
"The Golden Age of Islam" - The History of The Caliphate

Rakhmanova Odinakhon Ravhsanbekovna

Department of World History, Fergana State University, Uzbekistan

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*Correspondence: Rakhmanova

Odinakhon Ravhsanbekovna

Email: setoraimohihosa@mail.ru

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Abstract: The article provides brief information about the reign of the Abbasid Caliphate during five centuries, the socio-economic and political disagreements that occurred on the territory of the Caliphate, the role of the Abbasid Caliphs in the development of science and culture, from the history of their rise to power to their fall

Keywords: *Umayyads, Abbasids, Abbasid Caliphate, Hashemites, Abul-Abbas al-Saffah, Al-Mansur, Al-Mamun, Abu Muslim, Khorun ar-Rashid, Al-Mutasima, Al-Mutadid.*

Introduction

The introduction should briefly place the study in a broad context and highlight why it is important. It should define the purpose of the work and its significance. The current state of the research field should be carefully reviewed and key publications cited. Please highlight controversial and diverging hypotheses when necessary. Finally, briefly mention the main aim of the work and highlight the principal conclusions. As far as possible, please keep the introduction comprehensible to scientists outside your particular field of research. APA style should be employed for citations and references. See the end of the document for further details on references.

In VIII century in the Middle East a new dynasty seized power in one of the greatest empires in the world, the Arab Caliphate. The Abbasids ruled for 5 centuries. Under their leadership, an era of military domination of Islam, the construction of cities, outstanding scientists and technological innovations began. This period is usually called the "Golden Age" of Islam. This is the history of the Abbasid Caliphate. In 632 AD, the Prophet

Muhammad (s.a.v.) died in the Arabian city of Medina and his followers professing the new religion of Islam covered the Arabian Peninsula and united it under the rule of Abu Bakr (632-634), the first caliph, the viceroy of God on earth, then they broke out onto the world stage fighting with two superpowers of the Middle East - the Eastern Roman and Sassanid Empires. After decades of war, both states become vulnerable and the Muslims begin a campaign of destruction, winning victory after victory (Umar (634-644), Uthman (644-656)) [10: 6-7]. By 651, they captured 2/3 of the Eastern Roman Empire and almost the entire Sassanid Empire. But in 656, the third caliph Uthman was killed, which led to the first Muslim civil war or fitna (656-661). Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, enjoys the support of the people. But the ruler of Syria, Uthman's relative Muawiya, opposes him; five years of bloodshed culminate in the murder of Ali in Kufa. Muawiya (661-680) wins and establishes a new Umayyad Caliphate. Further conquests help create one of the largest empires in history. But it is also torn apart by new civil wars. One of the challenges is Hussein (626-680), son of Ali and grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. He opposes the succession of the throne by Muawiya's son Yazid. But in 680 he and his followers are defeated and killed in the Battle of Karbala (October 12, 680).

The supporters of Ali and his descendants will later be called Shiites. They still annually commemorate the death of Hussein on the day of Ashura [705]. The vast Umayyad Caliphate continued to expand (Yazid I (680-683), Muawiyah II (683-684), Marwan I (684-685), Abd al-Malik (685-705), Al-Walid I (705-715), Sulayman (715-717), Umar II (717-720)) but it was beset with serious internal contradictions and much of what we know about the Umayyad Caliphate comes from later sources, often unfavourable. What is clear, however, is that the small Arab Muslim elite that dominated this great empire was becoming increasingly unpopular with many of its subjects, including those later called dhimmis. These were non-Muslims, mostly Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. They were treated as an inferior class and forced to pay extra taxes. Even those who accepted Islam, the so-called mawali, were often treated as second-class citizens. The discontent that had been building for decades was about to explode. The symbol of the Umayyads' power was their white banner, but in 747 a new symbol challenged their authority: the black banners of the Abbasids.

Methodology

Abbasids An Arab family descended from the Prophet Muhammad's uncle, al-Abbas, from whom they took their name. They and their supporters believed that this blood connection with the Prophet gave them a legitimate claim to the title of Caliph, much more so than the Umayyads, whom the Abbasids later portrayed as decadent and despised. The Abbasids promised a return to true Islam, correct teaching, and moral governance, and sent missionaries and agents throughout the Caliphate.

In 747, the Caliphate was again engulfed in rebellions and civil wars. The Abbasids seized their chance. In Eastern Khorasan, the commander Abu Muslim raised a rebellion, taking the black banner of the Hashemites as his symbol. The Hashemites are descendants of Hashim and belong to the numerous family of the prophet, among whom the Abbasids occupy an important place.

