



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

SCHOOL OF ART AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

COURSE CODE: ISL 272:

COURSE TITLE: ABBĀSID CALIPHATE

COURSE GUIDE ISL 272: 'ABBĀSID CALIPHATE

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INTRODUCTION

You are welcome to ISL 272: The ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate. This is a two-credit unit for part 2 students in Islamic Studies. The materials have been developed to expose you into the history of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate. This course guide gives you an overview of the course. It also provides you with information on the Organization and requirements of the course.

Course Aims

The aims of this course are to help you to learn about one of the important periods in the history of Islam with particular focus on the roles of the

founding fathers in the establishment and consolidation of the empire, the effect of the empire on the development or otherwise of Islam and the collapse of the empire.

Course Objectives

To achieve the aims set out above, ISL 272 has overall objectives for the course as a whole. These are not the same with the specific objectives which are at the beginning of each unit and upon which you are advised to read before you start working through the unit. You may want to refer to them during your study of the unit to check your progress.

Presented below are the wider objectives of the course. By meeting these objectives, you regard yourself as having met the aims of the course. On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

- (a) Give the background to the emergence of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate.
- (b) Know about the history of the founding fathers, their administrative policies, achievements and their weaknesses.
- (c) Appraise the golden era of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate as well as its era of decline and eventual downfall.
- (d) Discuss the factors that led to the rise of petty dynasties both in the western and the eastern parts by the empire
- (e) Identify the factors that led to the collapse of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate.

Working Through This Course

To complete the course, you are required to read the study units and other related materials. You will also need to undertake practical exercises for which you need a pen, a notebook, and other materials that will be listed in this guide. The exercises are to aid you in understanding the concepts being presented. At the end of each unit, you will be required to submit written assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of the course, you will write a final examination.

Course Materials

The major materials you will need for this course are:

- Course Guide
- Study Units
- Assignment file
- Relevant textbooks including the ones listed under each unit.

Study Units

There are 14 units (of three modules) in this course. They are listed below:

Module 1: 'Abbāsid Caliphate: The Early Period (1)

- Unit1: Background to the Emergence of the 'Abbasid Caliphate
- Unit2: The Rebellion and the Areas Covered By the Emerging Abbasid Empire
- Unit3: The Rise of Abūl-'Abbās as-Saffah to Power and the Roles of the Barmacides
- Unit4: Abū-Ja'far Al-Mansūr: Ascension, Achievements and Weaknesses
- Unit5: Al-Mahdi and Al-Hadi in the History of the Abbasid Caliphate

Module 2: 'Abbāsīd Caliphate: The Early Period (2)

- Unit 1: Hārūn Al-Rashīd
- Unit 2: Al-Amin and al-Ma'mūn the Great
- Unit 3: Caliph al-Ma'mūn in Baghdad
- Unit 4: al-Mu'tasim, and al-Wathīq in the History of the Caliphate

Module 3 The Decline and Fall Of 'Abbāsīd Caliphate

- Unit 1: Caliphs at Samarra: Al-Mutawakkil and His Successors**
- Unit 2: Petty Dynasties in the West
- Unit 3: Petty Dynasties in the East
- Unit 4: **The Seljuk Turks and The Assassins**
- Unit 5: **The Collapse of The 'Abbāsīd Empire**

Textbooks and References

Certain books have been recommended in the course. You may wish to purchase them for further reading. Assignment must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadline.

Assessment File

An assessment File and a Marking Scheme will be made available to you. In the assessment file, you will find details of the works you must submit to your tutor for marking. There are two aspects of the assessment of this course; the tutor marked and the written examination. The marks you obtain in these two areas will make up your final marks. The assignment must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadline stated in the presentation schedule and the assessment file. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total score.

Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs)

You will have to submit a specified number of the TMAs. Every unit in this course has a tutor marked assignment. You will be assessed on four of them but the best three performances from the TMAs will be used for your 30% grading. When you have completed each assignment, send it together with a Tutor Marked Assignment form to your tutor. Make sure each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline for submissions. If for any reason, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor for a discussion on the possibility of an extension. Extensions will not be granted after the due date unless under exceptional circumstances.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination will be a test of three hours. All areas of the course will be examined. Find time to read the unit all over before your examination.

The final examination will attract 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions, which reflect the kinds of self-assessment exercises and tutor marked assignment you have previously encountered and all aspects of the course will be assessed. You should use the time between completing the last unit, and taking the examination to revise the entire course.

Course Marking Scheme

The following table lays out how the actual course mark allocation is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignments (best three assignments out of four marked)	=30%
Final Examination	=70%
Total	100%

Presentation Schedule

The date for submission of all assignments will be communicated to you.

You will also be told the date of completing the study units and date for examination.

Course Overview and Presentation Schedule

Unit	Title of Work	Weeks Activity	
Course Guide			

Module 1 Abbasid Caliphate: The Early Period (1)			
1	Background to the Emergence of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate	Week 1	Assignment 1
2	The Rebellion and the Areas Covered By the Emerging ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate	Week 2	Assignment 2
3	The Rise of Abūl-‘Abbās as-Saffah to Power and the Roles of the Barmecides	Week 3	Assignment 3
4	Abu-Ja’far Al-Mansūr: Ascension, Achievements and Weaknesses	Week 4	Assignment 4
5	Al-Mahdi and Al-Hadi in the History of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate	Week 5	Assignment 5
Module 2 ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate: The Early Period (2)			
1	Hārūn Al-Rashīd	Week 6	Assignment 1
2	Al-Amīn and al-Ma’mūn the Great	Week 7	Assignment 2
3	Al-Ma’mūn in Baghdād	Week 8	Assignment 3
4	Al-Mu’tasim, and al-Wathīq in the History of the Caliphate	Week 9	Assignment 4
Module 3 The Decline and Fall of ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate			
1	Caliphs at Samarra: Al-Mutawakkil and His Successors	Week 10	Assignment 1
2	Petty Dynasties in the West	Week 11	Assignment 2
3	Petty Dynasties in the East	Week 12	Assignment 3
4	The Seljuk Turks and The Assassins	Week 13	Assignment 4
5	The Collapse of The ‘Abbāsīd Empire	Week 14	Assignment 5
	Revision	Week 15	
	Examination	Week 16	

How to Get the Most from This Course

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecture. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning. You can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to the lecture. In the same way, a lecturer might give you some reading to do. The study units tell you where to read, and which are your text materials or set books. You are provided with exercises to do at appropriate points, just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is introduction to the subject matters of the units, and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next to this is a set of learning objectives. These learning objectives are meant to guide your study. The moment a unit is finished, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If this is made a habit, then you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading

from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from reading section. The following is the practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into any trouble, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly, it is your assignment.
2. Organize a Study Schedule. Design a 'Course Overview' to guide you through the course. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates and Schedule of work for each unit.
3. Once you have created your own schedule, do everything to stay faithful to it. The major reason why students fail is that they get behind with their coursework. If you run into difficulties with your Schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late to help.
4. Turn to unit 1, and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. You will need your text books and the unit you are studying at any point in time. As you work through the unit, you will know what sources to consult for further information.
6. Keep in touch with your study centre. Up-to-date course information will be continuously available there.
7. Well before the relevant due date (about 4 weeks before due dates), keep in mind that you will learn a lot by doing the assignments carefully. They have been designed to help you meet the objectives of the course and therefore, will help you pass the examination. Submit all assignments not later than the due date.
8. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsecured about any of the objectives, review the study materials or consult your tutor.
9. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you can keep yourself on schedule.
10. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your Schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutors' comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also the written comment on the ordinary assignments.
11. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in the course guide).

Tutors and Tutorials

Information relating to the tutorials will be provided at the appropriate time. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must take tutor-marked assignments to the study centre well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor if you need help. Contact your tutor if:

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings
 - You have difficulty with the exercises
- You have a question or problem with an assignment or with your tutor's comments on assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face-to-face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending the tutorials. You will learn a lot from participating in discussion actively.

Summary

The course gives you an overview of what to expect in the course of this study. The course teaches you about the mosque in Islam; focusing on its definition, history, types, roles, dos and don'ts in the mosque and the future challenges.

We wish you success with the course and hope you will find it both interesting and useful.



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COURSE CODE/TITLE: ISL 272: THE ‘ABBĀSID CALIPHATE 1

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ISL272: THE ABBASID CALIPHATE I

MODULE 1

‘ABBĀSID CALIPHATE: THE EARLY PERIOD (1)

Unit 1 BACKGROUND TO THE EMERGENCE OF THE ’ABBĀSID CALIPHATE

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 An Introduction to the House of ’Abbās
 - 3.2 The ’Abbāsīd Rebellion
 - 3.2.1 The Beginning of Propaganda
 - 3.2.2 Factors that favoured the ’Abbāsīd Propaganda
 - 3.2.3 The Profile of Abū Muslim
 - 4.0 Conclusion
 - 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor marked assignment
- 7.0 References / Further reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

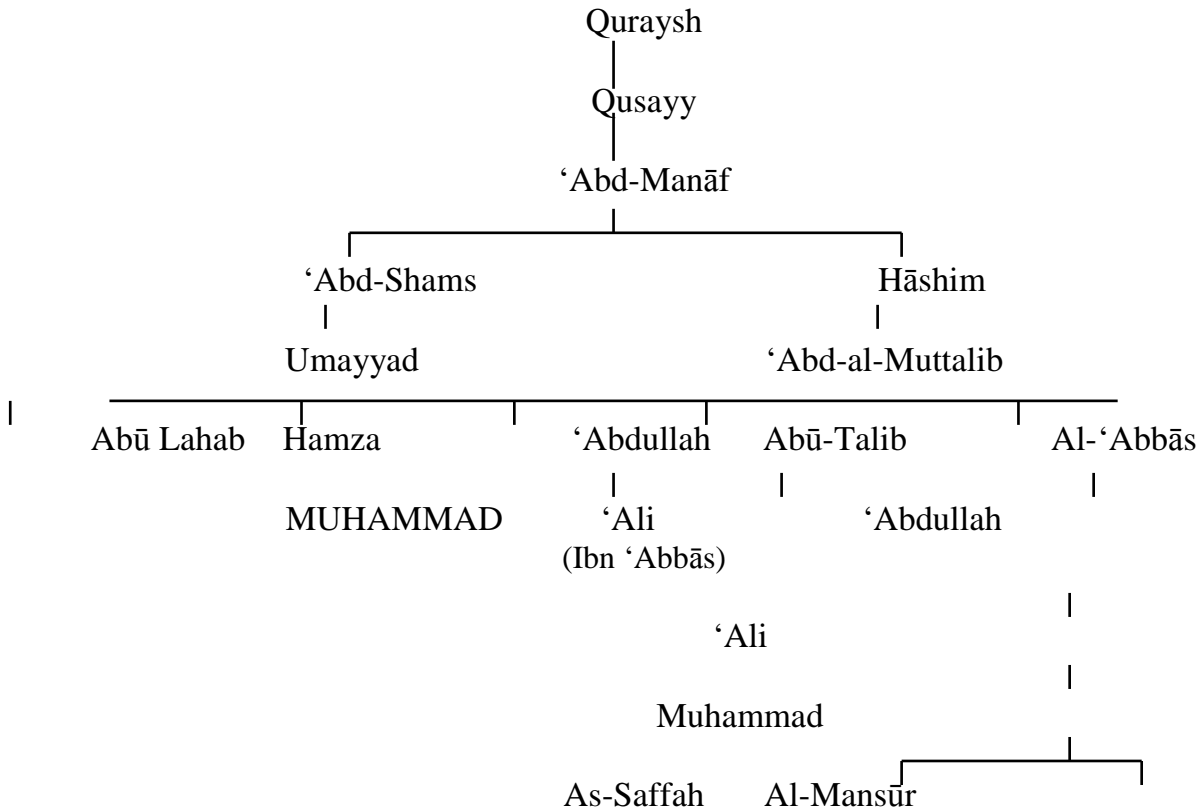
The ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate is the third in the chain of succession in Islamic history coming after the era of the four rightly guided Caliphs (Khulafāu Rāshidūn) (11A.H.-40A.H./632-661C.E.) and the Umayyad (40A.H.-128A.H./661–750 C.E.). It started from 128A.H./750 C.E. and ended in 637 A.H./1258 C.E. and marked a new phase in the history of Islam. In this unit, efforts shall be made to introduce the house of ’Abbās by going through their genealogy. It will also focus on the reasons for the propaganda embarked upon by their founding fathers, the major prosecutors of this revolution, the revolution itself and those factors that helped the successful propaganda of the ‘Abbāsīd.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

- By the end of this unit you should be able to
- Trace the origin of the house of ’Abbās
 - Explain how the propaganda began and the factors that favoured it
 - Know about the personality of Abū Muslim

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 An Introduction to the House of ‘Abbās



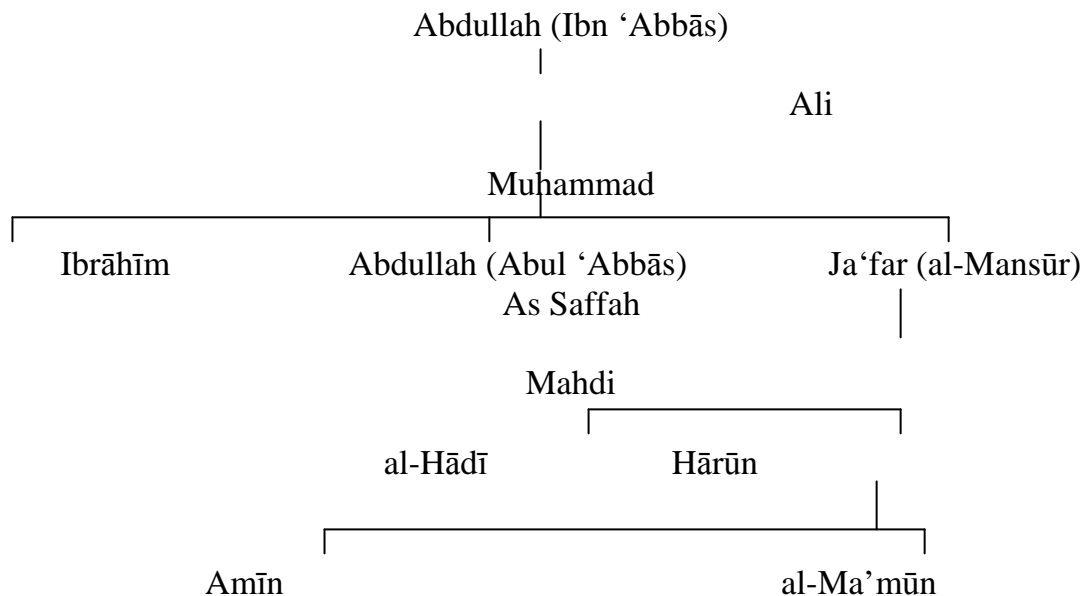
The house of ‘Abbās can be traced back to the Hashimite clan of the famous Qurayshi family in Makkah. Hāshim, the progenitor of the Hashimite family had given birth to Shayba better known as ‘Abd-al-Muttalib. ‘Abd-al-Muttalib was blessed with many children four of whom are to become popular figures in the history of Islam. These are Abū Tālib, ‘Abbās, Hamza and Abdullah. Another son by ‘Abd-al-Muttalib was Abū Lahab, the man who earned an unenviable fame as a bitter enemy of Islam and the persecutor of its adherents.

‘Abdullah gave birth to Muhammad, the man who later became the Prophet of Allah while Abū Tālib’s son called Ali was appointed as the fourth Caliph after the Prophet’s death. The marriage of Ali to Fatima, his cousin and the surviving daughter of the Prophet further strengthened the relationship between the families of ‘Abdullah and Abū Tālib by blood and by marriage. The descendants of Ali are later to be known as the Alids or the Fatimids; while in general term they are usually referred to as *ahl al-Bayt*; a name that apparently indicate their biological attachment to Prophet Muhammad’s household. The nomenclature *ahl al-Bayt* and

the roles of its members are crucial to the emergence of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate as would be seen later in this study.

‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd-al-Muttalib was the eponymous founder of the ‘Abbāsīds’. He had four children among whom was Abdullah, better known in history and tradition as Ibn ‘Abbās. Ibn ‘Abbās’ contributions to the spread and development of Islam cannot be over emphasized. The depth of his love for the Prophet was demonstrable in his attachment to the children of Fatimah. ‘Ali the son of Ibn ‘Abbās was to follow in this footsteps as the head of the ‘Abbāsīd family when his father died. His commitment to the cause of the Fatimids perhaps influenced Muhammad his son who succeeded him. Muhammad ibn ‘Ali was in fact the first to conceive the idea of seizing the Caliphate from the Umayyad. Before he died, Muhammad had named his three sons as his successors; one after the other. These were Ibrāhīm, ‘Abdullah Abūl ‘Abbās (known as as-Saffah d. 132A.H./754 C.E) and Ja’far, popularly called al-Mansūr (d. 154A.H./775C.E.).

‘Abbāsīd Genealogical Trees from Ibn ‘Abbās



SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Trace the genealogy of the ‘Abbāsīd family from ‘Abd-al-Muttalib to Ja‘far al-Mansūr.

3.2 THE ABBASID REVOLUTION

3.2.1 The Beginning of ‘Abbāsīd Propaganda

As stated earlier, Muhammad Ibn ‘Ali Ibn ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbās was the first ‘Abbāsīd leader to conceive the idea of putting an end to the Umayyad rule. The idea necessitated a serious propaganda, first by him and later by his sons who succeeded him one after the other. But removing the hated Umayyad was not the only plan, another one was the claim of the ‘Abbāsīd house to the Caliphate. To

legitimize this claim, the after Imath of the tragic event at Karbala became the reference point. The murder of Husayn ibn Ali (the fourth Caliph of Islam) at Karbala' automatically placed Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah in the vantage position of claiming his right to the Caliphate. By way of introduction, Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah was a son of Ali by another woman of Hanafi tribe whom he married after the death of Fatimah. Upon the death of Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah in 122 A.H./743 C.E. he was succeeded by his son Abū Hāshim in the serious struggle to claim this right. Abū Hāshim died without an issue and had the right transferred to Muhammad ibn Ali Ibn Abdullah ibn 'Abbās. The issue of transfer received credence from some people even though history was not clear as to whether this transfer is for the 'Abbāsīd to assume power or to claim it for the Alids; the original claimant to the office. To the massive supporters of Ali particularly the Shiites, all the propaganda efforts of the 'Abbāsīds is to claim the right to caliphate for the Alids. But to Muhammad, all that he needed was Abū Hashim's nod to claim this title. To win the support of Alids and sympathizers in this cause, the 'Abbāsīds employed two strategies: one is to carry out the propaganda in the name of the *ahl al-Bayt*; claiming the common origin with the Alids as the off shoot of the Hashimite clan. Second is to give their cause a religious colouration by emphasizing a return to theocracy rather than the autocratic government in power. Hitti puts this in proper perspective when he said that under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad, revolutionary Islam opposed the existing order with a feigned ideal of theocracy and a promise of return to orthodoxy. The support of the 'Abbāsīd was further strengthened by the lack of effective leadership on the part of the Alids to claim this right alone.

After gaining the support of the Alids, the 'Abbāsīds, launched the movement of all the Hashimites against the Umayyads using al-Humaymah, a little village south of the Dead Sea as their headquarters. The propaganda began during the reign of Caliph Yazīd II, the third son of Abdul Malik and successor to Caliph Umar II.

From the eastern part of the Empire, the 'Abbāsīd emissaries, appearing in Khurasan and disguising as innocent merchants were actually routing for Muhammad, the head of the 'Abbāsīd family. Sometimes some of these emissaries were caught and punished. This did not diminish their resolve to continue their campaign against the Umayyad government. The propaganda assumed a dangerous dimension when adherents began to enlist into these groups and within a short time, many secret organizations emerged with the sole purpose of subverting the Umayyad dynasty. By the time of Hishām who succeeded Yazīd II the heat was already on the Umayyads.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain the reason advanced by Muhammad al-Hanafiyyat to justify his claim to Caliphate

3.2.2 Factors that favoured the 'Abbāsīd Propaganda

There were so many factors that favoured the propaganda efforts of the 'Abbāsīds against the Umayyad dynasty. Some of these factors are explained as follows:

Persecution of members of the Hashimite family: The history of persecution of the Hashimite family began with the tragic event of Karbala where Husayn (the son of Ali) and his band were slain by Yazīd's forces. Not done yet with the corpse, his head was cut off and conveyed to Yazīd in Damascus. This unfortunate event was later to further promote Shiism, a sect that was favourably disposed to the cause of Ali. In the words of Rahim; 'Indeed Shiism was re-born on the tenth of Muharram. Karbala's tragic scene gave the Shiites a battle cry for revenge'. This persecution continued during the reign of Abdul Malik when his intolerable viceroy to Iraq; and former governor to Hijaz, Hajjaj ibn Yusuf began to oppress and ill-treat not only the Alids but also the entire people of Madinah. He was said to have killed between 120,000 and 150,000 men, generally on false charges during his long reign as viceroy. Similarly, not less than 50,000 people of both sexes were found to be rotting away in his prisons when he died. More of these persecutions of Hashimites were also recorded during the period of Hishām when Khalid the former viceroy of Iraq faced a severe torture in the hands of his successor Yusuf ibn Umar on false accusation of favouring the Hashimites. The extension of this persecution to the entire Hashimite family and the Caliph's refusal to call his viceroy to order necessitated the visit of Zaid ibn Husain to Hishām to seek redress. In total ignominy, Zaid was driven away and furiously, he went to Kufa where he attempted to rise in arms against the caliph in defiance of the advice by his relatives. It ended in a dīśāster, as Zaid was killed and his body buried by his followers. As if this was not enough, the Umayyads in utter show of hatred discovered his grave, exhumed his corpse and nailed it on the cross. It was later removed, burnt to ashes and thrown into the Euphrates. Further to this callous act of deliberate annihilation, Zaid's son named Yahya, who initially escaped from this barbaric attack fled to Khurasan and was manhunted. In desperation, he rose in arms against the Umayyads and was killed; his head severed and sent to Walid while the body was nailed to the cross. Yahya's death created tension in Khurasan and in their show of love for him, every male child born on the day of his death was named after him.

Maltreatment of the Mawālis: The Mawālis (singular *mawla*) were generally known as the non-Arab people that embraced Islam and affiliated themselves to Arab house holds. According to Abdul (1988) however: this is not completely true as they are Muslims who are not full members of an Arab aristocracy by descent.

This group includes Persians, Egyptians, Berbers, Nabateans and lesser some Arabs. The Mawālis in theory were granted the full right of Islamic citizenship in accordance with Islamic principles, yet they were not accorded the same status as Arabs in practical term. They were found at the lower stratum of the society. Even their commitment to learning did not guarantee them social and economic equality.

It is therefore no wonder that they possessed no alternative than to identify themselves with the Shiites in Iraq and the Kharijite in Persia. In provinces such as Khurasan where they were highly concentrated, they have assumed a corporate unity. This explained why they were able to organize into various secret units that could deal with the Umayyad government.

