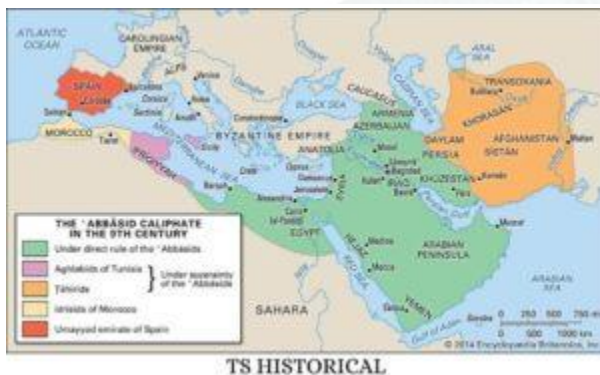




## The Abbasid caliphate: Period (750–1258)

### The Abbasid caliphate



Abbasid caliphate in the 9th century The Abbasid caliphate in the 9th century.

The [Abbasid caliphate](#) was the second of the Muslim empire's two great dynasties. In 750 CE, it removed the [Umayyad caliphate](#) and established the Abbasid caliphate, which ruled until 1258, when it was destroyed by the [Mongol](#) invasion.

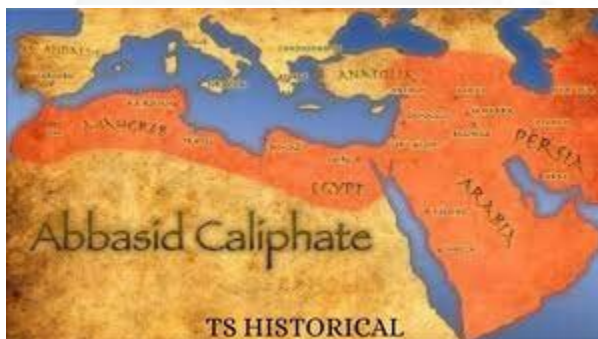
The name is derived from al-Abbs (died c. 653) of the Hashemite clan of the Quraysh tribe in Mecca, the **Prophet Muhammad's** uncle. From around 718, members of his family worked to wrest control of the empire from the Umayyads and gained widespread support, particularly among Shii Arabs and Persians in Khorsn, through effective propaganda. Under the leadership of Ab Muslim, an open uprising in 747 resulted in the defeat of **Marwan II**, the last Umayyad caliph, at the **Battle of the Great Zab River** (750) in Mesopotamia and the proclamation of Ab al-Abbs al-Saff, the first Abbasid caliph.



The caliphate entered a new era under the Abbasids. Instead of focusing on the West, as the Umayyads had done, the caliphate now turned eastward, including North Africa, the Mediterranean, and southern Europe. The capital was relocated to Baghdad, and the events in Persia and Transoxania were constantly monitored.

The caliphate was not coterminous with Islam for the first time. Local dynasties claimed caliphal status in [Egypt](#), **North Africa**, **Spain**, and other places. With the rise of the Abbasids, the empire's power base expanded internationally, emphasizing participation in the community of believers over Arab identity. Because the Abbasids received so much support from Persian converts, it was only natural for them to adopt much of the Persian (Sasanian) governing tradition. The Abbasids also acknowledged openly the embryonic Islamic law and professed to base their reign on the faith of Islam, thanks to the support of pious Muslims.

## Abbasid Caliphate Collapse



On the 9th of August, 833 CE, **Al-Ma'mun** died. Usually, with someone like him, a powerful and stable ruler, you'd expect his son to succeed him. His son was indeed a great military commander. He had the competency but he didn't succeed Al-Mamun. Instead, Al-Mamun was succeeded by his brother, who came to be known as Al-Mu'tasim. There was one reason behind this, the Turkic Mercenaries. During Al-Mamun's reign, Al-Mu'tasim had been in control of a private army of Turkic nomads from the Eurasian Steppes.



Al-Mamun had used them in various military campaigns. One of the biggest advantages that the mercenaries had was that they were loyal to gold so, they could tip the balance of power in the empire in the Caliph's favor.

The caliph didn't have to rely on his vassals anymore. It was because of this force that **Al-Mu'tasim** took control of the empire after his brother's death. This probably looked like a good idea at the time. A similar thing has been tried throughout history and it has worked exactly ZERO times because those mercenaries usually come to the realization that the emperor needs the mercenaries MORE than the mercenaries need the emperor!

