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Review Essay

ON PRAISE AND VIRTUES OF BOOKS IN THE ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

*Azenita Abdullah*¹

Introduction

Book is not merely an object but an artefact that embodies rich and significant meanings and histories of human endeavours. A book took its form and purpose to preserve the narratives, thoughts, guidance, and wisdoms of the earlier generations and accessible by others and later generations across the centuries and geographical settings. In the Islamic tradition, the word *kitāb*, which is the Arabic term for book has its cultural, philosophical and spiritual dimension. The Quran is called “The Book”, embodies the speech of God (*kalām Allah*) revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to all mankind, and historically speaking it is the impetus of Islamic textual tradition which flourishes until today.

A study of the book in the West is considered quite established and a remarkable amount of literature has been produced throughout the centuries. The historians spent great deal of efforts to study various aspects of book and publish their findings. These studies are extensive, and not limited to the scripts, papers, binding and printing, but described the professions and events in the book enterprise such as the scribes,² booksellers,³ book trade,⁴ book collectors and

¹ A writer and research scholar. Email: azenita.abdullah@gmail.com This essay is based on a Master’s thesis “*Book Culture in Islamic Society: A Historical Analysis of the Early ‘Abbasid Period with Special Reference to Al-Jahiz’s Kitāb al-Hayawan*,” submitted to the International Institute of Islamic Thought & Civilization (ISTAC), 2002.

² For profound studies on book production in the Islamic world, see Thomas W. Arnold and Adolf Grohmann, *The Islamic Book: a Contribution to its Arts and History from the VII-XVII Century*, (1929); Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Christopher De

libraries⁵ – to the extent of the care and love for books.⁶ Nevertheless, despite its deep cultural significance and spiritual meaning of book in Islamic history, very few scholars have studied and written on the subject and is perceived as a difficult area of research. Pedersen⁷ explained why there have not many who pursued this subject. The main reason is scanty sources of reference. For instance, no major medieval source could be found for the purpose of his study, thus he had to collect or rely on information from various primary Islamic sources, including the Quran, Hadith literature, biographies, chronicles, poetries and even geographical literature, none of which had been extensively studied by the earlier scholars for such purpose. In addition, the advancement of information and communication technology – the use of computers for instance, has significantly affected the public's interest and demand for printed books, and the habits of people in reading, buying and collecting books. Thus, book trades and libraries have struggled and no longer exist as important institutions in society today. Although we cannot deny that these technologies have brought benefits to our life, they are detrimental to our heritage and values.

The present study is a small and humble step taken to contribute to the contemporary studies on the subject. It is motivated by the discovery of early treatises by al-Jahiz (d. 255AH /869CE), a prolific writer, theologian and natural biologist of the Abbasid

Hamel, *Medieval Craftsmen, Scribes and Illuminators* (London: British Museum Press, 1992). For a survey of contemporary scholarship on all aspects of bookmaking, see G. Endress, *Grundriss der Arabischen Philologie*, ed., Wolf Dietrich Fischer (Wiesbaden, 1983).

³ See, for instance, Charles Welsh, *A Bookseller of the Last Century* (London: Thoemmes Press, 1997); and Henry Curwen, *A History of Booksellers* (London: Thoemmes Press, 1996).

⁴ See, for instance, Adolf Growoll, *The Profession of Bookselling* (London: Thoemmes Press, 1996).

⁵ See, for instance, Edwards Edwards, *Libraries and Founders of Libraries* (London: Thoemmes Press, 1997); also, Olof Pedersen, *Archives and Libraries in the Ancient Near East 1500-300 BC* (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 1998).

⁶ See, for instance, John C. Clark, *The Care of Books* (London: Thoemmes Press, 1997).

⁷ See Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1984). Henceforth cited as *The Arabic Book*.

caliphate. One such treatise was entitled *Fī Madḥ al-kutub wa'l-ḥathth 'alā jami'ha* (*On the Praise of Books and the Promotion of their Collection*). Another was his *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* (*The Book of Animals*), a multi-volume work on natural history. Interestingly, al-Jahiz introduced this book with a chapter wherein he described the value of book as companion, a vehicle of learning, and a versatile tool for the success of human endeavours. Many who had studied this book earlier were curious as to why the author began his major work with such a kind appreciation towards book. It came to light that al-Jahiz was a great bibliophile, a person who loved books and was very passionate about acquiring books, which he regarded as man's best companion. He was a voracious reader. It is said that there is no book, whatever its subject-matter, ever passed through his hands, without having him reading from cover to cover. In addition to the books which he could buy and copy, he also used to borrow books from the booksellers on deposit and devoured them as fast as he could. There is ample evidence of his vast and multifarious reading in numerous writings that have come down to us from his facile pen. There is a famous anecdote of his death that it was his habit to heap around him all the books he needed to read and one day a heap of books collapsed on him and caused his death.

