

Al-Saffah - concerned about Umayyad return, invited the remaining family of the Umayyad to dinner, had them clubbed to death before the meal, and then served the meal to the hosts of the dinner. (**Banquet of Blood**) **al-Rahman** was the only survivor. he fled to Spain and the emirate of Cordoba. (Another story has the newly appointed governor of Syria hunting down the Umayyad family and only al-Rahman escaping. Either way, **Syria**, the power base of the Umayyad dynasty, accepted the rule of al-Saffah. The Abbasid dynasty began by being, according one historian (Kennedy, *The prophet and the age of the Caliphates*), “free from major internal dissections.”

Shi'ites felt betrayed when al-Saffah named himself caliph

Al- Saffah used supporters from different backgrounds in his administration and military. Non-muslims, such as Jews, and a heretical branch of Christians (**Nestorian Christianity**), had places in the government, as well as non-arab muslims, including Persians. **Abu Muslim** was a Persian general who served in the revolution (actually started the open revolt in 747 at the province of **Merv** with the **Khorasanian** rebels who later swore allegiance to al-Saffah — which students would know based on their research of the revolution) and served during the reign of Al-Saffah. He was well liked by numerous groups due to his treatment of Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Non-Arabs. Al-Saffah was cautioned by his brother **al-Mansur** to limit the trust in Abu Muslim (Al-saffah limited Abu Muslim's personal guard to only 500 men). Al-Mansur even tried to convince Al-saffah to kill Abu Muslim more than once. (More on this later).

He needed strong military in order to combat the encroaching **Tang dynasty (China** battles in central Asia) the Umayyad remains (Spain), and the internal rebellions (Shi'ite among others) in Syria and Mesopotamia.

Al-Saffah moved the capital from **Damascus** (in Syria) to **Kufa** (Iraq) The eventual movement of the capital to **Baghdad** (under al-Mansur) was to solidify the the focus of the empire on the East rather than the West.

Education under Al-Saffah

The capital of the empire was moved from Damascus to Baghdad, which was a a city built to be the new capital (Baghdad is not Babylon; Babylon was located about 90 miles south). Baghdad was built in large part by a powerful family descended from **Barmak** (Barmakids). Barmak's son, **Khalid** became the **wazir** (Prime minister) under al-Saffah. (Kalid's son **Yahya** rose to become one of the most powerful people of the caliphate under **Harun Al-Rashid** (5th caliph, In english the name is “Aaron the Just” who ruled during the highest point of the Abbasid's Golden Age of Islam from 786 to 809) (More on him later)

The Barmakids

An interesting note is that the Barmakids were (probably) originally Buddhists, perhaps Buddhists priests and leaders of a Buddhist monastery before Khalid converted to Islam. The connection to Buddhism may have led to a connection with India and Indian culture which made it's way into Arabian culture and education. (Arabic Numerals, sometimes called Indo-Arabian numerals). Khalid was given the task of building Baghdad (which was originally known as the Round City of Baghdad). They invited scholars and doctors from all over the empire to Baghdad.

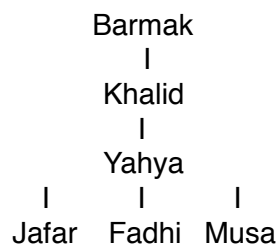
The Barmakids are given credit for the first paper mill. **Paper**, rather than papyrus, is cheaper to produce, though at that time, still quite expensive and difficult. The mill wasn't really a mill since it didn't use water (debated but unlikely given sources that don't ever mention water), but non-the-less was important in the development of education in the Middle east. The paper making process was developed in China centuries earlier, but had rarely made it out of China due to the Chinese reluctant desire to share. After the battle of Talas, Chinese captives were put to work in the Samarkand (another city) paper mill. (Eventually paper would make it's way to Western Europe but not until the 13th century).

