- **Immediate differences/clashes –Islam vs. Hinduism**
 - Hindus have their structured social hierarchy, MAJOR differences between people, polytheistic beliefs and tolerance for other peoples beliefs
 - Muslims have their unified social system (only divisions in sex), monotheistic belief and highly doctrinaire (text based) system of beliefs that is generally tolerant AS LONG AS YOU BELIEVE IN ONE GOD
- **HOWEVER**, the first series of interactions between Muslims and Hindus was actually quite peaceful

The First Wave

- 711 CE – peaceful trading contacts over land and sea with Indian rajahs
 - Remember, India is now a fragmented series of kingdoms (no unified empire)
- **ATTACK**
 - Pirates from Sind began attacking Muslim traders and the Umayyads retaliated (Muhammad ibn Qasim claimed Indus Valley for the Umayyads)
- **Resistance is futile**
 - Most Indian kingdoms did not resist Muslim “invasions”
 - Many local leaders were attracted by the principles of Islam (tolerance, light taxes, equality)
 - They became protected by the Umayyads, and enjoyed religious freedom yet taxation for their freedom
 - NO CONVERSION was forced on Hindus or Buddhist living in protected areas

Indian Influences on Islam

- **Cultural and Intellectual Interactions**
 - Mathematics flourished
 - They are called Arabic numbers by they really came from India
 - Algebra and other geometric principles (360 degree circle) came from India to the West
 - Navigational tools/astronomical charts
 - **Medicine**
 - Indian doctors (IMAGINE THAT!) came to heal wounded Arab soldiers in the Umayyad and Abbasid courts that Greek doctors pronounced were beyond help
 - Music (ooh boy the Sitar!)
 - Chess
 - Adaptations of clothing/foods and elephant riding
 - Architectural designs shared

The Second Wave: From “Booty to Empire”

- For a long period, Muslims added very little territory in India, meaning they did not directly control it
 - Even Sind began to slip out of the hands of Muslim rulers
- **The decline of the Abbasids gave rise to the Turks**
 - The 3rd Turkish ruler, Mahmud of Ghazni, led expeditions into India, drawn by stories of magnificent wealth...he defeated on rajah after another
 - These raids continued well into the 1200s
- **A Sultanate was established in Delhi**
 - Completely self-sufficient from other Muslim Empires
 - Ruled the subcontinent continuously for 300 years
 - Fought off constant invasions from Mongols and other Turks as well as other Indian rajahs

Conversions and Accommodations

- Again, few Indians were converted forcibly into Muslims
 - Most conversions were won by faith alone, spread by merchants and by Sufi mystics
 - Sufis shared an aura of magic and healing powers
 - They established schools, arranged protection for their villages and even welcomed low caste and outcaste individuals
- Most converts came from areas in Western India or in Bengal
- Buddhists, low caste and untouchables made up the largest numbers of Hindus who converted
- Another force for conversion was to avoid the tax Muslims placed on non-Muslims

Conversions and Accommodations

- High caste Hindus felt threatened by the Muslim faith
- Many still took power roles under Muslim rule, despite separate living habits, unfriendly relations and restricted sexual interactions
- Hindus were convinced that eventually their Muslim invaders would become absorbed
 - Hindus were in great number in Muslim bureaucracies, made up most of the army, Muslim rulers even adopted local ruling styles and practices (divinity, Hindu imagery)
 - Most importantly, Muslims begin to divide into castes
- Negative consequences (mostly for women)
 - Marrying young girls and many girls (polygamy)
 - High caste widows and sati

Islamic Challenge/Hindu Revival

- As a consequence to Islamic intrusion on their faith, many Hindus resorted to practicing cult worship of specific gods and goddesses (Think Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom)
- Bhaktic cults were open to all Hindus, even the low castes and even had saints who were low caste members
- The most widely worshiped gods and goddesses were Shiva, Vishnu and Kali
- These ritualistic cults helped rebuff further conversion of lower caste Hindus to Islam

The Stand Off

- Tensions soon mounted into conflicts
 - Hindu Brahmins began denouncing "Muslims as infidel destroyers of Hindu temples and polluted meats eaters"
 - Began to convince converts to revert back to the Hindu faith
- Muslim religious leaders began to see the fusion of both faiths as impossible (Sikhs)
 - The main focus became keeping the converts they already had within the faith
- Conversions came to a halt and Muslims remained to be dominate in Indus Valley regions and the Ganges delta (important!)

Islam in SE Asia

- IMPORTANT – Indonesia is the world's largest Islamic nation (population wise)...how?
 - Muslim traders continued sailing the seas and reached the islands of SE Asia by the 8th century
- Trade goods, which would later fuel the explorations of European powers, such as spices and woods, became crucial to the Muslim trading empire
- Muslim came to dominate trading ports on Sumatra after the collapse of the Shrivijaya Empire
 - This made conversion efforts easy and many peoples converted to the Muslim faith as trade ports became the diffusing centers of the faith

Islam in SE Asia

- Islam spread to many other Indonesia islands...but met resistance on Java and Bali and in mainland SE Asia, where Hindu-Buddhist dynasties rejected its spread
- The Sufis again get credit for most of the spread for similar reasons (previously discussed)
