

**How to cite this article:**

Yousefvand, R. (2025). The Process of the Decline of the Translation Movement during the Reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tasim (833–842 CE). *Journal of Historical Research, Law and Policy*, 3(3), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.61838/jhr/p.451>



Article history:
Original Research

Dates:

Submission Date: 05 May 2025

Revision Date: 12 August 2025

Acceptance Date: 19 August 2025

Publication Date: 01 September 2025

The Process of the Decline of the Translation Movement during the Reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tasim (833–842 CE)

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ABSTRACT

With the accession of al-Mu'tasim, the eighth Abbasid caliph, and the transfer of the capital of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra in 836 CE, together with his preference for Turkish military slaves over other groups, conditions emerged that encouraged scholars, scientists, and translators to migrate away from the center of the caliphate, while the Bayt al-Hikma (House of Wisdom) gradually lost its former prestige. The principal objective of the present study is to examine the factors contributing to the decline of the Translation Movement. The central research question is concerned with the factors that caused the golden age of the Translation Movement to enter a period of decline despite the relatively recent establishment of the Bayt al-Hikma. This article seeks to explain the factors underlying the decline of the Translation Movement and the process through which this transformation occurred. The decline of the Translation Movement was directly associated with the transfer of the Abbasid capital from Baghdad to Samarra. The caliphs' diminished attention to the sciences during this period, the significant weakening of the caliphal administration resulting from the increasing influence of opponents and challengers to the Abbasid court, competition among political elites, and the declining prestige of the Bayt al-Hikma were among the principal factors contributing to the decline of the Translation Movement. The findings indicate that there was a relationship between the transfer of the capital of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra and the decline of the Translation Movement. This study employs a descriptive-analytical research method and is theoretical in nature.

Keywords: Abbasid Caliphate; Bayt al-Hikma (House of Wisdom); al-Ma'mun; Samarra; al-Mu'tasim; decline of the Translation Movement

Introduction

After the period of conquests [The most significant consequence of the era of Islamic conquests was the encounter among various ancient cultures and civilizations, through whose interaction Islamic culture and civilization, with all its distinctive characteristics, gradually took shape. Thus, under the influence of Islamic teachings in the territories governed by the Islamic Caliphate, eminent scholars emerged in various branches of knowledge and produced numerous scientific achievements indicative of the flourishing of science within Islamic civilization (1).], subsided, the territories of the Islamic state attained a degree of stability, and Muslims gained relative respite from the foundational codification of the Islamic sciences. Under the patronage and encouraging



