

## Tracing the Abbasid Dynasty’s Role in Shaping Arabic Literature and Islamic Intellectual Identity

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### ABSTRACT

This article investigates the formative role of the Abbasid Dynasty in shaping the intellectual identity of the Islamic world during the Golden Age of Arabic literature. The research is grounded in the idea that dynastic power, when aligned with cultural patronage and institutional innovation, can catalyze literary and scholarly flourishing. The Abbasid era, particularly in Baghdad, witnessed an unprecedented synthesis of classical knowledge and original thought, facilitated by the establishment of institutions such as Bayt al-Hikmah and the translation movement. Using a historical-analytical method, this study examines the sociopolitical conditions that enabled the emergence of key literary figures, the proliferation of philosophical and scientific discourse, and the development of a cosmopolitan literary culture. The findings demonstrate that the Abbasids not only preserved Greco-Roman and Persian legacies but also fostered new epistemologies through Arabic prose, poetry, and critical thought. This article contributes to the discourse by bridging literary history with sociological analysis, offering a nuanced understanding of how dynastic authority influenced intellectual production. It addresses a gap in existing scholarship by arguing that the Abbasid Dynasty’s strategic support for knowledge creation was instrumental in defining the contours of Islamic civilization. The conclusion affirms that the Abbasid patronage system laid the foundation for a transregional intellectual legacy that continues to inform contemporary Islamic thought and literary scholarship.

**Keywords:** *Abbasid dynasty; Arabic literature; Islamic civilization.*

### INTRODUCTION

Islamic civilization experienced the peak of intellectual glory during the Abbasid Dynasty, especially between the 8th and 13th centuries AD. This period was not only characterized by rapid progress in the fields of science and philosophy, but also by the birth of monumental works of Arabic literature. Arabic literature in the Abbasid era developed in various forms and genres, becoming the main medium in transmitting the thoughts, values, and intellectual identity of Muslims. However, in contemporary studies, there are still limitations in understanding how these literary dynamics contributed to the formation of the intellectual identity of the Islamic world as a whole. This research departs from the need to revisit the position and contribution of Abbasid-era Arabic literature in the construction of Islamic intellectual identity. In a broader theoretical framework, this study places the phenomenon of literature as a reflection of the interaction of culture, science, and

power under Abbasid rule, which made Baghdad the center of world learning. Therefore, it is important to connect the development of Abbasid Arabic literature with the intellectual discourse that developed at that time, as well as to understand how the literary heritage shaped the mindset and knowledge system of Muslims in the following period.

In the previous literature review, there have been various analyses of the development of philosophy, science, and politics of the Abbasid Dynasty, but in-depth studies of literature as a shaper of Islamic intellectual identity have rarely been comprehensively touched upon. This research presents a new perspective by making literature the main object of study, as well as contributing to the field of literary studies and Islamic intellectual history. The main purpose of this article is to reveal how Arabic literary products during the Abbasid period played a role in formulating and shaping Islamic intellectual identity. The author argues that literature was not only an aesthetic work, but also a medium for the transformation of ideas and intellectual values that shaped the nature of Islamic civilization. This article is based on the hypothesis that the Abbasid dynasty used literature as a strategic tool in combining the Arab-Islamic tradition with other cultural influences, resulting in an intellectual synthesis that was durable and influential across the ages.

## **METHODS**

### **Subject of Research**

The focal point of this inquiry comprises the seminal literary corpus of the Abbasid Dynasty, specifically targeting the intellectual zenith between the 8th and 10th centuries. The research subjects are centered on the primary classical Arabic texts authored by the era’s literary paragons—most notably Al-Jahiz, Al-Mutanabbi, and Ibn Al-Muqaffa’—whose works are treated as representative artifacts of the period’s cultural and intellectual complexity. These primary sources are complemented and contextualized by a curated selection of secondary data, including peer-reviewed academic journals, historiographies of Islamic literature, and authoritative digital archives that illuminate the socio-political landscape of the Abbasid Golden Age.