The Shiite Factor: The Shiites, a group of people that were well disposed to the house of Ali were not happy with the usurpation of power by Mu‘awiyah, the founder of Umayyad Caliphate and his successors. To this end, the murder of Ali and the maltreatment of his descendants in subsequent years also encouraged Shiite consideration of a pact with the ‘Abbāsīd propagandists to seek revenge. The support became overwhelming when the agenda of the ‘Abbāsīds, though superficial was to claim the right to the Caliphate for the Alids

Lukewarm attitude of the Muslim Scholars: The God fearing Muslims particularly the Muslim scholars watched with bitter sorrow the non-conformity of the Umayyad with the basic principles of governance according to Qur’ān and their cruel treatment of the people among others. Further to this was their non commitment to religious duties. Apart from very few of the Umayyad Caliphs who were highly devoted, the majority indulged in many vices which Islam frowned at. In the words of Hitti: even before the time of Hishām it became the fashion for the caliph, as exemplified by Yazīd II to pass his time in the chase and over his wine cup and to be absorbed more in music and poetry than in the Qur’ān and state affairs. But scholars and religious leaders of that period who were to uphold the ideals of Islam and campaign against these vices could not help the situation as many of them had resigned from this world. The battle cry of the discontented elements against this oppression therefore found no response from them. Seeing this as a weakness on the part of the living scholars; they had no choice than to look elsewhere in search of capable leadership to head their subversive campaign against the oppressors. It is in this situation and disaffection, so says Ali that Abū Muslim found his materials for the revolts and Khurasan became the centre for recruitment of the adherents to the cause of the house of ‘Abbās.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Account for the factors that favoured the propaganda efforts of the ‘Abbāsīds against the Umayyad dynasty

3.2.3 The Profile of Abū Muslim

Abū Muslim was generally believed to have come from Isfahan although others are of the view that he was of obscure origin. As a *mawla* himself, he was enlisted in the service of Muhammad Ibn Ali ibn ‘Abbās. When Muhammad died and the mantle of leadership fell on his brother Ibrāhīm, he appointed Abū Muslim as the head of the propaganda machinery against the Umayyads. Abū Muslim had all the characteristics that qualified him as a propagandist and a master strategist. He was a man of steel heart, intelligent and possessed a high power of organization. His oratorical power attracted many followers to the ‘Abbāsīd cause and within a short period, he was at the head of tactical forces, whose primary goal was to sweep the power off the feet of the Umayyad.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Describe the qualities that made Abū-Muslim qualify as the leader of ‘Abbāsīd propaganda and rebellion.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The ‘Abbāsīd family was a branch of the Hashimite clan in Makkah. Their common origin with the *ahl al Bayt* (i.e. the Prophet’s household) gave them the reason to justify their claim to the Caliphate. The Alids who were the most qualified claimants to this exalted office did not possess the kind of leadership that could match the hated Umayyads strength for strength. To the Alids therefore, the ‘Abbāsīds propaganda and the rebellion that followed would be an opportunity for them to assume this leadership. They were even more convinced when the popular proclamation of the ‘Abbāsīds was *ahl al-Bayt* a pronouncement that indicate the return of the Caliphate to its rightful owners who were the Alids. It was perhaps for this reason that the Alids supported the propaganda effort that began with Muhammad ibn Ali ibn ‘Abbās; and religiously prosecuted by Abū Muslim.

5.0 SUMMARY

- The ‘Abbāsīd and the *ahl al-Bayt* (i.e. the household of the Prophet) are of the Hāshimīyyah family in Makkah.
- The *ahl al-Bayt* primarily includes the Alids (the descendants of Ali) who were the offshoot of the Prophet by blood and by marriage
- Being claimants to the office of the Caliphate, they saw the Umayyads occupation of the Caliphal office as usurpation of power.
- Lack of effective leadership robbed them of any successful attempt to claim this right and subsequently paved the way for the ‘Abbāsīds
- The ‘Abbāsīd propaganda therefore originated from Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Abdullah ibn ‘Abbās whose objective was to return the Caliphate to the rightful owner; the *ahl al-Bayt*.
- This propaganda was favoured by many factors which included the persecution of the Hashimites, the spirit of inequality between the Umayyad in particular and the Arabs in general and their Mawālīs brethren, the grievances of the Shiites against the Umayyads as well as the lukewarm attitude of the scholars.
- To achieve their aim, the ‘Abbāsīds found in Abū Muslim a capable leader to prosecute the propaganda and lead the war.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Mention and discuss two factors that favoured the ‘Abbāsīd campaign against the Umayyad

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Unit 2 THE REBELLION AND THE AREAS COVERED BY THE EMERGING 'ABBĀSID EMPIRE

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Rebellion and Its Effects
 - 3.1.1 The Rebellion
 - 3.1.2 The Effects of the Rebellion
 - 3.2 Areas covered by the 'Abbāsīd Empire
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor marked assignment
- 7.0 References / Further reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, the background of the 'Abbāsīd dynasty, the evolution of its propaganda, and the factors that favoured the propaganda were discussed. In addition, detailed information concerning the major stakeholders was given. In this unit we shall discuss how the revolution took place and its effects on the emerging 'Abbāsīd Caliphate. Furthermore, we shall focus on the areas covered by the 'Abbāsīd Empire.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Give details of how the 'Abbāsīd revolution was executed
- Explain the effects of the revolution on the new Caliphate
- Have deep knowledge about the sphere of influence and the areas controlled by the 'Abbāsīd Empire.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Rebellion and its Effects

3.1.1 The Rebellion

The efforts by Marwān II (122A.H.-128A.H./744-750C.E) at subduing the insurrection in Syria as well as contending with the zealots in Iraq and Arabia

provided the fertile ground for the ‘Abbāsids onslaught against the Umayyads. Moreover, there was an on-going hostility at that time between Mudar and Himyār; two tribal groups of the Arabs. While Marwān was busy trying to suppress these insurrections in the west, his governor in Khurasan Nasr was battling with the Himyarite uprising in the east. Abū Muslim used this opportunity to issue the manifesto for their long awaited uprising. With a large group of people on his side all clad in black as a mark of mourning and the maximum support secured particularly from the adherents of Fatimah, Abū-Muslim’s strategic choice of *ahl al-Bayt* as his slogan did the magic. Within weeks, preparation for the impending battle was complete as according to Ali, the ‘Abbāsīd warrior (Abū Muslim) and his forces were on their way in their onward march towards the west. His force first drove Nasr, the governor of Khurasan out of Marw. The inability of Nasr to face the superior fire power of the forces under Abū Muslim necessitated his call for assistance from Caliph Marwān who could not offer any, as he was busy battling with the insurrection in Mesopotamia. For the second time, another appeal for help went to Marwān. In response, Marwān sent a directive to the viceroy of Iraq requesting him to reinforce the beleaguered viceroy. Before the arrival of reinforcement, Farghana and Khurasan had been captured by Abū Muslim forces. One of Abū Muslim’s general named Khataba bin Shabib led a batch of soldiers in a hot pursuit of Nasr to Sarrakhs where the governor’s forces were completely routed. Further defeat of his forces in Jurjan forced Nasr to flee towards Fars but died on the way. The series of defeat suffered by the Umayyad forces necessitated Marwān’s manhunt for the Hashimites in whose interest the standard of revolt was raised. Through his spies, Ibrāhīm the head of the ‘Abbāsīd who was hiding with other descendants of ‘Abbās in Humaima near Palestine was found, arrested and brought to Harran where he was imprisoned. The incarceration of Ibrāhīm could not however diminish the zeal of Abū Muslim and his forces to put an end to the Umayyad rule. The force of Khataba in company of Khalid ibn Barmak whose descendants later played dominant roles in the stabilization of the ‘Abbāsīd Empire, advanced westward after the defeat of Nasr. Khataba’s son Hasan laid siege to the city of Nehawand while his father engaged the large army sent by Marwān in fierce battle and defeated it. Khataba went further to defeat the two forces led by Marwān’s son, Abdullah and Yazīd his viceroy, after a heavy siege on Nehawand. From Nehawand, Khataba deployed another force under Abū Ayun to face Abdullah ibn Marwān and headed towards the capital of Iraq. His force and that of Yazīd met on the spot not far away from the Euphrates River. The battle ended in a devastating defeat for Yazīd but not without the loss of the commander himself. Khataba died and the mantle of the army leadership fell on his son Hasan who successfully drove Yazīd from his camp and forced him to return to Wasit. In quick succession, Kufa was captured without much opposition. The news was a sad one for Marwān who was furious with rage and ordered the killing of Ibrāhīm who was still under his prison custody. Account of Ibrāhīm’s murder varies. One version relates that he died through a house falling over him while another version is of the view that he was poisoned. Before his death however, Ibrāhīm was said to have sent a message to his brother Abūl ‘Abbās as-Saffah confirming him as his successor to the ‘Abbāsīd leadership. Meanwhile fierce battles were going on

and within three years all the forces sent against the 'Abbāsīd revolution fell one after the other. In 127A.H./749 C.E Abū-Ayun forces met the Caliphal forces from Syria under the command of Abdullah ibn Marwān at Little Zab and a fierce battle ensued. The defeat of Marwān's son in this battle forced the Caliph to lead a strong army of 12,000 men across the Tigris in an advancement towards the Greater Zab.

Before their arrival, reinforcement from Kufah had strengthened the Abū Ayun forces under the command of Abdullah ibn Ali, one of as Saffah's uncles. What Marwān met at Greater Zab was a fortified Abbasid troop, at whose hands Umayyad Caliph suffered a defeat and fled towards Mosul. Getting no support from the people of Mosul, he ran to Harran and from there to Hims and finally to Damascus. Still not sure of his safety, Marwān fled to Palestine. But wherever he fled Abdullah ibn Ali was after him. Apart from Damascus where his supporters offered a little resistance and were subdued, virtually the whole empire has fallen into the hands of the 'Abbāsīds without a fight. Abdullah ibn Ali continued his chase after Marwān who left his Palestine hideout and made his flight towards Egypt. No sooner had he arrived in Egypt than Abū Ayun and Sālih were despatched by Abdullah ibn Ali to follow him up. Marwān was traced to Fustat and found at a place called Busir on the western bank of Nile where he was killed. With the death of Marwān came the end of the Umayyad dynasty. On the order of Abūl-'Abbās, members of the defeated Umayyads were hunted and killed wherever they were found. Not done yet, Abdullah ibn Ali invited about eighty surviving princes and other relatives of the Umayyad under the pretext of granting them amnesty and slaughtered them in cold blood. Few however escaped and among them was Abdur-Rahmān who escaped and fled to Spain where he later founded another Umayyad dynasty.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Describe vividly how the 'Abbāsīd rebellion was fought and won.

3.1.2 Effects of the Rebellion

There is no doubt that the revolution brought about significant changes in to the system of administration of the emerging Caliphate, the people and to Islam. These changes include the termination of the Umayyad rule and the establishment of a new empire and the transfer of the seat of power from Damascus to Kufa in the first instance and later Baghdād in Iraq. It also means the coming to an end of the Arabian rule and the emergence of the persianised 'Abbāsīd rule. Under this new arrangement, emphasis was laid on the balance of power between the Persians and the Banu 'Abbās. In fact, some considered the 'Abbāsīd victory as Persians' victory over the Arabs. The new Islamic government became internationalized as against the aristocratic government of the Umayyads which was monopolized by the Arabs.

The fall of the Umayyads marked the end of conquest and expansion; and the beginning of the age of consolidation, civilization and culture. The Shites at least temporarily felt compensated as a result of this revolution, particularly for the wrong done to Ali. Furthermore, the Persian culture became manifest in the life of the 'Abbāsīds although Arabic remained the official language. Numerous body-

guards were recruited from among the Persians, and some were in the army. Infact, they occupied central positions in the Caliphate as a result of their service. Both the Arabs and the Persians were culturally mixed and the *mawla* (pl. *Mawālis*) ceased to be segregated and feel inferior. In other words, social class disappeared by a process of assimilation and naturalization and the Mawālis acquired the status of the Arabs. It is instructive to note that with time the Arab tribes gradually began to lose their privileges and the rights in military and administrative matters.

Even the numerical strength of the *Mawālis* later emboldened them to claim superiority over the Arabs. The non-Arabs generally began to assert their identity with the emergence of the *shu‘ūbiyyah* tendency. Lastly, the empire witnessed for the first time the appearance of the vizierate, an office with Persian origin.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Enumerate the effects of ‘Abbāsīd revolution on the new caliphate.

3.2 Areas Covered by the ‘Abbāsīd Empire

The areas covered by the ‘Abbāsīd Empire were not radically changed from what they used to be under the Umayyads. Although the ‘Abbāsīd list of provinces; primarily following the Byzantine and Persian models varied from time to time and according to some sources, the political classification may not necessarily have to tally with the geographical. However, what seems to be the chief provinces under the early Caliphs of Baghdād can be divided into two. The first comprised five provinces and were often referred to as *aqālīm al-maghrib* (the Western provinces) and they include:

- a Africa west of the Libyan Desert together with Sicily
- b Egypt
- c Syria and Palestine, which were sometimes separated
- d al-Hijaz and al-Yamamah (Central Arabia)
- e Yemen or Southern Arabia

The second part known as *aqālīm al-mashriq* (the Eastern provinces) consists of the following;

- a al-Bahrayn and ‘Uman, with al-Basrah in al-Iraq as its capital
- b al-Sawad, or al-‘Iraq (Lower Mesopotamia), whose leading cities after Baghdād were al-Kufah and Wasit
- c al-Jazirah (i.e. the island, rather the peninsula, ancient Assyria), whose capital was al-Mawsil (Mosul)
- d Adharbayjan, of which Ardabil, Tibriz and Maraghah were the leading towns
- e al-Jibal (the mountains, ancient Media), later called al-‘Iraq al-‘Ajam (the Persian ‘Iraq) of which the principal cities were Hamadhan, al-Rayy and Isbahan
- f Khuzistan, with al-Ahwaz and Tustar as chief towns;
- g Faris, with Shiraz as the capital;
- h Karman, which present capital bears the same name;

- i Mukran, which included modern Baluchistan and extended to the highlands overlooking the Indus valley;
- j Sijistan or Sistan, with capital at Zaranj;
- k Quhistan,
- l Qumis,
- m Tabaristan,
- n Jurjan,
- o Armenia,
- p Khurasan, which included what has now become the north-western part of Afghanistan and which leading cities were NaysAbūr, Marw, Harat (Herat) and Balkh
- q Khawārizm,
- r al-Sughd (ancient Sogdiana) between the Oxus and Jaxartes, having two famous cities, Bukhara and Samarqand
- s Farghanah, al-Shash (modern Tashkand) and other Turkish lands

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

The areas covered by the Abbasid Empire indicated its popularity during the early period. Discuss

4.0 CONCLUSION

Disenchantment created by the misrule of the Umayyad Caliphs gave birth to the propaganda embarked upon by the ‘Abbāsids as well as the rebellion that followed. Abū Muslim the ‘Abbāsids war hero prosecuted ‘Abbāsid rebellion with able and loyal lieutenants and the general support enjoyed from the people. The capitulation of the whole empire in the hands of the ‘Abbāsids did not only put an end to the Umayyad rule but also ushered in a new political dispensation and dynasty championed by the Arabs but generally controlled by the Persians and their *Mawālīs* brethren. The new empire was a conglomerate of many elements including particularly the Arabs and the Persians all of whom were divided into provinces that were broadly categorized into *aqālīm al-maghrīb* (the Western provinces) and *aqālīm al-mashriq* (the Eastern provinces).

5.0 SUMMARY

- Abū Muslim led the ‘Abbāsīd revolution against the Umayyad
- Together with his able lieutenants, they used the opportunity of Marwān’s preoccupation with uprisings in the west to launch their attack
 - The attack led to the defeat of Nasr ibn Nayyar, Marwān’s governor in Khurasan and his son Abdullah in Little Zab.
- Enraged by the defeat of his son, Marwān personally led a force of 12,000 men against the ‘Abbāsīd forces led by Abdullah ibn Ali and his deputy Abū Ayun.
 - Both forces met at the Greater Zab and there Marwān force was humiliated
 - The caliph fled and was pursued till he arrived Egypt where he was tracked down and killed

- His death marked the end of the Umayyad dynasty and the establishment of the 'Abbāsīd empire
- The new empire covered a vast area covering African minor and parts of Asia
 - The areas contained many provinces that were broadly divided into two
- These were *aqālīm al-maghrib* (the Western provinces) and *aqālīm al-mashriq* (the Eastern provinces).

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

The success of the 'Abbāsīd rebellion had great effects on the 'Abbāsīd Empire.
Discuss

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Unit 3 THE RISE OF ABŪ-L-‘ABBĀS AS-SAFFAH TO POWER AND THE ROLES OF THE BARMECIDES

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 Abdullah Abū- ‘Abbās as-Saffah (127-132 A.H./749-754 C.E)
 - 3.1.1 Ascension and Personality
 - 3.1.2 His Administrative Policy
- 3.2 The Vizierate
- 3.3 The Barmecides
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor marked assignment
- 7.0 References / Further reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, attention was focused on the rebellion that brought the ‘Abbāsids to power. In the same unit, the effects of this rebellion on the emerging Caliphate as well as the major areas of control of the ‘Abbāsids were discussed. In this unit, one of the founders of this dynasty who was also its first caliph; Abdullah Abū ‘Abbās as-Saffah shall be the major subject here. This shall include his election, administration and achievements. In addition, efforts shall be made to explain the relevance of the new office i.e. the vizierate in the administration of the caliphate. Finally there shall be an insight into the roles of the powerful Barmecides family in consolidating the empire.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Have an insight into how Abū- ‘Abbās as-Saffah came to power, his administration as well as his achievements
- Discuss the powerful position occupied by the viziers in the administration of the empire
- Comment extensively on the contributions of the Barmecides to the caliphate in its early history

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Abdullah Abūl-'Abbās as-Saffah (127A.H.-132A.H./749-754C.E)

3.1.1 Ascension and Personality

After the sack of the Umayyad dynasty, the 'Abbāsids came to power with Abdullah Abūl-'Abbās as the first ruler of the nascent government. His proclamation as caliph was made in Khurasan and Kufah in 127A.H./749 C.E. and by 128A.H./750 C.E. when the conquest was complete; the caliphate had gained total acceptability. In his first *khutbah* delivered during his inauguration as the caliph, Abūl-'Abbās proclaimed himself 'as-Saffah' meaning the blood-shedder, in apparent reference to his brutal vengeance on the fallen Umayyads many of whom were mercilessly executed. It was by this sobriquet that Abūl-'Abbās was popularly known in history. Abūl-'Abbās is married to Ummu Salmah; the only wife to whom he was passionately attached and who has an overriding influence over him. Abūl-'Abbās spent his short reign of four years in securing the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate; quelling pockets of uprising against his government by the partīsāns of the ousted dynasty in Damascus, Palestine and Mesopotamia among others. As at the time of as-Saffah's inauguration, Yazīd ibn Hubaira, the viceroy of the last Umayyad caliph in Iraq was fully in control of Wasīt; a town that was under the siege of Hasan ibn Khataba and Abū Ja'far, as saffah's brother. Aware that eleven month siege without a single challenge from the Umayyad forces was an indication of a collapsed dynasty, Yazīd re-strategised by calling upon the Alids to take up the Caliphate. While this call also received no immediate response, Yazīd; in a bid to save his face and his head finally decided to surrender to Abū Ja'far on two conditions (i) amnesty for him; his family and his followers and (2) guarantee the safety of their property. Taking cognizance of Yazīd's large followership and the possibility of a rivalry between him and the Caliph, Abū Muslim advised that he should be put to death. Thus, Yazīd and his sons fell to the swords of Abū Ja'far's forces. To feel safe also from the possible attack of the Shiites who were based in Kufah and are the unrepentant sympathizers of the Alids, as-Saffah built his residence few miles away and named the new settlement which became his capital Hāshimiyyah.

In the running of his administration, Abūl-'Abbās made use of trusted men some of who were either his family members or who have shown dedication to his cause as his governors. His brother Abū Ja'far became the viceroy of Mesopotamia, Armenia and Azerbaijan; his uncle Dāūd bin Ali held Hijaz, Yemen and Yamama while Sulaiman ibn Ali controlled Basra, al-Bahrain, Oman, Ahwaz and so on. Others include Abdullah ibn Ali in Syria; Abū Muslim, Khurasan; and Abū Ayun in Egypt. Khalid ibn Barmak held the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer while Abū Salmah became the vizier and the confidential adviser. The competition for power and influence within the administrative machineries of as-Saffah claimed its first victim in Abū Salmah. As the vizier to the caliph, his soaring influence over the Caliph was to the discomfort of Abū Muslim. One day, he was said to have been way laid while returning home from the Caliph's court and killed by Abū Muslim followers. Another source attributed his death to the Kharijites. As-Saffah

died of small pox in his early thirties at Anbar on the 9th of June 132A.H./754 C.E, leaving behind a son Muhammad and a daughter; Raita. Before his death, as-Saffah named his younger brother Abū Ja'far as his successor and his nephew Īsā as heir presumptive.

By character, Abūl-'Abbās was a combination of opposites. He combined cruelty and kindness. Perhaps his cruelty is attributable to his historical massacre of his real and imagined enemies. His other side however, showed a generous ruler, a devoted husband and an affectionate father.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Assess the life of as- Saffah as a Caliph and a family man

3.1.2 His Administrative Policy

Following his assumption of power, as-Saffah adopted a new policy in the administration of the Caliphate. These included the abolition of the old Arab aristocratic policy of the Umayyads and its replacement with another one that embraced all Muslims in government irrespective of their race or colour. In other words, he internationalized his administrative policy by appointing all Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs, in important offices on the basis of merit.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

State the major policy introduced into the Caliphate by as-Saffah

The Vizierate

The newly created post by the 'Abbāsīd with a Persian origin is that of the vizierate. The occupier of this office is known as the Wazir. The vizier was the second in command to the Caliph in the running affairs of the state and usually deputized for him when the Caliph engaged himself in other duties of the state or domestic matters. The power exercised by the vizier was enormous. Infact the Caliph saw the role of vizier as the extension of his 'divine right' to rule Particular reference to this can be found in the expression of Caliph al-Nasir while appointing

Muhammad ibn Barz al-Qummi as his vizier thus:

Muhammad ibn Barz al-Qummi is our representative through the land and amongst our subjects. Therefore he who obeys him obeys us; and he who obeys us obeys God, and God shall cause him who obeys Him to enter Paradise.

As for one who on the other hand disobeys our vizier, he disobeys us, and God shall cause him who disobeys Him to enter hell-Fire.

Indeed the enormous power wielded by the vizier included the appointment and removal of governors and judges although theoretically with the approval of the Caliph. A good example was the Barmecides who exerted great influence over the Caliphs It was also customary for them to confiscate the properties of such

governors whose appointments were terminated. During the period of Caliph Mu'tadid, the vizier usually got a monthly remuneration of one thousand dinars. It is generally believed that the vizierate first appeared in Islamic government under Caliph al-Mansūr and that Khalid al-Barmak was the first occupier of that office. However, Ameer Ali had a contrary view. According to him as-Saffah was the first caliph to create that office and made Abū Salmah, who was instrumental to his emergence as caliph, the first vizier.

This powerful position was abolished after the reign of Caliph al-Muqtadir (287-311A.H./908-32C.E.) and in its stead the post of 'commander of the commanders' amir al-Umarā' was instituted and the Buwayhid's became the subsequent holders of that office

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

How would you describe the position occupied by the viziers in the administration of the caliphate?

3.3 The Barmecides

The Barmecides family was a famous and powerful Persian family in the history of 'Abbāsīd Caliphate. The head of this family was Khalid al-Barmak who was the son of a *barmak* the chief priest in Buddhist monastery. Khalid embraced Islam when Central Asia was overrun and subdued under the command of Qutaybah ibn Muslim in 84 A.H./705 C.E. He played very significant role in the 'Abbāsīd movement under the leadership of Abū Muslim. The intimacy of Khalid with the Caliph was indicated in the fact that his daughter was nursed by the wife of as-Saffah and the daughter of the Caliph was likewise nursed by Khalid's wife. He began his career very early under the 'Abbāsīd and rose to the headship of the *diwan al-kharaj* (i.e. finance department). He later became governor of Tabaristan where he suppressed a dangerous uprising. He was also at a time an adviser to al-Mansūr and had very considerable influence over the Caliph. Later in his life, he played an important role in the capture of a Byzantine fortress. Khalid became the founder of the illustrious family of *wazirs*.

