GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC LIBRARIES

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The existence of the libraries in the Islamic Society indicates the growth and development of Islamic civilization, for that is its outcome and reflection. With the advancement of Islamic civiliz-ation the number of libraries increased and their objectives varied. These libraries, comprehending all types of disciplines, consisted of public libraries of the central mosques, the schools and the hospitals, the state libraries established by the Caliphs, the commanders or the rulers, and the private ones owned by religious scholars, jurists and others.

Most of the thinkers of the Islamic world agree that the growth of the library in Islam was the outcome of the mosque, with which it had a close connection. The study circles (*halaqat ad-dars*) of various Islamic sciences used to be held in these mosques. Thus, the sacred mosque (*al-Masjid al-Haram*) at Makkah al-Mukarramah, the mosque of the Prophet (*al-Masjid an-Nabawi*) at Madina *al-Munawwara*, and many other mosques in the conquered territories were the rendezvous of the individuals and the groups to learn the Islamic religion and its characteristics. A scholar used to sit in the mosque, and around him gathered his disciples. He dictated to them whatever Allah had inspired in him about religious and worldly knowledge. The students, in turn, would write these lectures from their teacher and collected them together. These collections later became the books and works of the scholars. That is how there began the study circles and the dictation sessions. The latter resulted in the appearance of numerous books under the name of *Amali* (dictation/lectures). Haji Khalifa, in his book entitled *Kashf as-Zunun*, has devoted to it an exclusive chapter. Among those books on *Amali* (*Lectures/dictation*) the most reputed are "*Amali*" by al-Qali, Tha'lab, az-Zujaj, Ibn Durayd and Badi az-Zaman al-Hamadhani.[1]

In the beginning of the second century after the *Hijrah*, the movement of compilation gained momentum, and due attention was paid to the compilation of the Prophetic traditions in the first instance and then to the *Maghazi* and the *Siya*, for they helped a great deal in the study of the Holy Quran and the Prophetic Ahadith. Then followed the age of compilation of books on different branches of Islamic and Arabic studies. The books were thus produced widely and their number increased rapidly. The compilers of those books usually gave each report along with the chain of narrators which showed the extent of its credibility and reliance.

The second century of the *Hijrah* also witnessed great concern and extraordinary arrangements for translation activities. Thus Ibn Juljul relates in his *Tabaqat* that the work of Ahram bin A'yan in medicine was translated into Arabic during the period of Marwan b. al-Hakam and that 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Aziz brought it out for public use.[2] This led to the production and multiplication of books on various branches of Islamic learning. Since books were also produced in the lecture halls of the mosques, the libraries too were established in these places. This is because the mosque in Islam is not only the place of worship, but also the centre for spreading the Islamic Call and the fountainhead of speculative thinking.

It appears that the libraries of the mosques were the first libraries the Muslims established in Islam. It was the custom among the Muslims to deposit in the mosques copies of the Quran, and works on *Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh* and *'Aqa'id* produced by religious scholars. These were kept in the mosques so that the people who came there for saying prayers, and the people interested in learning and studies, could be benefitted by them. Thus we find that, just as the mosque was the place of worship, it was likewise the centre of study in different branches of knowledge at different levels. The practice of teaching in the mosque continued for a considerable length of time till in later years the *Nizamiyah* schools were established during the middle of the fifth century after the *Hijrah*. The mosques, however, went on discharging their functions even after the establishment of *Nizamiyah* schools. To most of these mosques, especially the significant ones, were attached libraries containing valuable books and manuscripts. Some of the important mosques became important intellectual and literary centres where studies were zealously pursued and students and teachers were attracted towards them from all over the world. Study circles were held in these mosques, just as they were held in the Sacred Mosque at Makkah, in the Prophet's mosque at Madina, in the Aqsa mosque at Jerusalem, and other important mosques in various Islamic countries, such as al-Azhar in Cairo, al-Masjid al-Umawi in Damuscus, and other mosques in Baghdad, Tunis, the Maghrib, Andalus and other places.

