

CHAPTER 7

HISTORY OF ISLAM

The Abbasid Dynasty

Abbasid, in Arabic, *Al-Abbasiyun* is the dynastic name generally given to the Caliphate of Baghdad, the second among the three great Dynasties of the Muslim empire that come about immediately after the collapse of Umayyad Dynasty. The Abbasid Empire was built by Abul Abbas, one of the descendants of the prophet's uncle, Abbas Ibn Abdul-Muttalib. It ruled the Islamic Empire from 750 to 1258 CE. This period saw the golden age of Islamic culture, making it one of the longest and most influential Islamic dynasties ever witnessed. It became the largest empire in the world having contacts with distant neighbours including the Chinese and Indians in the East, and the Byzantines in the West. This allowed the empire to adopt and synthesize ideas from the cultures of these neighbours.

Factors that led to the rise of Abbasid Dynasty

The following are the factors that led to the rise of Abbasid Dynasty:

1. The decline of Umayyad dynasty: Umayyad Empire become increasingly unpopular due to the weakness and immorality of their leaders leading to its final decline.
2. The Abbasids revolted against the Umayyads because they considered themselves to have a direct family tie to the Prophet (p.b.u.h). Since they were descendants of the Messenger of Allah, they considered themselves as the rightful heir to the Prophet.
3. Dissatisfaction of the other Muslims with the hereditary system of the Umayyad's rule.
4. Their victory over the Ummayyad at the battle of Zab: The Abbasid Dynasty seized power from the Umayyads in 750 CE after their conquest at the Battle of Zab, near the Tigris River. The battle was led by a Persian General, Abu Muslim. Abu Muslim's army, together with the one of Al-Saffah

confronted the Umayyad army, led by Caliph Marwan II. The Umayyads lost the battle and Caliph Marwan II was killed.

5. Capture of Damascus by Abul-Abbas Al-Saffah: Damascus, the capital of the Umayyad submitted to the rule of the Abbasid Dynasty. This enabled the Abbasids to crush Bukhara, Yamama, Oman, Sind and Khurasan and bring them under their rule.
6. The shift of the Abbasid capital from Damascus to Baghdad: After seizing power, the Abbasids shifted their capital from Damascus to Baghdad. This city was founded in 762 CE by the second Abbasid caliph, Al- Mansur (754 – 775 CE) and became the largest city in the world.

Decline of the Abbasids

The following were administrative, political, or economic reasons that led to the downfall of Abbasid Dynasty:

- a) Vast Islamic empire: Expansion of the Islamic Empire troubled efforts to move armies and control local administrators in far territories. Most subjects retained local loyalty other than the central government. This led to rebellion and calls for cessation by some of the Provinces.
- b) Decentralization: The provincial governors and their military defied the authority of the centre administration and declared their autonomy. As time passed by, they became permanently independent.
- c) Lack of revenue to run the massive empire: When the caliph saw that the taxes collected were less, he authorized the governors and military commanders to take responsibility of tax collection. This made the governors powerful, independent-minded and became disloyal.
- d) The Shias were dissatisfied because of the non-Arabs Mawalis were given more favours such as making them better or equal to Shias. The Shias felt betrayed by the Abbasid and withdrew their support.
- e) The negligence of the military department: The empire lacked revenues to sustain its armies which were spread all over throughout the vast empire. This resulted to low morale and making the subjects to lose control.

- f) Greed and corruption among the members: The Abbasid became one of the most prosperous empires in the world at that period. The Caliphs awarded positions to their favourites resulting to discontentment among the subjects.
- g) Most of the later caliphs led luxurious life and cared little for the state and conditions of their subjects. Most of the leaders devoted their valuable time to wine, women and music which undermined the strict moral code of Islam. These un-Islamic practices angered the general Muslim population calling for the downfall of the dynasty.
- h) Natural catastrophes: The flood in Mesopotamia rendered the people homeless and hopeless. Besides this, famine and epidemic diseases destroyed the population in many provinces. This weakened the economy and also the defence of the state.
- i) Turkish Armies: The armies like the Mamluks who were vested with the responsibility of defending the Caliphate became more strong and powerful. They began to realize that they had the capacity to create their own states, thus turning against Baghdad.
- j) The Seljuk Turk: The gradual increase of the Seljuk Turks made them take over Baghdad with their leader appointing himself the Sultan. They later exerted military pressure on Egypt and Byzantine. When the Byzantine were defeated, they called for assistance from Christians, resulting to the Crusade wars.
- k) Rise of Mongols who conquered most of the regions controlled by the Abbasid: These were pastoralists who emerged from the Gobi Desert in the 13th Century. With the leadership of Genghis Khan, they destroyed Baghdad, Damascus and a number of Persian cities. Their attacks marked the death of the Abbasid dynasty that had lasted for 500 years and put to the sudden end of the Islamic golden age, once cherished by the Muslim Ummah.

Achievement of Abbasid Dynasty

Meaning of the concept “the golden age of Islamic civilization”

The Golden Age was a period of astonishing achievements of Muslim scholars, scientists, craftsmen, and traders during the two hundred years or so. During this period, from 750 to 950, the territory of the Muslim Empire encompassed present-day Iran, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, North Africa, Spain, and parts of Turkey and drew to Baghdad peoples of all those lands in an unparalleled cross-fertilization of once isolated intellectual traditions.

Even though the Abbasid dynasty was faced with several challenges that finally led to its decline, a lot of achievements were witnessed that made the period of their rule to be referred to as **‘the Golden Age of Islamic civilization.’** These numerous achievements include the following:

Agricultural achievements of Abbasid Dynasty

The following are the agricultural achievements made by Abbasid Dynasty:

- a) They Improved on the methods of irrigation which resulted to more land to be cultivated. They adopted the following:
 - The Abbasids dealt with the problem of the scarcity of water by controlling the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, thus improving the irrigation system by digging canals called *Nahr-Isa*.
 - They also they also perfected the waterwheel and constructed underground water channels called qanats; they were built in order to tap underground water that was used for irrigation purposes.
 - They also developed a sophisticated system of irrigation using machines such as norias, watermills, water raising machines, dams and reservoirs, thus they managed to greatly expand the exploitable land area.
- b) The Abbasids were able to develop horticulture, within 100years Baghdad and its surroundings presented the appearance of a veritable garden, staple crops of Iraq were produced such as rice, wheat, dates, barley and cotton.

