

# The House of Wisdom (Bayt Al-Hikma)



## Course: History of Medicine

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## Abstract

The paper examines the library of the Muslims world, ‘House of Wisdom’, known to the world as ‘Bayt Al Hikmah’. The archive was made accessible to the public, where books were translated into Arabic so that the locals could get advantages from it. Not only the books from around the world were interpreted and translated in this library but original books were also produced. The Golden Age of the Muslim period was thus called golden since they acknowledged the importance of knowledge. The subsequent research paper discusses themes, historians and patrons and workings of the House of Wisdom. On the historical basis this research gathers and formulates pertinent evidence and resources about Bayt Al Hikmah and its connected features. Thus a period of political and economic stability came into being, of the Abbasid rule where Baghdad became the pivot of knowledge and understandings. The impact Bayt Al Hikmah left on the libraries was unprecedented.

## 1. Introduction

The institution located in the heart of Baghdad, built by the early Abbasids reign was a collective and imperial expression of the rational ambition of the régime of the Abbasids. The library was originally founded by Caliph Mansur, later Caliph Harun Al Rashid and later his son Mamun expanded the institute and was made accessible for the public use. Mamun who reigned from 813-833 AD gathered scholars who were well known in their fields to discuss ideas, scholarly evidence, culture and ethos in the house of Wisdom(Anjum). Scholars from different religious backgrounds worked at high post at the library. S.M. Mukarram Jahan in his paper, Bayt Al Hikmahand its achievements states that not only Muslims but Christians, and Jews were also given high rank at the library. House of Wisdom soon became a hub of intellectual and academicians, who took advantage from the library reading halls, lecture theater, inwhich different activities such as map making, bindings and interpreting were supported. The world's wealthiest center of intellectual expansion of the time with a population of over a million, considered to be the biggest city of that time. During the Abbasids, Countless extraneous works were interpreted and translated into Arabic from idioms varying from Greek, Chinese, Sanskrit. Huge libraries were erected; academics and researchers victimized by the Byzantine Realm were welcomed. The Bayt al -Hikmahbring together a model of the library directory, where books were systematized into boundless categories and classes. The library also familiarized categories like translators, scientist, scribe, authors, poets, scribing, dissertation, discourse and argument. (Adel Abdul-Aziz Algeriani 2017)

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### **Abu Ja'far al-Mansūr**

Adel Abdul-Aziz Algeriani in his research article The House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah) and Its Civilizational Impact on Islamic libraries: A Historical Perspective pertains that Some archives refer that the organizer and founder of Bayt al-Hikmah was Abu Ja'far al-Mansūr (95-135 AH). Al Mansur had a huge personal collection on books on astronomy and astrology that he was keen to study. He even had a collection of books on medicines, astronomy, engineering and literatures. Other than this special focus was given to Quran and hadith and other related publications from the prophet Muhammad traditions. Al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf ibn Maṭar, an arithmetician and translator and interpreter. Al Hajjāj was appointed by Al Mansur to translate Greek literature, Element twice by Euclid. For this purpose, he was paid heavily by the Caliph. This according to many historians laid strong foundations of the Bayt Al Hikmah.(Algeriani) Historians of the contemporary world regard Al Mansur as one of the greatest caliph of the Abbasids time period. Al Mansur was the founder of new capital called Madinat as Salam, meaning a city of peace and harmony. Al Mansur was also the first to sponsor the Translation movement of the Islamic world with the developing need of literature and thirst for knowledge. His personal collection of books includes a collection of Persian literature on philosophy, medicine, astrology, sciences and arithmetic. He got these books translated into the local vernacular. The books from other languages were also translated, authors and intellectuals were supported greatly in this matter.



