

## TCI 9.9 Bookmaking & Literature

In the 8th century, Muslims learned the art of making paper from the Chinese and soon were creating bound books of their own. Bookmaking, in turn, encouraged the growth of Muslim literature.

Craftspeople used their talents to produce beautiful books. Bookmakers gathered the sheets of paper and often sewed them into leather bindings. They illuminated the bindings and pages with designs in gold, as well as with miniature paintings.

Books became a big business in the Muslim world. In Baghdad, more than 100 bookshops lined Papersellers' Street. In addition to copies of the Qur'an, booksellers there sold many volumes of poetry and prose.

Arabs had a rich heritage of storytelling and poetry. Arab poetry often honored love, praised rulers, or celebrated wit. They often wrote epic poems, or long poems that tell a story. Prose eventually replaced poetry for recording history, special events, and traditions. Writers also composed stories in prose.

One famous collection of stories is called *A Thousand and One Nights*. Also known as *Arabian Nights*, this book gathered stories that originally came from many places, including India and Persia, as well as elsewhere in the Middle East. In the book, a wife tells her husband a new tale each night. The stories take place in Muslim cities and in places such as China, Egypt, and India. Later, a European translator added tales that were not part of the medieval Arabic collection. Among these added tales are those about Aladdin's magic lamp, Ali Baba, and Sinbad the Sailor, which remain well-known today.

Muslim literature was enriched by Sufism, or Islamic mysticism. This type of religious practice involves intense personal experiences of God, in addition to the regular performance of rituals. Sufis longed to draw close to God in their everyday lives and inspired commoners on the frontier of the Muslim world to convert. One way to express their love and devotion was through poetry filled with vivid images and beautiful language. Rabi'a, a poet of the 8th century, shared her feelings in this verse: "But your door is open to those who call upon you. My Lord, each lover is now alone with his beloved. And I am alone with Thee."

A 13th-century Sufi poet, Rumi, had an enormous influence on Islamic mysticism. Rumi wrote a long religious poem in Persian that filled six volumes. Pilgrims still travel to his tomb in Turkey.

