

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

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A Preliminary Outline

I. Introduction: We will give a brief idea of what the House of Wisdom was.

II. Historical Background: We will discuss Abbasid rise and Baghdad's development and role of Caliph Al-Ma'mun in promoting learning.

III. Main Activities

A. Translation

B. Mathematics

C. Astronomy

D. Medicine (maybe will discussed)

IV. Destruction & Legacy: We will discuss the fall of Baghdad and what happened to the scholars' works and the survival of knowledge through Europe and later generations

V. Lessons from the House of Wisdom: We will discuss the Importance of the legacy to advanced civilization.

Suggested References

Jim Al-Khalili, *The House of Wisdom: How Arabic Science Saved Ancient Knowledge and Gave Us the Renaissance* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010). **(Secondary Source)**

This book gives a big picture of how the House of Wisdom helped keep science alive and how that knowledge later influenced Europe. We think it can help in the introduction and maybe in the legacy part.

Jonathan Lyons, *The House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilization* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009). **(Secondary Source)**

This book is about how the ideas and discoveries made by Arab scholars were passed to the West. It may be useful for the lessons and legacy part.

Ibn al-Nadim, *The Fihrist of Al-Nadim*, trans. and ed. Bayard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970). **(Primary Source)**

This is an early catalog of books and authors that shows what people were reading and translating in Baghdad. It might be helpful in the translation part.

Al-Mas'udi. *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids*. Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone. London: Kegan Paul International, 1989. **(Primary Source)**

This book is about the Abbasid era in detail. It can help provide background for the historical background and maybe even for the destruction part.

Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society* (London: Routledge, 1998). **(Secondary Source)**

This book goes deep into how Greek philosophy and science were translated and transformed in the Abbasid period. It fits best with the translation and historical background parts.

Tayeb El-Hibri, *The Abbasid Caliphate: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). **(Secondary Source)**

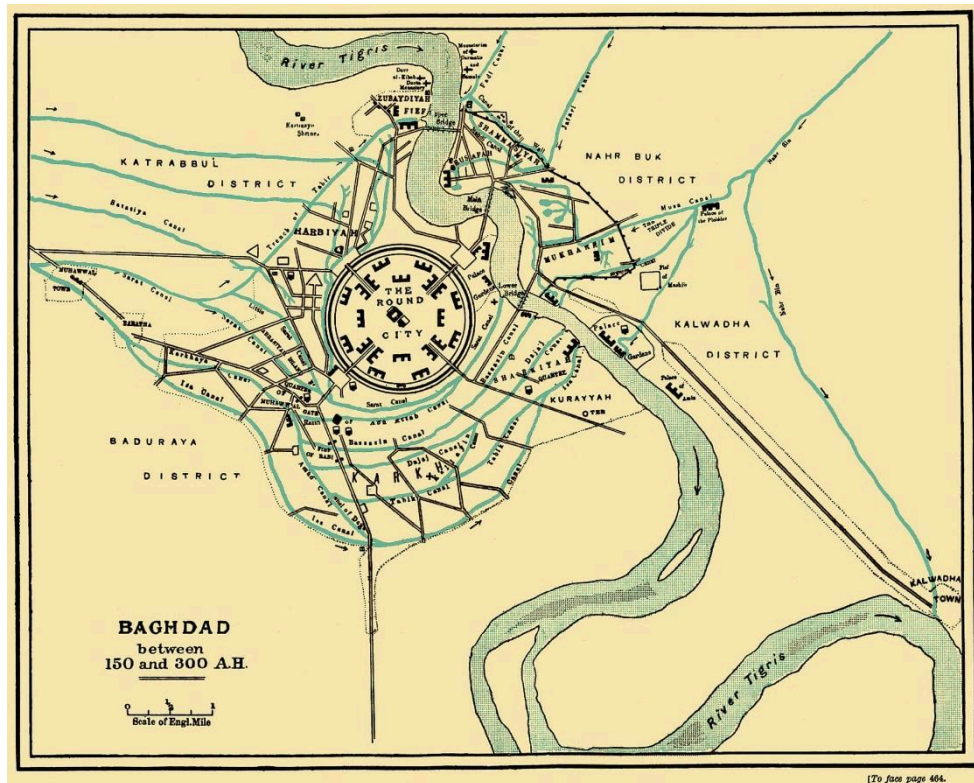
This book gives a full look at the political and cultural side of the Abbasids. It seems helpful for the historical background part, especially for explaining how the Caliphs supported scholars and why Baghdad became a center of learning.

Michael Cooperson, *Al Ma'mun* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005). **(Secondary Source)**

This book focuses on Caliph Al-Ma'mun, who played a huge role in developing the House of Wisdom. It should help in the historical background and main activities parts.

