

# The Rise of Baghdad 900CE



## History Year 5 Autumn

### Unit learning journey:

**Lesson 1:** The Rise of Islam

**Lesson 2:** Baghdad: A city of peace

**Lesson 3:** Baghdad: building a city

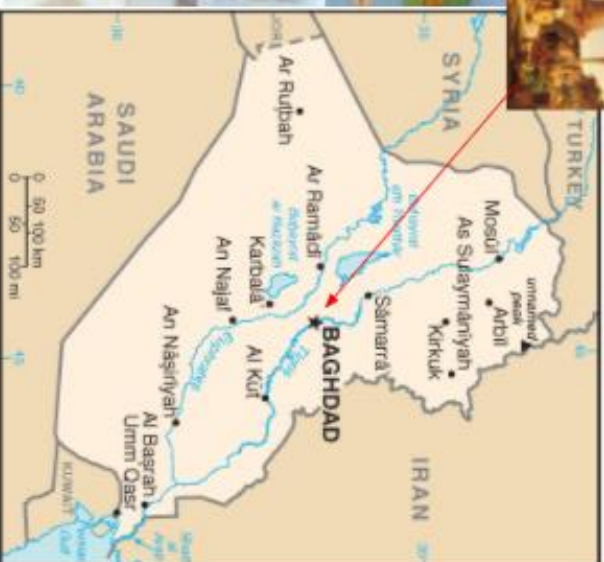
**Lesson 4:** Baghdad: a centre for learning in the Islamic Golden Age

**Lesson 5:** The Mongol attack on Baghdad and the regional powers

## Knowledge Organiser - Baghdad 900 CE (History Year 5)

Key Vocabulary	Definition
Scholarship	The act of academic study at a high level
Civilisation	A civilisation is a nation or group of people, that share a common culture, common laws, a common economy, and typically a common faith or religion.
'City of Peace'	Baghdad in 900 CE was referred to as the 'City of Peace'.
House of Wisdom	The House of Wisdom was a place in Baghdad where texts were translated and where people came to learn and read. It is remembered as one of the world's greatest libraries.
Mongols	The Mongols (originally from Mongolia) were a tribe of nomads who rode on horseback across central and northern Asia.

Key People	What did they do?
Caliph Al-Mansur	A religious leader who is remembered for founding the city of Baghdad.
Muhammad	A Prophet and military leader who established Islam
Al Tabari	An influential scholar, historian and translator/ interpreter.
Hulago Khan	A Mongolian military leader who invaded Baghdad in 1258 and destroyed the city.



The Fall of Rome

476 CE



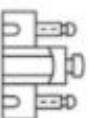
The construction of Baghdad begins.

762 CE



Baghdad is a hugely significant city and a centre of learning.

900 CE



Mongol forces invade Baghdad and destroy the city.

1258 CE



Birth of Muhammad

570 CE



Abbasid Caliphate

750 CE – 1258 CE



# Lesson 1: The Rise of Islam

## Key vocabulary

Empire

A way of thinking about the nature of thought, the universe and the meaning of life

Philosophy

A group of countries ruled over by one power.

Islam

A place of prayer for Muslims.

Mosque

A religion. The word means 'submission to the will of God'

## Caliphate of Cordoba

An Islamic state that covered parts of North Africa and Iberia (Spain and Portugal)



Alhambra Fortress

## Key location vocabulary



Medina



Mecca



Can you see where we are in relation to Saudi Arabia?  
 Before Islam 570CE, there were many different religions in this area. Muhammad came from **Mecca** but had to flee due to persecution, he then built a mosque in **Medina** where many Muslims take pilgrimage today.

The Fall of Rome 476 CE

The construction of Baghdad begins. 762 CE

Baghdad is a highly significant city and a centre of learning. 800 CE

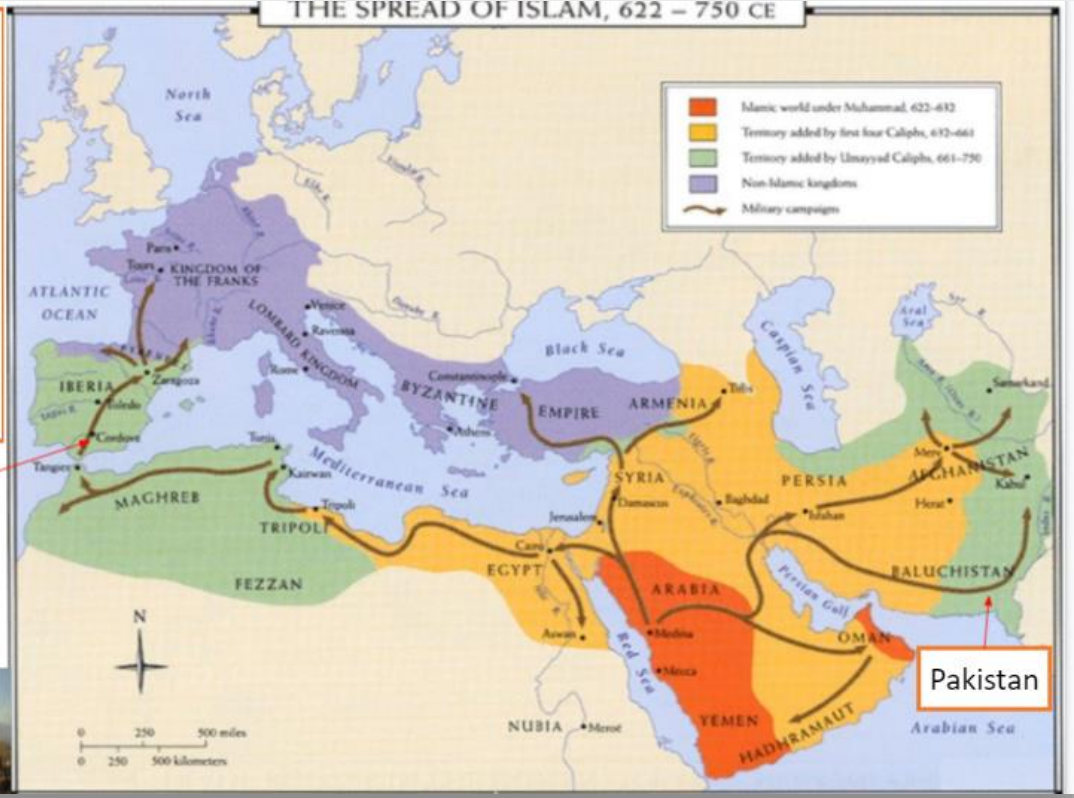
Mongol forces invade Baghdad and destroy the city. 1258 CE