policies of some Abbasid caliphs [The Abbasid state remained in power in the Islamic world for approximately five centuries, from 750 CE, when Abu al-Abbas al-Saffah came to power, until 1258 CE, when Hulagu Khan of the Mongols conquered Baghdad (2). One of the most important bases of support for the Banu Hashim was Iran, because for several reasons the Iranians were irreconcilable opponents of the Umayyads and supporters of the Shi'a (3). Consequently, the Abbasids soon realized how they could exploit the discontent of the Iranian population (4). The establishment of Abbasid rule did not merely represent the transfer of authority from one dynasty to another or allegiance to another caliph; rather, it constituted a profound and fundamental transformation in the society of the time, and extensive measures were undertaken in various fields during the first Abbasid period, particularly in the formation of a scientific movement.], and through the extensive financial resources of the public treasury, Muslim society gradually became increasingly interested in sciences and crafts that had largely been preserved within non-Muslim civilizations. One of the principal intellectual sources underlying this orientation was the Qur'an and numerous traditions that encouraged believers to acquire knowledge and technical expertise [The Holy Qur'an is among the most important divine sources encouraging human beings toward teaching and learning (Taha 20; al-Zumar 39; al-Mujadila 58; Al Imran 3).]. More than anything else, however, the Muslim conquests, particularly the conquest of the entire Sasanian realm and parts of the Byzantine Empire, created the conditions required for this movement. Each of these regions possessed a long-standing culture and civilization. Muslim conquerors incorporated the conquered lands into an integrated political realm and, alongside their interactions with other cultures, developed new forms of cultural exchange and participation with Hellenized communities both near and distant. Within a relatively short period, the enthusiasm and activities of rulers, intellectuals, and seekers of knowledge in the Islamic world intensified to such a degree that the period later became known as the era of the Translation Movement [The policy of certain Abbasid caliphs of collecting books written in different languages necessitated the presence of skilled and experienced translators at the court. Recognition of this fundamental need facilitated the migration of Iranian, Indian, and Syriac physicians, theologians, and literary scholars to the center of the caliphate. Individuals familiar with the art of translation undertook the transmission of these works. Among them were distinguished figures such as Yuhanna ibn Masawayh and Hunayn ibn Ishaq (5, 6).]. Although the initial traces of this movement appeared during the Umayyad period, its principal impact emerged under the Abbasids. Most of the materials translated during the Umayyad era consisted of administrative, bureaucratic, political, and commercial documents translated out of the practical necessity of communication between the new rulers and their non-Arabic-speaking subjects. Even texts that could be classified as cultural works were generally translated for military or administrative reasons. The conscious Translation Movement, which produced profound and far-reaching historical, social, and cultural consequences, began with the emergence of the early Abbasid caliphs. This scientific movement continued for more than two centuries. Particularly during the reign of al-Mansur, the second Abbasid caliph (754–775 CE), major efforts were undertaken to translate foreign sciences through both literal and sense-for-sense methods. During this period, the earliest translations were from Persian into Arabic. The translators of these works were generally newly converted Muslims of Zoroastrian background. The translation of several literary works, including *Kalila wa Dimna* [Among the earliest works translated from Pahlavi into Arabic was *Kalila wa Dimna*. This important work is one of the best-known products of Indian literature. During the Sasanian period, the physician Burzoe translated it from Sanskrit into Pahlavi, and Ibn al-Muqaffa' subsequently translated it from Pahlavi into Arabic at the beginning of the Translation Movement (7).], by Abd Allah ibn al-Muqaffa', an Iranian writer, was among these achievements. During subsequent periods, Muslim translators acquired greater mastery of translation

techniques and, based on the experience accumulated in this process, works written in Syriac and Greek were translated into Arabic. Hunayn ibn Ishaq, known as the “Shaykh al-Mutarjimin” (Master of Translators), was a highly skilled Nestorian physician proficient in Greek, Syriac, and Pahlavi who became the first translator to assemble a group of translators and organize translation activities systematically. In general, the Translation Movement during the Abbasid period may be divided into four phases, each distinguished by differences in the subjects and volume of translations depending on the interests of the caliph and other contextual factors, ultimately culminating in the decline of the movement. Particularly from the reign of the fifth Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid (786–809 CE), these periods may be classified as follows: 1) the period of Harun al-Rashid; 2) the period of al-Ma'mun; 3) the post-al-Ma'mun period and the transfer of the center of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra, representing the period of decline of the Translation Movement; and 4) the end of the Translation Movement. The principal research question is: What factor caused the golden age of the Translation Movement to decline after the death of al-Ma'mun despite the relatively recent establishment of Bayt al-Hikma? The hypotheses are as follows: 1) there was a relationship between the transfer of the center of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra and the decline of the Translation Movement; and 2) there was a relationship between religious intolerance, the caliphs' neglect of the sciences, the weakening of the caliphal administration, and the decline of the Translation Movement. The research method employed in this article is descriptive-analytical and theoretical in nature. The principal objective of the present article is to identify and trace the factors influencing the decline of the Translation Movement during the reign of al-Mu'tasim.