These mosques contained collections of important books on multifarious subjects. They included both bequeathed (*mawquf*) and donated (*mawhub*) works produced by Muslim scholars during the past ages. It appears that many scholars used to make wills to the effect that some of their books or their entire libraries might be donated as *Waqf* to the mosque of their village or town. Thus Ibn Khallikan tells us that Abu Nasr Ahmad b. Yusuf as-Sulayki al-Manazi (d. 437 A.H./1045 A.C.) had a large collection of books which he dedicated as *Waqf* to Jami Mayya Fariqayn and to Jami Asad. During his time they remained preserved in the libraries of both mosques and were known as the works of al-Manazi.[3] Besides, some caliphs and

rulers used to donate many valuable items to the mosques so as to seek a reward from Allah. These sometimes included books also. Yaqut al-Hamawi reports that when he left the city of Marw in 616 A.H./1219 A.C., there existed ten *Waqf* libraries containing such a large collection of books as could be found nowhere else in the world at that time. Two of these libraries were located in the Central Mosque. The number of one of them reached about twelve thousand volumes.[4]

The examples of the Islamic libraries attached to the mosques can still be found during our own days in most of the Arab and Islamic countries, such as the *Sacred Mosque* at Makkah, the *Mosque of the Prophet* at Medina, *Jami' al-Azhar* at Cairo, *Jami' Bani Ummaya* at Damuscus, *Jami' az-Zaituna* and *Jami' al-Mansur* at Tunis, *Jami' al-Mansur* at Baghdad, the mosque at Cordova (Qurtuba), Tulaytala, Bilad al-Maghrib and the *al-Jami al-Kabir* at Sana'. Each of these mosques contained and still contains big libraries replete with excellent manuscripts and published works on different subjects. These libraries, housed in the mosques, were founded hundreds of years ago. The books on various subjects contained therein were donated by rulers and scholars, and their numbers continuously increased with the passage of time throughout the long period of Islamic history. It also appears that there existed more than one library in some of the great mosques. Thus Yaqut says, "During his times there were two libraries in the *Al-Jami al-Kabir* (Great Mosque) at Marw. One of these was called *al-'Aziziyah*. It was dedicated by a man called 'Asis ad-Din Abu Bakr. It contained twelve thousand volumes." "The other library," continues Yaqut, "was called *al-Kamaliyyah* and I do not know to whom it was attributed."[5]

It should be pointed out that these libraries often became targets of theft, plunder, burning and inundation which resulted in great loss or the complete destruction of large portions of their contents.

Alongside the mosque libraries, another type of library was also found. They were the private libraries (*al-Maktabat al-Knassa*) found in the houses of the Companions, the Successors, the Caliphs, Rulers and Ministers. Thus it is reported that Sa'd b. 'Ubada al-Ansari possessed a book or books which contained a collection of the traditions of the Holy Prophet.[6] Similarly, 'Abd Allah b. Masud, in addition to his famous *'Sahifa* (treatise containing a collection of Ahadith), possessed a few more treatises written in his own handwriting. Moreover, Asma' the daughter of 'Umays, possessed a *Kitab* (treatise) in which she had collected some traditions of the Prophet. Again, A'bu Huraira had many *Kutub* (tracts) containing traditions. We also know that 'Abd Allah b. 'Amr b. al-As used to memorise his *Kutub* and *Suhuf* (treatises) which were kept in a box fixed with rings. Similarly, 'Abd Allah b. 'Abbas had many books reaching in weight that of a camel-load.[7]

Again, 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar possessed a large number of books,

including many excellent and rare works. Whenever he went out to the
market, he looked into them. Similarly, 'Urwa b. az-Zubayr had many
books which were burnt on the occasion of the battle of Harra. He was
much grieved for their loss and said, "I wish I could have my books for my
family and property."[8]

   Abu Qilaba 'Aba Allah b. Zayd, an illustrious Successor, willed his books
to Ayyub as-Sakhtiyani. When they were brought to him they weighed a
camel-load. Al-Hasan al-Basri said, "Some people are great: they will take
care of them." The Ummayyad and the 'Abbasid periods saw a large
number of scholars who devoted themselves to the collection and
preservation of books on various sciences and languages. The foremost
among them was Ibn Shihab az-Zuhri (d. 124 A.H.) who possessed a huge
collection of books. At home he devoted himself to study and used to be
surrounded by his books. His pre-occupation with them one day forced his
wife to say, "I would prefer three rival co-wives to his love for books."[10] Abu
'Amr b. Al-'Ala (70–154 A.H.) was another scholar who not only possessed
a big collection of books, but had written several books on Arab Eloquence.[11]
Over and above all this, there were the libraries of Jabir b. Hayyan (d. 200
A.H.) and Imam ash-Shafii (d. 204 A.H.) which contained a large number
of books on various sciences. Ahmad al-Madini (d. 272 A.H.) also
possessed many books.[12] Similarly, the library of Muhammad Zakariya ar-
Razi (d. 311 A.H.) was contained in many large boxes full of books.
Muhammad b. Nasr al-Hajib (d. 312 A.H.) also had a large collection of
books on different subjects.[13] Moreover, Abu Bakr as-Suli is reported to
have possessed a big house full of books.

