

TRANSLATORS' INTRODUCTION

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION, ITS EDITION AND REVISION

Edwin Elliott Calverley (1882–1971) prepared in draft a complete English translation of the double-book summary of Islamic natural and revealed theology comprising Mahmud al-Isfahani's commentary entitled *Matali' al-anzar, sharh Tawali' al-anwar*, together with its subject text, 'Abd Allah al-Baydawi's *Tawali' al-anwar min matali' al-anzar*.

The two works were published together in multicopy editions by printing presses, first by lithography in Istanbul in 1305/1887, designated 'L' herein, then by typesetting in Cairo in 1323/1902, designated 'T' herein. In these two printed editions each division al-Baydawi made in his concise text was followed by the presentation of Isfahani's commentary on that division. The editors of T based their work on L, while checking the text with available manuscripts. They corrected most of L's scribal errors but added some typographical errors in the process.

Calverley purchased an excellent manuscript copy of the Isfahani commentary from Istanbul through an agent he had commissioned, and he designated this personally owned manuscript "MS 875" in his draft, from the Hijri date of its completion, A.H. 875/A.D. 1470. Due to the editor's use of another MS also dated 875, Calverley's manuscript is herein designated simply the 'MS'. With L and T the 'MS' has been closely relied on as a translation source. It may be read in the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Calverley wrote a summary of his work and a description of his purchased manuscript in an article published in the *Muslim World* in 1963,¹ where he expressed the hope of his work's early readiness for publication. From dates in Calverley's materials his work on this double-text extended from about the middle 1930's ("5 August 1937" on translation ms p. 168) up into the early 1960's ("24–4–63" on L p. 88). He wrote, "End of Translation, 20 September 1962 EEC",

¹ "Al-Baydawi's *Matali' al-Anzar*, a Systematic Theology of Islam", *Muslim World* 53 (1963) [293]–297.

on his translation p. 2462, with date and initials on L p. 487, but as noted his work of revision was obviously a continuing concern.

Calverley retired from his teaching post in Arabic and Islamic Studies and editing the *Muslim World* at Hartford in 1952, and Dr. Kenneth Cragg was named his successor. In 1956 Dr. Elmer H. Douglas (1903–1990) followed Cragg in the teaching role, and later in the journal's editorship. Then in 1965 Douglas took a three-year leave from Hartford to accept a call to teach in Trinity Theological College in Singapore.

On leaving Hartford in 1965 Douglas paid a farewell call on Professor Calverley who was living at Avery Homes, a retirement care facility. On that occasion Calverley requested him to finish preparing the Baydawi/Isfahani translation for publication. Douglas accepted this task, and thereupon took home with him the translation and its apparatus. In 1968, after returning to the States, Douglas formally retired from Hartford Seminary, then took up the Calverley translation project as well as his own research and production of translations and studies of Arabic authors, although realizing that his sight had begun to fail.

In 1975 Professor Douglas invited James W. Pollock, who had been a student of both Calverley and Douglas at Hartford, to take over the work on Calverley's translation draft. He affirmed very clearly to Pollock that his friend Calverley had placed no limiting conditions whatsoever on the handling of the unfinished literary product or on its apparatus. The same understanding has governed also in the transfer of this privilege and responsibility from Douglas to Pollock.

The literary materials received in 1975 from Professor Douglas included:

1) Calverley's copy of L, the Istanbul lithograph of 1305/1887 that includes both Baydawi's *Tawālīʿ al-Anwār* and Isfahani's commentary upon it;

2) Calverley's manuscript of the Isfahani commentary alone (dated Rabiʿ I, 875/1470), to be known herein as the 'MS';

3) Some 107 pages [about 20–25 by Calverley, and about 80 by Douglas] of typed transcription of the handwritten translation draft; and

4) Calverley's handwritten translation draft (in easily legible script mostly in pencil), totalling 2462 pages of loose-leaf 9" × 6" paper. When these pages of the translation draft were collated, one leaf

(= 2 p.) was noted as missing, so it was retranslated. All together they filled 16 ring-binder loose-leaf notebooks.²

With Pollock as editor, the translation project, requiring copying into typescript, a general editing and close revision, moved steadily from 1975 but did not gain momentum until there were larger blocks of time available in a 1986 sabbatical leave and after retirement from library employment on August 31, 1987.

The partial table of contents printed in L and T was translated, filled out completely, and correlated closely with the content of the divisions according to Baydawi's intent and Isfahani's explanations. It serves as an overview of the subject matter that Baydawi had mentally outlined with clarity and logic. One is informed by this concise outline rather than mystified, as one may be with the books of Baydawi's close compeers, as in the three-volume Teheran 1980's edition of Ibn Sina's *Isharat* with the commentaries by Nasir al-Din Tusi and Qutb al-Din Razi, the Cairo A.H. 1332 reprint edition of Fakhr al-Din Razi's *Muhassal* with Tusi's *Talkhis*, and the Cairo 1983 edition of 'Adud al-Din Iji's *Mawaqif*. Pagings for these titles cited in our footnotes are from these editions.

In preparation for the major task, these and other source materials were purchased, plus a fairly complete library of the available literature on the main fields covered, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* new edition being on a most useful and valuable personal subscription.

Working photocopies of both L and T on durable new paper were made and bound. From the Princeton University Library, microfilm copies were purchased of three MSS of Baydawi's *Tawali' al-anwar min matali' al-anzar* alone: Garrett 283B (dated 718 A.H./1318–19 A.D.),

² The microfilm copies of manuscripts mentioned in Calverley's 1963 *Muslim World* article were not present among these translation materials, nor was Dr. Calverley's copy of 'T', the Cairo typeset edition of 1323/1902 based on 'L', present among the materials received.

This latter book was later found and cataloged when Pollock as Indiana's Near East Librarian came across it in a Collection of Arabica formerly owned by Dr. Calverley. This special collection came into the temporary custody of Indiana University Library in 1981 and remained there to about 1990. Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, which had purchased Dr. Calverley's entire library, had placed his Arabic books with Indiana for servicing and circulation among an active clientele in Arabic Studies. Due to the cost to both institutions for preservation measures, Indiana University decided to terminate the arrangement and so returned the Arabica collection to Concordia.

Garrett 989Hb (dated Dhu al-Hijjah 874/1470) and Garrett-Yahuda 3081 (dated by R. Mach “before 850 H.”/1446). Also from the same library, copies were purchased of two MSS of Isfahani’s commentary, *Matali’ al-anzar sharh Tawali’ al-anwar*: Garrett-Yahuda 4486 (dated 864/1459–60) and Garrett 989Ha (dated Safar 875/1470).

Calverley’s handwritten translation contained repeated notices to himself of required reworking that he had hoped to provide, while revised passages were often present alongside earlier drafts, and frequent alternate wordings for terms, phrases and clauses remained throughout. Furthermore, as a consequence, the constant and normal exact repetition of statements in scholastic dialogue usually was lost to view in the draft. Calverley had begun typing a copy of his handwritten work, but near the beginning of the introduction an oversight was made where a single sequential page numbering for two different drafts was entered on the typed pages.

It became clear to the editor, therefore, that a close and complete revision of the whole translation draft was necessary. This has been done with care, with affectionate personal and professional respect for our forebear, and with constant reliance upon his massive accomplishment. This editorial liberty was taken with an awareness of both its present privilege and in turn the book’s future critical review, knowing that the latter would be intended for improvement in the art and effort of translation, so that the book in hand could be held as a ‘fair copy’ and valuable, while in English.

The intended readership of this translation

This translation’s intended readership begins among the ranks of medievalist and Islamist scholars. Within this specialized readership the Editor hopes for and is relying primarily on a judgmental balance scale on which, as a result of these scholars’ professional assays, the pointer is tending toward approval. Preliminary critiques have indicated basic factors that should characterize a translation to make it useful. Our ‘reach’ has been for these factors, and as they have come within our ‘grasp’ they have been incorporated here.

