

Public Libraries

Muslims loved collecting books and establishing libraries. There was a large network of public libraries in masjids in most big cities, plus prestigious private collections. Public book collections were so widespread that it was impossible to find a masjid, without a collection of books. Masjid libraries were called 'Dar al-kutub' or the 'House of Books' and they were the focus of learning and intellectual activity.

Before the Mongols destroyed Baghdad in 1258 C.E., it had 36 libraries and more than a hundred book dealers. Aleppo in Syria has the largest and oldest masjid library, called the Sayfiya, at the city's grand Umayyad Mosque, with a collection of 10,000 volumes. The Umayyad rulers of Spain had a library of 600,000 volumes in their huge Cordoba library. In 1050 C.E., the book collection of Al-Azhar library in Cairo had more than 120,000 volumes recorded in a 60-volume catalogue totalling about 3,500 pages.

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