

The House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah), an Educational Institution during the Time of the Abbasid Dynasty. A Historical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The era of the Abbasid Dynasty has been viewed by many historians as the Golden Age in Islamic history, during which several technological and educational advancements occurred. Education was regarded as a very fashionable and crucial element of the Abbasid society after the Caliphs realised the necessity of knowledge and wisdom to power the wheel of progress. This research historically analyses education in the reign of the Abbasid Dynasty that marked the beginning of one of the brightest ages in Islamic history, in particular and human civilisation in general. It investigates the role of one of the leading libraries in medieval times as well as the contributions of caliphs who had devoted their time and wealth to help develop the House of Wisdom. The study also explores the emergence of the educational institution, particularly Bayt al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom) that preserved the reproductive translation movement, the knowledge transmission and the scientific progress,

and in so doing, ensured the preservation of the knowledge and heritage of the ancient civilisations, contributing unprecedented discoveries to the western world which used these discoveries to progress. This study adopts a qualitative approach as its historical framework through which the authors analyse and investigate the development of the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah) and its impact on similar libraries on the basis of credible and primary

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sources that marked one of the brightest ages of Islamic history. The historical basis of the research framework gathers relevant information about the House of Wisdom and some other related aspects.

Keywords: Abbasid dynasty, caliphs, education, house of wisdom, knowledge transmission, reproductive translation movement

INTRODUCTION

The Abbasid state came into power on the ruins of the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 AD), when preachers from the Abbasids played a major role in the downfall of the Umayyad state, as generally agreed among historians. The establishment of the Abbasid state was done through a coup that was never carried out in Islamic history (al-Sirjāni, 2008); the Guided Caliphate (632-661) was founded based on the *Shūra* (consultation) Council, then the Umayyad state - in its inception – and emerged on the same basis after Hassan bin Ali (624-670 AD) (son of Ali) stepped down from the throne and was replaced by Mu'awiyah (602-680 AD). However, the Abbasid state decided to come into power through a military coup against the ruling authority without *Shūra* (consultation) from the Muslim majority, and through an uprising against the rulers of the Muslim Umayyad that was unprecedented in Islam. The Abbasid dynasty attained its most distinguished period of intellectual and political life soon after its establishment. The Caliphate reached its peak of greatness during the reigns of Hārūn al-Rashīd

(763-809 AD) and his son, al-Ma'mūn (786-833 AD). The Abbasid dynasty held a special place in popular imagination and was the most admired in Islamic history. The Abbasid Caliphate attained a degree of power, glory and progress that can be appreciated by studying its foreign relations, its court and aristocratic life in its capital of Baghdad, and also through the consummate intellectual awakening culminating in the al-Ma'mūn patronage, an awakening that was unprecedented in the history of Islam as a result of considerable foreign influences, namely from Indo, Persian, Syrians and the Hellenic tradition. In less than fifty years after Baghdad was established, the Arab world proudly possessed the major philosophical works of Aristotle, of the neo-Platonic commentators and most of the medical knowledge of Galen besides scientific works of ancient Persians and Indians. In a few decades, what took the Greeks centuries to develop had been assimilated and innovated by Arab and non-Arab scholars.

METHOD

This present study adopted a qualitative research approach on the basis of a historical framework through which the authors analyse and critique the progress of the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah) and its impact on similar libraries utilising primary sources. The historical framework involved authors gathering relevant information about the House of Wisdom and its development not as merely a storehouse, but as one of

the institutions of higher education that appeared during the Abbasid dynasty.

Statement of the Problem

There have been several studies of the Abbasid House of Wisdom from a historical or pedagogical perspective. Al-Diyaji (1975) for instance, dealt with the House of Wisdom, its development and the caliphs' efforts to uphold the library's legacy. Another very important study on the same library was that of Khedr (1962), titled *Al Ma'mun and His Bayt Al-Hikmat*, a book which basically dealt with some financial and management aspects of the library as well as the tremendous support provided by the caliph al-Ma'mun, who had sent expeditions to collect important books and other notable books translated from other languages. What the researchers have found problematic in the studies on the House of wisdom, is the total neglect of the library's educational contributions to Muslim civilisation, and this study sheds some light on the library, not only as a storehouse of books but also a precious educational institution that saw the value of translated works that allowed the introduction new subject matter in its educational curriculum that boosted the quality of Muslim intellectual history.

Historians have argued that the first true academy in Islam which provided for the physical needs of its scholars and learners and developed into a model for later institutions of higher learning and education was the Nizamiyah (1065-1075), which was in the form of a theological seminary (*madrasah*), particularly emphasised studies

of Shafi'i rites and the Ash'ari system. The Qur'an and ancient poetry were the pillars of the study of humanities (*'ilm al-adab*), similar to what European universities did with the classics (Hitti, 1949).