It is believed there are several other works written on the subject by Muslims scholars that are yet to be explored, but undoubtedly al-Jahiz's work is one of the earliest written that have enlightened us on the socio-historical and spiritual values of book in the Islamic tradition. Books are considered the oldest and the most reliable means of communication, and they encompass thoughts, ideas and wisdoms of their writers that would be accessible to later generations – without which an advanced culture and civilisation of today would not exist.⁸ The third and fourth century Hijrah of the Abbasid is the most remarkable period in the history of Islamic books. This period saw the rapid transmission of knowledge and

⁸ The US Library of Congress is credited with the convening of an international conference on the role of books in the development of civilisation in the Islamic world. A proceeding of the Conference was published in George Atiyeh, ed., *The Book in the Islamic World* (Albany: State University of New York Press and The Library of Congress, 1995). Henceforth cited as *The Book in the Islamic World*.

cross-cultural learning and thanks to the tremendous volumes of books produced. The bookmaking industry and profession became very advanced, coinciding with the introduction of paper and papermills in Baghdad. The flourishing of bookmaking industry was reflected in the growth of new crafts and profession of scribes, editors, proof readers, binders, calligraphers, book agents or traders and librarians. There were numerous public and private libraries, and mosque libraries, academies established during this time. The book, that was once scarce and with only limited copies available, became accessible and widely circulated. It is said, “to dwell on the literary history of Baghdad would amount to writing a history of Muslim science and literature.” In Ibn Nadim’s famous catalogue named *Al-Fihrist Ibn Nadim*, thousands of titles on various subjects by various authors could be traced.

The word book comes from an old English word, *boc* from the Germanic root *bok*. The Latin word is *codex*, that denotes the meaning of book in the modern sense. The Arabic word is *kitāb*, from the root word *k-t-b*, and generally taken to refer to a collection of writings.⁹ Al-Lahyani defines *kitāb* as “something written.” The word *kitāb* is also understood in more restricted sense to refer to sacred scriptures or religious texts. According to al-Zajaj, in the Quran, the word *al-kitāb* refers to the *Taurāt*, but when the word *kitāb Allah* is used, it specifically refers the holy Quran. The Quran also uses the word *al-kitāb* to refer to the record of deeds of every human being that will be presented on the Day of Judgment to account for rewards or punishment. Finally, the word *kitāb* could also mean order, decree or injunction. Jacques Berque argues the word *kitāb* literally means “something written” but to precisely determine the meaning – whether it refers to a simple inscription, or to a holy writ, or to the fate as pre-ordained by God, or to the roll of those called to justice in the Last Judgment, or else to the Quran proper, the context has to be considered.¹⁰ There are equivalent Arabic words for *kitāb* such as *risālat* (monograph), *majmu‘at* (codex, compilation), *riwāyah* (novel) or *mujālad* (volume or tome). In

⁹ See Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1992), 689-699.

¹⁰ Jacques Berque, “The Koranic Text: From Revelation to Compilation” in *Book in the Islamic World*, 17. Henceforth cited as *Koranic Text*.

Indonesian language, *kitab* refers to the Bible and in the old classical Malay language, *kitab-kitab Melayu* refers to books. *Kitāb* is also commonly used as part of titles of many Arabic books, especially prominent ones such as *Kitāb al-Buldān (The Book of Cities)*, *Kitāb al-Aghni (The Book of Songs)* and *Kitāb al-Ḥiyāl (The Book of Ingenious Devices)*.

The respect and admiration towards books are drawn from the Quran. Books are generally viewed as indispensable instruments in the search for knowledge, which is considered as sacred in the Islamic religion. Thus, it is impossible to study the history of the book in the Islamic tradition without looking at the history of the Quran. The Quran's name *al-Kitāb*, its compilation and transmission have greatly influenced the 'ideation' of book in the Islamic tradition. It also determines good conduct or manners (*adāb*) towards books.

