

Except for a few lines quoted in *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq*, which contain a verse of al-Bayhaqī's lampooning al-Buḥturī (ed. Ḥusaynī, 267; ed. al-Hādī, 295), his poetry has been neglected and probably lost. His only surviving work, *Kitāb al-maḥāsīn wa-l-masāwī*, which was compiled during the caliphate of al-Muqtadir (r. 294–320/908–32), earned him his reputation (though only in modern times). This work, which features a number of political-religious subjects in its first section, is an anthology of already existing *adab* discourses—anecdotes, lengthy narratives and traditions, specimens of prose genres, poetry—and even the introduction is based on quotations from the *Kitāb al-hayawān* (“Book of animals”) of al-Jāhīz. It constitutes a turning point in the history of *adab* literature, as it marks the beginning of the literary genre called *al-maḥāsīn wa-l-masāwī* (Gériès, *Un genre*, 71–101, 149–152; *EI*<sup>2</sup>). Al-Bayhaqī's originality is manifest in the meticulous application of his chosen method of organising the materials—on the basis of *maḥāsīn* versus *masāwī* (merit, good, positive, virtuous, proper versus fault, bad, negative, vicious, improper)—in juxtaposed and contrasting chapters, whose titles bear the names of the various topics treated, and in which he presents his ideas, conceptions, and attitudes towards them. Al-Bayhaqī's book reflects the practical philosophy of the third/tenth-century *adīb* (littérateur), and reveals him to be a Zaydī Shī'ī, an ethical person with refined tastes, and someone well versed in *adab* materials—both prose and poetry, and especially the works of al-Jāhīz (Gériès, *Un genre*, 79–101). The book, which preserves materials from earlier works now lost, was used extensively by the unknown author of *al-Maḥāsīn wa-l-addād*, falsely attributed to al-Jāhīz (Gériès, *Un genre*, 102–10), but was neglected by the majority of medieval Arab writers and biographers.

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## Bayt al-Ḥikma

**Bayt al-Ḥikma** (“the House of Wisdom”) was the palace library of the early 'Abbāsid caliphs, mentioned in the

sources only in connection with al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/786–809) and al-Ma'mūn (r. 196–218/812–833). The idea, developed in twentieth-century scholarship, that the Bayt al-Ḥikma was a bureau for the large-scale translation of Greek books into Arabic, operating along the lines of a modern research institute or even a university, is entirely incorrect. While we have little information about the real nature of this library, it is clear that it had more to do with collecting and preserving books of pre-Islamic Iranian and early Arabic lore than with transmitting Greek science.

The expression *bayt al-ḥikma* (as well as the alternate expression, *khizānat al-ḥikma*) is apparently the Arabic translation of a Middle Persian term for libraries of the Sāsānian kings. A Middle Persian account from the sixth century C.E. states that the Sāsānids and their predecessors kept copies of books of religion and science in a *ganj* (treasury, storehouse), a word equivalent to Arabic *khizāna* (Shakī, 114–25). Hamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. after 350/961) reports that in pre-Islamic Iran books containing recastings in verse of Persian historical lore, warfare, and romances were stored in “houses of wisdom” (*buyūt al-ḥikma*) for the Sāsānian kings (*al-Amthāl al-ṣādīra 'an buyūt al-shī'r*, cited by Gregor Schoeler, 2:308). *Ādāb al-mulūk*, a book on royal deportment deriving from Sāsānian sources and ascribed to al-Sarakhsī (d. 286/899), provides information on the role of the palace library (*bayt al-ḥikma*) in connection with the king's study of royal history (Rosenthal, 109).

The Arabic term was probably coined in early 'Abbāsīd times, in the second half of the second/eighth century. Our source of information on this matter is almost exclusively the late fourth/tenth-century book catalog of al-Nadīm (written 376/987), *al-*

*Fihrist* (ed. Gustav Flügel, 2 vols., Leipzig 1871–2, repr. Beirut 1964), on which some of the later sources are largely dependent. The term *bayt al-ḥikma* alternates with *khizānat al-ḥikma*—Sahl b. Hārūn (d. 215/830), for example, is cited as both *ṣāhib bayt al-ḥikma*, 10, and *ṣāhib khizānat al-ḥikma*, 120—and sometimes the institution is referred to merely as *khizāna* (5 [bis], 19). In the *Fihrist* these terms are most frequently associated with the caliphs Hārūn al-Rashīd and, especially, al-Ma'mūn. The construction in which this is expressed is either an *idāfa* (*khizānat al-Ma'mūn*, “al-Ma'mūn's storehouse [of books],” 5) or a prepositional phrase with *li-* (*khizānat al-ḥikma lil-Ma'mūn*, “the storehouse of wisdom of al-Ma'mūn,” 274). Courtiers of al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–47/847–61) in the next generation—al-Faṭḥ b. Khāqān (d. 247/861; 116, 143) and 'Alī b. Yaḥyā b. al-Munajjim (d. 275/888–9; Yāqūt, *Irshād al-arīb*, ed. D. S. Margoliouth, Oxford 1922<sup>2</sup>, 5:467)—are also designated as having their own *bayt* or *khizānat al-ḥikma* of an unsurpassed number of books, showing that the terms refer to a library in the conventional sense. In view of its association with the caliphs al-Rashīd and al-Ma'mūn and of the Sāsānian origin of both the terms and the institution, it seems beyond reasonable doubt that the references are to a palace library.