- c) Adoption of scientific approach to farming enabled them to improve farming techniques, thus farming manuals were produced in every corner of the Muslim world detailing where, when and how to plant and grow various crops.
- d) They enhanced the Islamic rules on land ownership and labour rights alongside the recognition of private ownership and the introduction of share cropping, thus creating big incentives to engage in agriculture.
- e) Sugar production was refined and transformed into a large industry thus building the first sugar refineries and establishing sugar plantations.
- a) New types of turbines and mills were introduced. This reduced the need for manual labour and increased production.
- b) New crops from far as well as neighbouring cultures were introduced. For example, sorghum from Africa, rice, cotton and sugar from India, citrus fruits from China among others.

Economy and Trade Achievement of Abbasid Dynasty

The following are the economic Achievement made by Abbasid Dynasty:

- During the Abbasid era, trade was more extensive. Businessmen were free and safe to trade with other countries since the Islamic rule abolished many boundaries and unified almost the whole of the Eastern world.
- More trading centers were established. These included areas as far away as China, the East Indies, India, Malaya and Philippines.
- There was importation and export of basic items. The Muslims imported necessities like wood, metal and grains. They exported cloth, livestock and pearls (from the Gulf).
- There was a proper and efficient system of banking. This improved financial and economic performance.
- There was development of highly skilled crafts. The large urban population of Baghdad brought all sorts of skilled craftsmen including, among others, weavers, leatherworkers, metal workers, bookbinders, bakers, jewellers and paper makers.

- The rapid growth in trade attracted several developments. For example, the introduction of a *Muhtasib* (an inspector) whose role was to ascertain that proper weight and measures are given in order to avoid dishonesty in trade.

Contribution of Abbasids to Education

The following are the achievement of Abbasids to Education:

1. The state encouraged its citizens to seek formal knowledge. The state established many schools in Baghdad and in the provinces.
2. There was great emphasis on the preservation and translation of many key Greek, Persian, Egyptian and Indian works. These works were translated into Arabic.
3. Significant works were written in the fields of, Mathematics, Science, Medicine, Literature, Art and Architecture and Philosophy.
4. There were well established universities and libraries in Baghdad, Cairo, Cordoba and Timbuktu.
5. Several works of Mathematics which was developed by the Indian civilization was improved upon.
6. Development of Literary works. There were several books of literature that were written and translated e.g. the famous *Alif Lela Uleila* (Tales from 1001 Nights or The Arabian Nights) and *Rubaiyat*, both written by Omar Khayyam, *Rose Garden* by Sadi, a great Persian writer while Al-Mas'udi wrote *Meadows of Gold* which provides vast knowledge on the Abbasid Empire.

Contribution of Abbasid Dynasty to Medicine

Development in medical field. Great developments in medicine were achieved during the Abbasid rule:

- a) The state supported and patronized medical experts during their research.
- b) Many books on a variety of medical disciplines were written and translated to several languages.
- c) Medical experiments were conducted and documented.

- d) Several hospitals were established in the dynasty. The major hospitals were Al- Nuri hospital in Damascus and the Mansuri hospital in Cairo. At one time, Baghdad had more than sixty hospitals.
- e) Quite a number of medical instruments were designed to handle various procedures.
- f) Pharmacists introduced many drugs to be used in the curing several diseases and ailments. Some of these included camphor, sandalwood, cassia, tamarind, nutmeg, cloves, aconite, and mercury.

Contribution of Abbasid Dynasty to Development of town infrastructures

The following are the achievements made by Abbasid Dynasty in the development of town infrastructures:

- The Abbasids built a number of towns and cities like Baghdad, Samarra, Syria
- Improvement in communication and transport routes.

Contribution of Abbasid Dynasty to Art and Architecture

The following are the contribution made by Abbasid Dynasty to the field of art and architecture:

- Using Byzantine knowledge and art, the Abbasid designed domes (for example, Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem) and arches.
- They developed the art of calligraphy which was used in writing and decorations.
- Art of decorations mainly used to decorate buildings mosques, administrative blocks, palaces, libraries and museums.
- The great Mosque of Samarra which was commissioned in 848 CE and constructed in 851C.E. with its freestanding minaret with a square base. Is the largest ever constructed standing on 10 acres of land with 464 pillars.
- The construction of the Great Mosque at Cordoba, southern Spain (first part in the 8th C and its fourth and final part in the 10th C) which has 514 columns.
- The Abbasid developed the distinct type and style of ceramic that can be distinguished technically as 'Islamic'.

Selected Abbasid rulers

Abul Abbas Al-Saffah (750-754 CE/ 132-136 A.H)

His full name is Abul Abbas Abdullah Ibn Mohammed Ibn Ali Ibn Abdullah Ibn Abbas. He was born in 721 C.E/ 103 A.H. His Father was Al-Mahdi (the 3rd caliph of the Abbasid Dynasty) and the mother was Al-Khayzuran (Yemeni slave girl). He was nicknamed As-Saffah meaning blood- shedder and promised to get ruthless revenge of his brother. Some they say, it is because of his unparallel generosity and too much slaughtering of animals for his hospitality.

Abul Abbas's accession to the caliphate

He proclaimed himself the first caliph of Abbasid dynasty in Kufa, a prominent Muslim City in southern Iraq. Before his caliphate, a congregation of his supporters was called in a Mosque clad in black clothes symbolizing the martyrdom of his brother Imam Ibrahim, in 750 CE. He therefore, decided to revenge for his brother's assassination.

