

Biography- Al-Musta'sim

Al-Musta'sim Billah was the last Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad; he ruled from 1242 until his death. Al-Musta'sim succeeded his father in late 1242.

He is noted for his opposition to the rise of Shajar al-Durr to the Egyptian throne during the Seventh Crusade. He sent a message from Baghdad to the Mamluks in Egypt that said: "If you do not have men there tell us so we can send you men." [3] However, Al-Musta'sim had to face the greatest menace against the caliphate since its establishment in 632: the invasion of the Mongol forces that, under Hulagu Khan, had already wiped out any resistance in Transoxiana and Khorasan. In 1255/1256 Hulagu forced the Abbasid to lend their forces for the campaign against Alamut.

In 1258, Hulagu invaded the Abbasid domain, which then consisted of only Baghdad, its immediate surroundings, and southern Iraq. In his campaign to conquer Baghdad, Hulagu Khan had several columns advance simultaneously on the city, and laid siege to it.

The Abbasid caliphate could supposedly call upon 50,000 soldiers for the defense of their capital, including the 20,000 cavalry under al-Musta'sim. However, hastily assembled these troops were poorly equipped and poorly disciplined. Although the caliph technically had the authority to summon soldiers from other Muslim empires to defend his realm, he either neglected to do so or lacked the ability to. His taunting opposition had lost him the loyalty of the Mamluks, and the Syrian emirs, who he supported, were busy preparing their own defenses.

On January 29, the Mongol army began its siege of Baghdad, constructing a palisade and a ditch around the city. The Mongols kept the people of Abbasid Caliphate in their capital and executed those who tried to flee. Employing siege engines and catapults, the Mongols attempted to breach the city's walls, and, by February 5, had seized a significant portion of the defenses. Realizing that his forces had little chance of retaking the walls, Al-Musta'sim attempted to open negotiations with Hulagu, who rebuffed the Caliph. Around 3,000 of Baghdad's notables also tried to negotiate with Hulagu but were murdered. Five days later, on February 10, the city surrendered, but the Mongols did not enter the city until the 13th, beginning a week of massacre and destruction.

Many historical accounts detailed the cruelties of the Mongol conquerors. Baghdad was a depopulated, ruined city for several centuries and only gradually recovered some of its former glory.

The Mongols looted and then destroyed mosques, palaces, libraries, and hospitals. Priceless books from Baghdad's thirty-six public libraries were torn apart, the looters using their leather covers as sandals. Grand buildings that had been the work of generations were burned to the ground. The House of Wisdom (the Grand Library of Baghdad), containing countless precious historical documents and books on subjects ranging from medicine to astronomy, was

destroyed. Survivors said that the waters of the Tigris ran black with ink from the enormous quantities of books flung into the river and red from the blood of the scientists and philosophers killed.

Citizens attempted to flee, but were intercepted by Mongol soldiers who killed in abundance, sparing neither women nor children. Martin Sicker writes that close to 90,000 people may have died.[30] Other estimates go much higher. Wassaf claims the loss of life was several hundred thousand. Ian Frazier of *The New Yorker* says estimates of the death toll have ranged from 200,000 to a million.

The caliph Al-Musta'sim was captured and forced to watch as his citizens were murdered and his treasury plundered. According to most accounts, the caliph was killed by trampling. The Mongols rolled the caliph up in a rug, and rode their horses over him, as they believed that the earth would be offended if it were touched by royal blood. But the Venetian traveller Marco Polo wrote that Al-Musta'sim was locked in a tower with nothing to eat but gold and "died like a dog". All but one of Al-Musta'sim's sons were killed, and the sole surviving son was sent to Mongolia, where Mongolian historians report he married and fathered children, but played no role in Islam thereafter

Hulagu had to move his camp upwind of the city, due to the stench of decay from the ruined city.

The historian David Morgan has quoted Wassaf describing the destruction: "They swept through the city like hungry falcons attacking a flight of doves, or like raging wolves attacking sheep, with loose reins and shameless faces, murdering and spreading terror...beds and cushions made of gold and encrusted with jewels were cut to pieces with knives and torn to shreds. Those hiding behind the veils of the great Harem were dragged...through the streets and alleys, each of them becoming a plaything...as the population died at the hands of the invaders."