

The Impact Of The Socio-Cultural Environment During The Abbasid Dynasty On The Development Of Theological Thought

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ABSTRACT

This article provides information about the development of science and culture during the Abbasid dynasty, the "Mihna" policy, that is, debates about whether the Holy Quran was created or not, the translation of several books on astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, medicine, history, and literature from various languages into Arabic during the reign of Caliph al-Mansur, and the emergence of the palace library that became the basis for the creation of "Bayt al-hikma." The article also presents the views of scholars and researchers on the developed socio-cultural environment and the development of theological thought during the Abbasid dynasty.

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One of the most multifaceted and scientifically controversial topics in the history of Islamic thought is the development of science and culture during the Abbasid dynasty. Some authors try to associate this period only with religious tolerance and the flourishing of science. However, historical reality shows that the intellectual life of this period was a complex process shaped by state policy, sectarian interests, and cultural syntheses.

For two hundred years, the Abbasid Caliphate flourished. The Abbasid Caliphate was especially strong in the 8th-9th centuries. At this time, such powerful caliphs as Mansur (754–755), who founded Baghdad, and al-Ma'mun (813–833), ruled. The "golden age" of the Abbasids falls on the era of Caliph Mu'tazid (892–902).

The Silk Road was a network of trade routes connecting Asia with Europe. Most of these routes passed through the Middle East. This trade route was in Muslim hands. However, the lack of stability during the Umayyad Caliphate prevented the full use of such an important trade route. The Abbasids changed this by building the city of Baghdad at the center of the Silk Road. Its central position allowed the Caliphate to attract merchants from China, the Frankish lands, the Byzantine Empire, India, and Ethiopia. This large flow of trade brought in huge monetary revenues. This contributed greatly to the development of a strong standing army.

In the 9th and 10th centuries, the city of Baghdad became the largest cultural and political center in Asia, and indeed in the world. From the 10th to the 13th centuries, Baghdad was the capital of the Abbasids. After the fall of the Caliphate, although it lost its status as a capital, it did not lose its importance as a cultural center. The Abbasid capital, Baghdad, was a circular city surrounded by two sets of walls. It was a city of

nobility, the residence of the caliph and his administrative capital, a commercial city with developed crafts, and a very large trading center.

Muhammad Zaman (Boston University) argues: “The relationship between the Abbasid caliphs and the scholars was not simply one of cooperation, but rather of selective patronage based on political interests. This process ultimately led to the formation of the Sunni elite”¹. Dr. Zaman’s point is very important, because the caliphs’ sect was not neutral in matters, but rather an active political agent. This situation naturally led to the formation of theological views based on the political conjuncture. For example, the “Mihna” policy, i.e. the debate over whether the Quran was created or not, which began in the form of a lecture, later clearly demonstrates the influence of the state’s position on science and faith.

Hayrettin Yujesoy (professor of the Department of Religious Studies at the Washington University School of Law in St. Louis) writes: “Messianic views, which gained popularity within imperial politics, were transformed into a political tool for religious reforms during the reign of al-Ma’mun. These views served as a means of social mobilization”². This approach shows that theology was activated as a political tool. Thus, theological views were not just formed, but were purposefully constructed and disseminated by the state.

After the accession of the most famous of the Abbasid caliphs, Harun al-Rashid (786-809), major changes occurred in all aspects of social and cultural life. During the reign of Harun al-Rashid, the “House of Wisdom” turned from a place where various literature was stored into a center for translation and research. Famous scholars and researchers who came there had the opportunity not only to get acquainted with books on various topics, but also to read them. During this period, the importance of translation work increased significantly.

Abbasid caliphs such as al-Mansur, Harun al-Rashid, and al-Ma'mun, not only paid special attention to attracting ancient manuscripts and great scholars to their courts, but also showed unparalleled zeal in this regard. As a result, Baghdad soon became a convenient city with great opportunities for scientific activity throughout the caliphate. This, in turn, increased the desire of scholars to create there.

