

## Intellectual Development of Islam during the Abbasid Dynasty (750 – 861 M)

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### *Abstract*

This article analyzes the history of Islamic intellectual progress during the Abbasid Dynasty which in Islamic literature is said to be the city of Baghdad as the center of Islamic civilization. In the Abbasid period, not only the Arabs filled the dynamics of Arab life, but also the Indians, Africans, Europeans, Persians, and Chinese. So as to form a cosmopolitical society, open, and easily accept new things that were considered useful. The dispute with the civilization of other nations brought a new influence so that science developed rapidly. In addition, the main influence is the leadership pattern of the caliphs who can provide progressive and revolutionary policies, namely providing support for the movement to translate foreign manuscripts, providing facilities for science lovers by establishing many libraries, especially Bayt al-Hikmah as an institution of education and science studies and as a library so that Muslim intellectuals are born.

**Key words:** Abbasid Dynasty, Islamic Intellectuals

### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini menganalisis sejarah kemajuan intelektual Islam pada masa Dinasti Abbasiyah yang dalam literatur Islam dikatakan sebagai kota Bagdad sebagai pusat peradaban Islam. Pada masa Abbasiyah, tidak hanya bangsa Arab yang mengisi dinamika kehidupan Arab, tetapi juga bangsa India, Afrika, Eropa, Persia, dan Cina. Sehingga membentuk masyarakat yang kosmopolitik, terbuka, dan mudah menerima hal-hal baru yang dianggap bermanfaat. Perselisihan dengan peradaban bangsa lain membawa pengaruh baru sehingga ilmu pengetahuan berkembang pesat. Selain itu, pengaruh utama adalah pola kepemimpinan para khalifah yang dapat memberikan kebijakan-kebijakan yang progresif dan revolusioner yaitu memberikan dukungan kepada gerakan penerjemahan naskah asing, memberikan fasilitas bagi para pecinta ilmu pengetahuan dengan mendirikan banyak perpustakaan khususnya Bayt al-Hikmah sebagai sebuah lembaga pendidikan dan kajian ilmu pengetahuan dan sebagai perpustakaan sehingga lahir intelektual muslim.

**Kata Kunci:** Dinasti Abbasiyah, Cendekiawan Islam

## INTRODUCTION

A country can be experience the peak of glory and success, among others, due to intellectual progress. History records the intellectual development of Muslims over time influenced by factors and causes. The factor is the pattern of the leadership of the caliph, aware of the importance of science for the advancement civilization. The reason is to want to make changes from stagnation and make movements to progress and develop. To meet a point called "Glory". the term Glory in various fields, both social, political, and intellectual is then by Philip K. Hitti called an extraordinary achievement so that he mentioned it as the golden age or Islamic Golden Age Agus (Rifa'i, 2010). The long-standing Abbasid reign formed different patterns of government and adjusted the social, political, and cultural changes at that time. So historians divide it into five periods. the glory of Abbasid in the first period (132 H/750 M-232 H/ 861 M) especially during the 7th caliph al-Mahdi (775-785 M), al-Hadi (775-786 M), Harun Al-Rashid (786-809 M), al-Makmun (813-833 M), al-Mu'tashim (833-842 M), al-Watsiq (842-847 M) and al-Mutawakkil (847-861 M) (Badri Yatim, 2020). But the indicator of progress is the mastery of science and technology by Muslims at that time. This is recognized by scientists and historians such as Kneller (1978). The confession revealed that Muslims have successfully transmitted foreign science to the Islamic world, by studying various literacies (Greek manuscripts).