Birth of Muhammad 570 CE

Abbasid Caliphate 750 CE - 1258 CE



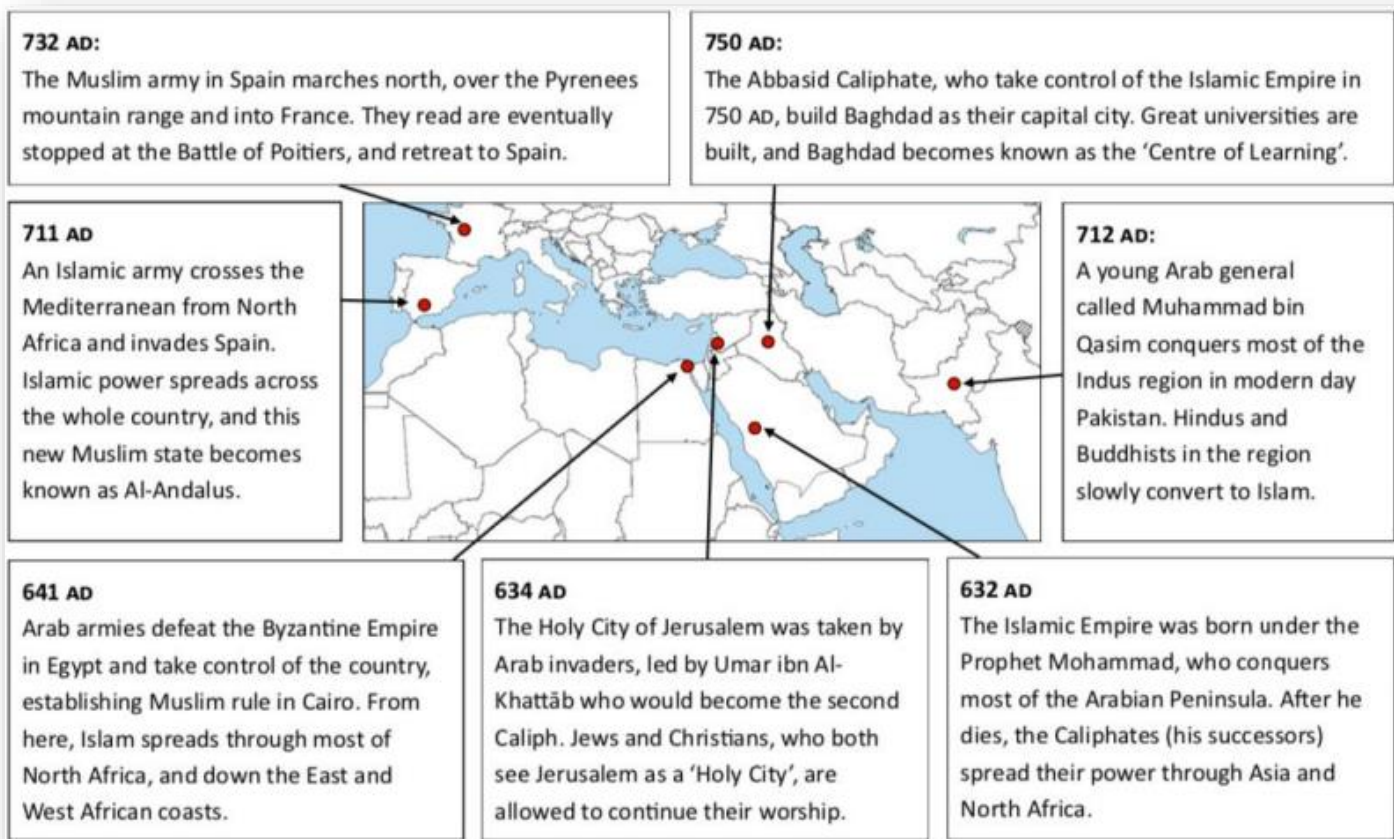
After Muhammad's death, particularly in the 7th century, Islam spread across three continents to Pakistan in the east and Spain in the West. Islamic scholars and students studied many different areas, not only religion but astronomy, philosophy and mathematics. In Europe, areas of Spain became centres of Islamic learning and culture.