This border region, which today includes northeastern Iran and parts of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, is particularly fertile for rebellion. Here, Arabs and converts to the faith live side by side. They intermarry and fight side by side to defend the border.

To many, the Umayyads are distant and unpopular rulers. In fact, for decades, Hashemite agents and missionaries have been fomenting resistance, seeking to overthrow the Umayyads and establish their own rule. They have sown the seeds of revolution, and so when Abu Muslim begins his rebellion, he quickly attracts supporters from Arabs, Persians, and Central Asians, many of whom are experienced warriors. He proves a brilliant commander, winning a series of victories over the Umayyad forces and capturing Kufa, the capital of Iraq, in 749. The Abbasids take over the leadership of the revolution, and the following year their forces meet the army of the Umayyad Caliph Marwan II at the Zab River. Most of our information about the subsequent battle comes from Abbasid sources.

Caliph Marwan appears to have been a brave but reckless commander. He launched a frontal cavalry charge against the Abbasid line. Abbasid historians recount how their own troops, emboldened by their recent victories, formed walls of spears, repelled the cavalry, and the charge ended in disaster. The Umayyads' morale was broken, their army routed, and Marwan himself fled the battle. But he was pursued and killed in Egypt [11:19]. Other Umayyads were also hunted down and exterminated. Even their graves were desecrated. One of the surviving members of the dynasty, Abd ar-Rahman, fled to Spain. Just a few years later, he founded the Emirate of Cordoba, a second branch of the Umayyad dynasty that would flourish in Iberia for many centuries. Meanwhile, Abu'l-Abbas al-Saffah becomes the first Abbasid caliph, although it would take the Abbasids more than a decade to consolidate their power. Al-Saffah moves the seat of the caliph from Harran to Kufa, closer to the Abbasid holdings in Persia. In 751, he sends an army to contain the westward expansion of the Chinese Tang Dynasty. The campaign ends in a bloody victory at the Battle of Talas, but also marks the limit of the caliphate's eastward expansion. Many of those who helped overthrow the Umayyads sought an end to hereditary rule and a return to caliphs elected from among the elite. They were disappointed when Al-Saffah was succeeded by his brother Al-Mansur in 754. The Abbasids would become the new ruling dynasty, and Al-Mansur would prove to be one of its greatest caliphs. But his reign gets off to a bad start with the execution of the brilliant and popular general Abu Muslim, who is now seen as a potentially dangerous rival. Al-Mansur faces a rebellion by the Alids, a powerful clan descended from the Prophet's son-in-law Ali. They resent the growing power of the Abbasid dynasty and make their own claim to power.

In 762, Al-Mansur suppressed the last major rebellion of the Alids, ushering in an era of stability, prosperity and peace. That same year, he ordered the construction of a new capital on the banks of the Tigris River. It would officially be called Madinat al-Salam, the City of Peace. This would prove to be his greatest legacy. A city that would become part of the splendor of the medieval world. Baghdad. During the reign of Al-Mansur's grandson Harun al-Rashid. The Caliphate flourished as never before. And Baghdad became its heart. And there are many legends about Caliph Harun al-Rashid the righteous. He is the central figure in One Thousand and One Nights, a masterpiece of Arabic literature. The image of

Ar-Rashid that has come down to us from such sources is the image of a pious, wise and beneficent ruler who prayed 100 times a day and gave 1,000 dirhams every morning for good deeds. According to legend, Ar-Rashid wandered the streets of Baghdad disguised as a beggar to see how his subjects lived. He was a fine horseman, a patron of the arts, an avid chess player. His court was a place where religion and philosophy could be openly debated and discussed. Even with a woman. In the Caliphate, as in the rest of the medieval world, few women held high positions in their own right. But as mothers, wives, and concubines, they could wield enormous influence.

Al-Khayzuran, once a slave from Yemen, rose from concubine to wife of the caliph and wielded considerable power during the reigns of her husband, Caliph Al-Mahdi, and her son, Caliph Ar-Rashid. Known for her intelligence and education, she led discussions on policy and military strategy, received foreign ambassadors, and intervened in matters of justice. She spent much of her vast wealth on public works and charity. Many called her a co-ruler or even a true caliph.

The success of Ar-Rashid's rule was due to the efficient work of the organs of power and administration. To a large extent, it was built on the model of the predecessors of the Sassanids, and Persian and Central Asian representatives of the bureaucracy were widely used in it. The Barmakids family should be especially noted.

