

The Abbasids

The Abbasid Dynasty rose to power in AH 656 / AD 750, and established the court in Baghdad. Abbasid rule stretched from Central Asia in the east, to Tunisia in the west, and lasted some 508 years. The reign was distinguished by their encouragement of equality between different ethnic and social groups that made up society; due to the vastness of their empire, they established regional governorates to oversee order and stability. In the Mediterranean region, the Aghlabids governed Tunisia, and the Tulunids governed Egypt, on behalf of the Abbasids. The Golden age of the Abbasids was between the 3rd and 4th / 9th and 10th centuries, during which time the Middle East and North Africa witnessed a major shift from a largely agricultural economy to one driven by trade. This led to new wealth that narrowed the social gap between Arab and non-Arab communities giving rise to further developments in many crafts, especially glass, pottery and weaving. These goods were exported worldwide to places such as China and Sub-Saharan Africa. The seeking of formal knowledge was encouraged by the state. Many schools were established in Baghdad and the provinces. The art of book translation thrived and led to the preservation of many key Greek, Persian and Indian works which were translated into Arabic. Significant contributions were made in the fields of science, mathematics, medicine and philosophy. The decline of the Abbasids began during the 5th / 11th century, when parts of the empire began to break away or became autonomous regions. The Fatimids (297–567 / 909–1171) set up a rival dynasty in Egypt; and Tughrul Beg – one of the Abbasid's Turkic officers – took personal control of Baghdad, the Abbasid seat, in 447 / 1055. There were several unsuccessful attempts to re-establish Abbasid suzerainty, but the final blow came when the Mongols swept through the Middle East and conquered Baghdad in 656 / 1258.



Great Mosque of Kairouan
Hegira 221 / AD 836
Umayyad, Abbasid
Kairouan, Tunisia



Fragment of a medical prescription
Hegira beginning of the 2nd century / AD 8th century
Abbasid
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt



Glass vessel possibly for chemistry
Around hegira 3rd–4th century / AD
9th–10th century
Abbasid
National Museum of Damascus
Damascus, Syria