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The Physician as a Rebellious Intellectual

The Book of the Two Pieces of Advice or Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn by ʿAbd al-Laṭīf ibn Yūsuf al-Baghdādī (1162-1231)

Introduction, Edition and Translation of the Medical Section
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Book of the Two Pieces of Advice or Kitāb al-
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History of Research

In 1962 Samuel Miklos Stern presented the scholarly community with the first ever
description of the Book of the Two Pieces of Advice or Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn by the
well-known grammarian, lexicographer, philosopher, and physician ‘Abd al-Laṭīf
ibn Yūsuf al-Baghdādī.² A couple of years later, the German scholar Albert Dietrich
gave a very short description of the Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn without referring thereby
to Stern's prior publication.³ Eight years later, in the year 1972, the physicians and
medical historians Paul Ghalioungui and Said Abdou presented us with a brief

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CRC of this manuscript. The monograph is dedicated to my grandfather, Nanne Pieter
Joosse (1888-1980), who was never given a proper chance to learn, but would have made
a terrific learner.

² Samuel Miklos Stern, 'A Collection of Treatises by ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī', in:
Islamic Studies, (Karachi), vol. 1 (1962), 53-70, at 59-66 [Reprint in: Samuel Miklos
Stern, Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Thought (London 1983): Variorum Reprints CS 183
under No. XVIII].

³ Albert Dietrich, Die arabische Version einer unbekannten Schrift des Alexander von
Aphrodisias über die Differentia specifica (Nachrichten der Akademie der
Wissenschaften in Göttingen: I. Philologisch-historische Klasse, Jahrgang 1964; Nr. 2,
description of the Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn in the Arabic language. Although the initial section of the book must be regarded as one of the forgotten masterpieces of Arabic-Islamic medicine, it took 35 years, until 2007, before the next publication on the subject announced itself in the form of the present author's English translation of a lengthy passage dealing with the untimely death of the prince al-Malik al-Zahir Ghāzī ibn Yūsuf of Aleppo, which in the same year was followed by his elaborate description of the Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn in the Dutch language. In the year 2008, the present author and Peter E. Pormann co-authored a brief article on the so-called "mathematical fragment". This publication was soon followed by another article, likewise co-authored by Joosse and Pormann, which challenges the idea that Islamic medicine declined after the twelfth century A.D. Moreover, the article also sheds important new light on questions regarding the social history of medicine, and discusses a number of quotations from the Book of the Two Pieces of Advice.

Dimitri Gutas recently has published a study on the philosophical contents of the treatise, and is in the course of preparing an edition and translation of the autobiography of 'Abd al-Latīf as present in the philosophical section of the Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn in which he inter alia shall comment on the linguistic peculiarities of

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8 N. Peter Joosse and Peter E. Pormann, 'Decline and Decadence in Iraq and Syria after the Age of Avicenna? ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī (1162-1231) between Myth and History', in: BHM 84 (2010), 1-29.

the treatise and on the philological details concerning the readings of the Bursa MS. Cecilia Martini Bonadeo’s recent study (2013) on ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s philosophical thought contains amongst others a partial English translation of the philosophical section of the Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn as well as an extensive commentary on it.

**Dating the Manuscript & Principle of Edition**

The medical section of the Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn has been preserved only in the unique manuscript: Bursa (Turkey), Hüseyin Çelebi 823, fol. 62r-78r. This MS is a so-called majmū’a, a collection of texts, which contains nine more treatises on a variety of subjects by ‘Abd al-Laṭīf and another one by the Greek philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias on the differentia specifica. It is stated in the colophon of the manuscript that it was copied in the Anatolian city of Erzinjān, in the country of the Rūm Saljūqs,\(^{10}\) in the year 622 A.H./1225 A.D. The title page refers to the fact that text no. 2: Qaul li-‘Abd al-Laṭīf b. Yūsuf alā ḥāl Ibn Khāṭīb ar-Raiyī fī tafsīr sūrat al-ikhlāṣ was written in Aleppo in the year 613 A.H./1216 A.D. The Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn, or Bursa no. 5, must have been written in Aleppo after the death of the prince al-Malik al-Zāhir Ghāzī ibn Yūsuf that is, after the month of October 1216 A.D.