The importance of this family and their roles were numerous. First, al-Mansūr's successor al-Mahdi had entrusted the education of his son Hārūn to Yahya the son of Khalid. When Hārūn eventually became the Caliph, Yahya ibn Barmak became his vizier with an unrestricted power. The respect accorded Yahya by the new Caliph can be located in the latter's often reference to the former as 'my father'. According to Ameer Ali, in the instrument of appointment given to Yahya, Hārūn was quoted to have concluded:

'I devolve upon you the responsibility of my subjects; you may pass judgements as you like, for I shall not occupy my self with these matters with you'

In this regard, Yahya was practically in charge of the administration between 164A.H./786C.E. and 182AH/803C.E. when political intrigues within Hārūn's cabinet threw the Barmecides out of favour with the government.

Meanwhile the popularity they enjoyed was not lost in their life style as they had their palaces in eastern Baghdād. One of these magnificent residences called al-Ja'fari was later occupied by al-Ma'mūn who transformed it into the royal palace.

Members of this family were said to have amassed so much wealth that the fractions they saw fit to bestow on panegyrists was enough to make the latter wealthy

The Barmecides were Shi'ites and did not hide their allegiance to Shi'te leaders. Their ingenuity became known in the various areas by which each member of this family was endowed, for example al-Fadl is reputed with being the first in Islam to introduce the use of lamps in the mosque during the month of Ramadan. Ja'far became famous for eloquence, literary ability and penmanship. In words of Hitti, 'Chiefly because of him Arab historians regard the Barmecides as the founders of the class designated "people of the pen" (*ahl al-qalam*).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

The role of the Barmecides in the consolidation of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate in the early period can not be over emphasized. Discuss

4.0 CONCLUSION

The reign of Abūl 'Abbās as-Saffah marked a new chapter in the history of Islam. Leading this dynasty was Abūl 'Abbās as-Saffah, its first caliph who spent major parts of his four year rule in subduing insurrections.

5.0 SUMMARY

- The empire which had as-Saffah as its first caliph consisted of a mixture of the Arabs and the Persians.
- The new government and the entire empire reflect generally the Persian culture
- Abūl-'Abbās himself spent his four years in power to quell the nsurrection that resulted from their rise to power.
- The Vizierate office was a newly created office with the occupier of that office called the vizier and had its origin from Persia.
- Historical accounts vary as to the first man to occupy the exalted post of the vizier
 - Khalid al-Barmak, one of the viziers was to be the arrowhead of the celebrated and illustrious family of Barmak many of whom were viziers.
- Members of this family were powerful, talented and exerted great influence upon the individual Caliph under whom they served.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Explain several factors that informed the active involvement of the Persians in the administration of the 'Abbāsīds

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Unit 4

ABŪ-JA‘FAR AL-MANSŪR (132A.H-153A.H./754C.E.775C.E.):

ASCENSION, ACHIEVEMENTS AND WEAKNESSES

CONTENT

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 - 3.2.4 His Death
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The last unit focused on the history of Abū-l-‘Abbās as-Saffah the first Caliph of the ‘Abbāsīd Empire. In this unit we shall focus on the second Caliph; Abū Ja‘far al-Mansūr; his contributions to the development of the Caliphate, his achievements as well as his weak points.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Discuss about how al-Mansūr consolidated his rule in particular and the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty in general
- Enumerate in details the successes achieved by Caliph al-Mansūr
- Assess the personality of al-Mansūr as well as his weaknesses
 - Discuss fully the construction of Baghdād

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 Abū-Ja‘far al-Mansūr: The Second ‘Abbāsīd Caliph

3.1.1 Ascension and Personality

Abū Ja‘far succeeded his brother as the second in the line of the ‘Abbāsīd rulers in 132AH/754 C.E. However, by virtue of his spectacular achievements which shall be mentioned later, he was generally regarded as the real founder of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate. Abū Ja‘far assumed power with the title ‘al-Mansūr’ meaning the

victorious'. While as-Saffah spent his period to secure the caliphate, Abū Mansur devoted himself to the task of its consolidation. To achieve this aim; he spared no time or means at his disposal.

Al-Mansūr faced the first challenge of leadership when his uncle Abdullah ibn Ali who was the governor of Syria under as-Saffah laid claim to the caliphate. To crush the revolt, al-Mansūr directed Abū Muslim to lead an army against the challenger force. The two forces met in Nasibin. In a well fought battle, Abdullah's army was defeated and together with his family, this hero of the Zab war escaped to Basra. He remained in hiding for sometime only to be captured and together with his two sons were imprisoned in a castle not far from Hāshimiyyah. To avoid possible reoccurrence of the Nasibin event, al-Mansūr made a tactical ploy to eliminate his uncle. Abdullah was released after seven years imprisonment and ceremoniously lodged in a house specifically built for him over the foundation of salt. There he remained until the first heavy shower of rain demolished the house and claimed his life.

Having got rid of his uncle, Abū Muslim's popularity, particularly among the Khurasanians became a source of worry to al-Mansūr who considered him too dangerous to himself and his family. More importantly, Abū Muslim's total control over his numerous Persian kinsmen made his attitude become overbearing. Of particular example was his disrespectful reaction to a royal order given by al-Mansūr concerning the Nasibin war booty. The first plan of al-Mansūr was to make Abū Muslim unpopular by assigning to him another role that would take him away from his devoted followers. In this regard, Abū Muslim was offered the viceroyalty of Syria and all its dependencies. Abū Muslim would not want this and together with his troops he decided to return to Khurasan. With lavish promises from the Caliph, Abū Muslim set aside his return to his province and went straight to the caliphal court. He was enjoying the honours granted him in this court until one unlucky day when the man who prosecuted the war that established the caliphate was murdered in cold blood while having an audience with the caliph.

Assessing the character of al-Mansūr exposes him as a man who possessed an opposing mixture of good and evil. His roles as a politician and a ruler showed his foresight, wisdom and attentiveness to public affairs. Al-Mansūr was a devoted father but generally as a man he was said to be cruel and treacherous. He was very devoted as he slept little, and rose early for the morning prayers. Al-Mansūr usually spent the afternoon with his family and children after the day's job. In the evening after saying his prayers, he was fond of listening to the dispatches of the day, and took counsel from his ministers. He only retired to rest when one-third of the night was well spent. In physique Al-Mansūr was thin, tall and fair in complexion. His conduct and life was exemplary so also was his tenacity to justice. He led his subjects by example. Of particular reference was a period when he was summoned by the Qādī of Medina, at the instance of some camel-owner. Apart from attending in person accompanied only by his chamberlain, al-Mansūr stood as an ordinary litigant before the judge, who did not even rise from his seat to receive his sovereign. The judgement favoured the plaintiffs and al-Mansūr acknowledged the independence and integrity of the impartial judge.

Caliph al-Mansūr had a hectic time crushing many rebellions that arose during his reign. One was the insurrection in Khurasan of Sunbad the Magian who in 133A.H./755 C.E. thought it right to avenge the murder of Abū Muslim and was defeated. Rising at the same time was a Persian sect named the Rawandiyah which held the extremists position of trying to identify the caliph with God. With regard to this peculiar belief the Caliph was God incarnate. According to the historical account by Rahim: ‘They came to the Caliph’s court and shouted, “It is the house of our Lord, he that giveth us food to eat and water to drink”’. The agitation caused among the people by this position forced al-Mansūr to take strong action against them by getting two hundred of their leaders arrested. This action infuriated the Rawandiyah members and they rose in rebellion. In response, troops were drafted to deal with them and the riot was not only suppressed, they were also expelled from the city in 136A.H./758 C.E. Al-Mansūr also had to deal with the raids carried out by the Byzantines against the Muslim territories. They were subdued and their Emperor was forced to sue for peace in 135A.H./757 C.E.

In the eastern part of the empire particularly in Khurasan, the governor rebelled and al-Mansūr’s force under the command of his son al-Mahdi suppressed it. Another uprising in Tabaristan resulted in heavy defeat in the hands of al-Mahdi and his troops taking many of them captives. After this campaign, Tabaristan which was formerly under the nominal sovereignty of the Caliph was annexed to the Empire in 138A.H./760 C.E. The attempt of Caliph al-Mansūr at recovering Spain from its Umayyad ruler, Abdur Rahmān the grandson of Hishām failed as many of his generals were killed. Seeing the futility of this ambition; al-Mansūr did not make any more attempts for the recovery of Spain which was a distant territory. The Kharijites also exerted their influence over the Berbers and were fomenting troubles in Africa. They killed Aghlab their governor and his son, Umar and occupied Qayrawan. Yazid Muhallab a new governor appointed by al-Mansūr crushed this rebellion and restored peace to the troubled territory. Few other revolts were recorded in Deilem, Armenia and Mosul and al-Mahdi, the heir apparent was sent to suppress them and was successful in restoring peace there. For effective administration, al-Mansūr made a new distribution of the provincial governorship. In addition, he appointed a member of the house of Hasan as the governor of Madinah

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Describe how Caliph al-Mansūr overcame the challenges that faced him at the beginning of his rule

3.2 Major Achievements

3.2.1 Foundation of Baghdād

To further secure his empire, al-Mansūr who had his residence at Hāshimiyah decided to move his capital away from this area which lied between Kufa and Hirah. The proximity of Kufah posed a great danger to the new empire as

1. Syria was the base of the Umayyads
2. Wasīt was more or less the extension of the Umayyad house

3. People of Basrah and Kufah were favourably disposed to the Alid cause. In 140A.H./762 C.E. the foundation of a new capital was laid in Baghdād, a settlement on the eastern bank of the Tigris. The construction of the city took four years at a cost conservatively put at 4,883,000 *dirhams*. About one hundred thousand architects, craftsmen and labourers took part in the construction of Madīnat al-Salām (the city of peace); the official name by which Baghdād was then called. Baghdād was a well planned city consisting of many imposing structures with the palace at the centre and the mosque close by. Its circular shape gave it the name *al-Mudawwarat* meaning ‘the round city’. The beauty of this magnificent city was unrivalled at that period. Apart from al-Mansūr’s palace, the Golden Gate (*Bab ad-dhahab*) and the Green Dome (*al-qubbah al-Khadra*) were two other palaces built by al-Mansūr before his death. The first one located at the bank of the Tigris was called *Qasr al-Khuld* (palace of eternity) and the other; *al-Rusafah* (Causeway) was meant for the heir apparent, the Caliph’s son al-Mahdi. As a city sited on the Persian territory; it became the centre of Persian culture. The Persian cultural influence became predominant even within the Abbasid Caliphate. The only areas remaining for the Arabs to boast of were Islam as the state religion and Arabic as the official language of the state.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

- a What were the factors that compelled al-Mansūr to move the seat of his government from Hāshimiyyah to Baghdād?
- b Baghdād was a model city to behold during the reign of al-Mansūr. Discuss.

3.2.2 Other Achievements

Al-Mansūr was a statesman, and had no rival in his time. Due to his numerous achievements, he was practically regarded as the founder of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate. He secured the Caliphate of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty that for nearly six centuries, his family was in power. “The permanence of the family”, says Ameer Ali, “the power they wielded and the influence they exercised after they had lost their temporal authority were due to his foresight”. He was the founder of the Sunni Islam which became the source of strength to the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty. Caliph Mansūr’s administration was liberal and progressive and happened to be the first in history. His administration was more focused on the welfare of the people rather than on conquest and expansion. His achievements included construction of roads, canals and wells. He also established hospitals and schools throughout the empire. The Aqsa Mosque was rebuilt about 149AH /771C.E. by him following an earthquake. Similarly, Al-Mansūr established the vizierate, a Persian office which was the first in the history of Islam. He had to his credit the foundation of a translation bureau called ‘*Dar al-Hikmah*’ where valuable works of the ancient scholars were translated into Arabic. His liberal disposition to scholars and men of learning was great as he encouraged the study of history, philosophy, medicine and astronomy. He appointed scholars to high post at his court and with this he had no doubt prepared the way for great intellectual life under his worthy successors.

As Caliph, he personally reviewed his troops, inspected the fortresses; and made sure that the army was fully equipped with improved weapons and armour. He was meticulous and very careful in handling the accounts of the state. His flair for accountability “even to fractions of dirhams and grains, earned him the designation of Abū’ d-Dawanik”. Al-Mansūr built the city of Rafika, and surrounded Kufa and Basra with walls and trenches. He also ordered a census of the population.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Enumerate some of the significant achievements of Caliph al-Mansūr

3.2.3 His Weaknesses

Al-Mansūr had some weaknesses which almost destroyed his character and achievements. According to Rahim ‘he was sometimes cruel, unscrupulous and vindictive’. An example of his cruelty can be cited in the murder of Abū-Muslim; the man to whom the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate owed its emergence. Another major incident that obviously remained a dark spot in the history of Caliph al-Mansūr was his ill-treatment of the descendants of Caliph Ali. The incident which has its root in history can be viewed from three angles. The first was the influence enjoyed by the descendants of the first three caliphs all of whom were connected with the Alids in Madinah. Afraid of the implications of this particularly as it happened during the time of Marwān, al-Mansūr resorted to various methods of trying to discover whether similar conspiracy was going on against him. He decided to send many emissaries to parley with the Alids with the aim of obtaining vital information against the caliph as a veritable ground for accusation later on. The second was the members of Ali’s family rightful claim to the Caliphate and the basis for their total support for ‘Abbāsīd struggle. Therefore to the Alids, the Abbasids had deceived them and had usurped their Caliphate. The third cause which was a bit related was in reference to the meeting that took place in Madinah at the eve of the collapse of Umayyad dynasty. This meeting which was attended by most members of the Banu Hashim included al-Mansūr himself. Muhammad; a great grandson of Hasan was chosen as the caliph, even while his father was alive as a result of his impeccable character which earned him the sobriquet ‘*an-Nafs-uz-Zakiya*, or the Pure Soul. His choice by general consensus which included al-Mansūr now became an albatross with the assumption of the ‘Abbāsīd to the caliphate. When Caliph al-Mansūr’s attempt to capture Muhammad and his brother Ibrāhīm who had run for their lives failed, he arrested all the members of the family including their father; and in chain he sent them to Kufah where they were imprisoned.

The torture of the family shocked Muhammad and Ibrāhīm, and both returned and lived in hiding. While Muhammad was at Madīnah, his brother Ibrāhīm was in Basra. A serious manhunt for the fugitives began; they emerged from their hideout and rose in rebellion against the Caliph. The two were to announce the removal of al-Mansūr simultaneously from Madīnah and Basra. In the words of Ali, ‘had this plan been successfully carried out, it is probable that the ‘Abbāsīd rule would have come to an end’. But in eagerness Muhammad was said to have been forced before

his brother could complete his own preparation. The failure of this strategy was to al-Mansūr's advantage as he was able to attack them one after the other.

Muhammad enjoyed the overwhelming support of the people of Madīnah, and within few days he was recognized as the Caliph of Islam in Hijāz and Yemen. The two prominent Imams of that time viz: Imām Abū Hanīfa and Imām Malik who were the founders of the Hanafite and Malikite schools of law respectively ruled in favour of his claim. To show that Muhammad meant business, the Caliph's appointee for Madīnah was arrested and imprisoned. The weight of support for Muhammad and the dangerous dimension the revolt was assuming informed the need for the Caliph to change tactics. He extended the hands of conciliation to Muhammad which the latter rebuffed. The refusal of Muhammad forced al-Mansūr to send his nephew Īsā ibn Mūsā against Muhammad with a large force. Muhammad, fighting with just three hundred men, fell in the battle together with his men except one in 140A.H./762 C.E. They were buried in the Martyrs' Cemetery near Madīnah.

Ibrāhīm led his forces comprising mainly the Alids at Basra and won over Persia. His defeat of Caliph al-Mansūr's forces in several engagements sent jitters into the camp of the latter. This situation nearly forces al-Mansūr to flee from Kufa. He however summoned courage and dispatched Īsā ibn Mūsā against him. In this battle which was fought at the bank of the Euphrates, Īsā's troop was routed comprehensively. To minimize casualty his troops made a tactical retreat and flee. This war overwhelmed al-Mansūr so much that for seven weeks during which the Alid forces fought the Caliph, he was unable to change his dress except for public prayers. Ibrāhīm's decision not to pursue the enemy became his undoing. The 'Abbāsids capitalized on this and made a surprise attack in which Ibrāhīm was killed and his troop dispersed. Ibrāhīm died in 141A.H./763 C.E. and the event that followed this battle was not palatable to the surviving enemies of the caliph, real or imagined. In retaliation, the Caliph began a serious persecution of the people of Madīnah and Basra. Many eminent people who had any link with Ibrāhīm were caught, killed and had their property destroyed. Al-Mansūr's ordered the confiscation of the property of Ali's descendants and withdrew all the privileges due to the people of Madīnah. For endorsing the candidature of Muhammad Ibn Ali to the Caliphate, the great Imām Abū Hanīfah was thrown to prison while Imām Malik was flogged. To al-Suyūti as quoted in Rahim "al-Mansūr was the first, who occasioned dissensions between the 'Abbāsīd and Alids".

SELF ASSESMENT EXERCISE 4

How would you reconcile the role of al-Mansūr as a statesman with his description as a cruel man?

3.2.4 His Death

The feeling of al-Mansūr that he may soon die necessitated the preparation for a capable successor. Against the choice of his brother as-Saffah who had nominated Īsā ibn Mūsā his nephew, al-Mansūr went for Mahdi his son. With this development began the principle of hereditary rulership as all the thirty five Caliphs

who succeeded were his lineal descendants. Al-Mansūr wanted his crown prince to succeed and did not hesitate in giving him his last instructions on the successful governance of the empire. Some of these as quoted in Ali from ibn al-Athir are as follows;

1. Never allow a thing which has to be done to-day, to remain over for tomorrow.
2. Keep the people and the army contented.
3. Never go beyond the bounds of moderation in inflicting punishment.
4. Never leave your treasury empty.
5. Whatever you have to do, do it yourself.
6. Concentrate your energy on your work
7. Associate with people from whom you can get good advice and counsel
8. Do not neglect your friends and relatives.
9. Defend the frontiers religiously.
10. Nothing maketh a caliph virtuous but piety, nor well disposeth a monarch but obedience, nor reformeth a people but justice; and the last of men to pardon is he who oppresseth him that is beneath him.
11. Do not proceed with any business until you have reflected upon it, for the meditation of a wise man is a mirror which showeth him his faults and his merits.
12. Seek the continuance of bounty by gratitude and of power by pardon and of obedience by conciliating affection and of victory by humility and forgiveness of men

Al-Mansūr left for Makkah where he had hoped to spend the rest of his life. This was not to be as he died on the way at a place called Bir Maimuna, some few hours journey away from Makkah in 153A.H./775 C.E. after a reign of nearly twenty-two years. He was aged sixty years; leaving behind a well-filled treasury, the contents of which, as he told his son, were sufficient for ten years expenditure. To protect his corpse from the prying eyes of those who may want to desecrate it, a hundred graves were dug and al-Mansūr was secretly buried in one of them.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

List the basic principles of governance given as admonition by al-Mansūr to his son and heir apparent al-Mahdi

4.0 CONCLUSION

The ascension of Abū Ja'far al-Mansūr marked a turning point in the Caliphateship of the 'Abbāsids. With his foresight, he was able to consolidate his rule and that of the 'Abbāsīd Empire in general. After the initial suppression of insurrections in his domain al-Mansūr made some remarkable achievements one of which was the establishment of a new capital city; Baghdād. As a result of these achievements, he was reputed to be the real founder of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate

5.0 SUMMARY

- Abū Ja'far the second Caliph of the 'Abbāsīd bore the title al-Mansūr and was generally regarded as the real founder of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate by virtue of his achievements
- After consolidating his rule, he concentrated on many developmental projects which include construction of roads, wells, canals, schools, library and hospitals as well as the conduct of population census
- His era which was regarded as one with splendour and glory also witnessed the foundation of Dār al-Hikmah, where many works were translated into Arabic
- His major achievement was the foundation of a new capital Baghdād; a city which construction spanned some four years at a huge cost.
- Though kind, Caliph al-Mansūr was also said to be sometimes cruel an example being the death of Abū Muslim at his instance and his attack on the house of Ali which became a dark spot in his administration.
- Against the choice of his predecessor, al-Mansūr named Mahdi his son as his successor.
- Al-Mansūr died on his way to Makkah in 153A.H./775 C.E. leaving a healthy treasury that could sustain his successor for ten years.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Assess the role of al-Mansūr in the consolidation of his empire

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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Unit 5

AL-MAHDI AND AL-HĀDĪ IN THE HISTORY OF THE 'ABBĀSID CALIPHATE CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 Al-Mahdi (153-165A.H/775-785C.E.: administration and achievements
 - 3.1.1 System of Administration
 - 3.1.2 His Achievements
- 3.2 Al-Hādī (165-166.A.H/785-786C.E.)
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor marked assignment
- 7.0 References/Further reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we discussed the ascension and achievements of Abū Ja'far al-Mansūr as the second caliph of the 'Abbāsīd dynasty. In this unit, we shall discuss the third and the fourth Caliphs; al-Mahdi and al-Hādī. Discussion shall include their system of administration and achievements.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Discuss fully the ascension of al-Mahdi and his successor; al-Hādī
 - Understand in full, the achievements of al-Mahdi as Caliph
- Digest the challenges faced by both al-Mahdi and al-Hādī in the discharge of their duties as caliphs

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Al-Mahdi: administration and achievement

3.1.1 System of Administration

Muhammad b. Abū Ja'far al-Mansūr came to power after the death of his father in 153AH/775CE and took the name al-Mahdi while his mother was Umm Mūsā, a woman who came from the old Himyarite kings of Yemen. By character, he was humane and generous. He was also a man of mild and amiable temperament. This

won him the admiration of the people, particularly those who had one way or the other been offended by his father's policy of administration. At the beginning of his rule, al-Mahdi began the policy aimed at mending fences with those who had one way or the other fell into the iron hand of his father. For example, he released all prisoners except those who were convicted for treason, felony and dangerous crimes. Al-Mahdi was also kind to the Alids by releasing those among them who were in prison, restored their properties and gave them suitable allowances. Not only this, al-Mahdi also restored to Makkah and Madīnah the privileges withdrawn by his father. His generosity is shown in the way he gave out in charity. For example, during his pilgrimage to Makkah in the year 160 A.H./781 C.E., he was said to have distributed an amount of nearly 30,000,000 dirhams in charity among the poor people of Hijāz and a donation of 150,000 garments in Makkah alone. To his enemies al-Mahdi was also magnanimous. His level of magnanimity is evident in the way he treated the case of the son of Marwān II (the last Umayyad Caliph) who attempted an uprising in Syria. The son of Marwān was defeated, captured and kept in custody on the instruction of al-Mahdi. After some time he was released and placed on pension. Another incident was the case of Mazuna, the widow of Marwān II who was also treated with kindness and honour. She was harboured by al-Mahdi's queen called Khaizuran in an apartment at her palace.

However the magnanimity and kindness of al-Mahdi is limited by his zero tolerance for heresis. For example, a shaykh called ibn Abdul Qudūs introduced some doctrines that had their roots in Zoroastrianism. The followers of this sect were known as *zanādiq* (sing. *zindiq*). By their activities, social conventions and religious beliefs were undermined. Al-Mahdi would not allow this in his empire. They were crushed. Similarly was al-Muqanna, the veiled prophet of Khurasan who posed as the incarnation of a deity and for years defied the forces of the 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Mahdi. Al-Muqanna's doctrine taught that religion consisted in faith and not in work. His preaching of these immoral and wild doctrines attracted large following. By 158 A.H./779 C.E. al-Muqanna's forces were defeated and Muqanna himself was killed.

Al-Mahdi was to resume an age-long struggle between the Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire in response to the violation of previous treaties by the latter. The Byzantine had raided Asia Minor and destroyed properties and lives. They also took a large number of women and children prisoners. As the first 'Abbāsīd Caliph to engage in the war, al-Mahdi personally led Arab forces in 161 A.H./782 C.E. On arrival at Bosphorus, the regent called Irene was forced to sue for peace and single handedly signed a treaty which involved the payment of between 70,000 and 90,000 *dinars* as tribute twice a year. The brilliant performance of Hārūn who accompanied his father in this expedition earned him the honorific title ar-Rashīd (follower of the right path). For the same reason his father appointed him as the Viceroy of the Western provinces of the empire and designated him as the second heir apparent to the caliphate after his elder brother Mūsā al-Hādī.

