

The history of the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah)

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I. Introduction:

House of wisdom or Bayt Al- Hikma is the large and greatest library in the word at the 8th century between (780-830 CE) in Iraq- Baghdad, and it founding by Abbasid caliphs Harun al-Rashid and al-Mamun. Bayt al-Hikma saved books from all the world and translate them to Arabic and different languages such as Greek, French, Syriac, and Sanskrit, to became the leader of world's intellectual hub for many centuries. The most famous figures associated are Al-Khwarizmi mathematician who developed algebra, Hunayn ibn Ishaq translator and physician; led many translation projects, Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Al-Razi, and Ibn Sina, all these names change, develop, and discover the aspects of science and literature. Hulegu Khan when attack's Baghdad in 1258 CE, he destroys the institution, and through all the books in Tigris River because that and the huge amount of the books the color of the river becomes

black with

ink. [1]

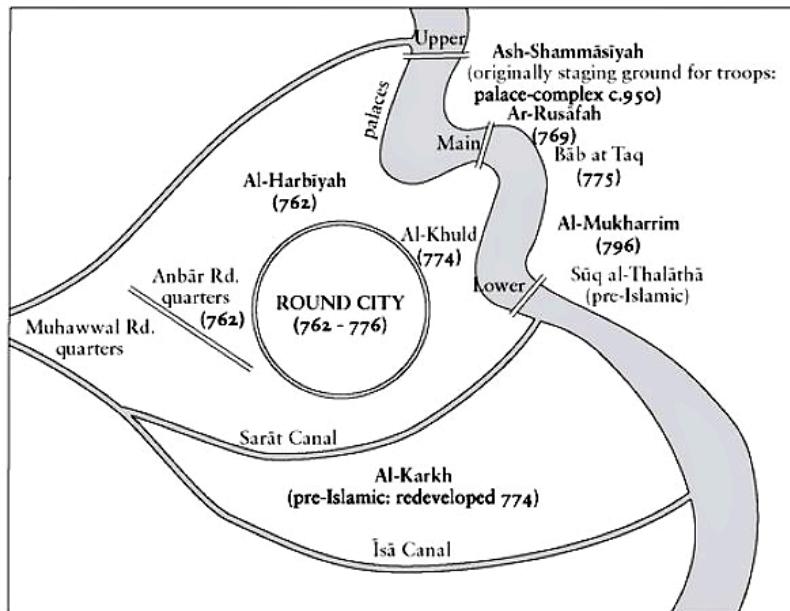


Scholars at the Abbasid library (*Maqamat al-Hariri*) by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti

II. Historical Background:

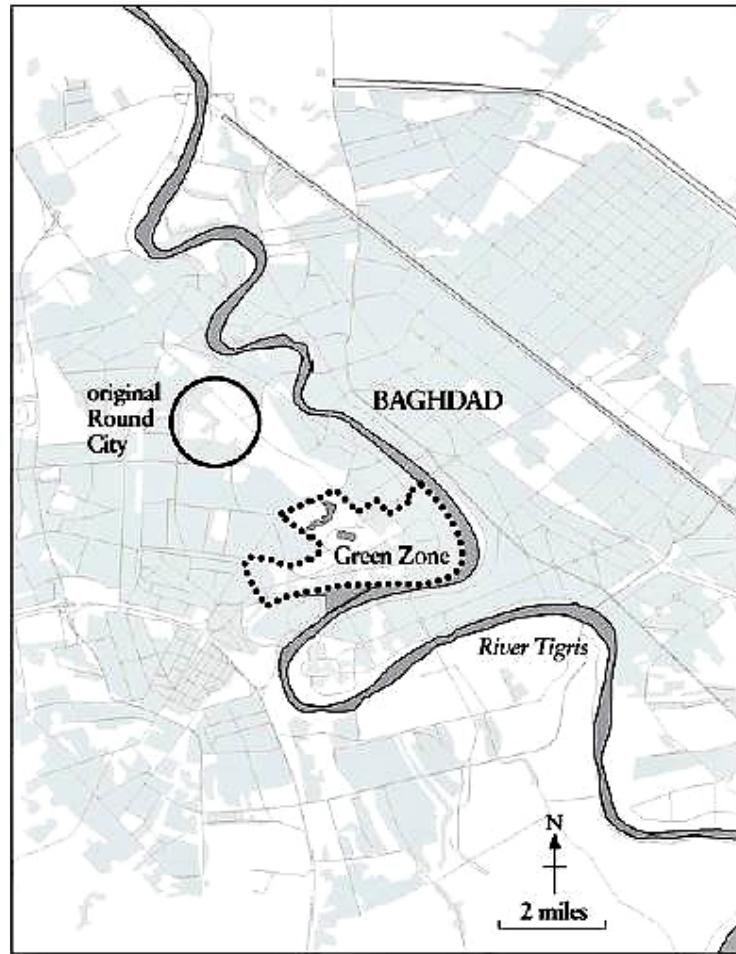
After the emergence of the Abbasid rulers in 750 CE, the House of Wisdom established. In 762 CE, the Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–775 CE) built Baghdad and made it his capital instead of Damascus. Baghdad's location and international population made the perfect location for a stable commercial and intellectual center. The Abbasid rulers created a supportive environment for intellectuals within their multicultural empire. [2]

