



## HISTORY OF THE BAIT AL-HIKMAH LIBRARY DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF BANI ABBASIYAH

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### Abstract

Bait al-hikmah is a silent evidence of the progress of civilization that occurred during the Abbasid dynasty, the advancement of science made Bait al-hikmah the direction of information in its time. This study aims to find out about the History of the Bait Al Hikmah Library During the Golden Age of the Abbasids. This research method uses library research with a qualitative approach. Researchers obtain information through books, articles and journals related to the research topic. The focus of this study is the Bait Al-Hikmah Library During the Golden Age of the Abbasids. In history, the background to the establishment of Bait al-Hikmah is due to internal factors from the belief in the value of religious teachings that always encourage its adherents to learn and seek knowledge. During the Abbasid Dynasty which adhered to the Mu'tazilah ideology, the ruling caliphs loved science and encouraged the development of science at that time. In addition, the conditions at that time were very conducive to transferring Greek and Persian treasures into the arms of Muslims. In addition, the rulers around the time before the founding of the House of Wisdom were people who loved knowledge.

Keywords: Historis, Library, Bani Abbasiyah, Library Bait Al-Hikmah, The Golden Age,

## SEJARAH PERPUSTAKAAN BAIT AL-HIKMAH DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF BANI ABBASIYAH

### Abstrak

*Bait al-hikmah menjadi bukti bisu atas kemajuan peradaban yang terjadi dimasa daulah abbasiyah, kemajuan ilmu pengetahuan menjadikan bait al-hikmah kiblat akan sebuah informasi dimasanya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui tentang Sejarah Perpustakaan Bait Al Hikmah During the Golden Age of Bani Abbasiyah. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kepustakaan (Library research) dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Peneliti mendapatkan informasi melalui buku, artikel dan jurnal-jurnal terkait dengan topik penelitian. Adapun yang menjadi fokus dalam penelitian ini yaitu Perpustakaan Bait Al-Hikmah During the Golden Age of Bani Abbasiyah. Dalam sejarah Latar belakang didirikannya bait al-Hikmah di antaranya karena dorongan faktor internal dari keyakinan atas nilai ajaran agama yang selalu mendorong pemeluknya untuk belajar dan menuntut ilmu. Pada masa Dinasti Abbasiyah yang berpaham Mu'tazilah, membuat para khalifah yang berkuasa sangat mencintai ilmu pengetahuan dan mendorong bagi perkembangan ilmu ketika itu. Selain itu kondisi pada masa itu sangat kondusif untuk mentransfer khazanah Yunani dan Persia ke dalam pelukan kaum muslim. Selain itu, para penguasa di sekitar masa menjelang berdirinya bait al-Hikmah adalah orang-orang yang mencintai ilmu pengetahuan.*

Kata Kunci: Sejarah, Perpustakaan, Bait Al-Hikmah, The Golden Age, Bani Abbasiyah.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Books are products of human thought that illustrate human culture and civilization in their time. Through books, the next generation can see the transformation of knowledge from one generation to the next. Books represent humans to tell their culture and civilization, in the Islamic intellectual tradition is inseparable from the role and existence of books among the people. During the Abbasid Caliphate, the books were collected in a library called "Bait al-Hikmah".

At that time the library was a means of learning, until Muslims were able to build a great civilization that lasted several centuries. A lot of information and knowledge that was not well documented by Muslims was simply forgotten. As a result, the order of Muslims in economic, political, social, cultural and other aspects of life has stagnated. Finally, Muslims only become followers of developed nations, which in this case is the western world. Whereas we realize that the progress of the western world is achieved through the mastery of science taken from Muslim centers of knowledge such as libraries (Qalyubi : 14)

This shows how important libraries are in the development of a nation. In this case the library has a very important role, because a lot of knowledge, information and documentation is provided by the library. Many literatures reveal that libraries are places of learning activities, which are almost the same as what is done in schools. This function and role of the library has been adopted by libraries in developed countries such as the UK, Australia and Canada. Many libraries are transformed into learning centers or resource centers. This is to identify that libraries during the Islamic heyday were very important and representative for the development and advancement of society.

