CHAPTER II

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF IBN-AL-ATHİR

Before describing the life of Izz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, it is necessary to give a brief account of the period in which this historian lived. Certain politico-social forces current during the period had played an important role in shaping the mind and the thoughts of Ibn al-Athīr. We cannot properly understand his historical outlook, attitudes, leanings, and prejudices without first making a survey of the historical forces prevailed throughout the then politically torn Muslim world.

The appearance of the Saljuqs on the soil of the Mamlakat of Islam in 429-700 A.H./1037-1300 A.D. was an event of great political significance. The Saljuqs were the descendants of Seljuq b. Taqaq, Yaqaq, or Daqāq - a chieftain of one of the Khāns of Turkistān. He was powerful and influential in the court. His son Saljuq was born when he was in the service and was carefully brought up. From his appearance the sign of greatness and nobility was discernable which struck the king, and consequently the king drew him near and showed all kinds of favour to him.

He honoured him with a title - Sabāshi-equivalent to the Commander of the army. But the wife of the king was jealous of the Saljūq and did not like the favour accorded to him in the court.

A conspiracy was hatched against the life of Saljūq, who, due to luck and wisdom, sensed the plot. Therefore, with the whole kith and kin and the followers, he crossed into the neighbouring Muslim state where all of them embraced Islam. Saljūq and his sons and grandchildren fought from the side of the Samanids against Mahmūd of Ghazanah. His two brothers - Tughral Beg and Chāghān Beg became so much strong that they attacked Khurāsān and took over the chief cities; Merv, Nishāpūr, Balkh, Jurjān, Tabristān and Khurāsān. The Jabal, Hamadān, Dinawar, Hulwān, Ray and Isfahān were conquered in 433 A.H. Tughral Beg entered Baghdad—the seat of the Caliphate as a conqueror and was proclaimed the Sultan. Thus within a few years the Saljūqs established a mighty empire comprising the whole Western Asia from Afghanistan to the frontiers of Byzantine provinces in Asia Minor and to Egypt of the Fātimids. Their mighty hand once again infused a fresh life into the exhausted viens of the 'Abbāsides. But the unity and glory brought about by the Saljūqs again fell into decay. The death of the great Saljūq monarch Malik Shāh in 485 A.H. - 1072 A.D. proved a pointer to decline.

After the death of Malik Shāh, a number of principalities sprang up. Barqiyārq and Muhammad formed separate independent
states. But these young princes whose rule was based on military power consisting of the Turk slaves could no longer retain their states. These slaves who still retained their truculent and uncouth nature, replaced their inexperienced, luxuriant and cultivated masters all over the Saljūq dominion and according to Lane-Poolē in the twelfth century the whole Seljūq empire, save Anatolia, was in the hands of the captains of their hosts, who formed distinct group of dynasties.

The rise of the Atābeks, at the time of confusion and disruption in the political field which had caused a social and economic disorder in the whole empire of the Seljūqs, had gained strength. While the Atabeks to power, the Byzantine army approached the Syrian border on the coast of the Mediterranean, and a number of fortresses fell one after another in their hands. This pressure was so powerful that no prince had courage to check it, and on the other hand, the Fāṭimids were losing their political and military influence. The Sicilian monarch gained the upper hand and the sporadic attacks of his army against Africa and its achievements weakened the air of the Fāṭimids.

The Crusades started after the death of Malik Shāh in 1098. Within a few years, a number of cities, were taken by the Crusaders. Jerusalem itself was captured in 1099 and only eleven

1. Lane-Poolē, Muhammedan dynasties, pp. 160.
years later the greater part of Palestine and the coastal part of Syria was captured.

The external military oppression was not greater than the internal chaos which prevailed within the Islamic society. The economic and social conditions were desperately hopeless. The Arab Bedvins freely intercepted the commercial caravans and looted them. Thus the routes and highways became deserted which proved a fatal blow to industry and ultimately to the prosperity of the people.

The politico-economic devastation also influenced the religious condition. The intelligent and shrewed Bātimids exploited this situation. Their secret and well-organized activities added another great danger to the safety of the people. All men of conscience and learning became the target of the Bātinid terrors. Thus Islamic society faced a great danger. A statement of Ibn al-Athīr to this effect is a genuine testimony to this. He records:

"At the time when 'Imād al-Dīn took over the counties, the Franks extended their territories, enlarged the army and increased their apprehension, at authority against the Muslims; their mischiefs became common, they encroached upon Muslim territory which was undefendable by the Muslims. The repeated attacks of Franks humiliated the Muslims; their forays pressed on into Miyar-Bikr as far as 'Amād, they spared neither the orthodox nor the heretics; in Mesopotamia, they despoiled the people of all the silver and valuables they possessed. As far as Harran and Rakka, they oppressed them with contumely and shame, and gave them daily to a drink the cup of death — all the roads to Damascus were cut, save that which passes Rabla and the desert, and merchants and travellers were forced to
suffer the danger and fatigues of a long journey across the wastes, in peril of life and property from the wandering Beduins. The Franks even exacted blackmail from all the towns in their neighbourhood, and went so far as to send agents to Damascus to liberate Christian slaves. At Aleppo they forced the inhabitants to pay tribute up to the half of their revenue — even to the proceeds of the mill at the Carden Gate.\(^1\)

This observation of Ibn al-Athir shows that the political and economic conditions of the Muslim of the period were in a deplorable state. It is often happened in the annals of the nations when any one loses its political glory, the whole social fabric shatters into pieces.

But the timely rise of the Atabeks of Mūsul generated a new vigour and inspired new hope for political salvation of the Islamic world. They regained not only the lost territory from the Crusaders but displayed political sagacity when they paid first attention to the internal consolidation. They integrated 'Irāq, Mūsul, Sanjar, Jazīra, Harrān and other Syrian cities under their own banner; thus not only political stability was restored but external military pressure of the Crusaders was struck back with great success. The roads were repaired, the 'caravan sarays' were built and postal services more adequately managed and looked after. The system of irrigation received priority and was highly developed.