The *Fihrist* provides the following information about this library when it is mentioned in association with the names of these two caliphs. Among their holdings that are mentioned explicitly are books described as having “old-fashioned copy-hand” (*qadīm al-naskh*, 21), one, presumably in Arabic, allegedly written in the hand of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Hāshim, the grandfather of the prophet Muḥammad (5), another written in the Ḥimyarite script (5),

and still another in the Sūdānī script (19). The activities that were carried out in the library included book copying (‘Allān al-Shu‘ūbī, 105)—clearly as a means to enrich the collections—and book binding (Ibn Abī l-Ḥarīsh, 10). Mentioned as affiliated with the library are Sahl b. Hārūn (10, 120, 125) and Salm (120, 243, 268, 305) as directors or librarians (*ṣāhib*), and, as associated employees, Abū Sahl al-Faḍl b. Nawbakht (fl. c. 158–193/775–809; 274), Sa‘īd b. Hārūn (120, 125), and Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Khwārazmī (d. c.232/847; 274), as well as Yaḥyā b. Abī Maṣṣūr al-Munajjim and the Banū Mūsā (Ibn al-Qiftī, *Tārīkh al-ḥukamā’*, ed. Julius Lippert (Leipzig 1903), 441–2), it being stated explicitly with regard to the Banū Mūsā that they were “registered” there (*athbatahum*) by al-Ma’mūn.

The men mentioned as affiliated with this library were for the most part Iranians, and in a few instances it is expressly recorded in the *Fihrist* that they were involved in translating books from Persian into Arabic, as was the case with Abū Sahl al-Faḍl b. Nawbakht (274) and Salm (120); the latter is also mentioned as having prepared, like Ibn al-Muqaffā‘ and Sahl b. Hārūn—both well known *shu‘ūbīs* and Middle Persian experts—summaries and extracts of *Kalīla wa-Dimna* (305). It is thus clear that the function of this library under the early ‘Abbāsids was similar to that under the Sāsānians, that is, the preservation of the Persian heritage, although now in Arabic translations, to which there was apparently added the corresponding function of collecting and preserving Arab traditions: in addition to “old” books from the pre-Islamic and early Arabian tradition mentioned above were books on Arab history and warfare said to have been commissioned by al-Manṣūr (Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 57 n. 49), and Hārūn al-Rashīd is imagined

in a much later source to have ordered a book on the biographies of Persian kings (*siyar al-mulūk*) to be brought to him from the Bayt al-Ḥikma (preface of the *Nihāyat al-arab fī akhbār al-Furs wa-l-‘Arab* of pseudo-Aṣma‘ī, cited by ‘Alī 1951, 143). It is only under al-Ma’mūn that we hear of men with a different profile affiliated with the caliph’s library, namely the mathematician and astronomer Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Khwārazmī, the astrologer Yaḥyā b. Abī Maṣṣūr al-Munajjim, and the mathematicians known as the Banū Mūsā. We do not know what became of the library thereafter, but al-Nadīm was able to identify copies of books from this *khizānat al-ḥikma* when he wrote his *Fihrist* in 376/987.

The library-director Salm, though of Persian background, is recorded in the *Fihrist* as having been involved, as a member of a committee, in the translation of Ptolemy’s *Almagest* (267f.) under commission by the Barmakid Yaḥyā b. Khālīd (Hārūn’s vizier from 169/786 to 187/803). In a colophon of a manuscript containing the translation of the earliest extant Arabic paraphrase of Aristotle’s logic, Salm is said also to have been involved, again together with others, in its translation for Yaḥyā b. Khālīd (Kraus, 1–20). The capacity in which Salm was involved in these projects is not clear. It is improbable that he knew Greek or Syriac, in which case either the translations of both these works were done from Middle Persian versions, or Salm perhaps merely edited or polished the versions prepared by the translators from Greek or Syriac. In any case, the available evidence does not indicate that these projects took place in the Bayt al-Ḥikma as part of its regular activities; the mention of the Bayt al-Ḥikma in these instances is merely in the title identifying Salm. A similar reference to Salm as part of a committee sent by

al-Ma'mūn to Byzantium to collect Greek manuscripts (243) is to be discounted as legendary. Salm was in charge of the 'Abbāsīd palace library under Yaḥyā b. Khālīd al-Barmakī, as is attested not only in the *Fihrist* but also, independently, in Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's (d. 328/940) *al-Iqd al-farūd* (ed. Aḥmad Amīn, Aḥmad al-Zayn, and Ibrāhīm al-Ibyārī, Cairo 1940–53, 2:127, where the printed name Sulaymān is clearly an error for Salm); and the Barmakids had already been removed from power ten years before al-Ma'mūn's accession. Furthermore, this report in the *Fihrist* is part of the fictitious account that credits the translation movement to al-Ma'mūn's dream of Aristotle (Gutas, 95–104).

