THE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF ‘ABD AL-LATIF AL-BAGHDADI

Shawkat Mahmood Toorawa

Introduction

The scholar of the medieval Islamic world is variously characterised but perhaps his most distinctive feature was the eclectic and dichotomous nature of his education. Not only was he instructed in the Islamic sciences, those of a religious nature and provided for by the waqf, but also in the foreign or ancient sciences, which were excluded from the waqf deed. This exclusion, however, did not prevent diligent and inquisitive scholars from seeking the knowledge of foreign sciences from the numerous libraries (sometimes overseas or at great distance), from masters “in the privacy of their homes, or in the waqf institutions, outside of the regular curriculum.”

The prominent Muslim physician, grammarian, lexicographer, jurist, and sometime alchemist, and philosopher ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi (557-629 AH/162-1231 CE) was such a scholar. His *shrta* (biography), which formed part of a larger work entitled *Ta’rikh* (History), was written for his son Sharaf al-din Yüsuf. Extracts survive in the notice devoted to him by Ibn Abi Usaybi’ah (d. 668/1270) in his biographical dictionary of physicians, the ‘Uyun al-anba’ fi tabaqat al-a’ibba’ (Sources of information on the classes of physicians). In these fragments, ‘Abd al-Latif speaks of his *sura’*s (auditions), his resolve to master *tibb* (medicine) and *kemiya* (alchemy), his diligence in learning the various *qira’at* (variant Qur’anic recitations), and his devotion to the works of Ibn Sinā (b. 370/980). What is remarkable is that his education encompasses a vast span of knowledge, tremendous motivation and memorisation. ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi is not an isolated example of this sort of education, not a unique product of his age.

At a time when much attention is being focused on the Islamisation of knowledge, it seems appropriate, maybe even necessary, to discuss examples of the educational and professional training of illustrious Muslim scholars and educators. Looking at the curriculum followed by ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, we may not only get “some insight into one of the best products of the Muslim educational system,” according to George Makdisi, but we may be in a better position to discuss the nature and role of Islamic education. Specifically, we may address the following questions: What are the priorities of education? Under which kinds of teachers should one study? To what extent can we
question the authority of the teacher? What place do we give to non-religious education? What roles do private patronage and state sponsorship play? This article outlines the education of a medieval scholar as a means of enlightening the modern educators.

Early Life ‘Abd al-Latîf al-Baghdâdî

Name. His name was Abu Muhammad ‘Abd al-Latîf b. Yusuf b. Muhammad b. ‘Ali Sa’d al-Baghdadî, known as Ibn al-Lubbât, Muwaffaq al-dîn. According to chroniclers, he was known as ‘Abd al-Latîf and Ibn Lubbât.

Dates of birth and death. All the chroniclers place his birth in 557/1162-3; Ibn Khallikân specifies Rabi’ I. He died on 12 Muharram 629/9 November 1231.

Early Life. ‘Abd al-Latîf was raised in the company of eminent scholars. His father, Yusuf b. Muhammad, probably the Shaykh Abu ‘Aziz al-Mawsilî obtained certificates of audition (ijâzât) from senior scholars (shuyûkh) of Baghdad, Khorasan, Syria and Egypt. His uncle whom he referred to as Sulaymân was most likely Abu al-Fadl Sulaymân b. Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-Mawsilî al-Safi recorded in the Shadharît; he died in Rabi’ I, 612/June 1215. He was born in 538/1143 and studied hadîth under Ismâ’îl b. al-Samarqandî and Yahyâ b. al-Tarâbî.

At an early age ‘Abd al-Latîf was also put under the care of:

a. Abu al-Najîb, probably Abu al-Najîb al-Suwahrawardi ‘Abd al-Qâhir b. ‘Abd Allâh b. Muhammad b. ‘Umawiyya. He was a Shaykh al-imam, knowledgeable in sufiyya (tasawwuf), exegesis (tafsîr), jurisprudence (fiqh) and theology (ushûl al-din). He was born in Safar 493/January 1097 and died at the time of ‘Agr on Friday 7 Jumâdî al-Âwwal 563/19 March 1168. ‘Abd al-Latîf mentions that under Abu al-Najîb’s guidance he had little time for pleasure and leisure (la‘b wa lâhaw), his time being spent in the learning of hadîth.

Among friends of ‘Abd al-Latîf’s family was Ibn Abu Usaybi’a. The latter wanted to meet ‘Abd al-Latîf but never got the chance; in the notice he devoted to ‘Abd al-Latîf, he included a letter he wrote to him. ‘Abd al-Latîf was apparently close to Ibn Abu Usaybi’a’s father, al-Qâsim, to his grandfather, Yûnis, and to an uncle of his whom he mentions as the man who introduced him to Aristotle. Wüstenfeld identifies this unnamed uncle as Rashîd al-dîn Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali b. Khalîfa and indicates that he was the head of a hospital.