The medical section of the Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn as presented by the single manuscript Bursa 823 is entirely intact. It is completely undamaged and very well legible. Its text was, moreover, written by an exceptionally careful scribe. The editor only had to make a single major correction to it (cf. fol. 77r in the ed. and trl.). The original Arabic manuscript of the medical section of the treatise has been attached as an appendix. It mainly serves as a control mechanism to my edition of the Arabic text (cf. pages 95-112).

The principle of edition used for the medical section of the Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn is as follows: The manuscript's reading of hamza, madda has been adapted to Classical Arabic [CA] standards. The manuscript's reading of shadda is omitted, except for isolated cases. The diacritical dots, where lacking, are supplied. The dots of tā’ marbūṭa, where lacking, are likewise supplied. The vocalization of the text is generally omitted, but is provided in those instances where this is deemed necessary in illustration of a specific form. The use of deviating forms of verbs, irregular plurals of nouns and full writing of long vowels in words which according to CA require short vowels, is not maintained.

\(^{10}\) The best study available on the Saljūqs of Rūm still is: Claude Cahen, *The Formation of Turkey: The Seljukid Sultanate of Rum: Eleventh to Fourteenth Century* (Harlow, Essex 2001); cf. also the recent study by Songül Mecit, *The Rum Seljuqs: Evolution of a Dynasty* (Abingdon [Ox]/New York 2014). Unfortunately, I have not been able to check this source.
Brief Survey of the Contents

‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī composed his Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn as a diatribe directed against false knowledge, which according to the author is worse than ignorance. As the title suggests, it is divided into "two pieces of advice", that is, "advice" for would-be physicians and would-be philosophers, respectively. Both incur ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s scathing criticism and find themselves lambasted in no uncertain terms. The first part, rebuking the doctors of his day, contains four main themes:

1. medical epistemology;
2. medical deontology: the discussion of the methods and practices of charlatans and quacks, called "spongers (mustarziqa)" by ‘Abd al-Laṭīf;
3. the idea that book-learning is not sufficient for practising medicine; and
4. the danger of prescribing and using purgatives without having the necessary skills and the full knowledge of the facts.

‘Abd al-Laṭīf laments the pitiful state of medicine. He does not tire to extol the virtues of the ancient Greek doctors such as Hippocrates, Dioscorides, and Galen of Pergamon. Their skills and know-how form a stark contrast to the inability of his contemporaries. The medical section of the work thus is intended to advise and recommend to physicians and students of medicine to abandon the medicine of those who do not fully master the medical art and are moreover frequently motivated by money more than the welfare of their patients. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf also criticises the medical education of his day: according to him students rely too much on a restricted number of textbooks such as the Canon by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 1037 A.D.) or imperfect abridgments. Students should therefore master the writings of the ancient Greek doctors in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of medicine.

‘Abd al-Laṭīf's Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn without any doubt belongs to the genre of advice-literature and therefore may well represent a so-called 'multiple mirror': a mirror for physicians, a mirror for philosophers and a mirror for princes [lege: rulers]. The latter aspect becomes clear from the fact that the treatise strives to 'give sincere advice and to (also) bring guidance…to kings of faraway regions, governors and princes, and furthermore to everyone who wishes the best for himself, and desires happiness. To all these people it [this treatise] brings love, solidarity, rejection of blind authority and fanaticism, by way of using insight, contemplation and consideration' (fol. 62v, lines 2-7).

11 For the very common parallel between philosophy as medicine of the soul and medicine as medicine of the body, see: N. Peter Joosse, ‘‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī as a Philosopher and a Physician: Myth or Reality, Topos or Truth?’, in: In the Age of Averroes: Arabic Philosophy in the Sixth/Twelfth Century, ed. Peter Adamson (London/Turin, 2011), 27-43.