Related to the development and progress of Muslims during the Abbasid Dynasty can be a learning for millennials to re-synergize scientific treasures to achieve the next level of golden age progress. the fact that the development of science and technology of Muslims today is no more advanced than in Western. Some of the things that became formulation of this research problem, namely: when did the Abbasid Dynasty experience a golden age? What were the characteristics of Islam in the Abbasid period? What were the factors of Muslim intellectual progress? and what were the evidences of Islamic intellectual progress? So to explain the formulation of the problem, this article uses the book "*The History of the Arabs*" (Philip K. Hitti, 2002) "*History of Islamic Civilization*" (Badri Yatim, 2020), "*History and Culture of Islam*" (Shalaby, 1993). Some of these sources were excavated, and analyzed to find out the history of muslim intellectual development during the Abbasid Dynasty. Some of the things that became the formulation of this research problem, namely: when did the Abbasid Dynasty experience a golden age? What were the characteristics of Islam in the Abbasid period? What are the factors of Muslim intellectual progress? and what are the evidences of Islamic intellectual progress? So to explain the formulation of the problem, this article uses the book "*The History of the Arabs*" (Philip K. Hitti, 2002) "*History of Islamic Civilization*" (Badri Yatim, 2020), History

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### **RESEARCH METHODS AND FOCUS**

This research using historical research methods with a focus on Islamic Intellectual history during the reign of the Abbasid Dynasty in the first period of 750 M-861 M. the method in this study uses stages in the form of Heuristic (source search) in the form of primary and secondary related to this study, Verification (source criticism), Interpretation (data analysis) by providing interpretations from historical sources that have been collected and finally Historiography (History writing).

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **The Islamic Golden Age Of Abbasid Dynasty (750 M-681 M)**

Daulah Bani Abbasiyah founded by Abu al-Abbas As Saffat is one of the Islamic governments that is able to reap success. The name of the Abbasid Dynasty is based on the name of the prophet Muhammad's uncle, Abbas bin Abdil Muttalib bin Hashim (Fahsin M.Fa'al, 2008). The advance of the Abbasid dynasty's rule was inseparable from the role of the first-period caliph. The peak of Abbasid glory lies in the first period (132 H / 750 AD - 232 H / 861 AD), after the foundation of abu al-Abbas and Abu Ja'far al-Mansyur namely caliph al-Mahdi (775-785 AD), al-Hadi (775-786M), Harun Al-Rashid (786-809 AD), al-Makmun (813-833 AD), al-Mu'tashim (833-842 AD), al-Watsiq (842-847 AD) and al-Mutawakkil (847-861 AD) (Badri Yatim, 2020) where science is at its peak, namely the caliph al-Mahdi (775-885 AD), al-Mu'tashim (847-861 AD) (Badri Yatim, 2020) where science is at its peak, namely the caliph al-Mahdi (775-785 AD), al-Hadi (775-861 AD) (Badri Yatim, 2020) where science is at its peak, namely caliph al-Mahdi (775-785 AD), al-Hadi (775-861 AD) (Badri Yatim, 2020) where science is at its peak, namely caliph al-Mahdi (775-785 AD), al-Hadi (775-861 AD) (Badri Yatim, 2020) where science is at its peak, namely caliph al-Mahdi (775-785 AD), al-Hadi (775-861 AD) (Badri Yatim, 2020) where science is at its peak, namely the caliph al-Mahdi (775-785 AD), al-Hadi (775-861 AD) (Badri Yatim, 2020) where science is at its peak, One of the factors was the love of the Abbasid caliphs to science and the form of high respect for experts of various sciences. Then this condition brings harmony to both. Scientists of various skills gathered at Baghdad palace to discuss various problems.

In Philip K. Hitti's book *"History Of The Arabs"* is clearly depicted the splendor and luxury of the lives of the caliphs, crown princes, court officials and people who lived at that time. As in the marriage of caliph al-Ma'mun to Buran recorded in Arabic literature

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as one of the grandest celebrations of the century, a thousand gems in various forms were sown from a golden tray to the bride and groom sitting on a golden rug, decorated with gemstones and sapphires. When al-Ma'mun became caliph, he built his residence in al-Ja'far Palace which was originally built for Ja'far al-Barmaki on the east side of the river. But not long after, the city again rose to become a center of trade and intellectuals (Philip K. Hitti, 2002).

reviewed from the side of the Baghdad region is described as the capital of the Abbasid government that does not fall easily, because it is in the Tigris-Euphrates valley starting from the city of your and Babylonia, and ending with Ctesiphon. Its favorable position as a center for loading and unloading ships made all known parts of the world at that time have access to enter there. Along the harbor are moored hundreds of ships, including warships and cruise ships, ranging from Chinese-made to rafts of animal skins belonging to locals (Phili K.Hitty, 2002).