The Barmakids were descended from the high priests of the Buddhist temple of Nawbahar near Balkh, modern Afghanistan. As early allies of the Abbasids, they played an important role in the governance of the state, helping to shape the era of Islamic state structure, imbued with elements of Sassanid-Persian culture. They served the Abbasids well. For three generations, but the court games for power could be dangerous and unpredictable.

In 803, Ar-Rashid decided that the Barmakids had become too powerful and the family suddenly and abruptly lost its support, with many of its members imprisoned or executed. Their fall ended Barmakid control of the office of vizier, a newly created position at court as the senior adviser and chief attendant to the caliph. This position was of great importance. Some viziers subsequently wielded such power that they eclipsed the caliph himself.

The fame of Ar-Rashid's court spread throughout the world. Charlemagne, King of the Franks, Emperor of the West and the most powerful ruler in Europe, sent several embassies to Baghdad. In return, Ar-Rashid sent him dazzling gifts of perfume, an ivory chessboard, a marvelous water clock and even an elephant named Abu-l-Abbas, who lived for several years at Charlemagne's court in Aachen.

The cultural life of the Caliphate, and Baghdad in particular, was remarkably multicultural. Even Persian holidays such as Nowruz, the Persian New Year, were celebrated at the Abbasid court. This openness helped the Caliphate flourish as a center of culture, science, art, and medicine. The center of knowledge was the city's famous library, Bayt al-Hikma, the House of Wisdom. Although little is known about its activities here and throughout the Caliphate today, scholars translated classical works from Greek, Middle Persian, and Sanskrit into Arabic. Their efforts helped preserve countless works that would otherwise have been lost, including the works of such greats as Aristotle and Galen. They

also made many original discoveries of their own, knowledge that became sought after in the medieval West. Baghdad scholars held leading positions in the world in many fields. Al-Kindi - known as the philosopher of the Arabs, was a famous polymath who wrote on logic, psychology, astronomy, astrology and many other topics. Al-Khwarizmi's contributions to mathematics led to him being called the father of algebra. From the Latinized version of his name, "algorismus", comes our word algorithm.

The Christian scholar Hunayn ibn Ishaq was nicknamed the Sheikh of Translators for his role in translating ancient texts into Arabic. Material culture also flourished under the Abbasids, and the introduction of glazed pottery in the 9th century opened up new artistic possibilities. Many colourful wares from this period, decorated with animals and Kufic script, have been found in the territory of the former caliphate. The Abbasid Caliphate also benefited from its position on the Silk Road, an ancient network of trade routes connecting Europe and Asia. This route carried valuable imports such as silk, spices, ivory, gemstones and even thoroughbred horses. To support trade, the Abbasids built new roads, as well as inns, almshouses and wells for the convenience of travellers. New knowledge and technology also spread along the Silk Road.

Chinese papermaking techniques first reached the Muslim world under the Umayyads. But it was under the Abbasids that papermaking really flourished, being much cheaper than parchment or papyrus, which were available in abundance. It transformed office work and book publishing practices and helped make medieval Islam one of the most bookish cultures in world history.

Result and Discussion

In the VII th century, the first Arab conquests pushed the border of the Eastern Roman Empire to the Taurus Mountains. From then on, the Caliphate and the Empire were in a state of almost perpetual war, with frequent raids by both sides across the Syrian border. The Arabs besieged Constantinople itself twice, but were never able to take the great city. In 782, Ar-Rashid himself, at the head of the Abbasid troops, reached the shores of the Bosphorus. Until 804, the Eastern Roman Empire paid the Caliphate an annual tribute, when Emperor Nicephorus stopped paying, the Abbasid army crossed the Taurus Mountains and caught his army by surprise. Under Krasos, the Romans suffered a heavy defeat. The emperor himself was lucky to escape. The cycle of raids and counter-raids continued for years, as a result of which Ar-Rashid even moved the capital of the Abbasids to Raqqa, to be closer to the border. But this fixation on the rival in the West led to the Caliph not noticing the problems in the East.

In 809, news arrived of a rebellion in Khorasan. It was during a campaign to the east to counter this rebellion that Caliph Harun Ar-Rashid fell ill and died. His 22-year reign would be considered the golden age of the Abbasid Caliphate. A time of prosperity, stability, intellectual and cultural achievement. But Ar-Rashid's own attempts to ensure a peaceful transition to the throne led to disastrous consequences and plunged the Caliphate into civil war once again.