In addition, and beyond this difference between specialist and non-specialist readers, by presenting the work in English, we are seeking to interest everyone who wants to study the structure of Islam in

itself along with its relationships with other civilizations. This wider readership extends to all students, leaders and followers, both in the religious faiths and in secular thinking as well, within the global community that is more familiar with the use of English than it is with Arabic. Naturally, the expectations and informational needs of such a readership are wide and varied. The translation of this classical Arabic summary of Islamic philosophical theology is provided to help meet every reader's preliminary wish to know and understand, and we hope it will not preempt anyone's impulse to exercise further scholarly initiative. Furthermore, to afford a panoramic measure of the subject field, this translation aims only to follow the authors at a suitably distant elevation, giving readers a liberating intermediacy between an editor's effort to produce an outer space mental view of complete information totality—always Baydawi warns against such absurd impossibilities—and a reader's terrestrial pedestrian experience of laborious gleaning of knowledge. Although some scholars already have pronounced the era of Baydawi's philosophical and religious thought to be moribund, there are others who recognize it as a plateau, an intellectual staging area, and the threshold to agile and creative new phases.

In Professor Calverley's article cited above regarding this translation, he had pointed out how useful Baydawi's Qur'an commentary was to Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike in their study of Islam. He reasoned that since Baydawi's commentary was important for interpretation and learning, then the same author's summation of the Islamic theology underlying his commentary would also have a continuing importance. The extent of its significance has yet to be estimated and realized. Furthermore, Dr. Calverley chose *Nature, Man and God in Medieval Islam* as the English title for this translation in order to relate it both to ongoing studies and to *Nature, Man and God*, the Gifford Lectures by Bishop William Temple, a memorable presentation published in 1934.

Two University of al-Azhar dissertations on Baydawi were published in the early 1980's, as cited in full in Baydawi's biographical sketch just following here. In addition, Professor Muhammad al-Zuhayli of the University of Damascus published his book, *al-Qadi al-Baydawi*, in 1988. All three of these modern writers are active in the field of Islamic law, in which Baydawi had served in his professional capacity as judge. Professor Zuhayli states [p. 156]:

[Baydawi's *Tawālī' al-anwār*] is superior for the excellence of its topical arrangement and interior subdivisions, its precision of expression, its focus on demonstrated proofs, and its comprehensive use of the technical terms of theological statement.

The setting in which Baydawi and Isfahani worked

The historical and intellectual setting in which the two authors worked must be clear to every reader's awareness as we proceed in this translation. The hope is that interested students will note and appreciate the intellectual landscape of our authors' worldview as they state what they mean with emotional perseverance and convinced judgment. Here we should note the aptness of their book titles for this purpose. Baydawi's name for his concise text as it may be translated, "*Rays of dawnlight outstreaming from far horizons of logical reasoning*", is more than a short-lived floral centerpiece of words. Indeed, it connotes both the physical presence of the mountainous terrain of his native Iran and the palpable intellectual milieu of the great minds who personify the high peaks and far horizons of logical reasoning. Then Isfahani's title inverts Baydawi's wording and gives a different perspective in which the connotations are likewise immediately perceptible, also as translated, "*High vistas of logical reasoning, a commentary on 'Rays of dawnlight outstreaming.'*"³ Through these titles Baydawi and his Commentator together make the plain statement of their admiration and respect for the work of those other scholars, contemporary and past, from whom came these "Rays of dawnlight outstreaming." From Aristotle to Ash'ari and Jubba'i, to Ibn Sina, Ghazali and Fakhr al-Din Razi, Baydawi gathered their 'dawnlight rays' of careful thinking and systematically focussed them into a clear and coherent picture, very much worth the observation.

A time chart is presented herewith showing the relative dates of Baydawi and Isfahani together with dates for other great scholars looming up in this panorama.

³ A third writer closely related to these two is 'Adud al-Din Ijī, who like Mahmud Isfahani was a student of a student of Baydawi. The translated title of his summary work is "*The main route stations in an exploration of the science of theological statement*" [= *al-Mawaqif fi 'ilm al-kalam*]. The memories of mountains and roads around their home towns of Bayda', Isfahan and Ij helped in mentally formulating their book titles. Isfahani as an ex-patriot in Egypt well remembered the 'high vistas'.

A TIME CHART RELATING SELECTED MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHERS AND THEOLOGIANS

C.E.	
800	Kindi, ca.? 801–66; Ash‘ari, Abu al-Hasan, 873/4?–935/6; Jubba‘i, Abu ‘Ali Muhammad, d. 915/6; Jubba‘i, Abu Hashim ‘Abd al-Salam, d. 933; Ka‘bi al-Balkhi, Abu al-Qasim, d. 931 or 2; Maturidi, Abu Mansur, d. 944
900	Farabi, 875–950; Sijistani, 912?–985; Yahya ibn ‘Adi, d. 974; Baqillani, 940–1013; Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar, d. 1025; Isfarayini, Abu Ishaq, d. 1027; Ibn Sina, Abu ‘Ali (Avicenna), 980–1037; Abu al-Husayn al-Basri, d. 1044
1000	Ibn Hazm, 994–1064; Juwayni, Imam al-Haramayn, Abu al-Ma‘ali, d. 1085; Anselm, 1033–1109; Abelard, 1079–1109; Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad, 1058–1111
1100	Nasafi, Abu Hafs ‘Umar, d. 1142; Shahrastani, Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karim 1086?–1153; Ibn Rushd, (Averroes) 1126–1198; Ibn Maymun, (Maimonides) 1135–1204; Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, 1154–1191; Fakhr al-Din Razi, 1150–1210
1200	Tusi, Nasir al-Din, 1201–1274; Thomas Aquinas, 1225–1274; Ibn Kam-muna, d. 1284 or 85; Shams al-Din Muhammad Shahrzuri, 13th c.; Ibn al-‘Ibri, (Bar Hebraeus) 1225 or 6–1286; BAYDAWI, ‘Abd Allah, ca. 1225??–1316?; Ibn al-‘Assal, Abu Ishaq Ibrahim, d. 1260?; Hilli, Hasan ibn Yusuf Ibn al-Mutahhar, 1250–1325
1300	ISFAHANI, Mahmud, 1276–1348; Iji, ‘Adud al-Din, 1281–1355; Taftazani, Sa‘d al-Din Mas‘ud, 1322–1390; Ibn Khaldun, ‘Abd al-Rahman, 1332–1382 Jurjani, ‘Ali ibn Muhammad, al-Sayyid al-Sharif, 1339–1413

Baydawi frequently referred to the authors of the scholarly works that were his sources using their honorary titles or nicknames by which they were familiarly known. The first such title encountered without a full name given with it is the “Shaykh” [‘Venerable Teacher’] in his book “*al-Isharat*” [at L 14], which, as here, when given with his book title clearly means Ibn Sina. But more commonly used for Ibn Sina are the titles “Imam” [‘Leader in Islam’] and “Hakim” [‘Physician-Philosopher’], the latter being distinctively his. The titles Imam and Shaykh are commonly and widely used of various individuals. Indeed, “Shaykh” more frequently refers to Ash‘ari, the founding scholar of the orthodox Sunni school of thought, and “Imam” more frequently refers to Fakhr al-Din Razi, the aggressive Sunni spokesman for the generation just before Baydawi’s career, while “Ustadh”, [‘Professor,’] is applied only a few times to Abu Ishaq al-Isfarayini. The editors of the Cairo typeset edition (at T 14) identified Razi as the person intended by Baydawi’s short reference, “The Imam”, but L (at L 30) and two manuscripts, the MS and

MS Garrett 989Ha, both completed in 875/1470, did not notice the need to add this identification. Again, at (L 63) “The Imam” is sufficient for identification as Razi’s book title *al-Muhassal* accompanies and clarifies the reference.