Libraries in Islamic history occupy an important position. Its existence is very difficult to separate from the development and progress of Islamic science and civilization, especially in the 8th-10th centuries M. Hypothetically, it can be argued that if there were no libraries at that time, science and civilization would not have progressed. Or at least the development of science would have been very slow and stagnant if there was no library. The works of Muslim scientists were collected in libraries scattered in various cities. Mehdi Nakosteen noted that there were 36 libraries in Baghdad before it was destroyed by the Mongol army of Hulagu, including the Bayt al-Hikmah Library founded by al-Ma'mun, Umar al-Waqidi Library which is estimated to have 320 camel loads of books, Dar al-Ilm Library, Nizamiyah Library, Mustansiriyah Library, al-Baihaq Library Madrasah, Muhammad Ibn al-Husain Library, Ibn Kamil Library. The wealth of classical Islamic intellectual treasures comes from two sources; first, from translations of ancient manuscripts from various pre-Islamic civilizations along with commentaries provided by Muslim scholars; second, from the original works of Muslim scholars themselves from various types of scientific traditions. (Saepudin, 2016)

The heyday of Islam was characterized by the rapid development of science, culture and Islamic education. This rapid development was supported by the existence of institutions that accommodate these developments. At that time, scientific institutions were established as centers of learning science, culture and Islamic education. The golden age of Muslim civilization began with the rise of the Abbasid Dynasty in 132 H/750 M. The five centuries of the Abbasid caliphate was a period of Islamic development. This dynasty was less interested in conquest as in the Umayyah Dynasty, but the Abbasid Dynasty was more interested in knowledge and domestic

problems. This can be seen in the great effort to translate and absorb knowledge from other civilizations. (H. Fuad Riyadi, 2014)

The Abbasid dynasty was a milestone in the history of library progress. One of them was Bait al-Hikmah. This institution was not only an educational institution, but also a library. With a historical review, this paper tries to analyze how the development of the Bait al-Hikmah library during the Abbasid Dynasty. Baitul Hikmah had been initiated by the caliph Harun al-Rashid, becoming the center of all scientific activities. With the establishment of Bait al Hikmah, the transfer of knowledge became more advanced. The caliph managed to recruit the best writers, historians and scientists. The rapid development of Baitul Hikmah encouraged the institution to expand its role, not only as a translation institution, but also as: 1) a center for documentation and scientific information services for the community; 2) a center and forum for scientific development activities; and 3) a center for planning and developing educational implementation. (Rodin, 2021).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses a type of library research, namely a series of activities related to library data collection methods. According to Dr. Abdul Rahman Sholeh, library research is research that uses ways to obtain information data by placing facilities in the library such as books, magazines, documents, records of historical stories or pure library research related to the object of research. Researchers get information through the book Anthology of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies. Because what is studied is a written text in the form of a corpus (data used as a source of research material), this research is classified as a library research approach. Library research is research conducted using literature in the form of books, notes and research reports from previous research.

According to M. Nazir, literature study is a data collection technique by conducting a study of books, literature, records, and reports that have something to do with the problem being solved. Literature study is an important step where after a researcher determines the research topic, the next step is to conduct a study related to the theory and research topic. In searching for theories, researchers will collect as much information as possible from related literature. Literature sources can be obtained from books, journals, magazines, research results (theses and dissertations), and other appropriate sources (internet, newspapers etc.). When researchers have obtained relevant literature, it is immediately organized to be used in research. Therefore, the literature study includes general processes such as systematically identifying theories, finding literature, and analyzing documents that contain information related to the research topic (Syaidariyah Hasibuan, 2022).