Since they controlled the paper mill, and had influence in the government the Barmikid family enjoyed considerable influence in the Empire. During the reign of Huran al-Rashid, there was an increase in Islamic science, astronomy, and medicine, in part due to the influence of the Barmakids; thus, Iranian (Persian) science made it's way into Islamic culture and eventually after the clash of culture in the Crusades, into the Western World as well.

(This should not be seen as exclusive since Al-Andalus (Spain) had some influence as well. Pope Sylvester II (999) brought Arab numerals to Western Europe as well as the Abacus). I, personally, am not familiar with the connection of Baghdad and Al-Andalus at that time, and do not know of the influences. I am also am unaware of other Baghdad influences on Sylvester II).

Getting back to the Barmakid's and the paper mill, their influence in Islamic culture can be seen in the arab stories collectively known as **The book of One Thousand and One Nights**. Sometimes referred to in English simply as *Arabian Nights*. (You are familiar with at least one character in the stories — a Barmakid who became famous for his eloquence; he was a vizier that reoccurs in several stories named **Ja'far**.) The Earliest scraps of text of *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights* dates to the 9th century.

Family tree:



They eventually fell out of Favor with Harun (Whose name 'the Just' will be a bit questioned when I tell that story later).

Al-Saffah

Defeated the Umayyads (Battle of (Great) Zab) - 750.

Embraced non-muslims and non-Arabs into the government and military.

Fought against the Tang Dynasty of China at the Battle of Talas - 751.

Put down rebellions in Syria and Mesopotamia. (was attacked by the Byzantines during this time).

Moved the capital from Damascus to Kufa (Eastern focus)

Was disliked by the Shi'ites, but ultimately had a more harmonious caliphate than the previous years of the Umayyad.

Died of smallpox on **10 June 754 (136 AH)**, four years after taking the title of Caliph. He appointed his brother al-Mansur as his successor.

Al-Mansur (r. 754 - 775)

While al-Saffah was the one who removed the remnants of the Umayyad and rallied support for the Abbasids, Al-mansur was an important player in the rebellion. Al-mansur was given the task of getting a surrender from a governor in Iraq who barricaded himself and his troops in a town. After delivering the message of the death of the last Umayyad Caliph Al-Mansur promised the governor that he would give him safe passage in return for the town. The governor surrounded, but was executed anyway.

Al-mansur was also responsible for killing several rivals.

Consequently, since al-Saffah's reign only lasted four years; so, it fell on Al-Mansur to stabilize and consolidate the Abbasid dynasty's power base.

Moved the Capital to Baghdad (Round city of Baghdad). (762-763)

He had to deal with several revolts by his military commanders. His uncle **Abd Allah**, declared that his own claim to the caliphate was stronger than al-Mansur's claim (despite al-Saffah's appointment). Although Al-Manusur was suspicious of Abu Muslim, the Korasanian military general (**Abu Muslim**) supported al-Mansur and helped defeat Abd Allah.

However, in 755, after Abu Muslim had helped Al-mansur solidify his position of Caliph, al-Mansur was concerned at how strong his popularity was with the people, al-Mansur had Abu Muslim brought to his court, while they were talking, the caliph gave a signal and four or five guards attacked Abu Muslim and killed him. al-mansur declared that Abu Muslim was executed as a betrayer of the faith (heretic). According to one 18th century english historian, al-Mansur was not content, and he "committed outrages on the body, and kept it several days."

His potential political rivals had been removed, and he and al-Saffah had removed the Alid competition and cut the Shi'ites from their political agenda.