### **Resurgence of Islamic Intellectual**

The Abbasid Dynasty in the span of 524 years (132 H / 750 AD-656H / 1258 M) has been able to bring Muslims to achieve a scientific revival at that time marked by various activities in the field, namely: compiling scientific books, organizing Islamic sciences and translating foreign language books (Shalaby, 1993). The scientific awakening is also a special feature of the Abbasids and can reach the attraction of Muslims to seek knowledge and dive deeply (Zainal Abidin Ahmad, 1997).

The revival was largely due to the influx of foreign influences, some Indo-Persian and Syrian, and most importantly greek influence. The intellectual movement of the time was marked by the project of translating works in Persian, Sanskrit, Syrian, and Greek into Arabic. Starting with their own work on science, philosophy, or literature that is not too much, the Islamic Arabs, who have a high curiosity and a great interest in learning. The Abbasids would absorb the civilization of the nations they conquered or encountered.

In Syria, they absorbed the pre-existing Aramaic civilization influenced by Greece. And in Iraq, they adopted a similar civilization influenced by the Persians. Until three-quarters of a century after the founding of Baghdad, the Arab literary world has had the major philosophical works of Aristotle, the work of neo-Platonic commentators, and Galen medical writings, as well as Persian and Indian scientific works. And in the decades' Arab scholars have been exploring the science and culture developed over the centuries by the Greeks. In addition Greek Indian culture also influenced the formation of Persian Islam, especially as the first source of inspiration in the field of mysticism and mathematics. Around 154 H/771 M, an Indian traveler introduced an astronomical manuscript to Baghdad entitled Siddhanta, on the orders of al-Mashur later translated by

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Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Fazari, who later became the first Islamic astronomer (Philip K. Hitty, 2002). In addition to India, other cultures are Persian culture, this is literature, the earliest literary work is *kalilah wa dimnah* (the story of Bidpai), a translated work from Middle Persian, which is also a translation of Sanskrit. The original work was brought from India to Persia (Philip K. Hitty, 2002).

### **Characteristics of Islam and Society**

#### **a. Cosmopolite**

Cosmopolitan Islam is an inclusive attitude, recognition of cultural pluralism and political heterogeneity so that Muslims can dialogue with global civilization, bring up critical attitudes, and correct their own culture (Abdurrahman Wahid, 2007).

Abbasid civilization in the Middle East became the main trace of enlightenment in the West. The open, tolerant, moderate, and respectful character of the diversity of Islam are characteristic of them as a cosmopolitan society. From here were born Islamic architects, physicists, astronomers, doctors, philosophers, and so on. In addition, they also have a good understanding of religion such as memorizing the Qur'an and al-Hadith, interpreters, jurists, and even Sufi experts such as al-Ghazali, al-Kindi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, and others.

This open and moderate attitude can be exemplified by the caliph al-Mashur who had a court doctor named Jurjis (George) ibn Bakhtisyu, a Nestor Christian who was an expert in medicine and philosophy, his son Jibril (Gabriel) had also been the head of the hospital in Baghdad during the time of al-Rashid and became the caliph's personal physician (Philip K.Hitty). Yuhanna (Yahya) Ibn Masawayh a Christian is narrated to be the earliest translator of manuscripts for al-Rashid, especially manuscripts on medicine. Hunayn Ibn Isyaq a Scholar and distinguished figure of his time was a Christian Nestor of Hira, he became the head of the translators and supervisors of his libraries with the responsibility of translating scientific works from Greek to Syrian and then by his son (Ishaq) and nephew (Hubaisy Ibn al-Hasan) translated into Arabic. He later became the greatest translator of Aristotle's works (Philip K. Hitty, 2002). Although they were not Muslims, they found a noble place in the eyes of the caliph, because the native Arab Muslims did not understand Greek well. And also because the caliph had the nature of love of science, it was also influenced by the chaos of Greek culture when Islam conquered the Fertile Crescent area.