His Early Education

Ibn Abu Usaybi’a recorded that ‘Abd al-Latîf’s studied hadîth with the following:

b. Abu al-Fadl Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Baqî b. Muhammad b. Sulaymân al-Baghdadî, Ibn al-Batti. He was born in 477/1084 and died on Thursday, 17 Jumâdâ al-Âwwal 564/16 February 1169 at the age of eighty-seven. He is identified by the biographers as one of the chief traditionists of Iraq (musnad al-‘Iraq). He heard hadîth from Malik b. ‘Ali al-Banîyâsî, Ahmad b. Ahmad al-Haddî, Ibn al-Nâzîr, al-Tamîmî and others. His sana’ is reported to have been sound (qâhid), according to Ibn al-Imâm, the author of the Shadharît.


To these must be added another from whom he studied in the Dâr al-dhâhab, a second-story madrasa (madrasa mu’allaqâ) founded by Fakhr al-dawla b. al-Mutallîb, namely:


He also studied grammar with:

f. Ibn al-Khâshshab i.e. Abu Muhammad ‘Abd Allâh b. Ahmad, Ibn al-Khâshshab al-Baghdadî (492/1098-9 Friday 3 Ramadan 567/May 1172), died when ‘Abd al-Latîf was ten. Many of ‘Abd al-Latîf’s teachers also studied with him (e.g. al-Wâjîb, al-Qazwînî, al-Kindî). The work ‘Abd al-Latîf mentions is:

I. The Ma’ânî al-Zajjîs. This is the Kitâb fi ma‘ânî al-Qur’ân by Abu Ishâq Ibrahim b. Muhammad al-Sarî al-Zajjîs. ‘Abd al-Latîf studied this work according to the ascension/reading (qirât) of Ibn al-Khâshshab (see above) who had studied it from Shu’bah bint Ahmad b. Faraj b. ‘Amr al-Ibarî.

Besides hadîth, ‘Abd al-Latîf was occupied with the study of khârij (calligraphy), the memorisation of the Qur’ân, and the memorisation of other key texts, among them:
2. The Faṣlā. This is Thā'ālībī’s (815-904) Faṣlā al-Lughāh, described in the Wafayāt as small in size but great in benefit (ṣaghīr al-ḥujjam kabīr al-fa‘ī‘alāh).

3. The Maqṣūrāt of al-Ḥārīrī (446-516/1054-1122), a belles-lettres written in rhymed prose narratives.

4. The diwan of al-Mutanabbi (born in 303/915 and died in Ṭamādūn 354/August 955).

g. Al-Ṭāhir. When he was an adolescent, al-Baghdādī’s father took him to Kāmil al-dīn al-Ṭāhirī, a schoolmate of his from his Niẓāmīyyah days. Kamal al-dīn Abū al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. Ubayd Allāh Abū al-Barrāk al-Ṭāhirī al-Naḥwī was born in 513/1119 and died on 9 Sha‘bān 577/18 December 1181. He came to Baghdad where he studied in his youth jurisprudence (fiqh) with Sa‘īd b. al-Razzāz and became accomplished in khilāf, the divergences of the law (in one’s own madhhab and in the other madhhab). He then became a tutor (mu‘īd) in the Niẓāmīyyah as it was customary for the master-juristconsult to have one in a college of law. He studied literature (adab) with Abū Maṣūr Allāh al-Jawālīqī and Ibn al-Shu‘ārī. He studied hadīth with his father whilst in Anbar and with ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Anṣārī in Baghdad. Al-Ṭāhirī was incredibly prolific. His works include al-Inṣā‘ fi masā’il al-khulāf bint yuṣnma al-baṣriyya wa al-kāfīnyn (The Just Treatment of Grammatical Differences between the Baṣrī and Kufī Schools) and commentaries (sharḥs) on the diwan of al-Mutanabbi, on the Maqṣūrāt of al-Ḥārīrī and on the Adab al-Kāfī of Ibn Qutayḥa. He is most famous for the Nucub al-ḥiṣāb ‘lī tabāriṣ al-udabā‘a.

‘Abd al-Latif read the introduction to the Faṣlā with al-Ṭāhirī but because he was still young, al-Ṭāhirī referred him to his disciple, al-Wāṣfī al-Wāṣfī who held his hulqah in the Zafarīyyah Mosque (on him see below). ‘Abd al-Latif writes that he later mastered al-Ṭāhirī’s one hundred and thirty works on nahiyy, fiqh, uṣūlīyya (uṣūl al-fiqh and uṣūl al-dīn), tasawwuf and zāhid (asceticism). He also memorised with him:

5. The Kithāb of Sibawayh (d. between 177/793 and 180/796-7), a grammatical work of approximately one thousand leaves and is the largest work of its kind. It contains numerous examples from the Qur‘ān and over a thousand verses from pre-Islamic poetry. Ibn Khallīkān says that it is an unmatched work.

6. Al-Ṣufī’s commentary on the Kithāb of Sibawayh by Abū Sa‘īd Ḥasan b. al-Hāsān. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Marzābān, born 290/903 and died on Monday 2 Rajab 368/2 February 979. He was very famous even during his own lifetime and Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī (see earlier) was envious of him. In 368/979, the latter bought a copy of the sharḥ for two thousand dirhams in order to find fault with it and found none.