Figure 1

### Al Mamun's Translation Movement:

Al Mamun's greatest effort with the Romans and Greeks resulted in the buying of large number of books for the library. He prepared a delegation to visit places as Asia Minor, Cyprus and others in search of literature, books and manuscripts of all sorts. Al Mamun's reign is considered prime for its scientific works, intellectual activity, educational development and exceptional progress. Ibn al-Jawzi, who indicates that when the king had knowledge of a scholar consequently, a scholar converts into a king(Adel Abdul-Aziz Algeriani).The caliph himself visited the institute regularly, showing keen interest in the process. Regular seminars and discussion were part of routine life of the library. These seminars were called kalam.Kalamis the skill of ethical and logical deliberation that Al-Mamun supported on from his Persian tutor, Jafar. Other than that major research projects were also patronized by the Caliph. These projects include correct mapping of the world, study to the pyramid of Giza and participated himself in excavations(House of Wisdom).The Arab world was well aware of the translations and it was a significant part of their culture. Translation played a vital role in the dissemination of information.This started historically from the ancient world of Greeks to the Persian empire, and from Japan to the Arabs world. Muhammad ibn Mukarram ibn Alī ibn Ahmad ibn Manzūr al-Ansārī al-Ifrīqī al-Misrī al-Khazrajī, also known as Ibn Manzūr, a pronounced Arab Scholar defines the word translation in Arabic as, Al Tarjama which literally means, the one who deduces the words and utterance.Translation movement was widely supported by the caliph of that time, but the movement quickly gained momentum and was patronized by the wealthy class of that time. They, not only aided in translations but also in procurement of rare and exceptional manuscripts from farfetched areas(editors, A polemical introduction). Two schools of translation were most distinguished. Al Jahiz and Al Safadi were the schools of translation in Islam. Al Jahiz moved to Baghdad under Mamun's reign. One count of the director of Bayt Al Hikmah declares, Al Jahiz was highly appreciated by the Caliph for his literary work and for his contributions for Bayt Al Hikmah (editors, Al Jahiz Muslim theologian and scholar).The most notable translator from the Abbasids dynasty is the Aal Hunain Abu Zaid Hunain bin Isshaq (773-853). Aal Hunain was a Christian who studied medicine in Baghdad and was considered well versed in primordial Greek. Aal Hunain was appointed by the Caliph al-Mutawakkil,

a Abbasid Caliph employed him to the post of physician of the court; a post he held all his life. Not only him, but his family was also involved in different translation works. These includes his son, Isshaq and his nephew Jaish bin Al-A'asam. He and his family had a great reputation with work related to translation. Aal Hunain was so well-known and his work could effortlessly be known for his exceptional and matchless editing expertise. One account also says that Al Mamun gave him the rank of chief Translator and was often bestowed generous and precious gifts. Al Mamun also gave him tasks that were very critical. Aal Hunain was called Ibn Hunain by his sub ordinates, which literally meant Master Hunain(Akbar).The translators employed for the library and specific other purposes were paid a salary of 500 dinars plus some donations by the officials(Ahmed Farras Oran). One source also says that during 276 to 892AH, Baghdad alone had 100 bookshops called Warraqins in the local vernacular(Oran). Translations done during Al Mamun's reign were of superior quality than the predecessors, for these incorporated ideas from the ancient worlds. (Adel Abdul-Aziz Algeriani 2017)