One notices the contrast in Isfahani’s commentary. For the benefit of the Mamluk King Nasir Muhammad, Isfahani, much more often than Baydawi, has identified formally the authors who were quoted or were the objects of his criticisms. It seems very evident that both our authors expected their listeners and readers to be studying the great writers concurrently with their lecture courses, and therefore not to be in constant need of orientation. But such expectations often were beyond medieval students, just as they are beyond most modern learners. The excellent manuscript of Isfahani’s commentary that was owned by Professor Calverley is peppered with tiny glosses of coded author information that were added from 1470 onwards by successive determined owners who were either advanced graduate students or active as teachers.

Fakhr al-Din Razi and Ibn Sina appear to be the most influential scholars in Baydawi’s thought. As is the custom among academic lecturers in any given field of knowledge, our author had assimilated the teachings of his great forebears, quoting longer or shorter word strings or restating them as the best current understanding of the topic in hand. Razi’s *Compendium* (= *Muhassal*) was most helpful to Baydawi with its survey and sifting of the leading thinkers both “ancient and modern.” Regarding Ibn Sina, perhaps we may characterize this gifted doctor of medicine and of philosophy as having verbal hyperfluency—with occasionally the smallest trace of a ‘benevolent unconcern’—that continues to push many another scholar to the limits of their ken for logical meaning control!

These two influential writers, Ibn Sina (d. 1037) and F.D. Razi (d. 1210), well represent the two parallel and mostly distinct currents of intellectual activity flowing in the Islamic community’s common stream of consciousness. These were [naql] the traditional ‘religious’ current and [ʿaql] the rational ‘philosophical’ current. Coming down to Baydawi’s time were other scholars with Razi in the traditional current, including the two Jubba’i’s, Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar and Abu al-Qasim Ka’bi al-Balkhi, Ash‘ari, Baqillani, Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni, Ghazali, Nasafi, Shahrastani, Abhari and Tusi. Along with Ibn Sina in the rational current are the philosophers following Aristotle, Kindi, Farabi, and Ibn Rushd.

Since the Islamic community's common stream of consciousness supported the flow of both these currents, it should not be surprising that scholars in each current would be to some degree borrowing concepts and arguments from scholars in the other current. Each of these 'mostly distinct' thought currents had its spokesmen who vigorously struggled to advance the legitimacy and supremacy of their own way of thinking. Great books were written, such as Ghazali's *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, (= *The Annihilation of Philosophy*), and great debates were held. The thought of Ghazali, the champion of 'tradition', was full of 'rational' terms and arguments. And Ghazali's effort called forth a worthy rebuttal from Ibn Rushd (who was called Averroes north of the Mediterranean), who wrote *Tahafut al-Tahafut* (= *The Annihilation of [Ghazali's] "Annihilation"*). Baydawi was a strong supporter of the 'Kalam' movement in traditional theology which actively reached out and incorporated many terms and arguments from philosophy. The struggles and interplay of ideas between the 'traditional' and the 'rational' currents began among the early Mu'tazilah and continued for many decades broken only by what appear to be informal 'historical rest periods'. Truly, the Islamic community's stream of consciousness, like that of other religious communities, has been at times a flow of 'seething rapids' and 'white water'. And at times the contrasting moods of 'white water rapids' versus 'calm tranquility' are both to be found within the career and writings of an individual scholar.

On the translation of arabic theological and philosophical terminology

Our general intention with this English translation is to provide an important Muslim classical summary statement of Islam which may illumine a wider understanding of this civilization and its religious foundation. We have striven in sympathy to bring over the mind and expressions of the authors. In dealing with the writers' fertile Arabic language, to use a good earth metaphor, we have 'plowed and disked' the material into the English form of our day. The footnotes deal with greater or lesser questions that arise in the field of study, as the many glosses by the medieval book owners demonstrate. However, as translators we have declined to dissertate. Now in a nautical metaphor, we found that to chart and encompass all the intellectual deeps and sweeps of this history and its culture would

require sailing and remaining far far beyond the value-added feature of the plain English we intend.

Specifically, we have attempted to match English to Arabic terms in their context, the choice here balancing between 1) the correlation with contemporary plain meanings, and 2) the following of traditional scholarship, with notes explaining their relative values. We cannot rely strictly on past scholarly tradition in matching English with the Arabic. Over time there comes a failure in the necessary creative tension between a reader's subjective conception of a term and the objective application of it. Therefore, some older valid expressions have been redesigned and struck into English, and are here offered as new bearers of meaning.

Our hope is that many students will discover in this translation more aspects of history and theology that invite their own research and recording. Wherein the question in choosing a source book for comparative studies in religion may concern merely varying tastes in values, students can at least agree with the saying, "De gustibus non est disputandum." But wherein an excellent description of a classic human religious posture provides needed material for analytical reflection and intuitive composition,—in a scholarly community of mutually active good will,—then all devotees of knowledge and friendly meeting will do well when we shall think again together.

A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON 'ABD ALLAH IBN 'UMAR AL-BAYDAWI

'Abd Allah al-Baydawi was born near Shiraz, Iran, in the village of Bayda'. No date of his birth can be found, but it was before the family moved into Shiraz upon his father's appointment as chief qadi there. This appointment came sometime during the 34 year period, 1226–1260, when Abu Bakr ibn Sa'd ibn Zangi governed in Shiraz as Atabeg of Fars province. Thus, Baydawi was probably born in the first half of the 7th/13th century; less vaguely, but arbitrarily, we will say that he was born 'ca. 1225?' He would have lived through the major upheaval of Islamic civilization when Hulagu and the Mongol armies overthrew Baghdad and killed the caliph in 1258, then went on to establish the Ilkhan [or, Mongol "Viceroy"] kingdom in Persia with Tabriz as its capital. Depending on when he died, Baydawi could have lived as a citizen under the rule of up to eight of the different Ilkhans, from Hulagu [1256–1265] to Uljaytu [1304–1317].

The establishment of the Ilkhan rule in Persia after the Mongols' violent entry into southwest Asia made the populace there extremely apprehensive of what might happen next. It is natural that people of all classes in Persian society would have studied closely the actions and judgments of each Ilkhan ruler for anything that might affect the welfare of their cities and institutions, as well as of themselves, their families, and their neighbors.

It was known that Hulagu's favorite wife and many of his soldiers came from Christian communities that the Nestorians had established in Asia, and although the Ilkhan himself was not a Christian, he indeed showed favor to this group in society. On the other hand, his son the next ruler, Abaqa [1265–1282], was openly a Buddhist and supported that faith, while one of his wives was a Christian. At one time the Shi'i community had been in favor, and although Takudar Khan [1282–1284] had been a Muslim and called himself Ahmad, no faith was set up as the state policy until 1295 when Ghazan Khan took the name Mahmud and embraced Islam in the Sunni form.

Berthold Spuler relates how this Ilkhanid policy of religious toleration was considered a "necessary expedient of internal administration."⁴ Externally, the Ilkhans together with the states and the church of European Christendom became very much interested in developing a mutual relationship, but commerce and communication by land between them were hindered by the strong Muslim Mamluk state in Egypt and Syria.

Although these changes in religious loyalties and the consequent favoritism of the Ilkhan rulers for certain groups did have unsettling effects on the total populace of their empire, nevertheless, their political and military strength in defense of the empire, and their concern for its internal peace and prosperity together provided the opportunity for flourishing growth in the arts, literature, religious studies, and the sciences. Scholars offering different subject specialties and representing various religious and philosophical worldviews moved

⁴ *The Muslim World, a Historical Survey, Part II The Mongol Period*/by Berthold Spuler; translated from the German by F.R.C. Bagley. Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1960, p. 31 in the chapter "The Ilkhans in Persia", pp. 25–42, with maps between pages 68 and 69. See also Spuler's contribution of the historical part to the article, "Ilkhans", in the En-I-2.

to Tabriz and Shiraz as leading cities in this now relatively peaceful land. Learning, teaching, and writing opportunities were plentiful and were used to advantage.

It is reasonable to surmise that a continuing need was felt among leading members of the majority Muslim population for an up-to-date intellectual defense and summary presentation of the Islamic worldview, the foundation of their civilization. It became 'Abd Allah al-Baydawi's concern to provide the arguments and system of ideas that would serve this purpose.

