

THE MONGOL DESTRUCTION OF THE ABBASID CALIPHATE AND ITS HISTORICAL CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the analysis of one of the most significant political events in the history of the Middle East in the mid-thirteenth century—the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 and the consequent dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate. The study examines the political, military, religious, and civilizational consequences of this event through a comprehensive approach. In addition, the role of this event within the system of international relations of the time, as well as its impact on subsequent historical developments, is analyzed from a scholarly perspective. Founded in the eighth century, the Abbasid Caliphate served for a long period as the political and religious center of the Islamic world. In particular, the city of Baghdad played a crucial role in the formation of the “Islamic Golden Age” as a center of science, culture, and trade. However, by the thirteenth century, the Caliphate began to lose its former power due to internal political weakening, economic difficulties, and a decline in military capacity. The weakening of central authority led to the increasing autonomy of provincial governors, political fragmentation, and the breakdown of the defense system. Under such complex historical conditions, the Mongol Empire pursued a policy of westward expansion. The army led by Hulagu advanced into the Middle East, initially conquering the territories of Iran and Iraq. In 1258, Baghdad was besieged and surrendered within a short period. The last Abbasid caliph, al-Musta‘sim, was executed by the Mongols, thus bringing an end to a caliphate that had lasted for more than five centuries. The conquest of Baghdad was accompanied by widespread destruction. Numerous historical sources report mass killings of the city’s population, as well as the destruction of madrasas, mosques, and libraries. The destruction of the renowned “Bayt al-Hikma” (House of Wisdom), a major intellectual center, is symbolically interpreted as the decline of Islamic scientific and intellectual life. Many scholars regard this event as marking the end of the period of political and cultural centralization in Islamic civilization.

Keywords: Siege of Baghdad, Hulagu, the Ilkhanate, the events of 1258, Ilkhanid administrative system, Islamic civilization, Middle Eastern history, the Middle Ages..

Introduction

The mid-thirteenth century is widely recognized as a turning point in the history of the Middle East. In particular, the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 and the resulting political dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate represent one of the most significant events that left a profound impact on the medieval Islamic world. For several centuries, the Abbasid Caliphate had functioned not only as a religious center but also as a principal foundation of science, culture, and political governance. The city of Baghdad, in turn, was known as one of the largest intellectual and cultural centers of its time. However, by the thirteenth century, the Caliphate began to lose its former strength due to internal political instability, economic decline, and a



reduction in military capacity. The weakening of central authority led to the strengthening of separatist tendencies in the provinces. It was under these historical conditions that the Mongol Empire implemented a policy of westward expansion. The army led by Hulagu advanced into the Middle East, captured Baghdad in 1258, deposed the last caliph, and brought an end to the caliphal system. This event is significant not only as the fall of a single dynasty but also as a transformation in the balance of political power across the entire region. The dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate led to the disappearance of a central religious-political institution in the Islamic world and created the conditions for the emergence of new state formations in the Middle East. Therefore, this article examines the causes of the Hulagu invasion, the course of the siege of Baghdad, and its long-term historical consequences through a scholarly analytical framework.

Research Objectives and Tasks

The primary objective of this study is to analyze, on the basis of historical sources, the process of the dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate by the Ilkhanate in the thirteenth century, and to evaluate the political, religious, and civilizational consequences of this event from a scholarly perspective. The study aims to demonstrate that the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 was not merely a military success, but a complex historical phenomenon that fundamentally altered the balance of power in the region.

The research tasks are defined as follows: first, to examine the internal political and economic conditions of the Abbasid Caliphate in the mid-thirteenth century; second, to identify the causes of the Mongol campaign into the Middle East under the leadership of Hulagu; third, to analyze the course of the siege of Baghdad and the process of the dissolution of the Caliphate on the basis of historical sources; fourth, to assess the short-term and long-term consequences of this event from both political and cultural perspectives. Through these objectives and tasks, the study seeks to reveal the essence and significance of a crucial turning point in the history of the medieval Middle East.

Methods

In this study, a complex of scholarly methods commonly employed in historical research was utilized to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the process by which the Abbasid Caliphate was dissolved by the Ilkhanate in the thirteenth century. The research methodology is not limited to a descriptive account of events but is aimed at identifying causal relationships, internal and external factors, and long-term historical impacts.

