Sultanic Rule in the Mirror of Medieval Political Literature

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WRITINGS ON THE APPROPRIATE CONDUCT of rulers, the organization of rule, its aims and justification, pervade Arabic and Persian literature, and both literatures are interconnected via translations and borrowings in this realm. Together they constitute a robust textual corpus produced over centuries by Muslim authors from Spain to India and from Central Asia to the Sahara. One may distinguish various genres within this field of writing, even if boundaries are often blurred: political testaments in epistolary form, mirrors for princes offering counsel—in itself a varied genre—including treatises on ethics and political philosophy designed to give advice to rulers; handbooks on political administration; works on law or more particularly state law; works on political philosophy proper; *adab* compendia collecting sayings and exempla about the recommendable conduct of rulers; and historiography presenting exempla of good or remarkable rule.

Political Discourse

In the following, our interest in political literature is related to the first, most prolific and persistent group in an attempt to retrieve aspects of the political thought it conveys. This perspective is necessarily analytical and selective. The literary character of the mirror for princes genre is often daunting and prevalently manifest in elaborate style, artful composition and selective compilation from a large repertoire of established traditions. It thus tends to take precedence over political discourse. The politico-moralist idiom which pervades this literature is also not directly supportive of the discussion and negotiation of political issues. The conjunction of ethics and power, or the idea that rule is sustained when it obliges to the norms of the good and recommendable conduct, is a basic presumption in most of the writings in this realm, except for those advocating an a-moralist application of autonomous techniques of power. Somewhat in contrast to these trends we are giving attention to those aspects of discourse that refer to regula-

tive habitual institutions and thus transcend political ethics centered on the ruler's person. What we are aiming at, in other words, is to demonstrate that political conceptualization in our texts includes a notion of good rule as it results from the functioning of the ruler's agencies and their aiming at the common good.

Established conceptions, current discursive conventions and elements of common knowledge about statecraft abound of course, and references to issues related to the authors' time tend to remain opaque and random and therefore need to be inferred from the context. But this does not diminish their explanatory potential for the history of political thought. Medieval authors, or many of them, indeed responded to concerns and problems they perceived, however conventional their literary approach might have been. This takes us beyond the exploration of conventional thematic perspectives, but does not deny other readings which may emphasize the authors' directly pragmatic strategies, for instance.[1]

The pre-modern literature of mirrors for princes, or a considerable part of it, may thus be read as political literature and a contribution to the evolution of political thought. Irrespective of its normative attitude, it engages in discussing the premises, objectives and perils of structure and organization of the polity. In this respect, it discusses how to justify power through the good that it brings, and reflects how political structures favoring unrestricted autocratic rule were perceived and countered. Authors eventually recommend strategies in reaction to what they perceived of a problematic reality.

The general mood is to advise rulers to seek a remedy and exhort them to comply with their duties. In general, there is no articulation of claims that could be made against them. From this point of departure, Patricia Crone emphasizes the generic difference between this kind of political articulation and modern concepts: "The single most important difference between contemporary Western political thinking and the Islamic tradition is that contemporary thought focuses on freedom and rights whereas the Islamic tradition focuses on authority and duties. This separates contemporary political thought from all pre-modern societies."[2] Such dichotomy may however be too rigorous, and it also tends to encourage an apodictic dismissal of the political significance of pre-modern literature.[3] It may therefore be more rewarding to inquire whether we can deduce that governmental ethics centered on the person of the ruler are combined with, or even were trans-

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1. Marlow 2004, 169-94.
2. Crone 2013, 554.
3. "their effectiveness was limited," Crone 2013, 557.

formed into, concern for human and material resources based on the reality of political administration.

The most general approach to such a notion may be found in critical assessments which evidence an author's awareness of problematic issues. An obvious example is presented by Ibn Ẓafar the Sicilian (d. 1169 or 1172 CE), for instance, where he comments on dynastic rule in his *Consolation for the Ruler During the Hostility of Subjects*:

> Uprisings (of the people) are aimed against sovereigns whose crown is a hereditary right. Brought up in the midst of plenty, most are inclined to indolence while being persuaded that their capacity to govern is inherent in them. Moreover, most of them believe that the virtues of their illustrious forefathers live on in them, but they do not see any necessity for exertion on their parts.[4]

