

Nizām al-Mulk’s *Siyar al-mulūk* in Early Persian Prose Literature
Louise Marlow, Wellesley College

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Ferdowsi University, Mashhad

On the occasion of Ferdowsi University’s International Conference of Khwāja Nizām al-Mulk Ṭūsī’s Millennial, it seems fitting to consider the relationship of Nizām al-Mulk’s celebrated book of political advice, *Siyar al-mulūk*, to the Khurasanian formation of its author.¹

According to his own account, Ḥasan b. ‘Alī Nizām al-Mulk (408-85/1018-92) composed his *Siyar al-mulūk* at the request of the Seljuk Sultan Malikshāh (r. 465-85/1072-92), who solicited a number of treatises on the topic of governance in 479/1086 (*Siyar al-mulūk*, 3). Between 479/1086 and 484/1091, Nizām al-Mulk composed the first thirty-nine chapters of *Siyar al-mulūk*. In 484/1091, he revised these chapters and added eleven new chapters, to produce a two-part book comprised of a total of fifty thematic chapters. The final version of the book was never in fact presented to Malikshāh, who outlived his powerful vizier by a mere thirty days (Yavari 2015).

Having begun his career of administrative service, like his father, under the Ghaznavids, Ḥasan b. ‘Alī Ṭūsī after some years joined the service of the Seljuk dynasty. In about 445/1053-4, he entered the service of Alp Arslān (r. 455-65/1063-72), who eventually appointed him as his vizier and bestowed upon him his celebrated title ‘Nizām al-Mulk’ (Iqbāl 1959, 47-8; Mīnuvī 1988, 196). In this capacity, Nizām al-Mulk soon directed the administration of the entirety of Khurasan, the province of his familial roots and early life (Mīnuvī 1988, 193-4). When in 455/1063 Alp Arslān succeeded Tughril Beg (r. 431-55/1040-63), Nizām al-Mulk accompanied the new Sultan to western Iran. In about 456/1063 he took up residence in Isfahan, the city which became, under Alp Arslān’s successor Sultan Malikshāh, the governmental centre of the Seljuk state (Safi 2006, 43-81). As part of this movement to western Iran, Nizām al-Mulk directly sponsored the relocation to Isfahan of several eminent Khurasanians, especially from the Khujandī and Šā’idī families (Durand-Guédy 2010, 112-29; cf. Bulliet 1994, 115-27, 145-68). Just as he brought with him these notables from Khurasan, he also brought with him his Khurasanian literary and cultural formation. I shall offer a few remarks on the ways in which *Siyar al-mulūk* reflects and continues the literary culture of Khurasan.

Regarded as a ‘work of political philosophy’ (Tor 2011, 117) in the form of an ‘advice manual for the king’ (Yavari 2014, 6; cf. Isti’lāmī 2006), *Siyar al-mulūk* is in many ways a highly distinctive text. Scholars have remarked on some of its striking features: its extensive and suggestive uses of historical narrative; its greater attention to matters pertaining to the court than to administrative affairs; differently, its functional purpose as an administrative handbook (Simidchieva 2004; Yavari 2015; *eadem*, 2018; Meisami 1999, 145-62; Bowen [Bosworth] 1995; Lambton 1971, 420; *eadem*, 1984, 55). As the copious manuscript record and

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the production of several translations reveal, the *Siyar al-mulūk* of Niẓām al-Mulḳ has enjoyed a wide and geographically dispersed readership since very shortly after its composition. Frequently invoked in later writings, Niẓām al-Mulḳ's work of political advice appears rapidly to have acquired a high status among members of the administrative and literary élites of Persianate societies, including in the Mughal and Ottoman Empires. The extensive references to and uses of *Siyar al-mulūk* in subsequent writing, especially but not exclusively in Persian, have been amply documented by Neḡuin Yavari (Yavari 2014, 19-20; *eadem* 2018, 149-50, n. 3).

Among the clearest and most immediately apparent ways in which *Siyar al-mulūk* reflects a Khurasanian background is in the language in which its author composed it, namely Persian. It was in Khurasan and Transoxiana that (New) Persian first appeared and flourished as a literary language. Fostered in the region, and particularly in Tus, during the period of the Samanids (204-395/819-1005) and continued under their successors, the Ghaznavids (366-582/977-1186), Persian became an established linguistic medium across numerous literary genres and intellectual discourses (Meisami 1999; Zadeh 2012). At the same time, in the western regions of Iran, under the Buyids (320-454/932-1062), Persian speakers continued to maintain high standards of literary expression in Arabic, which language exclusively they continued to use for all literary purposes. The advent of the Seljuk era brought the use of Persian, already well established in the eastern regions, to the formerly Buyid domains of Iraq and western Iran, and Niẓām al-Mulḳ contributed to this process of literary-linguistic diffusion (Meisami 1999, esp. 145-62; Peacock 2015, 156-88; cf. Fragner 1999).