   Among the largest private Islamic libraries was the library owned by
Banu Marwan. The number of its catalogues of books titles alone exceeded
44 volumes some of which contain only titles of Poetry.[14]

   The above library was founded by the Ummayyad Caliph Hakam II. The
Caliph had taken a keen interest in establishing and enriching this
monumental library. For this purpose he sent book dealers to various
countries to make purchases. It is reported that he wished to have for his
library the famous book *"Kitab al-Afghani"* of Abu'l-Faraj, who had
attributed it to Banu Ummayh. he therefore sent him one thousand dinars
of 'pure gold', whereupon Abu'l-Faraj sent a copy of it before taking it to
Iraq. In order to build and enlarge his private library, Hamak had
employed in his house expert copyists, skilled scribes and efficient book
binders.[15]

   Yaqut related that the library of as-Sahib b. 'Abbad (d. 385 A.H.)
contained 6,200 volumes and its catalogues alone consisted of 10 volumes.[16]
Again, the library of al-'Aziz al-Fatimi contained 1,600,000 volumes.[17] The
book collection of Vizier Muhallabi consisted of 117,000 volumes.

Similarly, the number of books owned by Usama b. Munqadh was 4,000 volumes, which were stolen by the Crusaders. Lamenting this tragic incident, he used to say, "The loss of these (books) remained the cause of my grief throughout my life." Again, Ibn Sina, on the authority of al-Qifti, reports that he had petitioned Nuh b. Mansur the Sultan of Bukhara, to be granted permission to know about the contents and the Sawan al-Hikam library. He reported that his request was acceded to, and he went through the catalogue of books of al-Awail and asked for what he needed.[18]

During his illness in the year 728 A.H., which resulted in his death, Ibn Taymiya was forbidden to write anything at all. All books, papers, ink-pots and pens were, therefore, taken away from him. But prior to his illness he had already left a bulk of written material. It is reported that his books and other writings, reaching in number to hundreds, were taken away to the library of al-'Adiliyya. According to the historian al-Barlali, this amounted to 60 volumes and 14 Rayta Kararis.[19] The famous historian Abu Shama, the author of *Kitab ar-Rawadatayn*, had bequeathed to this very library his entire personal library consisting of a large number of books on varied Islamic subjects.[20]

At-Taj al-Kindi was one of the great scholars of Damascus. He was a linguist, a prose writer, a poet, and a philologist. He was the tutor of Ayyubi Kings such as Amjad Bahram Shah, 'Izz ad-Din Farrukhshah and Malik al-Muazzam 'Isa. he used to teach in a *Maqsura* (closet) in the Banu Ummayya Mosque known as *al-Maqsura 't-Tajiya*. It was situated on the north-eastern side of the mosque. This *Maqsura* also contained a public library. The historian Abu Shama had found a catalogue of this library in the handwriting of at-Taj al-Kindi. Its number reached 761 volumes, the details of which are as under:

   a) On the Science of the Holy Quran, its recitation, exegesis and intonation
   (*Tajwid*)   140 volumes
   b) On the Science of the Hadith and its technical terms
   (*Maslihuh*)   19 volumes
   c)On the Science of the *Fiqh* and its principles (*Usul*)   39 volumes
   d) On the Arabic Language   143 volumes
   e) On the Poetry, Eloquence (*al-balagha*) and Rhetorics
   (*al-Ma'ani*)   122 volumes
   f) On Syntax (*an-Nahw*) and Etymology (*at-Tasrif*)   175 volumes
   g) On Ancient Sciences of Medicines etc.   123 volumes

The library contained a number of catalogues and indices. The catalogues listed all the books received by the library.[21]

Apart from the libraries of religious scholars (*al-'ulama*), the jurists (*al-fuqaha*) and the men of learning (*al-udaba*), there existed also the private libraries in the palaces of the caliphs, the rulers (*al-Umara*) and the wealthy

(*al-aghniya*) who had patronized them by providing financial assistance. The motive behind the establishment of these libraries was to educate and discipline themselves, their courtiers and their relatives. Broadly speaking, they were established with the intention that a limited group of people from amongst their friends and colleagues, and the scholars and the researchers of their own regions, might be benefitted by them.