In his inaugural speech, he praised the Ahlul-bait and made strong and scathing attack on the Ummayyad for having usurped the caliphate from them. He highly praised the people of Kufa and Khurasan. He ended up his speech by saying: I am As-Safah who grants. I am the fearless avenger so be prepared.

The very name As-Saffah is enough to tell what type of a person he was. It is said that the number of people he killed and murdered, had surpassed all such massacre in history. After he had conquered Makkah, he followed everyone with Umayyad blood and finished him mercilessly.

He started his reign from a castle near Kufa. After some period, both Damascus and Kufa were considered unsuitable to be made the capital of the new empire. He later decided (in 753CE) to move his capital to Anbar, a town nearly 161 KM up the Euphrates.

Abul Abbas's character

As-Saffah was a mixture of opposites, cruelty and generosity. To the Ummayyad and the enemies of his family, he was mercilessly, cruel and revengeful. But to his family and friends he was humane and generous. He was a very affectionate father and a devoted husband. Ummu-Salamah was his only wife and at the

same time, she proved to be kind, loving, clever having a great influence over her husband to an extent of avoiding him from many acts of violence.

Administrative policies of Abul Abbas As-Saffah

The following are the administrative policies adopted by Abul Abbas As-Saffah:

- a) Unlike the Umayyad policy of appointing the Arabs only in the high administrative post, As-Saffah adopted the international system of appointing all the Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs. Merit was the key to promotion and higher positions. For example, he appointed Khalid ibn Barmek who was a Persia as a financial minister.
- b) On top of that, As-Saffah rewarded those activists who worked tirelessly for the cause of the Abbasid Dynasty.

Challenges faced by Abul Abbas during his caliphate era

Caliph Abul Abbas's four-year period in power witnessed his efforts to consolidate and rebuild the caliphate. Unfortunately, his reign was faced with the following challenges:

Dissatisfaction among non-Arabs: The non-Arab groups, especially the Persians posted a series of revolts to the caliphate. This made the first phase of Abul Abbas's rule to see the gradual decline of his political authority as power was entrusted to military commanders who some of them were non-Arabs.

Spread of immorality and worldly vanities within the caliphate: The second phase (945-1258), of his rule maintained only insignificant and moral authority while the rest of his dynasty was led by governors who became materialistic. As-Saffah himself became worldly minded though he portrayed himself as a pious person.

The rise of shiat Ali: These are the followers of Ali-Alawiyyin (Alids) who argued that they deserved the caliphate more than the Abbasid, since they were the direct descendants of Hassan and Hussein, the sons of Ali ibn Abi Talib (R.A), the grand children of the prophet Muhammed (p.b.u.h)

Death of Abul Abbas As-Saffah

The increased hostility by the unfaithful and the Alids threatened Abul Abbas. He felt insecure and feared for his life prompting him to build a courtly residence, Al-Hashimiyah in the town of Anbar. This is where he died of smallpox at the age of 34. Before his death he had nominated his elder half- brother Abu Jaffar as his successor. Abu Jaffar moved the capital from Anbar to Baghdad.

Achievements of Abul Abbas As-Saffah

As-Saffah ruled for four years and nine months. Among his outstanding contributions were as follow:

1. He established a firm legal and dynastic base for the later Abbasid caliphs.
2. He was able to consolidate the Abbasid Empire.
3. He was able to suppress revolts that were aimed at bringing down his empire
4. Marking the route between Al-Kufah and Makkah, and showing the mileage from place to place. Signs were placed on the routes for guiding the travelers.
5. Using of Black flags as the symbol of the Abbasid instead of the white flags which were used by the Umayyad Dynasty.

Abu Jaafar Al-Mansur (136-158 A.H/ 754-776 A.D)

His full name is Abu Jaafar ibn Muhammed ibn Ali. He was given the tittle Al-Mansur meaning the victorious because of his great achievements. He was born in Humayma in 101 A.H. He is considered to be the real and practical founder of the Abbasid Dynasty. He ruled for almost 22 years full of greatness and achievements.

Al-Mansur's character

As a man who was the backbone of the success of the establishment of the Abbasid dynasty and the removal of the Umayyad, he was indeed a good, strong and brave general. He was prudent, genius, cautious and persistent. It is his foresight and his administrative acumen which made the Abbasid power to be firmly established and consolidated in spite of heavy odds against the infant dynasty.

During his caliphate, he abandoned the scheme of conquering and devoted himself to the welfare of his people. He used to spend the first third of the night to learn about the government matters, the second third for sleeping and the last third for Tahajjud and other ibaadah.

The problems faced by Al-Mansur during his caliphate

At the time of taking over, he had several problems confronting him but three were the biggest real headaches. These were as follow:

- His uncle Abdullah ibn Ali who expected to take over the caliphate after the death of As-Saffah. The uncle opposed Abu Jaafar taking over. He moved to Syria. Abu Jaafar sent an army under the command of Abu Muslim who defeated the uncle at Niasibin (754 A.D). Abdullah fled to Basra where his brother Suleiman was the governor. Al-Mansur dismissed Suleiman from governorship of Basra and imprisoned Abdullah in a castle. He was imprisoned and remained so until he died.
- Abu Muslim was very powerful in Khurasan and in the entire Abbasid Dynasty. Some people in Khurasan not only looked at him as a savior and hero but also a prophet King like king Suleiman. Hence Abu Jaafar saw him as a threat and appointed him as viceroy of Syria in order to cut down his influence. But he refused. Therefore, he planned to kill him. Abu Jaafar sent lavish gifts to Abu Musa who later invited Abu Muslim to his palace. By the time Abu Muslim has felt safe and at home, his bodyguard was kept aside, some men engaged by Abu Jaafar managed to kill him.
- The confrontations by Alids. Muhammed ibn Abdillah who was the leader of Ali's family confronted Abu Jaafar in Madinah. Calipha Al-Mansur sent his nephew Isa ibn Musa to Madinah with a big army. Muhammed was defeated in Ramadhan 145 A.H. His head was sent to Abu Jaafar. Ibrahim, Muhammed's brother was also defeated in Basra and was killed in Dhul-Qaadah 145 A.H.

