



PERPustakaan Nasional Malaysia  
100, Jalan Sultan Ismail  
62500 Putrajaya

DIHIMPUNG DAN DITAMPILKAN  
BERSEKUTUAN DENGAN PERUSAHAAN  
PUBLIK BERSEKUTUAN MALAYSIA

ALBUKHTHUMUDDIN, DOKTER HUKUM DAN HUKUM  
ISLAM, HUKUM & CIVILIZATION IN THE  
HUMANIZATION OF THE SOCIETY OF MALAYSIA

ALBERTA ABU HILMI

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA  
MUIJARRAM 1429 / MARCH 2002



## APPROVAL PAGE

Thesis Title: Book Culture in Islamic Society: A Historical Analysis of the Early  
'Abbasid Period with Special Reference to al-Jahiz's *Kitab al-Hayawan*

Author: Azenita Abdullah

Date: April 3, 2002

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master (M.A.) in **Islamic Civilization**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ismail Marcinkowski  
Supervisor

This thesis was submitted to ISTAC and is accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master (M.A.) in **Islamic Civilization**

Prof. Dr. Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud  
Deputy Director  
and Student Academic Advisor

This thesis was submitted to ISTAC and is accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master (M.A.) in **Islamic Civilization**

Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas  
Founder-Director



الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا  
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA  
بِوَسِيْلَةِ اِسْلَامِ اِنْبَارِ اِيْجَسِيَا مِلْدِيْسِيَا



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT & CIVILIZATION  
(ISTAC)

BOOK CULTURE IN ISLAMIC SOCIETY:  
A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EARLY 'ABBĀSID PERIOD WITH  
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AL-JĀHĪZ'S *KITĀB AL-HAYAWĀN*

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC  
THOUGHT & CIVILIZATION (ISTAC) IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ART

AZENITA ABDULLAH

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA  
MUHARRAM 1423/ MARCH 2002

## DEDICATION

*To my beloved husband Rohaizat Abd Jalil  
and my daughter Nur 'Alia –*

*Thank you for giving me the much-needed support, understanding  
and companionship all this time.*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praise be to Allah, it is with His Grace and Mercy this thesis finally came into fruition. Peace and blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and upon his Family and all his Companions.

First and foremost, I would like to take this opportunity to record my appreciation to Y.M. Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, the Founder-Director of ISTAC, for giving me the privilege to seek education at this beautiful and inspiring institution. In relation to this work especially, I would also like to acknowledge him for founding such a scholarly library whose collections are invaluable to researchers in various areas of Islamic studies. Almost all of my references are collected from this library and in fact, the library has become a source of inspiration for me to venture into this area of research.

Prof. Dr. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, the Deputy Director of ISTAC, has been very helpful to me in many ways. His advice and personal counsel has been instrumental in my academic development at ISTAC. I am very thankful to him for granting me the opportunity to continue with my M.A. in Islamic Civilization at ISTAC after completing my Master in Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree at IIUM in 1999. He was also responsible for bringing me into this Institute as a student and later as a staff.

To my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ismail Marcinkowski, I wish to record my sincere thanks and appreciation for his helpful comments, suggestions and improvement on my work.

A special note of thanks goes to Dr. Siraje Ssekamanya for his invaluable assistance which provided me with a smooth reading of *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* and for reading the entire work and made innumerable corrections and suggestions.

I wish also to thank all the remaining ISTAC Professors and academic members, especially Prof. Dr. Ala'Eddin Kharoofa, for their concern and encouragement along the way; to Tuan Haji Mat Ali Mat Daud, the ISTAC Registrar, and Pn. Nooraini Yusoff, Senior Assistant Registrar, for their concern and relentless support; and all the administrative and library staff for their assistance.

My deep appreciation also goes to all my colleagues and friends, especially Megawati Moris and Norzakiah Saparmin, who never fail to show their continuous support and understanding in facing the difficulties throughout my Master's program.

Last but not least, I wish to express my gratitude to my parents for their continuous support, patience and understanding throughout my education, particularly awaiting for the completion of my master's program at ISTAC.