The approach used is a qualitative approach, which is a research intended to describe and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, thoughts of people individually or in groups. Some descriptions are used to find principles and explanations that lead to conclusions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. History of Library Bait Al-Hikmah**

According to some historical sources, the Bait al-Hikmah Library was first established by the seventh Abbasid caliph, Caliph Al-Ma'mun in 215 H/ 830 M in Baghdad. In another source it is mentioned that the Bait al-Himah Library was established during the time of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, the fifth caliph and father of al-Ma'mun who ruled from 170-193 H/ 786-809 M. (Ahmad, Amin : 1978)

But actually the forerunner of the Bait al-Hikmah Library itself dates back to the time of Caliph Abu Ja'far al-Manshur. At the time of Caliph Abu Ja'far al-Manshur,

he devoted the construction to good books sourced from the writings of the Arabs and translations from different languages. It was only during the time of Caliph Harun al-Rashid who ordered the release of books and manuscripts written and translated.

Harun al-Rashid made a special building to improve the scope of most of the books and open in front of every teacher and knowledge seeker. Then Harun al-Rashid also made a very large and magnificent place, then all the stored books were moved to the place which was later named Bait al-Hikmah (Yanto, 2015) After that, it developed into the most famous scientific academic center in history. After the time of Harun Al-Rashid, the Bait al-Hikmah library was then developed by Caliph Al- Ma'mun. During Al-Ma'mun's time, the Bait al-Hikmah library grew in size with the addition of its collection. Al-Ma'mun also invited great translators and copyists as well as scholars and writers. Not only that, he also took care of scientific missions to the Roman country which contributed greatly to the revival and glory of the Bait al- Hikmah library (Raghib As-Sirjani : 2009)

The main purpose of establishing the Baitul Hikmah was to collect and transcribe foreign sciences into Arabic. This was the beginning of the progress achieved by Islam, which grasped the world with science and civilization. At that time, various disciplines of science and civilization developed, marked by the establishment of Baitul Hikmah as the largest center for the study of science and civilization in its time. This educational institution was established thanks to the efforts and assistance of people who held leadership in the government.

From 815 M al-Makmun developed this institution and renamed it Baitul Hikmah. It was during al-Makmun's time that science and intellect reached their peak. At this time the Baitul Hikmah was used in a more advanced manner as a

repository for ancient books obtained from Persia, Byzantium, even Ethiopia and India. In this institution al-Makmun employed Muhammad ibn Musa al-Hawarizmi who was an expert in algebra and astronomy and was also one of the great teachers at the Baitul Hikmah. Other Persians were also employed in the Temple of Wisdom. At that time the director of the Temple of Wisdom was Sahl Ibn Harun.

Under al-Makmun, the Baitul Hikmah served not only as a library but also as a center for astronomical and mathematical study and research. In 832 M, al-Makmun made the Baitul Hikmah in Baghdad the first academy, complete with binoculars, library, and translation institute. The first head of this academy was Yahya ibn Musawaih (777-857), a student of Gibril ibn Bakhtisyu, then Hunain ibn Ishaq, a student of Yahya was appointed as the second headke (Riyadi, 2012).

## **2. Function of Bait Al-Hikmah Library**

Bait al-Hikmah is part of the caliph's palace building located in the city of Baghdad, this institution is managed by a number of mudir (director) scientists who are given the title "Shahib". The director of Bait al-Hikmah is called "Shahib Baitul Hikmah". The first director was Sahal Ibn Harun al-Farisi (215 H/ 830 M). He was appointed by Caliph al-Ma'mun, in addition he was assisted by Said ibn Harun who was also nicknamed Ibn Harim, to take care of Bait al-Hikmah. Hasan Ibn Marar Adz-Dzabi was also appointed to the office of Bait al-Hikmah. (Montgomery Watt: 1995)