In Khurasan, the florescence of writing in Persian in the century before the Seljuk era did not entail an abandonment of Arabic. Indeed, it is in Arabic that most of the region's surviving pre-Seljuk literature of political advice was written. This surviving literature includes the widely disseminated *waṣīyya* or *'ahd* of Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn (r. 159-207/775-822), leader of the Abbasid al-Ma'mūn's (r. 189-218/813-33) forces in his war against his brother al-Amīn (r. 193-8/809-13) and founding figure of the Tahirid dynasty in Khurasan; and the *Ādāb al-mulūk* of the celebrated *adīb* and philologist of Nishapur Abū Manṣūr 'Abd al-Malik al-Tha'ālibī (350-429/961-1038), who dedicated his book to the Ma'mūnid Kh'ārazmshāh Amīr Abū l-'Abbās Ma'mūn b. Ma'mūn (r. 390-407/1000-16). Among other pertinent texts produced in the eastern regions are the several writings (in Arabic) of the philosopher-*adīb*-polymath Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 322/934) on the subject of *siyāsa* (Biesterfeldt 2012). Interestingly, al-Tha'ālibī reports having heard that when the Samanid al-Amīr al-Sadīd (Manṣūr I b. Nūḥ I, r. 350-65/961-76) asked his vizier Abū Ja'far Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-'Utbī for a brief treatment of *siyāsa*, al-'Utbī had replied that Abū Zayd al-Balkhī had written such a book, which might be translated (from Arabic into Persian) (*Ādāb al-mulūk*, 85-6). Al-Tha'ālibī also mentions a book on the subject of governance (*siyāsa*) by the Amīr Abū l-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Sīmjūr (r. 345-49/956-60 [first governorship in Khurasan], 350-71/961-82 [second governorship]). It seems probable that this book was written in Persian, since al-Tha'ālibī remarks that it reminded him of a treatment of the same subject (*ma'nā*) that he had read in Arabic (*Ādāb al-mulūk*, 54). Importantly for purposes of this discussion, both narratives reflect a regional demand for a Persian literature on the subject of statecraft.

It was in the context of the newly unified Iranian territories of the Seljuk empire that the production of a Persian literature of political advice attained its full development. The most

prominent examples of the new Persian literature are the *Andarznāmeḥ* or *Qābūs-nāmeḥ* (c. 475/1082-3) of the Ziyarid Amīr ‘Unṣur al-Ma‘ālī Kaykāvūs (b. c. 412/1021-2, r. 441-c. 480/1049-c. 1087); the *Siyar al-mulūk* of Nizām al-Mulk, the subject of the present discussion; and the *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* of Nizām al-Mulk’s contemporary and fellow native of Tus, Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī (450-505/1058-1111), who probably wrote the work for either Muḥammad b. Malikshāh (r. 498-511/1104-17) or Sanjar b. Malikshāh (r. 513-52/1119-57), who ruled the eastern territories of the Seljuk empire before assuming overall rule of the Seljuk domains. Mention should also be made of the allegorical poem *Kutadgu bilig* (462/1069-70), composed in Kashghar in Qarakhanid Turkish and dedicated by its author Yūsuf Khāṣṣ Ḥājib to the Qarakhanid prince, Tavghach Bughra Khan (Ḥasan b. Sulaymān, r. 467-96/1074-1102) (Dankoff 1983).

Despite the long years that the Persian authors Kaykāvūs, Nizām al-Mulk and Ghazālī spent in western Iran and Iraq, all three of them had spent formative periods of their lives in Khurasan, and they retained close ties with the eastern regions. The Ziyarids, rulers in the Caspian regions of Tabaristan and Mazandaran, had become vassals to the Ghaznavids during the reign of Sultan Maḥmūd (r. 388-421/998-1030); Kaykāvūs had spent eight years at the Ghaznavid court of Mawdūd b. Maḥmūd (r. 432-40/1041-50), and had married a Ghaznavid princess; moreover his grandfather the Amīr Shams al-Ma‘ālī Qābūs b. Vushmagīr (r. 367-71/978-81, 387-402/997-1012), himself a respected stylist in Arabic as well as Persian, had spent a significant period of his life in Nishapur. Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī, a student in Nishapur of, among other eminent figures, Imām al-Ḥaramayn Juvaynī (d. 478/1085), Abū l-Qāsim Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) and Abū ‘Alī Fārmadhī (d. 477/1084-5), composed his *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* in about 503/1109, after his return to Khurasan and in the later years of his life (Hillenbrand 1988).