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

Suggested Primary Documents



An 1883 illustration of early Baghdad



The earliest scientific manuscripts originated in the Abbasid era



Physicians employing a surgical method. From Şerafeddin Sabuncuoğlu's *Imperial Surgery* (1465)



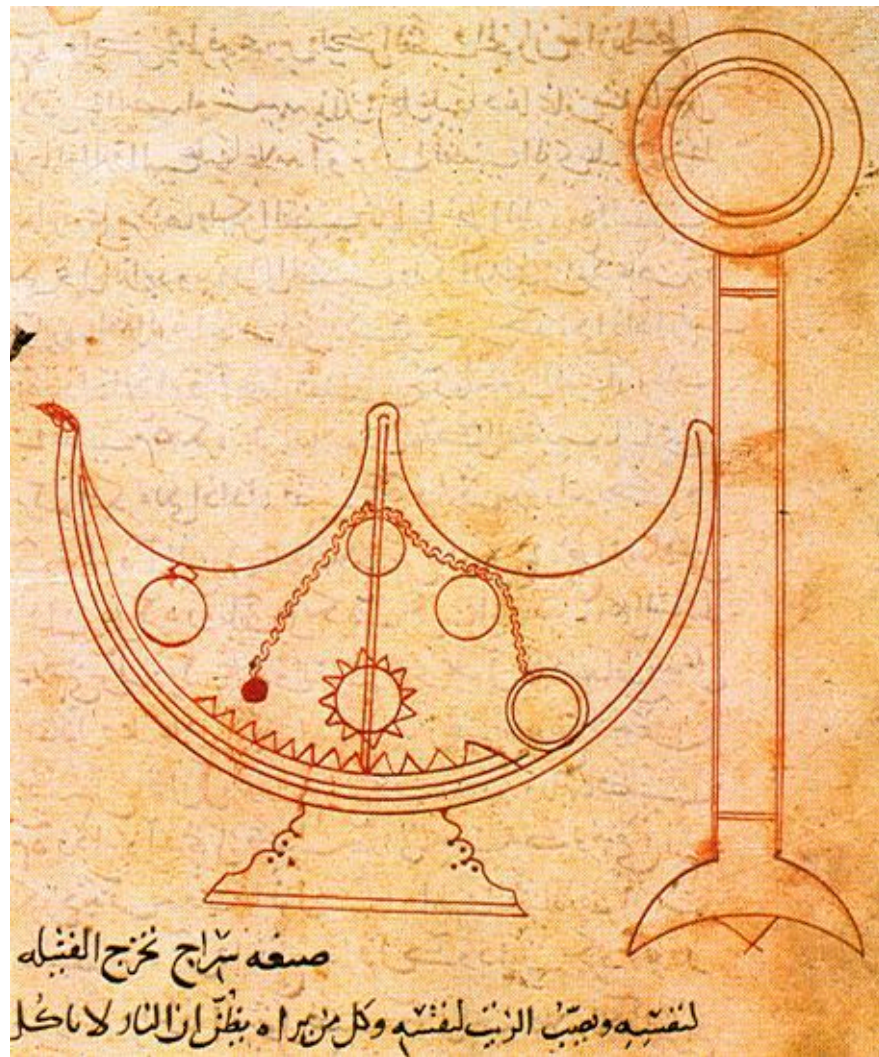
Hulagu Khan's siege of Baghdad (1258)

فاذا برد العَصِيرُ فَصَفِّهِ فَمَذَا الشَّرَابُ مُوَافِقٌ لِمَجْعِ الحَلَقِ وَالْحَنِيبِ وَالرَّيْبِ
وَالْأَسْرِ وَالرَّاقِفِ وَلَمْزِجُهُ بِلَعْمِ غَلِيظٍ فِي حَلَقِهِ يَصْفِي اللَّوْنِ وَيَكْثُرُ النَّفْسَ



وَلَيْسَتْ لَهُ غَايِلَةٌ مُوَافِقٌ لِلثَّانِيهِ وَالْكَلاَمُ ع ع
صَنَعَهُ شَرَابٌ لِلزَّهَامِ وَالسُّعَالِ ٥٥

وَوَزَمَ الْبَطْنَ وَاسْتَرَخَا الْمَعْدَنَ خُمْسَ رُبْعٍ أَوْ قِيَّةٍ وَأَصُولَ سَوْسَنٍ ثَمَرِ أَوْ قِيَّةٍ
وَقَلِيلَ لَيْثٍ رُبْعٍ وَثَمَرِ أَوْ قِيَّةٍ رَقَّةً جَمِيعًا وَارْبِطَهُ خَرْقَةً وَاجْعَلْهُ فِي لَيْثِهِ اقْسَاطَ شَرَابٍ
طَيِّبٍ وَانْزِكْهُ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ صَفِّهِ وَارْفَعْهُ فِي إِنَاءٍ نَظِيفٍ اشْرَبْ مِنْهُ بَعْدَ الْعِشَاءِ



Drawing of *Self trimming lamp* in Ahmad ibn Mūsā ibn Shākir's treatise on mechanical devices.



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