This was the state of affairs of the libraries during the lifetime of their patrons. After their deaths, some of them were bequeathed in favour of seekers after knowledge, in which case they remained with their own heirs or with their official successors if they had a love for books. In other cases, they were given to the mosque libraries, to school libraries, or to the public libraries. It also happened that the collection of books of the deceased scholar reached the hands of the book-sellers as part of the legacy bought by them. Later, the scholars possessing private libraries bought by them from these booksellers and preserved in their own libraries.

With the increase in the Islamic conquests, the conquerors found a large number of important books on different subjects in the conquered lands. They preserved these books safely, studied and perused them, and made the necessary arrangements for translating the useful among them into Arabic. Alongside translation activities, independent books also began to be compiled. Consequently, a large number of books and translated works on different branches of useful subjects were produced. The great caliphs and the chiefs also took a keen interest in books; they gave monetary awards to religious scholars and writers on their literary contributions. Some of them awarded the writer with the gold equal to the weight of his book. This was done to encourage the work of translation and compilation and to bring to light the intellectual movement which produced a large number of books. With the increase in the number of books, more public and private libraries were established. The Islamic countries vied with each other in building up public libraries in their principal cities. Similarly, the caliphs, scholars, jurists and writers felt pride in establishing libraries in the mosque, in palaces, in homes, in schools and in frontier stations. Scholars were appointed to maintain and look after these libraries and to make useful additions in the existing collection. In order to enrich the libraries and to yield fruitful results therefrom, huge financial grants were given by the caliphs, the chiefs and the rich. This gave birth to a new kind of library: the Public Library. It was different from the libraries of the mosques or the private ones in the sense that it was larger in size and possessed more books.

The public library first emerged at the very time when the mosque libraries of private libraries were established. Thus it stood side-by-side with its sister libraries and played a major and active role in the field of

knowledge and Islamic learning, preserving over several centuries the intellectual Islamic heritage and safeguarding them against destruction, annihilation (*al-talf*), loss (*ad-diya*) or theft (*as-sarqa*). This clearly shows the progress of Islam in its intellectual achievement.

Historically speaking, the first public library is reported to have been established by the Ummayad caliph, Mu'awiya b. Sufyan (41–A.H.) in Damascus in the early period of his reign. Named *'Bayt al-Hikma* ("House of Wisdom") it was housed in a large building and contained a great collection of books.

The successor of this Ummayyad Caliph, Khalid b. Yazid b. Muawyah also established a special public library. he accumulated in it a large number of books dealing especially with Chemistry, in which he was personally interested. Because of his particular interest in this discipline he made a large collection of Chemistry books and made arrangments for Arabic translation of works dealing with this subject. For this purpose he spent a considerable amount of money. In fact he was the first to make arrangement for translating into Arabic Greek and Coptic works.[22] As a result of this and also because of his great encouragement to compile books on Chemistry, a large number of translated books appeared. When the Abbasids came to power, the Caliph al-Mansur (136–158 A.H.) took a keen interest in books and libraries and established the largest public library in Baghdad, known as *Dar al-Hikmah*. It was considered to be the largest Islamic public library of this period. Al-Mansur encouraged the task of preparation and compilation of works on various Islamic subjects in general and made special arrangements for translating into Arabic Greek works on subjects such as Medicine, Astronomy, and Philosophy. When a large number of translated books were prepared, the caliph placed them in the *Dar al-Hikmkah*. At the same time he ordered the copying of all the translated and compiled books available to him; with a view to disseminating knowledge among the Muslim *Ummah* he sent them to different Islamic countries.

During his reigh, the Caliph ar-Rasheed (170–193 A.H.) also attended to *'Dar al-Hikmah'* and made considerable additions in the existing collection of Caliph al-Mansur. He included in it a large number of original or translated Arabic books and also books in other languages, most of which he had obtained during his conquest of Roman territories and in the markets of Asia and elsewhere. He deposited all these books in the library of *Dar al-Hikmah* for the general use of religious scholars, jurists, and men of learning. In addition to this, the Caliph encouraged the compilation and translation works and gave for this purpose awards and prizes. This greatly influenced Islamic literary activity which resulted in the addition of intellectual works on various useful subjects.