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1. Lane-Poole, *Saladin and the fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (London, 18), pp. 33-34.
The above mentioned condition was, in later period, further strengthened by another dynasty - the Ayyūbids. But the course of the history took another turn. A new political phenomenon developed due to the Crusades and the invasions of the Mangūls. The pressure of the Mangūls was first felt in 12th century when the Ayyūbids had lost their unity and glory.

Everywhere disruption, distruct and weakness permeated the mind of the irreconcilable Atābek rulers whose zeal and boldness had vanished. We can visualize this deplorable situation which echoes in the works of Ibn al-Atūr, Ibn Khallikān and Yāqūt. The former mourns thus:

"I pray to God to bring easiness to Islam and the Muslim, because they are helpless and without protector. These "Tātārs" have overpowered them owing to the absence of any strong power. It has happened so because Khūrāz̤m Shāh conquered all the countries and killed their rulers. Thus he has become the only powerful Monarch in the Islamic World. But, when he himself was defeated by "Tātārs" none remained to resist the pressure."

The prevalence of such a political condition in the Islamic world again provided a chance for the Bātinids to intensify their subversive activities and thus strike at the very root of peace and unity prevailing in the Muslim society. This politico-
economic fluctuation in its historical development bore remarkable influence in shaping and developing the mind of our historian. It guided his mind towards the universal thinking which transcended him from narrow limitations.

It was on the 4th of Jamāda I, 555 A.H.-1160 A.D. that our historian was born in Jazīra Ibn ’Umar a town situated on the western bank of the Tigris. The city was first populated according to Yaqūt by Hasan b. ’Umar b. Khattāb al-Taghlibi, while Ibn Khallikān records a different opinion. He writes:

"Most of the people call it Jazīra Ibn ’Umar but I do not know who is meant by Ibn ’Umar. It is said to have been attributed to Yusuf b. ’Umar al-Thaqāfi the ‘Iraqi governor, I came to know the truth later, namely, that a certain ’Abd al-Azīz b. ’Umar of Berqād in the province of Mūsāl built it and it was named after him."3

It was a large city and had a considerable population. It had a mosque, a fort and a very large "Madrasa." When the

1. Hudūd al-‘Ālam, translated by V. Minorsky, p. 141. Yaqūt, who was well acquainted with the Jazīra, reports; it is encircled by Tigris from three sides like Crescent. It is entrenched around the city, filled with water, a milstone is installed over the ditch so as the water encircled all around, Mu’jam-’Ul Buldān, Vol. 2/138.


Atābeks of Mūsul established their kingdom naturally the Jazīra came under their rule and the father of our historian - Athīr al-Dīn was appointed administrator in his early youth.

"Ali b. Muhammad b. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jazari - historian, genealogist, literateur, jurist, poet and traditionalist was one of the three sons of Athīr al-Dīn. Authors of biographical dictionaries preserve no information about the early life of Athīr al-Dīn. Our knowledge about him is fragmentary scattered in the pages of Tarikh al-Daulat al-Atābeksiya from which certain aspects of his personality can be visualised.

Athīr al-Dīn Muhammad b. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm was a pure Arab. He belonged to the tribe Shaiban. Perhaps his immediate forefathers did not distinguish themselves in any field of learning, politics and administration, otherwise historical books might have possessed some information about them. It is very likely that Athīr al-Dīn learned the traditional subjects e.g. Hadīth, Fiqh and Adab. The historian listened Hadīth to his father.

The career of Athīr al-Dīn achieves prominence when he is seen to be related with the men of Imād al-Dīn Zangi during the

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years 1128 and 1146 A.H. He was educated, intelligent, wise, honest and loyal. He had keen interest in Hadith and was well versed in it. He was father of many children of whom three became renown. After the death of Imād al-dīn, Athīr al-Dīn was appointed an administrator of the Jazira by Sayf al-Dīn al- Ghāzī in 1146 A.H. and held this post till the reign of Quṭb al-Dīn Mawdūd (565-1169, and later promoted to the post of treasurer.

During the tenure of his office, he was highly respected by the people due to his clemency, for-giveness and unbounded devotion to the cause of public welfare. Ibn al-Athīr reports many accounts which testify to the benevolent deeds of his father. He records a conversation held between Quṭb al-Dīn and Athīr al-Dīn, on the authority of his father which reflects the good nature of Athīr al-Dīn.

The services of Athīr al-Dīn to the house of the Atābeks and high position which he held in the court of the Atābeks, provided ample opportunity for the prosperity, dignity, and power of his family which was later enjoyed by his celebrated sons.

Besides these high administrative offices which he held, Athīr al-Dīn possessed large immovable properties. Izz al-Dīn records that he had orchards and big land in the Aqīma. Besides, he was shareholder in a large commercial concern which was run on inter-continental scale, because he mentions that during the Crusades' raids on the coast of the Mediteranean his two ships, full of merchandise, were captured by the enemies.

It seems that Athīr al-Dīn was the richest man in the town. He lived as a humble, pious, austere and benevolent governor of the people.

His relations with the ruling family remained always cordial, unstinted and reliable. Sayf al-Dīn and Quṭb al-Dīn laid great confidence in him and consulted him in connection with the settlement of land taxes and its measurement. As a sincere and honest governor, he sometimes differed with the central policies in matters of taxation and measurement.

1. Ibn al-Athīr, Tarikh al-Atābeka, p. 265.
2. Ibid., p. 281-82.
Our historian was born in such a rich family. He was second to his elder brother Majd al-Dīn al-Mubārak (1149-1209), his younger brother was Naṣr al-Lah (558-637 A.H./1162-1239 A.D.). All the three brothers were born in Mūsul. It is held that Athīr al-Dīn had one more son and his name was Muhammad and was a Muhaddith.