The Turks started taking over the establishment. This broke up into many conflicts with the older Abbasid Bureaucracy and Al-Mu'tasim even founded a new city, Samarra, and took his Turkic establishment there. Turkic influence kept growing even after Al-Mu'tasim's death in 842CE. Al-Mutawakkil tried to get rid of them. He even had two of the most powerful Turkic generals arrested but the Turks, along with his son who was angry about not being the heir apparent, plotted his assassination and eventually killed him in 861 CE.

This was effectively the end of Abbasid power. From then on, all the Abbasid caliphs were puppets of one Turkic General or the other. This period is known as the Anarchy at Samarra. Eventually, Al-Mutawakkil's grandson did move the capital back to Baghdad but it didn't change much. Cancer that Al-Mu'tasim had exposed the caliphate to had completely taken over all aspects of the empire. A position of Amir ul Umara or Commander-in-Chief was established for the Turks.

The Abbasids continued to lose territory. They lost all of Arabia which broke up into various tribal entities. They lost Egypt which was taken by the Tulunids, their former vassals. Their clients Taharid in Persia were overthrown by the Saffarids who even threatened Baghdad itself. Syria broke up into an independent entity early on but was later cannibalized by the Egyptian Tulunids. The Abbasid empire had shrunk to a quarter of its size within 50 years.

There was a brief period of recovery from 892 CE till around 904 CE when managed to bring quite a bit of former Abbasid land back into their control, however, the empire was



internally plagued by the same issues. Discontent among the local dynasties was growing. During the next forty years, the Amir ul Umara kept installing and deposing caliphs, Abbasids kept losing and gaining territory, and instability was at its worst.

The Caliphate even alternated twice between the same two caliphs for a while. Former Abbasid caliphs that paid lip service to the Abbasids kept growing in control. Eventually, in 945 CE, a dynasty from Daylam defeat the Abbasid army under the command of Tuzun, the Amir ul Umara, and marched on Baghdad. For the first time in around three hundred years, the caliph was a vassal of another ruler. The Buyids replaced the Turkic as the puppet masters.

They became the protectors or Sultan of the Caliphate. The Caliph usually kept control over the capital city of Baghdad. This was usually done with the help of a certain group of ruffians called the Ayyarun. These were a class of warriors that served as local gangs, taking advantage of the increased instability due to the Shia-Sunni tensions.

These Shia-Sunni tensions had been fueled by the rise of the Fatimids in Egypt and North Africa. By 970 CE, they had taken over Egypt, making Cairo their capital. A lot of people in the Abbasid realm had sympathies for the Shias. Also, the Buyids, the “protectors” of the caliph were Shia themselves. At this point, the Shias weren’t exactly an entirely different sect as it is now, it was mostly just a political division.

The faith systems themselves weren’t very different. It would’ve been nothing out of the usual except the Fatimids also called themselves Caliphs, the rightful ones since Shias believe the Caliphate should’ve stayed in Ali’s descendants and the Fatimids claimed descent from Ali and his wife Fatima, Muhammad’s daughter, from whom they got their name.

The Shia caliphate was doing great at a time the Sunni one was in decline so, naturally, a lot of people were starting to align their sympathies with the Shia Caliph. So, the Abbasid caliph, Al-Qadir published The Baghdad Manifesto. It was basically like a medieval Birther movement.

The Caliph got many “genealogists” and scholars to “prove” that the Fatimids were indeed not Fatima’s descendants but rather, in a shocking twist, were descendants of a



Jew, which were considered an enemy of Islam itself. Meanwhile, the Fatimids were like, "I'm sorry, I can't hear you over the sound of my armies conquering Syria and Palestine".

Meanwhile, in the year 1040 CE, an [Oghuz Turkic](#) clan from the Eurasian Steppes had just defeated the Ghaznavids in the Battle of Dandanaqan, clearing their way to all of Persia. 1055CE, Tughril Bey captured Baghdad from the Buyids, some say on the request of the Abbasid Caliph. Tughril Bey's brother, Chagrin Bey married his daughter, Khatun Khadija, to the caliph. This was done in the hopes that the Caliphate and the Sultanate would merge through their son. This didn't work out, another Sultan later tried the same with his daughter but that didn't really work either.

Things were pretty good over the next forty years, the caliph ran the religion and the Seljuqs ran the empire. It was a good partnership, except, the Seljuqs had started kicking the Byzantine gates. In 1071 CE, Alp Arslan defeated the Byzantines with basically no effort at the Battle of Manzikert. The Byzantines couldn't resist the Turks anymore. Turkic tribes started settling in the previously Byzantine region of Anatolia.