Reflecting on history, the Abbasid government that has an open attitude absorbed many major civilizations that appeared before, such as Greece, Rome, Persia, and

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India. This is what distinguishes other conquerors. When Islam conquers a territory it does not and removes, and destroys the destruction of existing civilizations. but still maintain, adapt, and harmonize with civilizations that are much more advanced and large than the Arabs before the arrival of Islam.

The prominent features of the Abbasid dynasty were: (1) with the transfer of the capital Baghdad, the government of the Banu Abbas was far from Arab influence. Whereas the Umayyads are very Arab-oriented. (2) in the administration of the State the office of vizier, who is in charge of the heads of departments, this position does not exist in the Umayyad government. (3) a new professional army was formed during the reign of Bani Abbas (Badri Yatim, 2020).

### **b. Scientific Transmission**

The Abbasid Daulah is believed to be the daulah that brought about the peak period of the progress of Muslims in the field of science. Bosworth noted that this progress occurred in the first three centuries of Abbasid rule (8-10 AD) (G.E. Bosworth, 1993). This began with the translation of foreign manuscripts, especially greek into Arabic, the establishment of centers for the development of science, and the establishment of ideologies, scientific, and religious movements (Latiful Khuluq, 2009). The development of science in the Abbasid period cannot be separated from the role of educational institutions, these institutions became a means of transmitting science. Such as Maktabah, Kuttah, Halaqah, Observatory, and Clinic, dar al-Hikmah, and dar-al-ilmu and madrasah.

There are two main ways of transmitting science, namely orally and in writing. Oral is the way the teacher reads the learned text, gives information on important points, while the student listens in the way of al-qira'ah 'ala al-sheikh, the teacher asks the student to read the text, the teacher listens then corrects the wrong reading. After that the student is welcome to ask things that are not yet understood from what is read, or the teacher asks (repeat) to the student how far he understands what is read. Then came the discussion (munazarah). The writing method is the recording or copying of texts dictated by the sheik, later known as manuscripts. The writing method is carried out by copying the works of scholars. In copying these books there is a process of intellectualization, so that the level of mastery of one's knowledge increases, and finally gives rise to the ta'liqah system of the works of scholars (Iskandar et al, 2014).

The success of the process of transmitting science cannot be separated from the role of the ruler at that time, financing and fostering the transmission process. And there is a touch between Islamic civilization and other civilizations, such as

Greece, Persia, Alexandria (Egypt), and Hindu civilization. This inter-civilizational dispute then occurs through dialogue and the transmission process becomes easy to develop.

**c. Mu'tazilah ideology as the basis of the State by the Abbasid caliph**

Mu'tazilah is a rational of theology and had become the official school of the State during the reign of the Abbasid Daulah under the leadership of Caliphs al-Ma'mun, al-Mu'tashim, and al-Watsiq. Rationalistic tendencies are also illustrated by the attitude of the Abbasid caliph, the highest point of the caliph al-Ma'mun and his supporters who adhere to the mu'tazilah tradition. Put forward reason by stating religious texts must be in accordance with human reason, thus encouraging to seek justification through the works of Greek philosophy. So the Greek influence was so strong, especially in the time of al-ma'mun (Ibn Khaldun).

Mu'tazilah is considered a more rational and liberal teaching, the tendency in this school is realized by increasing followers and exercising power in Baghdad. Al-ma'mun often held meetings related to science in the palace of Baghdad.