There is no record of the subjects he was taught in be primary stage. But it can safely assumed that he might have been taught the Qurʾān, Hadīth, language and Mathematics. The Madrasa of Jazīrah Ibn Umar had many good teachers who must have taught all the three brothers. Ibn al-Athīr did not live very long in the Jazīrah and had to leave it at a very early age. He migrated, with his father and two brothers, to Mūsul and settled there. But it is not known, at what age or in which year our historian left for Mūsul. Ibn Khallikān reports that Ibn al-Athīr was born in the Jazīrah and later, he went to Mūsul with his father, two brothers and settled there. This is also corroborated by al-Subky. Later biographers repeated the earlier information. A modern scholar A.F. Voziliev maintains that "the


historian proceeded to Mūsul with his father and two brothers in the year (576 A.H.-1180 A.D.) and completed his education there. This opinion is expressed by the scholar without any historical evidence. In 576 A.H.-1180 A.D. Ibn al-Athīr, was in Medina. Further, on another occasion, he writes that in the beginning of Dhu‘l-Qa‘da 573 A.H.-1177 A.D. he was in Baghdad on his way to the Pilgrimage. It means that he reached Medina in Dhi‘l-Hijja and offered his first pilgrimage in 574 A.H.-1178 A.H.

His presence in Medina in the year 576 A.D. suggests that it was the second visit of Ibn al-Athīr to the city, and moreover, the second performance of Hajj. It cannot be said that after performing the first Hajj in 574 A.H.-1178 A.D. he continued to stay in Arabia; because, he has pointed out in his book that he went to his native town - Jazira Ibn Umar for educational purpose in 574 A.H.-1178 A.D. He mentions which confirms not only that he returned to Mūsul after performing the first pilgrimage in 573 A.H.-1177 A.D. and again visited Mecca in 576 A.H.-1180 A.D. but it also throws light on the question of the settlement of Ibn al-Athīr’s family in Mūsul.

1. A.F. Voziliev, Al-Arab wal-Rum, p. 303.
This passage decisively informs that the historian had left the Jazîra before 574 A. H.-1178 A. D. and settled in Mūsul. Further, he frequently visited the native town for one reason or the other. So it is hardly acceptable that Ibn al-Athîr would have migrated to Mūsul in 576 A. H.-1180 A. D.

Now a question arises. In which year did Ibn al-Athîr, along with his father and brothers settle in Mūsul? No definite answer is available in this connection, but certain scanty informations are available which prepare ground for the investigation. A very reliable contemporary author, Yâqût al-Ḥamvî, who lived in Mūsul and was very intimate with Ibn al-Athîr, reports on the authority of our historian Ibn al-Athîr, that Mubârak b. Muhammad, the elder brother of the historian migrated to Mūsul in 565 A. H.-1169 A. D. and remained there till his death.

Since Athîr al-Dîn was appointed the treasurer of Qutb al-Dîn Muhammad in 565 A. H.-1169 A. D., he had to live in Mūsul to discharge his responsibility. The statement of Yâqût concerning the migration of Mubârak to Mūsul in 565 A. H. coincides with the date of Athîr al-Dîn's appointment as a treasurer. This coincidence fairly suggests that Athîr al-Dîn settled in Mūsul probably in the beginning of 565 A. H. 1149 A. D. or a bit earlier. Anyhow when he left for Mūsul other members of the family also

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accompanied him. Further we find a reference to the effect that in 574 A.H. 1178 A.D., the historian came to Jazîra for educational purpose, which indicates that Musul had already become a permanent home of Ibn al-Athîr's family. But they did not break their relations with their native town. Though all the possibilities favour the point that our historian left the Jazîra in 565 A.H. 1169 A.D. when he was only ten years old, yet no definite evidence is traceable in this respect. The date suggested by A.F. Voziliev is without any evidence and is, in no case, acceptable. The settlement of Ibn al-Athîr's family in Musul opened a new era in the history of the family.

From the adolescent period onwards, Izz al-Dîn lived in Musul. The city at that time was one of the greatest seats of learning, culture and civilization. Musul is a very ancient city. The historians have no record of its foundation.

During the time of the Atabeks it was a prosperous and highly developed city. Ibn al-Athîr records that before the Atabeks the city was deserted, its gardens were ruined and old buildings were not well maintained; its population was reduced. Fruits were in great scarcity; but after the rise of Imad al-Dîn

1. Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat, Vol.3/33. Ibn Khallikan report that Izz al-dîn, after being brought up in the Jazîra, moved to Musul along his father and two brothers.

Zanqî, the city was carefully repaired, roads were built, and new mosques, palaces and colleges emerged up. The ancient buildings were looked after, and new gardens sprang up, the city wall was repaired and the city itself was given extension. Fresh vegetables and fruits were made available throughout the year in large quantity. The great traveller Ibn Jubair recorded his impression when he visited the city, "the buildings, Mosques, toilets, Inns, Markets and hospitals attracted his attention for their beauty, stateliness and decoration. He mentions six colleges or even more on the banks of Tigris which looked like palaces; each having hospital attached to it. Yaqūt mentions annually the total income of the Wilayat was four lakhs dirham, and it has increased manifold now. The famous traveller Ibn-Batūţa passed through the city in 8th century and mentioned all the ancient and modern palaces, Inns, colleges and Carwansarāis. He noted the courtesy and generosity of the people. The medieval importance and beauty of Müsul is still noticeable.

Müslûl, possessing so significant geographical position and being a confluence of the east and the west, was in those day a centre of culture and civilization. The patronage of the

5. Sulaimān Saigh, Ta'rikh al-Müslûl, p. 221-22.
Atabek dynasty the learning and Arts attracted noted scholars, poets, Jurists, traditionists and Artisans who developed and marvelled their taste in the serene and blessed environment of Mūsul. An important point is to be emphasised here that a good proportion of the population was Christian. It is here that Ibn al-Athīr, perhaps, learnt Syriac language from the Christians. His younger brother Naṣr allāh knew the language.