For effective administration, Al-Mahdi followed the Persian model of administration during his reign, and Persian Mawālis began to hold high offices.

Al-Mahdi initially appointed Abū Ubaidullah as his vizier. Later on Abū Ubaidullah was replaced with Ya'qūb bin Dāūd; a talented bureaucrat as his prime

minister. Ya'qūb's advice played a big role in the works undertaken and carried out in al-Mahdi's reign. Ya'qūb's popularity however later attracted so many enemies among al-Mahdi's courtiers. The Caliph's mind was poisoned against the minister on the false suspicion that he was conspiring with the Alids. Ya'qūb was confined in political prison called the Matbak, where he remained for several years until he was finally released by Hārūn.

Al-Mahdi was married to Queen Khaizuran a wise and generous woman. These qualities did not only have positive effect on her life, but also made her a distinguished personality in politics and administration. She had a great influence on her husband. Also possessing a profound influence over the caliph was his chamberlain Rabi' ibn Yūnus.

On the issue of succession, al-Mahdi defied the instruction of his father and predecessor; al-Mansūr. He replaced Īsā; the heir presumptive for his two sons; one after the other. The unlucky Īsā was said to have been induced to resign his right to the succession. Having spent ten years as caliph, Mahdi died at Masandan in 165A.H./785 C.E. at an early age of 43 as a result of an injury sustained when his horse knocked him against the gate of a ruined palace, and got his spine broken. He was tall, fair, and well-built. Hārūn was present at his father's death, and following his father's instruction he immediately proclaimed Mūsā al-Hādī as the Caliph, and was the first to take the oath of allegiance to him.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What were the actions taken by al-Mahdi to show his lack of tolerance for heresies?

3.1.2 His Achievements

Al-Mahdi rebuilt the holy mosques at Makkah and Madinah and introduced an audit office called *dīwān al-Zimām*. He was the first to introduce into the 'Abbāsīd regime a kind of court of appeal established to set aright cases of miscarriage of justice in the administrative and political departments. It was called *dīwān al-nazar al-mazālim*. His love for education and learning made him to entrust the education of his son Hārūn to Yahya ibn Barmak. Mahdi's reign and that of al-Rashīd witnessed the most momentous intellectual awakening in the history of Islam. He dug canals among which was *Nahr al-Silah* in Wasīt. He developed trade and promoted scholarship. He fixed pensions for the disabled and imprisoned debtors. Mahdi constructed and rebuilt many mosques, schools and roads in the empire which included a wide metalled road from Kadessia (near Baghdād) to Makkah. Inns and wells were provided for the convenience of pilgrims and travellers. Al-Mahdi selected about 500 men from the Ansar of Madina to form his security guards.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Enumerate the key achievements recorded during the reign of al-Mahdi.

3.2 Al-Hādī (165-166A.H/785-786C.E.)

When caliph Mahdi died in 165AH/785 CE, his eldest son Mūsā popularly known as al-Hādī became the new Caliph. He ascended the throne at the age of 24. On assumption of office, Hārūn congratulated his brother and pledged his loyalty to him. Not only this, he also sent to him the insignia of the Caliphal office which included the imperial seal, the prophet's mantle and the royal sceptre bequeathed by their dead father. Al-Hādī however did not appreciate his brother's loyalty. Apart from this he was bent on making his son Ja'far his heir apparent against the choice of his late father. To achieve this aim, he made all efforts within his power to intimidate all those who may serve as obstacles in realizing his goal. These include the imprisonment of Yahya ibn Barmak who was Hārūn's chief adviser and many other Hārūn's servants. This ambition which his mother Khaizuran vehemently opposed perhaps particularly account for the sour relationship that existed between both of them. The other factor was Khaizuran's ambition to continue her influence over her son as she had it over her husband. This, the young caliph regarded as undue interference in state affairs. To keep her in check, al-Hādī did not hide his displeasure for those courtiers and nobles who frequented her receptions. This situation divided the Caliph house into two camps: one supporting the caliph; and the other pitching its tent with his mother and Hārūn. Hārūn's effort at persuading his brother to reason proved abortive. When eventually the situation was assuming a dangerous dimension; Hārūn, on the advice of Yahya ibn Barmak left the palace for his personal safety.

Al-Hādī's unfavourable disposition towards the Alids is reflected in the ill-treatment of 'Ali's family by his governor of Madīnah. In response, Ali's descendants rose in rebellion headed by Husain, a great-grandson of Hasan. The rebellion was not only suppressed, his members and several other families were put to death. Idris, a cousin of Husain escaped to Mauritania where he was warmly received by the Berbers. With their support, he founded the popular Idrisid dynasty; a dynasty that did not only mean the separation of Maghrib from the empire but also was the first Shiite dynasty in Islam.

In one odd day during the month of Rabi al-Awwal, al-Hādī was staying at Īsābad; a town close to Baghdād when he was struck by an incurable disease which eventually claimed his life. But he was to reconcile with his mother before this untimely departure. In this parting meeting which was not only sorrowful but touching, he told his mother that his position as a Caliph would sometimes make him to take certain measures which may not be palatable to her and that to this extent; he had never been an ungrateful son. He thereafter asked for his mother's forgiveness and confirmed the rule of his brother, Hārūn. Some few days later Mūsā al-Hādī ibn al-Mahdi died.

Al-Hādī was described as a hard hearted man but brave, energetic and generous. He was also very devoted to literature. By physique, he was tall like his father. Al-Hādī left behind seven sons and two daughters, one of whom named Ummu Īsā' later married al-Ma'mūn, the son of Hārūn.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Briefly appraise the short tenure of Mūsā al-Hādī

4.0 CONCLUSION

The liberal disposition of al-Mahdi became the major thrust of his administrative policy as it played vital roles in putting right all the wrongs by his late father. Al-Mahdi; though generous and possesses amiable temperament, the way he dealt with heretics and his total onslaught on the Byzantines shows a man who does not compromise on any principle he believes in. Influenced by a powerful wife Khaizuran and his chamberlain Rābi‘ ibn Yūnus, al-Mahdi did his best in bequeathing a worthy legacy to two sons; one after the other. But the elder Al-Hādī was to some extent unlike his father. His nearly two years on the throne were spent fighting imaginary enemies within and declaring war on opposition outside. His unenviable reign produced the first experience of dismemberment when fugitive Husain established an independent dynasty in North Africa.

5.0 SUMMARY

- Muhammad ibn Abū Ja’far al-Mansūr popularly called al-Mahdi ascended the ‘Abbāsīd throne in 153A.H/775 C.E. at the age of twenty three.
 - As a humane and generous leader, al-Mahdi returned all the properties confiscated during the reign of his father to their owners, freed all prisoners and gave out a large sum of money as charity.
 - Al-Mahdi did not condone heresies during his reign.
- The age long animosity between Muslim and the Byzantine was renewed when the incumbent regent; Irene reneged on Byzantine is treaty with the Muslims to pay tribute
- Irene succumbed to al-Mahdis forces and signed another treaty that contained high penalty.
- Al-Mahdi’s administration which followed Persian model was influenced by his wife Khaizuran and his chamberlain Rābi‘ ibn Yūnus.
 - He died in 165A.H/785.C.E. at the age of 43 and was succeeded by Al-Hādī
 - Al-Hādī died leaving behind seven sons and two daughters.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Despite the general assessment of al-Mahdi as an amiable and generous leader, he was described as a man who did not give room for heresies. Juxtapose his ambivalent position with valid examples.

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MODULE 2

‘ABBĀSID CALIPHATE: THE EARLY PERIOD (2)

Unit 1 HĀRŪN AL-RASHĪD (166-189AH/786-809CE)

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 Hārūn ar-Rashīd
 - 3.1.1 His Ascension and Initial Challenges
 - 3.1.2 His War with the Byzantines
 - 3.2 An Assessment of His Life
 - 3.2.1 His Religious Life
 - 3.2.2 His Social Life
 - 3.3 His Achievements
 - 3.4 The Fall of the Barmacides
 - 3.5 His death
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor marked assignment
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

An insight into the lives and reign of two Caliphs; al-Mahdi and his successor son al-Hādī dominated our discussion in the last unit. In this unit however, discussion shall focus on Hārūn ar-Rashīd and this shall include his ascension and the initial challenge faced by his administration, his wars with the Byzantines and an assessment of his religious and social lives. In addition to this shall be an insight into his achievements, the fall of the Barmacides and his death.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Discuss the initial challenges faced by Caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd immediately he assumed power
 - Analyse his religious and social lives in details
 - Explain vividly his war with the Byzantines
 - Have deeper knowledge of his achievements
 - Digest the issue of succession and finally his death.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 Hārūn ar-Rashid (166-189A.H./786-809C.E.)

3.1.1 His Ascension and Initial Challenges

At the request of al-Mahdi and the resignation of claim to succession by Ja'far the young son of al-Hādī, Hārūn the second son of al-Mahdi became the next ruler of the 'Abbāsīd Empire. He ascended the throne in 166A.H./786 C.E. at the age of twenty-five and bore the title ar-Rashīd (one who follows the right path). As a man gifted with abundant talent, Hārūn is reputed to be one of the most successful rulers in history. The history of his ascension, which marked the beginning of a glorious era in the history of Muslim rule in Asia, cannot be complete without mentioning the role of those talented people in the service of his empire. One of these was his mother Khaizuran; who was earlier on discussed. Her overbearing influence over her son was the re-enactment of this same thing she did during the reign of Caliph Mahdi; her husband. More important than this was the way Hārūn utilized the God given talents of the Barmacide family to achieve success. Yahya ibn Barmak, his teacher and adviser became his vizier while his sons al-Fadl, Ja'far, Mūsā and Muhammad occupied different offices at different times in the empire. For example, when Yahya became old, the office of the vizier was transferred to his son Ja'far who also became the Caliph's boon companion. He was said to be liberal, enlightened and highly cultured.

Hārūn faced his first test to leadership when Yahya ibn Abdullah; a member of Ali's family declared himself as caliph in Deilem. To deal with the situation, Hārūn sent a strong force of 50,000 men under the command of al-Fadl who; instead of war used his diplomatic initiative to induce Yahya into submission with the promise of a high office at the court in Baghdād. Upon a very strong assurance that he had received a royal amnesty, Yahya arrived at Baghdād and was given a rousing welcome. After some time Yahya fell victim of an accusation for conspiracy and jailed, where he eventually died. To forestall any possible and unpleasant reaction from the Alids over this incident, Hārūn also brought into Baghdād, Mūsā al-Kazim the son of Ja'far as -Sadiq who also died shortly afterwards.

Apart from the above, the early part of Hārūn's reign witnessed an uprising of the Kharijites in Hulwan under the command of a beautiful lady called Laila. The incapability of the imperial forces to break the ranks of these formidable rebels necessitated the application of a subtle method of appealing to their leader; Laila to lay down their arms. This method, adopted by one of the Caliph's generals and a relation of Laila did the magic. Laila deserted the rebels and the Kharijites became weak; a situation that led to their total defeat and dispersal.

Similar incidents also occurred both in Syria and in Africa. In Syria for example, a serious and violent conflict had broken out between the Northern Arabs and their Southern brethren. The war which continued for two years was later suppressed and peace restored there. The case of Africa was also of serious concern to the Caliph. The Berbers and the Kharijites were always fomenting troubles and disturbing the

peace in the area. Although the governor in charge of this area named Harthama ibn Ayan did his utmost best to keep these insurrections in check; the same could not apply to his successors who were too weak to do the same. Against the background that Africa had little or no prospect as money had to come from the central treasury to run its administration, ibn Aghlab agreed to pay to the central treasury, a sum of 40,000 dinars annually on conditions that the Caliph would grant him the independent hereditary governorship of the province. Upon the advice of Harthama, Hārūn accepted this proposal and handed over the governorship of Africa to Ibrāhīm ibn Aghlab and his descendants. It is worthy to note that with this development, no ‘Abbāsīd Caliph exercised authority beyond the western frontier of Egypt.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Briefly explain the challenges faced by Caliph Hārūn in the early period of his reign and how he was able to overcome them

3.1.2 His war with the Byzantines

The treaty signed by Empress Irene with Caliph al-Mahdi on the payment of tribute was not pleasing to the Byzantines. She was overthrown by her chancellor called Nicephorus. Emperor Nicephorus who reigned between 182A.H./802C.E and 191A.H./811C.E. revoked the treaty and through correspondence, demanded the immediate return of the tribute already paid to Caliph Hārūn. Furious at this letter, Hārūn replied as follows:

‘In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. From Hārūn the commander of the believers, to Nicephorus, the dog of a Roman. Verily I have read your letter oh son of an infidel mother. As for the answer: it shall be for your eyes to see and not your ear to hear.

True to his word, Caliph Hārūn set off with his forces on the same day from Raqqah and together they entered the Byzantine territory and captured many of their strongholds which included the port of Hiraclea. Shocked at the level of casualty recorded on his side, Nicephorus sued for peace. His prayer was granted on the ground that he would pay increased tribute to the Caliph. Nicephorus was to renege on this agreement later on when he discovered that the Caliph had returned and raided the Muslim territories for the second time. Once again, the Caliph had to advance with his forces and engaged Nicephorus in severe battle that also resulted in heavy loss on the part of the Byzantines. Nicephorus himself begged for peace which was also granted for the second time by the Caliph. Meanwhile, an insurrection broke out in Khurasan and the pre-occupation of the Caliph with its settlement was seen as another opportunity by Nicephorus to break the treaty signed between him and the Caliph. He captured many Muslim territories, plundered their properties and carried away many as prisoners of war. For the third time, the Caliph who was now weary had to proceed against the Byzantines, recovered all territories and captured many of their possessions. Hārūn’s advance towards Constantinople; the capital frightened Nicephorus and in his characteristic manner sought for pardon and was at the same time granted although in the face of

humiliating treaty. This includes the personal imposition of some stringent measures and conditionalities on the members of his family. For the umpteenth time, he displayed his insincerity to agreement as he broke the treaty in 188A.H./808C.E. by dealing a severe blow on the Muslims. The problem at Khurasan would not permit Caliph Hārūn to deal immediately with this situation. His plan to fight back at a later date was also not to be as he died shortly afterwards.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

The Byzantine war with Caliph Hārūn can be described as one war too many.
Discuss

3.2 An Assessment of His Life

3.2.1 His Religious Life

Caliph Hārūn was remarkably religious and highly devoted to the observance of Islamic rituals. It was reported that he used to perform one hundred units of *nāfilah* daily and give out one thousand *dirhams* in alms. He had personally led the caravan of pilgrims to Hajj about nine times and took along large numbers of indigent pilgrims on each occasion. Zubayda, his wife was also reported to have spent three million *dinars* which also included the expenses she personally made to supply the people of Makkah with water from a spring twenty five miles away during one of her pilgrimages. Acting under the influence of his wife Zubayda, Caliph Hārūn nominated his eldest son al-Amīn as his successor in 170A.H./791C.E. and eight years later his second son al-Ma'mūn from a Persian mother became his heir apparent. During the pilgrimage performed in company of his wife and the two sons in 182A.H./802C.E., a document binding them to the arrangement of the succession was signed and deposited in Ka'ba

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Caliph Hārūn's generosity and that of his wife portrayed them as people who had the welfare of their subjects in mind. Discuss

3.2.2 His Social Life

Despite his religiousness, Hārūn lived opulent life. His royal palace was said to have consisted of many annexes for harems, eunuchs and special functionaries who occupied almost one third of the whole Baghdād. His audience chamber was well decorated with rugs, curtains and cushions, which were the best products from the Orient at the time. His wife Zubayda showed so much passion for elegance and distinction that she would never allow any vessels on her table except the one made with gold or silver. She was reputed to be the first to ornament her shoes with precious stones.

Hārūn had a passion for poets and music so much that the celebrated libertine poet of the period Abū Nuwās became his boon companion on many nocturnal

adventures. Other boon companions of Hārūn included one Ibrāhīm, a talented singer who earned a monthly salary of 10,000 *dinars*, and ibn Jami as well as Mukhanaq whose talented voice earned him a seat by the caliph's side. Caliph Hārūn was really great in character and achievement. The only defect of his character was his occasional out burst of suspicion and temper. On account of this, he was not just to the Barmacides and the Alids. This can however be excused in that such instances are few and Hārūn exercised his autocratic power with great discretion and fairness. For his pastime, ar-Rashīd is credited with being the first 'Abbāsīd caliph to have played and encouraged chess. Zubayda was reputed to have presented her husband, Hārūn with ten maidens one of whom became the mother of al-Ma'mūn and another of al-Mu'tasim.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

How would you reconcile the attitude of Caliph Hārūn as a deeply religious man with his penchant for luxurious life?

3.3 His Achievements

As a ruler, Caliph Hārūn saw to the general welfare and happiness of his people as he led by example. For instance, he usually went through the streets of Baghdād at night to check the condition of the people and to bring relief to the oppressed and the needy. He equally used to tour his empire frequently in order to assess the security situation of his people. The perfect security and peace that reigned during his period was so manifest that pilgrims, traders and others could freely move about in the empire. His organizational ability was superb. Caliph Hārūn introduced a postal system that kept the Caliph informed of all the happenings in his empire. This however was not without the administrative acumen of Yahya his Barmacide counselor. The encouragement given by Hārūn on agriculture, industry and commerce resulted in an unusual prosperity in the empire. The stories of the 'Arabian Nights' was an indication of the great commercial activities of his time. At the intellectual level, Hārūn attracted men of learning to his capital. His reign witnessed an upsurge in the number of jurists, philosophers and poets among others. In other words, Baghdād became the centre of learning and culture with scholars such as al-Asma'ī, Abdullah ibn Idris al-Shāfi'ī, Īsā ibn Yūnus and Sufyan Thawri and other learned men holding sway during his reign. Furthermore, a Syrian physician named Yuhanna (Yahya) ibn Mūsāwayh, a pupil of Jibril ibn-Bakhtishu and a teacher of Hunayn ibn Ishaq was said to have translated some medical manuscripts which the Caliph had brought from Ancyra and Amorium. Abū Yusuf, the great jurist was his chief Qādī. Hārūn gave systematic shape to the Hanafi School of law and enlarged the translation bureau of al-Mansūr by spending money generously for its expansion.

As a soldier, Caliph Hārūn was daring, dashing and strategic. He personally led his armies to war and other rebellions and disturbances. His campaign against the Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus is a testimony of his resourcefulness as a soldier and a commander. In fact it was at this war that his father gave him the honorific title; ar-Rashīd (follower of the right path).

Hārūn was also said to be the first to introduce field hospitals and ambulances on camels which always accompany the army when on the battle front. Caliph Hārūn constructed many mosques, colleges, schools, hospitals, dispensaries, roads, bridges, and canals all of which ranked him as one of the greatest rulers of history.

By his achievements also, the glory of his name spread far and wide. In fact, exchange of envoys and presents took place between the Caliph and the Chinese emperor as well as Charlemagne, the king of the Franks.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Enumerate and explain the actions and achievements that made some people to conclude that Hārūn's government was the best in the world during his time.

3.4 Fall of the Barmecides

Hārūn's reign of glory and unprecedented achievements was largely due to the meritorious services of the distinguished family of Barmak that served Hārūn's empire with distinction for seventeen years (166-182A.H./786-803C.E.). "The people were prosperous" says Amir Ali, "the empire had grown rich and strong, national wealth had increased and the arts of civilized life were cultivated everywhere". However it remains a mystery how such an illustrious family should have a sudden fall. Several factors were given as the reasons why Caliph Hārūn had decided to dispense with that family that served him so well. One factor stated that a personal quarrel had occurred between Hārūn and Ja'far which was attributed to a secret marriage between Ja'far and Hārūn's sister called 'Abbasa. According to the famous historian Ibn Khaldun however, the great power wielded by the Barmacides was the real cause of their downfall. This may not be far from the truth for the following reasons: (1) they had been in the corridor of power for long, (2) Caliph Hārūn was not only young and inexperienced, he was more or less like a child to Yahya; the patriarch of the family. Their influence in all aspects of the Caliph administration have been domineering be it civil, military or revenue. It was even quoted that their seizure of authority got to an extent that ar-Rashīd was often forced to the necessity of asking for and not obtaining from the Chancellor small sums of money. Ibn Khaldun, also quoted in Rahim writes that their influence was unlimited and their renown had spread in every direction as all faces turned towards them for assistance. Their popularity there fore overshadowed that of their master and this was highly detestable to the caliph. To this extent, the situation cannot continue for long.

Apart from the above, it is equally important to note that this unlimited power would naturally arouse the jealousy of other courtiers at the court of the Caliphs. More important than these were the fundamental problems of conflicts drawn along party and religious lines in the court. The Barmacides who played major roles in the 'Abbāsīd ascendancy to power were Persians. The Arabs who also constituted another group of the palace officials naturally felt bitter about the rising profile and influence of the Persians and were there fore looking for an opportunity to return to the status quo. From the angle of religious doctrine also, the Barmacides were Shiites and the Sunnis who felt edged out now wanted to revive their rightful place

in the Caliphate. In addition, personal rivalry between al-Fadl ibn Rabi, the Chamberlain and the leader of the Arab group and the Barmacides made the former to engage in plots of discrediting the latter before the caliph whenever he had the opportunity. The matter got worst when information spread that the Barmacides were plotting to overthrow the Caliph.

All the above factors were better summarized by an author who stated that ‘of the many factors which led to Hārūn’s action may be mentioned (a) injured pride: a sense of being dominated and the desire to assert himself, a desire which would not meet a favourable reaction from the Barmacides; (b) the incitements of Hārūn by rivals and enemies of the Barmacides especially al-Fadl b. Rabi’.

Based on suspicion therefore, the Caliph ordered that Ja’far be put to death, his father and brothers imprisoned and their properties confiscated. While Yahya and al-Fadl died in prison, Muhammad was afterwards released. The end of this illustrious family did not only mark the decline of Persian influence in administration, it also ushered in the emergence of Arab influence once again as al-Fadl ibn Rabi got the office of Prime Minister.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Explain the factors that led to the downfall of the Barmacides.

3.5 His death

Hārūn’s attempt to deal with the rebellion in Khurasan began when he sent one of his sons called al-Ma’mūn to Marw as an advance party while he himself followed with the rest of the army. No sooner had he arrived at the village called Sanabad near Tus than the illness from which he had been suffering since he left Raqqa relapsed and took a serious turn. Sensing that the ailment may claim his life, he called on all the members of his family and gave his last advice. He urged them to be faithful in the observation of their engagements and the maintenance of unity among themselves. He also asked them to take adequate care of his two grown up children so that one does not rebel against the other. He ordered that his empire be shared among the two sons namely al-Amīn, from his wife and cousin Zubayda and al-Ma’mūn. By this arrangement, al-Amīn who was the eldest was to take care of Iraq and Syria in the west while the eastern province should be under the control of al-Ma’mūn. Caliph Hārūn died in 189AH/809CE after a reign of twenty–three years and six months.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Briefly state the last advice given by Caliph Hārūn to his family before he died.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Three factors seem to have played positive role on the life of Caliph Hārūn and that of his administration. One is the talent by which he was bestowed by God; two was his experience as a young man who had seen what administration was all about and

three was the quality of people who supported him in his administration. But for these factors, his suppression of many insurrections, wars with the Byzantines and other laudable achievements could not have been possible. Most importantly is to say that notwithstanding all these activities; he was still able to attend adequately to his family and his religious activities

5.0 SUMMARY

- At the age of 25 Hārūn ar-Rashīd became the fifth Caliph of the ‘Abbāsīd Empire in 166A.H./786C.E.
- The success story of Hārūn was largely due to his natural talent and the support of notable officials among who were the famous Barmacides.
- Hārūn engaged in several wars with Byzantine under Emperor Nicephorus and each war ended in favour of Hārūn only to resume again after cessation of fire called at the instance of Nicephorus who usually sue for peace.
- The last attempt by the Caliph to eliminate the Byzantines decisively was not to be as he fell sick; an ailment that eventually claimed his life.
- Hārūn was deeply religious but this does not have any significant impact on his social life as a man who has a passion for luxury.
- Hārūn bestrode every aspect of administrative life like a colossus be it social, religious or intellectual.
 - His policy was welfarist as he devoted much time to peace and security.
- Account varies as to the actual reason why Caliph Hārūn played the inglorious role of persecuting the Barmacides who contributed so much to the success story by which Hārūn was known as the best ‘Abbāsīd ruler in history.
- Whatever the reasons, the incident remained a dark spot in the history of the caliph and his administration.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

The reign of Hārūn marked a brilliant period in the history of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate. Discuss.