De Lacy O'Leary (1872-1957), a British orientalist gave his support to the idea that Bayt al-Hikmah was established by Al-Ma'mun, and he revealed that Bayt al-Hikmah was not just a library but rather a school or an institution. He stated: "*the caliph Al-Mamun has founded a school he named Bayt al-Hikmah, and he made it an institution that embraces the translation of the Greek books*" (De Lacy, 1973). There are several aspects of the House of Wisdom as an educational institution, which are totally absent in the scholarly literature, this paving the way for a thorough investigation to shed some light on these aspects and to examine the educational value of the House of Wisdom itself.

Background on the Scientific Progress during the Period of Abbasid Dynasty

The Abbasid times witnessed a remarkable period of the translation movement (750-850AD) that made it possible for Arabic language to be used for the first time in scientific literature (Al-Diyaji, 1975). The movement was followed by an age of adaptation and creativity for the Abbasid thinkers, who not only had the opportunity to assimilate the ancient Persia and classical Greece but they also adapted their distinctive needs and ways of thinking. In medicine and philosophy, the intellectuals' independent work was less noticeable

than in astronomy, geography, alchemy or mathematics. In philology, linguistics, theology and law, the Abbasids carried on the ingenuity of Arab-Muslim thinking and research.

The Abbasid collective mind was the one that transmuted translations in no small degree over the course of centuries together with many innovative and new contributions which were transmitted to Europe by way of Spain, Sicily and Syria that formed the basis of the canon of intellectuality which was dominant in medieval European thought. And transmitting from a cultural history is as essential as original creations. After all, had the researches of Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Galen been lost to posterity and vagueness the world would have been as poorer and deprived as if they had never existed.

Abbasid Dynasty and the Progress of Education

The Abbasid state period witnessed an unprecedented intellectual awakening in various fields of education, ultimately it evolved through the mosques (*masjid*) which were the main institutions of teaching and learning the Islamic culture. Scientific circles and workshops were made inside the mosques since the education in early years of Islam was focused only on religious studies. When education had developed, scholars were able to organise and attend debates that were necessary not to educate people only but also to eliminate the threat of disorder known for Muslims as *fitnah* that emerged during those times. Those debates and educational circles were attempts to

avoid any disruption of the laws of God (Allah) Almighty and to take back the rights of the oppressed from oppressors and achieve justice (Al-Asfahānī, 2002).

For a child, home was where learning began. . As soon as the child could utter words and speak, it was the duty of the father to teach him “the word” or *al-Kalimah* in Arabic terms: *La ilaha illa-l-Lah* (there is no god except Allah). At the age of six the child was held responsible for the ritual prayer and thus marked the beginning of the child’s education (Al-Ghazālī, 2008).

Students of that time were taught Arabic grammar, biographies of prophets and more precisely the prophetic tradition or Hadiths relating to the prophet Mohammad. They were taught also principles of arithmetic and poetry. Throughout the entire curriculum, memory work was emphasised. Intellectually, students were given special care either by parents, teachers, or Caliphs themselves. Abu al-Faraj al-Asfahānī (967 AD) stated that deserving pupils in elementary school of Baghdad were proudly paraded along the street on camels while almonds were thrown at them. Sometimes the shower of almonds would tragically damage an eye of a young scholar (Al-Asfahānī, 2002). In certain cases, the scholars who had successfully mastered a section of the Qur’an were granted a whole or partial holiday.

Children from rich families had private tutors or preceptors (*mu’addib*) who gave instructions in religion, fine literature and the arts of composing verse. It was a common practice to hire foreigners as

instructors. As for aristocratic education, it may be idealistically determined from the instructions that were given by al-Rashīd (763-809 AD) to the tutor of his son, al-Amin (787-813):

“Be not strict to the extent of stifling his faculties or lenient to the point of making him enjoy idleness and accustom himself thereto. Straighten him as much as thou canst through kindness and gentleness but fail not to resort to force and severity should he not respond” (Al-Mas’ūdī, 2005).

In elementary school, the teacher was called *mu'allim*, sometimes also *faqīh* on account of his theological training and knowledge. There has been a higher concern when choosing the *mu'allim* in whom sometimes special characteristics must be acquired as in the book *al-Bayan* a quotation will demonstrate the *mu'allim* (educator) qualities, Al-Jāhiz had said that seeking advice from unwise teachers, shepherds, and those who sit much among women is not recommended. He had stressed the very high personal and intellectual qualities which should meet certain criteria in order for them to be hired to teach at institutions or at royal castles (Al-Jāhiz, 1998).