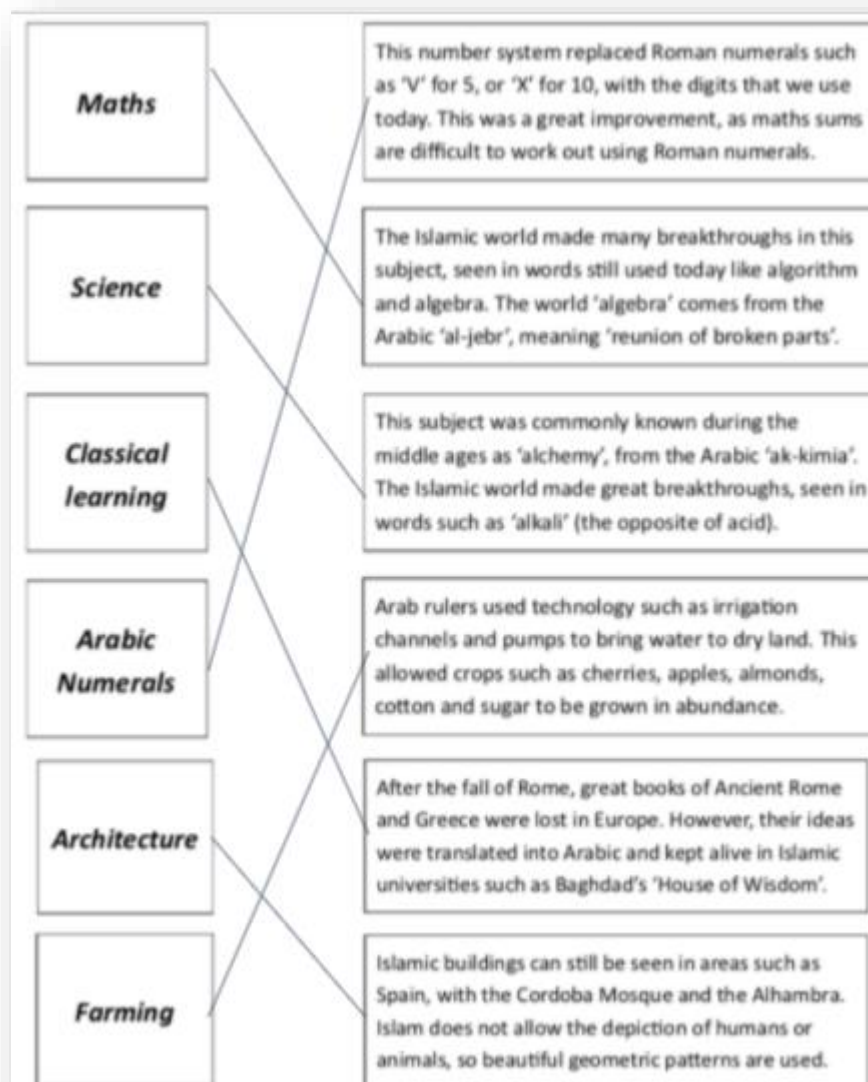
Spain

Cordoba  
Alhambra

Pakistan



## Islamic contribution to Western Civilisation



[Step for Depth: Read this article. Write a paragraph to explain the role that learning played during the spread of Islam](#)

## Baghdad's rise, fall – and rise again (The Spectator)

The history of Baghdad more than any other city mirrors the ebb and flow that has marked Islamic history and civilisation. The rise and fall of empires and dynasties, the splendours of Islam's high culture and its decline, the periodic tensions and ease that affected relations between nations and peoples, sects and faiths have all been played out in the teeming neighbourhoods, palace precincts, market areas, great mosques, educational centres and military compounds of this remarkable city.

Unlike its rival Damascus, the capital of the first Muslim empire, the Umayyads, which had been established for centuries before the arrival of Islam into Syria, Baghdad was pre-eminently a city of the Islamic era. It was founded specifically to be the capital of a universal empire, smack in the middle of trade routes that converged on it from all points of the azimuth.

It was the genius of the caliph al-Mansur, brother of the first Abbasid caliph, Abul Abbas, 'the Slayer', the scourge of the Umayyads, who conceived of the idea of a new capital and selected the site. Separated by hundreds of miles of desert from the lands of Syria and Arabia, it stood in the middle of the fertile plains of Mesopotamia. Lying on the Tigris river, Baghdad faced east towards the Iranian plateau and central Asia. The Tigris and nearby Euphrates linked it north with upper Syria and Asia Minor and south with the Gulf of Basra and further to India and the Orient. Al-Mansur also chose the design — it was to be 'the round city', a geometrically perfect circle, protected by giant walls pierced by equidistant gates, from which ceremonial avenues led to the centre. The scheme was monumental in scope.

On 30 July 762, al-Mansur laid the first brick. Tens of thousands of labourers toiled on the site, excavating foundations for the public buildings around which the city was to evolve, and within a mere four years all was ready. Al-Mansur had supervised every detail of the construction himself and had kept meticulous records and strict financial discipline, in character with his parsimony and punctiliousness. But the caliph was also intolerant, and prone to fits of extreme violence. After his death, his son al-Mahdi discovered a hidden chamber in the palace grounds where al-Mansur had dispatched dozens of the descendants of Ali, rivals to the Abbasid claim of supreme authority.

Baghdad, now dubbed Madinat al-Salam, the City of Peace, quickly grew into its expected role as the capital of a world empire. The ninth century was the golden age of the early Abbasids, of Harun al-Rashid, and his son al-Ma'mun, when the metropolis was at its glorious height. Unbelievable wealth poured in from all corners of the empire; its markets and bazaars were brimful with all the world's goods; its palaces and public buildings were a wonder to behold; its artisans and craftsmen were unmatched in skill and refinement; scholars, scientists, philosophers, theologians, poets, panegyrists and belletrists converged on Baghdad, raising its intellectual and artistic status beyond all other cities of the time.

But its rise was short-lived. By the tenth century, the once centralised empire began to crumble. The capital was moved to Samarra, 100 miles north of Baghdad, by the caliph Mu'tasim, mainly to avoid the tensions between the old Arab military class and his new Turkish praetorian guards. This was an ill-fated decision as the Abbasid caliphs now fell under the sway of their erstwhile Turkish protectors. Eventually, the caliphs returned to Baghdad, which remained the capital of the Abbasids until 1258.

For a long period, Baghdad survived the eclipse of Abbasid power, but the loss of its political status as the unrivalled imperial capital inevitably affected the stature and fabric of the city. Travellers spoke of its decay, despite its still resplendent exterior. Three centuries of political conflicts, sieges, fires and floods took their toll, and by the 13th century authority had shifted towards the military dynasties who ruled under a nominal Abbasid caliph.

Henceforth, neighbourhoods became increasingly defined by groups or sects. Frequent internecine rioting would break out, involving the Shia, residing mainly in the Karkh area of west Baghdad, and the majority Sunni population on the eastern side. A short-lived attempt by the caliph al-Nasir to revive the imperial power of the Abbasids brought a measure of peace and stability, but a few decades after his death, his work was undone by the inept last Abbasid caliph, al-Musta'asim. Through a mixture of lassitude and misplaced arrogance, presiding over a city torn apart by sectarianism, al-Musta'asim grossly underestimated the threat of the converging Mongol hordes. Nor was he helped by his scheming and possibly duplicitous vizier, Ibn al-'Alqami. In 1258, the city fell to the massed armies of Hulagu, grandson of Genghis Khan, and to horrific wanton killing and destruction, with the massacre of some 800,000 inhabitants.

But even worse was to follow. As the city slowly emerged from the rubble of the Mongols' devastation, it was struck a further blow, in 1401, this time by the armies of Tamerlane, whose savagery in many respects exceeded that of the Mongols. Thereafter, Baghdad sank to a wretched backwater, falling prey to the rival rulers of nomadic Turkic clans, the Black Sheep and the White Sheep. Occupied in 1508 by the expanding Safavid empire, based in Iran, it was next conquered by the Ottoman sultan Suleiman in 1534 and for four centuries (apart from a brief interlude under the Safavid Shah Abbas) it remained under Ottoman control.

Throughout this long period the city festered and shrivelled further, its distant sultan only showing interest when his possessions in Iraq were menaced by Persia. Though a measure of stability was introduced in the early 18th century by Hassan Pasha, the Georgian mameluke nominally under the suzerainty of the Ottomans, by the beginning of the 19th century, Baghdad's population was reduced to a mere 50,000, prone to disease and pestilence.