Significance and Background of the Study

Following the collapse of Umayyad rule and the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate, a profound transformation occurred in the scientific and cultural life of Muslims. The Translation Movement was initiated under the early Abbasid caliphs and, with the establishment of Bayt al-Hikma [The first Bayt al-Hikma known in history was the Abbasid Bayt al-Hikma. According to some researchers, the first founder of this important Islamic scholarly institution was the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid (786–809 CE), and the Barmakids gathered for him in this center many Indian, Persian, and Greek books that had become available by that time (2).] and the presence of Iranian scholars, followed an ascending trajectory during the reigns of Harun al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun. Before long, however, with the accession of al-Mu'tasim, the eighth Abbasid caliph, the scientific and cultural situation changed. Following the transfer of the center of the caliphate from Baghdad, the newly flourishing Islamic civilization entered a period of decline and deterioration. The decline of the Translation Movement did not mean a reduction in scholars' interest in science, a decrease in the number of translated works, or a decline in the number of scholars capable of translating between different languages; rather, its principal cause was the transfer of the center of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra, the dispersal of scholars and translators, the growing influence of the Turks within the caliphal administration, and the preference accorded to Turkish military slaves over Iranian and Arab commanders. Consequently, identifying and tracing the causes underlying the decline of the Translation Movement and the diminishing importance of Bayt al-Hikma constitute a historical necessity. Previous research has examined various aspects of scientific flourishing in Islamic civilization and the emergence of the Translation Movement from different perspectives. Among these studies are *An Examination of the Periods of the Scientific Movement in Islamic Civilization during the Abbasid Era from Its Beginning to the Fourth Century*, by Ali Reza Mahdipour and Kianoush Savarpour; *Bayt al-Hikma and the Translation Movement in the Abbasid Era*, by Ramezan Rezaei; and *An*

Examination of the Foundations of the Flourishing of Islamic Civilization in the Early Islamic Centuries, by Vali Allah Abdoli. These studies have addressed several other dimensions of the Translation Movement; however, the present article investigates the process of transformation and the factors affecting the decline of the Translation Movement from the time of the transfer of the center of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra in 836 CE.

Establishment of Bayt al-Hikma

The emergence of academies, Bayt al-Hikma institutions, and houses of learning may, in fact, be traced to the establishment of public universities or educational mosques. Since institutions of this kind were not fundamentally established for devotional purposes, and worship was not incorporated into their programs from the earliest stages of their activity, they differed clearly from mosques and, in this respect, most closely resembled the ancient Greek academies. Accordingly, a clear distinction exists between an academy, which is essentially a scientific and research institution, and a university, whose principal and fundamental function is education (8). One of the consequences of the interaction between Arabs and non-Arab peoples from other countries following the Islamic conquests was that the Arabs adopted numerous administrative and military practices and social institutions from the cultural heritage of those peoples. The establishment of Bayt al-Hikma was one such example of borrowing from foreign cultures. Because the precise nature and extent of Muslim influence from this external concept remain inadequately known, considerable obscurity surrounds the origins of this scholarly institution. The first Bayt al-Hikma known in history is the Abbasid Bayt al-Hikma, whose origins remain largely obscure and uncertain. According to some researchers, the first founder of this important Islamic house of learning was Harun al-Rashid, and the Barmakids gathered for him at this center many Indian, Persian, and Greek works available at the time (2). It appears, however, that the origins of Bayt al-Hikma may be traced to a period before Harun al-Rashid. There can be little doubt that al-Mansur, the Abbasid caliph for whom *Kalila wa Dimna* and other works had been translated, was familiar with the concept of *Khizanat al-Hikma* (Treasury of Wisdom). He had a strong interest in Persian civilization and the customs of Iranian kings, adopted many of these practices in his own governmental system, and most probably established a library in his palace in emulation of them. The nucleus of this library consisted of translated works originating from the cultural heritage of Iran and India. It therefore seems unlikely that al-Mansur, despite his extensive encouragement of the factors that facilitated the Translation Movement, would not have established a private library in his palace.

The Translation Movement

The founder of the Abbasid Caliphate, Abu al-Abbas al-Saffah (750–754 CE), was unable to devote substantial attention to the sciences for several reasons, including the difficulties associated with consolidating power, confronting opponents, addressing the problems of a newly established government, and the brevity of his reign. His brother al-Mansur (754–775 CE), however, despite the challenges associated with political consolidation, firmly established himself on the throne (9) and, through the construction of Baghdad and the transfer of the center of the caliphate, established a powerful and efficient government. Al-Mansur's profound interest and belief in astrology, astronomical observation, and divination led him to avoid undertaking important actions without consulting astrologers. Consequently, by inviting leading astronomers from Iran and India, he became known as the first caliph to summon astronomers to the royal court (10). As a consequence of the caliph's interest in and need for astrologers and specialists in astronomy, a group of Iranian and Indian astronomers entered the court of the Islamic Caliphate