This passage is extant in one particular manuscript of the work, whereas many others do not include it.[5] This circumstance may be indicative of the statement's delicate nature, as it suggests that a lack of efficacy exposes governments to the challenges of (legitimate) upheaval, even if it is somehow relativized, as the ensuing discussion gives occasion to denounce the unrest of people as not being motivated by corruption and repression of the king, but by ignorance and greed. However, by addressing a particular issue related to the historical situation, it also reveals a common trait of mirrors for princes addressing local sovereigns. There are other passages of this kind, such as a description of pretended piety revealing the intent to defraud.[6]

Political Frameworks

Ibn Ẓafar himself edited his work twice, dedicated to an unknown ruler in Syria facing a situation of upheaval, and then in 1159 CE to Muḥammad b. Abī l-Qāsim al-Qurashī (Ibn al-Ḥajar) the Sicilian Amīr of the Muslims under Norman rule.[7] Just as in his case, the reflection of political issues rather appears within a political framework that grants authority and responsibility to the local rulers addressed. It is thus related to the concept of sovereign local rule which gradually took shape from the eleventh century onwards. The notion of local responsibilities can be presumed to have subsisted ir-

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4. Translation of *Sulwān al-muṭāʿ*, see Ibn Ẓafar, *The Just Prince*, 242.

5. Ibn Ẓafar, *Sulwân al-muṭâʾ*, 128. Available Arabic editions do not include this passage such as the ones of Damaj (Beirut 1995), 222-3, or al-Buḥayrī (Cairo 2001), 86.

6. Ibn Ẓafar, *The Just Prince*, 278; Ibn Ẓafar, *Sulwân al-muṭâʾ*, 167.

7. Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217 CE), *Riḥlat Ibn Jubayr*, 341.

respective of the caliphate's habitual claim to paramount authority and the adherent politico-theological ideology. But when the *shar'ī* ideal of a political authority invested by the caliph lost significance in favor of local rule as an independent institution of governance including the administration of the religious-judicial apparatus, a new political paradigm gained ground.[8] Whereas concepts of a divinely ordained duality of spiritual and worldly powers (prophet and king, caliph and sultan) preceded and accompanied this political process,[9] the political role of the Saljuqs was crucial. Patrons of the re-establishment of Sunni Islamic rule, they introduced a new division of power which did not leave significant temporal power to the caliph.[10] The Saljuqs also established the ruler's title Sultan which became with the end of the twelfth century a widely spread term used for independent local rulers. Sovereignty in this context implies the necessity of a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence *(qahr),* and is often postulated by use of pastoral, natural, or religious metaphors. Autonomous sovereignty is repeatedly circumscribed by a formula according to which the ruler is the shadow of God on earth (*al-sulṭān ẓillu Llāh fī l-arḍ*). This formula appears regularly in advice literature and Islamic tradition since the eleventh century and is related to the Iranian tradition of divine right.[11] Islamic tradition, using *sulṭān* in its impersonal signification of political authority, refers to God's support (*al-sulṭān 'izzatun min Allāh*) granted for the most visible (strongman) (*aẓhar 'ibādihī*) apt of fulfilling the task.[12]

The *Siyāsatnāma* (The Book of Government or Rules for Kings) attributed[13] to Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 1092 CE), conceives the sultan's rule as an autonomous institution based on the Persian tradition of kingly rule. As the book was transplanted to India by Fakhr Mudabbir's *Ādāb al-mulūk* (ca. 1260 CE)[14] and found several emulators there, such as Abū l-Faẕl 'Allāmī's (d. 1602 CE) well known *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*, it is an influential testimony for the concept of sovereign rule. On the Arabic side, the *Counsel on Princely Manners* (*Kitāb al-Ishāra*), written by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Murādī (d. 1096 CE) in the context of rising Almoravid rule in North Africa, is entirely based on traditions of political wisdom, ethics and philosophy. The author may have reckoned that the importance of Islamic law was sufficiently brought forward by Almoravid propaganda, and thus paid no heed to *shar'ī* legitimacy.

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8. Woods 1999, 4-6.
9. Arjomand 2013, 84.
10. Tor 2013, 532-4.
11. Arjomand 1984, 94; and Arjomand 2013, 90.
12. al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī (d. 1014 CE), *al-Mustadrak 'alā l-ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 3, 6, no. 4260.
13. Khismatulin 2008.
14. Ahmad 1962, 121-3.

Another approach is exemplified by the Mālikī expert of law and tradition, al-Ṭurṭūshī (d. 1126 CE), who wrote a detailed treatise on the principles of rule, completed in Fustat in 1122 CE. His book gives evidence of the author's preoccupation with matters of Islamic *fiqh,* as it is meant to demonstrate the comprehensiveness of Islamic norms rather dealing with the practicalities of the organization of rule.[15] The synthesis of both trends, political wisdom and the integration of *sharīʿa* norms appears established later in the twelfth century when the conventions and political reality of local sovereign law had taken shape.