Teachers were clearly grouped into a loose form of guild and the master could award an approved certificate (*ijāzah*) to those students who satisfactorily passed the prescribed course and examination under his supervision. Al-Zarnūjī (1223 AD) who is best known for two scores of Arabic treatises on education, most of which survived in manuscript form, devoted a part to the high regard that students should hold to the

profession of teaching and to the teacher himself, quoting the adage attributed to 'Ali the companion: “I'm the slave of him who has taught me even one letter” (Al-Zarnujī, 1943).

Knowledge was very sacred for Muslims which explains why education had developed during the caliphate times, the Umayyad period and particularly during the Abbasid Dynasty's era when education had reached its peak, especially in the era of caliph al-Ma'mūn (786-833 AD), who developed and preserved the legacy of the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah).

The Emergence of Institutions of Higher Education

The first prominent institution for higher learning in Islamic history was the House of Wisdom (*Bayt al-Hikmah*), that was founded in al-Ma'mūn's caliphate. The House of Wisdom served not only as a translation bureau but also it functioned as an academy and public library and it contained observatory connected to it which sprang up during this time due to the spread of astronomy teaching and learning. Hospitals also made their first appearance at this period and served as centres for medical studies (Khedr, 1989).

Historians have argued that the first real academy in Islam which made provision for the physical needs for its scholars and learners and became a model for later institutions of higher learning and education was the Nizāmiyah (1065-1075 A.D) which represented a theological seminary (*madrasah*) more particularly for studies

of Shafi'i rite and the Ash'ari system. The Qur'an and old poetry formed the pillar of the study of humanities (*'ilm al-adab*) the same as European universities did with classics (Hitti, 1949).

It is worth noting that imam al-Gazālī lectured at Nizāmiyah School for four years (1091-1095 A.D). When he was introducing his *Ihya' al-Gazālī* combated the motion that the imparting of knowledge was the object of education and he asserts the necessity of stimulating the moral consciousness of pupils or students, therefore becoming the first author in Islamic world to bring the problem of education into organic relation with profound ethical system (Al-Ghazālī, 2008).

For the Abbasid higher institutions there was an emphasis on the science of tradition and memory work in their curriculum. It has been related that al-Gazālī (1058-1111 AD) earned his title of Authority of Islam (*hujjat al-Islam*) when he memorised 300.000 traditions. Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780-855 AD) stated that he knew by heart, 1000.000 traditions, similar anecdotes while al-Mutanabbi (965 AD), Abu-Tammam (845 AD) and Al-Ma'arri (973-1057 AD) were credited for their memorisation skills and continuous flow of information, traditions, and poems from memory (Shalabi, 1977).

Development of the House of Wisdom and Similar Libraries

The founder of the House of Wisdom during the Abbasid dynasty was Abu Ja'far al-Mansūr (714-775 AD), who amassed books on medicine, astronomy, engineering and

literature that had been translated during his reign. He also acquired publications on Hadith (prophetic tradition), history, Qur'anic sciences, storing his massive collection in a large room that eventually became the House of Wisdom (Al-Diyaji, 1975).

A new record says that Al-Ma'mūn (786-833 AD) was the one who named the place that contained this large collection of books as well as maps and manuscripts The House of Wisdom (*Bayt al-Hikmah*). According to Ahmed Amin the name was given because besides books on religion there were even more different documents and publications of foreign origin, whether translated or bought from other countries, including sizeable collection of books and documents on philosophy or wisdom (*hikmah*) (Amān-Allah, 1962).

The active translation movement during the Abbasid Dynasty period was carried out in different places such as public and private houses of wisdom, houses of scientific research, private libraries, mosque libraries, schools and institutions that were spread throughout the Islamic peninsula. These institutions were not specifically for translation and Arabisation of knowledge only but rather they were also centres of writing, publishing, reading, copying, and storage of books, transcripts, maps, etc. Amazingly, the Abbasids had created the first observatory in Islamic and human history, devoting a special building for the purpose of studying stars, planets, weather, etc. Of all these houses of wisdom, the ultimate house of wisdom was the one

that contained the previously mentioned stores, rooms and buildings on Baghdad the *Bayt al-Hikmah al-Baghdadi* or House of Wisdom (Ma'rūf, 1975).