One of the remarkable aspects of the Atabek dynasty was that they gave basic importance to education and public welfare which they inherited from the Seljuqs, many colleges were run by the official aids. It was due to this encouragement and patronage that Mūsul became one of the greatest seats of learning. A large number of great scholars filled the official posts and undertook professional jobs in the different colleges. Among the noted scholars 'Imād Muḥammad b. Yūnus al-Mūsul (608-635 A.H. 1211-1140 A.D.), and the famous family of Shahrazūr may be quoted in this respect. Ibn Dāhān Sād b. al-Mubārak (569 A.H.-1169 A.D.) - the famous lexicographer and grammarian, Ibn Dāhān Yahyā b. Sād (616 A.H.-1219 A.D.) were the distinguished members of

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 16/848.
5. "He was teacher of Mubārak - the elder brother of the historian" Yaqūt, Irshād al-Arib, Vol. 6/241.
the elites of Mūsul. Ibn al-Mustufī (627 A.H.-1229 A.D.), the historian was also residing in Mūsul. The eminent poets al-Shāṭānī (572 A.H.-1176 A.D.) Muḥizzāb al-Dīn ʿAlī Shāmīm al-Halābī (601 A.H.-1204 A.D.) contributed much by their poetic genius to the courts and the gatherings of the scholars. Education was so much valued and books so much needed that a scholar and calligrapher like ʿYāqūt al-Hamvī earned money in abundance by this profession. Literary meetings were periodically held in the palaces and problems of literary importance were frequently discussed in the colleges and Madrasas. This was Mūsul of twelfth century that excelled in the field of learning, literature and art, which became permanent abode of our historian.

The new social environment of Mūsul provided great opportunity for Ibn al-Athīr to acquire not only knowledge but to train his mind, to refine his manner and to elevate his taste.

1. He had his residence both in Mūsul and Arbil, he was master of all the branches of literature and history. He wrote a history of Arbil in five volumes". Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat, Vol. 3/294-98.


3. "The metal works of Mūsul and their fellow craftsmen who carried the same art into Persia, Syria and Egypt made lively representations of court life, the monarch drinking among his servants and musicians, hunting, playing polo, or engaged in Battle: some of the metalworker were certainly christians but their patrons were muslim princes who paid no heed to theological opinion on the matter,"T. V. Arnold. Ency. of Islam, Vol. 4/692-930.
We are informed that he was busy in the pursuit of knowledge while he had already finished elementary education in his native town where the famous Shafi'i theologian Abu Tahir Ibrahim b. Muhammad b. Ibrahim b. Mahran (1123-1176 A.D. 517-572 A.H.) was lecturer. Ibn al-Athir, most probably, was schooled by him. When Ibn al-Athir records that he went to the Jazira in 674 A.H. 1178 A.D. for listening Hadith to a lecturer he obviously means Ibrahim.

It was natural that in Musul the number of his teachers should have been very large. But most of the biographers do not help us much in this respect. Ibn Khallikan mentions a scholar Abu al-Fadl Abd allah b. Ahmad al-Khatib al Tusi while al Subky mentions Khatib al-Tusi, Abu al-Farj Yahya al-thaqafi and Muslim b. Ali al-Sanjii. Ibn al-Athir's contemporary scholars like Abu al-Berkat Abd-Allah b. Shareji might have been his teacher. Ibn Khallikan mentions that Ibn al-Athir listened to the Khatib and his contemporaries. Two more scholars - Muhammad b. Alwan b. Mahajir b. Ali b. Mahajir (602-615 A.H.

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6. Ibid., Vol. 3/33.
1108-1219 A.D. and Mohammad b. Yunus b. Muhammad b. Munāt b. Malik Shaikh Ahmad al-Din b. Yunus al Arbil (535-603 A.H./1140-1205 A.D.) are to be mentioned. The former was a great doctor of Fiqh and he served in a number of colleges especially the one built by his own father. The latter belonged to Arbil. He migrated to Mūsul where he mastered in Fiqh. His fame spread far and wide and learned doctors came to him from far off land. It is possible that Ibn al-Athīr might have attended the lectures of these scholars.

Ibn al-Athīr spent most of his adolescent period studying in Mūsul. He was gifted with great intelligence, acute and penetrating mind. Since he was a son of famous treasurer of Qutb al-dīn, naturally he was welcomed everywhere and the learned class paid much attention to him. His favourite subjects were Fiqh, hadīth, Tafsīr, literature, mathematics and music, but in later years, he gradually turned towards Hadīth, and history, and achieved lasting reputation in them.

It is not definitely known when Ibn al-Athīr first went out of Mūsul to other cities. It may be expected that he went to other cities in 573 A.H.-1177 A.D. During this journey, he

2. Ibid., Vol. 5/46.
certainly would have tried to contact noted scholars living in Mecca, Medina, Damascus and Baghdad. It is to be pointed that he undertook the journey for Hajj and returned to Musul the same year.

A prominent teacher of Musul, Abu al-Haram Meccî b. Rayân b. Shabba al-Nuhvi al-Musli is mentioned as the teacher of Ibn al-Athîr. Ibn al-Athîr, living in the same city, had close relation with his teacher - Abu al-Haram; and most of the literary works were taught to Ibn al-Athîr by him. It is also expected that Ibn al-Athîr might have developed a taste for music under his influence.

His second pilgrimage to Mecca was in 576 A.H.-1180 A.D. as he mentions himself. Perhaps during this visit his elder brother Mubarak accompanied him. He records that he listened Sunan Nasâi' of 'Abd al-Rahmân to Yaish b. Sadaqa with his brother; but the exact date is not mentioned by him. The reason

1. He was the son of a poor father who departed from the World leaving him alone. The future scholar disgusted of his mother left for Musul and after completing primary education he proceeded to Baghdad where the noted literatures Ibn al-Khashshâb, Ibn al-Safar, Ibn al-Anbarî and Abu Mohammad Said b. Dahhân became his lecturers. After being well versed in literature, he again came to Musul and found himself well-received. Ibn Khallîqan records on the authority of Ibn al-Mustawfi - the author of Tarikh Arbil, that, he was versatile in all the branches of knowledge and authority on language and was recognized as intelligent and pious. (603 A.H.-1206 A.D.) Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat, Vol. 4/365-67. Ibn al-Athîr, Al-Kâmîl, Vol. 12/100.

4. Ibid., Vol. 12/114.
for holding the opinion is that Mubarak could not have spare
time to proceed to Hajj in later years due to his administra-
tive engagements and declining health.