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Unit 2 AL-AMĪN (189-192AH/809-813CE) AND AL-MA’MŪN THE GREAT (192-213A.H./813-833C.E.)

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Al-Amīn and al-Ma’ mūn and the issue of Caliphate
 - 3.1.1 Ascension of al-Amīn to the Caliphate
 - 3.1.2 The Wars between al-Amīn and al-Ma’ mūn
 - 3.2 al-Ma’ mūn the Great: His Ascension and the Role of al-Fadl ibn Sahl.
 - 3.3 Attempt to Return the Caliphate to the House of Muhammad and its Consequence
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor marked assignment
- 7.0 References / Further reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, the reign of Hārūn ar-Rashīd was discussed. In this unit, study shall be focused on the ascension of al-Amīn to power and the fratricidal war between him and his brother al-Ma’ mūn. It will also discuss the circumstances that led to the proclamation of al-Ma’ mūn as Caliph. Furthermore, the unit shall explain the rationale behind al-Ma’ mūn’s initial attempt to return the Caliphate to the Prophet’s household and the consequences of that attempt.

1.0 OBJECTIVES

- By the end of this unit, you should be able to
- Know about al-Amīn came to power
 - Understand the causes of the feud between al-Amīn and al-Ma’ mūn his brother
 - Discuss the reason for al-Ma’ mūn’s attempt to return the Caliphate to the family of the Prophet and its consequence.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Al-Amīn and al-Ma’ mūn and the issue of Caliphate

3.1.1 Assumption of al-Amīn to the Caliphate

When Caliph Hārūn died in 189A.H./809C.E. al-Amīn was in Baghdād while al-Ma’ mūn was in Marw as the governor of the Eastern province. The news of his death, necessitated the movement of al-Amīn from his palace in Marw to (the Imperial palace) in Baghdād. With the imperial seal, sword and the royal mantle, al-Amīn led the first public prayer as Caliph and delivered the Khutbah. The oath

of allegiance given by the troops and the citizens capped it all and thus emerged Muhammad al-Amīn as his father's successor. Ascension of al-Amīn to Caliphate made it mandatory for al-Ma'mūn to recognize his brother and declare his loyalty to him particularly in consonance with the wish of their father on succession. From his headquarters therefore; al-Mamun congratulated the new Caliph and also sent him some present.

By character assessment, al-Amīn was described as a feeble minded fellow; fun-loving and given to pomp and pageantry. Engagement in frivolities when he was supposed to face the affairs of the state ran his government bankrupt. A good example of such pastimes was the ballel he organized with enormous money spent in securing the services of one hundred beautiful girls, each in splendid attire and decorated with pearls all danced in unison to the soft harmony of music. He was said to have spent lavishly on jugglers and buffons as well as sooth sayers all of whom were employed from all parts of the empire. It is therefore not surprising that while al-Ma'mūn's province was thriving, the empire itself which al-Amīn had left in the hands of the ambitious but incompetent vizier was drifting to a ruin. These traits which eventually made him fell victim of the treacherous plan of al-Fadl ibn Rabi who later became his vizier also played major roles in the early termination of his reign as well as his life.

Historical accounts had shown that the army taken to Khurasan during the dying days of Hārūn had been willed over to al-Ma'mūn as a necessary measure for the defence of the Eastern provinces where the latter was the governor. However when the Caliph died and the troops were to be returned to Baghdād, al-Fadl ibn Rabi who was practically the Prime Minister since Ja'far Barmak's death led the army back and handed them over to al-Amīn. Aware of al-Amīn's weakness, al-Fadl ibn Rabi believe his action would put him in a vantage position to have a strong hold on the emerging government. He was right as the caliph invested him at once with the dignity of vizier and distributed two years pay in advance among the troops at least to pacify them against any eventual uprising.

With al-Fadl ibn Rabi virtually in control of al-Amīn's government the new Caliph indulged himself in what he knew how to do best; turning his court to centre of amusement with musicians, dancing girls and others. He spent state money extravagantly on these.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain briefly the three personal traits that have negative effects on the administration of al-Amīn as a Caliph.

3.1.2 The Wars between al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn

Al-Fadl ibn Rabi's conspiracy with al-Amīn against al-Ma'mūn on the issue of the army and the treasury made him uncomfortable and insecure against the possible ascension of al-Ma'mūn in future. To make this impossible, al-Fadl ibn Rabi instigated the Caliph against the choice of al-Ma'mūn as his successor. The Caliph would not initially listen to this but with the vizier's persistence and that of another courtier named 'Ali ibn Īsā ibn Mahan he succumbed to pressure. To perfect this

strategy, al-Ma'mūn was summoned to Baghdād but the clever governor did not go as he gave an excuse that it would not be safe for him to leave the province at the time. Seeing this as an effrontery, al-Amīn announced the deposition of al-Ma'mūn from his government and directed that his name should no longer be mentioned in the Friday *khutbah*.

Al-Amīn thereafter nominated his infant son called Mūsā in flagrant disregard to their father's wish and gave him the title; *al-Nātiq bi-l- haqq* meaning the proclaimer of Truth' and a little while after his second son as his heir under the title *al-Qāim bi-l- haqq* (Firm in the truth 'of the Lord').

In response to this breach of faith and agreement, al-Ma'mūn tightened up the security of his province by putting whoever entered it under serious surveillance. Meanwhile, Caliph al-Amīn had sent for the document deposited at Ka'tah containing the succession agreement and tore it into pieces. The battle line was then drawn as the Caliph raised an army, fifty thousand strong and dispatched them towards Rayy under the command of Ali ibn Īsā ibn Mahan. Al-Ma'mūn who was also fighting in self defence did not sit idle. Al-Amīn's force met in May 190A.H./811C.E. with Al-Ma'mūn's troop of forty thousand men under the leadership of Tāhir ibn Husain. The Caliph's troop was defeated and Ali ibn Īsā killed with some of his men either dispersed or made to defect to Tāhir's side. While this war was on, persecution continued in Baghdād. Al-Fadl ibn Rabi used his position to seize the sum of hundred thousand *dirham* presented to al- Ma'mūn and kept in the care of Naufal; a man who doubled as the guardian to al-Ma'mūn's two infant children. This brazen show of high handedness received criticism from the people against the caliph and his vizier.

The defeat of al-Amīn's force necessitated his decision to raise yet another force comprising twenty thousand strong men under Abdur-Rahman b. Jabala. With Tāhir still as the commander of al-Ma'mūn's army; al-Amīn force was also defeated. This victory was followed by conquest as Tāhir occupied the territories of Hamadan. Further reinforcement of Tāhir's forces included that of Harthama ibn Ayan and Zuhair all of whom dealt a devastating blow on the Caliph's army. The continuous march of Tāhir's forces through many towns was so overwhelming that within a short time, he had covered the whole Persia. Al-Ma'mūn at this period did not only assume the title of *Amīr al-Mū'minīn* (commander of the faithful), he was also proclaimed the caliph in those conquered places. The exploit of the principal adviser to al-Ma'mūn called al-Fadl ibn Sahl in this war earned him the post of the Minister of war (*Amīr al-harb*) in addition to the post of chancellor of the exchequer (*Amīr ul-Kharaj*). By virtue of his former post therefore; al-Fadl ibn Sahl was invested with the overall control throughout the principality, according to Ali 'from Tibet to Hamadan, from the Indian Ocean to the Caspian Sea'.

The preoccupation of the two brothers in this fratricidal war provided an opportunity for a rebellion in Syria where the leader of a group; 'Ali b. Abdullah b. Khalid b. Yazid b. Mu'awiyah called on people to accept him as Caliph. The same applies to the grandson of the warrior Maslamah both of whom could not match their proclamation with rigorous actions and within a short time; nothing was heard of them again.

The continuous extension of occupied lands by al-Ma'mūn forces was so rapid that many governors under caliph al-Amīn were forced by necessity to acknowledge al-Ma'mūn's authority. These include Abbas ibn al-Hādī; the governor of Kūfa, Mansūr ibn Mahdi; governor of Basrah and Dāūd ibn Īsā the governor of the Holy cities of Makkah and Madīnah. Al-Ma'mūn forces at last advanced towards Baghdād from different directions and laid siege on the city. For months this situation continued and al-Amīn who had almost emptied the treasury to prosecute this war was now in a precarious position as all his supporters had deserted him.

Occupation of the eastern part of Baghdād by Tāhir was enough signals for al-Amīn to know that the game was over. He had no alternative than to hand himself over to his brother al-Ma'mūn upon whom he still reposed some confidence. A deal was struck with al-Ma'mūn's generals that al-Amīn should surrender himself to Harthama while his instruments of office handed over to Tāhir. With this arrangement concluded, the Caliph left his Baghdād abode and together with Harthama boarded a boat on their journey to Marw. This journey turned out to be ill-fated as some cruel Persian soldiers sank their boat. While Harthama was rescued by one of his boatmen, al-Amīn managed to swim ashore. The unlucky Caliph was captured by these heartless soldiers and confined in a house where some Persians broke into during the dead of the night; killed him and had his head displayed on the walls of Baghdād the following morning. This event which occurred in 192A.H./813C.E. was to the discomfiture of al-Ma'mūn who received the news of his brother's death with grief. To show his anger, he directed that the murderers be punished. As a way of compensating al-Amīn's sons also at least to some extent, al-Ma'mūn adopted them, gave them all the privileges due to them and when they grew up they were married to his daughters.

The death of al-Amīn at twenty-eight and a reign that spanned four years and eight months was seen by many historians as another victory of the Persians over the Arabs as Al-Ma'mūn's mother was a Persian and whatever roles such powerful generals like Al-Fadl ibn Sahl, harthama and Tāhir ibn Husain could play as Persians in securing their sister's son is not an effort in futility. Moreover, the war to Persians is also worthwhile in that it marked the revival of Persian influence which had been lost since the fall of the Barmacides.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

How would you describe the tenure of al-Amīn as a Caliph of Islam?

3.2 Al-Ma'mūn the Great: His Ascension and the Role of al-Fadl ibn Sahl.

Al-Ma'mūn became the undisputed Caliph of the 'Abbāsīd empire after the death of al-Amīn in 192A.H./813C.E. Al-Ma'mūn however did not resume at the capital in Baghdād. His devotion to philosophy and speculative science made him remain at Marw; his base as governor; and only left the conduct of his administrations in the hands of his prime Minister: Al-Fadl ibn Sahl. But to commit such a vast empire into the hands of a man who lacked the administrative capacity to control it

was a big mistake. No sooner had the ambitious Prime Minister took up this job than he faced an outbreak of troubles in many parts of the empire. Nasr ibn Sabath from the Umayyad house had risen against al-Ma'mūn in Syria with the purpose of restoring the Umayyad dynasty; and for more than five years defied the imperial troops. Hasan ibn Sahl faced serious threat in Iraq from the vagabonds who were not happy at his appointment by his brother. From another angle were the Alids descendants who saw this period as an opportunity to claim their right to the Caliphate. Representing these agitators was Ibn Tabataba' the man had few people pledging their loyalty to the family of the prophet. Ibn Tabataba', with the support of Abū Sarāya attacked Hasan ibn Sahl, defeated him and established a control over the entire southern Iraq. Ibn Tabataba' was later poisoned by Abū Sarāya and was replaced with a young man from the Alids called Muhammad ibn Muhammad. Abū Sarāya advanced further with his troops and occupied Basra Madāin and Wasīt. They also captured Makkah, Madīnah and Yaman. The chain of victories recorded by these Alids spurred them more and they decided to make their ways to Kufa. A timely intervention of Harthama ibn Ayan who came in response to distress call by Hasan ibn Sahl saved the situation. Abū saraya and his troops were mercilessly routed and the captured areas restored. Abū Sarāya fled to Mesopotamia and was later captured and killed. The defeat of Abū Sarāya consolidated the 'Abbāsīd rule in Iraq and Arabia. After suppressing the uprising of Abū Sarāya, Harthama got the order from the Vizier to move to Egypt, but he would not obey him. Instead he was prepared to go to Marw and inform him about what is happening in the caliphate and the dangerous consequence it portends. On arrival, Harthama told the Caliph about the problems at hand and the catastrophe that may result if quick action is not taken. What transpired later and the circumstance of his death remained a mystery as historical facts differed concerning it. However, the ones of Harthama's dead led to a violent riot in Baghdād; particularly in the army where he was extremely popular and marked the commencement of a new uprising and total disobedience to Hasan ibn Sahl's order and that of his brother. Not only this; al-Mansūr ibn Mahdi was elected to replace Hasan as governor and the former accepted on the condition that he would act until the arrival of al-Ma'mūn in Baghdād or his nomination of somebody else as governor.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Assess the roles of Harthama in the consolidation of al-Ma'mūn's government.

3.3 Attempt to Return the Caliphate to the House of Prophet

Muhammad and its Consequence

In 194A.H./815C.E., while al-Ma'mūn was still at marw he made a spirited attempt to return the Caliphate to the Prophet's house by sending for the Fatimide Imam Ali III, son of Mūsā from Madīna. After his public pronouncement that he found no one else qualify for the exalted post of Caliph after his demise, al-Ma'mūn announced Imam Ali's name as his heir apparent with the title; ar-Rida *min ali Muhammad* meaning the acceptable among the children of Muhammad which is shortened to ar-Rida. To further confirm his plan. Al-Ma'mūn announced the ban

on the black colour of the ‘Abbāsīd and the introduction of the Green colour that belongs to the Fatimid. These actions elicited spontaneous reactions from his ‘Abbāsīd brethren who declared al-Ma’mūn’s deposition and elected Ibrāhīm ibn Mahdī as Caliph. This incident led to total pandemonium in Baghdād as there was virtually no government in control. There were disorders and the brigands of Baghdād used this opportunity to unleash terror in the hearts of the people. No one including the elites was safe and this called for a vigilance committee to bring things back to order. Further social disorder in other parts of the empire particularly in Iraq and Hijāz was so frightening as to suggest that al-Ma’mūn’s caliphate has collapsed.

In the midst of these crises; ar-Rida served as the saving grace. He personally went to Caliph al-Ma’mūn and acquainted him with the true state of affairs; beginning from the suppression of truth by his vizier; to Ibrāhīm’s election and most importantly his (ar-Rida) unpopularity among the people as to his nomination as the Caliph. On inquiry, ar-Rida’s facts were corroborated by others who added that al-Ma’mūn lost in Harthama, a faithful servant through al-Fadl’s vindictiveness. These startling revelations informed al-Ma’mūn’s instant decisions to move his empire’s headquarters to the Capital. Caliph al-Ma’mūn was on his way to Baghdād when al-Fadl ibn Sahl was said to have been murdered in his bath at sarakhs. The Caliph himself and his court had to tarry a while in Tus where his heir apparent, Imam ar-Rida also died suddenly. The death was painful to al-Ma’mūn and to immortalize his good friend, he built a mausoleum over his grave in Tunis.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain the consequences of Caliph al-Ma’mūn’s attempt to return the caliphate to the house of the Prophet Muhammad.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The novel idea of dividing the whole empire between two sons who were prospective candidate’s succession may have been the major factor in the fratricidal war between al-Amīn and al-Ma’mūn. This together with feeble-mindedness, and bad advisers were responsible for the decision that did not only ruin al-Amīn’s government but also end his life. But al-Ma’mūn also with his intelligence made some mistakes in some aspects of his administration in the hands of an incompetent vizier and the unilateral decision of changing the status quo of the issue of succession, all suggest how limited man reasoning faculty can when it comes to decision making

5.0 SUMMARY

- Al-Amīn who succeeded his father in 189A.H./809C.E. did not only place the rein of government in the hands of his viziers, they also led to his downfall as a result of his feeble mindedness.
- Al-Fadl ibn Rabi; treacherously handed over the army and treasure meant for al-Ma’mūn to the Caliph and was rewarded with the office of the prime Minister.

- Afraid of possible punishment in case al-Ma'mūn becomes the Caliph, the vizier instigated al-Amīn against his brother and convinced him to choose his infant son as his successor instead of al-Ma'mūn.
- Towards achieving this grand plan, al-Ma'mūn was summoned but his refusal to come led to his deposition and the standing order that his name should no more be mentioned in Khutbah.
- In addition, Caliph al-Amīn declared wars on his brother and ended up a loser.
 - Eventually al-Amīn surrendered himself and was desirous to be taken to al-mamun who could guarantee his safety.
 - He could not reach Marw as he was killed by some cruel Persian soldiers.
- With al-Amīn's death, al-Ma'mūn assumed his caliphate post but remained in Marw, also leaving the administration of his empire in the hands of his incapable Prime Minister.
 - Ibn Sahl's incapability to quell several insurrections under him became worrisome to one of his generals; Harthama who took the bold step to inform al-Ma'mūn at Marw.
 - His return from Marw was met with disaster as he died under mysterious circumstance; an incident that turned the whole capital Baghdād into turmoil as a result of his popularity among the army.
- The situation was further compounded by al-Ma'mūn's nomination of ar-Rida as his successor and the pandemonium that followed.
 - Ar-Rida's effort at telling the Caliph about the true state of affairs saved the situation as the Caliph now decided to move his court to Baghdād.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

The murder of Harthama and the proclamation of ar-Rida are two major incidents that nearly caused the downfall of Al-Ma'mūn's government. Discuss.

7.0 REFERENCES / FURTHER READING

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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Unit 3 CALIPH AL-MA'MŪN IN BAGHDĀD

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Al-Ma'mūn the Great
 - 3.1.1 Administration
 - 3.2 Achievements
 - 3.3 Adoption of al-Mu'tazilism as State religion by al-Ma'mūn
 - 3.4 Character and Marriage
 - 3.5 Nomination of Successor and Death
 - 4.0 Conclusion
 - 5.0 Summary
 - 6.0 Tutor marked assignment
 - 7.0 References/Further reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The ascension of al-Amīn and the rift between him and his brother; al-Ma'mūn formed the major topics of discussion in the last unit. The Caliphate of al-Ma'mūn which was briefly introduced in the last unit will be continued here, with special attention to his administration, achievements, personal characters and death.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

- By the end of this unit, you should be able to
- Discuss the style of Al-Ma'mūn's administration
 - Explain how al-Ma'mūn was able to overcome all insurrections that arose during his caliphateship
 - Get acquainted with the achievements of Caliph al-Ma'mūn
 - Highlight his contributions to scholarship
 - Give account of his passion for philosophical speculations

3.0 AL-MA'MŪN THE GREAT

3.1.1 Administration

In 199A.H/819C.E. Caliph al-Ma'mūn made a triumphant entry into Baghdād and assumed the reigns of government himself. He was warmly welcome by the people who were happy with his return to the seat of government. Al-Ma'mūn restored peace and order in the city and re-organised his administration. He appointed Hasan, the son of al-Fadl ibn Sahl as the prime Minister; Tāhir who was initially made the head of the royal guard later became the viceroy of the East while an Alid was entrusted with the government of the two Holy Cities of Makkkah and Madīnah. Al-Ma'mūn gave the cities of Kūfa and Basra to his two brothers and talha the son of Tāhir replaced his father as the head of the royal guard. Another

son of Tāhir named Abdullah; a capable general headed the government of Syria and Egypt.

Apart from Tuesday that was set aside for literary and scientific discussions, all other days of the week were devoted to the conduct of state affairs. Al-Ma'mūn was so meticulous that he took time to attend to every detail of state function and keeps proper account of the state treasury. In addition, al-Ma'mūn established the council of state comprising representatives from various communities that made up the empire. It is therefore common to see Muslims, Jews, Sabians, Christians and Zoroastrians among the council members. This council was regarded as the first regular constitutional body in the history of the caliphate.

Al-Ma'mūn first official assignment was on how to quell the insurrection of Nasr ibn Sabath in Syria and gave the task to Abdullah ibn Tāhir; the viceroy in charge of the area. Abdullah engaged Nasr in fierce battle and at the end the latter was forced to sue for peace and sent to royal court where he was pardoned by the Caliph. After suppressing this revolt, Abdullah went to Egypt where another insurrection was going on. After subduing the rebellion there, he gave an order to a body of Spanish Muslims who had settled in Egypt to either lay down their arms or leave the province. This group had been disturbing the people of Alexandria after their expulsion from Umayyad Spain and for their decision to leave for Crete; permission was given. In addition, he assisted them with necessary logistics to conquer Crete and settle there it is worthy of note that two years earlier, Ziyadatullah Aghlab had conquered Sicily and annexed it to 'Abbāsīd empire under Al-Ma'mūn.

Abdullah also had a rough with a powerful brigand called Babek. Babek belonged to the Magian sect that had been terrorizing people of the Northern province for upward of twenty years and had established a strong hold at Mazendran; an inaccessible mountain fortress. According to this sect that believed in metempsychosis, the rules of morality enforced by Islam, Christianity and Judaism should not be recognized. Several years of successive attempts to crush the sect proved abortive and when Abdullah forces put serious pressure on Babek, he had to enter into relations with the Greeks with the purpose of instigating them to invade the Muslim territories. The joint forces of this group and Theophilus, the then Byzantine emperor invaded the Muslim territories and killed many people. This treacherous act was met with a reprisal as al-Ma'mūn personally dealt decisive with the joint forces in three successive operations. The enemies had no option than to sue for peace. To guard against future attack of the Greeks al-Ma'mūn embarked on the construction of a fortified military base at Tyana, seventy miles north of Tarsus. He had just begun this project when he died.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Assess the roles of Abdullah as a brilliant soldier in al-Ma'mūn's army.

3.2 Achievements of al-Ma'mūn

There is no gainsaying that al-Ma'mūn's Caliphate is the most glorious in the history of Islam. As a benevolent ruler al-Ma'mūn took great interest in the welfare

of his people. Agriculture, commerce and industry flourished during his period while many educational institutions were opened for the general public and were richly endowed. In the area of intellectual development, al-Ma'mūn's reign is unrivalled. His love for intellectualism could not have been by accident. Apart from al-Ma'mūn's natural endowment, his vast knowledge in many areas accounted for his interest in learning. Al-Ma'mūn knew the Qur'ān by rote and earned excellence in its interpretation. He was also versatile in al-Hādīth, jurisprudence, philosophy and many other areas of academic endeavour. During his reign, almost all areas of knowledge were developed. Mathematics, astronomy, the science of medicine among others made gigantic strides during this glorious period of Asiatic civilization. His interest in philosophy and scientific discussions was so profound that every Tuesday was set aside for this purpose.

The intellectual awakening of al-Ma'mūn's period was further re-inforced with the establishment of *Bayt al-Hikmah* (The House of Wisdom) where there were various departments of learning. It was in this academy that a lot of Greek and ancient works were collected for translation into Arabic so as to make them accessible to common man. It also became the bureau for original research works. Because of adequate provision of essential research facilities, scholars patronized this academic from different parts of the world.