His ruthlessness in the consolidation of power, and theological differences, led to several revolts. First, in Korasan, a religious leader (of a heretical group (**mazdakite**, possibly but unlikely an orthodox Zoroastrian)) named **Sundpah** demanded that blood be spilled for the death of Abu Muslim. Sundpah is a good example of the Arab/Iranian conflict as his family was a powerful family before the spread of Arab Islam into Iran. (The house of Karen, was one of the "Seven Great Families" a feudal leader in pre-islamic Iran). Secondly, around 757, he was forced to put down a religious sect claiming blasphemous. A group known as the **Rawandayyah** claimed that Abu Muslim was a prophet who could know the future. *"They claimed that al-Mansur is Allah (Allah is certainly above this claim), who knows their secrets and whispers. They declared this claim and when al-Mansur heard about it, he arrested some of them, who admitted their claim. He asked them to repent, but they said, "al-Mansur is our god. When he kills us, we will become martyrs, like his prophets and messengers, some of whom he killed by the hands of his chosen creatures and some by home destruction, drowning, or wild beasts, while he killed some others by diseases or other ways of his choice. It is up to him to do to his creatures whatever he pleases. He cannot be questioned about his actions."*

Kitab Firaq al-Shi'a p. 105-106

Revolt of 762-763 (revolt of **Muhammad the Pure Soul**) (**Muhammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya**)

A descendant of Muhammad the prophet through Muhammad's daughter Fatima. He was initially followed by a large group including al-Saffah and al-Mansur, but after the revolution as the Abbasids established their position his followers abandoned him. However, he was then supported by a different group of Shi'ites. In 762, he began a new revolt against al-mansur. and the revolt was in Medina, which was dependent on other areas for goods, making it a bad place to initiate a war. Muhammad's followers was not nearly as trained or prepared as the imperial army of al-mansur. Muhammad refused to back down even after a large group of his soldiers abandoned him. **Dec 6 762** - he died as a martyr to the Shi'ites.

765 - Jafar al-Sadiq (the truthful) who was the Imam of the Shi'ites was poisoned, according to some sources, by Mansur's command. al-Mansur then sent a letter to the governor telling him to secretly read al-Sadiq's last testament and behead whoever he named as the next **imam** (in an attempt to end the Shi'ite **Imamate**. However, al-Sadiq listed four successors, his two sons along with the governor himself and al-Mansur himself. [Jafar al-Sadiq] was a descendant of Ali on his father's side and Abu Bukr on his mother's side].

In **767**, a revolt in Korasan, again, was led by a a man claiming to be a prophet. this revolt was also put down by al-Manusr. (One reason for the revolts in the Koresan region may stem from the fact that the influx of Persian influence and power eroded the old Arab aristocracy, including the Khorasanian Arabs that supported the Abbasids against the Umayyads.)

Thus, his power was not just built on military power. Politically, his best achievement was the city of Baghdad. The capital was built in part with ruins from **Ctesiphon** the last Iranian capital. It was a statement the the Abbasid dynasty was a permanent presence in the former Iranian lands. Additionally, al-mansur used several of the Iranian government practices and Baghdad served as a center for the newly created governmental structure. The bureaucracy that al-Manusr established centered on Baghdad helped solidify a stable foundation for the Abbasid political power base.

(Bureaucracy) He created a position called the vizier (wizier) (prime minister), and delegated local authority to leaders called emirs. The Persian influence and acceptance of al-mansur led to a more integrated Persian and Arab society and culture but did alienate some Arabs. (revolts) Additionally, the emirate of Cordoba was established as a rival to Baghdad.

He arranged his successor - his son, **al-Mahdi**, and established a strong basis for the hereditary title to be passed down.

He died in **775** on his way to Mecca.

The Persian education and culture continued in Baghdad. The **house of Wisdom** was eventually built. Al-madhi followed his father Al-mansur and was in turn filled by his own son **Al-Hadhi** (But only for one year) after his death the Caliphate came to his brother, **Harun al-rashid**. The greatest of the Abbasid rulers and the real creator of the Golden age of Islam with

prosperity in art, music, religious prosperity, and scientific and cultural achievement came during the reign of Harun Al-Rashid (**Aaron the Just**) (r. 786 - 809). he would also extend the influence of the caliphate into Europe by establishing relations with Charlemagne.