After the demise of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), and many Companions who memorised the Quran were killed during a series of battles, particularly in the battle of Yamāma, the need to keep and preserve the Quran in its authentic form was realised by some Companions. Umar al-Khattab (رضي الله عنه), a leading Companion, suggested to the then Caliph Abu Bakr (رضي الله عنه) to collate all the verses, and to write them in complete form as it was revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ) – and to ensure none of the verses would be lost. Although initially Abu Bakr (رضي الله عنه) hesitated to take the action for fear of doing something that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) did not acted upon during his time, Umar (رضي الله عنه) convinced him of the need. So, he ordered one of the Prophet's secretaries, Zayd ibn Thabit (رضي الله عنه) to search, collect all the fragments, and assemble them. He took hold of all the fragments that Zayd ibn Thabit (رضي الله عنه) had collected “whether written on palm branches or thin stones or preserved in the hearts of men,” and he wrote the verses on sheets (*ṣuḥuf*) of equal size and gave to the Caliph.

Nevertheless, some scholars believed that the compilation of the Quran had actually started since the time of the Prophet (ﷺ). After the Prophet (ﷺ) migrated to Madinah he engaged some Companions as the scribes, to record not only the administrative documents but also the Quran. One cited evidence that the Quran had already been written and compiled during the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) is the following statement attributed to Zayd ibn Thabit (رضي الله عنه): “We

were at the Messenger of God's [house] to collate the Quran from disparate scraps."¹¹ The Quran was finally completed into a volume called a *muṣḥaf* indicating the setting together of the manuscript into leaves or *ṣuḥuf* (sing: *saḥīfah*). The term *ṣuḥuf* was commonly used to describe a plate made out of wood used for feeding a number of persons, but the diminutive *saḥīfah* is used to refer to a page, or *sheet*, or folio.¹² To conclude, the 'book' that contains the divine revelation was to carry three names:

1. *Al-Kitāb*, where the dominant connotation seems to refer to, in the absence of contextual precision, to the archetypal or uncreated Quran;
2. Koran (Quran), which was a phonic unit subject to a repetitive, continuous psalmody; and
3. *Muṣḥaf*, as a visual object, an assembly of sheets, a 'book', as we now say, which brought among the Arabs the revolution of the book, a revolution that followed, other things being equal, the revolution of *tanzīl*, or revelation.¹³

Bibliophilism in the Early Abbasid Society

In this section a brief history of bibliophilism in Islam will be discussed. A bibliophile is an ardent reader and demonstrates certain habits or attitudes towards book which, for instance, he is very interested in acquiring either buying or copying the books for personal collections and sometimes extend them to others to use. The habits of reading and collecting books is motivated by the importance of knowledge, and the intrinsic values which they find in books. The early Abbasid period is regarded as the most significant period in the history of books in Islam; the historian Gibb divides this period into two phases: the first phase is from the beginning of the caliphate up until the time of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (170-193/786-809), a period of remarkable development in Islamic literature. The second phase is during the time of Caliph al-Ma'mun and his two successors, which is characterised mainly by the influence and assimilation of foreign

¹¹ Ibid., 18.

¹² Ibid., 13.

¹³ Ibid., 22.

elements, namely Greek and Persian.¹⁴

The great interest in books among Muslims especially during these two periods was remarkably manifested in the establishment of public and private libraries throughout the Islamic centres, the feverish activity of book lovers and book collectors, the multiplication and circulation of books on an unprecedented scale, and finally, a flourishing book-trade. The enthusiasm of book lovers is also evidenced by the care they lavished on the beautiful and tasteful binding of their literary treasures and on the illustration and illumination.¹⁵ It is mentioned earlier that to dwell at length on the literary history of Baghdad would amount to writing a history of Muslim science and literature.¹⁶ The amount of literature especially after the invention of printing was tremendous. Ibn Nadim, the famous bibliographer of the Abbasid period, listed in his *Fihrist* thousands of book titles in various subjects together with the authors' background. The Abbasid scholars contributed tremendously to the number of primary sources and classical works in various fields namely, the Quranic studies, jurisprudence, scholastic theology, grammar, lexicography, rhetoric, and literature, as well as in philosophy, science, medicine, geography, astronomy and music.