His great-grandfather 'Ali had been a respected local imam in Bayda', his grandfather Muhammad had been chief qadi in Shiraz, and his own father 'Umar followed in the steps of the grandfather in the same high post—a lineage of accomplishment, honor, and prestige. This household of 'ulama' was one of learning and legal precision. The family's traditional role was in public service and it was active at the level of the basic religious foundation of society.

Two dissertations on Baydawi's life and work were published at the beginning of the 1980's by students at the University of Al-Azhar in Cairo. One, by Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman,⁵ was a study of Baydawi's career in jurisprudence and its lasting influence in Islamic society, while the other, by 'Ali Muhyi al-Din 'Ali al-Qarah Daghi,⁶ is complementary to the first, being a study and critical edition of one of Baydawi's book on jurisprudence. Regarding the life and times of Baydawi, Qarah Daghi observes that our author was saved the necessity of traveling abroad to obtain advanced education, first by the library and teaching availability of his father, and second by the variety of talented specialists in the ranks of the scholars who had moved out of war-ravaged territories and gathered in Shiraz.⁷ That he made attentive use of these advantages is attested by his reputation in which he surpassed his peers in knowledge of the various religious sciences and became known for his learning beyond his own province.

⁵ Entitled, *al-Qadi Nasir al-Din al-Baydawi wa-Atharuhu fi Usul al-Fiqh*; [Cairo]: Dar al-Kitab al-Jami'i, 1981.

⁶ Entitled, *al-Ghayal al-Quswa fi Dirayat al-Fatwa/ta'lif Qadi al-Qudat 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar al-Baydawi*. [A study, critical edition, and annotation] by 'Ali Muhyi al-Din 'Ali al-Qarah Daghi. Al-Dammam, Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Islah, [1982].

⁷ 'Ali al-Qarah Daghi, op. cit., pp. 58–59.

The events in Baydawi's life that can be aligned with dates of fair certainty are few. The date of his birth had not been reported, and for his death so many conflicting dates have been recorded that its date also is regarded as uncertain. A number of medieval biographers, led by Khalil ibn Aybak al-Safadi [d. 764/1363], place it at 685/1286, and this date is still accepted by many as probably correct.⁸ Evidence for it, however, seems blurred and inconclusive. Other writers name dates a few years later. Hamd Allah Mustawfi Qazvini [fl. 1330–1340] wrote in his *Tarikh-i Guzidah* [p. 706] that Baydawi died in 716/1316–17. As a summary of the different dates mentioned two are in the 680's Hijri, three are in the 690's, and two are in the first two decades of the 700's Hijri. Baydawi had composed a world history that included events down to 674/1275, but the terminal date in this history comes well before the earliest date suggested for his death.

From information that has been assembled in the two dissertations mentioned, and in the biographical notices in the two editions of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, and especially in the illuminating study of the question by Josef van Ess,⁹ a tentative outline is suggested herewith for our author's life taking it up to 716/1316.

The friendship of the Atabeg of Fars province for the Baydawi family ended with that governor's death in 658/1260. 'Abd Allah Baydawi's father, 'Umar, continued serving the province as chief judge, Qadi al-Qudat, or, with the new title and rank of a Senior Judge of the Empire, 'Qadi al-Mamalik', to which the late Atabeg had named him.

⁸ Examples are the mention by H.T. Norris, "Shu'ubiyya in Arabic literature", *Abbasid Belles-Lettres* [p. 37], and John Burton, "Quranic exegesis", in *Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period* [p. 52]. These two titles comprise the second and third volumes of the series, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, both volumes being published in 1990.

⁹ "Das Todesdatum des Baidawi", in *Welt des Orients*, v. 9 (1978), pp. 261–270.

William Montgomery Watt follows van Ess, saying of Baydawi, "His death probably occurred in 1308 or 1316, though earlier dates are mentioned." [Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology, an Extended Survey*, [2nd ed.], Edinburgh University Press, 1985, p. 137.]

Van Ess listed these two dates as most probable, giving his preference to the evidence for the second. He says that there is factual evidence regarding Baydawi from the two to three decades following the traditionally accepted date of his death [685/1286] and this requires an entirely new study of his life [p. 269].

When ‘Umar al-Baydawi died in 673/1274–5, we will assume that his son ‘Abd Allah applied for and was granted the appointment, possibly doing so in person on a special trip to Tabriz, and so came into office as chief judge in Shiraz. Some years earlier, when ‘Abd Allah Baydawi had begun his career in public office, he had received successive appointments as qadi in a series of small towns in the Shiraz district, surely including his home village. Baydawi’s professional expectation had been of a long career in office, like his father and grandfather before him. Having studied all his life, he knew very well not only his specialty subject of jurisprudence but all the other religious sciences that were the foundation of Islamic civilization.

In the years of his early career, we surmise that he may have grown impatient for the wider public service and recognition that he expected. Individual judicial cases of people innocently or willfully entangling themselves in the details of the public law no doubt could have worn down his patience to the point where he began to act and speak outwardly as he may have thought and wrote in private, that is, concisely, precisely, and quite short on toleration of those whose reasoning powers were slower. When he served as a personal tutor of young minds he could be the sole arbiter and authority of their progress. But as a judge of his fellow citizens before the public and religious law, that “he approached . . . with reverence and reserve”,¹⁰ it seems that his severely correct temperament and the judgments he rendered began building up resentment among the financially and politically leading citizens of the province until this resentment reached a degree that became explosive. He was only a few short years into his career at Shiraz when abruptly he was removed from office, about the year 677/1278–79. His ouster from office proved such a family and personal embarrassment that he removed himself from Shiraz and traveled to Tabriz, the capital of the Ilkhan empire comprising Fars and other provinces.

Meanwhile, it appears that there was another family of the ‘ulama’ elite who rivaled the village “Baydawis” and wanted leadership in the province’s capital city. It may be speculated that on Baydawi’s exit from the scene, a young man named Fakhr al-Din Isma‘il al-Shirazi,¹¹ fifteen years of age and reputed to be a prodigious scholar,

¹⁰ Jalal al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

¹¹ Jalal al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman [*op. cit.*, p. 181] gives a full form of the name,

had immediately been put forward from the midst of this family as candidate for the chief judgeship of Shiraz. The boy was quickly accepted by the governor of Fars, who no doubt saw the fledgling jurist as being more docile, patient, and gentle in dispensing public justice to his elders.

A date for this eventful change in the careers of the two rival judges has been reached by calculations from Fakhr al-Din Isma'il's death date of 756/1355, less his age of 94 at death, which give his birthdate as 662/1263–64; then by adding 15 years, his age at induction to office, the year 677/1278–79 is produced for this his first installation as chief judge of Shiraz.

After completing his move to Tabriz and having settled into his lodgings, 'Abd Allah Baydawi one day decided to attend that city's chief 'school' or lecture hall. Professor Edwin Calverley retells from Taj al-Din 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Subki's *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyah al-Kubra* [vol. 5, p. 59]¹² what happened.

He entered a school there and took one of the back seats because no one there knew him. The instructor put to those present a question which he said none of those present could solve or repeat. Then Baydawi started to answer. The instructor said, "I will not listen until I know that you understand the question". Al-Baydawi said, "You may choose whether I should repeat the question word for word, or give the sense of it". The teacher was surprised and said, "Repeat the question word for word". Then Baydawi repeated it and then gave the solution, and showed that the teacher had not stated the problem accurately. Then he confronted the instructor with a similar problem and requested him to solve it, but the instructor begged to be excused. The wazir [of the empire] happened to be present and called Baydawi to his side, and when he found out who he was, he had Baydawi restored to his position in Shiraz.

In widening circles among scholars of the East this incident was told and recorded about Baydawi, the brilliant but impatient and severely correct jurist theologian, who had been ousted from office by a local governor but then restored to it by the highest authority of the empire.

using both Fakhr al-Din al-Shirazi and Majd al-Din al-Shirazi al-Bali [the latter name from a village in Shiraz district].