The cultural change witnessed in this era included people's general pursuit of Arabic learning at the expense of mother tongues and the cultivation of Persian literature. Among the scholars of this period were al-Bukhari; one of the collectors of al-Hādīth, Wakidi among the historians and the two Imams Shafī' and Ibn Hanbal both of whom were not only jurists but also founders of two of the four schools of Islamic law.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

By its achievements, al-Ma'mūn period was considered as the best in the history of Islam. Discuss

3.3 Adoption of Mu'tazilism as State Religion by al-Ma'mūn

The natural ingenuity of al-Ma'mūn coupled with the influence of some eminent scholars of his time made him to reason about the possible consequence of certain dogmas which he believed were too rigid and therefore inimical to political and social progress. In his own judgement, it amounts to treason for anyone to adhere to those doctrines in view of their ultimate consequence on society and state. Some few years to the end of his reign therefore he decided to emancipate human intellect from these obsolete dogmas for which many orthodox jurists were known. He opted for Mutazilism. This sect which adherents were known as Mu'tazilites got its origin from Wasil ibn 'Atā' and based its doctrines on the following:

- i that man has the free will to choose between good and evil
- ii that there would neither be corporal resurrection nor the visibility of God to human sight as this would imply that He himself was a body.

iii that Qur'ān is created and not the identical reproduction of a celestial original among others.

Al-Ma'mūn went further to pass a law in 213A.H./833C.E. making acceptance of the Mu'tazilites doctrine of the creation of Qur'ān a condition for appointment as a judge. Above all, he adopted Mu'tazilism as the official state religion and requested everyone either to conform to it or suffer persecution. To make good his threat al-Ma'mūn established an inquisition where those who denied this dogma were tried and convicted.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Enumerate and discuss the doctrines of the Mutazilites and their impact on the people during the al-Ma'mūn period.

3.4 His Character, Marriage and Death

Caliph al-Ma'mūn who was born the day his father Hārūn ar-Rashīd ascended the throne was described as a well built and good looking man. He was distinguished among members of the 'Abbāsīd household for his unique traits like prudence, determination, clemency, sense of judgement and liberality. Al-Ma'mūn was married to Khadijah better known as Buran, the daughter of his vizier Hasan ibn Sahl. The marriage was celebrated with pomp and pageantry reminiscent of the magnificence of the court of Baghdād at this epoch. The father of the bride was said to have entertained people for seventeen days on a lavish scale. Buran, a beautiful lady was notable for charity as she founded several hospitals and seminaries for women in Baghdād. Buran who had great influence over her husband survived the Caliph for nearly fifty years and died in 262A.H./883C.E.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss briefly the effect of al-Ma'mūn's liberal nature on his government as a caliph

4.0 CONCLUSION

To students of history, the description of Caliph al-Ma'mūn's government as the best in the history of Islam is no misplaced in view of the giant stride attained during that period. The way he bestrode the political landscape of that empire and the deft with which he dealt with multifarious problems as they appear goes to show his firm grip on the empire as a whole. This is particularly significant in his ability to bring back to life an empire that has almost collapsed due initially to his absence from the capital. Finally; his achievements in various areas of human endeavour is an eloquent testimony of a man who goes down in history as the indisputable pride of the house of 'Abbās within and outside the empire.

5.0 SUMMARY

- Al-Ma'mūn arrived Baghdād to personally take over the rein of government and chose some able lieutenants to take charge of every part of the administration
 - Al-Ma'mūn together with his brilliant general Abdullah ibn Tāhir did a great job in suppressing several insurrections that broke out during his reign.
 - The Caliph's period recorded a prosperous state that accommodated people of different races and religious affiliations
 - Himself a liberal man, al-Ma'mūn secularized his empire and gave particular recognition to the Mutazilites by adopting their doctrines as the official state religion.
 - His great passion for intellectual discourse informed the gathering of learned men in various fields in his court where philosophical discussions were usually held.
 - He founded *Bayt al-Hikmah* (house of wisdom) where mass production of academic works in translation or original works usually took place.
- His initial effort at choosing Imam ar-Ridha from the house of Muhammad as his successor backfired as his 'Abbāsīd brethren vehemently opposed this.
 - Al-Ma'mūn married Buran the daughter of his vizier Hasan ibn Sahl in a societal marriage; few of which have been so held in the history of Islam.
 - Before his death in 213A.H./833C.E. having spent twenty years and eight months; he nominated his brother Mu'tasim as his heir apparent against the popular choice of his son Abbas who was then enjoying the support of the army.
 - Al-Ma'mūn would be remembered for his forbearance, magnanimity and liberality among others.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Explain in detail, the contributions of al-Ma'mūn to intellectual development of Islam

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7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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Unit 4 AL-MU'TASIM AND AL-WATHĪQ IN THE HISTORY OF THE CALIPHATE

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Al-Mu'tasim(213-222A.H./833-842C.E.):Ascension, Administration and Achievements
 - 3.2 Al-Wathīq (222-227A.H./842-847C.E): Ascension, Administration and Achievements
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor marked assignment
- 7.0 References / Further reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, an extensive study of al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn was made. In this unit, we shall focus on al-Mutasim and al-Wathīq. The two were the last caliphs in the glorious era of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate. In addition, the unit shall give an appraisal of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate during the same era.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Discuss the rise of al-Mutasim, and al-Wathīq into the Caliphate
- Highlight major incidents that characterized the life of each of them as Caliphs.
 - Give an account of the 'Abbāsīd administration during the glorious era.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Al-Mu'tasim (213-222A.H./833-842C.E.): Ascension, Administration and Achievements

Before the death of Caliph al-Ma'mūn, he had nominated his brother Ish-āq as his successor. Ish-āq ascended the 'Abbāsīd throne in September 213A.H./833C.E with the name of *al-Mu'tasim bi-llah* (meaning he who takes refuge in Allah.) The reason for his choice by al-Ma'mūn could not be ascertained as his son 'Abbās who was very popular with the army should have been chosen. Al-Mu'tasim's maturity may have favoured his choice by al-Ma'mūn as the better candidate to maintain the continuity of action. The popularity enjoyed by 'Abbās almost caused disaffection among the army who were not disposed to the choice of Mu'tasim, but 'Abbās, not willing to go against his father's wish pledged allegiance to al-Mu'tasim and persuaded the army to support him.

Lack of confidence in the army made Mu'tasim to form new bodyguards consisting of the Turkish slaves. This new element introduced into the army which was hitherto composed of Arabs and Persians was a fatal blunder which ultimately led to the collapse of the Caliphate. The bodyguards were under the command of their own officers who were directly under the sovereign. They were therefore completely separated from the Arab and Persian troops before long, the guards became too powerful and Caliph al-Mu'tasim, feeling insecure moved with his favourite corps to Samarra, north-east of Baghdad. There he built a palace for himself and trenches that could accommodate two hundred and fifty thousand soldiers. He also provided stables for 160,000 horses. The power of the Turks reached its zenith when they assumed the *de facto* authority on who to depose and install as sovereign; all at their will and pleasure.

Caliph al-Mu'tasim, though not as brilliant as his immediate predecessor, faithfully followed the policy of his great brother. He had great interest in learning and patronised scholars. His era witnessed the flourishing of science and philosophy under such distinguished scholars as al-Kindi, "the philosopher of the Arabs". In pursuance of his brother's policy on religion, al-Mu'tasim recognized Mu'tazilite doctrines and put many of its adherents in high offices of the state. With this, Mu'tazilite ideas continued to dominate the life and thought of the empire and whoever refused to accept the doctrine was severely dealt with. Like al-Ma'mun, al-Mu'tasim concerned himself with the welfare of his people. It is remarkable that under his benevolent rule, agriculture, industry and commerce prospered and people lived in peace and happiness. The reign of Mu'tasim witnessed the appearance of some people on the bank of the Tigris, terrorizing the people of Baghdād and adjoining territories. The forces sent by the Caliph engaged them in severe battle for seven months after which they surrendered themselves to the Muslim generals who brought them to Baghdād. They were settled on the frontiers of Cilicia.

In 217AH /838CE al-Mu'tasim raised a large army equipped; according to Hitti 'as no Caliph's army before had ever been equipped' and penetrated into the heart of Roman lands and although he temporarily occupied Ammuriyyah, his attempt on the whole was unsuccessful. Also, there was the reappearance of Babek in Mazendran who was giving trouble to the people of Azerbaijan. Al-Mu'tasim had to deal with him by sending his Turkish general Afshin against him. After three years of intensive fighting, Babek was defeated and captured. He was taken to Samarra where he was executed. While the campaign against Babek was going on, the Byzantine Emperor called Theophilus was attacking the Muslim territories, killing several thousands of people and destroying properties. Al-Mu'tasim's plan to advance further in Byzantine territory failed as his discovery of a plot to assassinate him obliged him to abandon the idea. The Caliph returned to Samarra, and got wind of a dangerous rebellion under Madhar, a Magian prince of Tabaristan. His force under Abdullah ibn Tāhir crushed this rebellion after much fighting, and captured him. Madhar disclosed that the Turkish general Afshin had instigated him to this rebellion. Upon investigation, his statement was found to be correct and Madhar was executed. Afshin was confined in his house and starved to death.

Al-Mu‘tasim died in 222A.H./842.C.E. after a reign of about nine years. He was the last great Caliph of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISES 1

Account for the circumstances that led to al-Mu‘tasim’s movement of the capital from Baghdād to Samarra.

3.2 Al-Wathīq (222-227A.H./842-847C.E): Ascension, Administration and Achievements

Abu Ja‘far Harun, son of al-Mu‘tasim succeeded his father as the ninth caliph of the ‘Abbāsīd empire and bore the title, *al-Wathīq bi-llah* meaning (the one who trusts Allah), simply called al-Wathīq. He was described as an excellent ruler who combined generosity, forbearance and patience. As an able and enlightened ruler, he gave patronage to art and letters and encouraged industry and commerce. His period witnessed peace, prosperity and progress. Against the general misrepresentation of his character especially by the orthodox writers, al-Wathīq’s private life was above reproach. He had personal interest in music as he was also a poet. Al-Wathīq continued the Mu‘tazilite doctrine as a state religion. Al-Wathīq favoured the Turks and appointed a Turk named Ashnasas as “sultan” or lieutenant.

Al-Wathīq died in 227A.H./847 C.E. and his death was said to have closed a generation of able rulers of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Assess briefly the performance of al-Wathīq

3.3 Appraisal of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate during its Early Periods

The early periods of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty indicated a brilliant period of political, religious and intellectual life. The period is usually referred to as the golden era of Islam. The foundation laid by its founding fathers such as al-Saffah and al-Mansūr reached its peak in the period between the reigns of the third caliph, al-Mahdi, and the ninth, al-Wathīq, more particularly in the days of Hārūn ar-Rashid and his son al-Ma’mūn. It was through these two illustrious caliphs that the dynasty became a

success story in the history of Islam. The dictum quoted by the anthologist al-Thaalibi and cited by Hitti that, of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs “the opener” was al-Mansūr, “the Middler” was al-Ma’mūn and “the closer” was al-Mu‘tadid (271-282A.H./892-902 C.E.) is therefore credible. What made this period unique can be explained as follows:

Adoption of theocratic system of government: It is generally believed that the achievements of the ‘Abbāsīds during the early period represent the adoption of the true concept of theocratic state as against the purely secular state of the Umayyads. The Religious character of the Caliph during this period was indicated by his accession. These dressings include the mantle (Burdah) once worn by the

Prophet and his scepter. Since they came to power on the crest of religion; they have no option at least during this initial period than to lay stress on religious aspects to retain the support of the community. To this extent therefore, they made public observance of religious ceremonies obligatory. In addition, caliph during the period surrounded himself with men versed in Islamic laws whom he patronized and whose advice on matters of state affairs he sought. Unlike the Umayyad Empire which was purely Arab in nature and the government Arab based, the 'Abbāsīd government was more international with the Arabs forming only one of the many components of the new Neo-Muslim Empire. The early period of the 'Abbāsīd era also witnessed a high level diplomatic relation between the Arabs and the outside world. Of particular mention was the diplomatic exchange between the Franks (Europeans) at the time of Emperor Charlemagne. According to some Western authors quoted by Hitti: 'This reciprocity of cordial feelings found expression... in the exchange of a number of embassies and presents.'

The idea of this exchange can be explained in the ultimate desire of both Charlemagne and Hārūn to find a possible ally against their hostile neighbours. For instance, Charlemagne needed Hārūn as a possible ally against hostile Byzantium while Hārūn desired to use Charlemagne against his rivals and deadly foes, the neighbouring Umayyads of Spain, who had succeeded in establishing a mighty and prosperous state. The prosperity of the early period also became manifest in the luxurious living of the Caliphs and the members of their family, the officials, functionaries and other satellites of the imperial household. Regular payment of heavy stipends from the state treasury was made to the family until the practice was discontinued by al-Mu'tasim. Historical accounts indicate that Caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd's mother, al-Khayzuran, usually received an annual income of 160,000,000 dirhams. Another source stated that a certain Muhammad ibn-Sulayman, whose property was confiscated on his death by ar-Rashīd, left 50,000,000 dirhams in cash and a daily income of 100,000 dirhams from his real estate. Examples could still be drawn from many others who lived opulence lives during the period. The Barmecides represented a good reference point.

The period had its great landmark in the intellectual awakening which was followed by many of their successors in later periods. This awakening which had briefly been discussed under each caliph upon whom it flourished was due in a large measure to foreign influences, partly Indo-Persian and Syrian but mainly Hellenic. It is therefore not surprising that after the establishment of Baghdād the Arabic-reading world was exposed to the chief philosophical works of Aristotle, the medical writings of Galen, as well as of Persian and Indian scientific works. Hārūn and even al-Mansūr were said to have got a number of books from the east. Since many of these works were in foreign languages and the Arabians could not read them, they had at first to depend upon translations made by their subjects, among whom were Jewish, heathen and more particularly Nestorian Christians. These Nestorians translated the works first into Syrian and then from Syriac into Arabic.

They thus became the strongest link between Hellenism and Islam.

Abu-Yahya ibn al-Bitriq is credited to have been the pioneer translator of Greek works, having translated for al-Mansūr the major works of Galen and Hippocrates.

But evidently all these early translations were not accurate and had to be revised under ar-Rashīd and al-Ma'mūn.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The early period of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate indicated an era of able rulers whose tenure witnessed an empire at the zenith of its power. With the exception of al-Amīn, the zeal and commitment with which they pursue the state matters speak volume of their foresight, resilience and industry by which they became known in world Islamic history.

5.0 SUMMARY

- Before the death of al-Ma'mūn, he has nominated his brother, al-Mu'tasim as Caliph.
 - Mu'tasim was not comfortable with the army who showed more loyalty to 'Abbās, his nephew than to him.
 - To safeguard himself against possible army revolt, he raised four thousand bodyguards composed mainly of Turkish slaves.
 - The freedom given to these guards got into their heads and they began to persecute the people.
- The caliph, afraid of possible violent reaction from the people moved the seat of his government to Samarra.
 - Al-Wathīq succeeded al-Mu'tasim as the ninth caliph
 - By character, he was generous and patient
 - His reign was the last among the able rulers of the 'Abbāsīd dynasty.
- 'Abbāsīd caliphate reached its zenith during the early periods of its existence.
 - The period witnessed progress and prosperity.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Briefly appraise the golden era of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate.

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7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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Module 3

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF ‘ABBĀSID CALIPHATE

Unit 1 CALIPHS AT SAMARRA: AL-MUTAWAKKIL AND HIS SUCCESSORS

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 Caliphs at Samarra: Al-Mutawakkil and His Successors.
 - 3.1.1 Al-Mutawakkil (227-242A.H./847-861C.E)
 - 3.1.2 Al-Muntasir (242-243A.H/861-862C.E) and other Caliphs
- 3.2 Appraisal of the Events in Samarra
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

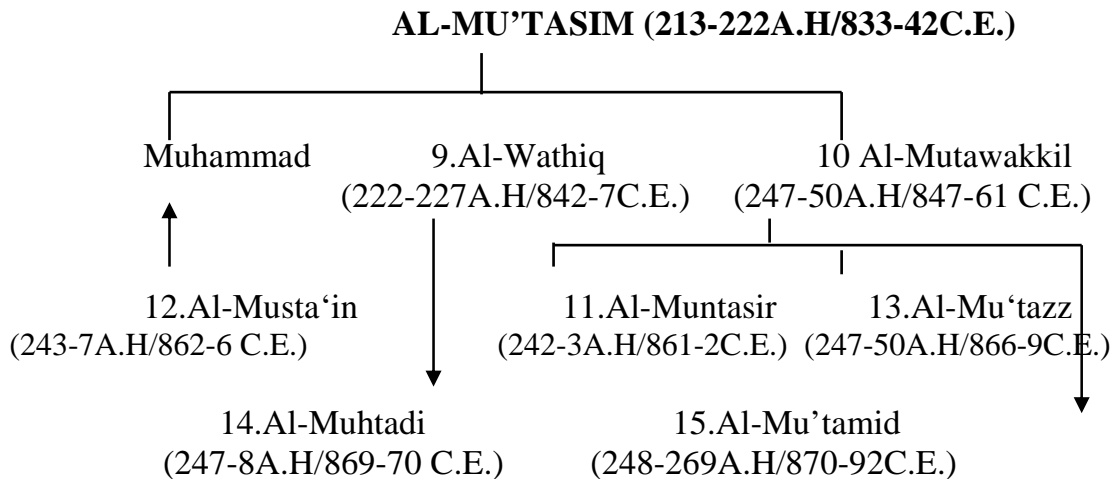
In the last unit, we discussed how al-Mu’tasim moved the capital from Baghdād to Samarra. In this unit, we shall explain the consequences of this movement and its far-reaching implications on the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate. To do this, the unit shall discuss the six successors to al-Wathīq at Samarra beginning with al-Mutawakkil from whose reign the caliphate began to decline. It would also include an appraisal of the events that characterized the period.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Discuss the reign of Mutawakkil and his successors in Samarra
- Explain the consequences of al-Mu’tasim and his seven successor’s movement from Baghdād to Samarra.
 - Appraise the events that characterized that period

2.0 MAIN CONTENTS



2.1 Caliphs at Samarra: Al-Mutawakkil and His Successors.

2.1.1 Al-Mutawakkil (227-42A.H./847-861C.E.)

Caliph al-Wathīq died without appointing any successor. After his death, the Qādī, the vizier and other courtiers wanted to give the throne to his young son

Muhammad. But the Turks under the leadership of Wasif opposed this and supported the claim of Wathīq's brother. The will of the Turks prevailed and Ja'far ascended the throne with the title: "*Al-Mutawakkil ala llah*" (the one who relies on Allah). He is fondly called "the Nero of the Arabs" and was the first Caliph in the period of decline. Al-Mutawakkil was regarded as a bad ruler for his

incompetence, obstinacy and cruelty. He began his reign by putting to death the vizier Ibn al-Zayyat who was said to have opposed his succession to the Caliphate.

He also put to death his supporter Wasif for his arrogance. Al-Mutawakkil continued the persecution of the orthodox scholars until the second year of his reign when he issued a ban on Mu'tazilite doctrine and restored the old dogma. From this period, the Mu'tazilites had a hard time in his reign as he began to persecute them. The Qādī Abū Dāwūd, his son Ahmad and other prominent Mu'tazilites were thrown into prison and their properties confiscated. In 230A.H/850C.E. Al-Mutawakkil resumed the early practice of oppressing the Alids and the persecution of the Shiites. He destroyed the tomb of Ali at al-Najaf and that of al-Husain at Karbala; two actions that earned him the everlasting hatred of all Shiites. But Mutawakkil's persecution was not confined to those mentioned above alone, non-Muslims also suffered from his excessiveness. They were excluded from the employment of the state, and were put in several other disadvantages.

His reign witnessed several disturbances like the rebellions at Armenia, Hims and other Byzantine lands. The Armenia and Hims rebellions were suppressed after some fighting but the Byzantine incursions into Egypt and Asia Minor were serious. In 232AH/852CE, the Byzantines destroyed the Egyptian coast and all the fortifications near Tunis. Along the line, they carried many people as prisoners of war and carted away properties. They also raided from the side of Asia Minor, as far as Darbakr and returned with 10,000 prisoners. In

240A.H/859C.E. however the Muslims engaged them in a fierce battle and defeated them severely; captured their fleet and ravaged their territories. Al-Mutawakkil was the first caliph to introduce the practice of wearing the sword round the waist; following the Persian tradition. This is against the old Arabian way of carrying it over the shoulder. It was during his reign too that Alī ibn Sahl Rabbān al-Tabari from Tabaristan changed to Muslim and became the caliph's physician. This physician has the great reputation of writing in 230A.H/850C.E. a book, 'Firdaws al-Hikmah' (paradise of wisdom), one of the oldest Arabic compedia of medicine. Al-Mutawakkil was not only a drunkard; he was also reckless with women. Report quoted in Hitti has it that the caliph had four thousands concubines, all of who shared his nuptial bed. He was also said on one occasion to have received as a present two hundreds slaves from one of his generals.

The cruelty of the Caliph had attracted a host of enemies, including members of his own family who were outraged by his behaviour, and therefore had no affection for him. His attitude also caused the displeasure of the Turkish soldiers from whom he lost the needed loyalty. They conspired to put him to death and with the connivance of his son Muntasir who abhorred his cruelties, their plan was perfected. One night when he was asleep, his palace was besieged by the Turkish guards who killed him. If Mutawakkil's cruelty created enemies for him, his weak and oppressive rule greatly undermined the integrity of the empire. His reign which saw the rise of the ascendancy of the Turks in administration was to continue in the reigns of his successors all of whom became mere puppets in the hands of the Turks.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How would you reconcile the personal character of Mutawakkil with his role as a caliph of Islam?

3.1.2 Al-Muntasir (242-243A.H/861-862C.E) and other Caliphs

When al-Mutawakkil died, his son, Abū Ja'far Ahmad popularly known as *Muntasir bi-llah* (the victorious by the help of Allah) was proclaimed caliph. Al-Muntasir was described as pious, just, forbearing and generous. He was very intelligent and had honest desire for the welfare of his people. He put right all the wrong that was done by his father especially to the descendants of Ali and the non-Muslims. The Caliph died after a reign of barely six months and was the first 'Abbāsīd caliph to whose grave a tomb was built. Abūl 'Abbās Ahmad, the grandson of al-Mu'tasim was raised to the throne upon the death of al-Muntasir with the title; *al-Musta'in bi-llah* meaning he who seeks the assistance of the Lord.' This caliph was only in power by name as the Turks who were at this time deciding the fate of the caliphate did not give him any authority to rule. Moreover, the death of al-Muntasir had further given the provincial governors the freedom to convert themselves into feudal lords in their respective areas of control; a development that further reduced the power of the caliph into a nominal suzerainty. The inability of this caliph to tolerate the control of the Turkish chiefs informed his decision to escape from Samarra to Baghdād.

Al-Mu'tazz was nominated as a successor to al-Musta'in. But this caliph who was the second son of al-Mutawakkil was soon forced to abdicate and al-Muhtadi was enthroned. The removal of al-Muhtadi was followed by the nomination of al-Mu'tamid to replace him. The period of al-Mu'tamid witnessed the emergence of petty dynasties one after the other; all of which shall be discussed in subsequent units.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Give examples on how the 'Abbāsid Caliphs became puppets in the hands of their former Turkish slaves.

3.2 Appraisal of the Events in Samarra

As stated earlier, the eighth 'Abbāsid caliph, al-Mu'tasim, son of Hārūn by a Turkish slave, was the first to move the seat of his government from Baghdād to Samarra. The purpose was to run away from the uprising of the people caused by the menace of his Turkish bodyguards recruited from Transoxiana. The movement of the seat to Samarra in 216AH/836CE was the beginning of the Turkish total control of subsequent rulers and the mark of a gradual decline of the empire as a whole. Samarra, a very beautiful city was to remain the capital for fifty-six years (216 -269A.H/836-92C.E.) during which period eight successive caliphs reigned.