Kingship and Sultanic Rule

Whereas a "sultanic political culture"[16] can be distinguished conceptually from the Islamic polity under the premises of the caliphate, the two paradigms, sultanate and caliphate, were not neatly separated. The caliph's confirmation of the rulers' authority continued as a practice and according to local circumstance even after the fall of the Baghdad caliphate. In some Muslim milieus, the ideological significance of the caliphate survived its abolishment in 1922 CE and the subsequent constitutional transformation under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924 CE.

Neither can we speak of a homogenous terminology of sultanic rule. Local rulers used various titles including king (*malik, pādshāh*), and also, in the Maghrib, Commander of the Muslims (*amīr al-muslimīn*). Some of these titles were used in combination with the title sultan.[17] The distinction between sultanate and imamate could be obliterated by individual authors according to their prospects. Ibn ʿAṭiyya al-Ḥamawī, a Syrian author writing in the second decade of the 16th century, assigns the obligations and tasks of the just *imām* to the Ottoman sultan Selīm I.[18] Outside of mainstream Sunnism, the Ibāḍī doctrine advocated a synthesis of political leadership and religious guidance reflected by use of the term Imamate.[19]

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15. al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Sirāj al-mulūk.*

16. Dakhlia 2002, 1196.

17. See for instance the inscription from Nasrid Granada of 1348: *mawlānā amīr al-muslimīn al-sulṭān al-mujāhid al-ʿādil Abū l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf .... b. al-Walīd b. Naṣr* (Lévi-Provençal 1931, 156–7, no. 171); or the inscription on the Damascus citadel from 1209–10 CE of the Ayyubid Sultan al-Malik al-ʿĀdil (d. 1218 CE): "Our Patron, the Sultan Malik al-ʿĀdil, defender (sword) of the mundane and religious realms, master (sultan) of the army of the Muslims ordered to erect the blessed tower (*amara bi-ʿimārat hādhā l-burj al-mubārak mawlānā al-sulṭān al-Malik al-ʿĀdil sayf al-dunyā wa l-dīn sulṭān juyūsh al-muslimīn* (Sobernheim 1922, 6.)

18. al-Ḥamawī, *al-Naṣāʾiḥ al-muhimma.*

19. Gaiser 2010, 8-9.

In spite of these variances and distinctions, the term sultan was in use from the Muslim West to India, and we may employ the term sultanate by way of simplification as a distinct political paradigm of independent local rule in general. Sultanic rule absorbed the Iranian tradition of kingship, but was reconcilable with the norms of the *sharīʿa,* whereas the term kingship tends to be seen in contrast to the Islamic ideal of apostolic succession to the Prophet thus representing worldly rule. In this vein, the notion of a division between "the legitimate vicarage of God and the profane kingship,"[20] even if historically imprecise and systematically inconsistent, was irreversible. It was expressed by Muslim authors, as al-Azmeh observes, sometimes in a melancholic tone. A tenacious expression of this notion is given by Ibn Khaldūn who wrote the first version of his groundbreaking *Muqaddima* between 1376-8 CE: When praising the companions of the prophet as representatives of an uncorrupted sober caliphate uninterested in worldly gains, he says in his chapter on the transition of power from the caliphate to kingship, they "refused kingship and its appearances, and disregarded its manners and customs in order to avoid the vanity (*al-bāṭil*) which these enwrap."[21]

Good Rule and Political Discourse

Ibn Khaldūn's analytical approach was critical of the exhortatory style which he recognized especially in al-Ṭurṭūshī's aforementioned mirror.[22] This reservation must derive from his postulation of an appropriate methodology for studying the history of civilization. His stance seems also to be induced by skepticism with regard to the political regimes of the epoch. In this light, Ibn Khaldūn would have cultivated doubt concerning the effects of political counsel, in accordance with his assessment that retention of power was the most important force driving politics in his time. This consideration is not far from what Ibn Ẓafar, above, was referring to, but it is more fundamental as he relates a deplorable political practice to a political discourse which is purely affirmative.

> Reasonable political order (*siyāsa ʿaqliyya*) is of two types: One type consists of balancing the general or public interest (*al-maṣāliḥ ʿalā l-ʿumūm*) with the interests of the sultan in retaining his rule. Such was the political order of the Iranians, abiding by wisdom. – [But] God has made this superfluous for us in the religiously defined polis (*milla*), and on the ground of the caliphate, as the rules of *sharīʿa* (i.e.