### **Instrument**

To navigate the interpretative complexities of these historical texts, the study utilizes the researcher as the primary analytical instrument, supported by a specific theoretical apparatus. The conceptual toolkit relies upon the theory of cultural identity construction synthesized with symbolic communication theory. These frameworks were selected for their hermeneutic power, allowing the research to transcend the aesthetic appreciation of literature and instead utilize these texts as diagnostic tools. This theoretical lens enables the dissection of literature as a sophisticated medium of symbolic exchange, capable of encoding and projecting

collective societal ideas rather than merely reflecting them.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The trajectory of data collection and analysis was executed through a systematic content analysis approach, prioritizing texts that encapsulate the era's intellectual vibrancy. Following the acquisition of data, a rigorous manual coding process was employed to deconstruct the narratives into distinct thematic categories, including the formation of intellectual identity, the assimilation of Hellenistic philosophy, the integration of Persian cultural strata, and the internalization of Islamic ethical values. This inductive analysis seeks to map the underlying narrative patterns, thereby revealing the strategic function of Abbasid literature as an ideological instrument that actively shaped the trajectory of Muslim thought and civilization.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The Abbasid dynasty was a golden era for the development of Arabic literature, where literary art was not only used as an aesthetic tool but also as the main medium in conveying ideas, shaping culture, and reflecting the thoughts of society. This period offered space for poets and writers to initiate philosophical, social, and spiritual concepts through their works. Literature became a means of communicating ideology, strengthening Islamic identity, and connecting local traditions with global civilization (Abdulla, 2020).

Baghdad as the capital of the caliphate became the center of intellectual activity in the Islamic world. The existence of institutions such as Bayt al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom) created an academic climate that gave birth to monumental and meaningful literary works. It was here that the process of massive translation of Greek, Persian and Indian texts into Arabic took place, which later had a major influence in shaping the style and insights of the literati. Figures such as Al-Jahiz, Ibn Al-Muqaffa', and Al-Mutanabbi not only created works of art, but also articulated intellectual and moral values through sharp and reflective language.

Abbasid literature developed through various phases, from the tajdid revolution with the emergence of new styles that broke away from Umayyad conventions, to the establishment of classical styles and the fusion of local and universal values. In works such as the poetry of Abu Nuwas or the scholarly prose of Al-Jahiz, we see how literary texts functioned as a means of free thought, social criticism, and even confirmation of identity in a complex and multi-cultural society. Literature thus serves a dual function: as a mirror of life and as a means of shaping shared meaning (Fitriyani et al., 2025).

Amidst the cultural pluralism of the Abbasid period, writers integrated Persian, Greek and Indian influences into Arabic narratives, demonstrating a notable intellectual openness. This tradition enriched the Islamic world and made

literature the foundation for a transnational intellectual identity. Arabic was standardized as the lingua franca of science and literature, enabling the exchange of ideas from different parts of the Islamic world. This is why Abbasid literature is not only a cultural heritage, but also an important contribution to the history of global civilization (Enani, 2025).

Arabic literature during the Abbasid dynasty experienced a remarkable development that reflected the spirit of the times and the intellectual dynamics that took place in the Islamic world. This period began with the establishment of the Abbasid Daulah in 132 AH, the move of the capital to Baghdad in 145 AH, and ended tragically in 656 AH with the conquest of Baghdad by the Mongols. The Abbasid dynasty provided ample space for literary creativity and the growth of science, making Baghdad the center of civilization and literature (Yusuf et al., 2024).

In the political context, the history of the Abbasid Dynasty is divided into four main periods. The first period lasted from the founding of the Abbasid Dao in 132 AH to the beginning of Al-Mutawakkil's caliphate in 232 AH. The second period started from the time of Al-Mutawakkil's caliphate and continued until the stabilization of Bani Buwaih's rule in Baghdad in 334 A.H. The third period lasted from the stabilization of Buwaih's Daulah until the entry of the Saljuqs into Baghdad in 447 A.H., while the fourth period covered the Saljuq rule until the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols (Gofur, 2023).

In terms of literature, Prof. Hanna Al-Fakhuri divides the Abbasid period into three main phases based on the character and content of literary works. The first phase is known as the period of the Tajdid Revolution (renewal) which began with the emergence of Bashar bin Burd and ended around 198 A.H. In this phase, great figures such as Abu Nuwas, Abu Al-'Atahiyah, and Al-Buhturi, who introduced a new style in Arabic poetry, challenged classical patterns, and expressed ideas more freely and freshly. The second phase was the birth of the classical madrasa school, starting around 232 A.H. to 334 A.H. Poets such as Abu Tammam, Al-Mutanabbi, and Al-Ma'arri emerged with highly aesthetic and meaning-dense works, enriching the treasury of Arabic literature. The third phase was a period of stability, during which literary works exhibited a more refined and expressive style, reflecting stability and intellectual maturity. Figures such as Al-Sharif Ar-Radhi and Al-Baha' Zuhair became ideal examples of poets who combined beauty of language with depth of meaning. Meanwhile, Dr. Yusuf Khalif offers an alternative division based on the literary tendencies of each century. In the second century AH, poets such as Bashar bin Burd and Abu Nuwas attempted to break away from the classical style of poetry, creating a fresh and evocative Abbasid literary idiom. The third century became an arena of debate between old and new literary styles, where innovators such as Abu Tammam