Administrative policies of Al-Mansur

The following are the administrative policies adopted by Abu Jaafar Al-Mansur:

- He used to make a close follow up on his administrators especially on financial matters. He was very concerned with the economy of his empire.
- He established central government instead of the regional ones.
- He introduced special branches of police force such as C.I.D that which brought to him information on government administration and whatever was of interest and concern.
- He reduced the number of the years one could remain as a governor. He would remove those whom he suspected could be rebel and declare their region as autonomous.

Death of Abu Jaafar Al-Mansur

Abu Jaafar Al-Mansur died in 158 A.H (775 A.D) in his way to pilgrimage (hajj). Before, his death he made sure that people accepted the nomination of his son Muhammed, surnamed as Al-Mahdi and to be followed by his other son Harun Ar-Rashid.

Contributions made by Al-Mansur during his caliphate reign

Despite the tough times he faced, Al-Mansur managed to make the following achievements:

- a) He built Baghdad as his new capital from 762 to 766 A.D. On the west bank of River Tigris. He did not want Al-Kufah because of the Alids influence. Neither did not want Damascus because of Umayyads' influence. Baghdad became the two city of the world at that time in beauty, splendours and magnificent design.
- b) He managed to establish peace and prosperity in his empire.
- c) He established a high sense of justice and even he could be summoned by the Qadhy in the court.
- d) He set up a translation bureau called *Darul-Hikma* for the translation of the valuable works of the ancient scholars from Persian, Greek and Urdu to Arabic.
- e) He encouraged the study of Medicine, Astronomy, Mathematics, History and Philosophy. Scholars were well placed and well paid.

- f) He fought against innovations (*bid'ah*) which arose. Worth mentioning is the Ruwendiyah sect of Persia which believed that the Khalifa was good incarnate.

Muhammed ibn Abdullah Al-Mahdi (158-169 A.H/ 775-785 A.D)

His full name is Muhammed ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammed ibn Abdullah. He was born in Humaymah in 126 A.H. His father gave him good training from early age in culture, public relation, administration and welfare. His name Al-Mahdi means the guided. He was nominated for the caliphate in 147 A.H. but took over in 158 A.H.

Al-Mahdi's character

He was humane and generous to his people who admired him. He was mild and amiable in temperature. To his people he was fatherly and kind.

Achievements of Al-Mahdi

Al-Mahdi made tremendous contributions but the outstanding ones were as follows:

- a) He released all prisoners except those who have been convicted of treason, felony or dangerous crimes. He pardoned the Alids and showed kindness to them.
- b) He restored the wealth and properties of people back to them and gave the reasonable allowances.
- c) The officers who were dismissed during his father's time were properly compensated.
- d) He kept a special place (a suggestion box) where people wrote their problems especially on the administrators who have done injustice to them.
- e) He fixed pensions for the lepers and imprisoned poor debtors.
- f) He built clinics for the sick people and special homes for them.
- g) He organized post services within the entire empire.
- h) He expanded the Masjidul Haraam and the prophet's mosques.

- i) He built stations and inns along the route to Makkah for the pilgrims and for travelers to rest between Makkah and Iraq. He also built many schools, mosques and roads.

Death of Al-Mahdi

Al-Mahdi died at an early age of 43 in 169 A.H (785 A.D) having ruled for almost eleven years. His son Al-Hadi took over after him to be followed by Harun Ar-Rashid. Al-Hadi was hard hearted not only to his brother Harun Ar-Rashid but even to his own mother. For his own safety, Harun moved out of the palace and stayed away. Despite showing loyalty and support to his brother Al-Hadi, things were not good on Harun's side. Al-Hadi regretted over all his evils while on death bed and he apologized to both his brother and mother. He nominated his brother Harun as the next Khalifah after his death instead of his earlier intentions of having his son taking over. He died in 170 A.H (786 A.D) at the age of 26. Some of historians claim that his mother Khaizuran sent slave girls to kill Al-Hadi because of the mistreatments she and Harun received from him.

Harun Ar- Rashid (170-193 A.H/ 786-809 C.E)

His full name was Harun ibn Muhammad ibn Abdallah ibn Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Abdallah ibn Abbas. He was the second son of the third Abbasid caliph Al-Mahdi (775 – 785CE). He became the fifth of the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad after succeeding his brother, Al-Hadi in 786CE both being sons of the same former slave mother, Khayzuran. Harun ascended the throne at the age of 22 years and ruled for twenty-three years, becoming the most prominent and celebrated caliph.

In his youthful ages, he was taught by a Persian known as Yahya, the Barmakid, who was a loyal supporter of his mother. While in his youthful age, Harun Rashid was appointed the governor of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Syria and Tunisia but entrusted Yahya to administer for him.

As a young man, his father used to assign him military tasks. For example, he successfully invaded and conquered Asia Minor and reached as far as the Bosphorus. He also led several expeditions against the Eastern Roman Empire

and his victory (or the success of his army) earned him the title “*Al-Rashid*,” which means “the victorious, the one following the right path, the upright or just.” As a great military leader and commander, he suppressed several revolts and uprising staged by the Kharijites and the rulers of Byzantium during his caliphate.

Accession's of Harun Ar-Rashid to caliphate

He took over the caliphate in 170 A.H after the death of his brother Al-Hadi. Harun Al-Rashid owed his accession to power to Yahya bin Khalid, the Barmakids whom he appointed his secretary. After being crowned as the caliph, he appointed him as his lieutenant and grand vizier. Under his guidance the empire prospered. Yahya became successful in managing the empire by installing a cadre of Barmakids as administrators. Yahya's sons Al-Fadhl, Ja'far, Musa and Muhammad occupied high positions under Harun's caliphate. Even when the mother passed on in 803 CE, the Barmakids effectively ran the empire for her son. They assisted him to administer the vast empire which extended from the Mediterranean to India. It included the northern part of Africa, but towards the end of his rule the empire lost much of its authority in Africa.