around 773 CE. One of them brought a work entitled *Sindhind*, containing extensive information on Indian astronomy and arithmetic. Ibrahim al-Fazari, one of the leading translators at the court, was commissioned to translate it. His efforts resulted in an Arabic work known as *al-Sindhind al-Kabir*. During the reign of al-Ma'mun, Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi abridged this work, which thereafter served for a long period as an important basis for the astronomical tables of Muslim astronomers (11). During the same period, numerous works on astronomy and astrological judgments were translated (3). Al-Mansur's intense enthusiasm for acquiring new knowledge directed his attention toward the external frontiers of the caliphate. Alongside the continuous efforts of researchers in various sciences, highly qualified physicians also contributed to the advancement of medicine. Among the active physicians at al-Mansur's court, Jurjis ibn Bukhtishu' occupied a distinguished position. He was the head of the scholarly center and hospital of Jundishapur and was summoned to the caliph's court when al-Mansur suffered from a severe illness around 765–766 CE (5). During his residence at the Baghdad court, he authored numerous medical works and, because he was familiar with Syriac, Greek, Persian, and Arabic, was able to translate Greek medical works for the caliph (12). His expertise, good conduct, and administrative competence ensured the continued presence of his descendants at the courts of six Abbasid caliphs (13).

The Caliphate of al-Mu'tasim, the Eighth Abbasid Caliph

When al-Ma'mun died, his brother Abu Ishaq Muhammad ibn Harun, known as al-Mu'tasim bi-Allah, assembled the commanders and leading figures (14) and called upon them to pledge allegiance to him, whereupon they all recognized him as caliph [The pledge of allegiance to al-Mu'tasim took place upon the death of al-Ma'mun in 833 CE (10). In that year, al-Ma'mun was campaigning toward Byzantine territories and preparing to besiege Amorium. He stated that he would summon Arabs from the desert and settle them in every city he conquered until he could establish himself in Constantinople. An envoy from the Byzantine emperor subsequently came to him proposing peace, cessation of hostilities, and the release of prisoners held in captivity, but al-Ma'mun rejected the proposal. When he reached the vicinity of Lu'lu'a, he advanced and remained for several days at a place called Badandun, between Lu'lu'a and Tarsus, where he died (15). His death occurred in 833 CE. He was 48 years and four months old. His brother Abu Ishaq performed the funeral prayer over him, and he was buried in Tarsus. Shortly thereafter, the commanders and soldiers who had accompanied al-Ma'mun pledged allegiance to al-Mu'tasim as caliph.]. Some commanders initially refused to pledge allegiance because of Abbas ibn al-Ma'mun. Abbas emerged from his tent and spoke to them in such a manner that they considered his remarks foolish, insulted him, and then pledged allegiance to Abu Ishaq (15).

The Geographical and Historical Background of Samarra

In *al-Kharaj*, Qudama ibn Ja'far states that the distance from Ukbara [a district west of Baghdad; from Baghdad to Ukbara there were six postal stages, and from Ukbara to Samarra there were seven postal stages (16, 17).] to "Surra Man Ra'a" was seven postal stages (18). In many historical sources, Samarra is referred to as Surra Man Ra'a (19). The city of Samarra, which served as the capital of eight Abbasid caliphs for more than half a century, from 836 to 892 CE, had already been known before the Muslim conquests. Its name in Aramaic was Samarra, and the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tasim selected it as the center of his caliphate and renamed it "Surra Man Ra'a," an Arabic expression meaning "he who sees it is delighted," so that the name would carry an auspicious meaning while remaining phonetically similar to its original name. The same Arabic name appears on extant coins minted in the