12 See: Joosse and Pormann, Decline and Decadence, 6-8 and 21-23.
‘Abd al-Laṭīf's Life and Medical Work

The polymath ‘Abd al-Laṭīf ibn Yūsuf al-Baghdādī (1162-1231 A.D.) was largely active in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. He was born in Baghdad in the aftermath of the Second Crusade (1147-49 A.D.) and lived through the Third, Fourth and Fifth Crusade. He grew up in an upper class Shāfi‘ī family that possessed strong links with the Niẓāmiya College [madrasa] in his hometown. He continued to move in fashionable and influential circles all his life and maintained a close relationship with the Ayyūbid rulers of his time (for instance with Šalāḥ al-Dīn and his sons) whose patronage he enjoyed and by whom he was supplied with ample means of sustenance and employment in high positions. The generous patronage that he enjoyed allowed him to devote his life to research and study, without having to worry about the material aspects of his private and professional existence.

He passed away in Baghdad on Sunday 12 Muharram 629 A.H. [9 November 1231 A.D.], where he intended to present a collection of his works to the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustanṣir b. al-Zāhir (1226-42 A.D.). He became sixty-nine years old, and was buried next to his father Yūsuf in the Wardīyah cemetery in his beloved hometown.

Some of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf's more famous students included the biographer and chronicler Ibn Khalilikān (d. 1282 A.D.); the historian and statesman Ibn al-'Adīm (d. 1262 A.D.); the botanist Ibn al-Sūrī (d. 1242 A.D.); the judge al-Tīfāshī (d. 1253 A.D.), noted for his works on magic, precious stones, sexual hygiene and eroticism; and the hadīth scholar al-Birzālī (d. 1239 A.D.).13 One of his lesser known pupils was the medical student al-Marāği.14 The latter is the author of a short manual (tadhkira) in twelve chapters on the basics of medicine.15

‘Abd al-Laṭīf produced a number of remarkable works not only on medicine, but also on alchemy, philosophy and grammar. His works portray him as an independent spirit and an innovative mind. Unfortunately, most of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf's medical oeuvre is lost today. We are however fortunate to have a number of interesting and important books and treatises by him. Apart from the passages on

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13 Cf. also Joosse and Pormann, *Decline and Decadence*, 5-6.


15 Dietrich, Medicinalia Arabica, at 224-28. This medical manual is preserved in the majmū‘a MS Manisa: Kitapsaray 1781/6, fols. 130b-153b. It was read, collated and approved by ‘Abd al-Laṭīf ibn Yūsuf al-Baghdādī in the Anatolian city of Erzinjān in the month of Rajab of the year 617 H.
medicine in his book on Egypt, the Kitāb al-Ifāda wa-l-i’tibār fī-l-umūr al-mushāhada wa-l-ḥawādith al-muʻāyana bi-arḍ Mīṣr or Mukhtaṣar akhbār mīṣr16 and the large medical section of his K. al-Naṣīḥatayn which among others contributes greatly to our understanding of the social history of medicine in the geographical areas of Islam, they are the following: a massive book "On the Principles of Simple Medical Substances and their Natural Qualities" (Fī Uṣūl mufradāt al-ṭibb wa-kaifiyāt ṭabā‘ī’i‘hā), as well as a shorter treatise entitled "Medical Aphorisms Extracted by ‘Abd al-Laṭīf" (Fuṣūl ṭibbīya intaza‘ahā ‘Abd al-Laṭīf); a didactic treatise entitled "Questions on Natural History" (al-Masā’il al-ṭabī‘īya), dealing with problems of natural history in the large sense (that is, including certain aspects of medicine); a commentary on Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq's "Medical Questions" (al-Masā’il al-ṭibbīya); a medium-length treatise "On the Disease Called Diabetes" (Fī l-maraḍ alladhī yusammā diyābīṭā); a critique on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s commentary on the first section of Avicenna's "Canon of Medicine" discussing generalities (Kullīyāt); two commentaries on works by Hippocrates, namely the "Book on Aphorisms" (Kitāb al-Fuṣūl), and the "Book on Prognostic" (Kitāb Taqdimat al-ma‘rifa); and a "Book on the Senses" (Maqāla fī al-Hawāss) investigating sense-perception, which seems to have a rather limited medical significance.17

The Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn: Topoi as Sources?