The preservation of manuscripts in the palace became a permanent process during the reign of al-Mansur, one of the Abbasid caliphs, and both their quality and quantity changed radically. In addition to collecting rare manuscripts, al-Mansur began to attract scholars from other countries to his court. Many scholars of various religious beliefs, physicians, chemists, geographers, and engineers, invited from the Gundishapur school in Iran³, served in his court. During the reign of Caliph al-Mansur, a number of books on astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, medicine, history, and literature were translated, and he set aside a special place in his palace to store these unique manuscripts. Thus, the palace library appeared, which became the basis for the creation of the “Bayt al-hikma”.

However, the task of this library was not to provide readers with the necessary literature, but to store the collected rare manuscripts, books brought from different countries and translated into Arabic. During the reign of al-Mansur, this place was not yet called “Bayt al-hikma”.

In 827, al-Ma'mun founded the famous “House of Wisdom” (Bayt al-hikma) in Baghdad, where a large team of experienced translators worked on translating Greek works on mathematics, astronomy, medicine, astrology, and chemistry into Arabic. Also, works such as philosophy, logic, and theology were of particular interest to the caliph, who was very interested in religious matters.

Although the Shiite policy ended after joining Baghdad, al-Ma'mun did not return to the Sunnis. Instead, he began to support the Mu'tazilite doctrine from the state, since he considered their doctrine to be the most acceptable for all currents of Islam. The Mu'tazilites rejected mysticism and the possibility of intuitive knowledge of God. On the contrary, they tried to give theology a philosophical and scientific basis. These ideas were close to the rational-minded al-Ma'mun, who officially accepted the Mu'tazilite dogma of the “creation of the Quran” in 827. In the history of science and culture of the peoples of the Middle East, the “Bayt al-Hikma” built in Baghdad is undoubtedly a major scientific center. “Bayt al-Hikma” in Uzbek means

¹ Zaman, M. (1997). Religion and Politics Under the Early ‘Abbāsids. – p. 106.

² Yucsoy, H. Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam: The ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate in the Early Ninth Century. Studies in Comparative Religion. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009. 212 pp – B. 214.

³ Atayev M. Sharqda dastlabki ilmiy markazlarning shakllanishi va rivojlanishi. <https://www.bukhari.uz/?p=36017&lang=oz>

"House of Wisdom". The "wisdoms" in this phrase refer to a number of sciences of that time, including philosophy, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, literature, and religious sciences. Therefore, "Bayt al-Hikma" was primarily a center of knowledge and translations, where work was carried out in other areas of science, in addition to the sciences listed above. Originally founded as a library, "Bayt al-Hikma" soon became a center for translating the books collected there into Arabic. Later, the greatest scholars and translators of their time gathered around this center and worked. It is worth noting that their core was formed by scholars from Transoxiana and Khorasan. At the same time, on the one hand, this place collected many rare works in Greek, Indian and Persian, on the other hand, the most rare of the collected books were selected, translated into Arabic and put into circulation, and on the third hand, the famous scientists who created important works gathered in the "Bayt al-Hikma", which became the most famous scientific institution of the Middle Ages and became known in scientific literature as the "Baghdad Scientific School" and the "Baghdad Academy".

During the reign of Harun al-Rashid's younger son, al-Amin (809-813), the activity of the "Bayt al-Hikma" somewhat declined, but during the reign of his eldest son, al-Ma'mun, it reached the peak of its development. Al-Ma'mun paid special attention to the "Bayt al-Hikma". As a result, during his reign (813-833), the scientific environment in the "House of Wisdom" developed to an unprecedented extent, where, in addition to translating and commenting on important books in Greek, Persian and Indian languages, independent scientific activity was also carried out and new works were written. Al-Ma'mun was interested in religious sciences, philosophy, and exact sciences, and he himself regularly engaged in them. He also appointed large rewards to translators and scholars for each book they wrote or translated. Under his direct patronage, a large number of books on various subjects arrived at the "House of Wisdom" from Greece, India, Rome, Iran and Merv. Some of them were brought to Baghdad as spoils of military campaigns.

With the support of al-Ma'mun, the best works were selected and translated into Arabic. In general, during this period, translation work was put on the right track and became a well-organized, permanent activity.