Although it might have been initially founded as a personal royal library during the rule of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, but his successor, Caliph Al-Ma'mun (r. 813-833 CE), who converted it into a model public academy. Caliph Al-Ma'mun, a rationalist who believed in the school of thought known as Al-Mutazila, encouraged overseas purchases of manuscripts even in foreign lands such as the Byzantine Empire. He extensively financed the translation movement, appointed the brightest minds (independent of their religions), and associated

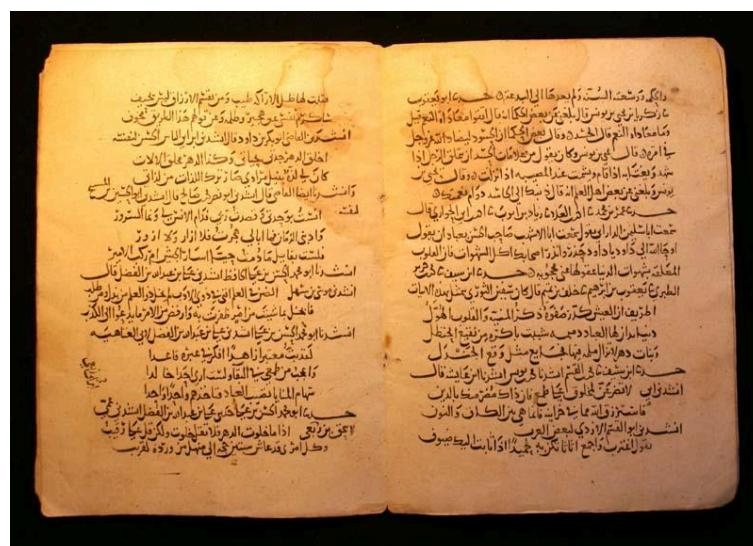


observatories and research institutes with the House of Wisdom. [3]

Schematic map of early Abbasid Baghdad showing the location of al-Mansur's original Round City on the west bank of the Tigris.



Round City projected onto a map of modern Baghdad contrasting its size and location with that of the US controlled Green Zone set up in 2003.



The earliest scientific manuscripts originated in the Abbasid era

III. Main Activities

The House of Wisdom was a cultural center encompassing all types of science and education, and it was a centre for research and studies, attracting all kinds of scholars. [1]

❖ **Translation:** translation was the primary activity at the House of Wisdom, and among the most important works translated there were the sacred texts, which were translated from Greek, Syriac, Persian, and Sanskrit into Arabic, [5] while preserving classical knowledge in fields such as medicine, philosophy, and mathematics. Hunayn ibn Ishaq was a prominent figure in this field. [7]