Within the history of medicine, be it in Chinese, Indian, ancient Greek and Roman, Byzantine, or Medieval and Renaissance European medicine, we find without a single exception communications about arguing and competing physicians, who cannot stand each other and do not give each other the time of day. Arabic medicine is no exception to that rule and does not provide us with a different picture. Within

16 This work contains ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s famous criticism of Galen with respect to certain anatomical data. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s discoveries were, however, not widely accepted. Only future research will provide us with the answer as to whether later Arabic physicians reacted to ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s ideas and how Arabic-Islamic medicine developed in the so-called post-classical age (i.e. after 1200 A.D. and onwards). Similarly, it is not at all known whether ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s ideas and works ever transferred to the Latin West during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It will be interesting to find out whether ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, directly or indirectly, influenced for example Renaissance authors such as the physician and botanist Prospero Alpini/Prosper Alpinus (Marostica/Venice 1553 A.D. - Padua 1617 A.D.) whose works cover similar topics, cf. his De medicina aegyptiorum, De plantis aegypti liber, De rhapontico, and Rerum aegyptiarum libri quattuor. Like ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, Alpini also composed a large work on the Hippocratic Prognostic: De praesagienda vita et morte aegrotantium libri septum [English translation: The presages of life and death in diseases. In seven books…Translated from the last Leyden edition, revised and published by Gaubius, at the request of Dr. Boerhaave. By R. James (London 1746)].

17 Cf. also Joosse and Pormann, Decline and Decadence, 6-8.
the Arabic setting we can also read about medical controversies, rivalry, and professional jealousy. Likewise we might come across physicians who pester the life out of each other, bombard each other with scathing criticism, and look upon each other with feelings of envy and enmity such as often prevail between men who are prominent in the same profession. On the one side, we will encounter physicians who sing each others praises. On the other side, we will meet those who pour scorn on each other, slander each other, and accuse each other of being a charlatan, a quack, a mountebank or a sponger with the sole purpose of making the other look bad in the eyes of his colleagues. The other becomes then a perfect doctor, or a fraud, a trickster or a charlatan, but merely in a subjective way, namely only in the eye of the beholder.\textsuperscript{18}

The thirteenth century Syriac author Bar Hebraeus, who was besides a high-placed cleric and many other things a well-trained physician himself, advised his readers that:

Learned men behave deceitfully towards each other. They are frequently very wicked and act stingy with regard to their respective science, or with respect to that which they have confirmed through their science, for they are afraid that other persons who come into possession of science will become more skilled in it than them, or because they want to be singularly esteemed in their time, or the one man of their time, or because they fear that their role in science will be reduced if it has to be shared with many people, or merely because of jealousy.\textsuperscript{19}

The theme of the physician who compels recognition against the incompetent and the inept, and who succeeds when all the other doctors have failed, is a literary topos which was popular and much savoured.\textsuperscript{20}

The topic of the praise of the good physician and the blame of the bad physician is another traditional theme.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} During my late teens I sojourned in Bombay (India) with my parents. On Bombay's streets, I often witnessed practitioners of one of the most curious forms of charlatanism: the karaklaxmi – people (mostly a pair: a male adult and a child) who transfer light ailments, like for instance headaches, ear-aches, and muscle pains, by looking deeply into the eyes of their patients and absorbing their pain through the cracking of a whip.


\textsuperscript{20} Françoise Micheau, 'Great Figures in Arabic Medicine According to Ibn al-Qiftī', in: Sheila Campbell, Bert Hall and David Klausner (editors): \textit{Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture} [Center for Mediaeval Studies, University of Toronto] (Basingstoke and London 1992), 169-185, at 172.

\textsuperscript{21} That this is also a universal theme can be extrapolated from Indian medicine. The earliest surviving Sanskrit medical manual by Caraka (first or first half of the second century A.D.), already mentions 'that fashionably dressed vaidyas (doctors of the traditional type) would walk the streets in the hope of finding patients. Immediately on hearing that someone is ill, they swoop down on him from all quarters and in his hearing speak loudly of their medical attainments. If a certain doctor is already in attendance (…) they make