Challenges faced by Harun Al-Rashid during his reign

Two important aspects come out clearly during the reign of Harun Al-Rashid:

Internal conflicts within the empire were witnessed

Alids' Rebellion: Two groups from the Alids demanded the leadership of the dynasty.

- One of these groups was led by Yahya ibn Abdulla and had a big following. Caliph Harun sent a strong army of 50,000 soldiers under the command of Fadhl ibn Abdulla Al-Barmaky to fight Yahya. Instead of fighting him, Al-Fadhl lured Yahya into accepting a compromise in which Yahya would be pardoned and given a high post by the Khalifah Harun. Yahya accepted and asked for a written surety from Harun. All was done. Yahya went to the palace of Harun. He was welcomed. After some months Yahya was accused of some conspiracy. He was therefore, imprisoned until his death.

- The second faction was led by Yahya's brother, Idris Ibn Abdullah. He rebelled against Abbasid caliphate and found his own Kingdom in Morocco, called the Kingdom of Adarisah. Idris was later captured, imprisoned and died. Harun Al-Rashid sent Ibrahim Aghlab to succeed him as the governor. Later, Ibrahim gradually pulled out from the Abbasid Empire and set up the Aghalibah government.

The khawarij Rebellion: The Khawarij rebelled in Holwan under the leadership of a beautiful maiden named Laila in 178 A.H. After sometimes, they were defeated by Khalifah's army when Laila accepted to return to her maidenly life. She was induced to do so by the Khalifa's general and a relative of hers.

The Bermaky Rebellion: They are purely a Persian clan whose lineage goes to Khalid ibn Bermak. Bermak was a chief of priest of a Budhist monastery at Balkh. Khalid's family helped that Abbassids to obtain caliphate from the Umayyads. Most of them were appointed to be governors and commanders. This made them to see themselves superior and thus rebelled against the Khalifah.

Harun Al-Rashid's Character

The following are the outstanding qualities of Harun Al-Rashid:

1. Harun Al-Rashid was a disciplined soldier and commander. He led several war expeditions and emerged victorious.
2. He was a great patron of art and learning. His splendid Baghdad court, welcomed various artists such as musicians, poets, and story tellers. Some of the stories from the greatest story narrator include the famous, The Thousand and One Nights.
3. He was humble and patient. He would sit for long hours discussing with quite a number of learned men, poets, jurists, grammarians, kadhis and scribes.
4. Harun himself was a scholar and poet, and was well versed in history, tradition and poetry.
5. He was a strict Muslim who observed swalat and had performed Hajj nine or ten times.

6. He was an eloquent speaker, a scholar and loved to be around literacy people. He highly respected the scholars and kept them in high esteem.
7. He was a generous leader who at times would walk in the streets and alleys of the city at night in disguise in order to discover for himself the plight of his citizens. In these night walks he used to distribute relief to the oppressed and destitute. He used to distribute about one thousand dirhams daily to the needy and the poor in the society.

Death of Harun Al-Rashid

The later years of Harun's reign were faced with series of rebellions. These grew more frequent after the fall of the Barmakids, the brilliant statesmen, on whom Harun had fully relied on in his administration. Troubles started in the eastern parts of the empire. The situation became so serious and uncontrollable that Harun himself decided to go to Khorasan. However, he died at Tus, 809 C.E. at the age of forty-five after 23 years of rule before he could quell the skirmishes. Before his death he divided his empire between his sons Al-Amin and Al-Ma'mun.

Achievement of Harun Ar-Rashid

The following are the contributions made by Harun Al-Rashid during his caliphate time:

1. Harun established learning institutions in the empire. Baghdad in the east and the Muslim cities of Spain in the west were famous for their schools and learned men. They produced scholars such as jurist Imam Shafi, Gabriel the physician, Abu Yussuf the doctor of Law among others.
2. He encouraged scientific innovations and attended most discussions called by scholars of various fields.
3. He introduced into Western Europe both algebra and the figures which we use in arithmetic. It is for this reason that we call these figures the "Arabic numerals."
4. Baghdad became centre of trade. This attracted business transactions between his empire and other parts of the world such as Yemen, India, China,

- Syria, Persia and Hijaz. Coins were also discovered in Germany, Poland, Sweden to improve trade between Arabs and other regions.
- 5 He encouraged the development and preservation of culture such as poetry, music, art and architecture.
 - 6 His reign saw the improvement in infrastructure. Several roads, bridges, canals and wells were constructed during his caliphate. He organized for an efficient postal service.
 - 7 Several Islamic schools, hospitals, mosques, asylums and libraries were established in all the states of his empire.
 - 8 He encouraged scholars to seek knowledge from various non-Arab people such as the Indians, Greeks, Hebrews, Syrians, Pahlari, Zand, Persian and Ethiopians among others.
 - 9 He managed to expand the empire up to Africa, Kabul and Sanhar and the empire extended to the frontier of Hindukush.
 - 10 Harun-al-Rashid gave great encouragement to learning. As a scholar and poet himself, he recognized and respected both the learned men in his kingdom and those in neighbouring countries.
 - 11 He established the magnificent library *Bayt Al-Hikma* (the House of Wisdom) where scholars had an access to all kind of works on medicine, literature and other disciplines.
 - 12 He created a fabulous Baghdad court that was attended by hundreds of courtiers and slaves. It can be remembered as a venue for famous story like *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Importance of Baitul-Hikma

The following are the significance of Baitul-Hikma:

- a) It contained a well-stocked library, an academy and a translation bureau which attracted scholars from East and West who came to study literature, philosophy, astronomy, science and medicine.
- b) It was a centre of cultural and scientific activities art and literature were developed.