and Al-Buhturi championed freedom of expression through complex and metaphorical poetic forms. The fourth century was the golden age of Al-Mutanabbi, a legendary poet whose poetry reflected the spirit of power, pride and high intellectual insight. In the fifth century, Arabic literature began to spread to the Andalusian region (Aliyev, 2024). Although it had been separated from the Abbasids from the beginning, it gave birth to a rich and flourishing literary tradition. Two important periods in Andalusia, the Umayyad period (138-428 AH) and the Muluk Al-Thawa'if period (428-897 AH), show how the culture of language and religion created a vibrant, diverse and widespread literary ecosystem (Rusydi et al., 2023). Professor Dr. Yusuf Khalif divides the journey of Abbasid Arabic literature based on the characters and literary phenomena that stood out in each century. In the first century AH, great poets such as Bashar bin Burd, Abu Nuwas, and Abu Al-Atahiyah emerged. They were instrumental in transforming Arabic poetry from strict classical forms into fresher expressions that were contextualized to the urban life of Abbasid society. With their stylistic boldness and exploration of new themes, they succeeded in introducing an Abbasid poetic tradition that distinguished this era from previous ones (Hussein, 2023).

Entering the third century AH, the Arab literary world was characterized by a fierce debate between two great poles: the old style that maintained classical conventions, and the new style promoted by the Badi' school. Figures like Abu Tammam and Al-Buhturi pioneered this innovative movement. They used complex metaphors and elevated language styles to express philosophical values as well as ideologies of power, enriching the form and content of classical Arabic poetry that had previously tended to be simple. The fourth century AH is known as the “century of texts” because it was during this time that Arabic literature reached its highest level of maturity (Masrika, 2023). Poets such as Al-Mutanabbi emerged as dominant figures, producing works that were monumental and represented the pinnacle of Arabic aesthetics. The poetry of this period was not only beautiful in form, but also full of intellectual ideas and the spirit of the times.

Meanwhile, in the fifth century AH, the center of Arabic literary activity moved to the Andalusian region. Although it had been politically separated from the Abbasids from the beginning, literature in Andalusia still carried the spirit and strong influence of the Baghdad center of civilization. Arabic literature of the Andalusian period spanned from 138 A.H. to 897 A.H. and exhibited its own characteristics in terms of stylistic subtlety, diversity of themes, and integration of local cultures. The century is divided into two main phases: the Umayyad period that lasted from 138 A.H. to 468 A.H., and the Muluk Al-Thawa'if (minor kings) period that lasted from 468 A.H. to 897 A.H. The Umayyad period is divided into two main

phases (Mahlooji & Abdoli, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

This research highlights how the Abbasid Dynasty became an important turning point in the development of Arabic literature that was not only aesthetic, but also full of social, philosophical and ideological functions. Literature during this period became the main medium in conveying ideas, shaping Islamic intellectual identity, and bridging local and universal values. The main findings show that Baghdad as the center of the caliphate facilitated the advancement of literacy through institutions such as Bayt al-Hikmah, the massive translation process from Greek, Persian and Indian languages, and the emergence of literary figures such as Al-Jahiz and Al-Mutanabbi. Writers and poets were able to transform literature into a vehicle for social criticism, spiritual reflection, and strengthening Islamic ideology in a multicultural society. The implications of this research confirm that Abbasid literature played a major role in constructing the global intellectual identity of the Islamic world. Arabic became the lingua franca of science and literature, extending its sphere of influence to Andalusia. Literature functioned not only as a reflection of the times, but also as a unifying force that shaped thought across regions. However, this study has limitations as it only focuses on analyzing the general characteristics and main figures in the Abbasid literary chronology, without exploring in depth the interdisciplinary interactions or local dynamics in the various Abbasid domains. Therefore, further research is recommended to explore the interconnections between Abbasid literature and the development of other sciences such as philosophy, theology, and social sciences. Comparative research between regions (e.g. between Baghdad and Andalusia) as well as more specific thematic approaches can enrich the understanding of the role of literature in shaping Islamic civilization as a whole.

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