The Abbasid caliphs undoubtedly played significant roles in the promotion of learning and growth of Islamic books. They were the patrons of scholarly activities by financing the studies of the scholars, participating in the intellectual discourse, and sending representatives to several places to search for manuscripts for the caliph's library. Caliph al-Mansur, for instance, instructed the famous *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* to be translated from Persian into Arabic by Ibn Muqaffa. The translation movement particularly from Greek and

¹⁴ H.A.R. Gibb, *Arabic Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 36-37. Henceforth cited as *Arabic Literature*. For more details on the influences of foreign elements in the development of Islamic sciences, see Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society, 2nd – 4th/8th – 10th Centuries* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁵ Sh. Inayatullah, "Bibliophilism in Medieval Islam," *Islamic Culture* 12 (1938), 154.

¹⁶ See S. Khuda Bukhsh, "A Historical Sketch of Muslim Learning" in *Contributions to the History of Islamic Civilization* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1929).

Persian into Arabic is the most vital factor that led to rapid development of literature during this period.

Caliph Harun al-Rashid made several advancements in the promotion of science and literature during his time. The Caliph built the famous academy known as *Bait al-Hikmah* or the House of Wisdom. The objectives of *Bait al-Hikmah* were to preserve the books which had already been collected (i.e. the library) and to facilitate various intellectual activities including translation of non-Arabic books into Arabic. The Caliph is said to have appointed several experts to be charged with the task of translation at the *Bait al-Hikmah*, such as Fadl ibn Naubakht for Persian books and Yuhanna ibn Masawaih for Greek books. The Caliph was very generous towards the men of letters. He gifted Sufyan ibn Uyainah with one hundred thousand *dirhams* and two hundred thousand *dirhams* to Ishaq of Mosul; and for a poem, he gave Marwan ibn Abi Hafsah five thousand *dirhams*, a robe of honour, a horse from his own stud and ten Greek slaves.¹⁷

It is not until the time of Caliph al-Ma'mun (198AH/813CE) that we find the literary movement in the full swing. The Caliph took active part in the religious and philosophical discussions and was equally interested in pure literature (*adab*), philosophy and exact sciences. Born by a Persian mother, he is described as having a natural inclination towards Persian culture. This tendency was strongly emphasised during his stay at Merv in the early days of his caliphate. It was said that the Sassanid king, Ardashir was his role model in governance.¹⁸ Fascinated by the Persian intellectual heritage, he commissioned a serious study and preservation of Persian works. Besides Persian, the Caliph also had strong interest in Greek culture, particularly because of extensive reliance of the Greeks on the application of rationality. In the *Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadim reported the reason why Caliph al-Ma'mun became so interested in Greek philosophy and sciences. It is said that the Caliph had a dream of meeting a wise man who claimed himself as Aristotle and explained to him what is reason. The Caliph believed in the dream and sent his people, amongst them al-Hajjaj ibn Matar, Ibn al-Batriq

¹⁷ Ibid., 293.

¹⁸ Ibid.

and Salman the director of *Bait al-Hikmah* to Byzantine to acquire more books on Greek philosophy to be translated into Arabic.¹⁹ Caliph al-Ma'mun's successor, al-Mu'tasim (218-227/833-842) was more of a warrior than a scholar, and we have to wait until the reign of al-Wathiq Billah (227-232/842-847) for the tread of literary activity to be taken up again. Al-Wathiq was a tolerant prince and devoted his attention to the translation of foreign books. Although al-Wathiq's successor, al-Mutawakkil Billah (232-247/847-861) did not share the same view with al-Wathiq, he continued the task of promoting the study and translation of foreign books. However, his reign marked the end of the glorious period of the Abbasid caliphate.

From these royal book-lovers and patrons of learning, let's now turn to their subjects, among whom we find many who valued the books and were delighted by their company. Three of them are celebrated names, al-Jahiz, Fath ibn Khaqan and Isma'il bin Ishaq. We already discussed Al-Jahiz, and now is Fath ibn Khaqan, a courtier of Caliph al-Mutawakkil who also had an amazing collection of books which he made accessible to others. He likes to carry a book with him, and tucked up in his sleeve; and whenever he found a spare moment he would take out and read it. Another book-lover who was also with the habit of carrying book in the sleeves is Abu Daud al Sijistani, the compiler of *Kitāb al-Sunān*, one of the great books on Hadith. In order to be able to carry books of bigger size, he used to order garments with extra-large sleeves.²⁰

Praises and Virtues of Books

In this final section, the praise and virtues of book in the Islamic tradition is presented. Because of great admiration and respect for books, Muslims always speak about them with great affection and respect and looked upon them as faithful friends. They did not regard them as merely carriers of knowledge and means of instruction, but also as something endowed with *human personality* pulsating with

¹⁹ See Bayard Dodge, trans., *The Fihrist of Ibn Nadim*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 583-584. It is said that at first, the Emperor Leo the Armenian, (813-820C.E.) refused to give them the books, but eventually fulfilled the request made by the Caliph's representatives.