During the period of the Caliph al-Mamun (193–218 A.H.), the activities of translation and production of books further increased. He accumulated books from different countries of the world and appointed translators to translate non-Arabic books into the Arabic language.[23] We find, therefore, that during the second and third centuries after the *Hijrah*, the movement of translation and compilation had gained considerable momentum. This was also the time of the appearance of the paper industry and its expansion. This industry developed rapidly and the people engaged in it came to be known as copyists (*warrequn*).

These *warraqun*, according to Ibn Khallikan, normally carried out the task of copying, correction and book binding. In our times, these may be compared to publication and binding works. The '*warraqun*' found for this new industry a big market in Baghdad, where there existed more than a hundred paper shops. These shops were not only places for copying and binding, but the bigger ones were the conference rooms of scholars and poets and the meeting places for cultured people, where they acquainted themselves with everything new about the world of books. They were also the venue for discussions on different literary topics.

Among the eminent scholars and writers of this interregnum were: Imam Shafii (d. 204 A.H.), the author of more than one hundred books; Jabir b. Hayyan (d. 200 A.H.), the compiler of more than 300 works; Jahiz, who wrote more than 120 books as mentioned by him in the beginning of his book entitled '*al-Haywan*'; and *Muhammad b. Zakariya ar-Razi (d. 311 A.H.), the author of over 250 books.*[24]

Speaking about the famous libraries in Islam, Qalqashandi in his book entitled '*Subh al-A'sha*', says, "In earlier times, the Caliphs and the Kings took a keen interest and paid full attention to the collection of books. Consequently, they established grand libraries. It is said that in the Islamic world, there were three large libraries which may be considered as the biggest ones."

The first of these was the library of the Abbasid Caliphs, popularly known as '*Dar al-Hikmhah*'. It contained countless invaluable works. It existed till the Mongol attack on Baghdad in 656 A.C. in which the last Abbasid Caliph was put to death by their King Hulagu. In this attack, the library was completely destroyed and utterly devastated, so that no traces of it could be found.

As regards the second and third largest libraries of the Islamic world, they were the 'Fatimide's library' at Cairo and the 'Ummayyad Library' at Cordova. All these libraries played important major roles in preserving the islamic heritage.

The Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs and Princes were not alone in founding public libraries. We find that many other Muslim countries of

that time also showed the same fondness for and interest in books and libraries as was found among the Umayyads and the Abbasids. No wonder, therefore, that quite a large number of public libraries were established in the then Islamic world under the names of *Bayt al-Hikmah'*, *'Dar al-Hikmah, 'Dar al-'Ilm* or *'Khizanat al-Kutub'* (treasury of books). Without giving an exhaustive list, the following libraries, established in Muslim countries in those days, may be mentioned here by way of example:

i) *Bayt al-Hikmah:* Established by Aghlabides at Qayrawan at the end of the 3rd century after the *Hijrah*.

ii) *Dar al-Hikmah:* Founded by the Fatimides at Cairo at the end of the 4th century after *Hijrah*.

iii) *Dar al'Ilm:* Established by al-Hakim al-Fatimi at al-Quds.

iv) *Khizanat al-Hikmah:* Founded by al-Fath b. Khaqan, the Viazier of al-Mutawakkil. The founder of this library was assassinated in 347 A.H. Speaking about this library, Ibn an-Nadim says, "In view of its best and finest collection of books on Science and Literature, I find it to be the largest library I have ever seen."

v) *Khizanat al-Hikmah:* Founded by 'Ali b. Yahya al-Munajjim, (d. 275 A.H./ 888 A.C.). It was situated at the outskirts of Qafas. People from different cities not only visited this library regularly but used to stay there to be benefitted by books on multifarious subjects.

vi) *Dar al-'Ilm:* Established by Ja'far b. Hamdan al-Musali (d. 323 A.H./934 A.C.) at Musal. Yaqut gives the description of this library in these words: "It contained a collection of books on all the sciences. It was bequeathed in favour of all searchers after knowledge. Thus no one was denied access to it. Even if a stranger wished to enter into it he was allowed to do so."

vii) *Dar al-'Ilm:* Established by Sabur b. Ard Sher at Baghdad in 383 A.H. The number of its books exceeded ten thousand volumes for which special catalogues were prepared.