Van Ess [op. cit., p. 269] reports the boy's name as "Magdaddin al-Fali."

¹² E.E. Calverley: "Al-Baydawi's Matali' al-anzar, a systematic theology of Islam", in *Muslim World* v. 53 (1963), p. 294.

When the imperial court in Tabriz restored Baydawi as Qadi al-Qudat of Shiraz, in about the year 680/1281,¹³ the judicial situation as it had been under him earlier lamentably began to repeat itself. Assuredly this time, Tabriz would have been fully informed of the hardship for the people and leaders of Fars through enduring 'the severity' of this chief justice. Baydawi's brilliance of mind was not questioned, but the rendering of his judgments had grated too sorely, and thus, his judicial career in Shiraz was brought to a full stop in 681/1282, only six months after his reinstatement.

And again Baydawi left the familiar city and traveled the miles north to the capital, Tabriz, an arena where he said he was determined to spend his time peacefully in ascetic living, religious meditation, teaching and writing. This trip in 681/1282 marks Baydawi's permanent move to Tabriz.¹⁴ And without delay, in Shiraz the youthful Fakhr al-Din Isma'il "al-Shirazi" was reinstalled as chief justice, and from then history records that he held office for seventy-five years.

The whole discouraging professional experience in Shiraz would have taken place during the reign of the son of Hulagu, Ilkhan Abaqa, during the years 663–680/1265–1282. And at the time of Baydawi's final trip to Tabriz, the new Ilkhan, Ahmad Takudar, would have just begun his reign, the dates of which are 680–83/1282–84.^{15,16}

In his al-Azhar University dissertation, Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman

¹³ Van Ess reports 680/1281 as the date calculated for Baydawi's restoration to the judgeship [op. cit., p. 265, n. 71].

¹⁴ This date of 681/1282 as part of the calculation is reported by Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman [op. cit., pp. 142–43], and by 'Ali al-Qarah Daghi [op. cit., p. 59, note 3].

J. van Ess [op. cit., p. 265, note 71] uses the same calculation but carries it only to Baydawi's reinstatement in 680/1281.

¹⁵ *A Middle East Studies Handbook*, by Jere L. Bacharach. Seattle, Univ. of Washington Press, 1989, p. 41.

¹⁶ There is a story that on reaching Tabriz, Baydawi had sought out a sufi shaykh, one Muhammad al-Kitkhata'i [spelling is uncertain] [=? kedkhuda] who was a confidant of Ilkhan Ahmad Takudar. He is reported to have asked the shaykh to intercede for him in requesting the emperor's intervention in restoring him yet again to the chief judgeship of Shiraz. On the occasion of the shaykh's regular Friday night meeting with the Ilkhan the request was relayed in such a manner as to show the applicant's foolhardiness in persisting in this quest for high office. The shaykh told the Ilkhan that the man "wanted a small piece the size of a carpet from one of the quarters of Hell [Jahannam]", that is, he wanted "the judgeship over Fars province." The Ilkhan immediately agreed to the request, and was ready

states that none of the writers who mentioned Baydawi's life had reported any intellectual or publishing activity from his Shiraz years other than the fact that he had served as the chief judge there, and that it was only after his final move to Tabriz that he came to have a reputation as a writer.¹⁷ This observation bears weight in our outline of Baydawi's life.

Baydawi is most famous for his commentary on the Qur'an, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa-Asrar al-Ta'wil*. It is a thoroughgoing revision of Zamakhshari's commentary, *al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil*, done in order to replace that author's Mu'tazilite interpretations and to provide a more widely useful orthodox commentary with fuller annotations. Baydawi dedicated it to Ilkhan Arghun whose reign was 683–90/1284–91, probably completing it during that reign. Such a reference work would have tremendous value to the Ilkhan in governing and understanding a populace with a majority of Muslims. It would provide opportunities for its author to give private lessons to members of the court as well as lectures for the general public. It was the foundation of his scholarly reputation and so would have been the textbook for his teaching. Without any doubt he was keeping busy as his career in Tabriz got underway.

Other outstanding works of Baydawi, in addition to the *Anwar al-Tanzil*, include *Minhaj al-Wusul ila 'Ilm al-Usul* and a commentary to go with it, and *al-Ghayah al-Quswa fi Dirayat al-Fatwa* [?? = *Mukhtasar al-Wasil*], both the preceding titles being on Islamic law, then *Misbah al-Arwah*, as well as the compendium here translated to English, *Tawali' al-Anwar min Matali' al-Anzar*, both the preceding being on Islamic scholastic theology, and *Nizam al-Tawarikh*, on world history.¹⁸

to issue the order. When the shaykh reported to Baydawi just what he had told the Ilkhan, Baydawi was taken aback and seems to have been truly shocked into an objective comprehension of his real foolhardiness in continuing to apply for the office. He then withdrew his appeal, and remained with the shaykh in order to learn the way of mysticism.

This story is retold with slight variations in both the dissertations from al-Azhar University, and is attributed to the *Rawzat al-Jannat* by Muhammad Baqir al-Khvansari [1811–95], but it is fitted into the theory of the early date of Baydawi's death, 685/1286. Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman [op. cit., p. 180] cites the mention in the *Kashf al-Zunun* of Katib Celebi [= Hajji Khalfah] and Khvansari's *Rawzat al-Jannat* to the effect that Baydawi wrote his commentary on the Qur'an while working with Shaykh al-Kitkhata'i.

¹⁷ Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman, op. cit., pp. 157–158.

¹⁸ James Robson, article "al-Baydawi, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar", in En-I-2, v. 1.

In addition, he wrote a number of commentaries on the works of other writers in grammar, logic, and theology.

Both Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman and 'Ali al-Qarah Daghi mention the names of pupils who studied with Baydawi. 'Abd al-Rahman names two:¹⁹ Fakhr al-Din al-Jarbardi [= al-Chahar Barti] [664–746/1265–6—1345–6], and Zayn al-Din al-Habaki [= al-Hanaki], who was later the teacher of 'Adud al-Din al-Iji, famous for his authorship of *al-Mawaqif fi 'Ilm al-Kalam*. Qarah Daghi lists those two plus two others, namely, Kamal al-Din al-Maraghi [b. 643/1245–46], and 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad al-Isbahani, father and teacher of Mahmud ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Isfahani, the author of the commentary on Baydawi's *Tawali' al-Anwar* that is translated here together with its subject text. Qarah Daghi mentions that doubtless there were more:²⁰

It should be noted that if the early date [i.e., 685/1286] for Baydawi's death should be posited, and if his final trip to Tabriz should be set at 681/1282, then the space of four years allowable would seem to render it unlikely that he could have produced so many book titles, or earned the scholarly reputation that he had, or given adequate time for teaching of advanced students. And there is another factor bearing on the passage of time in this scholar's life in Tabriz, namely, the fact that the normal duration of the course of study for each of his pupils may with fair certainty be reckoned in years, rather than in 'quarters', 'semesters', or months.

An indication of Baydawi's gradual improvement in fortune is given by the discovery of a series of letters written by the wazir under Ghazan Khan and Uljaytu Khan [reigning respectively, 694–703/1295–1304 and 703–716/1304–1316], namely, the historian Rashid al-Din Tabib, to his son, Amir 'Ali, who was the Ilkhans' governor in Baghdad. These letters are believed to have been written about 703/1303 or perhaps as late as 712/1312–13, during or just after a war between the Ilkhanids and the Mamluks in Syria. In one of the letters Rashid al-Din gives a list of citizens honored by the Ilkhan, among whom is mentioned Baydawi as bearing the title "Qadi" [he alone in the list being so titled] and as having received an imperial gift that included 2000 dinars, a sable fur, and

¹⁹ Op. cit., pp. 185–188.