The Abbasid Caliphate flourished during the reign of Caliph Harun Ar-Rashid. And to ensure its further development, he arranged the order of succession in a way that he believed would ensure stability and peace. His son Muhammad was to be his successor. However, as had been the custom since the time of the Umayyads, he designated another son, Abdullah, as Muhammad's successor. This was the recipe for disaster in Baghdad in 809. Muhammad succeeded his father as caliph, taking the title Al-Amin, the Faithful. And his half-brother Abdullah became the ruler of Khurasan with the title Al-Ma'mun, the Trusted. Soon, warring factions formed at both courts. In Baghdad, Al-Amin's advisers urged him to remove his brother from the succession. And within a year of his reign, he broke his father's agreement. Al-Ma'mun was furious. Brotherly mistrust erupted into civil war. In 812, Al-Ma'mun's Khurasan forces won a great victory over vastly superior forces at Rayy and moved to besiege Baghdad. After a bloody siege that lasted a whole year, the city fell. Caliph Al-Amin was captured while attempting to escape and executed.

Al-Ma'mun initially ruled the caliphate from his former seat in Merv. There, seeking to expand his support after a civil war, he formed a new alliance with the Alids. This powerful family descended from Ali, the fourth caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. They would later become leaders of the Shi'ite branch of Islam, which believes that true spiritual authority lies with Ali's descendants. Instead of the traditional Abbasid black, Al-Ma'mun's court wore green. Associated with the Alids.

Al-Ma'mun even married two of his daughters into an Alid family and made the Alid imam Ali ar-Rida his heir. However, this policy provoked hostility in Iraq and led to a major rebellion in Baghdad. Six years later, the caliph moved the capital there to restore order and abandoned the alliance with the Alids. Al-Ma'mun is also remembered for his attempts to impose a new religious doctrine on the caliphate. At first, he invited eminent scholars to Baghdad to discuss theological issues such as the deeds of the companions of the prophet, the hadith, and the nature of the Quran. However, his claim that the Quran was at some point created by God and not eternal to him met with fierce resistance. Eighteen years of religious persecution followed, a period known as the Mihna, or inquisition, during which dissenting scholars were imprisoned and even executed.

In 833, Al-Ma'mun was succeeded by his brother, who took the title Al-Mu'tasim. He proved far less interested in theological debates than in military clashes. The Abbasid Caliphate's armies, renowned in battle, were recruited from both Arab and non-Arab subjects.

The Khorasani warriors of the frontier province of Khorasan were the soldiers who brought the Abbasids to power during the Third Fitna, a civil war in the Muslim world. Drawing on Persian and steppe military traditions, they included both heavy infantry and heavily armed cavalry similar to European knights. The descendants of the Khorasan who settled in the area around Baghdad were known as the Abna al-Khurasan. Renowned as elite and versatile infantrymen, the sons of the Khurasan people formed the loyal core of the Caliph's army. Other notable units included the Daylamites, skilled marksmen from the

highlands of northern Persia. African troops, including slaves and Muslim converts from Ethiopia, fought as infantry, armed with shield, sword, and spear.

The great Caliph Harun al-Rashid is known to have had an elite personal guard of 40 African warriors. The Abbasid forces were particularly skilled in siege warfare, and were adept at using catapults, mangonels, and battering rams. They even had special troops armed with naphtha or petroleum-based fire weapons. No relevant illustrations survive, but they are thought to have been similar to this slightly later Byzantine illustration.

However, the 9th century saw such a radical change that some historians have called it a military revolution. During the civil war between the sons of Ar-Rashid, Al-Mu'tasim began to expand his army by purchasing Turkic slaves. His favorite supplier was the Samanid family, rulers of Transoxania. These slave soldiers were kidnapped from their villages as boys or bought in slave markets in the squalor, and then put through intensive military training. Along with an Islamic education, they became formidable cavalymen and excellent horse archers. Contemporary Al-Jahiz wrote admiringly of them: The Turks are as good with a spear as anyone else, and if 1,000 of their horsemen are under heavy attack, they will shoot all their arrows in one with an alpe they will strike down 1,000 enemy horsemen. No army could stand such a test. Historians debate the exact timing, but at some point in the ninth century, these Turkic slave soldiers, known as mamluks, emerged as an elite element of the Abbasid army who were personally loyal to the caliph and could be used to intimidate his political rivals. The Turkic soldiers, despite their initial alien status and ignorance of the Arabic language and customs, came to wield enormous influence at the caliph's court. This caused discontent among the old nobility, many of whom also stopped receiving the traditional reward for military service, the *divan*. The discontent even prompted some soldiers to riot in the streets of Baghdad. To ease tensions, Al-Mu'tasim built a new city for the Turkic military elite. The city of Samarra. It was here that he stationed the Turkic troops and rewarded their commanders with land. And it was here that, in 848, work began on the construction of the world's largest mosque and its famous spiral minaret.