**Factors the progress of Islamic Intelligence**

- a. Spirit of reading culture,** In this period the picture of reading culture can be seen from the many bookstores, al-Ya'qubi narrated that in his time (about 891) the capital of the State was enlivened by more than a hundred bookstores lined up on the same street. In addition, reading culture can be illustrated from the function of the mosque as a place to store books and the number of libraries as a study institution that is open to the public, storing a number of books of logic, philosophy, astronomy and other fields of science. Students and experts can easily access the books they want, and can easily get paper and stationery for free. And the city of Rayy had a place to store thousands of manuscripts transported by more than four hundred camels. All the manuscripts are then listed in ten volumes of the catalog (Philip K.Hitty, 2020). From this it is illustrated that the place of reading for the educated community is not only in educational institutions or institutions but in libraries, mosques and bookstores. The large number of places to read a book reflects the life of its people's love of books and a strong reading culture.
- b. Caliph's policy,** To advance Muslim intellectuals at that time the Abbasid caliph had such a big role. What the policy is: first, the Caliph supports and funds the translation of science books from foreign languages. The intellectual movement was marked by a project to translate works in Persian, Sanskrit, Syrian, and Greek into Arabic (Philip K. Hitty, 2002). This era of translation lasted for a century beginning in 750 AD. Second, to bring scientific activity to life. Third, developing

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centers of knowledge activities such as building Bayt al-Hikmah (house of wisdom) which became a library, academy, and translation bureau, which in various ways is the most important educational institution since the establishment of the Alexandrian museum in the first half of the 3rd- century BC.M (Philip K.Hitty, 2002).

- c. **Assimilation of Arab Civilization with Civilization of other nations**, The next factor is the dispute between Arab civilization and other nations whose civilization was more advanced before Islam came, because during this Abbasid government many non-Arab nations converted to Islam and gave a new color to the advancement of science (Al-Aziiz et al, 2019).

### **Evidence of Islamic Intellectual Progress**

#### **1. The birth of Muslim intellectual figures**

Evidence of the advancement of Muslim intellectuals during the Abbasid Dynasty, among others is marked by the birth of Muslim scientific figures and their works. Among them are:

- a. Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Thabari (Philip K.Hitty, 2002), lived in the 9th century, his work is in the form of a book entitled *Firdaus al-Hikmah* (surge hukmah), one of the oldest medical comedies in the Arabic language. It also includes the study of philosophy and astronomy, and is based on Greek and Hindu sources.
- b. Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Za-kariyya' al-Razi (Rhazes, 865-925) (Philip K. Hitty), commonly called al-Razi, corresponds to his birthplace. He was a philosopher-theologian and also a physician. A prolific writer, one of his works dedicated to the caliph al-manshur entitled *Kitab al-Thibb al-Manshuri*.
- c. Ibn Sina, referred to by Arabs as *al-shaykh al-ra'is*, "leader" (learned man) and "prince" (official). If al-Razi mastered medicine more than Ibn Sina, ibn Ibn Sina mastered philosophy more than al-Razi. Ibn Sina's more than 200 works include philosophy, medicine, geometry, astronomy, theology, philology, and art. His two most excellent books are *kitab al-syifa'* and *al-Qanun fi al-Thibb* (Philip K. Hitty, 2002).
- d. Abu al-Abbas Ahmad, his main work *al-Mudkhil ila 'Ilm Hay'ah al-Aflak* (Philip K.Hitty, 2002).

#### **2. The Founding of Bayt al-Hikmah**

The Abbasid dynastic civilization experienced development beginning with the establishment of the bayt al-Hikmah educational institution and became evidence that the Abbasid dynasty was in the golden age. The establishment of Bayt al-Hikmah began with the early contact of Islam with Greek civilization, thus motivating the Abbasid caliphs to absorb and master the civilization of science obtained from



Greece. It was a translation bureau, library and higher education academy and was an important educational institution at the time (Hasan Asari, 2006).