First and foremost, the historical method (historical approach) was employed as the primary methodological framework. This method involves examining events within their specific historical context. The conquest of Baghdad in 1258 was analyzed in close connection with the political, economic, and military conditions of the thirteenth century. The weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate, the decline of central authority, the growing autonomy of provincial rulers, and the expansionist policy of the Mongol Empire were considered as elements of a unified historical process. In accordance with the principle of historicism, efforts were made to evaluate events based on the sources and conditions of the time, without imposing modern interpretations



artificially. In addition, a системный (systemic) approach was applied. According to this method, the dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate was analyzed not as an isolated घटना but as an integral part of broader political transformations in the medieval Middle East. In particular, the campaigns led by Hulagu, the internal policies of the Mongol Empire, its relations with other uluses, and the regional balance of power were examined within a unified analytical framework. This approach made it possible to analyze the event not in a narrow context but in relation to wider regional and even transcontinental processes.

The cause-and-effect (causal) analysis method also played a significant role. Through this method, the causes of the crisis of the Abbasid Caliphate were identified, and both direct and indirect factors of the siege of Baghdad were examined. Alongside internal political instability, economic difficulties, and weak military preparedness, the strategic objectives of the Mongol Empire—such as control over trade routes and the pursuit of regional dominance—were also taken into account. As a result, it was demonstrated that the event was shaped not by military force alone, but by a complex set of interrelated factors. The source criticism method constituted one of the key methodological foundations of the research. Historical sources and chronicles from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as well as modern scholarly studies, were subjected to comparative analysis. Differences in interpretations among various authors were identified, taking into consideration their subjectivity and historical context. For instance, while Muslim historians often portrayed the event as a tragedy and decline, some modern scholars interpret it as a shift of political centers and the emergence of new state structures. Therefore, sources were analyzed through a critical perspective.

The comparative-historical method was also applied. This method enabled the comparison of the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate with the decline of other historical empires. It was established that the combination of factors such as weakening central authority, economic crisis, and external invasions represents a common pattern in the судьбы of many medieval states. Thus, while the fall of Baghdad in 1258 was unique in many respects, it can also be understood within the framework of broader historical закономерности. Furthermore, the structural-functional analysis method was used to examine the political and religious roles of the caliphal institution. The Abbasid Caliphate functioned not only as a center of state governance but also as a source of religious legitimacy. Its dissolution created the necessity for new mechanisms of political legitimacy in the region. In this regard, the later conversion of Ilkhanid rulers to Islam and their efforts to cooperate with religious institutions were analyzed as responses to this need. The geopolitical analysis method was employed to evaluate the regional and international consequences of the event. The Mongol conquest altered the balance of power in the Middle East, led to the emergence of new political centers, and resulted in the redistribution of trade routes. These processes, along with their short-term and long-term outcomes, were examined on a scholarly basis. Particular attention was paid to the shift of political centers away from Baghdad and the formation of new state structures.

In addition, the retrospective analysis method was applied to examine historiographical approaches in subsequent periods. The interpretations of the events of 1258 by historians of different eras—as “decline,” “tragedy,” or “transformation”—were compared. This approach



contributed to the development of a multifaceted scholarly perspective rather than a one-sided evaluation.

In conclusion, the study employs a combination of the historical method, systemic approach, causal analysis, source criticism, comparative-historical method, structural-functional analysis, and geopolitical analysis. This methodological framework allows the event to be interpreted not merely as a military-political occurrence, but as a complex process of historical transformation. As a result, the dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate by the Ilkhanate is analyzed through a comprehensive and rigorous scholarly approach.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate by the Ilkhanate in 1258 marked a significant turning point in the history of the Middle East. The conquest of Baghdad resulted not only in a shift of political authority but also in the transformation of the region's religious and cultural center. Although this event led to the collapse of the central caliphal institution in the Islamic world, it simultaneously created the conditions for the emergence of new political structures and forms of governance. Thus, this phenomenon should be assessed not only as a period of decline but also as a process of historical transformation. Furthermore, the event brought about a fundamental change in the geopolitical balance of the region. As a result of Hulagu's campaigns, a new political force—the Ilkhanid state—emerged in the Middle East and later adapted to the local socio-religious environment.

Although the dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate was initially accompanied by severe crisis and cultural losses, over time, scientific and commercial activities continued to develop in other centers. Therefore, the events of 1258 should be interpreted not solely as a tragedy, but also as the beginning of a new political and civilizational stage in the history of the medieval East.

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