In considering the Khurasanian literary culture that shaped *Siyar al-mulūk*, it is particularly instructive to consider it in conjunction with the previously mentioned Arabic text, the *Ādāb al-mulūk* of al-Tha‘ālibī. Unlike Nizām al-Mulk and Ghazālī, al-Tha‘ālibī spent his entire life in the eastern territories (Samarrai 1975). He benefited from the patronage of several courts in the region and enjoyed close associations with the region’s notable families, and his writings reflect a pronounced regionalism (Rowson 1998, Bray 2010). It seems probable that al-Tha‘ālibī’s first language was Persian, yet he appears to have written his numerous compositions exclusively in Arabic. His *Ādāb al-mulūk*, in Arabic, presents an important contribution to the literature of political advice in an environment in which literary production in Persian was already flourishing and expanding.

Unlike his predecessor Ṭāhir, al-Tha‘ālibī composed *Ādāb al-mulūk* not as a continuous text, but in the form of a book divided into ten thematic chapters. The Persian mirrors of the Seljuk era continue to employ this internally differentiated form: the *Andarznāmeḥ* consists of forty-four thematic chapters; *Siyar al-mulūk*, as previously mentioned, comprises fifty chapters. There are further structural and conceptual continuities between the Arabic *Ādāb al-mulūk* and the Persian *Siyar al-mulūk*. An example of this continuity lies in the two authors’ uses of narrative. While al-Tha‘ālibī, in *Ādāb al-mulūk* as in his oeuvre as a whole, delights in the concise and harmonious union of word (or morpheme) and meaning, he also includes a significant portion of narrative content; in this respect al-Tha‘ālibī’s *Ādāb al-mulūk* differs from Ṭāhir’s *waṣīyya*. Furthermore, much of al-Tha‘ālibī’s narrative content is specific, recent and local; in this respect his mirror marks a departure from the widespread trend in literatures of political

advice to concentrate on examples drawn from ancient times and remote locales (Ferster 1996, 4, 8). In its division into thematic chapters, its extensive use of narrative and its drawing on numerous near-contemporary examples, Niẓām al-Mulk's *Siyar al-mulūk* continues, in Persian, to develop literary features evident in al-Tha'ālibī's *Ādāb al-mulūk*.

A brief set of examples drawn from *Ādāb al-mulūk* and *Siyar al-mulūk* will demonstrate the two authors' concentration in their narratives on recent and regional protagonists. Al-Tha'ālibī cites and relates accounts concerning, for example, the Tahirid governors of Khurasan (Ṭāhir I b. al-Ḥusayn (r. 205-7/821-2), 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir (r. 213-30/828-45), Ṭāhir II b. 'Abdallāh (r. 230-48/845-62), Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir II (r. 248-59/862-73, 259-67, 268-/873-81, 882-]); the Saffarid rulers Ya'qūb (r. 247-65/861-79) and 'Amr b. Layth (r. 265-87/879-900); the Samanid Amīrs Ismā'īl b. Aḥmad I (r. 279-95/892-907), Aḥmad II b. Ismā'īl (r. 295-301/907-14), Naṣr II b. Aḥmad (r. 301-31/914-43), [Maṣṣūr I b. Nūḥ I] al-Sadīd (r. 350-65/961-76), Nūḥ II b. Maṣṣūr I (r. 365-87/976-97); the Samanids' governor in Kirman Abū 'Alī [Muḥammad] Ibn Ilyās (r. 320-2/932-4, 324-56/936-67); several members of the Mīkālī family, leading notables and generous patrons in Khurasan; and several of the region's intellectuals, writers and poets, such as Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, Abū Bakr al-Kh'ārazmī (323-83/934-93) and Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Bustī (d. c. 400 or 401/1010 or 1011). Many of the political leaders invoked in *Ādāb al-mulūk*, as well as several of the more eminent viziers of the Samanids and Ghaznavids, also appear in the *Siyar al-mulūk* of Niẓām al-Mulk, who, following the pattern of his predecessor, adds the still more recent regional examples of Sultans Maḥmūd b. Sebūktigin and his successor Maṣ'ūd b. Maḥmūd (r. 421-32/1031-40), Tughril Beg (r. 431/1040) and Alp Arslān (r. 455-65/1063-73). In narratives of considerable length, Niẓām al-Mulk creates paradigmatic images of several of the region's leading figures, such as the Samanid Amīr Ismā'īl b. Aḥmad, Alptigin and Sebūktigin (Simidchieva 2004). In addition, like al-Tha'ālibī, Niẓām al-Mulk invokes the exemplary practices of the Samanids and the Ghaznavids in several matters of administrative practice and courtly life: the duties of boon-companions, the prompt issuing of payments, and the training of the *ghulamān* (*Siyar al-mulūk*, 122, 135, 141-2).