## ABSTRACT

The present study proposes to examine the role of books in the society. Books are regarded more than receptacle of ideas and thoughts, they are the oldest means of communication which have been and still recognized as a major factor in the growth and development of culture and civilization. In an attempt to discuss the role of books the study begins with the examination of the conception of books. It looks into the usage of the term *al-kitāb* in the Qur'ān. The study suggests that the compilation of the Qur'ān into a format that we have in our hands today is imperative for Muslims to conceptualize the significance and development of books in the Islamic tradition. Three major aspects of book production are discussed; the composition and transmission of books, scribes and booksellers, and libraries. These three areas manifest the civilization of books in the Muslim world, meaning to say, how books play great role in the development of an Islamic culture. The main task of the study is to introduce al-Jāhiz and his work, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* and to examine his contributions to the subject of present research. In *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* al-Jāhiz discusses the nature and importance of books. In addition, he also presents his critics, and responses to many issues related to books. Al-Jāhiz exemplifies the real character of a bibliophile, who devoted his entire life in the pursuit of knowledge and adored books more than other things in this world. On top of that, he was an excellent writer, who wrote number of works including two treatises that discusses the importance of books. Al-Jāhiz's insightful exposition of the importance and value of books is divided into the followings; books as the best means of expression, effective style of writing, the virtues of books, the habit of collecting and beautifying books, the problem of translation and editing, and his advice to writers on their purpose of writing. Following him there are a number of Muslims scholars who writes on the same subject as part of their major works or as a single work.



In the name of God,  
Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

Proclaim! (or Read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher,  
Who created- created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood: Proclaim! And  
thy Lord is Most Bountiful, - He Who taught (the use of) the Pen, - Taught man that  
which he knew not.

(*Al-'Alaq: 1-5*)

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

A book is not just simply a physical object. It is a living cultural entity. It preserves the thoughts and ideas of the older generations and makes them available to the later generations. From the Islamic perspective a "book" is not just physical but something spiritual. The Qur'ân is "The Book" for the Muslims which provides the principles and guidance governing all aspects of their life.

In the West the study of books as a vehicle of culture has been common and fruitful. This is not so in the world of Islam particularly in the present days. Western scholars have spent a great deal of time and money studying various aspects related to books.<sup>1</sup> The studies do not merely focus on studying the technical aspects of book production such as the calligraphy, book binding and printing but includes other areas for instance on the professions that grew out from this enterprise such as the scribes,<sup>2</sup> booksellers<sup>3</sup>, book trade<sup>4</sup>, book collectors and libraries<sup>5</sup> and including the care of books<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> An important collection of classic works on the history of books has been recently published which includes studies on printing, book trade, book collecting and bibliophile, book design and production and also on book illustration.

<sup>2</sup> Profound studies dealing with book production in the Islamic world were carried out by Sir Thomas W. Arnold and Adolf Grohmann, see *The Islamic Book: a Contribution to its Arts and History from the VII-XVIII Century* (1929). In addition, see also Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), and Christopher De Hamel, *Medieval Craftsmen. Scribes and Illuminators* (London: British Museum Press, 1992). See also a survey of contemporary scholarship on all aspects of bookmaking by G. Endress in his *Grundriss der arabischen Philologie* edited by Wolfdietrich Fischer (Wiesbaden, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> See for instance, Charles Welsh, *A Bookseller of the Last Century* (London: Thoemmes Press, 1997). See also Henry Curwen, *A History of Booksellers* (London: Thoemmes Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Adolf Growoll, *The Profession of Bookselling* (London: Thoemmes Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Edward Edwards, *Libraries and Founders of Libraries* (London: Thoemmes Press, 1997) See also Olof Pedersen, *Archives and Libraries in the Ancient Near East 1500-300 B.C.* (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> See for instance John C. Clark. *The Care of Books* (London: Thoemmes Press, 1997).