Other commentators of the Kithāb include: al-Mubarrad (d. 315/927), Ibn al-Sarrāj (d. 316/928), al-Rummānī (d. 384/994), al-Ma‘arrī (d. 449/1057), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1434), and Ibn al-Ḥāfīz (d. 646/1248).


h. Al-Wāṣfī. Al-Wāṣfī’s full name is Abū Bakr al-Mubārak b. Abī Tālib al-Mubārak b. Abī al-Zahrā Sa‘īd al-Wāṣfī, Ibn al-Dāhīn, al-Dārī; his biography appears in Ibn Khallīkān. He had in his youth memorised the Qur‘ān and all its variant readings on the authority of Abū Sa‘īd Naṣr b. Muṣṭafā and Sa‘īd b. al-Razzāz, and became accomplished in fiqh, the divergences of the law (in one’s own madhhab and in the other madhhab). He then became a tutor (mu‘īd) in the Niẓāmīyyah as it was customary for the master-juristconsult to have one in a college of law. He studied literature (adab) with Abū Maṣūr Allāh al-Jawālīqī and Ibn al-Shu‘ārī. He studied hadīth with his father whilst in Anbar and with ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Anṣārī in Baghdad. Al-Ṭāhirī was incredibly prolific. His works include al-Inṣā‘ fi masā’il al-khulāf bint yuṣnma al-baṣriyya wa al-kāfīnyn (The Just Treatment of Grammatical Differences between the Baṣrī and Kufī Schools) and commentaries (sharḥs) on the diwan of al-Mutanabbi, on the Maqṣūrāt of al-Ḥārīrī and on the Adab al-Kāfī of Ibn Qutayḥa. He is most famous for the Nucub al-ḥiṣāb ‘lī tabāriṣ al-udabā‘a.

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The three commentaries of 'al-Luma' mentioned by 'Abd al-Latif are those of:

9. Al-Thamānī (Aḥū al-‘Umar b. Thābit)
10. Al-Sharīf ‘Umar b. Ḥamza and
11. Ibn Barhān (d. 456/1064).

He also says that he read every commentary he could lay his hands on (wa kullu mā ajidū).\(^{45}\)

12. Ḥadāb al-kāthib,\(^{46}\) a manual of philology by Ibn Qutayba (213-276/828-889),\(^{47}\) particularly remembered for its famous introduction "which may be regarded as a politico-cultural profession of faith."\(^{48}\) 'Abd al-Latif learned it by heart in less than six months.

13. Tagwim al-lisān by Ibn Qutayba; 'Abd al-Latif learned it by heart in fourteen days, a fascicle a day.

14. Mushkil al-Qur‘ān, probably the Kitāb ta‘wil mushkil al-Qur‘ān by Ibn Qutayba,\(^{49}\) a treatise on variant readings of the Qur‘ān (qirā‘āt), eloquence (balaqahā) and the inimitability of the Qur‘ān (i‘jāz al-Qur‘ān).

15. Gharib al-Qur‘ān by Ibn Qutayba, its full title being Kitāb ta‘ṣīrīr gharib al-Qur‘ān.\(^{50}\) It is a philological commentary on the difficult passages in the Qur‘ān.


16b. Al-Takmila by Aḥū ‘Ali al-Hasan. Though some biographers list al-Takmila and al-Idāb as separate works, al-Qifṣī suggests that al-Takmila (as the name suggests) was a completion of al-Idāb.\(^{52}\)

[On the Muṣa‘afab, see (7) above.]

17. The Kitāb of Ibn Durustawayh (‘Abd Allāh; 258/871-346/956-7). The mention simply of al-Kitāb suggests the Kitāb al-kuttāb (but a case might be made for the Kitāb al-Hadīyā because of its similarity to works by al-Fārisī and Ibn Ḥinna).\(^{53}\) Ibn Durustawayh was a student of Tha‘lab, Ibn Qutayba and al-Mubarrad.\(^{54}\)

‘Abd al-Latif also read numerous ka‘būb al-mabsūṭāt, non-complex books, generally grammars, and muḥtasāzarāt (abridgements).

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18. Kitāb al-uṣūl. ‘Abd al-Latif read a copy of it that was in the waqf of Ibn Khushshab (d.567/1172) in the Rūbī‘ al-Ma‘minyyah. This is the Kitāb al-uṣūl al-kabīr by Abū Bakr Muhammad b. al-Sā‘ī, Ibn al-Sarrāj (d. 316/929). He was the youngest pupil of al-Mubarrad and thus received his special attention. He taught Abū al-Qāsim al-Zajjāj, al-Rumānī, Abū Sa‘īd al-Ṣa‘īfī and al-Fārisī. He was an ardent fan of Sīwāwiy’s as his own Kitāb reveals.