A second feature that *Ādāb al-mulūk* and *Siyar al-mulūk* share is the authority that they grant to a wide variety of figures associated with a range of cultural contexts. By invoking a large and diverse set of authorities, I propose, al-Tha'ālibī and Niẓām al-Mulk contributed to the creation of a conceptual and imaginative framework that promoted social inclusion and integration. In his introduction to *Ādāb al-mulūk*, al-Tha'ālibī asserts the shared values of all peoples, native and non-native speakers of Arabic alike, when he reports that *al-'arab wa-l-'ajam* (in other words, everybody) have always admired certain qualities in their kings (*Ādāb al-mulūk*, 30). His inclusivity is equally evident in the preface to his compendium of proverbial sayings *al-Tamthīl wa-l-muḥāḍara*, the scope of which al-Tha'ālibī describes as *islāmī jāhilī wa-'arabī 'ajamī wa-mulūkī sūqī wa-khāṣṣī 'ammī yashtamilu 'alā amthāl al-jamī* (*al-Tamthīl wa-l-muḥāḍara*, 14). In several of his writings, al-Tha'ālibī groups materials first by type and theme. Then, within each set of texts, he proceeds both by way of association and in more or less chronological order. In one characteristic section in *Ādāb al-mulūk*, he cites, in this order, the pre-Islamic Iranian-associated figures Iskandar, Anūshīrvān (= Khusraw I Nūshīrvān, r. 531-78), Kisrā Abarwīz (= Khusraw II Parvīz, r. 590-628); al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir (r. c. 580-602); the Umayyads Mu'āwiya (r. 41-60/661-80) and 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 65-86/685-705), as well as Ziyād (b. Abīhī, c. 2-53/623-73), al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra (c. 10-82/632-702), Yazīd b. al-Muhallab (d. 102/720); the

Abbasids al-Saffāh (r. 132-36/749-54), al-Rashīd (r. 170-93/786-809) and al-Ma'mūn (r. 189-218/813-33), as well as al-Ḥasan b. Sahl (d. 236/850-51, vizier of al-Ma'mūn) and the poet Bakr b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (b. Abī Dulaf); the Buyid 'Aḍud al-Dawla (r. 339-72/949-83) and last, the Ziyarid Qābūs b. Vushmagīr (r. 367-71/978-87, 387-402/997-1012) (*Ādāb al-mulūk*, 64-8). The pattern in his sequencing, which al-Tha'ālibī replicates in numerous instances, suggests movement through time, as the *adīb*, having begun with Iskandar, invokes clusters of figures associated with the Sasanian, Umayyad and Abbasid periods in turn, and concludes with the contemporary period. The markedly inclusive, indeed eclectic approach that al-Tha'ālibī adopts in the selection of his literary materials supports his promotion of social integration (Bray 2010, 33).

Niẓām al-Mulk resembles his predecessor al-Tha'ālibī in his fostering of inclusivity and integration. Indeed, Neguin Yavari has described Niẓām al-Mulk as 'crafting a political image that cast Islam as an ideology of state transcending confessional, ethnic, and regional divides' (Yavari 2018, 133). As one of several strategies by which he seeks to achieve this purpose, Niẓām al-Mulk follows al-Tha'ālibī's practice of combining figures from the Iranian past and the Islamic era in a seamless line. In his fifth and sixth chapters, as Deborah Tor has noted, Niẓām al-Mulk 'passes effortlessly back and forth among the normative practices of Ismā'īl b. Aḥmad the Samanid; then Bahrām Gūr; Parvīz, and Anūshīrvān; then back to Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna' (Tor 2011, 119-20). This feature of *Siyar al-mulūk*, like the earlier Arabic *Ādāb al-mulūk*, promotes a cultural assimilation in which a diverse set of authoritative and exemplary figures appear in harmony rather than conflict or even contrast.