20. al-Azmeh 2001, 164.
21. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar,* 357.
22. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar,* 65.

law of divine origin) make good for public and particular interests as well as for rules of good conduct. The imperatives of political rule are also incorporated in them. The second type consists in preserving the interest of the ruler, and how the rule is secured through coercion (*qahr*) and protraction (*istiṭāla*). Public interest here is subordinated (*wa takūnu l-maṣāliḥ al-ʿāmma fī hādhihī tabaʿan*). This is the political order of the rulers of the world, Muslims and unbelievers, even if Muslim rulers follow the requirements of the Islamic *sharīʿa* in their politics as far as their efforts reach. As a consequence their principles (*qawānīn*) [i.e. of politics] combine *sharīʿa* rules, ethics, the natural laws of society, and necessary measures of preserving supremacy and *ʿaṣabiyya*, esprit de corps. Orientation (*iqtidāʾ*) for this type of political order is found in divine law, in the comportment of the wise and in history.[23]

Ibn Khaldūn's pessimistic vision seems to deny the existence of any coherent normative or theoretical framework capable of determining objectives in politics. As a consequence, politics is about maintaining power. His assessment is linked to what he sees as the decisive and compelling momentum of Islamic history, the emergence of the religiously defined polity (*milla*), where "the rules of *sharīʿa* make good for public and private interest."[24] However, this felicitous time is lost in history.

His thought is not compelling. One may argue that the major obstacle for making the demand of good rule politically implementable is not the loss of good guidance through an unselfish caliphate, but rather disinterest in (or despair of) the political matrix of the sultanate.[25]

Successful rule is generally believed to depend on observing a number of principles each of which embraces the two aspects of rule: legitimate sovereignty and good governance. Political thought therefore regularly reiterates a number of components of good rule, which approximate the tenets of righteous and therefore legitimate rule.

Justice is the heart of political teaching. The obvious practical advantages are illustrated by the persuasive circle of justice, variously attributed to Persian and Greek authors and extent in many redactions. It connects the maintenance of kingship with the proper state of the army, which necessitates sufficient revenue from economic activity, which in turn does not

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23. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar,* 520-1.

24. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar,* 521.

25. Ibn al-Azraq, the most important pre-modern Arab recipient of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*, pursued this approach: Ibn al-Azraq (d. 1491 CE), *Badāʾiʿ al-silk.*

occur without justice.[26] The paramount importance of justice is also conveyed by its conceptualization as an autonomous institution. According to a well-known saying, extant in several texts, including Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1376 CE) legal opinions, "God supports that rule which practices justice, even if it is exercised by unbelievers, but does not give support to unjust rule, even if exercised by Muslims."[27] It may appear at first glance contradictory when the same author is found to state that sixty years of unjust rule are preferable to one day without rule.[28] But in fact both statements are coherent, since justice (*ʿadl*) is granted by governance which depends, according to the logic of sultanic rule, on the authority of the ruler.

Justice and the Common Good

In political literature justice is not only referred to as an abstract principle, but also appears as practices of good rule serving the common good. When the exigencies arising from the principle of justice are explained, contemporary expectations and political visions are exposed.

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān [b. Naṣr] al-Shayzarī dedicated his work *The Pursuit of the Right Path in Princely Policy Making* to Sultan Saladin (d. 1193 CE).[29] He also authored a work on market inspection (*ḥisba*),[30] a medical treatise on marriage and sexuality,[31] as well as a book on love.[32] In his treatise, *sunna,* or Islamic tradition, i.e. the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet, play a prominent role, a feature which suits Ayyubid politics: Sunni Islam was cultivated as a resource of mobilization and as conceptual framework for creating political unity. As usual, justice appears as a practical, moral, religious duty—an inevitable obligation. It is the field of politics per se, where demands are negotiated, support is secured or lost, where kingdoms are maintained or squandered, at least in the light of counsels for rulers. Justice represents the most important element of political practice in the service of the common good. For Shayzarī, justice is a comprehensive principle, an obligation to the law of God, which is accessible by reason and therefore not bound to the *sunna*.[33]

26. Lambton 1962, 100; for the octagon of justice see also Forster 2006, 61-2.
27. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-fatāwa*, 6: 168 and 410: *inna Llāh yanṣuru l-dawla al-ʿādila wa in kānat kāfiratan, wa lā yanṣuru l-dawla al-ẓālima wa in kānat muʾminatan.*
28. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-fatāwa*, 6: 322 and 340.
29. al-Shayzarī (d. 1193 CE), *al-Nahj al-maslūk.*
30. al-Shayzarī, *Nihāyat al-rutba.*
31. al-Shayzarī, *al-Īḍāḥ.*
32. Semah 1977.
33. al-Shayzarī, *al-Nahj al-maslūk,* 98-9.