The situation, however, was quite different in the early period of Islam. A survey of early Islamic literature on this subject shows that the scholars had much interest and spent tremendous effort writing various aspects of the subject. In the early third century of the Hijrah for instance, al-Jāhiz (d.255 A.H. / 869 C.E.), the prolific writer, wrote an important treatise on the praise of books "*Fī Madh al-kutub wa 'lḥathth 'alā jami'ha'*" ("On the Praise of Books and the Promotion of their Collection"). In addition, in his *Kitāb al-Hayawān* he offered a lengthy section on the topic of "books." Although, the main focus of this most reknown work of al-Jāhiz is on the animals, in the beginning of it he discusses about books, the value of the book as companion, a vehicle of learning, and a versatile tool for the success of all human endeavors.

Despite the fact that there have been many studies done in the previous years, there is still much to be explored. Amongst others, for instance, not much has been written on the role of books in the development of culture and civilization in the Islamic world.<sup>7</sup> Studies on aspects such as the physical properties of books which includes the binding, script, calligraphy; the method of production; the intellectual content and use should also be seriously and systematically surveyed. Such studies will be highly useful to the student of history especially, in order to understand and appreciate that books, as the oldest instrument of communication, have been and still are the greatest factor in the origin, growth and preservation of culture. They contain knowledge, ideas and messages without which an advanced culture cannot exist.

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<sup>7</sup> Recently, the Library of Congress convened an international conference on the role of books in the development of civilization in the Islamic world. The papers presented throughout the conference were later published. See George Atiyeh, ed., *The Book in the Islamic World* (Albany: State University of New York Press and The Library of Congress, 1995). Henceforth cited as *Book in the Islamic World*.

Pedersen in his book entitled *The Arabic Book*<sup>1</sup> points out the reason why there are not many studies on this subject. The main reason, he says, is primarily because of the resources that are scanty and difficult to find. For instance, there is no single major medieval source that he can refer to in his study and he had finally to draw the information from various primary sources. These sources include the biographies, literary history, *hadith*, the Qur'ān, historical chronicles, poetry and geographical literature, none of which had been extensively studied by the earlier scholars for such purpose. Besides this, in relation to the current trend in our society today, it is the age of computer and other communication technologies which ultimately give less emphasis to the importance of books in our daily life. Although we cannot deny that these technologies bring some benefits to our society, but they are also contributing to the destruction of our culture. Books are the most reliable medium of communication of ideas from the past to present and to the future.

The early 'Abbāsīd period (3<sup>rd</sup>- 4<sup>th</sup> century of Hijrah), is the most inspiring period in the entire history of Islamic books. It was the period that saw the tremendous development and progress in the method of book production which include the transcription, editing and proof reading, script, binding and calligraphy. The introduction of paper and the progress of paper mills in Baghdad had provided a great impetus to the art of book making and distribution of books in the society. The flourishing of book making industry is also reflected in the number of libraries that were established during that period and also the book trade that became one of the major business activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984). Henceforth cited as *Arabic Book*.

## 1. THE QUR'ĀNIC PERSPECTIVE OF BOOKS

The Qur'ān is *al-kitāb* (the "Book") that preserve the Words of Allah, the fountainhead of our life. In Arabic, the word *al-kitāb* refers to a variety of meanings. Generally, it means collection of writings.<sup>9</sup> Al-Lahyāni says, it could refer to "something written." In the Qur'ān, the word *al-kitāb*, as al-Zajāj interprets, could refer to the *Taurāt*. When the Qur'ān uses *kitab Allah*, it means the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, it could also refer to the original or undistorted *Taurāt*. The Qur'ān uses also the word *al-kitāb* to refer to the record of deeds committed by every human beings that will be presented on the Day of Judgment to act as the basis for punishment or rewards. Finally, the word *al-kitāb* could also mean order, or decree or injunction.<sup>10</sup>

Jacques Berque suggests in his article the term *kitāb* means nothing more than "written." To precisely determine the exact meaning whether it refers to a simple inscription, or to a holy writ, or to the fate as pre-ordained by God, or to the roll that those called to justice in the Last Judgment, or else to the Qur'ān proper, the context has to be considered.<sup>11</sup>

The compilation of the Qur'ān carries a great influence on the Muslims perspective of books. The Qur'ān was not revealed to us in the written as what we possess in our hands today. The Companions spend a great deal of effort to compile the Qur'ān for various reasons. The Qur'ān in the beginning was mainly kept in the memory of the Prophet and the Companions. In some cases, it was also written down on simple materials such as bones, leaves, hides and animal skins. After the demise of the Prophet

<sup>9</sup> See Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 1 ( Beirut: Dar Sader, 1992), 698.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 698-699.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Berque, "The Koranic Text: From Revelation to Compilation" in *Book in the Islamic World*, 17. Henceforth cited as *Koranic Text*.

the need to collect all the “fragments” of the Qur’ān was intensified particularly during the battle of Yamāma many of the Qur’ān reciters or memorizers were killed.