19. Al-‘Arād. This is al-Kaṣīf bi al-‘arād wa al-qawāṣf by Abū Zakariyya Yahiyya b. ‘Ali al-Shaybānī, Ibn al-Khāṭib at-Tabrizī (421-502/1030-1108).\(^{55}\) He was a student of al-Ma‘rī and studied hadith under Abū Ṭayyib al-Ṭabarī, al-Tadmūkhi and al-Khāṭib al-Baghdādī among others. His other works include a commentary on the Lūmā‘ (on which see above) and commentaries on the works of al-Mutanabbi, of Abū Tamām, of the Ḥamāṣatī, and of al-Ma‘rī’s Siṣq al-zand.\(^{56}\)

‘Abd al-Latif’s formal education ends here.

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Later Education

Baghdad

At some point after the death of al-Anbārī in 577/1181, ‘Abd al-Latif’s education was primarily, though not exclusively, concerned with the foreign sciences.

j. The son of Amin al-dawla Ibn Tilmīdī. ‘Abd al-Latif says he learned a great deal from him.\(^{57}\) Ibn Khallikān also highlights this teacher-student relationship.\(^{58}\) This education was very likely medical.

k. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Nā‘īlī. ‘Abd al-Latif praises highly this Almoravid\(^{59}\) who left the Maghrib upon the accession of ‘Abd al-Mu‘min in 524/1130. He is not mentioned in the biographical works.\(^{60}\) He, too, was trained, receive Ḥaṣrāt al-Raḍī al-Qazwīnī\(^{61}\) and Ibn Sakīnā.\(^{62}\) ‘Abd al-Latif found Ibn Nā‘īlī’s teaching style strange (‘abījīh)\(^{63}\) but credits him with excellence in the fields of al-kīnīyā‘ (alchemy) and al-nīṣāmī (onomatopoeia and numerology) and related fields. He was in possession of the works of two authors in particular: Jābir b. Ḥayyān and Ibn Wahshīyyah. By frequent mention of these, Ibn Nā‘īlī inspired in ‘Abd al-Latif a love for all knowledge (ṣawqan li al-‘ullām kullihā).\(^{64}\) With Ibn Nā‘īlī, ‘Abd al-Latif read:
20. The *Muqaddima* of Ibn Bāb Shādī. This is Abū al-Ḥasan Ṭabīb b. Ahmad al-Misrī, a jeweller by trade. Besides the *Muqaddima*, which is a grammatical work, he is credited with a commentary on the *Jumal al-Zayyaj* and one on the *Usul of Ibn al-Sarrāj*.

21. The *Muqaddima* of Ḥassāb (Ḥussāb?). I have been unable to identify this. When Ibn Nāʾīl left to join Nāṣir li-dīn Allāh (Caliph: 575/1180-622/1223), Ṭabīb al-Lāṭif who would meet Ibn Nāʾīl again in Damascus (see below) pursued his studies without respite (“putting my shoulder to the wheel, setting myself to the task with utmost seriousness and earnestness”). He read four works of al-Ghazzállī (450-505/1058-1111), the great scholar and Nizāmiyya professor of law remembered especially for his putative reconciliation of *sharía* and *taṣawwuf* and for his magisterial *Ihya ‘ullam al-dīn*;

22. *Al-Maqāṣid*. This is the *Maqāṣid al-falāsīf* (Tendencies of the Philosophers).

23. *Al-Mi’yar* i.e. *Mi’yar al-silm* (Weighing-scale of Science—on logic)

24. *Al-Mizān* or Mīzān al-‘amal (The Measure of Deeds).


He also read all the books of Ibn Sīnā (370-418/980-1027), 68 big and small volumes. He also got hold of a copy of:

26. The *Kitāb al-taḥṣil* of Bahmanyār. Abū al-Ḥasan Bahmanyār b. al-Marzūbān (d.456/1067) was a disciple of Ibn Sīnā. The *Kitāb al-taḥṣil* is a comprehensive interpretation of Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy, including treatments of logic, metaphysics, physics and cosmology. He is also known for his *Kitāb fī marāṭib al-wujūd*. Ibn Sīnā’s *Kitāb al-mubāślathā* is reported to be answers to queries raised by Bahmanyār.

Abū al-Lāṭif then studied books by Jābir b. Ḥayyān and Ibn Wāshiyah on alchemical transformation and experimentation. Abū Māsā Jābir b. Ḥayyān b. Abū Allāh al-Kuft (d. ca. 200/810) was a great philosopher, alchemist and chemist. He is reported to have been the first man to suggest the transformation of lead and base metals into gold and to have written up to 500 works. These include *Aṣṣār al-kimiyā* [The Secrets of Alchemy], *Usul al-kimiyā* [The Sources of Alchemy] which had many translations from Latin.