An era of Ottoman reforms, beginning in 1839, opened Baghdad to the outside world, but with that came various European imperial powers, enmeshing the city in rivalry. With the onset of the 20th century, the city began to regain some of its vitality, only to be plunged into the maelstrom of the first world war. In March 1917, a victorious Anglo-Indian army entered under General Stanley Maude, ending centuries of Ottoman rule.

For the next half century, Baghdad developed rapidly as Iraq's capital, first under the Hashemite monarchy established by Faisal I, and later under successive republican regimes. By the late 1950s, with a population of a million, it became (at least superficially) one of the most modernised cities of the Middle East, with its wide boulevards, cinemas and theatres, clubs and offices built in the international style, and its thriving cultural and literary scene.

But the plagues of war and civil strife then revisited with a vengeance. By the time of the US-led invasion of 2003, Baghdad was a sprawling metropolis of seven million mostly poor and even destitute citizens, with a decrepit infrastructure, rutted streets, abandoned houses and burnt or bombed public buildings.

Over the last decade, however, the city has once again begun to pull itself out of its downward spiral. Baghdad will always survive — and it may possibly even thrive again: a testament to the resilience of al-Mansur's City of Peace.

## Lesson 2: Baghdad: A city of peace

### Key vocabulary

Caliph

Caliphate

Tigris

Fertile

An area controlled by a muslim leader

A lush land where plants grow easily

The name of an important river in Mesopotamia used for trade

leaders who were thought to be the successors of Muhammad



After Muhammad's death, religious leaders, called Caliphs ruled. Caliph Al-Mansur was the leader of the Abbasid Caliphate and part of a family (dynasty) who ruled in the Middle East for a long time.





Al-Mansur wanted to build a city and chose to build Baghdad in a location that was near the Tigris River and also where many trade routes crossed.

Talk Task:

Where do you think traders might have come from?

Why was it important to build Baghdad near to the Tigris River?



Lesson 2 - teach

Al-Mansur liked the location.  
The city became the capital of an empire (the Abbasid Caliphate) so many people wanted to visit.

Caliph Al-Mansur began the construction of Baghdad began in 792 CE.

"This is indeed the city that I am to found, where I am to live, and where my descendants will reign afterward."



Baghdad was built in this location because lots of people could travel through that land.

People came to buy and sell things and also to study.

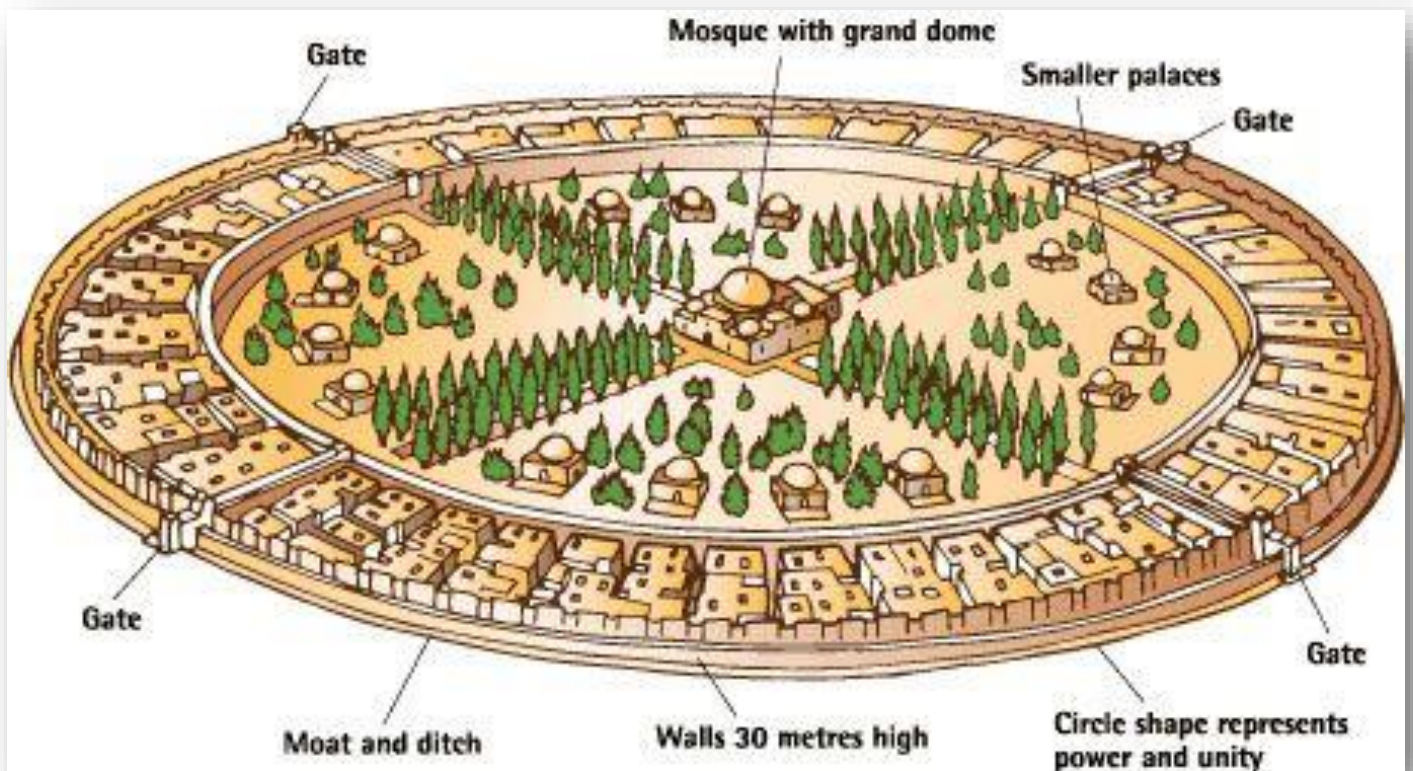


The first part of Baghdad, built by Al-Mansur, was called The City of Peace (Arabic: مدينة السلام, Madīnat as-Salām) this part was designed to be a circle shape. At the centre of the circle was a mosque, then government buildings, homes and shops radiated from the centre along avenues. Unfortunately, none of the original city has survived, but historians know about it from books and documents that have survived.