A.Ghufur and co-authors write about epistemological approaches to sources of knowledge during the Abbasid era: "During the time of Harun al-Rashid, sources of knowledge were classified in three directions: intellectual knowledge, sensory knowledge, and knowledge through discovery. This classification was integrated into the Quran, hadith, and Sufi thought"⁴. Despite the complexity and multifacetedness of this epistemological classification, its formation depended on religious teachings, political stability, and economic development. The lack of full scientific freedom limited the development of independent ideas.

Ilshtat Nasirov expresses the following critical opinion: "The Abbasids were selective in their adoption of Greek and Persian sciences, adopting only those parts of them that were in accordance with the Sharia. In this process, they adopted not the deep essence of the ancient scientific heritage, but rather its political and ideological benefits"⁵. This idea shows that the Abbasids accepted the scientific heritage in accordance with real historical processes, Sharia and the interests of the state. The historian, "Arab Herodotus" Abu-Hasan al-Ma'sudi, mathematician, author of the theorems of "tangent", "cotangent", "sine", trigonometric concepts Abu-Wafa al-Buzjani, astronomers Ahmad ibn Yusuf and Muhammad ibn Musa ibn Shakir, physicist Abu Ali ibn Al-Haytham and other great scientists worked in the Abbasid state. These scientists paid special attention to the education of the population in accordance with the requirements of the Muslim religion during the Abbasid Caliphate.

It is appropriate to include astronomy among the sciences that developed rapidly during the Abbasid period. During the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mun, two observatories were built under the "House of Wisdom" for observing celestial bodies. The first was built in 828 in the ash-Shammasiya region of Baghdad, and the second in 831 on Mount Qasiyun near Damascus. The activities of both observatories were carried out by astronomers from Transoxiana and Khorasan, whom al-Ma'mun gathered in his palace, including Muhammad (Musa) al-Khwarizmi, Ahmad al-Farghani, Yahya ibn Abu Mansur, Khalid ibn Abd al-Malik al-Marwarrudi, Ahmad al-

⁴ Ghofur A., Nasution K., Efendi M. (2021). The Epistemology of Medieval Islamic Education. – p. 74

⁵ Насыров И, Античное наследие в системе ценностных ориентиров аббасидских халифов в VIII–IX вв. // Философская антропология. Античное наследие в системе ценностных ориентиров Аббасидских халифов в VIII–IX вв. 2019. Т. 5, № 2. С. 62–88. p. 74.

Marwazi, al-Abbas al-Jawhari and others. Yahya ibn Abu Mansur of Merv was the founder and head of the observatory in the ash-Shammasiya region of Baghdad. He reported on the activities of the observatory to Muhammad al-Khwarizmi (783-850), the director of the Bayt al-Hikma. After Yahya's death in 831, al-Khwarizmi also directed this observatory and actively participated in the observations there. The Khorasan scholar Khalid ibn Abd al-Malik al-Marwarrudi was the organizer, director, and participant in the experiments conducted at the observatory on Mount Qasiyun near Damascus. Ahmad al-Farghani (c. 797-865) was also one of the most famous scholars at the Baghdad scientific center. Currently, eight works by al-Farghani are known, all of which are related to astronomy. His "Book of Celestial Movements and the General Science of Astrology" was translated into Latin twice in Europe in the 12th century and into other European languages in the 13th century, and its Latinized name "Alfraganus" was widely distributed in the West for several centuries.

Also, the development of mathematics in the Arab-Muslim world was influenced by the Greeks and Indians, who adopted the decimal number system using "zero" from the Indians. The first work on arithmetic written in Arabic was the treatise "Kitab al-jabr wal-muqabala" by the great Central Asian scholar Muhammad al-Khwarizmi, who worked in Baghdad in the 9th century. Muammar (Mustafa) Halilovich also analyzed the influence of the "Ikhwan as-Safa" community on the development of epistemology and social thought during the Abbasid era. "The ideas of the Ikhwan al-Safa were developed to preserve freedom of thought against the statist schools of theology, which saw knowledge as an encyclopedic and means of ensuring social justice," he writes⁶. This idea confirms the existence of independent schools of knowledge that were formed in conflict with religious theories.