He is credited also with several discoveries including *aqua regia*, sulphuric acid, nitric acid and nitrates of silver. Abū Bakr Ahmad [or Muhammad] b. ‘Abd al-Nāṣr Ibn Wāshiyah was an alchemist and astronomer who died ca. 198/800. 71 His works include: *K. al-fīlāḥa al-nabatīyāh* (On Nabataean Agriculture), *K. al-shawq al-mustashām fī marāṭīb rumāz al-aklām* (A unique collection of 93 cryptic alphabets), *K. tankalāshā* (On Taurus), *K. al-sumūm* (On Toxicology), *K. usul al-kabīr* (On Alchemy). ‘Abd al-Lāṭif devoted much time and effort, under the influence of Ibn Sīnā, to the study of alchemy which he later to reject: “The most forcible of those misled me was Ibn Sīnā through his book on this Craft with which he (supposedly) ‘perfects’ his philosophy.”

Moslul

In 585/1190, ‘Abd al-Lāṭif, aged twenty-eight, left Baghdad because none of the intellectuels there were of any interest to him and went to Mosul where he was to be disappointed by the paucity of scholars. Fortunately for him, he came across such scholars as:

I. al-Kamāl b. Yūnus. This is Abū al-Fath Kamāl al-dīn Māsā b. Yūnus al-Mawsili (551-639/1156-1242), who studied under his father in the madrasa of Amir Zayn al-dīn in Mosul, under al-Sādis al-Silmānī at the Nizāmiyyah in 571/1175, and who taught at the Kamāliyyah, which was named after him. 72 He studied grammar under Ibn Sa’dīn al-Qurtubī and Kamāl al-dīn al-Anbārī. In the person of al-Kamāl, ‘Abd al-Lāṭif did find an able mathematician and *faqih* who was also interested in alchemy.

After a year of vigorous independent study supported by a teaching position at the madrasa of Ibn Mūhājir ‘Abd al-Lāṭif heard about Shahbāz al-dīn al-Suhrawardī al-Maqūtī, whom people praised very highly, particularly with respect to ancient sciences. He, therefore, obtained some of his works from al-Kamāl who was himself quite taken with al-Suhrawardī’s writings. 73 His books studied by ‘Abd al-Lāṭif are:

27. *Al-Ta‘wīḥa* [Commentaries]

28. *Al-Lambha* [The Glimmer] and

29. *Al-Ma‘ārij*.

Al-Suhrawardī was executed by Ṣalāḥ al-dīn in 587/1191.

Damascus

‘Abd al-Lāṭif left for Damascus in 586/1190. There he found a number of scholars gathered through the generous patronage of Ṣalāḥ al-dīn; he named Jamāl al-dīn ‘Abd al-Lāṭif, the son of Abū al-Najīb; the Secretary, Ibn Talhāb; members of the house of Ibn Juhayr; Ibn al-Āṭar, the wazir who was later executed; and the wazir Ibn Ḥabayrāh. 74 ‘Abd al-Lāṭif spoke also of meeting:
m. Al-Kindī al-Baghdādi al-Nabī. This is Tāj al-dīn Abū al-Yamin Zayd b. al-Hasan (520-613/1126-1217). He studied under Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, Abū Mansūr al-Jawālīqī and Abū al-Sa‘īda al-Shāra‘ī. He first lived in Aleppo where he traded in old clothes; he befriended the Amir ‘Izz al-dīn Yūsuف b. Ayūb (neophyte to ‘Ala‘ī al-dīn) and accompanied him to Egypt where he used great libraries. He studied the Kāmil, Kitāb al-manḥaj and works by Abī ‘Alī al-Fārisī under the guidance of Ibn Mansūr as well as the Kitāb al-Sīwawayh, the Muqaddāmāt, the Isha‘ah and the Ta‘zīmī. ‘Abd al-Latīf found him and his methods strange and left him. During this time, ‘Abd al-Latīf worked on several of his own books (see below).

While in Damascus, ‘Abd al-Latīf came across ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Nā‘īlī, presumably the same man he had met in Baghdad, who was living in the Ma‘dā‘ana al-Gharbiyyah. He was the subject of some controversy and had two factions around him, one for him and one against him; the former included al-Khaṭṭāb al-Dawla‘ī.‘Abd al-Latīf says that he (himself) spoke to Ibn Nā‘īlī and reproached him for devoting himself to alchemy and philosophy whereas he could have been without equal in his day in both the Islamic (al-tīlim al-shar‘iyyah) and intellectual (‘aqīlyah) sciences. Because of this misguided calling, he was slandered by many. Apparently Ibn Nā‘īlī set out for Acre in order to complain to ‘Ala‘ī al-dīn about al-Dawla‘ī; he returned ill, was hospitalized and died there. Al-Mu‘tami‘, the governor of Damascus, who was a keen alchemist, took possession of all of Ibn Nā‘īlī’s books.