Yaish b. Sadaqa b. Ali al-Furati — a famous jurist
and lexographer was lecturer in Baghdad. Al-Subkey records
the opinion of Ibn Najjar that he was one of the leading
followers of Shafai and he was exemplary in piety and devout.
He died on 24th of Dhiqada, 573 A.H.-1177 A.D. Ibn al-Athir
held him in high regard. Another professor whom he listened
to was Abu Ahmad Abdallah b. Ali al-Sufi whom Ibn Khallikan
mentions in his Wafayat.

Now Ibn al-Athir was a grown up youth of 21 years. His
elder brother Mubarak b. Mohammad was 32 years old. Mubarak
was appointed treasurer of Saif al-Din Ghazi b. Modud not
before 565 A.H.-1169 A.D. he served several posts in the govern-
ment of Saif al-Din the fourth Atabek of Musul till 576A.H.-
1180 A.D.

1. This date differs with what Ibn al-Athir has recorded.
   He records the date 593 A.H.-1196 A.D. as his
death and relates a very interesting account about him of
which he is an eye witness. If the opinion of Subkey is
accepted then an objection arises. First it is recorded
that Ibn al-Athir performed his first Hajj in 573 A.H.-
1177 A.D., and on another occasion he describes that,
after performing his Hajj with his brother, he came to
Baghdad and listened Sunan Nasai to Yaish b. Sadaqa while
returning home. How is it possible that a man who died in
Dhu'l-Qa'da would have been able to meet him in Dhil Hijja.
It is also a fact that Ibn al-Athir performed his first
pilgrimage in 573 A.H.-1177 A.D. Probably the error accured
in the Tabaqat because it is not arranged according to
annalistic order while al-Kamil follows this method.
Al-Subkey, Tabaqat al-Shafaiya, Vol. 4/325.
4. Lane Poole, p. 163. Muhammadan dynasties, p. 163.
During his youthful years Ibn al-Athir had been exclusively devoted to studies. No information is recorded which may indicate other affairs which might have occupied him. His carefree, energetic, ambitious and most creative days, apparently, seem to be after the pursuit of knowledge which stood above all natural fury, temptation and avaricious end.

It is a matter of surprise that such a devoted student who resigned to academic achievements now is seen to be taking interest in the prevailing political affairs. He records that in 584 A.H.-1188 A.D. he was in Syria with the army of Salah al-Din. By that time Salah al-Din had become the sole custodian and defender of Islam against the Crusaders. He attained to such a great power that all the small Muslim principalities virtually became dependent on him, even the Atabeks of Musul made alliance with him. It was on the second October, 1180, that a grand alliance was negotiated under the leadership of Salah al-Din into which the princes of Mesopotemia, Jazira, Arbil, Keyfa and Mardin - the Sultan of Kunia and the king of Armenia entered. Ibn al-Athir, perhaps, accompanied the army of Musul which was sent for the help of Salah-al-Din.

2. Lane Poole, Saladin, p. 162.

2. Ibid., Vol. 12/43.
4. Ibn al-ʿĀthīr, Al-ʿKāmil, Vol. 12/114. "He was grand son of Sādır al-Dīn ʿIṣām, He was eighty seven years old. Fiqh, Hadith and Tasawwuf were the main subjects on which he had command. He was pious, God fearing and great worshipper. I have much listened to him." says Ibn al-ʿĀthīr.
6. He died in Jazīra al-Kus where he went as an ambassador of the Abbasid Caliph. "We were bosom friend says Ibn al-ʿĀthīr: "and, often lived together. His scholarship in Fiqh and other subjects was unquestioned." Al-ʿKāmil, Vol. 12/115.
7. He was extremely devoted to worship and other religious exercises. "He was one of my professors", says Ibn al-ʿĀthīr. "I listened to him Hadith." Al-ʿKāmil, Vol. 12/197.
Abd allāh b. Swad al-Tikritī (584 A.H. 1188 A.D.)\(^1\) Jamāl al-Dīn
Abu Ali b. Rawāha al-Hamvī (585 A.H. 1189 A.D.), Abu al-Abbas
Ahmad b. Abd al-Rahmān b. Dānhan-al-Murūf afḍal al-zaman
(585 A.H. 1189 A.D.)\(^2\) And Abu al-Farz b. Abd al-Wahhab b. Kulaib
al-Hurrānī (594 A.H.-1197 A.D.). Among his Baghdadī teachers
two more are mentioned by Al-Subkey. They are Abd al-Muʿmin
b. Kulaib and Abd al-Wahhab b. Sakina.\(^5\) He learnt Tafsir of
Abu Ishaq al-Thalabi, and al-Wasit of al-Wahidi from Abu al-
Mohammad ʿAbd allāh b. Abī b. Sowād al-Tikritī respectively.

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1. Ibn al-Athīr states that he was a scholar of Hadith and
one of his professors. Al-Kāmil, Vol. 12/16 Al-Bidays

2. He was killed by the Crusaders during the famous war at
Aka while he was in the tent pitched besides the tent of
Salaḥ al-Brīn. He was a man of learning and was a poet.

3. He settled in Mecca and died there. He was a man of ver-
tiability. He mastered in Fiqh, Usul, Mathematics Fara'id,
Astrology, Astronomy, and logic. He set seal to piety
and lived simple and hard life. He was the best to live

4. Ibn al-Athīr, Al-Kāmil, Vol. 12/62. He was more than 96
years old. He had the earliest chain of Hadith.


6. Abd al-Allah al-Takriti died in 584 A.H. He had interest
in Hadith and history. Tikrit was situated between
Baghdad and Musul. After completing elementary education
in Tikrit, he went to Musul and Baghdad. Qadi Ibn Shuhba
mentions the history of Tikrit in two volumes written by
him. Ibn Najjar remarks that he studied the book and
found it defective. Al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya, Ibn Kathīr

1. He settled in Mūsul. He was one of the greatest jurists of Mūsul. He listened to Abu al-Wakt. He was born in 529 A.H. and died in Jamad al-Akha, 621 A.H.-1224 A.D. Tarikh Ibn al-Dabithi, p. 127.

2. He died in 618, and was busy in trade since long time. Hadith was his subject. Ibn al-Dabithi, Tarikh Ibn al-Dabithi, p. 68.