It appears that it was from reports such as these concerning Salm that these arose in twentieth-century scholarship the myth that the Bayt al-Ḥikma of the early 'Abbāsīd caliphs was an academy and a school for the study of the ancient sciences, and a centre for the translation of Greek works into Arabic in which Ḥunayn b. Ishāq (d. 260/873) was active and which was founded by al-Ma'mūn in 217/832. Although there was some earlier speculation about it, it was DeLacy O'Leary's *Arabic thought and its place in history* (London 1922) that first linked the Bayt al-Ḥikma with the Nestorian physicians of Baghdad (including Ḥunayn), asserted that it was founded by al-Ma'mūn, and gave 832 as the official date of its establishment—all without citing any sources. Following O'Leary's unfounded assertions, and inspired by G. Bergsträsser's publication (Leipzig 1925) of Ḥunayn's bibliographic *Risāla* of Galenic translations, Max Meyerhof published an article that was responsible for the propagation of this myth (Meyerhof, 685–724). In this and subsequent publications in German, English, and French—articles

that were widely read as authoritative in part because of the author's expertise in the history of Arabic medicine—Meyerhof repeated and elaborated this imaginative interpretation of the Bayt al-Ḥikma as a full-fledged academy and institute of translation, founded by al-Ma'mūn in 830 or 832, where all the Greek manuscripts of the caliph were kept and in which a team of translators worked under the direction of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq. Very nearly the same picture of the Bayt al-Ḥikma appears in Dominique Sourdel's article in *ET*<sup>2</sup>. Later publications describe the Bayt al-Ḥikma as a full-fledged college of the sciences or humanities. There is, however, no evidence for these assertions, and the brief facts mentioned above constitute almost the entirety of the information that we possess on the subject.

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DIMITRI GUTAS – KEVIN VAN BLADEL

## Bookbinding

Several types of **bookbinding**, Ar. *tasfīr* or *tajlīd*, were used in the Islamic world. The art is known through a number of technical treatises but mainly via the study of surviving examples, the dating and localisation of which are complex matters, given that the time at which a book was bound is not necessarily the same as when it was written. Not all Islamic manuscripts were bound, and in cases in which binding did not occur shortly after copying, a binding may have been added upon acquisition or donation to an institution, or to replace a damaged binding; re-use of bindings also occurred quite frequently.

These bindings, meant mainly to protect, covered the most precious manuscripts, and the ornamental possibilities were developed rapidly. In an inventory of al-Qayrawān Mosque, in modern-day Tunisia, drawn up in 691–2/1292–3, we find descriptions of Qurʾān bindings, but nothing is mentioned of bindings for other texts. Indications in other documents suggest, to the contrary, that some manuscripts were not bound at all. Several techniques were used in the Maghrib and the Middle East. With the exception of Christian-Arabic manuscripts, some of which were bound in the Byzantine tradition, the techniques used in the Muslim world differ from those employed in the West. The bindings, themselves precious and fragile, were at times inserted

in leather cases with a vertical opening (Illustration 1). In the Maghrib and other parts of Africa, Qurʾān manuscripts as well as the most popular prayer books were kept in leather bags that were decorated or covered with embroidered velvet. An ornamental cord made the bags easier to transport.

We can distinguish two types of binding used in the Muslim world. The first was used for Qurʾān manuscripts in an oblong format written in the varieties of script collectively known as Kufic and produced until the fifth/eleventh century; these manuscripts were encased in a way that was apparently distinctive to copies of the Qurʾān. Georges Marçais and Louis Poinssot, in their 1948 study, described bindings of this type found in al-Qayrawān. Other discoveries followed, associated with Qurʾān manuscripts preserved in Damascus (but moved to Istanbul) and in Ṣanʿāʾ. This type, thought to resemble Coptic bindings from the second/eighth to the third/ninth century, was apparently known throughout the Islamic world, as the geographically wide-ranging examples suggest. With this sort of binding, the wooden covers were encased in leather and attached to the text-block by sewing strings that held the quires together or by being glued to the end sheets. A rim or wall, also of leather, enclosed the box on the three open sides; a leather strap attached to the lower board was wound around a hook fixed to the edge of the upper cover to close the volume. The inside of the cover was lined with parchment. The covers were decorated by means of stamping or by a technique using strings, a method of ornamentation also found on bindings used for Coptic and Syriac manuscripts. With the string technique, a string was first inserted into a groove carved into the wooden board