

Greed, Gold and the Death of the Last Abbasid Caliph: A Migrating Myth

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This paper examines the origins of a series of myths about the death of the last Abbasid Caliph, Al-Musta'sim Billah, during the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258. In the decades after the sack, a set of three distinct myths emerged surrounding the death of the caliph - one in which he was offered a plate of gold to eat before his execution, another where he dies of starvation locked in a room full of gold and a third in which he is killed by being force-fed molten gold. This paper looks at the Islamic and Armenian roots of the story and how it spreads, evolves and mutates as it is transmitted to generations of Christian and Muslim authors and what the story tells us about the values of its authors.