> Be aware that justice (*ʿadl*) is accomplished only when kings keep to
> ten features [of good rule]: (1) Erecting the lighthouse of religion and
> preserving its cultic practice; thereby inciting people to integrate
> their religion into their daily practice in an adequate measure without
> neglect nor exaggeration.[34]

The author obviously advocates moderation in the fulfillment of religious
obligations:

> (2) The sultan must also protect Islamic territories (*bayḍa*) and his
> subjects from heretics, aggressors, and evildoers; (3) undertake public
> construction to improve roads and highways; (4) protect his subjects
> against transgressions by government officials and members of the
> nobility, for otherwise he is accountable for their mishaps. (5) The
> sultan's fifth duty is to ensure that his subjects are protected from
> the army and state employees, so that officials would not reduce their
> income or delay the transfer of their pay which would let them be
> exposed to latencies stripping them of everything they possess.[35]

One can easily recognize the struggle against corruption in this last para-
graph.

> (6) His sixth duty is attending *maẓālim* court hearings regularly and
> settling quarrels between people on the grounds established by
> Islamic law.[36]

This refers to real practice. Saladin's predecessor, Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b.
Zangī, erected a court building in Damascus in about 1163 CE. Saladin him-
self presided court hearings there while in Damascus.[37]
    The organization of regular audits is mandated in the seventh duty, when
the sultan is invited to (7) "carefully measuring remuneration from the state
treasury according to the rank of people and thereby avoiding parsimonious
or extravagant treatment."[38] The Sultan's eighth task is (8) "the application
of penalties for crimes mentioned in the divine law,"[39] when the author asks
for a system of penalties commensurate with the stipulations of the *sharīʿa*,
rather than one based on the whims of the ruler or his agents who are thus
placing themselves above the law. In the ninth duty, the sultan is asked to

34. al-Shayzarī, *al-Nahj al-maslūk,* 98.
35. al-Shayzarī, *al-Nahj al-maslūk*, 98.
36. al-Shayzarī, *al-Nahj al-maslūk,* 99.
37. Rabbat 1997, 3-28.
38. al-Shayzarī, *al-Nahj al-maslūk,* 99.
39. al-Shayzarī, *al-Nahj al-maslūk,* 99.

safeguard against nepotism, by (9) "appointing capable, trustworthy and trained people to official positions."[40] Finally, the Sultan is charged with:

> (10) implementing the stipulations issued by qadis and market inspectors, executing what they could not achieve out of the lack of executive power. The king has to perform what law demands. When the king acts according to these ten features of justice, he applies the right of God (*kāna muʾaddiban li-ḥaqq Allāh*) with respect to his subjects. In return, he is entitled to receive their obedience, and merits their support. When he refrains from it, he deviates from justice preferring injustice (*jawr*) [which is a crime]."[41]

The concept of the right of God here incorporates two aspects. As God is the master of mankind, he does not invest the sultan with rule over man, but with rule over His creature (*wallānā amr ʿibādihī*).[42] In this sense the sultan's rule is subordinated, obliged to correspond with God's will to do good (*amaranā an nuḥassina*) and practice justice.[43] This general principle implies that people – given that they respect God's rules – are entitled to be treated corresponding to God's stipulations, which is the condition on which they pay obedience to the ruler. What this means in earthly rule is explained by Shayzarī in the passage above.

