

HISTORY OF ABBASID PERIOD IN ARAB

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Abstract

The Abbasid Caliphate was the third caliphate to succeed the Islamic prophet Muhammad. It was founded by a dynasty descended from Muhammad's uncle, Abbas ibn Abdul-Muttalib (566–653 CE), from whom the dynasty takes its name. They ruled as caliphs for most of the caliphate from their capital in Baghdad in modern-day Iraq, after having overthrown the Umayyad Caliphate in the Abbasid Revolution of 750 CE (132 AH). The Abbasid Caliphate first centered its government in Kufa, modern-day Iraq, but in 762 the caliph Al-Mansur founded the city of Baghdad, near the ancient Babylonian capital city of Babylon. Baghdad became the center of science, culture and invention in what became known as the Golden Age of Islam. This, in addition to housing several key academic institutions, including the House of Wisdom, as well as a multiethnic and multi-religious environment, garnered it a worldwide reputation as the "Center of Learning".

Introduction

The Abbasid period was marked by dependence on Persian bureaucrats (such as the Barmakid family) for governing the territories as well as an increasing inclusion of non-Arab Muslims in the ummah (Muslim community). Persian customs were broadly adopted by the ruling elite, and they began patronage of artists and scholars.^[2] Despite this initial cooperation, the Abbasids of the late 8th century had alienated both non-Arab mawali (clients)^[3] and Persian bureaucrats.^[4] They were forced to cede authority over al-Andalus (current Spain and Portugal) to the Umayyads in 756, Morocco to the Idrisids in 788, Ifriqiya and Sicily to the Aghlabids in 800, Khorasan and Transoxiana to the Samanids and Persia to the Saffarids in the 870s, and Egypt to the Isma'ili-Shia caliphate of the Fatimids in 969.

The political power of the caliphs was limited with the rise of the Iranian Buyids and the Seljuq Turks, who captured Baghdad in 945 and 1055, respectively. Although Abbasid leadership over the vast Islamic empire was gradually reduced to a ceremonial religious function in much of the Caliphate, the dynasty retained control of its Mesopotamian domain during the rule of Caliph Al-Muqtafi and extended into Iran during the reign of Caliph Al-Nasir.^[5] The Abbasids age of cultural revival and fruition ended in 1258 with the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols under Hulagu Khan and the execution of Al-Musta'sim. The Abbasid line of rulers, and Muslim culture in general, re-centred themselves in the Mamluk capital of Cairo in 1261. Though lacking in political power (with the brief exception of Caliph Al-Musta'in of Cairo), the dynasty continued to claim religious authority until a few years after the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517,^[6] with the last Abbasid caliph being Al-Mutawakkil III.^[7]

Abbasid Revolution (750–751)



The Abbasid caliphs were Arabs descended from Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib, one of the youngest uncles of Muhammad and of the same Banu Hashim clan. The Abbasids claimed to be the true successors of Muhammad in replacing the Umayyad descendants of Banu Umayya by virtue of their closer bloodline to Muhammad.

The Abbasids also distinguished themselves from the Umayyads by attacking their moral character and administration in general. According to Ira Lapidus, "The Abbasid revolt was supported largely by Arabs, mainly the aggrieved settlers of Merv with the addition of the Yemeni faction and their Mawali".^[8] The Abbasids also appealed to non-Arab Muslims, known as *mawali*, who remained outside the kinship-based society of the Arabs and were perceived as a lower class within the Umayyad empire. Muhammad ibn 'Ali, a great-grandson of Abbas, began to campaign in Persia for the return of power to the family of Muhammad, the Hashemites, during the reign of Umar II.

During the reign of Marwan II, this opposition culminated in the rebellion of Ibrahim al-Imam [ca], the fourth in descent from Abbas. Supported by the province of Khorasan (Eastern Persia), even though the governor opposed them, and the Shia Arabs,^{[1][9]} he achieved considerable success, but was captured in the year 747 and died, possibly assassinated, in prison.