Al-Mu'tasim's reliance on slave soldiers to consolidate his power destroyed centuries of military tradition and sowed the seeds of future upheavals. Two years later, the caliph led his new and formidable army against the old enemy of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. The campaign ended in great victory, the capture and plunder of Amorium.

The Caliph, crowned with glory, took the city of Amorium in battle.

You have filled us with hope and goodness these days, wrote the Arab poet Abu Tammam.

But even such victories could not ease the tensions between the Turkic commanders and the Abbasid nobility. Some nobles even plotted to overthrow Al-Mu'tasim and expel the Turks. But their plot was discovered and they were executed. Al-Mu'tasim was succeeded by his eldest son Al-Wasiq. However, after his unexpected death, his second son Al-Mutawakkil ascended the throne, supported by the Turkic commanders. They hoped to get an obedient puppet, but instead Al-Mutawakkil decided that the time had come to restore the authority of the caliph. On his orders, several Turkic leaders were killed, and he

tried to use Arab and Armenian troops to counter their influence. But the Turks struck back. In 860, the caliph was killed by his own bodyguards. The ensuing chaos and civil war became known as the "Anarchy of Samarra."

Four caliphs came to power in succession. All were puppets of the Turkic military elite. Each of them, in turn, was violently overthrown. Order was restored only with the accession to power of Caliph Al-Mu'tamid in 870. But this anarchy caused irreparable damage to the authority of the caliph.

Even before the Abbasids came to power, the vast caliphate had struggled to maintain control over its many regions. Abbasid authority to the west of Egypt had long been largely nominal, but now there were numerous major revolts, with local rulers and warlords staking claims to power. Egypt, fertile and prosperous, was among the first to be lost, to a rebellious Turkic general who founded his own Tulunid dynasty. In southern Iraq, a major revolt of East African slave farmers known as the Zinji broke out. The 14-year rebellion devastated the region, severely disrupting Abbasid tax revenues and Baghdad's food supply. In Afghanistan, a coppersmith named Ya'qub al-Saffar made a stunning rise to power, founding his own Saffarid dynasty and conquering much of eastern Persia. His advance was only halted at the Battle of Dayr al-Akul in 876. During such turbulent times, the Abbasid Caliphs had difficulty maintaining their hold on power. But there were successes. Caliph Al-Mu'tadid (892-902) orchestrated a brief rise of the Abbasids through military campaigns and shrewd diplomacy, including marrying the daughter of the Tulunid ruler of Egypt. This was the famous Qatr al-Nada. Her name means dewdrop. One scholar has called her one of the most intelligent and regal women who ever lived. When Al-Mu'tadid said to his bride You have succeeded in marrying the Caliph. What else can you thank God for? She replied You have succeeded. That makes my father your subject. What else can you thank God for?

Her bold response was a testament to her character, as well as to the fragile new balance of power between the Abbasid caliphs and some of their more powerful subjects.

During the reign of Al-Mu'tadid's son Al-Muktafi (902-908), Tulunid Egypt was completely annexed to the Abbasid Caliphate. However, in other regions, things were not going well. The Abbasid power collapsed in Arabia, where one of the Shiite groups, the Carmatians, even began to attack pilgrims heading to the holy Mecca. In 930, they stole the black stone of the Holy of Holies from the Kaaba, which was a terrible blow to the prestige of the Abbasids. In Central Asia, the Persian Samanids created their own empire and declared independence. This was the heyday of the so-called Iranian intermezzo. When the original Persian dynasties ruled in Persia again. It was increasingly said that the Abbasid Caliph reigned, but did not rule. He became a symbol of anarchy, often under the control of his vizier.

By the 930s, the caliph had lost control of both the civil administration and command of the army, which was transferred to a new official, Amir al-Umar, the chief military commander.

The final collapse came in 945. The Buyids were Shiite warlords from the Daylem mountains of northwestern Persia. Their first success was the conquest of Fars, after which they seized control of Persia and Iraq, and their triumphal entry into Baghdad was a profound humiliation for the Sunni Abbasids. However, they retained the title of caliph, being little more than the Buyids' lackeys and observers of these turbulent times.