city during the Abbasid period. It has also been said that Samarra bore the same name in ancient times and that its name derived from Sam, son of Noah. It was once a large, populous, and prosperous settlement but gradually declined in size and importance (10). The last major destruction of Samarra before the Abbasid rebuilding occurred during the conflict between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun. The site of al-Mu'tasim's palace had consisted of a monastery and lands belonging to Christians, which he purchased from them. Surra Man Ra'a was the last of the seven great cities established in Iraq within the Iranian cultural sphere. After the Abbasid caliphs, the majority of the population of Samarra consisted of Shi'a Muslims, because the tombs of the tenth and eleventh Shi'a Imams, Imam Ali al-Hadi and his son Imam Hasan al-Askari, are located there. In addition, a mosque associated by Shi'a tradition with the twelfth Imam, known as al-Qa'im Al Muhammad, is situated in the part of Samarra that had constituted al-Mu'tasim's military encampment. For this reason, the shrines of the tenth and eleventh Imams became known as the shrine of al-Askariyyayn. In the early fourteenth century, Hamd Allah Mostowfi, himself a Shi'a, wrote that near the mosque were the tombs of Imam Ali al-Naqi, a descendant of Imam Ali al-Rida, and his son Imam Hasan al-Askari. He further noted that the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil had expanded the buildings of Samarra and constructed an especially magnificent palace called al-Ja'fariyya, but that after his death it was destroyed to such an extent that virtually no trace remained, and that only a small part of Samarra was still inhabited. The extensive destruction of Samarra in Mostowfi's time was also confirmed by Ibn Battuta, who visited the city around 1330 CE (20).

Transfer of the Center of the Caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra

From the beginning of the Islamic period, it became customary for successive ruling dynasties to select new capitals, a precedent associated with the Prophet Muhammad, who transferred the political center to Yathrib, subsequently known as Madinat al-Rasul (2). When Ali ibn Abi Talib became caliph, he transferred the capital from Yathrib to Kufa, thereby disrupting the previous balance among the Arab tribes. Mu'awiya subsequently made Damascus his capital (21). When the Abbasids came to power, they did not consider Damascus, the residence of the Umayyads and their supporters and a city located close to the Byzantine frontiers, suitable as their capital and therefore considered moving the political center. Al-Saffah, the first Abbasid caliph, built a palace near Anbar, an ancient Persian city on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, and named it Hashimiyya. After al-Saffah died and al-Mansur became caliph, he too constructed a palace called Hashimiyya. Al-Mansur's Hashimiyya was located between Kufa and Hira. Al-Mansur initially intended to make Hira the capital, but because it was close to Kufa, where Shi'a influence was strong, he abandoned the plan (2). He therefore began searching for another location and, after careful consideration, selected Baghdad, situated near the Tigris and surrounded by fertile lands. Before becoming the capital, Baghdad had been a village founded by one of the ancient Iranian kings on the western bank of the Tigris. From the reign of al-Mansur until the accession of al-Mu'tasim, Baghdad served as the center of the caliphate and was regarded as the center of Islamic civilization. During the reign of al-Ma'mun, with the flourishing of Bayt al-Hikma, the city reached the height of its golden age and became the setting for outstanding scientific achievements. With the accession of al-Mu'tasim, however, the Abbasid Caliphate entered a new phase. Internal conflicts and court disputes over succession, such as the conflict between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun, encouraged subsequent caliphs to seek new military forces. During al-Mu'tasim's reign, when the inhabitants of Baghdad complained bitterly about the abuses committed by Turkish soldiers, the caliph began considering the relocation of the capital and selected Samarra for this purpose. It has been stated that al-Mu'tasim's mother was a Turkish slave woman, that Turkish support contributed to his rise to power, and, most importantly, that his lack of confidence in