[Byzantine Emperor](#) Alexios called on the Catholic church to help curb the Muslim expansion and in 1095 CE, Pope Urban in the Council of Clermont declared a Crusade. Deus Vult! God wills it. As you might expect the Muslim pope, the Caliph suddenly had a relevance boost when he helped rally the Sunnis to the cause of defending the holy land, well, more Anatolia than the Holy Land.

In 1099CE, Jerusalem fell to the Crusaders. Over the next fifty years, the relationship between the **Seljuqs** and the Abbasids fell apart because the Sultans thought the Abbasids were interfering too much in matters of the state. The empire itself wasn't stable. Many princes and other Turkic dynasties around the empire were contending for the throne. It was time for the Abbasids to take advantage of this.

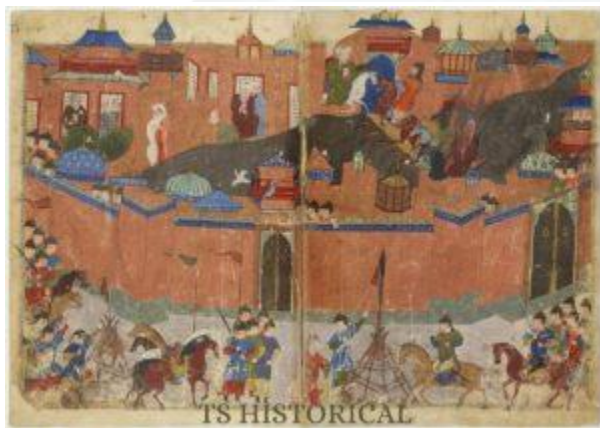
In 1125 CE, Al-Mustarshid was powerful enough to build an army and rebel, however, his rebellion didn't go far. They met the Seljuqs right outside Baghdad and were defeated. Al-Mustarshid was put under house arrest. His son, similarly, was hostile to the Seljuqs, so much so that they deposed him and he fled to Isfahan and was killed by the Assassins on the way there.





Finally, in 1157, al-Muqtafi once again declared independence. This time, he was able to fight back and defend his realm, freeing it from the Seljuqs. After 200 years of the occupancy of foreign powers, the Abbasids were independent. Over the next fifty years, the Abbasid Caliphate managed to secure most of Iraq.

However, the worst threat the caliphate had ever faced was coming. A force unlike any the world had ever seen, took over most of Eurasia. By 1227 CE, the year of [Genghis Khan](#) or Chinggis Khan's death, the [Mongols](#) were standing at the gates of Persia. They had taken over most of [China](#), the Eurasian Steppes, Khorasan, and even Persia. They had defeated the once mighty Khwarezmid Empire that had filled the vacuum left behind by the Seljuqs.



In 1258 CE, the grandson of Genghis Khan, **Hulagu Khan** laid siege to Baghdad, the heartland of the Islamic Golden Age. Hulagu Khan had demanded submission from the Caliph, which the caliph ill-advisedly refused. Hulagu sought to make an example out of the Caliph for this insolence. According to some sources, Al-Musta'sim didn't think it was an invasion but rather just another raiding party, many of which the Caliphate had pushed back. By January 29th, the siege of Baghdad began.

The caliph, reportedly, neglected to put a proper force together or reinforce his city's defenses. According to some sources, Hulagu Khan asked for all of the city's elite, the aristocracy, the scholars and engineers, and the bureaucracy, of them to come outside



the city for negotiations. As around 3000 of the city's elites went for negotiations, they were all murdered. On February 10th, the city surrendered.

The Mongols went on to massacre the city and its population. Some 200,000 to 800,000 or even a million people were killed. The stench of the dead bodies was so bad that Hulagu didn't stay in the city for long. Survivors said that the waters of the Tigris ran black with ink from the enormous quantities of books flung into the river and red from the blood of the scientists and philosophers killed.

The city was so thoroughly destroyed that even today, no signs of the core city, the circular city of peace, have been found. The caliph was killed, the Mongols feared spilling the blood of royalty so, he was rolled around in a carpet and trampled by horses. The end of the Abbasids in Baghdad. However, one of the Abbasid princes was given refuge by the Egyptians Mamluks. He and his descendants held the title of the Caliph, only in name, for the three hundred years.

In 1517 CE, the Ottoman Sultan, Selim invaded Egypt and took the title of Caliph for himself. Almost a millenia after Muhammad's death, the title of the Caliph went to someone outside Muhammad's tribe, the Quraysh.