He died in 576 A.H. 1180 A.D.

Perhaps the most interesting period between 683 A.H. 1187 and 1191 A.D. was spent by Ibn al-Athir in the affair of great significance. I have already mentioned his presence in the wars against the christians in 684 A.H. 1188 A.D. After it, probably, he did not return to Musul, because he records that after the capture of Jerusalem by Salah al-Din he came to Baghdad visiting Jerusalem. But the definite year is not mentioned by him. The political situation in Musul and the growing distrust resulting into deteriorating relation between the Atabeks of Musul and Salah al-Din cautioned him, too, not to be in Musul. Moreover, his elder brother Mubarak was the greatest confident of Izz al-Din Mas'ud I (576-89 A.H.-1180-1193 A.D.). When Salah al-Din died in 584 A.H.-1188 A.D., Ibn

al-Athir probably was not in Damascus; because the biographical
description in al-Kāmil about Salah al-Dīn is completely devoid
of first hand knowledge. But in the following year he is
seen to be in Damascus. He records that he was in Damascus when
Malik al-Azīz ʿUthman b. Salah al-Dīn besieged the city against

The presence of Abn al-Athir, at that time in Damascus
gives way to certain speculations. The political weather of
Damascus was not clear when Salah al-Dīn died in 589 A.H.-1193
A.D. The princes of Musul, Syria, Arbil and Jazira revived
new hopes and inspirations, especially Izz al-Dīn Masaud b.
Mudud called his counsellors for consultation in a new situatic
Mojahid al-Dīn Qaimaz and Majd al-Dīn Abu al-Saadat al-Mubarak
were among those who attended the meeting. The suggestion put
forth to the prince by Majd al-Dīn was remarkably significant.
If it were carried out the result would have proved disastrous
for Malik al-Afdāl and even the very existence of ʿUthman's rule
in Egypt would have been put to danger. But the more cautious
suggestion of Qaimaz which was accepted served nothing but to
miss the chance. This is what was being planned in Musul, but
in Damascus we see another more confusing scene.
The younger brother of our historian, Nasr Allah Ziya al-Din Ibn al-Athir was appointed the chief Vazir of Malik al-Afdal in 589 A.H.-1193 A.D. Ziya al-Din, by his intelligence and manipulating ability, took Afdal into his confidence and managed the affairs according to his will and whims. Since Afdal did not care about the state and he was luxuriant, drunkard, sex indulgent and lustful, the Vazir became too much powerful. He made Afdal disgusted from all the loyal and sincere nobles of the court, who subsequently left Damascus for Egypt. Among them the great scholar and Vazir Qadi al-Fadil deserves to be mentioned. Historians record the short sightedness and selfishness of Ziya al-Din. Ibn Kathir maintains. After the death of his father, the prince adopted wrong policy because he kept all the nobles and courtiers of Salah al-Din away from him and provided chance for others. He indulged in luxuries and his minister Ziya al-Din got hold of him and moulded him which ultimately not only ruined him but brought destruction on al-Afdal too. This trend of affairs which prevailed in the court of Afdal led him to the deprivation of the principality. His Vazir could not escape from the punishment too.

Keeping this background into mind, the presence of Ibn al-Athir in Damascus gains importance, but due to the lack of

evidence no judgment can be made in this respect, whatever interpretation is to be made can be derived from guess. On behalf of the prince of Musul, he might have reached Damascus on diplomatic mission, who had ill-intentions against Afdal. It is also possible that he was there to make himself available in case of certain eventuality/most probably to seize/the chance of any job there. Now Ibn al-Athir was 35 years old. The former conjecture gains strength with the fact that the house of Ibn al-Athir was closely related with the Atabeks of Musul; and it is also a historical fact that Salah al-Din betrayed the Atabeks which generated bitterness and ill-will in the hearts of the Atabeks and their loyals. This kind of assessment does not remain only a matter of conjecture, but it can be observed in the works of Ibn al-Athir. Further, the role of Ziya al-Din, while being associated with Ayyubids, is not fair; or, at least is unwise. It is due to this reason that Ziya al-Din always remained a cause of anxiety and suspicion among the trusted nobles of Salah al-Din whether they were in Damascus or in Egypt. Anyhow Ibn al-Athir's grievance against Ayyubids is understandable; but it is a universal outlook of Ibn al-Athir which controls, to a great extent, the emotion of the historian.

Another point deserves to be mentioned that Ibn al-Athir, while relating the account of Afdal from 590 A.H.-1193:

1. Ibn al-Athir, Tarikh al-Atabeka, p. 304-5.
till 596 A.H.-1199 A.D. does not criticise the policy of Afdal even an admiring attitude has been adopted in this respect. Further, it is also a significant fact that our historian does not mention even the name of his brother Ziya al-Din who was the sole architect of Afdal's policies during those days.

Ibn al-Athir perhaps returned to Musul not before 592 A.H.-1195 A.D. This year Afdal handed over the city to Al Adil. The historian probably was present in Damascus and, in the following year, he came back to Musul and stayed there for a considerable time and possibly did not leave Musul from 595 A.H.-1198 A.D. till 606 A.H.-1209 A.D. At the very beginning of the sixty century when his brother Majd al-Din was ill which lasted many years, and could not attend the court and discharge the governmental responsibilities, our historian, most probably, was called for the service of the government. His association with the service did not interrupt the educational activities. He might have been professor in one or the other college of Musul; because during those days, it was customary to hold both the posts simultaneously. It is also

recorded that Damascus, and Halab were defusing centres of his knowledge. During his stay in Damascus, he, not only received benefit from the scholars, but many others kneeled before him as students. The son of Ibn Asakir-sharf al-Dinb, al-Asakir received knowledge from him. Mohammad b. Sa'id b. Yehya Abu Abd allah Ibn al-Dabithi (637-558 A.H./1239-1162 A.D.), Isma'il b. Hamid b. Abd al-Rahman al-Ansari al-Hzraji, Abu Hamid Shabab-al-Din al-Kusi (653-574 A.H./1266-1178 A.D.), Majdal-Din al-Uqaili and Sangar al-Kadii etc. had met him and became his disciples. Al-Subkey mentions two more scholars Al-Zainabi and Majid Ibn Ali who listened to Ibn al-Athir.