**The following is the function of the Bait Al-Hikamah Library:**

### **a) Bait al-Hikmah Functions as a Library**

Bait al-Hikmah is the first large library in Baghdad, the library is part of the Bait al-Hikmah division which collects and manages books in various fields of science both books translated from various languages. The books are arranged

on shelves and can be taken by anyone who needs them. This library is also equipped with a separate room for copyists, binders and librarians (Ziauddin Sardar: 1988). During the time of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, the Bait al-Hikmah library was a place to store books led by a head and assisted by a number of staff 11 Even Rubhay Mushtofa Ulyan in the book "al-Maktabaat fi al-Hadharoh al-Arobiyah al-Islamiyah" expressly explains that the Bait al-Hikmah library is divided into 3 organizational structures, namely first, "Mushrif al-Ulya" (Responsible) called Deputy. Second, "Amiin al-Maktabah" (library officers / can also be called librarians) called khazin and third "al-Musaid" (assistant library officers) called Mushrif or staff (Yanto, 2015)

The collection of this library is very diverse and includes various languages such as Arabic, Greek, Sanskrit and others. The collection of Bait al-Hikmah is listed in the book al-Fihrist and al-Kasfy by Hajj Khalifah. Also in Ibn al-Nadim's al-Fihrist, it is known that the number of collections of Bait al-Hikmah reached more than 60,000 books, a very fantastic number for the size of that time. Even the placement of books in the Bait al-Hikmah library other than those belonging to the caliph, is arranged based on the classification of knowledge (subject) compiled by Ibn Nadim (Rohana et al., 2021). The library collection owned by the Bait al-Hikmah library is divided into several groups organized by collection ownership, such as the collection collected by Caliph Harun al-Rashid which was named Khizanah al-Rashid. The collection collected by Caliph al-ma'mun was named Khizanah al-Ma'mun, then the rest were placed according to the subject (H. Fuad Riyadi, 2014).

At the time of Caliph al-Ma'mun, there were three scientists who were recorded as librarians at Bait al-Hikmah, where they were given the



responsibility of leading the entire institution of Bait al-Hikmah which was not only limited to the library. The library also employed more than one librarian who had an equal position, among the librarians recorded as having worked there were Salma, Sahl ibn Harun and Hasan ibn Marar al-Dzabi. (Rodin, 2021).

In addition to scholars and librarians, the Temple also employed copyists and bookbinders. The most famous binder was Ibn Abi al-Haris who worked during the reign of al-Ma'mun. Other notable copyists were Abu Sahl al-Fadhu ibn Nubak and Allan al-Syu'ubi. During the time of Harun al-Rashid, a copyist who did not add anything new to the text or simply served as a copyist could be paid 2000 dirhams (about 134 million) per month (Yanto, 2015)

#### **a) Al-Hikmah Functions as an Educational Institution**

Apart from being a library, Bait al-Hikmah also functions as an academic or educational institution. During the time of Harun al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun, Bait al-Hikmah had a very large role as an institution of learning, for students on an equal footing. When schools were established, they were determined by the teachers who taught them and the monthly salaries arranged by the general treasurer. These salaries were also obtained from waqf bodies that were used to provide infusions for the cause. The salaries varied according to the position of the teacher or the waqf's input, though they still tended to be luxurious and quite generous. Among the teachers was Az-Zajaj who earned as much as 200 dinars each month as a fuqaha and scholar. Likewise, Hakim al-Muqtadli ibn Daraid who earned 50 dinars each month (Wicaksana & Rachman, 2018).

Education at Bait al-Hikmah includes branches of science such as philosophy, phalac, medicine, mathematics as well as various languages such as Greek, Persian, Indian in addition to Arabic itself. After graduating from Bait al-

Hikmah, they were given a diploma by the ustadz. The diploma is proof that they have studied the science and even obtained permission to teach it again. The diploma is also given to those who get special rankings in their lessons, the diploma is only entitled to be given and written by the ustadz concerned. The certificate contains the name of the student, the shaikh, the school of fiqh and the date of issuance (Yanto, 2015).

#### **b) Bait al-Hikmah Serves as a Research Institute and Observatory**

In addition, Bait al-Hikmah is also a center for studies and research, this research function is important in the development of the library. In this section, writers work under the writing and research division within the library. In addition, there were also those who wrote and researched outside the library, but then they gave their work to the library. In return, the authors were paid handsomely by the caliph (Yanto, 2015).

