

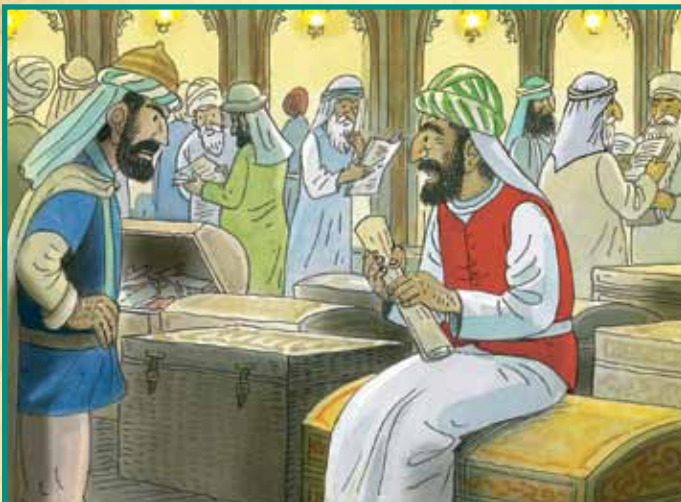
# The Thief Who Stole Nothing

## Baghdad and the House of Wisdom

For people who loved science, mathematics and philosophy, Baghdad in the 8th and 9th Centuries was a very exciting place to be.

### A ruler who loved learning

Baghdad was built and governed by the Abbasid Caliphs (Islamic rulers). The Caliph Haroun al-Rasheed, who ruled in Baghdad from 786 to 809, came from a family that loved learning. He collected books and manuscripts about the arts, sciences, philosophy, mathematics – everything he could get his hands on.



### A home for all the books

Haroun al-Rasheed built the amazing House of Wisdom in Baghdad to contain his collection of books. After

his death his son made the House of Wisdom even bigger, and added yet more books and manuscripts to the growing collections.



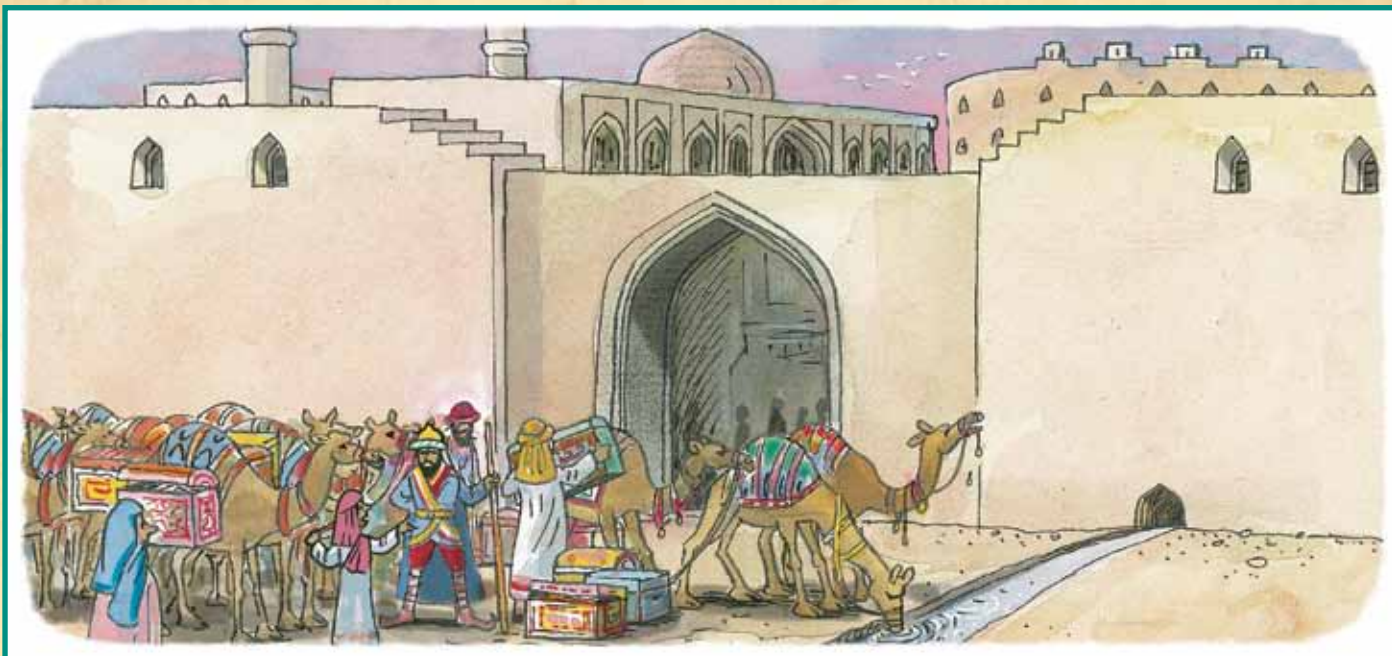
### Sharing knowledge

The Abbasids did not keep their knowledge to themselves. Baghdad at this time was a meeting place for people from all over the world – Persia, Greece, India, parts of Europe and even China. Scholars from many civilisations came to the House of Wisdom to translate, read and talk about the books and share ideas.

### Fact Languages for learning

Many different languages were used by the scholars in the House of Wisdom. The main language was Arabic, but books were also read and written in Hebrew, Aramaic, Farsi, Latin, Greek and Sanscrit.





### Creating new ideas

In the House of Wisdom, scholars from all over the world were welcome to bring their ideas and join in the conversations about science, maths, philosophy and art. Lots of exciting new ideas came about because of the conversations that went on in the House of Wisdom, and the work that the scholars did in translating ideas from one language to another meant that knowledge could travel much more easily than before.

## The end of the House of Wisdom

The House of Wisdom lasted in Baghdad for around 400 years, until the Mongol invasion of the city in 1258. The Mongol leader Hulegu (the grandson of Ghengis Khan) killed the last of the Abbasid Caliphs and ordered all the books and manuscripts from the House of Wisdom to be thrown into the River Tigris.

It was said that the water of the River Tigris turned black for several days, because of all the ink washing out of the books. Who knows what wonderful ideas and discoveries disappeared into the river, along with the books?

## Some more websites to explore

- The website of the travelling *1001 Inventions* exhibition, which looks at how ideas from early Muslim civilisation have influenced life today: <http://www.1001inventions.com/1001inventions/home>
- A website with images and information about a wide range of Islamic art: <http://www.discoverislamicart.org/>
- Web pages about the British Museum's Islamic World gallery, with artefacts and information about Islamic contributions to art, calligraphy and science. <http://www.britishmuseum.org>