existing troops and his growing preference for the Turks created the conditions for transferring the center of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra. In Baghdad, the Turkish military slaves, by order of the caliph, wore luxurious garments, were distinguished from other soldiers, and were permitted to ride through the streets of Baghdad. The inhabitants of Baghdad were subjected to abuse by these Turks, who rode their horses through markets and streets and trampled women, children, elderly persons, and blind individuals. At times, the inhabitants retaliated and killed some of the Turkish soldiers. Having become exhausted by these abuses, the people of Baghdad approached al-Mu'tasim and told him that if he did not remove the Turkish army from among them, they would fight him. Surprised, al-Mu'tasim asked how they would fight him, and they replied, "with the arrows of the dawn." When he asked what they meant, they answered that they would curse him in their prayers. On one occasion during a festival, an elderly man openly protested to the caliph about the matter. Ibn al-Athir identifies al-Mu'tasim's lack of confidence in his own troops as the principal reason for the construction of Samarra and reports that in approximately 835–836 CE, al-Mu'tasim went to the site of Samarra in order to construct a city there. According to this account, al-Mu'tasim stated that he feared his troops and believed that if they rebelled even once, they would kill all of his military slaves. He therefore wanted to reside in a location from which he could oversee them and, if necessary, reach and control them by desert routes or river. From that period onward, the center of the caliphate was transferred from Baghdad to Samarra for approximately 59 years. During the period in which it served as the capital, Samarra expanded considerably, reportedly extending for more than eight farsakhs. After al-Mu'tasim, however, the city rapidly declined and was later described as almost entirely ruined, with the exception of the cellar associated with Imam al-Mahdi and the Karkh quarter of Samarra. Between approximately 835–836 and 892 CE, Samarra witnessed the reigns of eight Abbasid caliphs: 1) al-Mu'tasim, 833–842 CE; 2) al-Wathiq, 842–847 CE; 3) al-Mutawakkil, 847–861 CE; 4) al-Muntasir, 861–862 CE; 5) al-Musta'in, 862–866 CE; 6) al-Mu'tazz, 866–869 CE; 7) al-Muhtadi, 869–870 CE; and 8) al-Mu'tamid, 870–892 CE. In 892 CE, following al-Mu'tamid, al-Mu'tadid became caliph. During his reign, the center of the caliphate was transferred back to Baghdad (20) and never returned to Samarra. The civil war between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun demonstrated that the caliph required a military force that would be fully loyal to him and detached from religious disputes. For this reason, even during the reign of al-Ma'mun, when al-Mu'tasim was appointed to important governorships, he organized a personal force of approximately 4,000 Turks. Al-Mu'tasim took particular interest in purchasing and assembling Turkish military slaves and provided approximately 4,000 of them with silk garments and gold ornaments, thereby distinguishing their clothing from that of other soldiers (22). After becoming caliph, al-Mu'tasim increased their numbers. In addition to slaves purchased in Transoxiana who were known for their expertise in horsemanship and archery, the forces also included groups of Slavs and even Berbers. Within a relatively short period, the caliph's army reportedly grew to approximately 70,000 military slaves and mercenaries, while Iranians and Arabs, who had constituted the core of the Islamic armies under earlier caliphs, were gradually removed from active roles. This transformation inevitably had serious consequences for the caliphal administration. Military slaves entering service were often subsequently manumitted and rose to high offices within the caliph's palace and even within the governmental apparatus itself.

Religious Intolerance and the Weakening of the Caliphal Administration

Following the policy of al-Ma'mun, al-Mu'tasim compelled the population to acknowledge that the Qur'an was created. He himself lacked scholarly expertise and was therefore unable to formulate an independent position on such theological questions, merely implementing the instructions of his brother al-Ma'mun. Scholars and

intellectuals who refused to accept the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an were subjected to persecution. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the famous jurist and traditionist, was flogged and imprisoned, while other scholars and judges who did not endorse the caliph's Mu'tazilite position were likewise exposed to the danger of corporal punishment and persecution. Al-Mu'tasim's treatment of the Alids, with the exception of the policies followed by al-Ma'mun, resembled the harsh approach of preceding caliphs. In approximately 834–835 CE, Imam Muhammad al-Jawad died in Baghdad. He had married Umm al-Fadl, the daughter of al-Ma'mun, and it has been reported that she poisoned her husband on the orders of al-Mu'tasim because of fears that Imam al-Jawad might father children who, as descendants of both al-Ma'mun and Imam al-Rida, could claim the caliphate (2). Al-Mu'tasim's policy of relying on Turkish troops in state affairs and granting them extensive rewards provoked jealousy and resentment among the Arabs. Ujayf ibn Anbasa, an Arab commander [Ujayf ibn Anbasa served as governor of Armenia and Azerbaijan during al-Mu'tasim's reign (23).], rebelled against Turkish commanders who mistreated the Arabs and even sought to eliminate al-Mu'tasim. He encouraged Abbas ibn al-Ma'mun to rebel against his uncle and claim the caliphate. Arab commanders likewise joined the conspiracy, and it was agreed that after the distribution of booty acquired during the famous campaign against Amorium, al-Mu'tasim, al-Afshin, and Ashnas [Ashnas commanded the vanguard of al-Mu'tasim's army against the Byzantines in approximately 837–838 CE (22).] would be assassinated. The conspiracy, however, was exposed. Abbas and some of the conspirators revealed their secret while intoxicated, and al-Mu'tasim deprived Abbas of water until he died. Ujayf subsequently met the same fate. Al-Mu'tasim thus suppressed the conspiracy at an early stage, but he did not escape its consequences. He became increasingly dependent on Turkish commanders and gradually distanced himself from Arab and Persian officers, removing their names from the registers of military stipends. The Turks themselves were not necessarily loyal to him and sought to appropriate political authority. During the period in which Samarra served as the Abbasid capital, the caliphs increasingly became instruments in the hands of Turkish commanders (2).