‘Umar al-Khattab رضى الله عنه suggested to the caliph Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه to prepare a complete, written text of the Qur’ān so that nothing of the revelation would be lost. Although initially caliph Abū Bakr hesitated to act for fear of doing something the Prophet did not do, ‘Umar convinced him of the need. So he commanded one of the Prophet’s secretaries, Zayd b. Thābit رضى الله عنه to search and collect all the fragments of the Qur’ān and assemble them together. He collected all the fragments of the Qur’ān “whether written on palm branches or thin stones or preserved in the hearts of men,” and he wrote it out on sheets (*ṣuḥuf*) of equal size and gave them to the caliph.

On the other hand, some scholars believed that the compilation of the Qur’ān had already started during the time of the Prophet. After his migration to Madinah he appointed some of the Companions as his scribes, to record not only the administrative document but also the divine revelation. Of particular example that proved the Qur’ān had already been written down and compiled during the time of the Prophet was Zaid ibn Thābit, to whom the following statement is attributed: “We were at the Messenger of God’s [house] to collate the Qur’ān from disparate scraps.”<sup>12</sup>

As far as the materials used for writing are concerned, initially a variety of materials such as palm branches, thin stones and animal skin were used. Parchment and papyrus were widely used before the manufacture of paper but they were too expensive and difficult to procure. A kind of leather or parchment from the skins of animals like sheep and goat were also used but normally only for government documents and copies of the Qur’ān because of its expensive price.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 18.

The Qur'ān was finally collated into a volume called *muṣḥaf* indicating that the setting together of the manuscript into leaves, *ṣuḥuf*, the plural *ṣaḥīfah*. The term *ṣuḥuf* was commonly used to designate a plate made out of wood used for feeding several number of persons, but the diminutive *ṣaḥīfah* used to refer to page, or sheet, or folio.<sup>13</sup> Until present, the 'Book' wherein the Islamic revelation has been collected was to carry three names:

- *al-Kitāb*, where the dominant connotation seems to refer, in the absence of contextual precision, to the archetype held by God;
- Koran (Qur'ān), which was a phonic unit subject to a repetitive, continuous plasmody; and
- *Muṣḥaf*, as a visual object, an assembly of sheets, a "book," as we now say, which brought among the Arabs the revolution of the book, a revolution that followed, other things being equal, the revolution of *tanzīl*, or revelation.<sup>14</sup>

As stated earlier, the Qur'ān plays an important role in forming the idea of "books" for the Muslims. That is to say, the conception of books is deeply derived from the Qur'ān. In addition, it did not only shape the idea in the Muslims mind but influenced the conduct or *adab* of a Muslim towards books. The Qur'ān and Ḥadīth as the primary sources of knowledge for Muslims. They are not merely treated as the sources of faith but look upon as the sources of every branches of Islamic knowledge.

## 2. BIBLIOPHILISM IN EARLY 'ABBĀSID SOCIETY

The term bibliophile refers to a person who is very enthusiastic about books. A bibliophile demonstrates certain habits or character towards book; for instance, he or she is very interested in buying, copying and collecting books for his personal use and may sometimes extended them to others to use. The habit of acquiring books is developed

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> *Koranic Text*, 22.

because of the great value attached to them not only as vessels of knowledge, but also because for them, they are better companion compared to human beings.