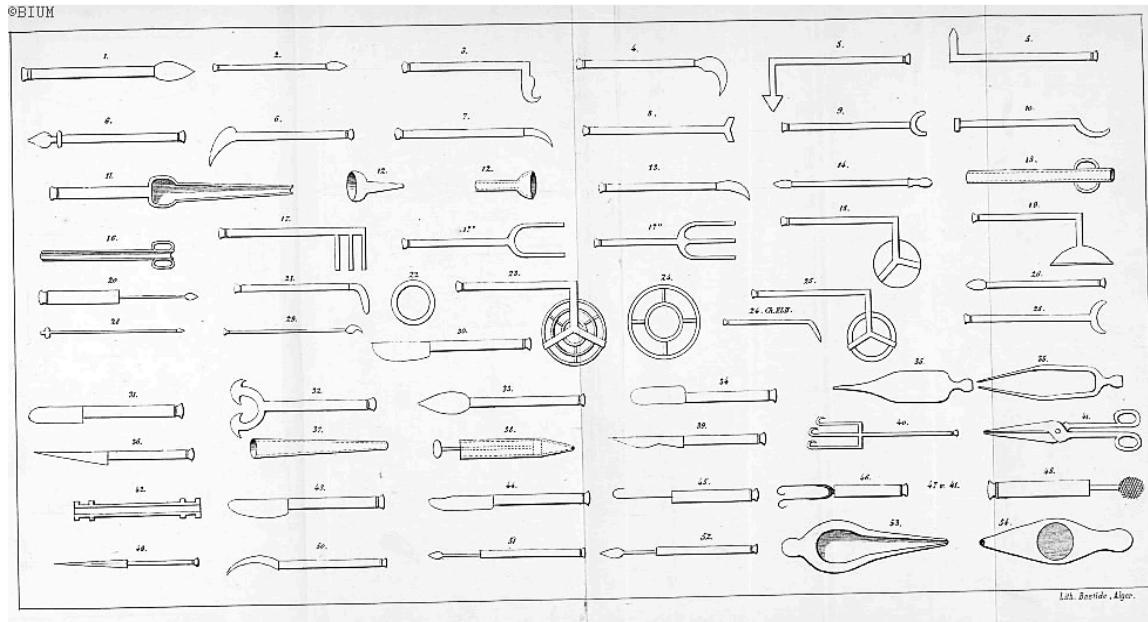
13th-century Arabic translation of *De Materia Medica*.

- ❖ **Mathematics:** the House of Wisdom made significant contributions, most notably its algorithms. [1] The House of Wisdom developed mathematics, particularly the concept of zero and the Indian numerals, which later spread throughout the world. [8]
- ❖ **Astronomy:** astronomy has been developed through improvements to astronomical observatories, where researchers have worked to refine and develop old data, calculate the Earth's circumference, and map the world. [3]



Al-Idrisi's map of the world (12th).

❖ **Medicine:** The House of Wisdom played a critical role in the development of medicine through translated Greek medical sources, and one of the most prominent translators was Hunayn ibn Ishaq. [6]



Surgical instruments described by Al-Zahrawi

IV. Destruction & Legacy:

The House of Wisdom was destroyed by the Mongols in 1258 AD under Hulagu Khan, [2] History indicates that, due to this destruction, the Tigris River became the color of ink. [6] Although the House of Wisdom was destroyed, knowledge survived, as copies of its manuscripts spread to centres of Islamic states such as Egypt and Andalusia. [4] Peoples across all fields of science benefited from this Arabic knowledge, which was translated into most of the world's languages and became important in the development of the world's peoples. [5]

V. Lessons from the House of Wisdom:

The House of Wisdom offers key lessons on civilization and knowledge. One of the most important reasons for the success of the House of Wisdom was the financial support provided by the Abbasid state, especially Caliph al-Ma'mun, [3] who played a key role in promoting the House of Wisdom by providing scholarships to students and funding projects.

Cooperation and peaceful are major role in the exchange of ideas among scientists. [4] and tolerance are among the most important foundations for success and achieving essential progress.

The House of Wisdom demonstrated an important lesson to the world on how to preserve information and civilization, which is crucial for the development of humanity, and that referring to previous civilizations for the sake of scientific advancement is essential for the progress of civilization. [1]



Scholars at Work in the House of Wisdom during the Islamic Golden Age

VI. References:

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- [8] Al-Khwarizmi, *The Algebra of Mohammad ben Musa*, trans. and ed. Frederic Rosen (Hildesheim, Germany: George Olms Verlag, 1986).