Libraries have been commonly placed inside the mosques, writers' precious personal collections (mortmain) of their books for the public located in the mosque library and easily accessible to the public. It was an effective way for scholars then to help create awareness and spread knowledge. For instance, Al-Katib al-Baghdadi (1002-1071 A.D) classified his books to be *waqf* (free access) for students and scholars. The libraries were established by wealthy men or dignitaries as semi-public institutions which housed collections of books on logic, philosophy, astronomy, and sciences. Such libraries were used for meetings and for scientific discussions and debates. It has been reported that scholars had no difficulty in accessing even private collections (Al-Hamawī, 1993).

During the Abbasid era, bookshops also emerged as commercial and educational agencies. In 891 AD, al-Ya'qūbi confirms that the capital boasted over hindered book dealers all assembled along one street. Owners of the bookshops and the sellers themselves were literary men, calligraphers and copyists, for instance, Al-Hamawī (1179-1229 AD) started his career as a clerk for a book dealer, Ibn al-Nadīm (995 AD), also known as al-Warrāq was himself a librarian to whom we owe the remarkable and scholarly work, *al-Fihrist* (Al-Hamawī, 1993).

Libraries were the ancient's path to teaching knowledge, since purchasing books was very expensive at that time, people who had earned a level of reputation for knowledge and teaching established their own libraries or bookshops and they open the doors to others who were seeking knowledge with full or partial access as the Ptolemies did in Alexandria and the Abbasid with the House of Wisdom.

Bayt al-Hikmah was the first library to have a distinguished reputation in the Islamic world, it is fair to say that it was the first Islamic university that united scientist, scholars and students, becoming the first scientific centre that provided people with a huge collection of reading and scientific materials related to the, medicine, philosophy, and wisdom (*hikmah*) (Shalabi, 1977). The caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty as well as the Abbasids gave special attention to knowledge in general and to Arabic books in particular. They also spent a huge amount of their wealth to buy ancient books to be used as references for their children and other knowledge seekers (Abd-Allah, 1973).

The Abbasid paid much attention to knowledge (*Ilm*) and to book collection and during their reign many libraries were established (Abd-Allah, 1973). Therefore, *Bayt al-Hikmah* (House of Wisdom) was of great importance since it contained books of incredible value in every field of the sciences and in many different languages (Al-Diyaji, 1975).

The House of Wisdom and the Translation Movement

The House of Wisdom was administered by many people of different religions, races, ideologies and cultures. They were trusted managers, translators, and writers. Workers were headed by a director known as owner of the House of Wisdom (*Sāhib Bayt al-Hikmah*) (Khedr, 1989).

Following the emergence of Islam and the opening of Persia, Egypt and Syria in the seventh century, many schools that taught philosophy of the Greeks and other sciences were established in those countries. There are numerous records that confirm the Arabs' exposure to various medicines and medical sciences because they had come across them in the course of their trading and business activities which took them to various countries and various cultures. It has been reported that al-Hārith Ibn Kildah travelled to Persia and to Gundeshapur in search of medical knowledge; this same man who was not a Muslim was approached by the prophet to diagnose and treat Sa'ad bin Abi Waqqas when he was sick on the final pilgrimage (*hajjat al-Wada'*) (Al-Tlisi & Al-Dhwib, 2002).

When the Arabs settled in the open peninsula and took over the Greek cultural works, they were already inspired by the Islamic teachings on the sanctity of knowledge and openness to learn from people of other faiths. The Arabs resumed the process of teaching and learning. There was one way to acquire more knowledge and wisdom (*phalsafah*), which was to translate and copy the knowledge they

found into the Arabic language. So the challenge for the Abbasids was to benefit from the knowledge written in books, mud walls, statues and tablets of mud and stone in foreign languages like Sumerian and Assyrian (Ma'rūf, 1975).

The great interest that the Muslims showed for knowledge was not mere coincidence but rather it was like a religious mission for Muslims strive and acquire knowledge and use it for the common good. Among the reasons that stimulated the Arabs to translate and adapt the knowledge of the ancients were:

1. The desire to see the sciences and literatures of foreign nations, for instance, Khalid Ibn Yazīd Ibn Mua'wiyah (died 704 AD) was one of the Caliphs who spent much time and money seeking books of Greek chemistry and philosophy. Abbasid Caliphs such as al-Mansūr, al-Rashīd, and al-Ma'mūn also showed the same commitment to seeking knowledge of the ancients.

2. The development of religious debates in which Muslims in the Umayyad period started to hold seminars and councils in the mosques for debating, issues they faced such as fate and destiny and whether man is a restricted or will-given creature.

3. Eagerness to acquire philosophy and logic of the Greeks, the controversy and debates that were held between Muslims, Christians and Jews that stimulated the Muslim minds to use rationality and philosophy that the Christians and Jews used in debating therefore they had to study philosophy of the ancients and use it to defend their Islamic beliefs.