Scientific Decline of Bayt al-Hikma and the Migration of Scholars and Translators

Following the death of al-Ma'mun, the rapid expansion of the Translation Movement began to lose momentum. The reign of al-Mu'tasim (833–842 CE) unfolded in an atmosphere in which rivalry between Turkish elements and influential Iranian and Arab groups increasingly restricted the activities of scholars. Despite the presence of many outstanding translators during this period, Bayt al-Hikma no longer possessed the prosperity and prestige it had enjoyed under al-Ma'mun. Al-Mu'tasim's poor governance and lack of interest in scholarship on the one hand (24), and the transfer of the center of the caliphate to Samarra on the other, considerably diminished the splendor of Bayt al-Hikma in Baghdad. The first manifestation of the disturbances of this period appeared within the Translation Movement. From this time until the reign of al-Mutawakkil, when the bright flame of the scientific movement increasingly faded, many scholars migrated to distant regions, and the cultural center of Baghdad became fragmented. The decline of Baghdad's scientific prominence was accompanied by the flourishing of other centers of scholarship in the Islamic world, including the courts of the Samanids, Buyids, Cordoba, and the Fatimids of Egypt (25). The short reign of al-Wathiq (842–847 CE) likewise failed to resolve Baghdad's scientific decline. When al-Mutawakkil came to power, despite the religious intolerance and strict policies of this Sunni caliph, Bayt al-Hikma once again experienced a degree of revival through prominent translators such as Hunayn ibn Ishaq, his sons, and his students. However, misguided policies and the prohibition of scholarly disputation on the one hand, together with punishments imposed on participants and writers engaged in such activities on the other, not only brought the

era of intellectual openness to an end but also generated dissatisfaction among distinguished translators and established authors and encouraged some of them to leave the center of the caliphate (10). Together with other political and cultural factors inherited from the reign of al-Mu'tasim, these developments weakened the scientific and cultural foundations of Islamic society and contributed to the gradual fading of the golden age of Islamic scientific activity.

Decline of the Translation Movement

Most researchers divide the development of the scientific movement during the Abbasid era into four periods: 1) the period of Harun al-Rashid; 2) the period of al-Ma'mun; 3) the post-al-Ma'mun period; and 4) the end of the Translation Movement.