Though, he resigned to scholarly pursuit and academic activities after 600 A.H. 1203 A.H. and his house became the gathering centre for the citizens of Musul and for those who

3. He was born in Kus and died in Damascus. Figh, Hadith and literature were the field of his especial interest. He was deputy (Wakil) in the state treasury. He has written Taj al-Majim in four Vols. *Al-Adim*, Vol. 1/308.
happened to have come to the city; even then he had close relation with the princes and the ruling class. Most of his literary achievements are the output of these years.

His repeated visit to Baghdad and Halab after 600 A.H. is recorded by Ibn Khallikan. Ibn al-Athir had intimate relation with Tugharbal Shababaldin who was the guardian of Muhammad al-Malik al-Aziz Ghayath al-Din the son of al-Malik al-Zahir Ghazi b. Salah al-din of Halab and Munbaj. The Atabek ruled on behalf of Muhammad who was then the child of only three years. Ibn al-Athir records the Sagacity, statesmanship, and good deed of the Atabek. Moreover, he mentions him as a great benefactor of him. This very cordial relation which existed between them facilitated Ibn al-Athir to visit Halab and stay with the noble. Ibn Khallikan records that he met the historian in Halab at the end of 627 A.H./1229 A.D. when he was staying with the noble who held him in high regard and laid great confidence in him. He used to meet him and, since between his father and Ibn al-Athir a deep friendship existed, he was very kind and held him in regard. Then Ibn al-Athir went to Damascus in 627 A.H./1229 A.D. and returned to Halab in the following year. Perhaps, this time he went to Damascus on a

diplomatic mission. The same year, after a short stay in Halab, he proceeded to Musul. Ibn Khallikan, during these days, developed great affection for the historian and had much benefited from him.

Ibn Kathir reports that the historian served one of the Atabeks as minister, but he does not mention the name of the Atabek. It is expected that during his brother's serious illness which lasted for a considerable period and died in 606 A.H./1209 A.D., he might have been entrusted with this highest office by Noor al-dīn Arsalān Shāh. The Sultan offered the post to his elder brother who declined it due to his deteriorating health. Ibn Kathir, when he narrates about Noor al-dīn, died in 607 A.H., 1210 A.D., refers to Ibn al-Athir as the greatest confident of the Prince. After the death of Noor al-Din, his son Izz al-dīn Masʿud became the heir. He was a child of only ten years and his Mamluk Badr al-Din administered the government on behalf of the Prince. The Mamluk had already offered the post to the elder brother and, in case of his decline, the next choice would have been Ibn al-Athir — the historian whose loyalty and great affection

3. Ibid., Vol. 13/54.
4. Ibid., Vol. 13/57.
towards the Atabek in general and to Noor al-Din in particular have been proved. So, there is possibility that our historian might have served the post of Vizārat before 616 A.H./1218 A.D. The relations of Ibn al-Athīr with Izz al-Dīn who died in 616 A.H./1218 A.D. was of especial interest because the historian wrote the history of Atābek dynasty and presented it to the prince. It is also to be noted that Diya al-Din Ibn al-Athīr, after the flight from Damascus repeatedly came to Mūsul and was attached to the court. But it is certain that his ambition was too high to be satisfied here, and since Ibn al-Athīr, the historian, most probably, held the Vizārat, did not remain longer in Mūsul and left for Arbil in 611 A.H./1214 A.D. and again returned to Mūsul in 618 A.H./1221 A.D.

Diya al-Dīn is never quoted by the historian. He has completely ignored him. The reason is not known. We can not say, with confidence, they were hostile to each other but it is certain that some very serious and significant event might have happened between them which impelled Ibn al-Athīr not to relate a single account on the authority of his younger brother. On the other hand the elder brother is reverently quoted by the historian. It is pertinent to note that Ziya al-Dīn has always been welcomed by the Atābeks of Mūsul whenever he was turned out from Damascus or Egypt.

1. Diya al-din Ibn al-Athīr, by Dr. Muhammad Zaghlul Sallam, p. 49.
The famous historian Ibn Khallikan records that Ibn al-Athir frequently visited Baghdad sometimes as an ambassador and sometimes on way to Mecca. The ambassadorial assignment was, perhaps, entrusted to him during the most crucial period between 615 A.H./1218 A.D. and 617 A.H./1220 A.D. when the house of Atabeks provided a boy of ten years to guide the destiny of the house. His very diligent, wise and ambitious slave Badr al-Din looked after the boy and ruled on his behalf. Badr al-Din seems to be very kind, generous and patronizing not only to Ibn al-Athir but to the whole family. From the very beginning of his career, Badr al-Din took the family of Ibn al-Athir into his confidence. Because the house, as enumerated in foregone pages, secured especial importance in the class of nobility which was the backbone of the Atabeks.

Now the most eventful life of Ibn al-Athir was approaching towards the end. His last 25 years, beside some temporary governmental assignments, were largely dedicated to the service of learning and scholarship. Almost all the works were designed and completed during this period. Instead of writing and compiling the great works, he received the scholars and pupils at his house which was turned an academy and discussed with them the problems of Academic interest. Thus the process of imparting knowledge and receiving it in turn continued up to his last days. His illuminating mind, untiring spirit, excelle

genius and scholar gipsy-like personality saw the last glimpse of the world on 26th of Sha‘ban in 630 A.H./1222 A.D. (123) in Mūsul and was laid to eternal rest.

It is very difficult to say anything about the family and personal life of Ibn al-Athir due to the lack of information. Ibn Khallikan who is a contemporary and student of the historian does not record sufficient information which might have been helpful in this regard. We do not know whether he was married or had any child. He records that Ziya al-din the younger brother of the historian had a son who died early (622-585 A.H./1226-1189 A.D. 2). The elder brother Mubarak had a son, 3 according to the statement of Al-Subkey.