Watch this video about the founding of Baghdad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6m6yQL85t5k>



## Further Reading

### The Birth of Baghdad - The Guardian

If Baghdad today is a byword for inner-city decay and violence on an unspeakable scale, its foundation 1,250 years ago was a glorious milestone in the history of urban design. More than that, it was a landmark for civilisation, the birth of a city that would quickly become the cultural lodestar of the world.

Contrary to popular belief, Baghdad is old but not ancient. Founded in AD762 by the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur "The Victorious" as the new seat of his Islamic empire, in Mesopotamian terms it is more *arriviste* than *grande dame* – an upstart compared to Nineveh, Ur and Babylon (seventh, fourth and third millennium BC respectively).

Baghdad is a mere baby, too, when compared with Uruk, another ancient Mesopotamian urban settlement, which lays claim to being one of the world's earliest cities and which was, sometime around 3,200BC, the largest urban centre on earth with a population estimated at up to 80,000. Some think the Arabic title for Babylonia, al-Iraq, is derived from its name.

We know a huge amount about the city's meticulous and inspired planning thanks to detailed records of its construction. We are told, for instance, that when Mansur was hunting for his new capital, sailing up and down the Tigris to find a suitable site, he was initially advised of the favourable location and climate by a community of Nestorian monks who long predated Muslims in the area.

According to the ninth-century Arab geographer and historian Yaqubi, author of *The Book of Countries*, its trade-friendly position on the Tigris close to the Euphrates gave it the potential to be "the crossroads of the universe". This was a retrospective endorsement. By the time Yaqubi was writing, Baghdad, *City of Peace*, had already become the centre of the world, capital of the pre-eminent Dar al-Islam, home to pioneering scientists, astronomers, poets, mathematicians, musicians, historians, legalists and philosophers.

Once Mansur had agreed the site, it was time to embark on the design. Again we are told that this was entirely the caliph's work. Under strict supervision he had workers trace the plans of his round city on the ground in lines of cinders. The perfect circle was a tribute to the geometric teachings of Euclid, whom he had studied and admired. He then walked through this ground-level plan, indicated his approval and ordered cotton balls soaked in naphtha (liquid petroleum) to be placed along the outlines and set alight to mark the position of the massively fortified double outer walls.

On 30 July 762, after the royal astrologers had declared this the most auspicious date for building work to begin, Mansur offered up a prayer to Allah, laid the ceremonial first brick and ordered the assembled workers to get cracking.

The scale of this great urban project is one of the most distinctive aspects of the story of Baghdad. With a circumference of four miles, the massive brick walls rising up from the banks of the Tigris were the defining signature of Mansur's Round City. According to 11th-century scholar Al Khatib al Baghdadi – whose *History of Baghdad* is a mine of information on the construction of the city – each course consisted of 162,000 bricks for the first third of the wall's height, 150,000 for the second third and 140,000 for the final section, bonded together with bundles of reeds. The outer wall was 80ft high, crowned with battlements and flanked by bastions. A deep moat ringed the outer wall perimeter.

The workforce itself was of a stupendous size. Thousands of architects and engineers, legal experts, surveyors and carpenters, blacksmiths, diggers and ordinary labourers were recruited from across the Abbasid empire. First they surveyed, measured and excavated the foundations. Then, using the sun-baked and kiln-fired bricks that had always been the main building material on the river-flooded Mesopotamian plains in the absence of stone quarries, they raised the fortress-like city walls brick by brick. This was by far the greatest construction project in the Islamic world: Yaqubi reckoned there were 100,000 workers involved.

The circular design was breathtakingly innovative. "They say that no other round city is known in all the regions of the world," Khatib noted approvingly. Four equidistant gates pierced the outer walls where straight roads led to the centre of the city. The Kufa Gate to the south-west and the Basra Gate to the south-east both opened on to the Sarat canal – a key part of the network of waterways that drained the waters of the Euphrates into the Tigris and made this site so attractive. The Sham (Syrian) Gate to the north-west led to the main road on to Anbar, and across the desert wastes to Syria. To the north-east the Khorasan Gate lay close to the Tigris, leading to the bridge of boats across it.

For the great majority of the city's life, a fluctuating number of these bridges, consisting of skiffs roped together and fastened to each bank, were one of the most picturesque signatures of Baghdad; no more permanent structure would be seen until the British arrived in the 20th century and laid an iron bridge across the Tigris.



A gatehouse rose above each of the four outer gates. Those above the entrances in the higher main wall offered commanding views over the city and the many miles of lush palm groves and emerald fields that fringed the waters of the Tigris. The large audience chamber at the top of the gatehouse above the Khorasan Gate was a particular favourite of Mansur as an afternoon retreat from the stultifying heat.

The four straight roads that ran towards the centre of the city from the outer gates were lined with vaulted arcades containing merchants' shops and bazaars. Smaller streets ran off these four main arteries, giving access to a series of squares and houses; the limited space between the main wall and the inner wall answered to Mansur's desire to maintain the heart of the city as a royal preserve.

The centre of Baghdad consisted of an immense central enclosure – perhaps 6,500 feet in diameter – with the royal precinct at its heart. The outer margins were reserved for the palaces of the caliph's children, homes for the royal staff and servants, the caliph's kitchens, barracks for the horse guard and other state offices. The very centre was empty except for the two finest buildings in the city: the Great Mosque and the caliph's Golden Gate Palace, a classically Islamic expression of the union between temporal and spiritual authority. No one except Mansur, not even a gout-ridden uncle of the caliph who requested the privilege on grounds of ill-health, was permitted to ride in this central precinct.

One sympathises with this elderly uncle of the caliph. Unmoved by his protestations of decrepit limbs, Mansur said he could be carried into the central precinct on a litter, a mode of transport generally reserved for women. "I will be embarrassed by the people," his uncle Isa said. "Is there anyone left you could be embarrassed by?" the caliph replied caustically.