The translation movement had its roots in Islam as the first intellectual movement, it was because of the efforts made by Khalid ibn Mua'wiyah (died 704) who was nicknamed "The Wise Man" by the people of Imran (*hakim A'l Imran*). This man had an influential interest in and devotion to different sciences, so he brought many philosophers (*hukama'*) and he asked for top translators and had books in Greek translated into Arabic. His age witnessed first publication of the science of wisdom (Khalifa, 1941).

Many translators from the time of Abbasid were also contributors such as Yūhanna Ibn Masawayah (777-857 AD), who was responsible for the oldest systematic treatise in the field of ophthalmology extant in Arabic, and also a book entitled *al-Ashr Maqalat fi al-'Ayn* (the *Ten treatises on the eye*) that Hunayn Ibn Ishāq (809-873 AD) prescribed for his pupils. The book has recently been published in English translation as the earliest existing text-book of ophthalmology (Hitti, 1949).

The translation process was not monopolised by any scholar or librarian, but translators were selected according to their achievements and intellectual ability, which is why people of different faiths, cultures, and ethnicity (Christians, Muslims, Persian, Coptic... etc.) were gathered in the House of Wisdom when they co-existed and collaborated to the intellectual progress of the Abbasid (Al-Diyaji, 1975).

The period of al-Ma'mūn (786-833 AD) is considered the golden era of the translation movement and intellectual

achievement. The Abbasid caliph had spent a fortune on collecting books and rare manuscripts, while also sending expeditions to India and Constantinople to acquire books and reading materials for the capital. He even asked the Byzantine emperor for the Roman books that were in their houses and castles. Passion for wisdom by al-Ma'mūn made him write a treatise with kings of Rome when he required them to send to the House of Wisdom the most precious of their books on wisdom that could not be found elsewhere (Al-Diyaji, 1975).

A piece of astonishing information about the House of Wisdom during the Abbasid Dynasty period is that there were numerous services for people seeking knowledge and learning. Many services were provided free of charge because the Caliph himself was the one paying for everything needed or provided for students and scholars, and readers who came to the House of Wisdom to take advantage of the free access to the reading materials of ancient civilisations written in their native language, while readers even enjoyed perks offered to them during a specific time of the day for reading. Translation procedure for public or private social classes was free of charge as well since the Caliph was the sponsor of the translators. The Abbasid Dynasty also provided free ink and free paper for both scholars and students regardless to age, race or social status (Khedr, 1989).

Abbasid Caliphs and the House of Wisdom

The caliphs of the Abbasid era were

not only concerned about politics and governance, but some of them turned out to be increasingly interested in knowledge and the sciences. They summoned scholars to their castles, inspired them and financially supported them in their research. After the translation movement took place, the caliph had to manage the huge number of books he acquired and to allow people to have access to that valuable and extensive collection of knowledge on all sciences from different civilisations. Harūn al-Rashīd (763 809 A.D) had a major influence in founding the House of Wisdom (*Bayt al-Hikmah*) in Baghdad that became the centre of knowledge and teaching within the Islamic caliphate (Khedr, 1989).

Al-Rashīd was a strong supporter of the House of Wisdom and eventually the intellectual movement with all his efforts, determination, and wealth. He befriended scholars and asked for their presence inside the castle, and tens of scholars used to accompany him on his journeys. The House of Wisdom attracted the attention of some other caliphs. Throughout the years became the most influential educational institution in the history of Islam where all sciences met with one another within the same institution that turned out to be a distinctive university of the Abbasid caliphate, especially during the time of Al-Ma'mūn.

The Abbasid caliphs' concern for knowledge and sciences attained its peak during the time of Al-Ma'mūn (832 A.D). Historians have generally agreed that Al-Ma'mūn was among the most knowledgeable caliphs in the Abbasids

dynasty, and his contemporaries regarded him as one of the most influential, intelligent and wise rulers ever among all Muslim ruling dynasties. Some also stated that he was one of the eminent scholars of his time. After being assigned as Caliph in Baghdad, Al-Ma'mūn founded a Council of Science and Literature for discussions and debates held every Tuesday under the supervision and sponsorship of the caliph himself (Amān-Allah, 1962).

During the time of Al-Ma'mūn (833 A.D), the House of Wisdom witnessed remarkable progress and innovations even though the heart of the House of Wisdom began as a modest centre of wisdom founded by his father but in the reign of Al-Ma'mūn it grew into a large cultural and scientific institution. It comprised different halls for different functions, for instance, halls of translation, of copying and writing, reading, debating and also an open public library for those who were keen on seeking knowledge. This house contained treasures of the Arab Islamic culture and treasures of foreign cultures, basically Greek, Persian, and Indian (Shalabi, 1977).