- c) It was a galaxy of experts' translators and original investigators enriched the Arabic language.
- d) New discoveries were made in areas of mathematics and astronomy. For example, Abu Hassan invented a telescope from a tube.
- e) The Muslim studies these works and made critical analysis. For example, Khawarizmi's great work in mathematics flourished and gained importance in the European Universities to the 16th century.
- f) Christians and Jews were employed to translate the work of Greek philosophers such as Plato, Socrates and Aristotle in Arabic and Persian. For example, Costa, son of Luke was in charge of Greek and Syriac works.

Al-Amin (193-198 A.H/ 808-813 A.D)

His full name is Al-Amin Muhammed ibn Harun Ar-Rashid. He was born in 170 A.H. His mother is Zubeidah bint Jaafar Al-Mansur. He is from the Hashimite ancestry from paternal and maternal side.

Accession's of Al-Amin to caliphate

He was nominated to the caliphate but was younger to his brother Al-Maamun by six months. The influence of Harun's mother Al-Khayzaran over him was enough to make him accept her wish to nominate Al-Amin. Also, the persuasion of Al-Amin's mother Zubeidah who was very close to her husband. Al-Fadh binul Rabii, a close minister to Harun also played a big role in influencing Harun to nominate Al-Amin instead of Al-Maamun.

Harun nominated Al-Amin to take over the entire empire after his death, and at the same time he gave Al-Maamun complete control of Khurasan and Al-Qasim (his brother) complete control of Iraq. This is how and when the Muslim empire began to be subdivided.

Death of Khalifah Al-Amin

Al-Amin literally gave Al-Fadhli the whole empire. Unfortunately, Al-Fadhli had a misunderstanding with Al-Maamun much earlier before his new appointment. So he used his position to poison Al-Amin over his brother Al-Maamun. This led to Al-Amin asking his elder brother Al-Maamun to give up claims of caliphate after his death. And instead, Al-Amin wanted his son Musa to succeed him. In addition, he sacked his brother Al-Qasim from governorship of Iraq.

Al-Maamun refused the order of Al-Amin. This made the Persians to fight for Al-Maamun, the son of their sister Marajil Al-Fazl ibn Sahl. The Arabs fought for Al-Amin. It is through these series of wars, when Al-Amin was defeated in 198 A.H. and was brutally murdered by the generals Harith and Harthamah.

Al-Maamun did not expect the conflict between him and his brother would end up in such a tragic death. He mourned the death of his brother and punished the murderers. He adopted the sons and daughters of his brother Al-Amin as his own children. He gave them and their mother Zubeidah all their properties, privileges and respect. In fact when the sons of Al-Amin grew to maturity, they were married to Al-Maamun's daughters.

Al-Ma'mun Ar-Rashid (198-218 A.H/ 813-833 A.D)

His full name is Abu Ja'far Abdullah al-Ma'mun ibn Harun al Rashid. He was an Abbasid caliph who reigned from 813 CE until his to 833 CE. He succeeded his brother Al-Amin who was killed during the siege of Baghdad in 813 CE. Al-Ma'mun was born in Baghdad, on 15 September 786 C.E/ 170 A.H. His father was the Abbasid caliph Harun Rashid and his mother, Marajil was of Persian origin.

Accession of Al-Maamun to caliphate

In 802 CE Harun Rashid, father to both Al-Ma'mun and Al-Amin, ordered that Al-Amin who was younger, should succeed him while Al-Ma'mun should serve as governor of Khurasan. Before he died Harun had also nominated Al-Ma'mun to serve as a caliph after the death of Al-Amin.

In the Last days of Harun's life, his health was deteriorating. At one time, he saw in a dream Musa ibn Jaafar sitting in a hall praying and crying. This dream made Harun remember how hard he had struggled to establish his own caliphate. He did not take this dream lightly. To him, it was a sign of disharmony within the family. Harun knew the personalities of both his sons and decided to change his earlier succession plan. He proposed to a group of his courtiers that for the good of the Abbasid dynasty, Al-Ma'mun should be the caliph after his death.

One of the courtiers, Fadhil ibn Rabi' however did not abide by Harun's last wishes. He convinced many other Muslims that Harun's wishes had not changed. Later, the other three courtiers of Harun, who had sworn loyalty to him

by supporting Al-Ma'mun, found loopholes in Fadhil's arguments. Fadhil then admitted that Harun had changed his immediate successor to Al-Ma'mun.

However, he argued that since Harun was not in his right mind, his decision should not be acted upon. Al-Maamun was the older of the two brothers, but his mother was a Persian woman while Al-Amin's mother was a member of the ruling Abbasid family. The relationship between the two brothers deteriorated just after Al-Rashid's death in 809 CE. Al-Amin ultimately succeeded his father. To show discontentment in brother's succession, Al-Maamun declared independence of Khurasan, his province.

In response to Al-Ma'mun's moves towards independence, Al-Amin declared his own son Musa to be his successor. This violation of Harun Rashid's testament led to a succession struggles between the two brothers. In 811 CE, Al-Amin gathered a huge army at Baghdad led by 'Isa ibn Mahan. The army invaded Khurasan, but Al-Ma'mun's general Tahir ibn Husayn, destroyed the army and invaded Iraq, laying a siege to Baghdad in 812 CE. In 813 CE Baghdad fell, Al-Amin was beheaded, and Al-Ma'mun became the Caliph.

Challenges faced by Al-Maamun

The first several years of Al-Ma'mun's caliphate were characterized by disturbances in Iraq, Syria, Egypt and other areas. Such disturbances include the following:

Alids rebellion: Al-Maamun, nominated Ali Ar-Ridha, the head of the descendants of Ali, the eighth Shia Imam, as his successor so as to please Alids and gain wider support. He even ordered the use of the *green flag* of the Alids instead of the *black flag* of Abbasids. However, the Alids showed dissatisfaction and staged a rebellion in Makkah led by Muhammad ibn Jafar As-Sadiq claimed the Caliphate for himself. He was however, defeated by the army of Al-Maamun and he quickly renounced his claim asserting that he had only become caliph on news that Al-Ma'mun had died. He was pardoned.