Jerusalem

‘Abd al-Latīf next set out for Jerusalem and Acre in order to join up with ‘Ala‘ī al-dīn’s camp and meet him, probably some time before the surrender of Acre to the armies of Richard I and Philip II, on 17 Jumādā‘ī I 587/June 12, 1191. He first met Bahā‘ī al-dīn Ibn Shaddād who had heard of ‘Abd al-Latīf’s fame in Mosul. Abū al-Mahāsin Yūsu‘r b. Rafī‘ al-Asadī al-Mawṣī‘ī Bahā‘ī al-dīn Ibn Shaddād (539/1145-632/1234) was born in Mosul, studied there and then went to Baghdad where he subsequently became an assistant teacher at the Nizāmiyyah. He then travelled to Aleppo and Damascus and joined ‘Ala‘ī al-dīn for whom he became a military judge (qādī al-‘askari) from 584/1188 until 589/1193.1 The fame of Ibn Shaddād was considerable and he was visited by the likes of Ibn Khaliqān, Abī Shihāma and Ibn Wāsīl. Ibn Shaddād is the author of the Kitāb Sharī‘at ‘Ala‘ī al-dīn known also as al-Nawādir al-sultāniyyah wa al-mahāsīn al-yūsufiyah.1 It was on Ibn Shaddād’s suggestion that ‘Abd al-Latīf went to visit ‘Imād al-dīn al-Kāṭīb whose tent was adjacent to Ibn Shaddād’s.

1 Imād al-dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Kāṭīb al-Iṣfahānī (519-597/1126-1201).148 son of another famous kāṭīb, was born in Kāshān where he spent his early youth. In Baghdad he was appointed kāṭīb to Nūr al-dīn and multāris in a madrasa built in his honour by the prince ‘Ala‘ī al-dīn.

Cairo

When he first arrived in Cairo he was met by the wakī‘ (legal agent), Ibn Sanā‘ al-Mulk.98 Ibn Sanā‘ gave ‘Abd al-Latīf money and provisions and introduced him to the various arba‘ of the region from whom he received gifts and blessings.99 His residence was the Maṣjid al-Rā‘ī’s Lulu‘.100

‘Abd al-Latīf informs us that his intention of going to Cairo was to see three men, Yāsīn al-Simiyā‘ī, al-Ra‘is Mūsā b. Maymūn and Abū al-Qasim al-Sha‘ī‘ī but we do not know that he received instructions from al-Qādi al-Fāḍil every ten days or so; the exact nature of this wasiyah eludes us.101

n. Yāsīn al-Simiyā‘ī is possibly Abū al-Tahir Ismā‘īl b. Shāhī b. Yāsīn al-Sā‘ī of the Shaḥdārāt.102 We are told that ‘Abd al-Latīf mentions him in relation to alchemy, which he taught al-Shaqqānī and in which he appears surpassed Mūsā b. ‘Urma‘ (perhaps he is Abū al-Qasim Muḥammad b. Ahmad al-‘Iraqī al-Simiyā‘ī) whom is attributed a book concerning the so-called cultivation of gold. ‘Abd al-Latīf did not like him, calling him a con artist ( mush‘īdhi‘), a liar ( kāḥidhāb) and a sweet-talker ( mu‘alla‘i‘).103

1 Mūsā b. Maymūn was of course the famous Jewish theologian, philosopher and physician Abū ‘Imrān Ibn Maymūn b. ‘Ubayd Allāh (Maymūn al-Qurtūbī) born in Cordoba in 527/1135 and died in Fustat in 606/1208. He and his family were forced to flee Spain in 533/1149 because of persecution and stayed in Fustat. He invented the name "Maymūn" for himself. 1194-1208. He wrote numerous works on alchemy, medicine and theology. He was a great contributor to the field of Jastārī’s "Kitāb al-mulūk wa al-mawqūfāt al-‘awān" (The Book of the Rulers and the Seizures of the Jews). 1195-1208.
was a jeweler and then a physician, first as a protégé of al-Qādī al-Fāḍil, then of al-Malik al-Afdal. He wrote twelve medical works in addition to brief monographs on such things as asthma, haemorrhoids and instructions on hygiene, sexual intercourse, pharmacology and the like. He wrote in both Arabic and Hebrew. ‘Abd al-Latíf informs us that one of his medical works was based on the sixteen books of Galen. This is probably the K. al-Nabd al-kabīr, in sixteen parts and four volumes. Mūsā also wrote Sinā’at al-muntaq (On logic) when he was sixteen, which draws heavily from Ibn Sinā, al-Fārābī and al-Ghazālī. In 587/1190 he wrote Dala’il al-hā’tirān (Guide of the Perplexed for fellow Jews; Hebrew: More Nevochim) which ‘Abd al-Latīf read. His verdict is harsh: "I looked through it and found it an evil book that corrupted the articles of Law and Faith with elements they thought would reform them."