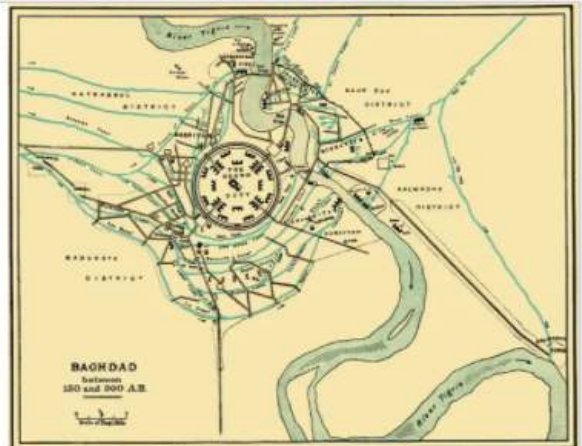
Mansur's palace was a remarkable building of 360,000 sq ft. Its most striking feature was the 130ft-high green dome above the main audience chamber, visible for miles around and surmounted by the figure of a horseman with a lance in his hand. Khatib claimed that the figure swivelled like a weathervane, thrusting his lance in the direction from which the caliph's enemies would next appear. Mansur's great mosque was Baghdad's first. Encompassing a prodigious 90,000 sq ft, it paid dutiful respect to Allah while emphatically conveying the message that the Abbasids were his most powerful and illustrious servants on earth.

By 766 Mansur's Round City was complete. The general verdict was that it was a triumph. The ninth-century essayist, polymath and polemicist al-Jahiz was unstinting in his praise. "I have seen the great cities, including those noted for their durable construction. I have seen such cities in the districts of Syria, in Byzantine territory, and in other provinces, but I have never seen a city of greater height, more perfect circularity, more endowed with superior merits or possessing more spacious gates or more perfect defences than Al Zawra, that is to say the city of Abu Jafar al-Mansur." What he particularly admired was the roundness of the city: "It is as though it is poured into a mould and cast."

The last traces of Mansur's Round City were demolished in the early 1870s when Midhat Pasha, the reformist Ottoman governor, tore down the venerable city walls in a fit of modernising zeal. Baghdadis have since grown used to being excluded from the centre of their resilient capital.

Just as they had been barred from the inner sanctum of the city under Mansur, so were their 20th-century counterparts excluded from the heart of Baghdad on pain of death 12 centuries later under Saddam Hussein. The heavily guarded district of Karadat Maryam, slightly south of the original Round City on the west bank, became the regime headquarters, the engine room of a giant machine carefully calibrated to cow, control and kill using the multiple security organisations that enabled a country to devour itself. Under the American occupation of 2003 it became the even more intensely fortified Green Zone, a surreal dystopia of six square miles in which Iraqis were largely unwelcome in their own capital.

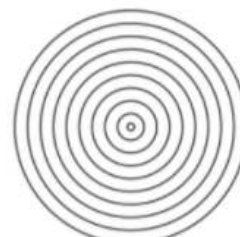
Today, after a 12-year interlude, the Green Zone is open to Baghdadis again. But as so often in their extraordinarily bloody history, Iraqis find they have very little to cheer about as the country tears itself apart. The great city of Baghdad survives, but its people are once again engulfed in terrible violence.



# Lesson 3: Baghdad: building a city

## Key vocabulary

- mosque
- palace
- government
- avenue
- concentric



circles sharing a centre point



A group of people who rule a country or a state



When he decided on the location, Caliph Al-Mansur laid the first brick himself.



# 1. Perfect time for the perfect city

At two o'clock, on 30 July, in the year 762 CE, a great Muslim ruler called **al-Mansur** (*al-man-soor*) was standing near the river Tigris holding a large brick. His advisers, his many servants and his clever **architects** all stood near him. An expectant hush fell over the crowd. All along the banks of the Tigris, thousands of workmen looked on. Everyone watched. Everyone waited. Then, carefully, al-Mansur laid the brick in its special place. The building of the new city had begun.

Al-Mansur had dreamed about building this city. It would be his new capital of the Muslim world – the city of **Baghdad**. It was such a special moment that al-Mansur had special coins made to mark the occasion. Here is a real coin from the reign of al-Mansur. The Muslim Arabs called these coins **dirhams** (*deer-ams*).



occasion. Here is a real coin from the reign of al-Mansur. The Muslim Arabs called these coins **dirhams** (*deer-ams*).

The ancient city of Baghdad no longer exists, but using descriptions of the city written at the time, historians have been able to work out that it was built on a plan like the one on the next page.

Al-Mansur had asked his architects to design a round city. He wanted his city to be a perfect circle. The architects made four big gates into the circular city. Can you find them?



Until now, Baghdad had been just a tiny village. People had settled there when the Persians were ruling. But now the Muslim Arabs had conquered these lands. Al-Mansur was their caliph (*kayl-iff*). A caliph was a ruler of the Muslim peoples. Al-Mansur was determined to be the greatest caliph ever. A great caliph needed a great city with fine palaces and beautiful mosques. He needed a city that would be famous throughout the lands that the Arabs had conquered.

Al-Mansur could therefore take no chances. He needed to know his city would be the best. Arab peoples often studied the stars. Like the Persian peoples that they had conquered, the Arabs believed the stars could guide them. So al-Mansur consulted his royal **astrologers**.



The astrologers studied the stars to work out the best time to build the city. It was the astrologers who told al-Mansur that July 30, 762, at two o'clock, was exactly the right time to begin to build. But al-Mansur was still worried. What if the architects had got the plan wrong? What would the city really look like? How could he be sure that it would be wonderful? So Al-Mansur ordered his architects to do one more thing before building could start. He told them to mark out the entire city, on the ground, with a trail of cotton seeds. Oil was then poured on the seeds. The seeds were set alight. Suddenly the vast plan of the city was marked out in a great circle of fire. Al-Mansur could now see what his city would look like, in a giant plan made of flames. What a sight it must have been! At last al-Mansur was happy. He said, 'By God, I will live in this city all my life. It will be my descendants' home. It will be the richest city in the world!' Al-Mansur was finally ready to lay that first brick.



The Middle East at the end of the 7th Century

What was the name of the river on which the new city of Baghdad was built?



Al-Mansur sent out a **decree** to all the corners of his empire calling for skilled people to help him build his city. Thousands of builders, **engineers**, carpenters and other workmen came to help. Al-Mansur paid them so well that they came from all over the Middle East. A master builder was paid one twelfth of a dirham. A labourer was paid one twenty-fourth of a dirham. This was very good pay. For a whole dirham, you could buy 30 kilograms of dates, two lambs or a whole sheep!

Al-Mansur could afford to pay well because people in his conquered lands paid him taxes. With so much farming in the rich land around the rivers, he could draw a big **revenue**.