Al-Ma'mūn's communications with Roman and Greek emperors resulted in the purchase of a considerable number of manuscripts and books from the Greek and Roman heritage due to his expeditions led by Al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf ibn Maṭar (786-833 A.D), Abu Yahya Ibn al-Batriq (796 – 806 A.D), and Yuhanna ibn Masawaih (777-857 A.D) to Asia Minor, Cyprus and others, and they successfully brought to the hands of the caliph a very valuable load of literature and

art that later was organised in the House of Wisdom in Baghdad. However, the packages were not given free to the caliph Al-Ma'mūn who paid a fortune to the emperors for them. The caliph himself appointed scholars and translators like Yahya Ibn al-Batriq and Hanin Ibn ishāq (809 – 873 A.D) and his son to look after the manuscripts and books that dealt with many subjects including philosophy, medical sciences, engineering, and astronomy (Salem, 1993) .

Al-Ma'mūn had spent generously on the translation process, paying a high monthly allowance to translators in the House of Wisdom, who also enjoyed some special privileges, for instance, Hanin ibn ishāq was rewarded the book's weight in gold for his translation. The House of Wisdom played a crucial role in the intellectual movement and consequently in the development of the Arab and Islamic culture and civilisation.

The caliph's contribution to the progress of intellectual revolution was not limited to his support for translating, debating and writing, but he also advised scholars to transform those sciences and data into technology. For instance, Al-Ma'mūn asked them to build an observer for the purpose of astronomy studies that was described by the Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy in his book *Almagest*. Scientists of that era had successfully developed such observers in a number of Arab cities such as Baghdad and Damascus. The knowledgeable caliph had always insisted on learning the Greek heritage and culture that was highly and openly appreciated by the scholars who made strikingly scientific progress in the

time of the Abbasid during which marked the dawn of the golden age of Islam had (Al-Diyaji, 1975).

The reign of Al-Ma'mūn has been described as the prime age of scientific progress and intellectual development during the Abbasid era which made it a very exceptional era in the whole Islamic civilisation due to the interest, respect and support given to scholars by the caliphs, with the situation of scholars being best described by Ibn al-Jawzi who stated that when the king had knowledge of a scholar subsequently, a scholar becomes a king (Al-Jawzi, 1923).

From the year 132 AG of the Abbasid caliphs' rule over the Muslims until the year 656 A.H, they had followed a straight path towards knowledge and wisdom, through which they founded an educational system for their offspring so that they make them more wise leaders of the Muslim society. It was achieved by assigning very competitive preceptors and instructors who taught their children from infancy to an advanced age. One of the subjects taught was wisdom (Ma'rūf, 1975)

Historians like al-Ya'qūbi (292 A.H) the writer of *History of al-Ya'qūbi*, stated that the Abbasid caliphs that he mentioned in his book were very keen to teach their kids the subject of wisdom due to its valuable role it played in leadership, decision and policy making. Some Muslim scholars have considered wisdom a very independent science just like all other sciences. Unfortunately, we can barely see in our academic curriculum our children

being taught wisdom or the way to be wise. Actually, many scholars and academia have brought to light the subject of teaching wisdom in early education of children and even at university level (Al-Ya'qūbi, 1980).

Subjects Studied in the Abbasids' House of Wisdom

Islamic schools and institutions in the era of the Abbasids played a very crucial and constructive role in preserving the Arab and Islamic heritage and in introducing remarkable progress to the religious, literary and scientific studies that offered a great service to Islamic Culture.

There is no doubt that in the beginning of the Islamic schools, great attention was paid to religious studies as the foundation for pursuing all other sciences. This interest had a greater effect in developing religious subjects like Qur'anic studies, prophetic tradition, and Islamic jurisprudence. It also helped people to understand those subjects that paved the way for new scientific studies and interpretations. New literary subjects were introduced like grammar and linguistics. There was considerable interest to make progress in various studies to serve the heritage of Arabic literature (Ma'rūf, 1975).

The Islamic schools also had no less value in teaching mathematical sciences including algebra, accounting, statistics, and engineering. Furthermore, they were interested to teach rational sciences like logic and philosophy. Many Arabs and non-Arabs had the honour to teach the previously stated subjects, namely scholars who had

spent their time and fortune to learn different subjects and passed them to their students who later developed those subjects in valuable scientific research in all academic spheres (Amin, 1973).