The life of the caliph in the new capital was almost like that of a prisoner, as indicated by Hitti who added that, 'the murder of al-Mutawakkil by them (the Turks) in December 242A.H/861 C.E., at the instigation of his son, was the first in a series of events in the course of which the mighty structure of the 'Abbāsid dynasty-already shaken-stood face to face with imminent collapse'. After the death of al-Mutawakkil, subsequent caliphs became puppets in the hands of their former slaves. Historical account also shows that in some cases women in the court usually played important political roles through their influence over these slaves.

This action sometimes created some confusion too difficult to explain. Two examples may be cited here. The first was the case of al-Musta'in who was forced to abdicate the throne and his slave-mother curiously shared the supreme power of the caliphate with two Turkish generals. Another one was the case of al-Mu'tazz who succeeded al-Musta'in. His mother was said to have refused to pay the sum of 50,000 dinars which might have saved the life of her caliph son, despite the fact that she had a saving of 1,000,000 dinars in addition to priceless jewellery in her possession. Such was the case that for two centuries the history of the disintegrating caliphate present a gloomy picture of confusion. The only place where there was peace and security albeit occasionally, were in the provinces where a governor, practically independent, held the reins with an iron hand.

One of the most important events of the period was the rebellion of the Zanj slaves led by one 'Ali ibn Muhammad. The leader of the group which consisted mainly of Negroes imported from East Africa used the opportunity of the disturbed conditions in the capital to claim in September 248AH/869CE that he was an Alid called to 'their deliverance by visions and occult science'. He got overwhelming support from many slaves who saw him as their Messiah. Many forces were sent to

suppress the strange rebellion, but being on a familiar territory the Negroes subdued them and according to historical account, mercilessly put all prisoners and non-combatants to the sword. During fourteen years (248-262A.H/870-83C.E.) of the reign of al-Mu'tamid witnessed this war and the estimated number of people who perished was conservatively put at over half a million. A source claimed that after one engagement the unclaimed heads of Muslims were so numerous that the Negroes dumped them into a canal which carried them into al-Barah, where they could be identified by relatives and friends. It took the intervention of the caliph's brother al-Muwaffaq who had taken personal charge of the operations to break the backbone of this insurrection. In 262A.H/883C.E. Ali ibn Muhammad was killed when his fortress called *al-Mukhtarrah* was stormed. In the words of Hitti, "thus ended one of the bloodiest and most destructive rebellion which the history of Western Asia records." It was in the course of this war that Egypt fell under the rule of ibn-Tulūn.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Briefly discuss the rebellion of the Zanj led by Ali ibn Muhammad.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The life of the caliphs at Samarra which was likened to that of prisoners by Hitti is a clear indication of the loss of total control of the caliphate by the 'Abbāsīd. Murder and deposition of Caliphs at will by the Turkish slaves turned masters did not only make nonsense of the past glory attained by the founding fathers of this dynasty, it also became the beginning of the rise of petty dynasties which eventually led to the collapse of the empire itself.

5.0 SUMMARY

- Al-Mutawakkil was elected by the Turks under the leadership of Wāsif.
- Al-Mutawakkil who was the first caliph in the era of decline was said to be incompetent, cruel and obstinate
 - His reign witnessed several disturbances
- For his cruelty, he paid dearly as he was killed by the Turkish guards with the full support of his son.
- From al-Muntasir, appointment and desposition of Calipha became the primary preoccupation of the Turks.
- It was the period when the caliph could no longer do anything on their own volition.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Explain in detail the effect of the movement of 'Abbāsīd seat of power from Baghdād to Samarra.

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Unit 2

PETTY DYNASTIES IN THE WEST

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we focused on the commencement of the decline of the 'Abbāsīd era. In this unit, discussion shall continue on this era with particular attention to petty dynasties that sprang up in the western part of the empire. Major dynasties of particular study here include the new Umayyad in Spain (128A.H/750C.E.), the Idrisid (165A.H/785C.E.), the Aghlabid (171A.H/800C.E.), the Tulunid (247.A.H/868C.E.), the Ikhshidid (316A.H/935C.E.) and the Hamdanid (308A.H/929C.E).

2.0 OBJECTIVES

- By the end of this unit, you should be able to
- Discuss the various dynasties that emerged in the the west
 - Give account of their roles in the emphire
 - Narrate how the dynasties contributed to the decline of the empire.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 PETTY DYNASTIES IN THE WEST

3.1.1 The Umayyads in Spain (128A.H./750C.E.)

The early period of 'Abbāsīd Caliphate witnessed the emergence of a dynasty established outside its main control. Precisely five years after the foundation of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate the only Umayyad scion to escape the massacre of his family in the hands of the 'Abbāsīd, the youthful 'Abd-al-Rahman, arrived Qurtuba in Spain

and established there a brilliant dynasty. It thus became the first province ever stripped off the 'Abbāsīd Empire.

3.1.2 The Idrisids (165A.H./785C.E.)

An independent dynasty emerged in 165AH/785CE when Idris ibn- 'Abdullah, a great-grandson of al-Hasan, participated in one of the many Alid uprisings in Madīnah. The insurrection which occurred during the reign of al-Hādī was suppressed and Idris managed to escape to Mauritania, where he founded a kingdom that bore his name. The dynasty which lasted between 168A.H./788C.E. and 355A.H./974CE had Fez as its capital. It was the first Shi'ite dynasty in history. The dynasty which enjoyed the full support of the Berbers collapsed as a result of their disadvantaged location. Sandwiched between the Fatimids of Egypt and the Umayyads of Spain, the Idrisids was finally destroyed through the attack of a general during the reign of Caliph al-Hakam II of Qurtuba (342-357A.H./961-976 C.E).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Write a short note on the Idrisid dynasty.

3.1.3 The Aghlabids (179A.H./800C.E.)

The Aghlabid dynasty came into existence over the territory called Ifriqiyah (Africa Minor) when Hārūn al-Rashīd ceded the so called area to Ibrāhīm ibn al-Aghlab his governor in 179A.H./800C.E. Ibn al-Aghlab ruled this area which composed mainly the Tunisians as an independent sovereign, devoid of any control from the 'Abbāsīd caliph in whatever form. The Aghlabids gave their leaders the title *amir*, and from al-Qayrawan their capital, they dominated the mid-Mediterranean for more than a century.

The dynasty was involved in many conflicts with Europe having been encouraged by its well-equipped fleet that gave it the audacity to attack the coasts of Italy, France, Corsica and Sardinia. For instance, one of its leaders, Ziyādat-Allah 1 (196-218A.H./817-838C.E) was said to have sent an expedition against Byzantine Sicily in 208A.H./827C.E.

It is to the credit of this dynasty that the great Mosque of al-Qayrawan, still standing as an icon vis-à-vis the famous holy mosques of the East was built. Its construction began under Ziyādat-Allah and completed by Ibrāhīm 11 (253-281A.H./874-902 C.E). The mosque which stood at the site in which the primitive edifice of 'Uqbah, founder of al-Qayrawān, had stood became to the Western Muslims the fourth holy city, ranking after Makkah, Madīnah and Jerusalem. It was also under this dynasty that Ifriqiyah became finally transformed from an outwardly Latin-speaking, Christianity-professing land to an Arabic-speaking, Islam-professing region. The dynasty came to an end when the last Aghlabid called Ziyadat Allah III took to flight when the Fatimids conquered his territory without offering any resistance.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Assess briefly the contributions of the Aghlabids to the development of Islam in Africa minor during the 'Abbāsīd period.

3.1.4. The Tulunids (247A.H/868C.E)

The Tulunid dynasty which reigned between 247-284A.H/868–905C.E. in Egypt and Syria was formed by Ahmad ibn-Tulūn. His father, a Turk from Farghanah, had been sent in 196A.H./817C.E. by the Samanid ruler of Bukhara as a present to al-Ma'mūn. Ahmad was deployed to Egypt as lieutenant to its governor where, by audacity he refused to send financial aid to Caliph al-Mu'tamid when the latter needed it to prosecute the Zanj rebellion. Further to this, Ahmad took a bold step to establish an independent dynasty in Egypt. This event became a turning point in the life of Egypt because it marked the total freedom from exploitation by the Baghdādi caliphs and their appointed governors, who usually shared the huge revenue. With Ibn Tulūn in power therefore, money remained within for the development of the city.

Ibn-Tulūn (247-263A.H/868-884C.E.) fortified his new state with a stable army that was well organized to meet any enemy threat. He had an army of about a hundred thousand soldiers consisting mainly of the Turkish and Negro slaves. He assumed the control of Syria without much opposition when its governor died in 256A.H/877 C.E. and developed a naval base at 'Akka (Acre) to maintain his hold on this neighbouring country. This period marked the beginning of many centuries rule of Syria from the valley to the Nile.

The Tulūnid regime interested itself in irrigation and it was the first since the Arab conquest to make Muslim Egypt famous as a centre of art. Ahmad Ibn Tulūn was said to have built a sixty-thousand-dinar hospital in Fustat, the capital of his dynasty. He also built a mosque that still bears his name and yet remained one of the principal religious monuments of Islam.

Many annalists wrote about the palace of Khumarawayh, Ahmad's extravagant son and successor, who was said to have covered its wall with gold. In the general assessment of Ahmad ibn-Tulūn as a typical founder of the many states on the ruins of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate, he was said to be a good example of a leader that had a firm grip over his army. But despite this, the Tulunid, the Ikhshidid that followed them as well as most of the other dynasties, did not possess any national basis in the lands over which they ruled and therefore were short-lived. In the words of Hitti, their 'weakness consisted in the absence of a strong coherent body of supporters of their own race. The rulers were themselves intruders who were obliged to recruit their bodyguards, which were their armies, from various alien sources'. According to him, 'such a rule can only be maintained by men of outstanding personal influence, and no sooner does the mighty arm of the founder relax or pass away than disintegration sets in'. No wonder that we find the state founded by Ibn-Tulūn reverting to the 'Abbāsīd under his son and fourth successor, Shaybān in 283-284A.H./904-905C.E.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Give an account of the roles of ibn Tulūn to the emergence of the Tulūnid dynasty.

3.1.5 The Ikhshidids (316A.H./935C.E)

The Ikhshidid, a Turkish dynasty of Farghanah origin was established at al-Fustat by Muhammad ibn-Tughj in 316A.H/935C.E. The founder who received the title, Ikhshid from the Caliph al-Radi in 321A.H./939C.E. followed the Tulūnid precedence by adding Syria-Palestine to his semi-autonomous state. Both Makkah and Madīnah were to be incorporated as part of areas under Ikhshidid control. Ibn Tughj was succeeded by two sons, one after the other both of whom ruled only in name, and left the reins of the government to an able Abyssinian eunuch Abu-al-Misk Kafūr. This black slave whose freedom was originally bought by Ikhshid from an oil merchant for the equivalent of eight pounds became the sole ruler from 345A.H-966C.E. to 347A.H./968 C.E. He was successful in the defence of his territory against the rising power of the Hamdānid. His case as a black slave rising from the humblest origin to wield absolute power was said to be the first but not the last in Islamic history. Like other dynasties the Ikhshidids and especially their founder had been accused of lavishing state wealth to cory favour from their subjects. They had no ime to embark on the development of their dynasty. ‘They made no contribution to the artistic and literary life of their domain and no public works have been left by them’ so says Hitti. The last representative of this dynasty was Abu al Fawaris Ahmad, an eleven-year-old boy, who lost the country to the illustrious Fatimid general, Jawhar in 347A.H/969C.E.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Give a brief account of the Ikhshdid dynasty

3.1.6 The Hamdānids (308A.H./929C.E.)

The Hamdānids were the descendants of Hamdān ibn-Hamdūn of the Taghlīb tribe that originally established their dynasty in northern Mesopotamia with their capital at Mosul. The Hamdanids advanced in 323A.H./944C.E. into the northern part of Syria under the leadership of the future Sayf-al-Dawlah (the sword of the dynasty), wrested Aleppo (Halab) and Hims from the Ikhshidid lieutenant in charge and became the founder of a north Syrian dynasty which lasted until 382A.H/1003C.E.. Sayf-al-Dawlah became famous in history as a result of his passion for scholarship. He organized a literary circle which included the celebrated philosopher-musician al-Farabi, the historian of literature and music, al-Isbahāni, court preacher ibn-Nubatah, and the poet al-Mutannabi’ as well as the philosopher poet Abu al-‘Ala’ al-Ma‘arrī. Sayf-al-Dawlah consolidated his position in northern Syria, and from 326A.H/947C.E., he began an annual campaign into Asia Minor for some twenty years. The success initially achieved by this caliph was short-lived as the brilliant performance of Nicephorus Phocas and John Tzimisces, both future emperors,

saved the day for Byzantium. In 340A.H./961 C.E. Nicephorus captured the capital, Aleppo and killed over ten thousand of its youth that were captured in the war. Further raid continued when Nicephorus became the emperor. Areas conquered by his troops included Cyprus and occupied Cilicia. Soon after his occupation of Antioch, Nicephorus' general entered Aleppo and forced Sayf's son and successor, Sa'd-al-Dawlah into a humiliating treaty. Thus began the adoption of a new policy of consolidating the conquests in Cilicia and northern Syria as well as plan the final goal of freeing Jerusalem.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Sayf-al-Dawlah owes his fame in Arab history to his exceptional patronage of scholarship. Discuss.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The petty dynasties in the West were founded by the Turks and Persians who had virtually seized the reign of leadership from the Arabs. The manner of their rise, their 'intruding presence' and rule in another man's lands were the basic reasons why they could not hold on for many years before their collapse. However, despite this, there were few of them like the Aghlabids and the Tulunids who tried in their little way to achieve success as independent sovereign states in the West.

5.0 SUMMARY

- The first dynasty outside the 'Abbāsid imperial control was the one founded in Spain by Abdur Rahmān of the Umayyad dynasty in 134A.H/765C.E. The dynasty ended in 410A.H/1031C.E.
- In 168A.H/788C.E. another dynasty emerged when Idris, the participant in the Alids revolt in Madīnah escaped to Mauritania and founded a kingdom bearing his name.
 - The dynasty which has its principal capital at Fez was the first Shiite dynasty in history and it lasted till 353A.H/974 C.E.
- Ibrāhīm ibn Al-Aghlab ruled the independent Aghlabid dynasty ceded to him by Hārūn ar-Rashīd and has its capital in al-Qayrawān where they dominated the mid-mediterranean between 179AH/800C.E. and 288A.H/909C.E.
 - Apart from the dynasty's foray into Europe, it has the unique credit of building the great Qayrawān mosque and the transformation of Ifriqiyyah from Latin-Speaking, Christianity professing land to an Arabic-Speaking, Islam-professing region.
- The Tulunid dynasty owed its origin to Ahmad ibn Tulūn who proclaimed an independent dynasty in Egypt and later assumed additional control of Syria.
 - He had a well organized army composed mainly of Turkish and Negro slaves and also engaged in irrigation, beautification of Fustat; and construction of a big hospital.

- The Ikhshidid dynasty; also of Turkish origin also originated from Fustat through Muhammad ibn Tughj in 316A.H/935C.E. and was succeeded by two sons who left the rein of government in the hands of a black freed slave called Misk Kafūr.
- The dynasty which was unable to achieve any success in the area of development because the leaders engaged themselves in lavish adventures was finally sacked in 348A.H/969C.E. by Jawhar; the illustrious Fatimid general.
- The Hamdanids were the rival dynasty of the Egyptian Ikhshidids and was founded by the descendants of Hamdān ibn Hamdūn with their capital in Mosul.
- One of the leaders of this dynasty is Sayf al-Dawlah who became famous for his patronage of scholarship.
 - Sayf-al-Dawlah engaged in so many wars in the Asia Minor for about twenty years.
- His initial successes were diminished by the onslaught of Nicephorus Phocas whose devastating blows on the Muslims led to the occupation of their lands.
- The conquest of Muslim lands made Sayf's son and successor to sign a humiliating treaty with Nicephorus; an action that marked the beginning of the Christian crusade against Islam.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write short note on any of the following:

- a. Idrisid dynasty
- b. Aghlabid dynasty
- c. Tulunid dynasty

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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Unit 3

PETTY DYNASTIES IN THE EAST

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Petty Dynasties
 - 3.1.1 The Tāhirids
 - 3.1.2 The Safarids
 - 3.1.3 The Samanids
 - 3.1.4 The Ghaznawids
 - 3.1.5 The Buwayhids
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor marked assignment
- 7.0 References / Further reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, the new dynasties that emerged in the west were the central focus of analysis. In what follows, the eastern part of the 'Abbāsīd Empire shall be the primary area of study. Attention shall be paid to the Tahirid dynasty, the Safarid dynasty, the Samanid dynasty, the Ghazwanid dynasty and the Buwayhid dynasty.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Give account of the petty dynasties in the eastern part of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate.
- Explain their roles in the empire and their influence on the 'Abbāsīd caliphs
 - Discuss the effects of their roles on the decline of the empire.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 PETTY DYNASTIES IN THE EAST

3.1.1 The Tāhirids

The once trusted general of al-Ma'mūn, Tāhir ibn-al- Husayn of Khurasan was the first to establish a quasi-independent state east of Baghdād. Tāhir, the descendant of a Persian slave, was rewarded in 199A.H/820C.E. by al-Ma'mūn with the governorship of all lands east of Baghdād. The centre of his power was located in Khurasan. Tāhir died two years later in his capital, Marw, but before his death the caliph's name was no more mentioned in the Friday prayer. Tāhir's successors extended their area of control as far as the Indian frontier and moved the seat of

government to Naysābūr, where they remained in power till 251.A.H/872C.E. when they were taken over by the Safarids.

3.1.2. The Safarids (248A.H./867C.E.)

The Safarid dynasty owed its origin to one Ya'qub ibn-al-Layth al-Safar and reigned for forty-one years beginning from 248A.H/867C.E. Al-Safar had been a brigand avocation and his conduct as head of a band of outlaws caught the attention of the caliph's governor at Sijistān. Entrusting him with the command of the governor troops was all that he needed to launch his dynasty when he eventually succeeded his benefactor. Within the few years of his dynasty's existence, al-Safar put almost all Persia and the neighbourhood of India under his control. He was even said to have threatened Baghdād under the Caliph al-Mu'tamid. The Safarid dynasty later fell only to give way to the Samanid dynasty.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Write short note on either

- The Tāhirid dynasty **or**
- The Safarid dynasty

3.1.3 The Samanids (253A.H./874C.E.)

The Samānid dynasty originated in Transoxiana and Persia between 253A.H./874C.E. and 378A.H./999C.E. and their founder was Nasr ibn-Ahmad (253-371A.H./874-992 C.E.). While Nasr was the founder, the one who really established and consolidated its power was his brother Ismāil who engaged the Safarids in a battle that won him Khurasan in 369A.H./900 C.E. Beginning as Muslim sub-governors under the Tāhirids, the Samanids under Nasr II ibn-Ahmad extended their kingdom to include places like Sijistan, Karman, Jurjan, Rayy and Tabaristan, in addition to Transoxiana and Khurasan.

The capital of the Samanids, Bukhara and their leading city, Samarqand, became renowned centres of learning and art from where reputable scholars emerged. The Samanid were to face the usual problems of succession in the hands of Turkish slaves with whom they had filled their court. The southern part of Samanid territory was taken over in 373A.H./994C.E. by the Ghaznawids, who rose to power under one of these slaves.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Bukhara, and Samarqand, the two major towns under the Samanid rule almost eclipsed Baghadad as centres of learning. Discuss.

3.1.4 The Ghaznawids (341A.H./962C.E.)

The Ghaznawid dynasty came into being through one Alptigin, one of the Turkish slaves of the Samanids who began his career as a member of the bodyguard.

Alptigin rose through ranks to become the governor of Khurasan. Later, he fell out of power as a result of a minor misunderstanding with the new Samanid ruler and left for the eastern border of the kingdom. In 341A.H./962 C.E. he captured Ghazna in Afghanistan where he exercised an independent control. The area later developed into the Ghaznawid Empire of Afghanistan and Punjab with Subuktigin as the real founder in 341A.H./962 C.E. Subuktigin, a slave and son-in-law of Alptigin was succeeded by sixteen rulers who were his direct descendants. Subuktigin extended his territory to Peshawar in India and Khurasan in Persia, which he first held under the Samanids. Subuktigin's son Mahmud reigned between 378A.H./999C.E. and 409A.H./1030C.E. and was a distinguished leader who was responsible for series of campaigns eastward. He was reputed to have conducted no less than seventeen campaigns during which period he annexed the Punjab, Lahore, and part of Sind. He was one of the first in Muslim history to be bestowed with the title *al-ghazi*, i.e. someone who distinguished himself in war against unbelievers.

Mahmud's spate of conquest also extended to the western borders of his domains including the Persian 'Iraq. As a Sunnite, Mahmud acknowledged the nominal suzerainty of the Caliph al-Qādīr from whom he later received the title *Yamin-al-Dawlah* (the right arm of the state). Mahmud constructed many magnificent buildings in his capital and founded a large academy which he also endowed. His court became the mecca for eminent poets and men of learning among whom were Arab historian al-Utbi, the celebrated scientific and historical author al-Biruni, and the illustrious Persian poet Firdawsi. The rise of the Ghaznawid dynasty has always been said to represent the first victory of the Turkish element in its struggle against the Iranian element for ultimate mastery in Islam. Immediately after Mahmud's death however, the provinces east of the dynasty began to separate themselves gradually from the capital in the highlands and therefore marked the beginning of further breakdown of the dynasty into series of independent Muslim dynasties of India. In 565A.H./1186C.E. the Ghurids of Afghanistan decisively routed the last Ghaznawids in Lahore.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain the roles of Mahmud ibn Subuktigin in the expansion of his dynasty's territory

3.1.5 The Buwayhids

The Buwayhid dynasty originated from three Buwayhid brothers, Ahmad, Ali, and Hasan. Their father, abu-Shuja' Buwayh, who claimed descent from the ancient Sasanid kings, was the chief of a warlike horde from Deilem and had been for some time in the service of the Samanids. The three brothers had been called by Caliph Mustakfi to assist in checking the insurgence of the Turks. After their victory, Caliph al-Mustakfi made Ahmad ibn-Buwayh his *amir al-umara'* with the honorific title of *Mu'izz al-Dawlah* (he who renders the state mighty). He also conferred the title of *Imād ud-Dawlah* on Ali and *Rukn ud-Dawlah* on Hasan. The three brothers began their expedition and gradually worked their way southward,

occupying Isfahān, and then Shirāz with its province (313A.H/934C.E.) and within two years the provinces of al-Ahwāz and Karman were included. The Buwayhids had chosen Shiraz as the capital of the new dynasty. In addition, *Mu'izz – al – Dawlah* insisted that he be mentioned along with the caliph in the Khutbah and that his name should be embossed on the coin. Like their predecessors, the Buwathids installed and deposed caliphs at will. They maintained several magnificent palaces in Baghdad and referred to them collectively as *dar al-mamlakah* (the abode of the kingdom). As a Shiite, Mu'izz al-Dawlah declared the 10th day of Muharram as a national day of mourning to commemorate the Karbala massacre. The new status assumed by the Buwayhids made the caliph to realize; rather too late that he had changed one master for another. His attempt to free himself from this disgraceful position informed his decision to uplot against Mu'izz al-Dawlah. Mu'izz al-Dawlah got wind of this conspiracy and took prompt action. In January 325A.H./946C.E., the unfortunate al-Mustakfi was blinded and deposed by Mu'izz-al-Dawlah, who choose al-Muti', another son of Muqtadir in 325A.H./946C.E, as the new caliph. Mu'izz al-Dawlah died in 346A.H./967C.E. leaving behind his son Bakhtiyar Izzud-Dawlah to succeeded him. The new caliph was soon ousted by his uncle Adud-Dawlah.