p. Abū al-Qāsim al-Sharī‘ī is Abū al-Qāsim Hībat Allāh b. ‘Alī al-Anṣāri al-Busayri (506-598/1112-1201). He studied ǧāhid under Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Barakat al-Saʿīdī. He is the author of a work entitled Maktūba fi ilmāy al-nāṣik wa al-mansūkh [Abridged work on the sciences of the abrogating and the abrogated]. He was also very impressed with this man whom he was apparently seeking in Cairo (iyāka al-tlab). From al-Sharī‘ī, whom he met in a large gathering in a mosque, he learned of the works of the classical masters, in particular those of al-Fārābī and al-Iskandar Thamīṭūs. ‘Abd al-Latīf explains that he had thought that Ibn Sinā was in possession of all wisdom (kunta azzūn innā al-hikma kullahā hāzīhā Ibn Sinā), but that al-Sharī‘ī soon won him over. Al-Fārābī (250-339/874-951) was such a famed commentator on Aristotle that he earned the title Mu'allim al-thānī (the Second Master) Aristotle being the first. Though ‘Abd al-Latīf does not specify the works, he almost certainly read:


Al-Iskandar Thamīṭūs (al-Afrūdi) is Alexander of Aphrodisias Themistius, regarded in medieval Europe and in the Islamic world as the most authoritative medieval commentators on Aristotle of his age (ca. 420 BH/200 CE). There is speculation that Alexander met Galen ca. 401 BH/180 CE and was subsequently appointed teacher of peripatetic philosophy in Athens. His works were translated by Hunayn b. Ishaq (d. 260/873), Ishaq b. Hunayn (d. 289/910-11), and Abū Bishr Mārī (d. 328/940). His commentaries on Aristotle are only available in fragments or quoted in other works, most notably in Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198). Thirty-five small treatises are available in Arabic manuscripts, fifteen deriving from the quotations of the Greek text, three from De anima libri mantissa. ‘Abd al-Latīf very likely read two medical tracts attributed to him:

31. Fī al-māthlāfiyya [On melancholia] and

Jerusalem

Upon Shāh al-din’s arrangement of a truce with the Franks (Sha’bān 588/September 1192), ‘Abd al-Latīf returned to Jerusalem and took the opportunity to visit him. He took with him some of the books of the ancients as he could manage and sought out the ruler. He found him generous and perspicacious and remained in his company for a time. Indeed, his praise of Shāh al-din is without reservation. Shāh al-din provided ‘Abd al-Latīf with a stipend of 30 dinārs a month; this was supplemented by his sons to make a total of 100 dinārs. As Mākīzi points out, “This amount, at the time, was ten times the normal monthly stipend of a college professor of law... Ten dinārs is half the amount paid to a physician of the fourth/tenth century.”

Damascus

‘Abd al-Latīf then returned to Damascus where he took up studies and teaching in the Umayyad Mosque. He devoted himself to the study of the ancients and his desire to learn them increased as he read more. His affection for Ibn Sinā seriously declined and he soon realised the fallacy of alchemy (baḥṭān al-kīmiyā). He goes on to say that he was saved from two great and ruinous errors: “My thanks to God were thus redoubled, for most intellectuals have followed the road to perdition simply through alchemy and the books of Ibn Sinā.”

At Shāh al-din’s death, which ‘Abd al-Latīf blamed on the incompetent blood-letting by his physician, Damascus soon came under the rule of al-Malik al-Atjāl, Shāh al-din’s oldest son.

Cairo

‘Abd al-Latīf remained with him until al-Malik al-Ţiz went to Cairo to oppose his brother al-Afdal. ‘Abd al-Latīf joined him; he was paid from the treasury. In Cairo, he spent time again with Abū al-Qāsim al-Sharī‘ī. During this time ‘Abd al-Latīf was teaching at the Azhar Mosque and he describes his daily routine. From dawn till four o’clock he taught the Islamic sciences. Midday, students who wished to study medicine and other subjects, by which he probably meant the foreign sciences, came to his house. He would return to the Mosque at the end of the day to teach other students. At night he would do his own studying. He followed this pattern till al-Malik al-Ţiz’s death in 595/1198. He then took up residence in town, supported by stipends from Shāh al-din’s remaining sons. It was at this time that Egypt suffered a plague. ‘Abd al-Latīf wrote about this plague and the inflation that followed it in his K. al-Farābī, which survives (see Literature Output below).
Al-Malik al-'Adil Sayf al-din (Latin: Saphadin) Abu Bakr b. Ayub (540-615/1145-1218) then took over the sultanate (596/1199-1200) and dispersed Salah al-din's sons (i.e., his nephews). He was recognised by the Caliph in 604/1207.

Jerusalem

'Abd al-Latif went to Jerusalem again, where he stayed a while teaching a variety of subjects (kathir min al-ulam) in the Aqsa Mosque, and he wrote a lot there.

Damascus

In 604/1207 he left for Damascus. He stayed in the 'Aziziyyah Mosque, where he taught law and studied independently. Many students came to him, not only to study grammar, in which he had previously distinguished himself, but also to study medicine, for which he was then renowned.

