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BAYʿAH. *See* Succession.

BAYT AL-ḤIKMAH. (House of Wisdom) Commonly refers to the public library of the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs al-Rashīd (r. 170–193 / 786–809) and al-Maʾmūn (r. 198–218 / 813–833). This library was also referred to as *khizānat al-ḥikmah* (storehouse of wisdom), although the latter phrase may refer to any collection of books, such as the *khizānat ḥikmah* of al-Fatḥ ibn Khāqān (al-Nadīm, p. 143; Yāqūt, p. 2008).

Primary sources offer scant information on the holdings, associates, and activities of Bayt al-Ḥikmah. In the *Fihrist*, al-Nadīm records that among the holdings of *khizānat al-Maʾmūn* (the storehouse of al-Maʾmūn) were a piece of hide (*jild*) with the handwriting of ʿwi al-Muṭṭalib (p. 5), a text in the Ḥimyarī script (p. 5), and an example of Ḥimyarī-style Abyssinian letters (p. 19). His comment that a book on revealed scriptures written in "old-fashioned script" (*qadīm al-naskh*) "appears (*yushbihu*) to be from the storehouse of al-Maʾmūn" (p. 21) suggests that *khizānat al-Maʾmūn* was known for its collection of works in old-fashioned scripts. He mentions that the directors (sing. *ṣāḥib*) of the library were Sahl ibn Hārūn (pp. 10, 120, 125, 305) and Salm (pp. 120, 243, 268, 305); and that associates of the library were Saʿīd ibn Hārūn al-Kātib (pp. 120, 125; Yāqūt, p. 1379), the bookbinder Ibn Abī al-Ḥarīsh (p. 10), the copyist ʿAllān al-Shuʿūbī (p. 105; Yāqūt, p. 1631), and the astronomers Abū Sahl al-Faḍl ibn Nawbakht (p. 274) and Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārazmī, who was "attached" (*munqaṭiʿ*) to the library (p. 274). Ibn al-Qifṭī adds that Hārūn al-Rashīd charged al-Faḍl ibn Nawbakht with maintaining the storehouse (*wallāhu al-qiyām bi-khizānat kutub al-ḥikmah*) (*Taʾrīkh*, p. 255), and that al-Maʾmūn "registered" the Banū Mūsā (*athbatahum*) at Bayt al-Ḥikmah (p. 441).

Since many associates were Persian translators, it is likely that a portion of the caliphal library's collection was devoted to Persian political theory and didactic literature for kings, and thus that the library served as an important venue for preserving and propagating Sāsānian kingship ideology for the ʿAbbāsid caliphs. However, such was clearly not the only area of interest, as shown by the collection of old-fashioned scripts and the association of astronomers and mathematicians. In light of the broad application of the term *ḥikmah* in classical Islamic epistemological discourses (Nasr, pp. 21–2), it is conceivable that Bayt al-Ḥikmah reflected a diverse array of intellectual interests.

The predominant picture of Bayt al-Ḥikmah in modern scholarship has been that of a research and translation institute specializing in Greek sciences. O'Leary (1922) was the first to assert that al-Maʾmūn founded Bayt al-Ḥikmah in 217/832 as a school of science modeled on preexisting Nestorian or Zoroastrian schools (p. 112), but he does not cite any supporting evidence. Meyerhof (1926) expanded on this claim, proposing, also without substantiation, that Bayt al-Ḥikmah imitated the medical school of Alexandria and functioned as the focal point of the Greek translation movement (pp. 702, 722). More recent reassessments of the primary evidence offer a more convincing interpretation. Dimitri Gutas (1998) explains that Bayt al-Ḥikmah was a palace library in the Sāsānian tradition and a state bureau for preserving the Persian literary heritage (pp. 55–57). While the existence of Bayt al-Ḥikmah suggests the 'Abbāsids' general interest in non-Arab culture and support of translators, there is no solid evidence to prove that the

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