Two decades later, another Shiite dynasty, the Fatimids, swept up the coast of North Africa, conquered Egypt, and established Cairo as the capital of their caliphate. Some historians call this period the Shiite Age, when Shiite dynasties ruled two caliphates and dominated much of the Muslim world. But this did not last long.

A formidable new Sunni power, the Seljuks, was about to break out of Central Asia. The Seljuks were nomadic pastoralists, cattle breeders, natives of the Central Asian steppes. They were brutal warriors who had become champions of Sunni Islam in the late 10th century. Perhaps driven by climate change, they moved south into Khorasan. The first empire to fall was the Ghaznavid successors of the Samanids, the Seljuks were the Unstoppables. They advanced west across the Iranian plateau, took Baghdad, overthrew the Buyids, routed the Byzantine army at Mainzikert, and created the Seljuk Empire. Their triumph was cut short by the invasion of the European Crusaders, who took Jerusalem in 1099 and established a series of Crusader states. A legendary Shiite sect dealt the Seljuks a mortal blow in 1092. The Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk was assassinated by the Assassins, a band of assassins disguised as Sufi mystics. The Assassins, or Hashashins as they are known in Arabic, were a new Ismaili military order that had formed in the mountains of northwestern Persia. Faced with powerful enemies but lacking an army of their own, they resorted to subterfuge and murder to achieve their goals.

There are many fanciful stories about the Assassins. But the order was real. It was feared and responsible for dozens of political assassinations. For the next two centuries, under the Seljuks, the Abbasid caliphs remained the spiritual leaders and authorities. But in the 12th century, the empire of the great Seljuks began to disintegrate. It is a familiar story of disputed successions and local rulers claiming power. Sensing weakness in 1136, the Abbasid caliph Al-Muktafi raised his own army to reassert Abbasid independence for the first time in almost two centuries. He took control of Baghdad, and in 1157 he defended it against a Seljuk siege. After generations of foreign subjugation, the Abbasids were once again an independent power. But that was soon to fall. In the 13th century, a new force from the East swept across the Islamic world, scattering armies and destroying every city that could not be conquered. These were the Mongols

Conclusion

The first to fall was the Khwarezmshah Empire, the successor to the Seljuks, routed by the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan. By 1256, his grandson Hulagu decided to resume the offensive. But first he turned his attention to the Assassins, who were rumored to be plotting his assassination. The order was defeated and destroyed. Two years later, Hulagu marched against the Abbasid Caliphate.

As his forces approached Baghdad, he sent a stern warning to Caliph Al-Musta'sim (1242-1258), demanding the city's surrender. Despite the Mongols' terrifying record of destroying any recalcitrant city, Al-Musta'sim decided that the walls of Baghdad were capable of repelling any steppe nomads. He was wrong. After a disastrous raid had wiped out half the Baghdad garrison, the city surrendered, but Hulagu was in no mood for mercy. A contemporary chronicler describes the horrors that followed. The inhabitants of Baghdad were put to the sword and for forty days were killed, robbed and enslaved. They tortured people for valuables. They killed men, women and children. Much of the city, including the Caliph's mosque, was burned and the city was reduced to ruins. The dead lay in mounds in the streets and markets. The death toll is unknown, but it runs into many thousands. Only the Christians are said to have been saved by the intervention of Hulagu's Christian wife. The libraries of Baghdad were destroyed. Books and manuscripts representing centuries of Muslim scholarship were thrown into the Tigris River, which was said to have been blackened by the ink. Al-Musta'sim was forced to witness this terrible destruction. Then, according to some, he was rolled up in a carpet and thrown under the hooves of horses, as the Mongols were afraid of spilling royal blood. The last Caliph of Baghdad was dead. Never again would the Abbasids wield significant political power.

Al-Musta'sim was not the last Abbasid Caliph. His line would continue in the Mamluk Sultanate that now rules Egypt. But his successors in Cairo were merely ceremonial figures, religious leaders with little power. The last Caliph, Al-Mutawakkil, surrendered to the Ottoman Empire in 1517 and was taken prisoner to Constantinople. Such was the humiliating fate of a dynasty that had once ruled one of the greatest empires in history. Dominant in the Middle East, defeating the Byzantines in the West and the Chinese in the East. Under its leadership, there was a great flowering of science, culture, technology and trade. And an era commonly called the Islamic Golden Age began. Over the following centuries, Islamic leaders asserted their legitimacy by claiming descent from this great Abbasid dynasty

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