

Introduction

‘Izz al-Dīn Abū’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Jazarī, known as Ibn al-Athīr, was born in 555/1160 in the Mesopotamian town of Jazīrat Ibn ‘Umar, modern Cizre. His family was well-to-do and closely connected in administrative capacities with the ruling dynasty of that region, that of the Zankids. Although his father and his two brothers followed bureaucratic careers in addition to engaging, in the case of his brothers, in scholarly and literary pursuits, Ibn al-Athīr, as far as can be known, held no office and was dedicated to the scholar’s life.¹ He performed his pilgrimage to Mecca in 576/1181 and returned via Baghdad, where he continued his studies. During the year 584/1188–9 he spent some time in Syria and witnessed at first hand some of Saladin’s campaigning, but whether he had any direct contact with Saladin is not known. He received patronage from the Atabeg Shihāb al-Dīn at Aleppo and consequently had some admiring words to say of him. At Mosul, where Ibn al-Athīr probably spent a good deal, if not the greater part, of his time, the Atabeg Badr al-Dīn Lu’lu’ also acted as his patron and encouraged his work. This connection too is reflected in the author’s favourable comments on that emir’s rule and administration. It was at Mosul, which had been untouched by any direct depredations of the Mongols at this stage (although there had been alarms and panic), that Ibn al-Athīr died during Sha’bān 630/June 1233.²

For this part of the chronicle the identity of Ibn al-Athīr’s sources remains a problem; indeed it is probably more acute than in the preceding parts. He names his written sources very seldom, a shortcoming that is stressed by many scholars. Those historians that have been identified as Ibn al-Athīr’s important sources in Part 2 of this translation, such as Ibn al-Jawzī and ‘Imad al-Dīn al-Isfahānī, were dead by the early years of the thirteenth century. Whether it will ever be possible to identify any of Ibn al-Athīr’s sources among the minor and local historians, whose works have been preserved in scattered quotations in later compilations, is very doubtful. Similarly there is little hope of supplying names and book titles to match the anonymous historians whom Ibn al-Athīr refers to now and then,

¹ That he lived a comparatively privileged life may be inferred from a comment of his own. At a time of famine in Mosul he remarks that, since all the dogs and cats had disappeared, obviously consumed by the hungry people, the servant girls in his house no longer had to guard the meat. What strikes one in this snapshot is that Ibn al-Athīr’s household clearly still had meat. See below, p. [447].

² For further biographical details, comment on the other writings of Ibn al-Athīr and background remarks on the *Kāmil* chronicle, see *Chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr* (1), 1–6, and references there cited, and also *Elr*, vii, 671–2, s.v. Ebn al-Aṭīr.

particularly for events in the eastern Islamic lands. It is by far the easier task to list the historians, both younger contemporaries of Ibn al-Athīr and those of the early Mamluke period, who knew and used Ibn al-Athīr's work. Without hesitation one could name Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Wāṣil, Ibn al-'Adīm, Abū Shāma, al-Yūnīnī and al-Nuwayrī. Another name to add is al-Nasawī's, who, although he made little or no direct use of his text, admired Ibn al-Athīr and his coverage of eastern affairs, while remaining puzzled about the identity of the sources that he might have had access to. This is significant in the light of the comments above.

If there is little to say about the written sources for this part of the chronicle, there is quite a lot of material and comment that derives from oral communications. As before, Ibn al-Athīr's older brother, Majd al-Dīn Mubārak, provided information from his direct experience of Zankid administration. Otherwise, our author's informants covered a wide range of people, including the likes of merchants, urban notables who were refugees from Daqūqa, envoys from the Georgian kingdom, slave girls, a villager who witnessed Mongol atrocities and a soldier who was a participant in a Khwārazmian expedition to Kirman and Sind but was unsure of the relevant dates.

As far as the progress of Ayyubid affairs is concerned, this part of the chronicle is initially a record of the rise to dominance of Saladin's brother, al-'Ādil Abū Bakr. Then follows the account of the Fifth Crusade against Damietta, which is presented in one of Ibn al-Athīr's continuous narratives that go beyond the basic annalistic framework. He comments on the cooperation and unusual mutual trust of the three sons of al-'Ādil, rulers of discrete entities, in their response to the Frankish threat. Ibn al-Athīr attributes to the Ayyubids the belief, which perhaps at one time he himself held, that the Crusaders were a greater danger to Islam than were the Mongols (see below) because their aim was lasting conquest. Of course, the Ayyubids were aware that the Damietta Crusade was a threat to Egypt, an attack on the basis of their power, which explains their willingness to cooperate to meet it. However, it is implicit in the narrative that this harmony weakens as rivalries develop. These rivalries had a significant effect on the response to the expedition of Frederick II and led to the cession of Jerusalem.

Events in the eastern lands of Islam loom large in this part of *al-Kāmil*. The narrative follows the complicated relations of the various states. We read of the fortunes of the Ghurids, their struggle with the Qarakhitay and their steady expansion into India. In lands to the west of the Jaxartes, in Transoxania, they gave way to the further rise of the Khwārazm Shāhs. Under Khwārazm Shāh Muḥammad this state achieved its widest expansion and dominance so that it came to threaten the Abbasid caliph in Iraq but was catastrophically swept away by the arrival of the Mongols. Ibn al-Athīr remarks that the very success of the Khwārazm Shāh in removing most of his rivals contributed to the completeness of his state's collapse.