Even if a close study of this text reveals parallels in other works of the genre, it remains obvious from the work's context, that the author's assessment is not the product of a literary tradition, but a deliberate pronouncement of faith, confirming established practice and postulating this practice as a precondition for successful rule. Frankish presence in the Islamic lands in this period catalyzed the ideologization of society, wherein religious authority gained favor, especially among the urban populations of the Bilād al-Shām.[44]

Duality of Political Power and Religious Authority

Sultanic rule, although principally unrestricted and legitimated by divine right, was not itself the source of religious authority. The indispensable alliance between worldly and religious authority was structured by the intersecting realms of judiciary, education, institutional religious services etc.,

40. al-Shayzarī, *al-Nahj al-maslūk,* 99.
41. al-Shayzarī, *al-Nahj al-maslūk,* 99.
42. Ibn al-Azraq, *Badāʾiʿ al-silk,* 2: 543.
43. Ibn al-Azraq, *Badāʾiʿ al-silk,* 2: 543.
44. Leder 2011, 81-101.

which were partly funded and at least co-directed by the agencies controlled by the ruler. On the other hand, the autonomous spiritual and juridical resources of religious authority, its cohabitation with popular strata of society and political and social impact is referred to in political literature, either as a challenge and potential danger, or as a source of guidance and righteousness. The necessity of balancing political power and religious authority constitutes a historical matrix of political thought that is applied by authors to circumstantial contexts. The discussion may go beyond rather theoretical reference to concepts and turn to particular policies.

Al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿAbbāsī was a civil servant, probably in the tax department, and completed his work, *Āthār al-uwal fī tartīb al-duwal* (Teachings of the Ancients on the Organization of Dynastic Rule)*,* in August 1309 CE, a few months after Baybars II al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Rukn al-Dīn Manṣūrī Jāshnakīr, who is his addressee, came to power.[45] The author wrote his treatise in troubled years, when the concept of dynastic succession, which the Mamluk Sultan Qalawūn tried to install, was challenged—and finally abrogated—by competing military rulers. Being also a historian, he pursues a clearly political approach to his task of giving political counsel.[46]

From the outset one may think that the author keeps to the traditional outline of advice literature by explaining the design of the virtuous state (*al-dawla al-fāḍila)*. The fictitious tale of the virtuous king is the raison d'être of advice literature, as it postulates an interrelation between power and morality. But under the circumstance of his time, when competing military leaders aspired to climb the throne solely on the basis of military power and political alliances, sovereignty, its legitimacy and conditions had to be defined more carefully.

An advocate of the supremacy of political power, he disregards Islamic legitimacy as a basis for political rule. The caliphate is a mandatory rule (*wilāya ʿalā l-nās)*.[47] Sovereignty is generally a divine right, a grace bestowed by God (*faḍlun ilāhiyyun yunʿimu Llāhu bihī ʿalā man yaṣṭafīhi min khalqihī)*.[48] The above-mentioned formula according to which the ruler is the shadow of God on earth (*al-sulṭān ẓillu Llāh fī l-arḍ)*[49]—a formula which is a staple of advice literature and the Islamic tradition since the eleventh century—is employed by ʿAbbāsī in a critical position. Unlimited power upends criticism and resistance, and is hazardous to both the ruler and those obliged to deal with him. It also breeds abuse of power. Obedience, moreover, is not just

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45. al-ʿAbbāsī (d. after 1307 CE), *Āthār al-uwal*. See also: Marlow 1995, 101-20.
46. al-Ṣafadī, (d. 1317 CE), *Nuzhat al-mālik*. See also Little 1970, 38-9.
47. al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal*, 68.
48. al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal*, 75.
49. al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal*, 139.

a univocal obligation of the ruler's subjects, but a contractual relationship (*kullu man ḥaqqaqa l-ṭāʿata li-ghayrihī, tahaqqaqat al-ṭāʿatu li-nafsihī*).[50]

Religious law, *sharīʿa*, and its agents, the religious scholars, are closely connected to political rule which is meant to defend the *sharīʿa*.[51] *Sharīʿa* is the basis of their authority, and those who claim licenses exempting them from the law, are wrongdoers.[52] Religious claims more generally are suspect, as they are considered to be primarily a source of authority for political contenders. The coalition between the sultanic sovereign and religion, as recommended here, appears to be precarious. Religious authority must be controlled and tamed, as it may spread error, and incite doubts and skepticism. Men of religion may intend to acquire political power by making use of their religious authority, they may declare to possess exclusive insight into the matters of law, thus make claim of licenses, exempting themselves from the law which they impose on others; men of religion may incite rebellion in the name of ascetic ideals, and in history, the author says, men of religion often organized movements which led to the creation of powerful dynasties.[53]

According to the author's assessment, religious authority constitutes an important rival to state power. He recommends dealing with it like the "kings of the west" (*mulūk al-gharb*) who are vigilant and try to make use of religious authority only when it confirms their position.[54]