The temple also consisted of an astronomical observatory. In the observatory, scientists studied, researched and wrote on various fields of science. For this, the caliph al-Ma'mun built this astronomical tower in a place of Ash-Shamsiyah near Baghdad. In order to be able to monitor the area of Bait al-Hikmah, he established the place so that the students of astronomy who were included in the education of science could practice the scientific theories they had learned. With the tower al-Ma'mun as well as the scientists were able to discern and calculate the earth's circulation (Hak, 2020).

#### **c) Bait al-Hikmah Functioned as a Translation Bureau**

The Abbasid era of translation began in 750 M and continued throughout the ninth and most of the tenth centuries. It was in this regard that Bait al-Hikmah showed its most important function apart from being a library.

Translation activities in Bait al-Hikmah received full support from the caliph, among other things by providing very large rewards or salaries for translators who worked at the institution (Riyadi, 2012)

Ibn Nadim mentions in his book *Al-Fahrasat*, people who were part of the translation team from Indian, Persian, Suryaniyah and Nibthiniyah languages. They not only translated books into 9 Arabic languages, but also translated them into all the languages of the countries that spread as a collection of Islamic societies. This brought enormous benefits that were felt by the entire community living under the auspices of the Islamic government at that time. The same thing was also revealed by Qadhi Shaid al-Andalusi that the caliph al-Ma'mun formed a special academic team to translate different sciences. He recruited great translators from all over the world. Among them were Abu Yahya ibn Bitrik (a Greek scholar), Hunayn ibn Ishak and Yuhana ibn Masawayh (Wicaksana & Rachman, 2018)

During the time of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, Yuhana ibn Masawayh was appointed to translate the old medical books obtained from Ankara and Amuriah. The Caliph also provided staff to assist him in his work.<sup>26</sup> This translation activity was also continued by Caliph al-Ma'mun. Like his father, al-Ma'mun endeavored to collect and translate various works of science and philosophy from Greece, Persia and India. al-Ma'mun even spent 300,000 dinars (about 660 billion today) to translate Greek works (Hak, 2020).

In the ninth century there was a famous group of translators headed by Hunayn ibn Ishaq. He was appointed by Caliph al-Ma'mun as the official translator at the bait al-Hikmah. He was entrusted with the task and responsibility of translating the scholarly works which were Greek books that

had been brought in from Asia Minor and from Constantinople. For his services, they were rewarded with 500 dinars per month or the equivalent of two kilograms of gold. Caliph al-Ma'mun even paid Hunayn ibn Ishaq a huge sum of gold, the weight of the foreign books he translated into Arabic.. (Riyadi, 2012)

Besides Yuhana ibn Masawayh and Hunayn ibn Ishaq and their students, there were other names who worked as translators in the House of Wisdom. The translator was Abu Yahya ibn al-Bathriq (d. 796-806 CE) who is known as the first translator from Greek. He translated the works of Galen and Hippocrates for Caliph al-Manshur, as well as Ptolemy's *Quadripartitum* for other caliphs. There were also Euclid's *Element* and the *Almagest* (which in Arabic is called *al-Majisti*), as well as Ptolemy's great work on astronomy (Rodin, 2021).

Then there was Tsabit ibn Qurrah (211-288 H/ 826-901 M), an equally important translator who was recruited by the Saba of Harran. These Sabaeans were star worshippers and thus historically had an interest in astronomy and mathematics. Tsabit and his students are famous for translating a number of Greek works on mathematics and astronomy including those of Archimedes and Apollonius of Perga. They improved upon earlier translations, such as that of Euclid which had been translated by Hunayn ibn Ishaq. There are other names of translators, such as Quatha ibn Luqa (a Christian from Baklabak who according to *Fihrist* had 34 works), Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunus, Sinan (son of Tsabit ibn Qurrah), Ibrahim (Grandson of Tsabit ibn Qurrah), Abu al-Faraj (great-grandson of Tsabit ibn Qurrah), al-Battani known as *Albategnius* / *Albatenius* is a famous scientist in the field of astronomy, al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf ibn Mathar and Abu Wafa' Muhammad al-Buzjani al-Hasib. In addition, there were other translators who

worked outside the library. These translators gave their work to the library, and the library took it and stored it in the Bait al-Hikmah library.(Hak, 2020)

Based on the description above, it proves that the Bait al-Hikmah library also functions as an institution for translating thousands of books in Greek, Persian, Indian and other languages.