**3. Works of translation manuscripts from civilizations other nations**

Intellectual development in the Abbasid period was influenced by civilizations of other nations that had been described earlier. From the conflict of civilization with other nations produced works of translation of Greek, Indian, and Persian manuscripts. Like; The astronomical manuscript entitled Siddhanta by Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Farazi who later became the first Islamic astronomer. Kalilah wa Dimnah literary work, a translation of Central Persian (translation from Sanskrit) originally brought from India to Persia. Translation of Galen's Greek medical manuscripts, mathematics, and Euclides' combined science, Element and Almagest, translated into Arabic as Majisthi. Then there is Hunayn Nestor Christians. He translated scientific works, one of which was Aristotle's Hermeneutica which was translated into Aramaic (Philip K. Hitty, 2002). From the works of translation of the manuscript became the forerunner of the development of science and the intellectual progress of Muslims at that time.

**4. Cosmopolitan city buildings in Baghdad (Madinatussalam)**

Evidence of Islamic intellectual progress in the Abbasid period can also be seen in the science of the development of art and architecture knowledge. The architectural charm of the Abbasid period is depicted in the phenomenal city building in Baghdad, Madinatussalam. The circular city building with a new style of Islamic city building art was built in the former Sasanian civilization (the heart of Ancient Persian rule). As many as 100 thousand architects, craftsmen, and laborers came from Syria, Mesopotamia, and other areas within the kingdom's territory. So al-Manshur cost 4,883,000 (Philip K.Hitty, 2002).

The city of Baghdad, nicknamed the city of circles (al-mudawwarah), is the birthplace of a legendary adventure story told by Syahrazad in "One Thousand and One Nights". Al-Mashur built the area because it was an excellent military base. The area was crossed by the Tigris River, so it could connect to China, dredging seafood and food products from Mesopotamia, Armenia, and the surrounding area. There is also the Euphrates river that allows the inhabitants there to get all the produce of Syria, Raqqa, and the surrounding area (Philip K.Hitty, 2020). The circular city is two-layered, a deep moat and a 90-foot-high third wall that surrounds the main area. The walls have four gates that are the same distance, there are four highways stretching from the city center, forming the radius of the four-sided royal wheel. So all form concentric circles that pivot to the caliph's palace, called the Golden Gate (bab al-dzahab) (Philip K. Hitty, 2002). Therefore, it appears that the city was strategically designed by the intellectual progress of the architects of that time.

Madinah al-Salam (city of peace) was able to bewitch foreign traders and foreigners to come to this forging, the city grew into an international trading and political center and became the heir to the power of the ancient Eastern nations. Its glory and splendor in the middle ages is unparalleled.

## CONCLUSION

From the article that the author explained above, there are three important influences, namely the Caliph, Society, and cultural assimilation. This influence formed a pattern that made the development of the Abbasid dynasty's Muslim intellect develop rapidly and was known as the golden age. The first pattern, the leadership of the Caliph of the Abbasid Dynasty during his reign. The pattern describes the leadership of the Caliph who loves science and appreciates scientists by providing support to carry out various activities such as translation of foreign manuscripts such as Greek manuscripts. Establishing many libraries such as the large library in Baghdad. The Caliph had the basis of the understanding of Islam mu'tazilah which influenced his spirit of seeking justification of reason by dissecting Greek manuscripts. the second pattern, the pattern of people who have an open attitude or called cosmopolitan is easy to accept political heterogeneity with global civilization so as to give rise to a critical attitude towards the culture itself this is the result of the assimilation or interaction of Arab culture with foreign nations. the third pattern is a strong reading culture in Abbasid society so that its insight into other civilizations is getting wider, and experiencing intellectual progress. Evidence of reading culture in its people is the establishment of hundreds of bookstores, libraries, and mosque functions that are not only a place of prayer but also a place to read, study science, and as a library.

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