²⁰ Bibliophilism, 164.

the warmth of life.

There are many anthologies in the Arabic language, which contain pieces of poetry in praise and appreciation of books, for examples: ²¹

“We have companions of whose conversation we never tired. They are intelligent and trustworthy, whether they be present or absent.”

“They give us the benefit of their knowledge — the knowledge of past times and the benefit of their wisdom, their instruction and their sound judgement.”

“We do not fear any disorder or ill treatment on their part; nor have we to guard ourselves against their tongue or hand.”

“If you said that they were dead, you would not be wrong; and if you were to say that they are alive, even then you could not be contradicted.”

It is said also:

“What a good companion a book is when you happen to be alone with it!

You can find consolation with it, even if those whom you loved have betrayed you!”

The booklovers would always find books as their loyal companions regardless of any circumstances:

“The book is a companion who does not betray, does not annoy nor make reproaches when harshly treated.”

The poet al-Mutannabi described this companionship in the following words;

²¹ *Bibliophilism*, 166.

“The most honourable seat in this world is in the saddle of a horse, and the best companion will always be a book.”

The Arabs used to attach great value to fighting and arms. Books sometimes are considered of equal value with arms, as al-Muhallabi advised his son;

“My sons! Whenever you stand in the market before a shop, stand only before those where weapons and books are sold.

Al-Jahiz’s praises of books are often quoted by the scholars who came after him. I have chosen here in the following paragraphs of this essay, al- Jahiz’s exposition on the merits of books that consist of many important points.²² It is important to remark here that his views embrace all types of books, and is not limited to the values of scholarly or scientific books alone. Firstly, al- Jahiz writes:

...A book is a receptacle filled with knowledge, a container crammed with good sense, a vessel full of jesting and earnestness. It can if you wish be more eloquent than Sahban Wa’il, or less talkative than Baqil: it will amuse you with anecdotes, inform you on all manner of astonishing marvels, entertain you with jokes or move you with homilies, just as you please. You are free to find in it an entertaining adviser, an encouraging critic, a villainous ascetic, a silent talker or hot coldness.²³

On the adaptability of books compared to other means of communication, he wrote:

...Moreover, have you ever seen a garden that will go into a man’s sleeve, an orchard you can take on your

²² See Abu Uthman Amr Ibn Bahr al-Jahiz, *Kitāb al-Hayawān*, ed., Abd al-Salam Harun, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Halabi, 1938-1945), 7 vols.; and Charles Pellat, *The Life & Works of al-Jahiz: Translations of Selected Texts*, trans. D.M. Hawke (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

²³ *Hayawān*, 38-39; *Life & Works*, 131.

lap, a speaker who can speak of the dead and yet be the interpreter of the living? Where else will you find a companion who sleeps only when you are asleep, and speaks only when you wish him to?²⁴

Al-Jahiz described the virtues of a book as the best form of communication;

...For all its smallness and lightness, a book is the medium through which men receive the Scriptures, and also government accounts. Silence when silence is called for, it is eloquent when asked to speak. It is a bedside's companion that does not interrupt when you are busy but welcomes you when you have a mind to it, and does not demand forced politeness or compel you to avoid its company. It is a visitor whose visits may be rare, or frequent, or so continual that it follows you like your shadow and becomes a part of you...²⁵

And books could provide the perfect form of companionship to man than his fellow beings;

...You denigrate books, whereas to my mind there is no pleasanter neighbour, no more fair-minded friend, no more amenable companion, no more dutiful teacher, no comrade more perfect and less prone to error, less annoying or importunate, of a sweeter disposition, less inclined to contradiction or accusation, less disposed to slander or backbiting, more marvellous, cleverer, less given to flattery or affection, less demanding or quarrelsome, less prone to argument or more opposed to strife, than a book.

I know no companion more prompt to hand, more rewarding, more helpful or less burdensome, and no tree that lives longer, bears more abundantly or yields more

²⁴ *Ḥayawān*, 39-41; *Life & Works*, 131.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

delicious fruit that is handier, easier to pick or more perfectly ripened at all times of the year, than a book.²⁶

And added;

A book is a companion that does not flatter you, a friend that does not irritate you, a crony that does not weary you, a petitioner that does not wax importunate, a protegee that does not find you slow, and a friend that does not seek to exploit you by flattery, artfully wheedle you, cheat you with hypocrisy or deceive you with lies.²⁷

As to other praiseworthy qualities of books, al-Jahiz emphasised the durability of books as means to transmit ideas written in the past for the benefit of later generations.