As mentioned earlier the early 'Abbāsīd period is regarded as the most significant period in the history of books in Islam. One of the leading Orientalists, Gibb, divides this glorious period into two phases; first that is from the beginning of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate up to the time of caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (170-193/786-809). This period covers the rich development of Islamic literature. The next phase covers the time of al-Ma'mūn and his two successors, during which the development of Islamic literature was characterized mainly by the influence and assimilation of foreign elements namely Greek and Persian.<sup>15</sup>

The great interest in books among Muslims especially during these two periods was remarkably manifested in the establishment of public and private libraries throughout the Islamic centers, the feverish activity of book lovers and book collectors, the multiplication and circulation of books on an unprecedented scale and finally a flourishing book-trade. The enthusiasm of book lovers is also evidenced by the care they lavished on the beautiful and tasteful binding of their literary treasures and on their illustration and illumination.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> H.A.R. Gibb, *Arabic Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 36-37. Henceforth cited as *Gibb*. For more details about the influences of foreign elements in the development of Islamic sciences please refer to recent study by Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society, 2<sup>nd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> / 8<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> See Sh. Inayatullah, "Bibliophilism in Medieval Islam," *Islamic Culture* 12 (1938), 154. Cited henceforth as *Bibliophilism*.



As one historian writes, "to dwell at length on the literary history of Baghdad would amount to writing a history of Muslim science and literature".<sup>17</sup> The amount of literature especially after the invention of printing was tremendous.

Ibn Nadīm, the famous bibliographer of the 'Abbāsīd period, in his so-called catalogue, *Fihrist*, listed thousands of titles in various subjects together with the authors' background. The 'Abbāsīd scholars contributed tremendously to the number of primary sources and classical works in various fields namely, the Qur'ānic studies, jurisprudence, scholastic theology, grammar, lexicography, rhetoric, and literature, as well as in philosophy, science, medicine, geography, astronomy and music.

The 'Abbāsīd caliphs undoubtedly played a major role in the promotion of learning and tremendous growth of Islamic books. Besides that they were the patrons of scholarship, by financing the studies of the scholars, participating in the intellectual discourse, and sending representatives to several places to search for manuscripts for the caliph's library. A good example of their patronage of writing is that, under the instruction of caliph al-Mansūr, the famous *Kalilah wa Dimnah* was translated from Persian into Arabic by Ibn Muqaffa. The translation movement particularly from Greek and Persian into Arabic is the most vital factor that led the tremendous development of literature during this period.

Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd made several advancements in the promotion of science and literature during his time. His most important contribution was the establishment of *Bayt al-Hikmah*, the House of Wisdom. It is said that he established the *Bayt al-Hikmah* with twofold motives; first to preserve the books already collected and secondly to facilitate greater progress in learning activities. He appointed experts to be charged with

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<sup>17</sup> See S. Khuda Bukhsh, "A Historical Sketch of Muslim Learning" in *Contributions to the History of Islamic Civilization*, vol.1 (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1929). Henceforth cited as *Muslim Learning*.

the task of translation in the *Bayt al-Hikmah*. Faḍl ibn Naubakht was in charge of Persian books meanwhile, Yūhanna ibn Māsawaih was entrusted with Greek books. The caliph showed extreme liberality towards learned men. He bestowed on one occasion to Sufyān ibn 'Uyai-nah one hundred thousand *dirhams* and on another two hundred *dirhams* to Ishāq of Mosul and he gave Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣah for a poem five thousand *dinars*, a robe of honor, a horse from his own stud and ten Greek slaves.<sup>18</sup>

It is not until the time of Caliph al-Ma'mūn (198/ 813) that we find the literary movement in the full swing. The caliph took active part in the religious and philosophical discussions and was equally interested in pure literature (*adab*), philosophy and exact sciences. Born by a Persian mother, he is described as having a natural inclination towards Persian culture. This tendency was strongly emphasized during his stay at Marv in the early days of his caliphate. He is said had taken the Sāsānid king, Ardashir as a model in his governance.<sup>19</sup> Fascinated by the Persian intellectual heritage, he commissioned serious study and preservation of Persian works. Besides Persian, he also had strong interest in Greek culture particularly because of the Greeks' extensive reliance on the application of rationality. In the *Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadīm mentions an account from which the reason why al Ma'mūn became so interested with Greek philosophy and sciences. It is said that al-Ma'mūn had dream of meeting a wise man who claimed himself Aristotle and explained to him what is reason. As an output of the dream al-Ma'mūn sent his people, amongst them al-Ḥajjāj ibn Maṭar, Ibn al-Baṭriq and Salmān the director of *Bayt al-Hikmah*, to Byzantine to acquire books on Greek philosophy for translation into Arabic.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 293.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> See Bayard Dodge, trans., *The Fihrist of Ibn Nadim*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 583-584. It is said, at first, the emperor Leo the Armenian, (813-820 C.E.) refused to give them books, but finally he fulfilled the request made by al-Ma'mūn's representatives.