Previewing the teaching curriculum in the House of Wisdom, it was highly and carefully selected in which many subjects were taught in philosophy (*hikmah*), medical sciences, mathematics, astronomy, biology, history, geography and music arts. During the time of Harūn al-Rashīd considerable attention was paid to the science of wisdom by translating books from different languages into Arabic, while lecturers were selected according to their achievements and area of specialisation and they were given great respect, highly paid and consulted by the caliphs in times of need due to their high intellectuality and wisdom (Majid, 1975).

Schools which taught religious and scientific studies had successfully contributed to the graduation of large number of students who had travelled throughout the peninsula to spread their knowledge and exchange it with other scholars. Many of them also were granted very honourable positions in school or government institutions in the Islamic world. The opportunity for the Muslims and non-Muslims to be admitted to different schools of different thoughts like the Baghdad, Basra, Cairo, Tunisia, Morocco or even Esfahan had a significant influence on the making of Islamic thought and strengthening human relationships. It also allowed the meeting of different minds and beliefs that together produced some very valuable ideas and works in the

field of science and literature. This was the major contribution of the Islamic schools in bringing together different human races, ethnicities, languages and religions (Amine, 1973).

The mixing of scholars and countries helped them understand one another's cultures and traditions and helped develop the Arabic language that had become the language of almost every aspect. Al-Andalusī had said that the religious unity had needed language and civilizational unity. Persians, people of Iraq, Levant and Egypt started to include their ancient knowledge in the new Islamic civilisation. Engaging in the translation movement also motivated caliphs of the Abbasids to incline philosophical studies. This interest helped some caliphs to encourage people to philosophise. Sā'id al-Andalusī mentioned in his book that when caliphate was given to Al-Ma'mūn, his ambitious personality sought to understand wisdom, and learn the philosophical sciences (Al-Andalusī, 1996).

Al-Ma'mūn was praised by O'Leary who said that since the caliph grew up reading Hellenistic culture, he was able to apply philosophical rules to some of the Islamic creeds and doctrines (De Lacy, 1973).

Baghdad, particularly the House of Wisdom, was the direction that attracted scholars from all around the peninsula, that contained the literary and scientific progress the Islamic state (*ummah*) had achieved, a progress which marked the civilizational superiority of that time embodied in the teachings of various

sciences such as philosophy, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, Greek, Persian, Indian languages as well as Arabic.

Study during the Abbasid era especially inside the House of Wisdom was not randomly held but there were some teaching methods that students and pupils had to go through before graduation. It is believed that education then has two stages:

1. Preparation level before entering the House of Wisdom:

1.1 From age 6 to 14 years: study was held at the house of the teacher or lecturer, small shops and Qur'anic schools, pupils learned and memorised the Qur'an, learning reading and writing along with grammar rules of the languages and practising the basics of accounting.

1.2 From the age of 14 to 18 years: held inside schools of mosques and circles, student learn at this age some religious sciences including jurisprudence (*fiqh*), interpretations, Hadith narrations, poetry, biographies, prophetic campaigns, and literary criticism.

2. Higher studies or study inside the house of wisdom:

2.1 Lectures system: held at one of the rooms of the House of Wisdom, some lectures were publicly attended but some others were meant only for some students at a certain level.

2.2 Debates and discussions system: also held in the House of Wisdom with a difference in the subjects being discussed. Major subjects that had been taught to higher education students were: mathematics, philosophical sciences, wisdom, astronomy,

natural sciences, medical sciences, geography, art and music (Khedr, 1989)

When students finish their studies, ultimately, they would receive a graduation certificate that proved their intellectual ability in one of the studied fields. If a student was among the top graduated another certificate would be awarded to him which allowed him to teach that particular subject. The responsibility of the awards was the lecturers' because they were supervisors of the level of a student (Khedr, 1989)

The scientific and intellectual progress of that era gave rise to adult education, consequently the level of literacy was very high for both men and women could learn and develop their educational skills. Adult education was systematically carried out everywhere for mosques in almost every Muslim town and city WHICH served as major educational centres. For instance, if any visitor came to a new city he could head to congregational mosque confident that he could be attending hadith lectures, as reported by al-Maqdisi when he was visiting al-Sus. This geographer and traveller of the tenth century in Palestine, Egypt and Syria had found several circles (*halaqāʾ*) or assemblies (*majālis*) that were led by faqīh Qurʾan leaders or scholars inside the mosques (al-Suyūti, 1964).