There was no natural stone in the great plains by the Tigris, so each brick was made from mud and baked in the sun. Every single brick was weighed and measured carefully. Millions of bricks had to be made because the huge circular walls were 24 metres high. Al-Mansur was strict with all these workers. He hated wasting money. He threw his workers in prison if they wasted a single brick! Each gatepost on the four enormous gates had a huge **dome**. The gates faced north-east, north-west, south-west and south-east. From each gate, led a road to a different part of the empire.



In the centre of the city was the caliph's palace. Its huge green domes could be seen by travellers for miles. Palace rooms were full of colour. Muslim artists loved colourful, symmetrical patterns based on ideas from the natural world. Fine silk and linen cushions, mats and **quilt**s covered floors and walls. Next to the palace was a mosque, where the caliph himself preached sermons during Friday prayers.



Historians can work out what the buildings looked like because palaces, fortresses and mosques that were built nearby at the same time have survived. This photograph shows a nearby palace that is still standing. See its vast walls, grand entrances and huge courtyard. These walls would have had been covered in carved patterns like those below. These beautiful patterns were based on drawings of plants, but all woven together in repeating shapes.



The main city soon expanded beyond the walls of the round city. Merchants and craftsmen built workshops, houses, hospitals and mosques. By the tenth century, a million people lived in Baghdad. Only China had a city bigger than this.

Now let's imagine we are walking in the streets outside the circular centre. Let's picture our journey. Let us start by the great River Tigris. Here there are grand houses built by rich merchants, with fine gardens running down to the riverbanks. Now let's move into the unpaved, winding streets, past the food stalls to the textiles and jewellery sellers. We pass mud-brick, single story houses with their flat roofs, so useful for sleeping outside in hot summer nights. Each house surrounds a courtyard. That courtyard is the centre of family life. Here the family eats, talks and cooks. Then we move into the poorer **quarters**. Here newcomers to the city squat in shacks and tents. Eventually the roads **peter out** into the dusty desert.

Everywhere, there are mosques. Above the noise of the street, five times a day, the muezzin calls us to prayer from the tall minarets that soar up to the sky.

Buildings inside the city included: The mosque, the palace, government buildings and accommodation and markets.

The city structure, included four gates and a concentric (circular) design.

Historians think it may have taken 100,000 workers to build the city and cost 4,883,000 dirhams (as was noted by a team of accountants at the time). The city walls were 90ft high and 40ft wide and ramps were built to allow horsemen to reach the tops of the walls. The iron gates were so heavy it took a team of doormen to open and close them. First built as a location for the officials and rulers of the Abbasid Caliphate, Baghdad

quickly became a city of extravagant fortune, 'linked

to the ends of the earth by land and by the sea'

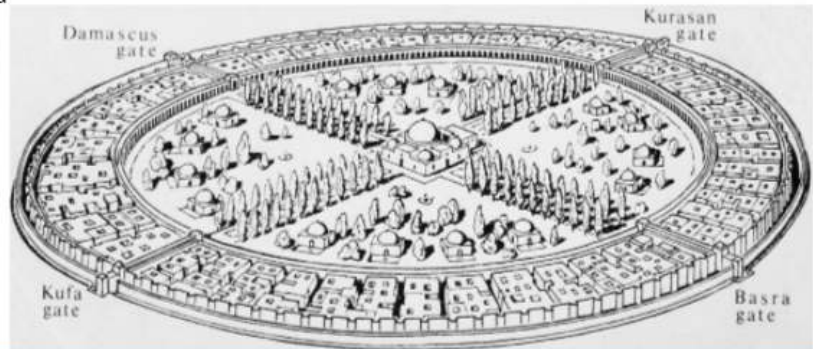
(Jason Goodwin). Wealthy families held fabulous

parties in the cities palaces; to celebrate his son's

wedding, Caliph Harun Al-Rashid, threw an

extravagant party and the 'going home gifts' were

deeds to land or slaves.



## Lesson 4: Baghdad: a centre for learning in the Islamic Golden Age

medicine



Key vocabulary

philosophy

The study of the meaning of life, the universe and everything.

law



translation

Hello = Bonjour

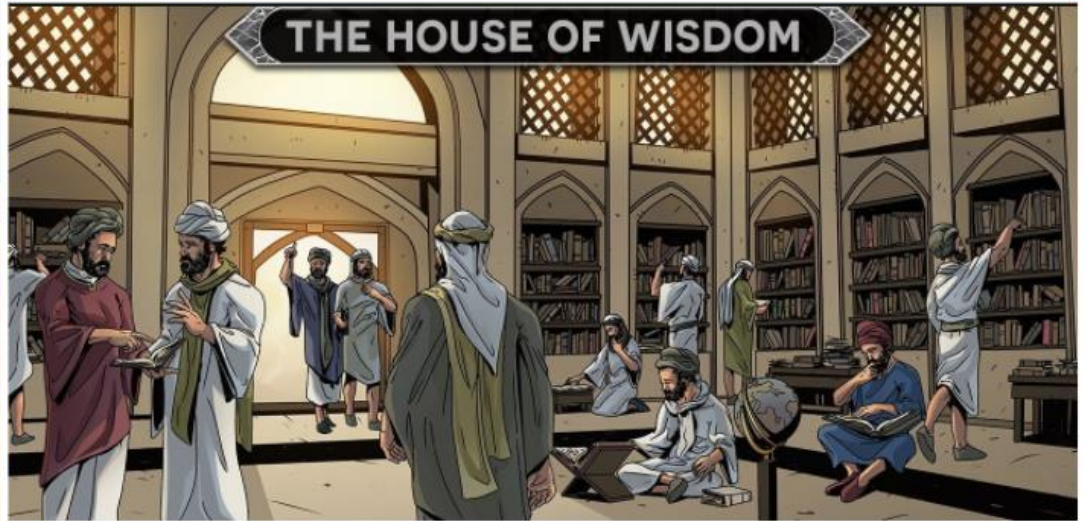
House of Wisdom



scholar



Baghdad was a hugely significant city by 900 CE and that people came from all over the world to study maths, science, medicine, philosophy and law. Baghdad had the world's largest collection of books. People worked hard to translate texts in Baghdad. This was significant because it meant people who could read Arabic could access important texts which were originally written in other languages.



'House of Wisdom'- a library, translation centre and school.

This was a time before modern technology, so if people wanted to learn something, or find information, they needed to travel to a place where that information was recorded.



Talk:  
Why is translation so important to the sharing of knowledge?