viii) *Sawan al-Hiknah:* Founded by Mansur b. Nuh as-Samani, who died in 366 A.H. at Bukhara. It contained many interesting works.

ix) *Dar al-'Ilm:* Established by ash-Sharif ar-Razi (died in 406 A.H.).

x) *Dar al-'Ilm:* Established by Ibn'l Baqqa, the Chief Qadi of Basra, who died in 499 A.H./1106 A.C.

xi) *Dar al-'Ilm:* Founded in Baghdad by Ibn al-Maristaniya, who died in 599 A.H./1203 A.C.

xii) *Library of Al-Hakam II:* The Umayyads of Spain also paid special attention to collection and preservation of books. Thus the library of the Caliph Al-Hakam II was well known for its rare manuscripts on subjects like Islamic Sciences, Arabic language, History, Medicine and Philosophy.

xiii) *Nizamiya Libraries:* In addition to the libraries mentioned above, a fourth kind of library known as specialized libraries *(al-maktab-at 'l-mutakhassisa)* also came into existence. In the beginning, these libraries were established in big schools and other academic institutions of the Islamic world. The earliest among them was the library of the *Nizamiya* school at Baghdad. It was established by the Seljuqi Vazier, Nizam al-Mulk (d. 485 A.H./1092 A.C.) to cater for the needs of the new education system introduced by him.

Historically, speaking, the kind of libraries referred to above appeared with the emergence of the *Madrasa Nizamiya* in Baghdad during the second half of the 5th century after the *Hijrah*. As such, all the new schools established on the pattern of *Madrasa Nizamiya* were provided with rich libraries which contained books pertaining to new syllabi prescribed and taught in these schools. When the Caliph an-Nasir li-din Allah al-Abbasi took over the Caliphate in the year 589 A.H./1193 A.C., he paid attention to the renovation of the *Madrasa* and the library and added to it many valuable and rare books not easily available elsewhere. It is said that the number of its catalogue alone reached more than six thousand volumes.[26]

xiv) *Khizanat al-Madrasat al-Mustansiriyyah:* This *Masrasa* was established by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustansir in Baghdad in the yer 632 A.H./1233 A.C. It may be considered on a par with the 'University' of modern times. It was named after its founder Caliph and possessed a large library. It is said that the number of its books on its opening day exceeded 80 thousand volumes.[27]

xv) *Khizanat al-Qadi al-Fadil:* Named after its founder Quadi al-Fadil, the Vizier of Salah ad-Din (596 A.H.), it was established in the *Madrasat al-Fadiliyya* in Damascus.

Muslims in that period showed a great love and fondness for books, as a result of which innumerable libraries flourished throught the length and breadth of the islamic world. For this very reason, due attention used to be paid to translation activities by the Caliphs and the Princes and a fortune was spent on its accomplishment. Furthermore, great encouragement was given for the accumulation, collation, review and classification of books. Moreover, the activity of making copies of important books was also accelerated. As a result of these literary activities, shops began to be opened for the sale of books. These shops first appeared in the early period of the Abbisid dynasty. Soon thereafter, with great rapidity, more shops were opened in the capitals and other major cities of the Islamic world.

It must be borne in mind here that Islam, since its very inception, carried with it the torch of learning, piety and righeousness. Its revealed Book, the Holy Quran, being the source of Islamic Law, provided the basis for Islamic thought. The Islamic libraries, playing a major role in the movement for the collection of Islamic books, accumulated a large number of works on different Islamic subjects and preserved thereby the Islamic heritage with the passage of time. But the Islamic Community suffered greatly at the hands of the Mongols and the Crusaders, and the libraries became the first victims of these barbnarous attacks. Consequently, while some of them were completely burnt to ashes, others were robbed and taken away by the invaders. As regards the remaining libraries,a they could not receive the same care and attention as had been given them previously. For a short period of time these libraries were turned into depositories. But in the later two centuries, they began to flourish again and to grow.