²⁰ Op. cit., pp. 65–68.

a mount and saddle.²¹ It is possible that Baydawi was not only honored as 'qadi' by tradition, but that he was also recognized by the Ilkhan's court in a new role of chief qadi of the Shafi'ite school of Islamic law.²²

The tranquillity of the Ilkhan empire was so only in a relative sense. Ghazan Khan had become a Sunnite Muslim as a formal step of religious loyalty. Various reforms in his administration were begun, and the construction of public buildings increased. However, the inconclusive war against the Mamluks and the threat of more war coming from a major division of the Mongols in the north forced the Ilkhan to build up his empire's defenses. Although the Ilkhan gave the Shi'ite minority advantages and money for their institutions and building projects they were still dissatisfied with his religious stance.

In about 705/1305 a leading Shi'ite scholar moved to Tabriz, namely, Jamal al-Din al-Hasan ibn Yusuf Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli, known as "Allamah Hilli" [648-726/1250-1325]. In the public discussions and debates on matters of Islamic faith and on the dispute between Shi'ites and Sunnites as to who should have been the rightful leader of Islam after the Prophet Muhammad, Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli soon became active as a Shi'ite spokesman, while 'Abdallah al-Baydawi was an outstanding scholar and speaker for the Sunnite majority. Both were highly intelligent and both keenly appreciated these opportunities for presenting their positive reasons and mutual objections and for constructing arguments and counter-arguments that could stand in the minds of attentive hearers.

'Allamah Hilli abridged Nasir al-Din Tusi's handbook on Islamic religious practice, *Misbah al-Mutahajjid* and organized it into ten chapters. Then he supplied his own composition which he called, *al-Bab al-Hadi 'Ashar*, [*The Eleventh Chapter*],²³ containing the teaching about God and His attributes, then Prophecy, the Chosen Leader [Imam]

²¹ D.O. Morgan, in his article, "Rashid al-Din Tabib", [En-I-2, v. 8, p. 443] states that this collection of letters is "generally regarded as a spurious compilation, perhaps of the Timurid period." J. van Ess, op. cit., pp. 266-267, mentions the doubts of other scholars as to the reliability of these letters, but accepts a counterargument against the doubts and is favorably inclined himself as to their historical value.

²² Cf. E. Tyan's article "Ḳaḍī", En-I-2 v. 4, pp. 373-374, esp. p. 374.

²³ Translated from Arabic and published by William M. Miller, London: Royal Asiatic Society, Luzac Distr., 1928 (reprint 1958).

of the nation, and the Hereafter. We note that the ‘Allamah begins by speaking about the obligation [wājib] that is divinely placed on believers in Islam to know and obey God, the Necessary Existent [wājib al-wujūd], and other foundational teachings of Islam.

Ghazan Khan’s hopes for reorganizing his empire ended when he died at the age of 31 in 703/1304. His brother Uljaytu succeeded him, intending to continue his brother’s plans. He had become a Sunni Muslim along with his brother, and sometime during the first years of his reign he had tightened his control of the Sunni community by combining two of their schools of Islamic law into one for administrative purposes. However, in 710/1310 he was won over to the Shi’ite cause²⁴ when Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli issued a fatwa in his favor that abolished a troublesome divorce.²⁵

This major shift in the ruler’s religious loyalty changed the balance of power in the Islamic community, and gradually put Sunnites on the defensive. For the next several years, tensions increased within the Persian populace and especially between the two large Islamic divisions. Baydawi deeply sensed the immediate and long term implications of this change. With reference to the succession of Islamic leadership after the Prophet Muhammad, he was convinced that the Shi’ite position contravened the facts of history. This basic deviance in the conception of historical fact he felt was also a denial of much that Sunni Islam stood for. With an educated and cultured spokesman like Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli, he would have been pleased and stimulated to continue discussion and debate over these matters. But the politico/religious atmosphere was radically changed, and the future seemed headed for an unthinkable tragedy.

Shi’ite citizens had been increasing in numbers in Persia, and now they were favored over the Sunnites on every occasion. Uljaytu was even persuaded to engrave on his coins the Shi’ite slogan, “‘Ali is the viceroy of God.” Bertold Spuler relates further in his survey of this history that Uljaytu persecuted the Sunnites so severely that “civil strife seemed bound to break out.”²⁶

During this tense period Uljaytu died in 717/1317, and his death was attributed to poisoning. Shortly afterwards in 718/1318 under

²⁴ B. Spuler, *The Muslim World, a Historical Survey, Part 2, The Mongol Period*, pp. 38–39. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960.

²⁵ Jalal al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman, op. cit., p. 183.

²⁶ B. Spuler, op. cit., p. 39.

the next Ilkhan, Abu Sa'îd son of Uljaytu, the historian Rashid al-Din Tabib, one of the two co-wazirs of the empire who had been struggling for supremacy at the second echelon of government, was accused by his opponent, Wazir Taj al-Din 'Ali, of having poisoned Ilkhan Uljaytu. And because his co-wazir accuser was temporarily too strong, no adequate defense could be made, so Rashid al-Din and his son Ibrahim were executed and their family property seized by the government. But history records a sort of vindication some years later when Ghiyath al-Din, another son of Rashid al-Din Tabib, was made wazir, the empire being still under Ilkhan Abu Sa'îd.²⁷

In the years after 710/1310 when Shi'ism had begun to modify the internal actions and attitudes of the government toward its non-Shi'ite citizens, for Baydawi there was no longer any satisfaction in public activity. As a Sunnite speaker attempting to address a changed and predominantly hostile public atmosphere, doubtless he would no longer have received the customary courteous and fair hearing by the crowd of listeners in the religious debates and discussions. His formerly attentive students excused themselves and disappeared from his company. Calumny in private gossip easily could have been splashed over his reputation.

Thus, his early determination to live an ascetic life of meditation and study would have prevailed in his daily plans. It was clearly better for him to keep "a low profile" and avoid trouble as much as possible. This principle he observed well until he was overtaken by death in 716/1316, the date given by Hamd Allah Mustawfi al-Qazvini [d. after 740/1339-40] as recorded in his *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*.²⁸

As Baydawi's name for long had not been heard either in gossip or in news reports, it has seemed to historians ever since that time that his last days are faded in the distance. This is a lapse of historiography, as no consideration has been given by any biographer nor has speculation been made regarding the relevant general fact of an aged and discouraged person's deteriorating physical and mental powers and how this fact would bear upon the continuance of regular daily communication between the outside world and such an

²⁷ D.O. Morgan, in his article, "Rashid al-Din Tabib" [En-I-2, v. 8, p. 443].

²⁸ Quoting Bertold Spuler regarding this history, "[It] (completed 730/1330) . . . contains a quantity of useful information about the author's times which is not to be found elsewhere, so that it is indispensable as a source for the later Ilkhan period . . ." B. Spuler, article "Hamd Allah . . . al-Mustawfi al-Qazwini" in En-I-2, v. 3, p. 122.

individual. So to Baydawi, as to everyone, gradually there did come the time of a parting along the unseen abscission line between body and intelligent soul. In this case of Qadi ‘Abd Allah Baydawi, as in many a noteworthy case, memories of his words and copies of his writings continue to reward study and to stimulate comprehension, both in scholars’ cells and in high offices of government.

A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON
MAHMUD IBN ‘ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ISFAHANI

Shams al-Din Mahmud ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Isfahani, author of this translated commentary on Baydawi’s *Tawali’ al-Anwar*, was born in 674/1276 in Isfahan.²⁹ His home was one where scholarship in general religious studies was honored and pursued by his father, ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad al-Isfahani. Mahmud aptly and heartily followed this example of motivation. A brief outline of the life of Isfahani, Baydawi’s commentator, is supplied by Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani [773–852/1372–1449], writing in his biographical dictionary of notables who died in the 8th/14th century, *al-Durar al-Kaminah fi A’yan al-Mi’ah al-Thaminah*, entry #4752. We shall follow this outline and suggest a partially filled in picture of his life and contribution, where possible correlating this with the time-frame of Baydawi’s career.