The caliphs wanted Baghdad to be much more than a beautiful city. They wanted it to be a city of learning and new ideas. When traders and merchants brought their goods to Baghdad, they also brought knowledge of distant places. Sometimes they even brought books.

Books were rare and precious. The caliphs of Baghdad knew that much knowledge created by the ancient Greeks had been lost. The great library of Alexandria (founded in 300 BCE) once tried to capture all the knowledge in the world. But decay and fire had destroyed so many books!



A nineteenth-century artist's drawing of what the library of Alexandria would have looked like.

Books were fragile (*frag-ile*). In fact, ancient books in the library of Alexandria did not look like modern books at all. They were long scrolls made of papyrus which decayed easily. Can you see the rolled up scrolls on the shelves in the picture above? These scrolls had to be copied and re-copied, again and again.



Some ancient Greek books *had* survived, however. Many had been preserved in the Byzantine Empire. The caliphs ruling in Baghdad knew about this! In this picture, you can see the caliph in Baghdad (shown on the left) sending his messengers to the Byzantine Emperor in his capital city of Constantinople (shown on the right). The messengers are asking for books.

Al-Mansur once wrote to the Byzantine Emperor asking for books on science and mathematics. The Byzantine Emperor sent him a chest full of books. Inside the chest, was the famous book on geometry by the ancient Greek mathematician Euclid! (*yew-klid*) The caliphs also sent **scholars** to Persia, North Africa, India and China. These scholars collected many treasured texts and brought them back to Baghdad.

This painting shows the House of Wisdom in Baghdad. The caliphs paid scholars from all over the Islamic world to come here. In the House of Wisdom, scholars translated Greek, Persian and Indian texts into Arabic. But these scholars did more than just translate books....





They used the old texts to make *new* knowledge - knowledge about maths, science, geography and technology that has helped to change the world. Here you can see a tenth-century Arab book about science.

Look again at the painting of the House of Wisdom. Do you notice that it has shelves with proper books? In the eighth century, Baghdad traders brought knowledge of paper-making from China. The caliph ordered paper mills to be built along the banks of the Tigris. Now more books could be copied. Baghdad soon became a city of bookshops and libraries. By the tenth century, the city had over 100 booksellers and many private libraries. One scholar refused to move to another city because he said it would take 100 camels to transport all his books. He couldn't afford to hire that many camels!

By the eleventh century, the caliphs and their scholars wanted to find ways to share this knowledge with more people. So the caliph and other rich citizens built colleges called **madrassas** (*ma-drass-uz*). In these madrasas, teachers taught religious knowledge about Islam, together with science, mathematics, astronomy, geography and philosophy. Below you can see a photograph of a madrasa, founded in the twelfth century, which still exists in Baghdad today.

A century later, cities in Europe started their first **universities**. These European universities copied the madrasas. Their scholars used all the old and new knowledge that Arab scholars had protected in



## Lesson 5: The Mongol attack on Baghdad and the regional powers

Mongols



Asia

Key vocabulary



Abbasid Caliphate



depopulate

Reduce the number of people in an area

uninhabitable

Impossible to live in

irrigation



Channeling water to plants

An empire began in Mongolia when Genghis Khan united several tribes. The empire grew and eventually stretched from Eastern Europe to the Sea of Japan, from parts of the Arctic, through India, Asia and Iran. This huge transcontinental empire connected land and allowed the spread of trade, technology, ideas and beliefs. The period of this empire is known as Pax Mongolica.



Mongol Army



Genghis Khan

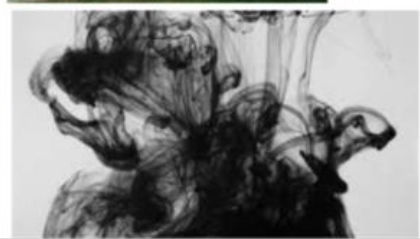
Over many years, Baghdad's golden age began to fade. A traveller, Ibn-Jubayr wrote in 1184, 'This old city still serves as the Abbasid capital, but most of its substance is gone. Only the name remains. The city is a shadow of a passing ghost.'



In 1258, an army of Mongolians, led by Hulagu Khan, arrived at the gates of Baghdad. The last Abbasid Caliph offered to surrender, but Khan's army attacked the city, killing the Abbasid family, the religious leaders, the court officials and the residents. It is thought hundreds of thousands of people were killed. The palace, Mosques, libraries and homes were burned to the ground.



So many thousands of books were thrown into the Tigris River that it is said the river ran black with ink for days.



Look at this tapestry showing the invasion of Baghdad in 1258. What can you see? Why does artwork have an important role in history? (Hint: stories without words)

Lesson 5 - teach



Hülegü's army conducting a siege on Baghdad walls. Tapestry circa 1430.

Lesson 5 - Reading

### The Mongol Attack on Baghdad - Key points

- The Mongols (originally from Mongolia) were a tribe of nomads who rode on horseback across central and northern Asia.
- One army of Mongols, led by Hulagu Khan, were set a target of conquering Syria, Persia and Egypt.
- To do this they needed to destroy the Addasid Caliphate who ruled Baghdad.
- Over several hundred years before this point, Baghdad had been in decline.
- Other centres of learning had sprung up around the world and the city was no longer the cultural centre that was before.
- In 1258, the Mongols entered Baghdad and complete destruction ensued.
- Baghdad's Mosque, hospital, libraries and palace were completely destroyed.
- Thousands of books are said to have been thrown into the Tigris River, making the river run black with ink.
- Over 200, 000 people were killed during this time.
- Entire regions were depopulated and were left uninhabitable as means of irrigation and growing crops were ruined.
- The Caliphate was destroyed and Baghdad's golden age had come to a violent end.

Let's answer in full sentences:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Where did the Arab peoples come from?                 | 1. The Arab peoples came from Arabia.                               |
| 2. What were Muslim rulers called?                       | 2. Muslim rulers were called caliphs.                               |
| 3. What river was the city of Baghdad built on?          | 3. The city of Baghdad was built on the River Tigris.               |
| 4. Who controlled this area before the Arabs came?       | 4. The Persians controlled this area before the Arabs came.         |
| 5. What did astrologers try to do?                       | 5. Astrologers tried to predict the future by looking at the stars. |
| 6. In what shape did al-Mansur decide to build his city? | 6. Al-Mansur decided to build his city in the shape of a circle.    |