### 3. Contribution of Bait Al-Hikmah Library

The role of the Bait al-Hikmah library which not only functions as a library, but as a translation institution, educational institution, and research institution / observatory as discussed above, it can be understood how much contribution it has made to society at that time and afterwards. This is supported by Hitti's statement in History of the Arabs that: Before the translation period ended (still effective Bait al-Hikmah), all the works of Aristotle had been read by Arabic-speaking people. This happened when Europe almost did not have any knowledge of the Greek mind and science (Hayyong, 2017)

Harun al-Rashid and Al-Makmun have been actively exploring Greek and Persian philosophy, people in their time in the Western world, namely Karl the Great and his nobility, are still clawing to write his name "33 In perceiving the thrust of the influence of the activities and existence of bait al-Hikmah, Syalabi further analyzes that this bait al-Hikmah brings rapid development in the fields of science, culture and literature among Muslims. Foreign science is entered, then mastered and owned by the Muslims (H. Fuad Riyadi, 2014)

Thus the treasury of this scientific work is preserved and can be damaged to generations that come later, when almost disappeared and destroyed.<sup>34</sup> The effort to harmonize the Greek mind with the Islamic mind, which was handled by alKindi and then continued by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, is even seen as a "tamer" and savior of the Greek philosophical mind which is very influential for its continuity until then.

The same thing was expressed by Nourouzzaman Shiddiqi that the era of Bait al-Hikmah gave birth to figures of science and the hukama such as Musa al-Khawarizmi (d.236/850 M), al-Kindi, alFarabi who earned the nickname al-Mu'allim al-Saani (the second teacher where the first teacher is Aristotle and Ibn Sina). Referring to Stanton in his work Introduction to the History of Science, he states that "the main task of humanity has been done by Muslims... "35 Translated works have been refined with new thoughts of expert translators, which are then booked and then spread to Europe through Syria, Spain (Andalusia) and Sicily. That became the dominant basis It became the dominant basis for the development of science in the West that occurred since the beginning of the Renaissance era. Even the resulting works collected in Bait al-Hikmah contributed to the Renaissance era in the Western world(Hak,2020)

## **Conclusion**

The background of the establishment of bait al-Hikmah is due to the encouragement of internal factors from the belief in the value of religious teachings that always encourage adherents to learn and demand knowledge. During the Abbasid Dynasty with the Mu'tazilah principle, the ruling caliphs loved science and encouraged the development of science at that time. In addition, the conditions at that time were very conducive to transferring Greek and Persian treasures into the arms of Muslims. In addition, the rulers around the time before the establishment of the bait al-Hikmah were people who loved science.

The existence of Bait al-Hikmah is in addition to its first function since its founding as an institution for translating Greek and Persian philosophy and science into Arabic, as well as a library and higher education institution and a kind of research institution that has an observatory for astrological research. Its most famous existence is as a translation institution in addition to being an institution of higher education. Bait

al-Hikmah reached its heyday during the time of Caliph al-Ma'mun, but it continued to run and live until Hulagu destroyed Baghdad in 1285 AD (656 AH) in which bait al- Hikmah was burned. Bait al-Hikmah has a thrust, both direct and indirect, which is quite large and broad towards the progress of culture and civilization in the Abbasid period in general (especially the early days), even during the era of Bait al-Hikmah has sprung Muslim philosophers and scientists whose works can be considered monumental and dominant influence on the progress of science in general and even in encouraging the emergence of the Renaissance in the Western world..

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