The ruler's justice is a moral obligation and instrumental to successful rule. According to its two-dimensional nature, it is based on the human disposition (*hay'a*)[55] towards equilibrium (*musāwāt*), and constitutes a general principle of avenging injustice (*inṣāf al-maẓlūm min al-ẓālim*). However, the ruler's faculty to apply justice in both its regards, is restricted by his absolute power: surrounded by a necessarily subservient entourage complaints are filtered or dismissed at an early stage. ʿAbbāsī recommends here the conventional remedy: the good ruler (*al-malik al-rashīd*) must seek consultation (*mushāwara*).[56]

Religious Law (*sharīʿa*) versus Political Rule (*siyāsa*)

A different approach to the division of power between political and religious authority appears in a pamphlet which advocates for the authority of Islamic law and its experts. Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī's work, *al-Jalīs al-ṣāliḥ* (The

50. al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal*, 100.
51. al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal*, 116.
52. al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal*, 116.
53. al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal*, 115-6, 124-7.
54. al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal*, 127.
55. al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal*, 68.
56. al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal*, 121.

Trustworthy Companion), was written in the span of forty days during the months of Muḥarram to Ṣafar of 613 AH, roughly May to June 1216 CE, probably for the Ayyubid prince al-Malik al-Ashraf Mūsā (d. 1237 CE).[57] It gives advice to the aspirations of a religious scholar at the time of the strategic alliance between political rule and Sunnī scholars. The author is critical of political rule, blaming the application of law, disregarding the *sharīʿa,* and rejecting the claim of contemporary authorities that this is justified by the principle of *siyāsa*—*siyāsa* as the authority to act outside of the framework of law—as this would imply that the *sharīʿa* is deficient and must be complemented by the juridical opinion of rulers. This is in his eyes unacceptable, as the *sharīʿa* contains all aspects of *siyāsa.*[58] Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī balances his critique of contemporary politics by stressing the religious character of his admonition. Deliberating on the Islamic tradition is the mechanism through which he promotes his views and shields himself from criticism. At the end of a chapter on injustice or tyranny (*ẓulm),* he adds a passage in rhymed prose, to deliver a sermon using religious imagery of punishment. It exposes the disturbing consequences of a disequilibrium caused by political injustice, because, as he says, ignoring the complaints of the governed does not protect against the retaliation (*thaʾr*) that the oppressed will seek.[59] This is more than an abstract thread, of course, because Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī is a public speaker, a religious orator famous for delivering moving sermons that captivate his audience. His treatise, therefore, gives support and at the same time challenges political rule. Neither distance from practical politics, nor a lack of theoretical substance, diminishes the political character of this work, which employs the theme of injustice to bolster the claim of religion to political relevance.

Ethics and Piety

The rules of ethical conduct constitute a codex that obliges, by virtue of its benefits, concern for the prosperity and well-being of the governed dominions. The concept of the virtuous ruler is in essence, therefore, not a function of piety or religious commitment, but may instead serve to emphasize a worldly order of good rule. As we learn form an author writing in a rather provincial setting in the Jazira, non-religious ethics are not only instrumental in establishing the imperatives of appropriate conduct of rulers, but may also provide a sphere of values that are unrelated to religion. Muḥammad b. Manṣūr b. al-Ḥaddād's *Precious Jewel for Princely Rule* was

57. Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, *al-Jalīs al-ṣāliḥ,* 17. See also Kronholm 1989-90, 81-91.
58. Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, *al-Jalīs al-ṣāliḥ,* 55.
59. Kronholm 1989-90, 88.

written for Lu'lu' Badr al-Dīn al-Malik al-Raḥīm who was the sovereign of Mosul in the first half of the 13th century (1232-59 CE).[60] A freedman of the Zangid al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Nūr al-Dīn Arslān, al-Malik al-Raḥīm did not dispose of dynastic legitimacy, but received a diploma from the caliph in Baghdad when his rule was established. The author combines Islamic wisdom with maxims and models of early Islamic Arab history highlighting "Arab" values from the eighth and ninth centuries—which in turn draw from the glorified pre-Islamic Arab past—such as forbearance (*ḥilm*), charity (*ʿafw*), nobility (*makārim al-akhlāq*), and vigor (*murūʾa*). The Islamic legacy is thus placed into a larger mould of pluralistic composition, inspired probably by the spirit of Arab tribes and their impact on local affairs.