The socio-cultural life of the Abbasid dynasty was of decisive importance for the intellectual history of Islam, and its influence on the development of theological and epistemological views was a wide-ranging, but complex and contradictory process. Some authors try to idealize this period as a "silent flowering of science," but critical analysis shows that these views have a number of methodological problems.

Caiyan Wang, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, argues that "academic centers such as the House of Wisdom were established on the basis of religious tolerance, economic stability, and political patronage, and they facilitated the development of science during the Abbasid period"⁷. While this approach is based on institutional development, it does not critically examine the complex relationship between science and religion. The House of Wisdom was organized and managed by the state, and the development of science there was often closely linked to state ideology and caliphate policy.

Muhammad Manazir Ahsan's study of social life states that "social culture and intellectual life during the Abbasid period developed rapidly, but at the heart of this cultural growth was the dominance of an elite class"⁸. This view complicates the issue of the diffusion of knowledge in society and the acceptance of theoretical concepts by the masses. The development of theology and philosophy occurred mainly within the court and among the patronage of scholars, which led to social stratification and censorship of knowledge.

Bashir's analysis emphasizes: "The Abbasid intellectual environment was shaped not only by Islamic scholars, but also by poetry and the literary elite, which were alternative sources of intellectual maturity"⁹. However, the author summarizes the influence of this literary environment on epistemological orientation. In fact, although social criticism and philosophical thought were expressed through literature, their influence on religious theories was limited and often marginalized by the dominant sectarian institutions.

Thus, socio-cultural life during the Abbasid period appeared as both a supporting and a limiting factor in relation to theological and epistemological views. State policy, scientific institutions, sectarian competition, and social stratification must be analyzed as important dynamics determining the development of science. A one-sided idealization of science as a "flourish" eliminates its critical features.

⁶ Halilović M, Putopisi u islamu i njihov doprinos razvoju socijalne misli. 2020. – p. 52.

⁷ Wang, C. (2024). The House of Wisdom: Intellectual Achievements of the Abbasid Caliphate. International Journal of Education and Humanities. – p. 3.

⁸ Ahsan, M. (1973). Social Life under the Abbasids, 170–289/786–902. – p. 44.

⁹ Bashir, A.-R. M. (2020). Muslim Intellectual Life in Eighth Century Baghdad. Islamic Sciences. – p. 12.

The influence of socio-cultural life on the development of theological and epistemological views during the Abbasid dynasty was a complex, multifaceted, and dynamic process, and characterizing it only as a one-sided “flourishment of science” leads to methodological shortcomings.

Professor Wael Hallaq (Palestine - specialist in Islamic law and the history of Islamic thought. Professor at Columbia University) notes: “In the early Abbasid period, especially under al-Ma'mun, the state took an active position in religious matters and sought to centralize theological views by attempting to affirm the creation of the Quran”¹⁰. This idea shows the state's desire to control not only science, but also the teachings of religion. As a result, theological ideas were formed not only on an intellectual basis, but also according to political pressures and demands.

Littmann Enno, on the other hand, writes about the influence of socio-cultural life on epistemological views: “In the Abbasid cultural environment, the sources of knowledge were interpreted differently, the Sufis emphasized revelation, the Mu'tazilites emphasized reason, and the Sunni scholars emphasized narration. This diversity shows the scale and diversity of approaches to knowledge”¹¹. However, the author does not analyze the dynamic environment formed by intense competition, debate, and sometimes political violence between these directions in sufficient depth.

Abdullah Ahmad Methqal Al-Shiyab, on the other hand, emphasizes the influence of social stratification in the cultural environment on the development of scientific and theological views, writing: “In Abbasid society, knowledge and science were mainly concentrated among the court and the elite of scholars, and the spread of mass knowledge was limited”¹². This point of view shows that the development of knowledge and science was not universal, but occurred in the context of social stratification and interests. Thus, although socio-cultural life during the Abbasid era created ample opportunities for the development of theology and epistemology, political, economic, and social interests played a decisive role in this process. The balance between science and religion was ensured not only ideologically, but also in practice through a strict mechanism of control and distribution. Therefore, it is insufficient from a historical and scientific perspective to describe the intellectual development of the Abbasid period in only a positive and idealized way.