‘Adud al-Dawlah: The Buwayhid dynasty reached the peak of its power under ‘Adud-al-Dawlah (the supporting arm of the state) who ruled between 328A.H./949C.E. and 362A.H./983C.E. ‘Adud was regarded as the greatest Buwayhid and the most illustrious ruler of his time. He was said to have united all the several petty kingdoms that had risen under Buwayhid rulers in Persia and al-Iraq, in 356A.H./977C.E. ‘Adud-al-Dawlah got married to the daughter of Caliph and also gave out his descendant to assume the caliphate. ‘Adud was the first ruler in Islam to bear the title *shahanshah*. He repaired canals and constructed many mosques, hospitals and public buildings in many cities. ‘Adud built the famous hospital in Baghdād which he called al-Bimaristan al-‘Adudi; completed in 357-8A.H./978-9C.E. and endowed with 100,000 dinars. ‘Adud had chosen a Christian named Nasr ibn Hārūn his vizier. With the authorization of the Caliph, he erected and repaired churches and monasteries.

‘Adud had passion for literary and scientific studies and his passion was followed by his successor son Sharaf-al-Dawlah (362-368A.H./983-89C.E). The Ikhwān al-Safa’, also flourished under the Buwayhid regime. The achievements of the Buwayhids were shortlived by internal quarrels that greatly weakened them and finally in 434A.H./1055C.E., the last of the family, Malik Rahīm, was ousted by the Seljuk Tughril Beg who entered Baghdād and put an end to Buwayhid rule. Malik Rahīm ended his days in confinement.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Assess the roles of ‘Adud ad-Dawlah to the flourishing of the Buwayhid dynasty.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The control of the Turks under whom the succeeding 'Abbāsīd caliphs became the puppets became more pronounced with the rise of several kingdoms and the election and deposition of the caliphs at will. The only charge witnessed was that the Turks came in different tribes, each struggling to have its shares in the power and the resources of the people over whom they were struggling to control. The result remain the same; leading to the decline of the once flourishing 'Abbāsīd Empire.

5.0 SUMMARY

- Tāhir ibn al-Husayn of Khurasan founded a quasi-independent state called Tahirid dynasty with capital first at Marw and later in Naysabur where the dynasty remained in power till 251A.H./872C.E. when they were taken over by the Safarids.
- Ya'qub ibn al-layth al-Safar; a head of a band of outlaws was the founder of Safarids dynasty with Sijistan as their original home.
 - Ya'qub who was entrusted with the command of Sijistan troops later succeeded his master and extended his domains to almost all parts of Persia and India neighbourhood.
- Nasir ibn Ahmad was the founder of the Samanid dynasty but his brother Ismail was the one who actually established its power.
- Under the Samanids, scholarship thrived with many scholars holding sway.
- The Samanids power began to decline when the authority of the state fell into the hands of the Turkish slaves in their courts.
- While Alptigin was the pathfinder of the Ghaznawi dynasty, Subuktigin was its real founder and was succeeded by sixteen Ghaznawids who were his lineal descendants.
 - Famous among these was his son called Mahmud who engaged in many conquests that earned him the title, al-Ghazi i.e. he who distinguished himself in war against unbelievers.
- The death of Mahmud led to the separation of the eastern provinces into many dynasties.
- Ghaznawid dynasty came to an end when the Ghurids of Afghanistan dealt a final blow on its remnant in Lahore in 565A.H./1186 C.E.
 - Ahmad ibn Buwayh founded the Buwayhid dynasty; in 324A.H./945 C.E.
- When together with his three sons occupied Isfahan; Shiraz and its province, al-Ahwaz and Karman and made Shiraz the capital of the new dynasty.
- Sharaf al-Dawlah, son of 'Adud stepped on his father's shoes and performed creditably well as a ruler.
- The dynasty was later sacked by the Seljuks and the cause was the disunity between Sharaf, Baha and their third brother; Samsam al-Dawlah.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write short note on any of the following

- a. The Ghaznawid Dynasty
- b. The Buwayhid Dynasty

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Unit 4 THE SELJUK TURKS AND THE ASSASSINS

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 The Seljuk Turks
 - 3.2 The Crusades
 - 3.3 The Assassins
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Further discussion on those forces that contributed to the decline of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate was undertaken in the last three units. The number of the dynasties that made up these forces and the magnitude of their contributions will be examined in this unit. Therefore, the unit shall look into other important dynasties like the Seljuks and the Assassins to see how their emergence had contributed in no small measure in bringing down the 'Abbāsīd caliphate.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Give account of the emergence of the dynasties under discussion.
- Explain major events that took place during the life of these dynasties.
- Give insight into the effects of their rise on the downfall of the 'Abbāsīd Empire.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 The Seljuk Turks

The Seljuks Turks consisted of a large number of Turks who came from Turkistan to settle at Transoxiana with the permission of Sultan Mahmud. They were to be in that territory as a result of an agreement to be paying tribute to the Sultan. These people, known as Seljuk Turks after the name of their leader Seljuk also had one of their tribes that settled at Khurasan. It was not long before these people became so powerful that they rose in arms against Sultan Mahmud's son and successor Mas'ūd and defeated him. They thereafter established an independent kingdom in Khurasan and elected Tughril, a grandson of Seljuk as their ruler. As a powerful general and ruler of his time, Tughril Beg successfully conquered Jorjan Khawarism and Persia and established a strong empire. He was conferred with the title of sultan by caliph Qā'im for assisting him to gain his freedom from the influence and control of the Turkish chief called Arslan al-Basasiri. He (Tughril

Beg) was also given the supreme authority to have direct and absolute control of the affairs of the Caliph.

Alp Arslan: When Tughril Beg died in 442A.H./1063C.E. he was succeeded by his nephew Alp Arslan who was invested with the title and prerogative of Sultan by Caliph Qā'im. Alp Arslan was noble, benevolent, just and wise. He was also pious, generous and brave. He fought and conquered Armenia, Georgia and Byzantine. When he defeated the large Roman army at Asia Minor, their emperor Romanus made peace with the Seljuk ruler by ceding the Roman territories in Asia Minor to him in 451.A.H./1072C.E. For effective administration of the newly acquired territory, Alp Arslan seconded his nephew Sulaiman there. Sulaiman extended the Empire to the Hellesont in the north and the Mediterranean in the west and also forced the Byzantine emperor to pay tribute to the Seljuks.

Jalal al-Dīn Malik Shah (452-488A.H./1073-1109C.E.): Jalal al-Dīn Malik Shah succeeded his dead father in 452A.H./1073C.E. and was equally invested with the power of a Sultan by Caliph Qā'im. The Caliph died in 454A.H./1075C.E. and was succeeded by his grandson Muqtadi. Malik Shah was a great ruler and his reign was described as a glorious period in the history of Islam to the extent that in the area of knowledge and culture, it was ranked parallel to that of Caliph al-Ma'mūn. Malik Shah was also said to be wise, noble and magnanimous. An incident that underscored the nobility of his character is illustrated from an incident that occurred at the early period of his reign. His brother had rebelled against him with the aim of obtaining sovereign power. He was said to have told his vizier that he had prayed to Allah to give victory to his brother, if he was more worthy than himself to rule over the Muslims. Malik Shah's empire extended from the confines of China to the Mediterranean and from Georgia to Yaman. By his benevolent rule, Malik Shah endeared himself to his subjects and also became the master of the vast empire.

Nizam al-Mulk: Nizam al-Mulk was the vizier of Malik Shah who formerly served his father in the same capacity. Nizam al-Mulk whose real name was Khwaja Hasan of Tus was a great scholar and statesman of history. He was a devoted and gifted vizier that enjoyed the confidence of his master so much that he was given the absolute control of the civil administration. Like Malik Shah, Nizam al-Mulk was also wise, benevolent and cultured. Peace and security prevailed in the empire during his period. Nizam al Mulk constructed numerous roads, canals and colleges in the empire and encouraged agriculture, industry and commerce. Many scholars flourished under the patronage of Malik Shah and his worthy vizier Nizam al-Mulk. Among them was Umar Khayyam, who distinguished himself as a poet, astronomer and mathematician. The Persian calendar was also reformed under Malik Shah in 454A.H./1075C.E. and became known as 'Jalali Calendar, after the name of Jalal al-Dīn Malik Shah. In the reign of Malik Shah, a group headed by one Hasan ibn Sabbah sprang up and was known as the Assassins. The approach of this group to attaining power was to terminate the lives of rulers through poison and dagger. They assassinated Nizam al-Mulk in 470A.H./1091C.E.

and Malik Shah's effort to suppress this brotherhood proved abortive as he died in 470A.H/1091C.E., at the age of thirty-nine. After the death of Malik Shah the dynasty began to decline. According to Rahim; 'The weakness of his successors, the rise of many small Seljuk dynasties in the empire and other civil wars accounted for the decline of the Seljuks'. This period also provide an opportunity for the Christians of Europe to launch crusade against the Muslims in Western Asia.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

- (a) Describe the position of Tughril Beg in the history of the Seljuks
- (b) Write short note on the following:
 - (i) Alp Arslan
 - (ii) Jalal al-Dīn Malik Shah
 - (iii) Nizam al-Mulk

3.2 The Crusades

The Christians of Europe began religious wars against the Muslims in the early 11th Century. These wars known as the crusades were caused by many factors and chiefly among them was religious. The Christians had wanted to recover Jerusalem which up till that time was under Muslims' control. Moreover, they wanted to assert their authority over Islam hand to ensure their domination over Muslim Asia.

The second factor which was social in nature had to do with the rise feudalism under the influence of the church. The negative effects of this development which included robbery, anarchy oand corruptions were all that the reigning Pope then needed to direct the Spirit of these warring factions into religious wars against the Muslims. Commercial factors also played significant roles in the war of the Christians against the Muslims during this period. Since the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean had become subject to Muslim control, the access of Italian cities to direct and profitable trade had been blocked. To merchants living in these cities, the Crusade would once again open for them these eastern territories for their prosperous commerce.

The first Crusade began in 475A.H/1096C.E. and was led by Walter the penniless. Between this period and 628A.H/1249C.E. eight wars were prosecuted during which many people were killed. Among many Seljuk rulers who reigned during these periods were Imamuddin Zangi (502-525A.H./1123-1146C.E), Nuruddin Mahmūd (525-553A.H/1146-1174C.E.) and Salahuddin the Great (496-572A.H./1117-1193C.E.) all of whom at one time or another fought gallantly to crush the crusaders and restore the lost glory of the caliphate. The eight crusades were led by Louis IX of France against the Muslims of Egypt in 628AH./1249C.E. The force captured Dimyat and was on its way to Cairo when Turan Shah, son of Malik Sālih engaged the Crusaders in heavy war in which the latter were defeated and Louis IX and his men taken prisoners.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Write a short note on the Crusades

3.3 The Assassins

The Assassins were a fraternity formed by Hasan ibn Sabbah at the time of Malik Shah. He was a descendant of the Himayarite kings of South Arabia and had served Alp Arslan as his mace – bearer. He left the service as a result of a misunderstanding and returned to his native – place Rayy. Later, ibn Sabbah went to Syria where he became an agent of the Fatimid Caliphs. Another version claimed that he joined the Fatimid propaganda because of his failure to occupy a high position in Seljuk state. Being jealous of the great rise of Nizam ul Mulk who was said to be his old school mate therefore, Hasan Ibn Sabbah aimed at the destruction of all authority. To achieve this aim, he organized the brotherhood of the Assassins.

In 469A.H./1090C.E., Hasan Ibn Sabbah occupied the Alamut castle in the mountains of Mazendran which he also made his headquarters. As the grand master of the brotherhood, he was called Sayyidina (our lord) as well as Shaykhul Jabal (Lord of the Mountain). Below the Shaykh al Jabal in the descending order of authority were three *Dai al Kabir* (great emissaries) for the three provinces of Jabal, Kuhistan and Syria. The *Fadais* were, a special class of disciples who acted as bodyguards and who also used to execute without hesitation the order to assassinate opposition persons. *Lasik* is the name by which ordinary followers of this brotherhood is called. The Assassins had used both poison and dagger to kill many people among the Seljuk family and some distinguished other too. As stated earlier, they secretly poisoned the great vizier Nizam al Mulk Tusi in 470A.H./1091C.E. and after the death of Malik Shah, they occupied many mountainous territories in Persia, Iraq and Syria. When Hasan ibn Sabbah reached the old age, he became a good Muslim and forced his followers to strictly observe the injunctions of the Qur'ān. Hasan ibn Sabbah's son called Buzurg Umaid succeeded his father as Shaykh al Jabal for 24 years. Buzurg Umaid's son and successor ruled 25 years while the last of the line of Shaykh al Jabal called Ruknuddin was defeated and captured by Hulagu in 635A.H./1256 C.E.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Account for the reasons why the Assassins emerged and explained their structural set up

4.0 CONCLUSION

The emergence of the Seljuk dynasty and the Assassins is still the manifestation of the 'Abbāsid caliphate in decay. It also signifies the magnitude of selfish ambitions that characterized our era of discourse in this book; all without putting Islam into consideration, the very first thing that formed the fundamentals upon which the existence of the entire empire was primarily based.

5.0 SUMMARY

- Seljuk dynasty was founded by the Seljuk Turks who had occupied Khurasān at the permission of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznawi.
- Their leader was Tughril Beg, a successful general who conquered many places like Khawarizm, Jorjan and Persia.
- He was conferred with the title of Sultan and given the authority to control the affairs of the Caliphate for assisting Caliph Qa'im.
- Arslan succeeded Tughril in 442A.H./1063C.E. and was said to have conquered, Armenia and Georgia as well as inflict defeat on the Romans.
- The period witnessed the attack of the Christians of Europe on Muslims in what is known as the Crusades.
- Religious, social and economic factors account for the causes of these wars which were fought between 475A.H./1096C.E. and 628A.H./1249C.E.
- Jalal al-Dīn succeeded his late father Arslan in 452A.H./1073C.E. and was given the title of Sultan by Caliph Qa'im before latter's death in 453A.H./1075C.E..
- His empire was vast as it extended from the confines of China to Mediterranean and from Georgia to Yaman and his period witnessed peace and prosperity.
- Khwaja Hasan of Tus surnamed Nizam al-Mulk served both Alp Arslan as governor and his son Malik Shah as the vizier.
- The period of Malik and his vizier Nizam al-Mulk witnessed the flourishing of many scholars and the reform of Persian calendar called the Jalali.
- Nizam al-Mulk was assassinated by the Assassins in 470A.H./1091C.E. a fraternity formed by Hasan ibn Sabbah.
- The empire of the Seljuks declined after the death of these men.
- They (the Assassins) assassinated many members of the Seljuk family and acquired the mountaineous territories of Persia, Iraq and Persia.
- Hasan ibn Sabbah repented and became a good Muslim at old age and enforced his followers to do the same.
- Ibn Sabbah was succeeded by Buzurg Umaid as Shaykh Jabal for twenty four years and the latter was also succeeded by his son who also ruled for twenty five years.
- Ruknuddin was the last ruler of the Assassins before he was defeated and captured by Hulagu in 635A.H./1256 C.E.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Account for the factor that led to the rise of the Seljuks

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Unit 5

THE COLLAPSE OF THE ‘ABBĀSID EMPIRE

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Collapse of the ‘Abbāsid Empire
 - 3.1.1 The Hulagu invasion of Baghdād
 - 3.2 Causes of the ‘Abbāsid downfall
 - 3.3 Administration of the ‘Abbāsids
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor marked assignment
- 7.0 References / Further reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, the focus of study was on the part played by the Seljuks, and the Assassins in the decline of the ‘Abbāsid Empire. In this unit, several factors that led to the collapse of the empire shall be studied with special reference to the religious, tribal, moral and social forces that were at work. In this unit also, efforts shall be made to highlight the basic features of the ‘Abbāsid administration.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Explain the factors that contributed to the collapse of the ‘Abbāsid Empire.
- Give account of the implications of the collapse on Islam as a religion.
- Discuss about the general lives of the people under the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 Collapse of ‘Abbāsid Empire

3.1.1 The Hulagu Invasion of Baghdād

While the Assassins were having a field day in their areas of operations, the Mongols or the Tatars (as they were fondly called) were also spreading havoc and destruction wherever they went. They have virtually wiped out of existence, the cultural centres of Eastern Islam where formerly stately palaces and libraries had been. It was stated that in Harat alone, out of a population of 100,000, about 60,000 people were gruesomely murdered. The magnitude of devastation was best described by Ali in the following words: ‘The mosques of Bukhāra, famed for piety and learning, served as stables for Mongolian horses. Many of the inhabitants of Samarqand and Balkh were either butchered or carried into captivity. Khawarizm was utterly devastated’. What seems to be the final blow on the

'Abbāsīd caliphate occurred in 632A.H./1253 C.E. when Hulagu, a grandson of Chingiz Khan led a huge army from Mongolia with the primary purpose of destroying the Assassins. He sent an invitation to the Caliph al-Musta'sim to join in this campaign. He got no response. By 635A.H./1256C.E. many strongholds of the Assassins had been captured effortlessly and their power subdued. After this conquest which was so terrible as to include the killing of babies, the conquering invader sent an ultimatum to the caliph demanding his surrender and began the demolition of the outer city wall. This also got no reply. In January 637A.H./1258 C.E., Hulagu, leading his men began the operation of pulling down the walls of the capital. By February of the same year, the Hulagu hordes invaded the city and in an attempt to save their lives, the Caliph with his three hundred officials and Qadis opted to surrender unconditionally. Ten days later, they were all put to death.

Hulagu and his forces laid siege on Baghdād and it lasted forty days and set buildings on fire. To save his life and those of his family, the caliph decided to surrender, and went to the Mongol camp. Hulagu asked the Caliph to assemble the entire people of Baghdād for the purpose of taking their census and they were all killed. Properties including books were burnt. The streets ran with blood and the Water of Tigris turned red as a result of the massacre that lasted six weeks.

Patients in the hospital, the students and professors were not spared. All were killed. The accumulated treasures for five centuries; so says Ameer Ali were thus for ever lost to humanity. Musta'sim himself, together with members of his family were beaten to death. According to Ameer Ali again; Baghdād the abode of learning, was ruined for ever. Quoting ibn Khaldun, Ali put the total number of people killed as one million and six hundred thousand.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Describe the brutal raid on Baghdād by Hulagu and the result on the eventual collapse of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate.

3.2 Causes of the 'Abbāsīd Downfall

Many factors have been attributed to the fall of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate. Generally speaking, one may cite the roles of the Mongols as the final straw that broke the camels back; their invasion of Baghdad according to Hitti was only contributory. More fundamental than this were the internal problems that have permeated the entire caliphate since the reign of al-Mutawakkil. These problems are:

1. Problem of consolidation: Many of the conquests made were mainly nominal and sometimes inconclusive. This made it difficult for these caliphs to consolidate the empire properly. In fact, the problems became acute with the extension of the empire that soon became too vast to be controlled by later weak rulers.
2. System of Administration: The 'Abbāsīd system of administration did not give room for stability and continuity. Extensive powers were sometimes concentrated in the hands of the provincial governors most of whom later asserted their independence. In fact in some cases, this independence was facilitated by the caliphs' magnanimous gifts of such province to be ruled by

hereditary right. Good examples can be cited of the Aghlabids in Africa and the Tāhirids in Khurasan. With governors as the commanders of the provincial forces and the cases of military governorship in later periods; it is natural that the central administration will be weakened and forced to disintegrate.

3. Racial cleavage: All the racial elements that constituted the entire caliphate were more conscious of their racial identity than see themselves as members of a united community. In the word of Hitti 'lines of cleavage between Arabs and non-Arabs, between Arab Moslems and Neo-Moslems, between Moslems and Dhimmis remained sharply marked. Even within the Arabs, there was the manifestation of dichotomy between the northern and southern Arabs. More fundamental than this was the enmity that usually arose from this cleavage. This enmity and rivalry which persisted throughout the caliphal period contributed in no small measure to the disintegration of the empire.
4. Emergence of religio-political sects: The emergence of many religio-political sects one after the other dominated the entire 'Abbāsīd period. Mention can be made of the Shiites, the Kharijites, the Fatimids, the Carmathians, the Ismailites and the Assassins among others. Not even Islam could be able to unite its devotees into a corporate whole. All these contributed one way or the other to the disintegration and the eventual collapse of the empire.
5. Economic Factor: Another major factor that led to the decline and eventual fall of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate was the economic decay that set in during the period. Exploitation and over-taxation of the government in the provinces by the central government made the latter rich at the expenses of the poor. It also led to the impoverishment of the rural areas as it discouraged farming and industry. Moreover, incessant warfare that characterized the entire period of the caliphate led to the death of many able bodied men who were needed as manpower for agriculture and other developments.

Further to this was the spread of epidemics like small pox, malaria and other ailments which deplete the population in large areas. It was stated by Hitti that 'no less than forty major epidemics are recorded in the Arabic annals of the first four centuries after the conquest'. Finally it is that this economic decay will naturally affect the intellectual development and stifle creative thought.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Examine the effect of economic decay on the downfall of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate

3.3 Administration of the 'Abbāsīd

The policy of administration: 'Abbāsīd caliphs internationalize their system of government by involving the non Arab elements in administration. This system is a substitute for the Arab's racial aristocracy. The 'Abbāsīd caliphate was a period of consolidation and civilization which afforded the caliphs the opportunity to devote themselves to the peace, prosperity and progress of the empire. Absolute monarchy

was also the fashion before the era of the Turkish *amirs*. The Caliph also doubled as the head of the state and the Imam of the Sunni Muslims. He was also the commander-in-chief of the army. Sometimes the caliph took advice of an informal council composed of the vizier and heads of departments particularly on important issues. The 'Abbāsids established the institution of the vizierate with the vizier (*wazir*) as the head of administration. Various administrative departments were created with specific functions. Among the important departments of the central government were:

1. Treasury (*Dīwān al-Kharaj*): This originated from the Umayyads and continued in the 'Abbāsīd era. The head of this department called *Sahib Dīwān al-Kharaj* was also an outstanding figure in the court of the Caliph.
2. Police Department (*Dīwān al-Shurtah*) headed by *Sahib al-Shurtah* (chief of Police) who was also the head of the Royal Bodyguard.
3. Postal Department (*Dīwān al-Barīd*): Postal department handled official as well as private correspondence. It also supervised the intelligence service.
4. Military Department (*Dīwān al-Jaysh*) was responsible for the recruitment, training and discipline of troops as well as looking after their welfare.
5. Chancellery (*Dīwān al-Rasā'il*): This was headed by the Principal Secretary with the responsibility of drawing up imperial mandates, diplomas, letters patent and political correspondence generally.
6. Audit Department (*Dīwān al-Zimam*) concerned itself with audit and account it was founded by al-Mahdi.
7. Appellate Court (*Dīwān al-Nazar fī al-Mazālim*): It is a kind of appeal court intended to redress cases of miscarriage of justice in the administrative and political departments.

The provincial administration was conducted by governors appointed by the caliph but whose powers and jurisdiction were considerably circumscribed. The judicial authority as in central administration was entrusted to the provincial Qadi ably supported by a number of deputies, stationed in the different towns.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Appraise the system of Administration under the 'Abbāsīd caliphate

4.0 CONCLUSION

The zeal with which the founding fathers of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate pursued the state affairs became lost in the administration of the subsequent rulers. Greed, over-ambition, luxurious life, lack of foresight and incompetence were the common symptoms that eventually combined themselves before the eventual raid of Hulagu in 1258 C.E. Despite this however, their progress in the area of infrastructural development, intellectual awakening and improvement of life generally still make them forces to be reckoned with in the history of Islam.

5.0 SUMMARY

- The Mongols waged fierce wars with the Muslims; devastating many properties and killing people.
- After sacking a lot of cities and making them desolate, they shifted their directions to Baghdād.
- The Mongol forces under Hulagu laid siege on Baghdad and wrecked it.
- The cause of the 'Abbāsīd downfall include problem of consolidation of each government; unstable and ill-defined system of administration and racial division.
- Others are the emergence of various religio-political sect as well as economic factor.
- The Caliphate established some important department like *Diwan al-Kharaj*, *Diwan al-Shurtah*, *Diwan al-Barid* and others.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Mention and explain two factors that led to the collapse of the 'Abbāsīd empire.

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