Baghdad rebellion: The nomination of Ali Arridha as his successor, provoked a revolt in Baghdad resulting to Ibrahim, Al-Maamun's uncle, to be made the

caliph. Al-Maamun secretly advanced towards Iraq, entered Baghdad without difficulty, and ended the revolt in 819CE. Ali Ar-Ridha had meanwhile died at Meshed.

Yemen rebellion: In Yemen, the Shia grew strong enough and staged a rebellion. Al-Maamun sent Muhammed ibn Ibrahim Azziyadi in 204 A.H who brought Yemen under control. Muhammed built Zubeid town as capital of his province. His family ruled that province up to 554 A.H.

Khurasan rebellion: Tahir binul Hussein was appointed the governor of Khurasan in 205 A.H. when a rebellion was sensed to emerge. He ruled up to 259 A.H.

[Al-Maamun's character](#)

The following are the outstanding qualities of Khalifah Al-Maamun:

- He was a fatherly ruler who showed love to his people
- He was a strong ruler who preferred peace.
- He was a generous and learned man.
- He was very tolerant to other religions and even appointed non-Muslims in high positions.
- He had strong determinations and was tactful in his approach.

[Death of caliph Al-Maamun](#)

Al-Maamun's death came after he and his friends ate some dates and water from a river. On that day he was sitting on the river bank wondering how splendid the water was. He humbly asked his colleagues what would go best with that cool water and they suggested some specific kind of fresh dates. Within a short while, someone brought that particular kind of dates. Caliph Al-Maamun kindly invited all those who were with him to share the dates with the water. Suddenly, all those who had enjoyed the water with the special kind of dates fell ill. Some recovered but the Caliph passed on. He died near Tarsus at the age of 48 on 9 August 833 CE/ 218 A.H. Before his death he had emphasized to Al-Mu'tasim, his half-brother, and his nominated successor, to

continue with his established policies and not to burden his subjects with more than they could handle.

Contributions of Al-Maamun Al-Rashid

The following are the achievements made by Khalifa Al-Maamun Al-Rashid during his reign:

- He discovered an object used in measuring the length of a terrestrial degree. This object was to determine the size of the earth and its circumference on the assumption that the earth was round.
- He enlarged the *Bayt Al-Hikma*, (House of Wisdom) which served as a center for translation of all Greek works into Arabic. For example, Yahya ibn Harun was in charge of the translation of the ancient Persian works into Arabic.
- His administration supported the ulama (scholars) and all the scholarly works. During his reign, sciences like alchemy (a branch of chemistry) was introduced and greatly developed by Jabir ibn Hayyan.
- There was economic prosperity during his time flourished and commercial trade reached at international level.
- Al-Ma'mun was a good administrator and is known for his efforts towards the centralization of power and the certainty of succession.
- He invited many well-known scholars in the Bayt Al-Hikma to share information, ideas and culture with his scholars. For example, Al-Kindi (philosopher) and Duban (a Brahmin scholar) were employed in Baitul-Hikma.
- Al-Ma'mun introduced the *mihna* in his administration. This was a loyalty oath consisting of a series of questions relating to Islamic theology and faith.
- He started many educational institutions and gave financial and other support on the same.
- He consolidated the Abbasid Empire by thrashing all the rebellions. For example, the Hindu rebellions in Sindh and most of Afghanistan were absorbed. The Mountainous regions of Iran and Turkestan were brought under the grip of the central Abbasid government.

Lessons that Muslims can learn from the leadership of Khalifah Al-Maamun in the Development of Education during the Abbasid era

The following are the lessons that Muslims can learn from the leadership of Khalifa Al-Maamun in the Development of Education during the Abbasid Dynasty:

- a) Muslims can learn the importance of establishing public libraries in the advancement of education. Al-Maamun encouraged the establishment of both private and public libraries such as Baitul-Hikma.
- b) Muslims learn the importance of supporting scholars and patronizing them. Khalifah Al-Maamun financed the writing of books and supported scholars with stipends.
- c) Muslims learn that Islam does not differentiate scholars on the basis of religion. Al-Maamun supported both the Muslims and non-Muslims like Greek scholars.
- d) Muslims learn the importance of establishing learning centres. During the reign of Al-Maamun many schools were established even in private houses.
- e) Muslims learn from the era of Al-Maamun the importance of translating educational works into languages that are understood by Muslims so as to promote knowledge such as work of Plato, Aristotle, Galileo were translated into Arabic for easy understanding.

Differences between ummayyad dynasty and Abassid Dynasty

The following are differences between Umayyad Dynasty and Abbasid Dynasty:

- a) Abbasid empire was founded by the descendants of Muhammed's uncle Abbas ibn Abdulmutalib while the Umayyad empire was founded by Umayyad family of Mecca, Muawiyah.
- b) Abbasid empire ruled from 750 to 1258, that is for about 500 years. On the other hand, Umayyad empire ruled for 90 years from 661 to 750.
- c) The Abbasid had their central headquarter in Baghdad while the Umayyad empire was centered in Damascus.
- d) The Umayyad empire was highly tribalistic and favoured Muslim Arabs unlike the Abbasid empire which was much more cosmopolitan.
- e) The Abbasid empire was more concerned with keeping and administering the land they had, whereas the Umayyad empire was mostly concerned with expanding their empire.

FATIMID DYNASTY

The origin of Fatimid Dynasty

The Fatimid Dynasty came to power after the Abbasid rule became unpopular among the people. The Fatimids are direct descendants of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) through his daughter, Fatima (RAA) and his cousin, Ali (RA). The Fatimid dynasty first established itself in Tunisia, with the support of the Barbers of North Africa, in December 909 CE. In the same year they established their capital at the Tunisian city of Al-Mahdiyya then, in 948 C.E shifted to Al-Mansuriya. Later on, they expanded their empire Egypt where they built Al-Qahirah (Cairo) to serve as their new capital.