Mahmud’s father, ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad Isfahani, was one of the four students of Baydawi whose names have been gathered from various sources.³⁰ No date for his course of study with Baydawi has been found, but we shall take it to have been sometime during what we assume would be his most productive years at Tabriz, between 681/1282 and on up to 710/1310, when the Ilkhan Persian empire officially became a Shi’ite state. Let us add to our assumptions the fact that ‘Abd al-Rahman would have moved his family to Tabriz while he studied there. That more distant capital city, plus Baydawi’s rising fame somewhat later than 681/1282, would have had more attraction as a study center than Shiraz would have had earlier than 681/1282, even though the latter was closer to their

²⁹ In Arabic the city’s name has been traditionally spelled with a “b” instead of an “f”, but in Persian it is “f”. This carries over into the usages with personal names.

³⁰ Qarah Daghi, ‘Ali Muhyi al-Din, op. cit., pp. 65–68. See also the list in the biographical note on Baydawi, p. xxxiv above.

home in Isfahan, since Baydawi earlier would have been less known as a scholar.

Mahmud would have been 7 years of age in 681/1282, and 36 years of age in 710/1310. Ibn Hajar says only that he “worked” in his home town [i.e., either as apprentice in a skilled trade, or as a ‘pre-professional’ student], becoming skilled and advancing in the various “arts and sciences”, and that he studied under his father and another shaykh, one Jamal al-Din ibn Abi al-Raja’.

When ‘Abd al-Rahman moved his family to Tabriz and began his course of study under Baydawi, it may be that Mahmud was still living with his parents while bringing in wages from his work. To speculate, if Mahmud accompanied his parents, he might reasonably have been near the age of twenty, reaching this age in 694/1294–5. By that time Baydawi’s career at Tabriz could have reached its highest level, his fame attracting students from cities in every direction.

The situation then would have been ideal for Mahmud to attend along with his father, and thus earn for himself a ‘subject teaching license’ [ijāzah]. This practice by students of bringing a child or youthful son along to hear the lectures and thus gain academic credit is known to have become a “routine” phenomenon in Islamic education by the time Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani was writing in the mid-8th/14th century.³¹

Of course, this is only speculation regarding Mahmud, as one would expect him at least to mention such an experience in his writings, and if later he had become proficient as a scholar, then his biographical notice in Ibn Hajar’s *al-Durar al-Kaminah* would have mentioned it also. But the lack of any such mention does not demonstrate in itself that he did not sit in his father’s shadow at Baydawi’s lectures. At any rate, therefore, whether as a direct or indirect hearer of the famous scholar, Mahmud is no more than ‘once removed’ from him. Especially since his father was the intermediary, Mahmud’s insight into Baydawi’s mind and work was deeply appreciative of that teacher.

To digress briefly, the same ‘once removed’ degree of separation from Baydawi the teacher holds also in the case of ‘Adud al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad al-Iji, his intermediary being his tutor

³¹ Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo, a Social History of Islamic Education*. Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 32.

shaykh, one Zayn al-Din al-Hanaki [or, al-Habaki]. However, al-Ijī's summary work on Islamic theology, *al-Mawaqif fi 'Ilm al-Kalam*, is neither presented or known as a commentary on Baydawi's book of natural and revealed theology, but rather as an original work. It is evident that medieval Islamic scholars observed some of the same general patterns in the organization of their topics. We have made a brief study of the organization of Ijī's book along with a comparison of it to the Baydawi text with its Isfahani commentary.³²

When his family eventually returned to Isfahan, Mahmud would have begun his teaching career which would build up gradually as he matured through his own reading and learning. His pupils probably included both primary and secondary students, as classes and as individuals, and from among them he could choose those who were more advanced.

His was an orthodox Sunni Muslim family, and when Ilkhanid Persia became a Shi'ite state in 710/1310 under Ilkhan Uljaytu [703–17/1304–17], Mahmud Isfahani would have felt the same discouraging effect upon his scholarly enthusiasm at the age of 36 that Baydawi was feeling very keenly as an elderly man. In addition to the religious situation, the Ilkhan Abu Sa'id [717–36/1317–35] seemed both weak and untrustworthy. He had allowed the famous wazir-

³² There is a close similarity in organization between Isfahani's commentary taken together with Baydawi's *Tawālī' al-Anwar* and Ijī's *Mawaqif*. Please note the two tables of contents: Baydawi has six main divisions, using standard 'book' terms for the divisions. Ijī has six main divisions, using a geographical metaphor of 'Stations on a Route of Exploration in Theological Knowledge'.

BAYDAWI

- [1.] Introduction: Studies
in logical reasoning.
- BOOK 1: Realities Possible:
- [2.] Section 1: Universals
- [3.] Section 2: Accidents
 - Ch. 1, General
 - Ch. 2, Quantity
 - Ch. 3, Quality
- [4.] Section 3: Substances
- [5.] BOOK 2: Realities Divine
(Dogmatic theology)
- [6.] BOOK 3: Realities Prophetic
(Prophecy, Imamate,
Practical theology,
Last Day)

IJĪ

- 1st Station:* Basic items of knowledge
and learning.
- 2nd Station:* "Matters
of general reference"
- 3rd Station:* Accidents
 - Obser. Pt. 1: General
 - Obser. Pt. 2: Quantity
 - Obser. Pt. 3: Quality
- 4th Station:* Substances
- 5th Station:* Things divine
(Dogmatic theology)
- 6th Station:* Matters of tradition
(Prophecy, Imamate,
Practical theology,
Last Day)

historian, Rashid al-Din Tabib, and his eldest son to be executed because of a rival's spite in 718/1318, but later he had raised the dead wazir's younger son, Ghiyath al-Din, to the same post his father had held, perhaps as some kind of an apology to the family.

The next mention of Mahmud Isfahani in Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani's brief obituary notice of him is that he went on the pilgrimage to Makka at the end of 724/1324. He was then 50 years of age. Thus, we realize that fourteen years under increasing Shiʿite control over the country's internal civilization is a long time for him to have endured the change from being in a majority Sunnite position to being of a second-class minority.

The following month, at the turn of the year 725/1325, it is apparent that he did not return to Isfahan, but instead, he traveled to Jerusalem, as Ibn Hajar mentions. His pilgrimage to Makka and his visit to Jerusalem as the next most holy place of Islam helped to restore his religious perspective and revived his confidence in his profession. Being a Sunnite Muslim, he felt an inward guidance to emigrate permanently from the Shiʿite Ilkhanid region that was his home to the territory of the Mamluk empire comprising Egypt, Palestine and Syria. This empire was a strong Sunnite state, so he was soon headed for Damascus, arriving there in Safar, the second month of the new year, his age being 51.

In the city at various lecture halls, and especially in the great Umayyad Mosque, wherever public discussion groups met regularly, there Mahmud al-Isfahani made himself at home, participating with all his old enthusiasm for things intellectual and religious. Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani picks up a semi-legendary moment in Mahmud's life, when he quotes a sharply observant old Shaykh Ibn Taymiyah [661–728/1263–1328], the Hanbalite judge and theologian, as scolding a talkative group at a public discussion, “Be quiet now all of you, so that we can hear what this noble fellow has to say. No one like him has ever come here”. [*al-Durar al-Kaminah*, 1966, p. 95.]

Thus it was for seven happy years Mahmud spent his days and evenings at the Umayyad Mosque intently poring over his reading or patiently helping groups of students with their difficult reading assignments. When it was his turn to lead a public discussion people would be left full of praise for him.