Ibn Ḥaddād's consideration of values and regards of political order is significant in that he justifies his approach by distinguishing a religious political order (*siyāsat al-dīn*) which is functional in performing the obligations (*farḍ*), from a sphere of worldly politics (*siyāsat al-dunyā*), which is functional in fostering civilization (*ʿimārat al-arḍ*). Both are united by the common goal of applying justice, "which grants a stable rule and cultivates the ruler's domain; because he who neglects religious obligations violates himself (*ẓalama nafsahū*), and he who does damage (*kharraba*) to the world violates the right of others."[61] Justice here does not emanate from divine law, it is not a legal principle derived from the *sharīʿa*, but rather a state of equilibrium, a middle ground which corresponds to the will of God[62] and yet includes the virtues that support politics (*siyāsa*) and accommodate the exigencies of various situations.[63] In this vein, justice is a carefully calibrated middle. The author professes a secular model of the appropriate, one that pursues the common good (*siyāsat al-maṣlaḥa*),[64] and he does so by providing a value fundament of Arab ethics as a model and goal.

In contrast, ʿAlī b. ʿAṭiyya al-Ḥamawī's (d. 1530 CE) *Counsels*, written for the Ottoman sultan Selīm I (reg. 1512-20 CE), conveys the worldview of an author preoccupied with moral theology, one with a Sufi imprint.[65] Individual piety is to be practiced in an environment characterized by disturbances of public order and moral decay.[66] Since the author displays awareness of the manners and social affairs of his time, his doctrine of personal conduct and moral practice rooted in Islamic ethics relates to a vision of how the polity should be organized. This perspective does not only stimulate his

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60. Ibn al-Ḥaddād (flourished 1251 CE, date of the autograph), *al-Jawhar al-nafis.*
61. Ibn al-Ḥaddād, *al-Jawhar al-nafis*, 75-6.
62. *Al-ʿadl mīzān Allāh fī l-arḍ*, Ibn al-Ḥaddād, *al-Jawhar al-nafis,* 79.
63. Ibn al-Ḥaddād, *al-Jawhar al-nafis*, 87.
64. Ibn al-Ḥaddād, *al-Jawhar al-nafis,* introduction (as-Sayyid) 57.
65. al-Ḥamawī, *al-Naṣāʾiḥ al-muhimma.*
66. See also his *ʿArāʾis al-ghurar.*

reprimand of widespread decadence, marked by the use of alcohol and in-
decent behavior, but also makes him chastise corruption and misconduct
and urge remedial action.[67] The author's critical stance brought him rebuke
and defamation, when people rejected his rigorist position.[68] Seeing himself
as an outsider, the author deplores the depravity of the Sultan's entourage,
comprised of false men of religion.[69] As the passage cited below may dem-
onstrate, he demands the sultan's attention to grievances and to exacting
standards of probity among his agents as constitutive of his own moral au-
thority. He therefore addresses the head of the government as Imam.[70] That
the Ottoman sultan was the Defender of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina
since 1516 may have been an additional inspiration to his approach.

> If rulers control themselves and their agents, avoid injustice and
> covetousness that leads to wrongdoing and seizing the property of
> others, prevent favoritism among their agents, stop wrongdoing and
> tyranny emanating from their staff (*su'āt),* assure that their armed
> forces observe God's law and commands, ensure that people of their
> entourage, whether rich or poor, do not act unjustly by accepting
> gifts or bribes (*barṭīl*), or fodder for their animals, or unauthorized
> hospitality (hospitality which is not reimbursed), and that they do not
> exercise pressure on the people, and do not oppress them through
> excessive taxation,[71]

only then may they be faithful to God and lay rightful claim to the title of
just ruler, or simply, *imām.*

The author's tone also gives insight into public disorder, which is ap-
parent in more detail from contemporary historiography.[72] His explication
of piety is embedded in a narrative that calls for remedying social ills, right-
ing wrongs and elevating the wellbeing of the populace. Islamic political
thought—although prolific, especially in the twelfth and the thirteenth cen-
turies, and engaged with the practical aspects of governance and political
life—has been mostly set aside in the contemporary period, overshadowed
by a more global lineage of political thought favored by Muslims and Arabs
today.

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67. al-Ḥamawī, *al-Naṣā'iḥ al-muhimma,*130.
68. al-Ḥamawī, *al-Naṣā'iḥ al-muhimma*, preface (al-ʿIlwānī), 14.
69. al-Ḥamawī, *al-Naṣā'iḥ al-muhimma*, 124-5.
70. al-Ḥamawī, *al-Naṣā'iḥ al-muhimma*, 130.
71. al-Ḥamawī, *al-Naṣā'iḥ al-muhimma*, 129-30.
72. See for instance the impunity of malefactors from the military: Martel-Thoumian
2008, 463.

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