Factors responsible for the rise of the Fatimid Dynasty

The following are the factors that led to the rise of the Fatimid Dynasty:

- a) The Shias who claimed they were the legitimate of the caliphate always confronted the Muslim leadership. During the Abbasid they were dissatisfied

because the Mawalis (non-Arabs) were given more favours. Thus, they revolted against the Abbasids.

- b) Some people were discontented with the ruling of the Abbasid due to their high level of injustice and high tax imposition. Therefore, they rebelled against the Abbasid resulting to their extinct.
- c) Economical drawbacks. The Abbasid were economically stranded and people moved draining the treasury of the government. Therefore, it was difficult for them to control people without money.
- d) The fact that Fatimid established well-trained army and capital in Egypt for their dynasty therefore revolted against the Abbasid Dynasty.
- e) North Africa hatred for the Abbasid Dynasty was also factor that introduced the rise of the Fatimids. The North Africans warmly welcomed the Alids because they also hated the Abbasid who had compelled them to pay heavy taxes. Later on, they joined forces with the Fatimid to fight against the Abbasid Dynasty.
- f) Greed and corruption among the Abbasid leaders. That is, most of the Abbasid caliphs led luxurious life and cared little for the state and conditions of their subjects.
- g) The expansion of Islamic empire troubled the efforts to move armies and control local Abbasid administrators in far territories. This gave a loophole for the Fatimids to overthrow the Abbasids.

Decline of the Fatimid dynasty

Several reasons may be attributed for the decline of the Fatimid dynasty especially after the reign of al-Aziz. Different conditions lead to the loss of political power in Baghdad and the nearby territories. These events happened over a period of two centuries. Among these reasons are as follows:

- Discontentment of the majority Sunni to the Shiite religious doctrine.
- There was increasing dissatisfaction in Egypt resulting to anarchy and tyranny. The caliphs lost control of the affairs of their government. For

example, the constant conflict and tug of war between the Berber, Sudanese and Turks resulted in the disintegration of the army on tribal lines.

- Difficulty in transport and communication within the vast empire made the Abbasids to lose control of most of its territories. The army could not move swiftly to suppress the revolts and
- Dissatisfaction of the non-Muslim Provincial population with a political and economic system that was centered on Baghdad and neglected their views.
- There were faction differences, quarrels and insubordination among the Berber, Turkish, Sudanese, and Nubian soldiers with each group aspiring for control.
- Natural calamities such as recurring famine and plague resulted to several deaths. The subjects were dissatisfied with the way the rulers handled the catastrophes. This weakened the Fatimid administration.
- Some caliphs were incompetent and left the management of the state affairs in the hands of their governors. This led to mismanagement of resources and injustice resulting to hatred from the subjects.
- The Fatimids lost their supremacy to an expanding and powerful group of Kurdish-Turks from Syria, called the Ayyubids who established their own dynasty.
- The emergence of the Saljuk Turks. The Abbasids asked the seljuk Turks who were emerging as the new great power in Islam to give a strong blow on the Fatimid Dynasty.
- The invasion of the crusaders. Their purpose was to recapture Muslim inhabited lands which they regarded as their Holy lands from the Muslims.

Achievements of the Fatimids

The following are the contributions made by the Fatimid Dynasty:

a). Contributions of Fatimids to Education

- Development in scientific research and writing advanced especially in medicine, optic and chemistry

- The administration gave financial assistance to both public and personal libraries. It also recognized and encouraged home tuition.
- The emergence of great scholars and intellectuals in various fields. For example; Ibn Salma Al-Kindi (historian), Ahmad ibn Hashim al-Misri (the Imam of *al-Qira'at*), ibn-Babshad (the grammarian) among others.
- There was great development in the fields of Literature and science. Several literary works were written and scientific discoveries made in various branches of science.
- They established universities and encouraged learning. Al-Azhar University and Darul-Hikma became the centres of instruction and knowledge.
- They encouraged renown mathematicians, physicians as well as the astronomers from all over the Muslim world.
- The palace library was great and well equipped for the interest of the scholars in carrying out scientific research and reliable reference point.

b). Contribution of Fatimids to Agriculture, Art and architecture, infrastructure and administration

- Agriculture, Trade and Industry greatly advanced as the government encouraged and motivated farmers, traders and industrialists.
- There was great advancement in art and architecture. This is evident with the various mosques, palaces, castles, minarets and calligraphic inscriptions, were all made in the most modern way.
- Infrastructure was improved for example ports which facilitated the movement and travelling.
- The administration maintained the highest degree of tolerance among the different sects.

List of Fatimid Caliphs

The following are the caliphs who ruled during the Fatimid Dynasty:

- Abu Muḥammad ‘Abdullah Al-Mahdi Ubadillah (909–934) founder Fatimid dynasty
- Abu I-Qasim Muḥammad Al-Qa'im bi-Amr Allah (934–946)

- Abu Ṭahir Isma'il Al-Manṣur bi-llah (946–953)
- Abu Tamim Ma'add Al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (953–975) Egypt was conquered during his reign
- Abu Manṣur Nizar al-'Aziz bi-llah (975–996)
- Abu 'Ali al-Manṣur al-Ḥakim bi-Amr Allah (996–1021)
- Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Ali al-Ẓahir li-l'zaz Din Allah (1021–1036)
- Abu Tamim Ma'add al-Mustanṣir bi-llah (1036–1094)
- Al-Musta'li bi-llah (1094–1101) Quarrels over his succession led to the Nizari split.
- Al-Amir bi-Aḥkam Allah (1101–1130)
- 'Abd al-Majid al-Ḥafiz (1130–1149)
- Al-Ẓafir (1149-1154)
- Al-Fa'iz (1154–1160)
- Al-'Aḍid (1160–1171)