One day in late spring, in the month Rabiʿ II of the year 732/1332, Mahmud being 58 years old, an important letter of invitation to membership came to him by post from the Cairo office of Shaykh

Majd al-Din al-Aqsara'i, supervising shaykh of the famous Nasiriyah khanqah in Siryaqus, then a northern residential suburb of Cairo. Built and fostered by the reigning Mamluk king, al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad, this khanqah [or, khanaqah] was an outstanding example of the retreat and study centers in Cairo, originally for Sufis and later accepting religious academics, that provided a room, meals, worship and study facilities and a common library, plus regular scholarships or stipends for budding or established scholars. The khanqahs brought honor and prestige upon their builders, their supervising shaykhs, and all who resided within.³³

Then, in short order, Mahmud ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Isfahani gave his hearty and obedient response to the sender of this letter by traveling to Cairo, alighting from his mount at the khanqah, and by taking up his lodgings there [fa-nazala 'indahu]. And there he was graciously welcomed by Shaykh Majd al-Din al-Aqsara'i and soon introduced to the residential fellows and the leading patrons of the khanqah in a general convocation, this without doubt becoming a 'lecture series' by general acclaim [wa-'umila lahu samā'].

The chief fostering patron of the Siryaqus khanqah was the king, al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun, now a mature leader in his third and finally secured reign [709–41/1309–40], having been installed and removed twice before [693–94, and 698–708], fortunately without injury.³⁴ He was ten years younger than Isfahani, and there is no doubt that this monarch warmly agreed with the supervising shaykh in appreciating the newly arrived scholar's gifts. Listening to Mahmud Isfahani's expositions of the Qur'an and to his discussions of the teachings and semi-philosophical debates of the Mutakallimun, the king felt his own need for a better comprehension of the religious foundation of Islamic civilization. Isfahani spoke often of a great Sunnite teacher, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar Baydawi, who had lived in recent years in the Ilkhanid empire when it had been a Sunnite land. Al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad even could have possessed a copy of Baydawi's theological summary, *Tawali' al-Anwar min Matali' al-Anzar*. But then, it was steep and heavy reading, even

³³ See Jonathan Berkey, op. cit., pp. 56–60, "Sufi Convents as Centers of Education", and J. Chabbi's article "Khanqah" in En-I-2, v. 4, pp. 1025–26, for gradual changes in the function of the khanqahs.

³⁴ See Peter M. Holt's article, "Al-Nasir", I. Al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun, 684–741/1285–1341, in En-I-2, v. 7, pp. 991–992.

for well educated royalty. As had the earlier Ilkhans, this Mamluk king sensed that behind the difficult sentences there was a religious scholar of forthright logical clarity and positive, serious judgment, with strength of conviction and knowledge, qualities the Ilkhans and their counterparts, the Mamluks, wanted to see in their legal consultants. Al-Nasir Muhammad saw these qualities in Mahmud Isfahani, but in a more fluent and genial style than in Baydawi.

Therefore, al-Nasir Muhammad proposed to Isfahani, and indeed, commissioned him to write out a full commentary on Baydawi's *Tawālī' al-Anwar*. This would be as a service both to him as king, and to all readers of religious and scholarly purpose. A sizeable reward in cash, property, office, or all of these, was always understood as part of a commission, and this also depended on the king's satisfaction with the end product.

Residence at the Siryaqus khanqah of course provided all the continuing needs of a scholar. Therefore, Isfahani set to work on the commentary that was commissioned probably sometime not long after becoming acquainted with al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad in 732/1332. The king was then in the final third of his last reign, being destined to live nine more years until 741/1340. These two dates may then be set as the extreme limits for the possible beginning and ending of Isfahani's work on this book.

Others of the leading Mamluk princes also had found Isfahani to be an appealing and convincing teacher. Few if any of them came from native Egyptian families, so their social class had no difficulty in accepting a foreign scholar's contribution.³⁵ Prince Qawsun al-Saqi, who had the high office of royal 'cupbearer',³⁶ and kept this title, "al-Saqi", adding it to his personal name, was able to convince Shaykh Mahmud Isfahani to accept the honor of being named the supervising shaykh of a new khanqah that the prince was building. The deal offered to Isfahani would have included a higher stipend and more comfortable lodgings as the supervising shaykh, a first-class library of manuscript titles to be commissioned from the best scribes, plus the all-important freedom of setting his own schedule of hours for individual work and for public discussion. He did not

³⁵ Carl Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages*, Princeton University Press, 1981, Ch. 2, "Geographic origins of the civilian elite", esp. pp. 61–68, 77–81.

³⁶ P.M. Holt, op. cit., p. 992.

refuse this fine offer, but continued without interruption in his own royally commissioned task.

Before he emigrated to Egypt Mahmud Isfahani had produced his own works or commentaries on the works of other writers in the fields of literary criticism, poetics, dialectical theology, and logic. In Cairo his written production ultimately included a commentary on Ibn al-Sa'ati's literary work *al-Badi'*, commentaries on two works of Baydawi, the *Tawali' al-Anwar* and the *Minhaj al-Wusul*, and his *Tafsir*, an interpretation of the Qur'an.

Colleagues and friends told of their amazed observations of him while at work, whether in Isfahan, Damascus or Cairo. Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani relates one vignette, that he avoided eating very much in the evening, for that would make him need to drink liquids, and that would make him need to find a piece of vacant land whereon to relieve himself, and therefore precious writing time would be lost to him. Friends remembered how firm his handwriting was and how quickly his pen flew along. And it seemed that any time some interruption came into the workings of his mind when he was involved either in conceptual thought or in problems of knowledge it was like an affliction to him. Ibn Hajar goes on to quote the historian Khalil ibn Aybak al-Safadi [d. 1362] as saying, "I saw him [in Cairo] when he was writing his commentary [[*tafsir*] on the Qur'an], he was working directly from his mind and memory without any review [of his source materials]; and people have found [this work] to be greatly useful."

Isfahani's move away from the Siryاقus khanqah, called the Nasiriyah after the king who built it, to another where he, Isfahani, was the supervising shaykh and chief scholarly ornament, was only a small irritation to the king. Likewise, Prince Qawsun's success in luring Shaykh Isfahani away from his first lodgings to newer ones with a grander title amounted to nothing more than the prince's usual activity in a court full of others like him constantly jostling and scheming for advancement in prestige, an activity that corresponded to the bustling hubbub in a busy market place, nothing to cause worry.

When Shaykh Isfahani finally announced that he had completed his commentary on Baydawi's *Tawali' al-Anwar min Matali' al-Anzar*, royal and religious and scholarly personages all welcomed and praised the work. Readings were scheduled, manuscript copies were commissioned, and the king presented the author a friendly and gener-

ous reward for the long task now completed. Of the place of Baydawi's *Tawali' al-Anwar* in the later esteem of Muslims, Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman, in his University of al-Azhar dissertation on Baydawi³⁷ quotes Taj al-Din 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Subki [d. 1370], who wrote in his biography of Shafi'i notables, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyyah al-Kubra*, "[Baydawi's *Tawali' al-Anwar*] is the most outstanding compendium that has ever been written in the science of [Islamic] theological statement." Furthermore, Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman goes on to say that of all the commentaries on Baydawi's *Tawali' al-Anwar* the most helpful and useful one is that by the great Doctor, Shaykh Shams al-Din [Mahmud ibn 'Abd al-Rahman] al-Isfahani.³⁸

For Mahmud Isfahani from then on no major changes were reported in his location, his reputation, or his work. He continued to debate and to discuss interesting philosophical and religious problems with other scholars and with the public, and he continued to teach his students and to write, although he had considerably slowed up in the latter activity. His friend the king died in 741/1340, and was succeeded by no less than seven short-lived reigns in the eight years following. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani says that Isfahani died in Dhu al-Qa'dah 749/1348, this being in the Second Pandemic of the bubonic plague.³⁹ At the age of 75 years, his successful career in scholarship as both teacher and writer was brought to an end. One may imagine that he found eminent satisfaction in his life among colleagues, friends and students. And without doubt, he remains an outstanding citizen of his world and an interesting person with whom to study and reflect.

³⁷ *al-Qadi Nasir al-Din al-Baydawi wa-Atharuhu fi Usul al-Fiqh*, p. 201.

³⁸ 'Abd al-Rahman, op. cit., p. 205.

³⁹ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *al-Durar al-Kaminah*, 1966, p. 95. See also "Fleas: the Lethal Leapers", by Nicole Duplaix, *National Geographic Magazine*, May, 1988, pp. 675 ff.