In another example, in his eighth chapter, on 'investigating and remaining apprised of affairs pertaining to religion, the religious law, and similar matters', Niẓām al-Mulk emphasises the interdependence of sovereignty and religion, since 'kingship and religion are like brothers' (*pādshāhī va-dīn ham-chūn dō barādar-and*, *Siyar al-mulūk*, 80). After recommending that the ruler should invite scholars once or twice a week, listen to the interpretation of the Qur'an, the authoritative accounts of the Prophet, the stories of just kings and the tales of the prophets, Niẓām al-Mulk cites sayings of Sufyān al-Thawrī (97-161/716-78), the founding Sasanian monarch Ardashīr (= Ardashīr I, r. 226-41), the Caliph 'Umar (r. 13-23/634-44), the Arabian sage Luqmān and Ḥasan-i Baṣrī (d. 110/729). The ruler who possesses divine grace (*farr-i ilāhī*), sovereignty (*mamlakat*) and knowledge (*'ilm*), Niẓām al-Mulk continues, secures the felicity (*sa'adat*) of both worlds; in all matters he acts with knowledge, and eschews ignorance. As examples of such sovereigns, Niẓām al-Mulk lists, in this order, Farīdūn, Iskandar, Ardashīr, Nūshīrvān the Just, the Caliph 'Umar, the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (r. 99-101/717-20), the Abbasid Caliphs Hārūn (al-Rashīd), Ma'mūn and Mu'taṣim (r. 218-27/833-42), and, significantly turning his attention to Khurasan, Ismā'īl b. Aḥmad the Samanid and Sultan Maḥmūd. The acts of these rulers, he concludes, have been recorded in histories and books, and people reading the accounts of these rulers' fine actions will never cease to praise them and to raise prayers on their behalf (*Siyar al-mulūk*, 79-82). In establishing this list, Niẓām al-Mulk presents a vision of rulership that includes Turkish as well as Iranian and Arab rulers in a long line of just rulers that begins before and continues beyond the dawning of the Islamic era. By this device, he indicates that the concept of justice is capacious and fluid enough to encompass rulers without regard to their genealogical, territorial, linguistic or religious identities.

In an interesting parallel, both al-Tha‘ālibī and Niẓām al-Mulk relate stories that suggest that even the most reprehensible of rulers may, for a period of time, behave in a manner that benefits his subjects, and that this single redeeming feature will avert his loss of power for as long as it endures. In *Thimār al-qulūb fī-l-muḍāf wa-l-mansūb*, al-Tha‘ālibī decries the discriminatory governance of ‘the Sasanian kings’ (*al-akāsira*). He adds, however, that they were deeply committed to ‘*imāra*, cultivation and the prosperity it yielded (*kānū yuḥibbūna al-‘imāra ashadd al-ḥubb*); indeed, they regarded it, he asserts, as the foundation of religion and sovereignty. Al-Tha‘ālibī relates that one of the prophets had appealed to God, asking ‘O Lord! Why have you given to the *akāsira* that which you have given them?’ By way of inspiration (*wahy*), the prophet received the response, ‘Because they have made My lands prosperous (*‘ammarū bilādī*) so that My servants can live in them’ (*Thimār al-qulūb*, 140). Niẓām al-Mulk relates a similar story concerning the prophet Moses and Pharaoh. Moses, too, appealed to God, asking him to destroy Pharaoh, and he received in answer to his prayer the promise that Pharaoh would indeed be destroyed. Years passed by, however, and Pharaoh remained on his throne. Moses fasted for forty days and on Mount Sinai prayed once more, asking when God would fulfil His promise. In response he heard a voice that said, ‘O Moses, you would like Me to destroy Pharaoh as quickly as possible, but a thousand times a thousand of My servants wish Me never to do so, because they benefit from the provisions he provides and live in ease under his rule. By My glory I swear that as long as he provides abundant food and comfort for My creatures, I shall not [yet] destroy him.’ It was only after Pharaoh ceased to provide such copious provisions that God fulfilled His promise (*Siyar al-mulūk*, 171-2 = *Book of Government*, 125-6). Both narratives convey the message that even the most ignominious of rulers can maintain his sovereignty as long as he acts with generosity towards his subjects; equally, as soon as he abandons this quality, his rule quickly comes to an end. By taking extreme and emblematic examples of tyranny, al-Tha‘ālibī and Niẓām al-Mulk indicate to their respective contemporary audiences the importance of royal justice, which underlies the maintenance of the kingdom’s prosperity and the welfare of the population.

These examples of some of the similarities between *Ādāb al-mulūk* and *Siyar al-mulūk* suggest, I propose, the currency of a Khurasanian literary culture that drew extensively on the recent and regional past and produced a strikingly inclusive genre of political advice. Niẓām al-Mulk not only continued and developed this important genre of advisory literature and political commentary but also carried it into the Persian language and across the entire Persianate world.

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