Aleppo and Erzincan

'Abd al-Latif next went to Halab (Aleppo) and Turkey where he stayed many years in the service of al-Malik 'Ali al-din Dzied b. Bahram (Bahrâm Shâh, also Fakhr al-din, 555-624/1160-1225), the governor of Erzinjan, to whom he dedicated a number of works. Bahrâm Shâh was his patron until his death at the hands of Kay-Qubad ('Ali' al-din Kay-Qubadh, regn. 616/1219-634/1237) in 625/1228. 'Abd al-Latif travelled widely between 17 Dhu al-Qa'da 625/18 October 1228 and 9 Shawwil 626/31 August 1229.

Aleppo was under the governorship of Shihâb al-din Atâbeki when he arrived there and was treated very well by him. He wrote many works there, taught many students medicine and the ancient sciences; he also taught bahdih and Arabic at the Jami' Mosque. He was, Ibn Abi Ujaybi's assures us, always studying, writing and composing. Ibn Abi Ujaybi's had hoped to meet 'Abd al-Latif but the meeting never took place though correspondence continued. 'Abd al-Latif speaks of coming to Damascus (where Ibn Abi Ujaybi's and his family were resident) but first wanted to present the Caliph al-Mustansir some of his works.

Baghdad

He died immediately after he arrived in Baghdad, Sunday 12 Muharram 629/9 November 1231, and was buried next to his father in the Wardiyyah cemetery.

The Educational Background of 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi

Literary Output

Only five of 'Abd al-Latif's works are mentioned by him in his autobiography as preserved in the notice devoted to him in the 'Uyun. These are:

1. K. rubba (On the Particle "rubba")
2. K. al-alif wa al-lam (On the Article "al")
3. K. al-wadhiha fi i'rab al-Fatiha (The Lucid Treatise on the Grammar of the Opening Chapter of the Qur'an [in 20 chapters])
4. Gharib al-badath al-kabir (Compendium of Obscure Terms Used in the Traditions)
5. K. al-ijaza wa al-l-tibbîr fi al-'umur al-mushâhada wa al-hawâdith al-mu'ayana bi-arad Misr (Book of Utility and Reflection with reference to the Observed Conditions and the Prescribed Events in Egypt).

This work, which survives, is divided as follows:

Book I 1. General Observations about Egypt
2. The Flora of Egypt
3. The Fauna Peculiar to Egypt
4. Description of the Ancient Monuments of Egypt Seen by the Author
5. Noteworthy Peculiarities Concerning the Buildings and the Boats Observed in Egypt by the Author of this Work
6. Foods Peculiar to Egypt

Book II 1. On the Nile: the Manner in which the Flooding of the River Takes Place and the Normalcy of this Phenomenon
2. Events of 597
3. Events of 598

A complete listing of 'Abd al-Latif's works appears at the end of the Ibn Abi Ujaybi's notice. A transcription of that listing is beyond the scope of this article.

Conclusion

The education of a polymath of the Islamic world in the 6th-7th/12th-13th centuries was a three-fold process. Besides the usual training in the Islamic sciences received at the hands of teachers qualified or certified (through jûza) to do so, the seeker of knowledge had to devote much time to independent study and had to seek masters outside the institutions for training in the foreign sciences. 'Abd al-Latif is an example of this. He is the product of a system of education unparalleled in his day.
The Educational Background of 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi

38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
45. Ed. Chas. Ahlman, 1900.
46. On him, see the excellent article in The Cambridge History of El, III, 844 (art. Nabil Kutayba).
47. El. III, 844.
51. Ibid.
54. Ibn âl-Imad (1931: V, 14). (Note: Silvestro de Sacy's identification of this teacher is mistaken.)
58. Ibn Khallikan (1972: VI, 77, #304). Ibn Khallikan studied under 'Abd al-Latif and was between 19 and 20 years old when the latter died.
61. Al-Qazwînî is probably Râdî al-dîn al-Abî al-Khayr Ahmad b. Ismâ'îl al-Talâqî (512-509/1118-1194) who taught in the Nâzarîyyah and excelled in dialectic, disputations, i'âd, and grammar and commentaries (Ibn âl-Imad [1931: IV, 300-01]).
64. Ibid.
68. New El. II, 357-59 (art. Diyarbâkîr Hâzyân).
70. New El. III, 963 (Ibn Walhâshîyâh questions his existence but this is not a widely held view).
73. Ibn âl-Imad (1931: IV, 206).
74. Ibn âl-Imad (1931: V, 253); Ibn Khallikan (1972: III, 446). This is not Abu Hâfîz 'Umar al-Suhrawardî (539-623/1145-1234),
75. Al-Israîîlî (1972: II, 63, #631).
77. Diya' al-dîn 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Abd al-Dawâlî (507-598/1113-1202) studied fiqh under Abû Kâshî and taught in the Ghazâlîyyah (Ibn âl-Imad [1931: IV, 336]).
The Educational Background of 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī

Leiden.


Ibn al-‘Iṣna‘ī (1350 A.H) Shaykhūr al-dhahāb fī akhābār man dhahab, I-VIII, al-Qadi, Cairo.


Al-Kāthīr al-Baghdādī (1313 [1349 A.H]) Ta‘rīkh Baghdādī, I-XIV, Dār al-Sa‘da, Cairo.


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