Many historians pointed out that the Imam al-Shafiʿi presided over such assemblies and circles (*majālis* and *hilaq*) at the mosque of ʿAmr al-Fustat, when he devoted his time to teach various subjects every morning till his death in 820 AD. Similar assemblies in Sijistān were

mentioned by Ibn-Hawqal (988 AD) but he insisted that not only religious lectures were given but also linguistics and poetry were held in these assemblies. Every Muslim had free admission to the lectures in the mosques which remained until the 11th century that witnessed the expansion of new Islamic schools (Suyūti, 1964).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The House of wisdom had been a celebrated library, and until now it was a sound judgement to consider it an educational institution of higher learning established in Baghdad by the Abbasid leader Harun al-Rashid (r. 786 – 809) and granted an influential impetus under his son al-Mamun (r. 813 – 33). Researchers had always claimed that the Bayt am-Hikmah was a mere library and store-like place for Greek and Persian literature, however, our research provided an extensive account of this library that went beyond those claims, and was a place of higher education and learning.

The House of Wisdom was not limited only in Baghdad, but as it has been discussed, few years after its establishment, new institutions were founded and named after this centre of learning in Baghdad. It functioned as a hub of Islamic and non-Islamic studies, culture, and society. The fall of the Abbasids did not limit the inclusion of the house of Wisdom institution in people's lives. On the contrary, they possessed an incredible amount of freedom to pursue knowledge and scientific research. As a result, we found that the Umayyads in Spain, Samanids in Bukhara, Fatimid in

Cairo and others, they were all inspired by Baghdad's house of wisdom and they attempted to duplicate it even in their academic curriculums. Even though several higher education institutions were founded in the Muslim civilization, there is but little knowledge about them and no systematic studies of these cultural and educational institutions which thrived throughout the Muslim peninsula. Consequently, this paper has analysed the earliest and most influential educational institution in Baghdad, the paper also relied on dispersed information of Arabic and non-Arabic writings that dealt with numerous topics such as Muslim religion, education, history, geography and other related literary works. It has become evident that Buyut al-Hikmah (Houses of Wisdom) in Baghdad, Bukhara, Cairo or elsewhere, they altogether were an essential element of the Muslim cultural and educational life at those times. Buyut al-Hikmah indeed, were not a simple depositing houses for books, maps manuscripts, and they were not entrusted to regular personnel, on the contrary, Buyut al-Hikmah operated as clusters of knowledge and learning and it accumulated young and old men and women who were enthusiastic to study, teach and debate. Regrettably, the onslaught against Muslim institutions, mosques, libraries by external invasions was carried unceasingly within the Muslim terrains from Baghdad to Egypt and from Spain to Morocco.

CONCLUSION

As it has been discussed, The House of Wisdom, was not just a library or a book

storehouse, but was in fact an educational institution that played a distinguished role in the history of the Middle Ages for it was a bridge that disseminated knowledge of the ancient civilisations including the Islamic one to the west. It was a departure from modern sciences. There is consensus among historians that thanks to The House of Wisdom and other similar institutions that the continuity of human civilisation was preserved after the fall of the Roman civilisation. The House of Wisdom also marked the emergence of Arab thinkers and intellectuals.

As stated in the earlier pages of this paper, the scientific revolution of the Abbasids especially during the functioning years of The House of Wisdom and the movement of reproductive translation and transmission of knowledge have been reflected in the introduction of new educational institutions that came to existence as a result of the role of the house of wisdom that represented a universal institution or university collected and produced a huge collections of books, manuscripts, maps and other innovations and discoveries which have been considered by many western historians as backbones for European progress after the end of the Dark Ages. An era that was never dark in the Abbasids peninsula but rather they were ages of discoveries, and intellectual loftiness.

The research showed that the Abbasid Dynasty had much to offer for the human civilization of intellectual and scientific progress. Caliphs were giving the translation movement and the intellectuals a very

high level of respect and support that have been the key factors to getting hold of the Hellenistic, Indian, and Persian knowledge and philosophy. The Abbasids did not just work on the theoretical level of the knowledge they acquired, but rather they started practicing and implementing it achieving various philosophical, scientific, astronomical and medical developments.

Indeed, the House of Wisdom was not just a library or a book storehouse, but rather it represented a very distinguished educational institution that played a vital role in the history of the Middle Ages for it was one of the Institutions that bridged and transmitted the ancient civilizations including the Islamic one to the west and its renaissance.

The House of Wisdom had carried delivery of the sacred message of teaching and learning throughout the Abbasid Dynasty reign until the attack of the Mongol against the Abbasid Caliphate. When the Mongols (1218-1265 AD) threw in the river of Euphrates almost all the literatures and discoveries produced during the Abbasid Dynasty era. An event that marked the fall of Baghdad. Consequently, it marked the collapse of Abbasid Caliphate and resulted a disastrous effect on the Islamic civilizational heritage.

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