Based on the above information, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1 The unification of countries and peoples with different levels of socio-economic and cultural development into one state during the Caliphate, the establishment of close ties between them, and the flourishing of economic life gave impetus to the development of internal and external trade relations. This factor, in turn, created the necessary conditions for the exchange of cultures and the development of science.

2 At the time when Islam was formed as a religion, the Arabs were a people consisting of semi-nomadic tribes. Naturally, the Arabs also immediately adopted the advanced culture of the peoples of the countries they conquered. This culture was a culture that was adapted to Islam based on the culture of the peoples who formed the Caliphate and embodied it.

3 The Arab caliphs took scientists, poets, and artists under their patronage. This behavior of the caliphs can be understood not as patronage, but as following the right path together with the whole society. The patronage of the caliphs for the development of science and culture undoubtedly ensured the high level of development of Arab-Muslim culture.

4 The foundation of the “Bayt al-Hikma”, which occupied a certain part of the palace of the Baghdad caliphs, was created during the reign of Caliph al-Mansur, and under the patronage of Harun al-Rashid, it was significantly expanded, developed, and began to operate under its historical name “Bayt al-Hikma”. Al-Ma'mun, however, gathered famous scholars there, provided them with all-round support, ensured its rise to the highest level of development and its transformation into a unique scientific school for that time.

The influence of Arab-Muslim culture on the culture of the peoples of the world is so incomparable that, in addition to the countries of Asia and North Africa, which were part of the Abbasid dynasty, even

¹⁰ Wael B. Hallaq. The Formation of Islamic Law. – :Routledge, 2004. – p. 76.

¹¹ Claude Gilliot, Education, Learning, early islam., Education and Learning in the Early Islamic World. Littmann E, The Transmission of Knowledge in Early Islam. – Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. – p. 58 <https://archive.org/details/EducationAndLearningInEarlyIslamicWorld/page/n5/mode/2up>.

¹² Abdallah Ahmad Methqal Al-Shiyab. The Abbasid caliphs: their role in the development of islamic politics and culture. SDGsReview | Florida, USA | VOL. 5| e04240| pag: 01-15| 2025.

European countries were not left out of this influence. Culture is a universal phenomenon. There is no pure culture that belongs to only one nation, created only by one nation. Although the main part of each national culture is created by this nation itself, it also has a share and influence of the universal culture created by the peoples of the world.

For many years, medieval literature has incorrectly interpreted the creators of the culture that formed and developed in the 8th-12th centuries as only the Arabs. In fact, it is extremely relevant today to recognize that this culture is a common culture created by all the peoples of the countries that were part of the Arab Caliphate, and that our great ancestors also made a great contribution to it.

In conclusion, it can be said that the remarkable feature and significant aspect of science and culture during the Abbasid era is that great attention was paid to scientific creativity and research in all areas. Ideological and dogmatic issues were put to an end, and the human factor was elevated. Secularism, not religiosity, was ensured. The scholars of that time were not strictly bound to Islamic beliefs, and even did not adhere to official Islamic dogmas, but rose to the level of free thinking. They confirm that man is the highest product of the Creator.

Today, one of the urgent tasks of today is to objectively illuminate and fully study the role of the cultural heritage created by the Muslim world in the socio-spiritual life of not only the Eastern but also the Western countries, as well as the enormous contribution of the Abbasid statehood to the development of human civilization.

Today, the relevance of studying Arab-Muslim culture lies in the fact that the cultural-spiritual heritage and cultural values of the Muslim East, and in general, many Asian and African countries, are gaining importance in modern society, its spirituality and ideology.

On this basis, it can be concluded that socio-cultural life during the Abbasid dynasty had a great influence on the development of theological and epistemological views. The relationship between science and religion has always served to develop knowledge and thought, which in turn has manifested itself in disputes, competition, and political imperatives.

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