Among these four periods, only the reigns of Harun al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun witnessed an extraordinary acceleration in the transfer of sciences from other civilizations into the Islamic world, during which a substantial proportion of the written heritage of earlier civilizations was translated, explained, and interpreted in Syriac and Arabic. The leading figures of the movement, who had been involved in scholarly activities from its earliest stages, largely continued their scientific work until the end of the reign of al-Mutawakkil. However, with the accession of certain ineffective caliphs who showed little concern for the advancement of science, this extensive scientific movement entered a period of decline. After al-Ma'mun, translation activities continued during the reigns of al-Mu'tasim and al-Mutawakkil; Hunayn ibn Ishaq, for example, remained active in translation. Nevertheless, the transfer of the center of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra during al-Mu'tasim's reign (833–842 CE) brought significant changes in the process through which scientific works were translated into Arabic. The most important reason for this transformation was the declining importance of Bayt al-Hikma, the most important scholarly institution of the period. The great number of scholars, physicians, and translators during the Abbasid scientific movement may raise the question of whether these individuals were Arabs. Ibn Khaldun's well-known observation is also applicable to this period: "Most of the bearers of knowledge were non-Arabs" (25). Throughout the period of Islamic civilization, some of the most important works on medicine, astronomy, and philosophy were written in Arabic but produced by non-Arab scholars. In any case, what enabled Muslims to succeed in their pursuit of knowledge was their intellectual curiosity and the existence of a degree of intellectual tolerance. Certainly, the motivation of many early caliphs to encourage physicians and astronomers derived in part from their practical need for these two groups of scholars (25). The principal stimulus behind the enthusiasm shown by Muslims for the theoretical investigations of Greek, Indian, and Iranian scholars was intellectual curiosity. This movement continued from the beginnings of the Translation Movement under al-Mansur and Harun al-Rashid and reached its peak during the reign of al-Ma'mun with the flourishing of Bayt al-Hikma. However, when the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tasim transferred the center of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra, the movement began to follow a declining trajectory and gradually deteriorated. Al-Mu'tasim preferred Turkish military slaves to the old companions and loyal supporters of his forefathers (10). Al-Dinawari reports in *al-Akhbar al-Tiwal* that when authority passed to Abu Ishaq al-Mu'tasim, he devoted himself primarily to the problem of Babak, assembled large numbers of men and substantial financial resources for the campaign, and appointed his military slave Haydar ibn Kawus, known as al-Afshin, commander of the army (14). The caliphs' neglect of the sciences, the substantial weakening of the Islamic caliphal administration as a result of the increasing activities of opponents and challengers to the Abbasid court, competition among political elites, and the declining prestige of Bayt al-Hikma in Baghdad were among the principal causes of scientific stagnation during

this period. During the short reign of al-Wathiq, no significant scientific movement emerged, although al-Wathiq reportedly favored discussion and intellectual inquiry, respected scholars, opposed unquestioning imitation, and sought knowledge concerning the views of ancient and contemporary philosophers as well as religious scholars. Many of al-Wathiq's court sessions focused on medical questions, and Ibn Bukhtishu' and Hunayn ibn Ishaq were among those who attended them. Like his father, al-Wathiq adhered to Mu'tazilite doctrine (22). When al-Mutawakkil became caliph, he prohibited the theological debate and disputation that had been common during the reigns of al-Mu'tasim, al-Wathiq, and al-Ma'mun. He encouraged adherence to established authority and instructed leading traditionists to transmit hadith and promote the doctrines of the Sunni community (22). He ended the examination of religious belief and prohibited disputation over matters of religion. After al-Mu'tasim, the Abbasid state increasingly came under the influence of a group of Turkish soldiers whose primary interests centered on acquiring wealth and transmitting booty toward Turkic regions. Ministers, governors, and other officials likewise became increasingly concerned with accumulating wealth, while the caliphs progressively weakened to such an extent that they could not always exercise authority even over military slaves and servants within their own palaces. The principal burden consequently fell upon farmers and other tax-paying classes. State officials, despite contributing little to production or economic output, collected taxes from the population with considerable severity (26). Following al-Mu'tasim's reign, the Turks gradually gained control over central political authority, and conditions at the court developed to the point that Turkish intervention could result in the deposition of one caliph and the installation of another; indeed, in some instances, the conditions for the assassination of caliphs by Turkish soldiers were created.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the establishment and development of Bayt al-Hikma under al-Ma'mun, the caliph's particular attention to various sciences, the presence of distinguished translators in Baghdad, and the substantial financial resources devoted to scholarly activities played an unparalleled role in the flourishing of Islamic civilization and the emergence of the golden age of the Translation Movement. This scientific movement was transformed when al-Mu'tasim, the eighth Abbasid caliph, transferred the center of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra. The movement did not merely enter a state of stagnation but began to follow a declining trajectory and ultimately deteriorated. After the transfer of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra, the caliphs gradually became weaker, whether intentionally or as an unintended consequence of political developments, while Turkish influence steadily increased. Therefore, the decline of the Translation Movement was directly related to al-Mu'tasim's transfer of the center of the Abbasid Caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra. The caliphs' neglect of scientific activity, the major weakening of the caliphal administration owing to the growth of opposition and political challenges at court, rivalry among political elites, and the declining prestige of Bayt al-Hikma in Baghdad were among the principal factors underlying the decline of the Translation Movement. The findings indicate that these factors were, in turn, closely connected to the transfer of the center of the caliphate from Baghdad to Samarra.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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