The Mongols (or the Tatars as Ibn al-Athīr calls them throughout) are introduced, under the year 617/1220–21, in a well-known, extended section, which

is rather more consciously crafted from the literary point of view. This section attempts to give their origins, describe their ways and follow the course of their astonishing early incursions. It portrays the shock and horror of the Mongols' arrival at a series of places. The younger historian, al-Nasawī, explicitly says that he does not intend to catalogue all those events in detail, because they are nothing but repeated slaughter and mayhem.³ One wonders whether there is not an implicit criticism of Ibn al-Athīr here, who does recount massacre after massacre and horror after horror in a somewhat repetitive manner of expression.

One should note that Ibn al-Athīr records fluctuating views of the Mongol incursions. At one time he seems to regard them as a passing threat and not as permanent conquerors (see pp. [398–9]), even to the extent that he says under the year 614/1217–18, in the context of an expression of gratitude to God for saving the Muslims from the Franks at Damietta, 'He also saved them from the evil of the Tatars, as we shall record, God willing.' Ibn al-Athīr was, after all, at this stage of his chronicle recording ongoing events as information reached him. Al-Nasawī too, at one moment, appears to say that the Muslims must keep their heads down, as it were, and wait for the passing of the storm.⁴ Later again in his narrative, Ibn al-Athīr hints at some return to normality and a revival of civic life under the Mongols in Transoxania, although Khurasan remains ruined and depopulated.⁵ Nevertheless, Ibn al-Athīr in no way underestimates the destruction and loss of life that the Mongols did cause and is anxious that future generations should not accuse him and other historians of exaggeration and fail to give credence to their accounts. One must acknowledge that from his own point of view Ibn al-Athīr was correct to look upon the Mongol incursions as the first and only act of a tragedy that had fallen on western Iran, Iraq and Mesopotamia. The final act was to come after his death with Hulagu's invasion, the end of the Abbasid caliphate and the establishment of the Ilkhanid state.

Fluctuations are also evident in Ibn al-Athīr's reactions to the erratic career of Jalāl al-Dīn, the son of Khwārazm Shāh, who waged an ultimately unsuccessful war against the Mongols. He is praised for his victories for Islam, in particular against the Georgians, but his barbarous treatment of Muslims finally brings condemnation. Towards the end of the chronicle there are contradictory reports about his fate, although his death is confirmed in the end.

The uncertainties about Jalāl al-Dīn's fate are typical of an increasing sense of disorder in the latter parts of the chronicle. The scope of Ibn al-Athīr's vision shrinks and sources of information are more random. This mirrors the growing fragmentation of the Islamic polity around the author. There are more signs that the text was not fully revised and one or two promised cross-references are not followed up. The author appears to lose confidence in his narrative. Various

³ Nasawī, 116.

⁴ Nasawī, 111.

⁵ See p. [495].

material and its relevant dates that have been dealt with in the extended sections that range beyond the annalistic framework are repeated and the chronological thread is to some extent confused. We do not know enough about Ibn al-Athīr's situation when he was writing the final parts of his work but there are clearly indications of a lack of revision— and this is perhaps not surprising, given the general circumstances.

In a work of this relatively wide scope it is inevitable that the reader is assailed by many names of persons and names of places. Every effort has been made to identify them. I believe that this has been achieved for most of the names of dynasties and prominent figures, although it must be admitted that many of the less prominent individuals for whom Ibn al-Athīr provided an obituary notice, by a process of choice that remains inscrutable, remain empty ciphers. The notices of these religious scholars, for such most of them are, should be seen as a token acknowledgment of the ongoing tradition of learning. As for toponyms, among so many that are found over such a large geographical spread as is covered in this work, it is sadly the case that some remain unidentified, perhaps at times because they have been corrupted.

The same general practice has been followed as in the preceding two parts. The pagination of the Arabic text that has served as the base for the translation, that is, the Dār Ṣādir edition of Beirut, has been noted between square brackets in bold type. In addition, internal cross-references and references to material in Part 2 have been given to the pagination of the original. Square brackets are also used to mark text that has been added, normally for purposes of clarification or occasionally for stylistic reasons. However, when an original third-person pronoun has been turned for the sake of clarity into an appropriate personal name (one hopes correctly identified), this has not been noted.

As for dates in the text, Christian era equivalents for Hijra dates are given, again in square brackets. If the day of the week is mentioned, it may be understood that the Christian date is an exact match when no other indication is given. If, however, an equals sign (=) precedes the Christian date, this indicates that an adjustment has been made for the sake of congruity.

Although capable of presenting a telling narrative, Ibn al-Athīr, to my mind, is not an outstanding stylist. The translator hopes that he will be pardoned, if, in these present pages, he has allowed himself more latitude in the quest for readability and variety than was perhaps the case in the first two parts.