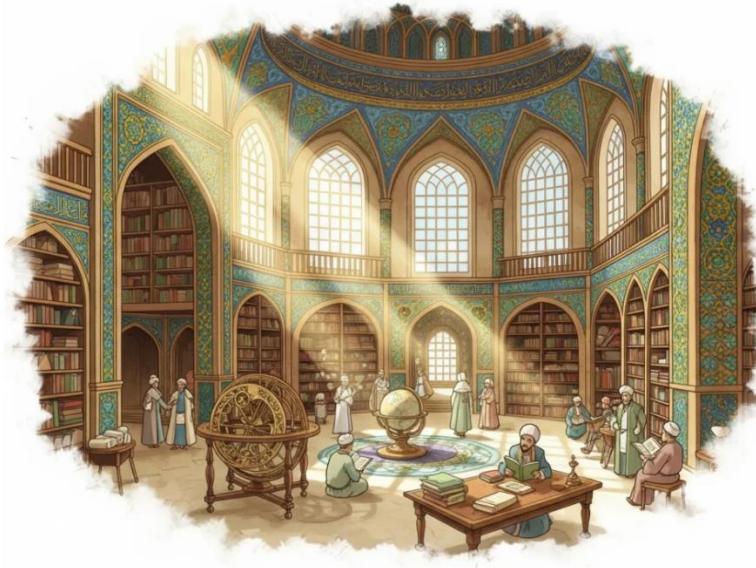


Figure 2

## Historians and Bayt Al HikmahBayt

Al Hikmah also known as the Grand Library of Baghdad, was a library made for public during the Golden Age of Islam. The library was modeled after the Sasanian Imperial Library. For the promotion of knowledge and literacy the noble class and the military also came forward and contributed great fund for the

library maintenance. More than 60 translators were involved in the translation services(JAHAN). Researchers and historians from the Bayt al-Hikmah doubled as engineers and architects in major projects, reserved precise official schedules, and were civic servants. They were worked frequently as physicians and counsellors (House of Wisdom). Many historians worked for the advancement of the library. Below is the list of scholars who worked directly at the House of Wisdom. (Ishāq). 1970.)



*Figure 3*

## Hunayn bin Ishaq

Hunayn bin Ishaq was an Assyrian descendants liberal Muslim and belonged to Al Hira. He was appointed by the Caliph to look after the library because of his keen interest in science and Greeks. He along with others were involved in buying of books for the library. For this specific purpose they travelled to distant places like, Egypt, Persia, Mesopotamia and Syria and Palestine. These trips were funded by the Caliph and the wealthy men from the court of Baghdad. Hunayn was a proficient translator, the works translated by him into the local vernacular were of great importance. He had translated more than 100 books into Arabic and Syriac. Hunayn Ibn Ishaq was also the one who wrote more than 100books on subjects of ophthalmology, medicine, veterinary medicine, universal history, syntax, logic and religion . (Ishāq). 1970.)



Figure 4: Hunayn ibn Ishaq

## Banu Musa

Ninth century mathematician, of Persian origin who worked at the astronomical laboratories established at the House of Wisdom in Baghdad. His famous works are done in the fields of mechanics, automation and geometry. These are the *Kitab Marifat Masahat Al-Ashkal*, *Qarastūn*, Book of Ingenious Devices on automata and mechanical devices and Book on the Measurement of Plane and Spherical Figures which talks about the basics of geometry, *Kitāb al-Daraj*, *Kitāb al-Hiyal*. During his life he inscribed 20 books, to which most of them have been destroyed



Figure 5: Banu Musa

## Yahanna Bin Masawayah

Not only Muslim but many Christians scholars also worked at high positions at the library, one of them is Yahanna Bin Masawayah. One of the earliest directors of the House of Wisdom was a medical expert and wrote books on gynecological problem. His famous works includes, Daghāl Al-Ayn (Disorder of the eye) with others being 445 writings in 799 publications in 9 languages (Ibn Māsawayh, Yūhannā-857 or 858). (Ishāq). 1970.)

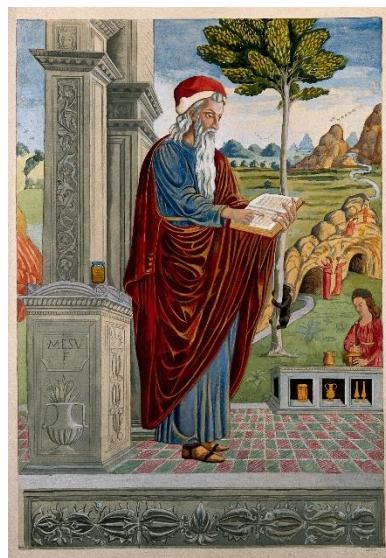


Figure 6:Yahanna Bin Masawayah in house of wisdom

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