Caliph al-Ma'mūn's successor, al-Mu'tasim (218-227/ 833-842) was more of a warrior than a scholar and we have to wait until the reign of al-Wāthiq Billāh (227-232/ 842-847) for the tread of literary activity to be taken up again. Al-Wāthiq was a tolerant prince and devoted his attention to the translation of foreign books. Although al-Wathiq's successor, al-Mutawakkil Billāh (232-247/ 847-861) did not share the same view with al-Wāthiq, he continued the task of promoting the study and translation of foreign books. However, his reign marked the end of the glorious period of 'Abbāsīd caliphate.<sup>21</sup>

From these royal book-lovers and patrons of learning, we now turn to their subjects, among whom we find many who treasured their books more than any thing else and found their greatest delight in their serene company. Among these are mentioned in the third century, the famous writer al-Jāhīz, Faṭḥ ibn Khāqān a courtier of the caliph al-Mutawakkil and the judge Ismā'il bin Ishāq.

Al-Jāhīz, one of the most prominent literary figures of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.H. was a voracious reader. It is said that there is no book, whatever its subject-matter, ever passed through his hands, without having him reading from cover to cover. In addition to the books he could buy and copy, he also used to borrow books from the booksellers on deposit and devoured them as fast as he could. There is ample evidence of his vast and multifarious reading in the numerous writings that have come down to us from his facile pen. It is even reported that he met a true bibliophile's death, because the books which he loved so much were the cause of his death. It was his habit to heap around him all the books which he needed for his studies. One day a heap of books fell down upon him and caused his death.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Muslim Learning*, 298-299.

<sup>22</sup> *Bibliophilism*, 164, See also Pinto, 215.

Al-Faḥḥ ibn Khāqān, a favorite of the caliph al-Mutawakkil also made a significant collection, famous for the large number and rare beauty of its books, and was open to the scholars who desired to benefit from it. He always carried a book with him, tucked up in his sleeve; and whenever he found a spare moment he would take it out and begin to read it. Another book-lover who was also in the habit of carrying a book in the sleeves, was Abū Dā'ūd al-Sijistānī, the compiler of a well-known *Kitāb al-Sunan*, a collection of traditions. In order to be able to carry books of bigger size, he used to order garments with extra-large sleeves.<sup>23</sup>

Because of their love of books, Muslims always speak about books with great affection and respect and looked upon them as faithful friends. They did not regard them as merely repositories of knowledge and means of instruction, but also as something endowed with human personality pulsating with the warmth of life. There is hardly an anthology in the Arabic language which does not contain pieces of poetry in praise and appreciation of books.<sup>24</sup>

A book-lover refers to his books in the following words;

“We have companions of whose conversation we never tired. They are intelligent and trustworthy, whether they be present or absent.”

“They give us the benefit of their knowledge - the knowledge of past times and the benefit of their wisdom, their instruction and their sound judgement.”

“We do not fear any disorder or ill treatment on their part; nor have we to guard ourselves against their tongue or hand.”

“If you said that they were dead, you would not be wrong; and if you were to say that they are alive, even then you could not be contradicted.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Bibliophilism*, 166.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

It is said also:

“What a good companion a book is when you happen to be alone with it!  
You can find consolation with it, even if those whom you loved have betrayed you!”<sup>26</sup>

The booklovers would always find books as their loyal companions regardless of any circumstances, as someone used to say:

“The book is a companion who does not betray, does not annoy nor annoy nor make reproaches when harshly treated.”<sup>27</sup>

The poet al-Mutannabi describes this companionship in the following words;

“The most honourable seat in this world is in the saddle of a horse, and the best companion will always be a book.”<sup>28</sup>