I know no animal product that despite its youth, the short time that has elapsed since its birth, its modest price and its ready availability brings together so much excellent advice, so much rare knowledge, so many works by great minds and keen brains, so many lofty thoughts and sound doctrines, so much wise experience or so much information about bygone ages, distant lands, everyday sayings and demolished empires, as a book.²⁸

There are plentiful benefits which people can derive from the habit of reading. To my understanding the following description which al-Jahiz wrote, truly reflects himself as an avid reader and the benefits he derived from the habit of reading throughout his lifetime. He gained knowledge in many areas without spending so much time in school and being under the direction or guidance of particular teachers, instead he learned many things through readings.

On the other hand, his position in society as well as his scholarship was primarily recognised on the basis of his knowledge.

²⁶ *Ḥayawān*, 42; *Life & Works*, 131.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ḥayawān*, 42.

His reputation as a writer and erudite scholar was already well-established before he moved to Baghdad. He wrote:

A book, if you consider, is something that prolongs your pleasure, sharpens your mind, loosens your tongue, lends agility to your fingers and emphasis to your words, gladdens your mind, fills your heart and enables you to win the respect of the lowly and the friendship of the mighty. You will get more knowledge out of one in a month than you could acquire from men's mouth in five years — and that at a saving in expense, in arduous research by qualified persons, in standing on the doorsteps of hack teachers, in resorting to individuals to you in moral qualities and nobility of birth, and in associating with odious and stupid people.²⁹

Even considering the minimal benefit that books can save us from wasting our time, al-Jahiz keeps to his view that the owner would still be at the advantage in terms of respect and other rewards.

Even if its kindness to you and its benevolence towards you consisted merely in saving you from the tedium of sitting on your doorstep watching the passer-by – with all the aggravations that posture entails: civilities to be paid, other people's indiscretions, the tendency to meddle in things that do not concern you, the proximity of the common people, the need to listen to their bad Arabic and their mistaken ideas, and put up with their low behaviour and their shocking ignorance – even if a book conferred no other advantage but this, it would be both salutary and profitable for its owner.³⁰

Finally, he also compared the role of books with teachers. According to him, books are more devoted and dutiful than teachers in imparting knowledge to students;

A book obeys you by night and by day, abroad and at

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Ḥayawān*, 50-52; *Life & Works*, 131-132.

home; it has no need of sleep, and does not grow weary with sitting up, it is a master that does not fail you when you need him and does not stop teaching you when you stop paying him. If you fall from grace it continues to obey you, and if the wind sets fair for your enemies it does not turn against you. From any kind of bond or attachment with it, and you will be able to do without everything else; you will not be driven into bad company by boredom or loneliness.³¹

Al-Jahiz's praise of books was obviously shared by other scholars amongst whom was Ibn Hazm (d.456/1064). In his book, the *Categories of Sciences* (*Marātib al-Ulūm*), Ibn Hazm wrote:

No book is devoid of usefulness, in fact, a book is an increase of knowledge which the individual will find if and when he needs it, for there is no way for the individual to retain all the knowledge in which he specializes. And since there is no way to accomplish this, it follows that books are delightful storehouses for the individual seeking knowledge. Had it not been for books, the sciences would have been lost and could hardly be found. Thus, he who decries the abundance of books errs; and were one to follow his opinion, the sciences would have been ruined, and ignoramuses would make contention and claims as they wish. Had not been for the testimony of books, the claim of both the scholar and the ignoramus would be on a par. It is through books that haughtiness is tumbled through reiterating the opinions of scholars, adhering to what is heard, and collecting it. Thus, the individual should cling wholeheartedly to the inkstand and paper; to people of civilized countries where knowledge flourished; and to confronting contenders and facing polemicists. It is through this that realities will emerge before him. For the one who speaks on his own

³¹ Ibid.

authority and on the basis of what he thinks is not the same as the one who speaks on the authority of someone else. A bereaved mother is not the same as a hired mourner.³²

³² Ibn Hazm, *Marātib al-Ulūm*, 76/239, cf. A. G. Chejne, *Ibn Ḥazm* (Chicago: Kazi Publications Inc., 1982), 100-101, 202-203.

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