The Islamic libraries known formerly as *"Khizanat al-Kutub"* and later as *"Maktaba"* or *"Dar al-Kutub"* played an important role in the lives of individuals and communities in providing food for thought and in forming public opinion. Let us consider what role these libraries played and why they were given so much importance.[30]

Role of Islamic Libraries in Islamic Society

Being the fountainhead of the Islamic heritage, Islamic libraries were to discharge very important functions and to perform a great religious service. To achieve this end, the establishment of the ordinary as well as the central mosques had been linked with the founding of the libraries alongside these mosques. thus, whenever any mosque was built, a library was also attached to it. This is because mosques in almost all the Muslim countries were and still are the usual place for imparting education. In earlier times the mosques were also used as the meeting place for all Muslims, whether dignitaries and noblemen or commoners and bourgeois. Here they used to assemble for mutual consultation and exchange of views, for the adjudication of disputes of contending parties, for repayment of loans taken by debtors, for the preparation of armies for defence of their territorial frontiers, and for other matters concerning their social, political and intellectual life. Attached to these mosques were the libraries which, in addition to their religious role, fulfilled academic and social roles as well.

As regards the academic role of the libraries, they served as one of several important educational training institutions produced by Islam such as *Katatib*, *Madaris* and the *Masajid*. The founders of big schools were keenly interested in attaching to their schools libraries containing books on different branches of Islamic learning. These libraries provided the basis for the practical teaching and training of Muslims.

The library in Islam also served as one of the centres of learning, research and publication. That is why the libraries, whether they were located in ordinary or central mosques, contained books on all branches of knowledge to meet the requirements of research and academic attainments. A few libraries were, however, reserved solely for higher learning and research or for specialization in some specific field of study.

So far as the social role of the libraries is concerned, it is abundantly clear, for libraries in Islam had never been deserted places, full of dust and dirt, frequented by such old persons as had no other work to while away their time. On the contrary, Islamic libraries served as social clubs in the true sense of the word, where members of the community and local residents of the city gathered together to enjoy a rewarding social life. The best example of such a library was the 'Basra Library', as mentioned by al-Hariri in his

Maqama in the sixth century after the *Hijrah*. Giving a vivid account of this prototype library, he says, "It is the assembly and the meeting place of the educationists and a rendezvous for visitors and wayfarers." In fact this was not the only library of its kind; there were many other such libraries in the Islamic world.

In addition to the above mentioned roles played by the library in Islamic society, there were many other functions which these libraries performed

Islamic libraries ever since their origin in the early period had been gradually developing. They made their full contribution in preserving and enriching the Islamic heritage. Moreover, they remained the storehouse of the knowledge which quenched the thirst for learning of religious scholars, the Caliphs, the Princes, students and others. They were located in the mosques, in the houses of religious scholars, jurists and men of letters; in the palaces of Caliphs and Princes; in big Islamic cities and in various educational institutions. The reason why the Caliphs, the religious scholars and the educationists vied with each other in establishing these libraries was the fact that they considered them as the symbols of progress and development and a manifestation of developed Islamic culture and civilization. That is why the destruction and devastation of Islamic libraries used to be the main target and the highest aim of the enemies of Islam and the Muslim community. The ulterior motives of these enemies in destroying the libraries was to give a death blow to Islamic thought. It was to achieve this end Hulagu in 656 A.H. burnt to ashes the 'Dar al-Hikmah' library of Baghdad and the 'al-Qada' of the Abbasid dynasty.

It must, therefore, be our foremost duty to look after every kind of library, whether private or public, and consider it as the fountainhead of knowledge in general and Islamic learning in particular. Moreover, we should spend unreservedly in obtaining rare and expensive books and manuscripts. In modern times, the countries which have their own libraries and intellectual heritage feel proud to possess these assets. The most deserving to claim this prestige and honour are the Islamic countries and the Muslim *Umma*. They must, therefore, give due attention to establish libaries in general and Public Libraries in particular on a modern pattern and to provide them with the best expertise and the latest library equipment and facilities. They must also be made educational centres and should contain millions of books on different useful subject in varied fields and multifarious disciplines. While these libraries should try to maintain, on the one hand, closer and stronger ties with each other, they must, on the other hand, establish and maintain links with other treasuries of knowledge throughout the world.

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14. *Nafh at-Tib*, vol.I, p.362
15. *Ibid*, vol.I, p.362
16. Yaqut, Mu'jam al-Udaba', vol.VI, p.259
17. In my opinion this number is not free from exaggeration.
18. Salah ad-Din al-Mukhtar, *Qawa'id Fihrist al-Makhtutat al-'Arabiya*, p.16
19. Yaqut al-Hamavi, *Mu'jam al-Udaba'*, vol.VI, p.259
20. *Ibid*, p.16; Also see Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa'n-Nihaya*, Vol.XIV, p.134
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22. Ibn an-Nadim, *al-Fihrist*, pp.497–498
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