On 9 June 747 (15 Ramadan AH 129), Abu Muslim, rising from Khorasan, successfully initiated an open revolt against Umayyad rule, which was carried out under the sign of the Black Standard. Close to 10,000 soldiers were under Abu Muslim's command when the hostilities officially began in Merv.^[10] General Qahtaba followed the fleeing governor Nasr ibn Sayyar west defeating the Umayyads at the Battle of Gorgan, the Battle of Nahāvand and finally in the Battle of Karbala, all in the year 748.^[9]

The quarrel was taken up by Ibrahim's brother Abdallah, known by the name of Abu al-'Abbas as-Saffah, who defeated the Umayyads in 750 in the battle near the Great Zab and was subsequently proclaimed caliph.^[11] After this loss, Marwan fled to Egypt, where he was subsequently killed. The remainder of his family, barring one male, were also eliminated.^[9]

Immediately after their victory, As-Saffah sent his forces to Central Asia, where his forces fought against Tang expansion during the Battle of Talas. The noble Iranian family Barmakids, who were instrumental in building Baghdad, introduced the world's first recorded paper mill in the city, thus beginning a new era of intellectual rebirth in the Abbasid domain. As-Saffah focused on putting down numerous rebellions in Syria and Mesopotamia. The Byzantines conducted raids during these early distractions.^[9]

Abbasid Golden Age (775–861)

The Abbasid leadership had to work hard in the last half of the 8th century (750–800) under several competent caliphs and their viziers to usher in the administrative changes needed to keep order of the political challenges created by the far-flung nature of the empire, and the limited communication across it.^[13] It was also during this early period of the dynasty, in particular during the governance of Al-Mansur, Harun al-Rashid, and al-Ma'mun, that its reputation and power were created.

Al-Mahdi restarted the fighting with the Byzantines, and his sons continued the conflict until Empress Irene pushed for peace.^[9] After several years of peace, Nikephoros I broke the treaty, then fended off multiple incursions during the first decade of the 9th century. These attacks pushed into the Taurus Mountains, culminating with a victory at the Battle of Krasos and the massive invasion of 806, led by Rashid himself.^[9]

Rashid's navy also proved successful, taking Cyprus. Rashid decided to focus on the rebellion of Rafi ibn al-Layth in Khorasan and died while there.^[9] Military operations by the caliphate were minimal while the Byzantine Empire was fighting Abbasid rule in Syria and Anatolia, with focus shifting primarily to internal matters; Abbasid governors exerted greater autonomy and, using this increasing power, began to make their positions hereditary.^[12]

At the same time, the Abbasids faced challenges closer to home. Harun al-Rashid turned on and killed most of the Barmakids, a Persian family that had grown significantly in administrative power.^[14] During the same period, several factions began either to leave the empire for other lands or to take control of distant parts of the empire. Still, the reigns of al-Rashid and his sons were considered to be the apex of the Abbasids.^[15]

After Rashid's death, the empire was split by a civil war between the caliph al-Amin and his brother al-Ma'mun, who had the support of Khorasan. This war ended with a two-year siege of Baghdad and the eventual death of Al-Amin in 813.^[9] Al-Ma'mun ruled for 20 years of relative calm interspersed with a rebellion in Azerbaijan by the Khurramites, which was supported by the Byzantines. Al-Ma'mun was also responsible for the creation of an autonomous Khorasan, and the continued repulsing of Byzantine forays.^[9]

Al-Mu'tasim gained power in 833 and his rule marked the end of the strong caliphs. He strengthened his personal army with Turkish mercenaries and promptly restarted the war with the Byzantines. Though his attempt to seize Constantinople failed when his fleet was destroyed by a storm,^[9] his military excursions were generally successful, culminating with a resounding victory in the Sack of Amorium. The Byzantines responded by sacking Damietta in Egypt, and Al-Mutawakkil responded by sending his troops into Anatolia again, sacking and marauding until they were eventually annihilated in 863.^[9]

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