Ibn Khallikan records his impressions about the historian in few words which throw light on the personality of Ibn al-Athir. He says, after meeting him in Halab in 626 A.H., that he was


2. Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al-Aayan, Vol. 5/32. His name was Muhammad and Surname, Sharf.

perfect in virtues, man of gracious manner and of immense
humbleness. The same opinion is repeated by the later biographers.

Ibn al-'Athir is never seen to be hankering after money,
power and other positions, though they never betrayed him. He
remained content with fortune and wealth and, instead of craving
for honour in the court and palaces, we find him always with
his never-deserting friend - the books. This quality of content
and ever increasing appetite for knowledge transcended his
from moral/all kinds of greed, baseness and narrow-mindedness. It
made him always forgiving, compassionate, tolerant and amiable.
Whoever met him and came close to him was enchanted by his noble
behaviour and loving manner.

He was liberal and all friendly to his contemporaries.
Hundreds of people holding different faiths, belonging to
different classes, cities and countries, had the honour of having
friendly relations with the historian. To his youngsters, he
certainly had been extremely kind, helpful and affectionate.
Ibn Khallikan received very good treatment from the historian
when he first met him in Halab.

He has written a number of excellent works, among them
the most famous and valuable is the universal history — Al

Kamil fi al-Tarikh. It includes the account from the beginning of the world to the year 628 A.H./1230 A.D. or 629 A.H./1231 A.D. The first portion begins with the history of Patriarchs, prophets, and the rulers of the earliest period. Then comes the history of Persia, Greek and Romans and it follows the history of Pre-Islamic Arabs and Battle-days. Then the period of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) and the first four caliphs, the Umayyads, the Abbasids, along with other dynasties such as Buahids, Seljuqids, Fatimids, Atabeks and Ayyubids have been described.

This famous history was first published in 1867-1874 AH in twelve vols. from Lieden under the editorship of C.J. Jornber who not only edited the book but also prepared its index in two vols. Later many editions were published from Cairo. The historian had drafted the book long before its final release. He mentions the book in Usud al-Ghaba and Tarikh al-Atabeka. He suggests the reader to consult Al-Kamil for further and

1. Ibn al-Amad, Shadharat al-Dhahab, Vol. 5/137. Ibn Kathir mentions that it ends with the year 628 A.H. Ibn Khallikah and Abu Fida also agree to Hafiz Ibn Kathir. Those who think that the book includes the account of 629 are partly true; because the historian mentions that Jalal al-Din Khuarzm is still missing while it is 629 A.H. but he does not furnish more account of 629 A.H. Al-Kamil, by Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 12/197

2. The famous orientalist C.B. Brockelmann has written a monograph in German entitled "Das Verhältnis von Ibn al-Athir Tabri" in which he pointed out the portions which have been taken from the history of Tabri.
detailed information. He finally released the book after a repeated recasting, modification, omission, and addition probable after 616 A.H./1217 A.D. when Badr al-din asked him to do so. A reference to this effect is made by the historian himself in the preface.

The second book is Usud al-Ghaba fi-Marafat al-Sahaba—an alphabetical dictionary of seven thousand and five hundred companions. This book has been published several times from Cairo and Tehran in five Vols.

A compendium of Kitab al-Ansab of Al-Samani entitled Kitab al-Lubab was prepared by the historian. Ibn al-Athir has so intelligently abridged the book that it excelled the original one. Many mistakes were corrected and important notes were added which made it extremely useful. Ibn Khallikan vehemently commends the book and thinks it surpassed the original one. Further, he mentions that original was in eight Vols. and rarely available. He has seen it only once in Halab. The book was completed in 616 A.H./1218 A.D. it has been edited by Westernfield by in 1825.

1. Two supplements of Al-Kamil were prepared by the later historians. One of them was written by Abu Tali Ali b. Anjab b. al-Sa' which covers the accounts till 656 A.H. (1258) another was compiled by Jamal al-din, Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Watwat. A persian translation was also made by Najm al-din al-Tabbi. Haji Khalifah, Kashf al-Zunun Vol. 2/1380.

Another most valuable work of Ibn al-Athir is the history of the Atabeks dynasty. It's name in Al-Kāmil is mentioned as Kitab al-Bahir but the present text bears different title—Kitāb al-Tarikh al-daulat al-Atabekyia. Its third name is recorded Ulul Absar. The book begins with the accounts of Qasim al-dowl Aqsankar—the ancestor of the Atabeks of Musul who was first appointed the governor of Musul in 477 A.H./1084 A.D. and ends with the death of Noor al-din Arsalān Shāh in 607 A.H./1210 A.D. He has written the book in recognition of the kindness and continuous help and favour from the side of the Atabeks to the family of Ibn al-Athir. The author has presented the book to Izz al-din al-Kahir as a token of humble reward. It's date of compilation is not mentioned by Ibn al-Athir but most probably, he completed the book somewhere between 608 A.H./1211 A.D. and 615 A.H./1218 A.D.

Dhahabi and al-Subkī record that he started writing the history of Musul which remained incomplete. The author of Hadiyat al-Ārifin records four more books of the historian Tuhfā:

2. It is the first and last edition issued from Paris. The famous orientalist De-Salane has edited it along with its French version.
al-Ajaib wa-Turfat al-Ghara'ib Al-Jami al-Kabir, Adab al-Siasah and Kitab al-Jihad. The Tuhfa contained historical information according to the statement of Ismail Pasha but perhaps he determined the nature of the work without ascertaining it, because it is a collection of prose and poems concerning sky, stars, sun, moon, water, brooks, and trees. It is in two volumes. Its text exists in Kaprulu library, Turkey. It dates back to the year 782 A.H./1380 A.D. This text bears the name of Ziya al-din Ibn al-Athir as its author. The same view is held by Haji Khalifa in Kashf al-Zanun but the publisher had corrected it and attributed it to Izz al-din Ibn al-Athir. Another copy of the book exists in the library of Princeton University which refers its authorship to Amad al-din b. Athir al-Halabi the author of Kanzal-Bara'aa.

The book 'Adab al-Siassah is mentioned only by Ismail Pasha. No other biographer has referred to it. Haji Khalifa records Abrat al-al-Abbar as an independent book different from the history of the Atabeks.