Al-Madhi (He who is guided by God) (r. **775 - 785**)

He began his reign in 775 upon the death of his father, who died on the hajj (or pilgrimage) to Mecca. The transition was peaceful and al-Madhi continued many of the practices of his father.

He added a little harmony to the relations with the Shi'ites

The shi'ites wanted harsher policies against heretics. Al-madhi made a conscious effort to do this. (Al-Saffah the bloodshedder had once said "tolerance is laudable, except in matters dangerous to religious belief...")

Al-madhi declared that the Caliph had the right, and even the responsibility, to define what was and what was not orthodox (true) theology of Islam. Those, sometimes referred to as free-thinkers, or sometimes called the *zindiq*, were targeted. He first ordered the collection of written sources that outlined the theology and refuted several of the known free-thinker ideas and heresies. And instituted a policy of hunting down and executing anyone who was suspected of being a *zindiq*. This policy was later used by another caliph named **al-Ma'mun** who sought to hunt down and execute Muslim religious scholars who refused to believe that the Qu'ran had been created rather than always having existed. (What I found interesting about this event, is that it was something that the Sunni did not believe but certain groups of the Shi'ites did. This however, was a bit later (around 833) and is part of Al-Ma'mun's period known as the **mihna**, which is a muslim version of the Inquisition).

The Barmik family continued to hold roles in the government as viziers, and gained even more power. More positions and departments were created with the Barmakids holding many of them. A man named **Ya'qub**, was imprisoned by al-Mansur for his part in the failed Alid revolt of 762-763. Al-Madhi released Ya'qub from prison. Ya'qub rose in power in the bureaucracy and eventually became vizier. Some sources say that he first gained al-Madhi's support by betraying another Alid sympathizer who planned to escape. However, with his own Alid sympathies in tact, Ya'qub was able to help create a little harmony between the Abbasid Caliph and the Shi'ites, briefly. Ya'qub rose up in power and influence so much that one historian described it by saying "never before had a member of the bureaucracy established such control over policy making." (**Hugh Kennedy**, 1986). His fall from power, however, was swift. When an Alid enemy of al-Madhi was caught, Ya'qub's loyalty was tested. Instead of executing the prisoner, Ya'qub let him escape, and was dismissed and then himself sent to prison. (He was later released by al-Madhi's successor).

In 775, a Byzantine named **Tarath** came to the Abbasid court to congratulate al-Madhi on his ascension to the throne. The Byzantine was so happy with the hospitality he received, he offered to build a mill, that he claimed would pay for itself in a year. He did just this, and al-Madhi was so impressed that he ordered that the mill's profit be returned to the envoy of Tarath for the rest of his life.

The city of Baghdad grew with people from Iraq, Syria, Persia, Arabia, Afghanistan, and even Spain making their way to the new city. The Muslim population grew to about 15% of the population of the Caliphate, but Baghdad had Byzantine Christians, Jews, and Hindu, (and possibly some Zoroastrians).

The city had a thriving paper and book market. The cheapness of paper and its durability helped the expansion of the bureaucracy during this period, because records could more easily be kept.

Rebellions

In **777**, al-Mahdi took the right of succession from his cousin **Isa ibn Musa** and declared that his own son, **Musa al-Hadi** should be the next caliph. The nobles were forced to swear the alliance to al-Hadi.

He put down a Khurasan rebellion in 777 led by a man named **Yusuf**.

In 778, he put down a rebellion led by the **son of Marwan**, who was leading a small Umayyad remnant group in Syria.

In **785**, al-Mahdi was poisoned by one of his concubines and he died (would like to know more about that story).

Al-Hadi only lived one year after his ascension to the position of Caliph.

He was followed by **Harun al-Rashid (Aaron the Great)** (r. 786-809)
But ended in 809 with the outbreak of the **Fourth Fitna**

The Golden Age of the Abbasids.