The Arabs used to attach great value to fighting and arms. Books sometimes is considered of equal value with arms, as al-Muḥallabi advised his son;

“My sons! Whenever you stand in the market before a shop, stand only before those where weapons and books are sold.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

### 3. AIMS AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the present study is to demonstrate the role of books in the Islamic society. To accomplish this aim the study focuses on the most significant period in Islamic history, the early 'Abbāsid caliphate from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H.. Throughout Islamic history, written tradition proceeds alongside with oral transmission, people relied heavily on the oral communication, except for a few things like business contracts and agreements. Nonetheless, despite having such position in the society it is still valuable in its own right and regarded as a representation of the oral transmission and endowed with great respect and love. Books are considered as part of everyday life and were treasured with great love and respect. The Islamic view of the book is essentially derived from their view of the Qur'ān, as a source of authority, beliefs and knowledge.

The study of books here will initially begin with explaining the word *kitāb* from the Islamic perspective and proceed with a brief study on the bibliophilism in the early 'Abbāsid society. The second chapter will focus on the production of books in the Muslim world encompassing the following sections; authorship, the profession of book scribes and booksellers and finally on the formation of libraries.

The third chapter will introduce al-Jāhīz and his most famous work, *Kitāb al-Hayawān*, as the source of study of book culture during the early 'Abbāsid period. The final chapter will focus on reading selected parts of *Kitāb al-Hayawān*, with the aim of exposing his ideas on this subject. It is hoped that this study will be able to bring to light al-Jāhīz's contribution to the study of books, references to which are scattered in short articles and allusions in works written with a different purpose.

Although the focus of the study is self-explanatory, as the title suggests, yet a few words of clarification are nevertheless called for. First, the notion “‘Abbāsīd” employed here is neither political nor a chronological designation, but a cultural one. Meaning to say that the present study tries to capture how the people led their lives during that time. In addition, the early ‘Abbāsīd society is understood here as the period that begins with the inception of ‘Abbāsīd rule in 132/ 750 to approximately the death of al-Ma’mūn in 218/ 833. As mentioned above, this period is known as the most excellent and significant period in the history of book production. Nevertheless, certain developments that occurred following the reign of al-Ma’mūn will also be noted. Second, the study does not attempt to discuss the artistic or illuminative nature of the production of Islamic book, such as book ornamentations and binding, miniatures, pen-drawing. Instead it focuses on the aspects that contributed to the rise of book culture in the Islamic society.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE COMPOSITION AND TRANSMISSION OF BOOKS IN THE EARLY 'ABBĀSID PERIOD

According to Ibn Khaldūn there are two key factors that affect the growth of book production in Islamic society; firstly, strong ruling governments that support the activity and secondly, civilizational growth. The disappearance of these two factors will significantly affect the book production enterprise in the society, as was the case in Baghdad particularly during 3<sup>rd</sup>- 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H. for instance. We have already mentioned that 'Abbāsīd caliphs played an important role which affected the tremendous growth and development of book production at that time. The rise of scribal profession (*al-warrāq*) was a high point in the "Civilization of the book" in the Islamic society and, as Ibn Khaldūn noted, this was the result of the increasing demand for writing and transmitting books. He states;

Formerly [people] were concerned with scholarly writings and [official] records. They were copied, bound and corrected with the help of transmission technique and with accuracy. The reason for this was the importance of the [ruling] dynasty and the existence of the things that depend on sedentary culture. All that has disappeared at the present time as the result of the disappearance of the dynasties and the decrease of civilization. In Islam it had formerly reached tremendous proportions in the Iraq and in Spain. All of it depends on civilization, on the extent of the [ruling] dynasties, and on the demand existing in [the dynasty] for it. Thus, scholarly works and writings were [formerly] numerous. People were desirous of transmitting them everywhere and at any time. They were copied and bound. The craft of book producers, thus, made it appearance. [They are the craftsmen] concerned with copying, correcting, and binding books, and with all the other matters pertaining to books and writings. The craft of book production was restricted to cities of a large civilization.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Franz Rosenthal, trans., *The Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 2 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), See the section called "The Craft of Book Production," 391-392. Henceforth cited as *Muqaddima*.