ORNATE MANUALS OR PRACTICAL ADAB?
SOME REFLECTIONS ON A UNIQUE WORK BY AN
ANONYMOUS AUTHOR OF THE 10TH CENTURY CE.

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This article concerns an important work, the text of which has yet to be published in full. The title of the manuscript (Haci Mahmud Efendi 2041, Istanbul) is Siyāsat al-mulûk, whose plain meaning is “The Policy of [the] Kings” and whose ostensible aim is to provide political guidance for sovereigns. In the following pages we shall show that the work, of anonymous authorship, was most probably intended for a restricted, bureaucratic readership, despite the implications of the work’s title. Rather than counselling kings, the author was advising administrators on the function and operation of the various administrative departments. The attention that administrative issues enjoy in the text may disappoint readers who would have preferred the literary tone of Adab works and the delightful maxims and words of wisdom that often typify works of this sort. That said, there are a number of links that bind the Siyāsat al-mulûk text with the most Adab-like forms and themes.

The title of the work

The fascinating, but slightly misleading title of the work is to be considered as a tentative one, as there are reasons to suspect that orig-

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1 We intend to produce jointly an annotated edition and translation of the Arabic text, which comprises fifty folios. Until now, only partial and preliminary treatments of the text have been undertaken (J. Sadan, Nouvelle source sur l’époque büyide, Tel Aviv University [Hadîra series], 1980, containing an annotated edition of only 20% of the text and reproduction of the remaining 80%; for studies of specific parts of it see Sadan, “A New Source”, Sadan, “La littérature”, Silverstein, “A New Source” and Silverstein, “On Some Aspects” detailed in the following footnotes.) Our edition will include an extensive commentary and elucidation of the historical, social, and administrative aspects of the text, rather than considering it as a specimen of the specula regis genre.

inally the text was given a different title altogether. The innocuously simple *Siyāsat al-mulāk* appears at the start of the manuscript, on the first page – which at first was apparently a blank, flyleaf or cover-page of sorts. The page includes the title and various additions that are clearly the handiwork of later readers, booksellers, or librarians. One example of this is the attempt by one such reader to label the work “On Medicine”, presumably owing to the description of the royal physician that occurs towards the end of the text. We consider this labelling to have been a mere attempt, since these two words were subsequently crossed out, no doubt by the reader or librarian who, upon considering the content more closely, realised that the issue of medicine was but one amongst many issues covered in a work that can be described, *grosso modo*, as “The Policy of [the] Kings”. This title, accordingly, was registered and not crossed out. With these circumstances in mind, the new title (which we have adopted) may be regarded as imprecise and tentative.

A clear distinction between the handwriting of the reader/librarian who wrote the two titles on the flyleaf arid that of the author of the text itself is readily discernable. The Arabic letter *ṣīn*, for instance, which recurs twice in the word *siyāsas* on the title page does not resemble the *ṣīn* employed throughout the work itself. Moreover, it is our view that the entire work (with the exception of the title page) was written by the author himself, despite being a revised version of at least one other copy. The many corrections inserted in the text – between the lines and along the margins – clearly suggest that these corrections are too thoughtful to be the result of a mere copyist. Admittedly, it could be (somewhat less reasonably) argued that the text was copied hastily and then corrected according to a more accurate, original edition which was preserved by the author. However, the page-setting and handwriting throughout do not support this possibility.

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2 MS, fol. 1a.
3 Fol. 45a ff.
5 At
most, we may consider the text in its present form to be a fresh copy in which the processes of correction, reconsideration, and thoughtful additions overlapped.

The date of the work

The existence of the present manuscript and its importance were first discovered just before 1980, while clawing through the card-catalogue of most of the manuscript collections in Istanbul, housed in the Süleymaniye Library. An initial glance at the text gave the reader the impression that the administrative machinery described in the work was very intricate and complex; the endless forms and receipts for every expense brought to mind an administrative routine that would not have been out of place in an Ottoman imperial context. Yet, the inescapable fact that the text was composed in Arabic and that it was littered with historical traces of the mid-tenth century CE, contributed to a convincing identification of the text as a manual that summarizes the collected experience of the Abbasid bureaucracy aimed at helping the administration that had recently started operating under the supervision of the newly arrived Buyid amirs.

There are numerous clues throughout the text that indicate when the anonymous author of our text was writing. For instance, the author recalls events that occurred to important people, specific Abbasid caliphs (al-Mu’tasim, al-Wáthiq, al-Mutawakkil), and other figures of the ninth century CE. The chain of transmitters cited, often at the start of a chapter, indicates that not more than three (and often only two) generations had passed since the occurrence of the events described; this is based on the reasonable assumption that when he says "[so and so] related" or "I heard from [so and so]" we are dealing with oral (hence, personal) transmission of the information. Similarly, the author expresses nostalgic longings for Abbasid rule, even specifying

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6 For instance, three copies of each: fols. 19a, 20a; five of each: fol. 13a.

7 Fol. 7a (‘Ubaydallah, the son of the vizier Ibn al-Zayyát [the latter having died in 847 C.E.,] was still alive when our anonymous author heard him reporting [haddathání, he told mes] on his father’s account of the Abbasid court); see also fols. 6a-6b, 18b, 25b-26a (a report in which the chief Qâdî of the ninth century C.E., Ibn Abî Du’ád [d. 854 C.E.], is involved is told personally to the author affirming that there was only one transmission link [a certain al-Thawrî who “told me”]).
where the Abbasid crown-prince had his offices. Furthermore, in a tantalizing "slip of the tongue" the author employs an informal term current amongst those officials who straddled the pre- and post-Buyid periods: in noting that copies of official documents are forwarded to senior authorities as a means of administrative control he writes that this copy is to be sent on to "al-Shīr", that is to say, to the Buyid sovereign or his representative. Although this phrase may well be innocent, a nuanced reading of the context suggests that a member of the ancien régime is mocking his Buyid supervisor or, at the very least, regarding the latter as an inferior outsider. There is a series of further hints that help establish the date of composition as circa the mid-tenth century CE, shortly after the de facto transfer of power from an administration directly controlled by the Abbasid authorities to one in which the Buyid amîrs have assumed authority.

**The ambivalent character of the author**

Despite the author’s anonymity, a number of observations can be made concerning his character. On the one hand, he appears to disdain ornate prose and stylistic epistolary writing; his tone is mundane, dry, and above all practical. Yet on the other hand, he is not averse to including maxims and other Adab-elements in his prose. The ambivalence in the author’s character is not simply attributable to split-personality: such inconsistencies may be explained as emanating from both the nature of his scribal profession, and that of the genre to which he is contributing. As a high-ranking functionary dealing with humdrum affairs of the empire’s finances – he is almost certainly a long-standing employee of the dīwân al-kharâq – the author seems almost obsessively jealous of the practitioners of ornate epistolary writing serving in the bureau of correspondence (dīwân al-rasâ’il), as we shall see below.

And yet, inexplicably, when writing on state affairs the author chooses to sprinkle the text with elegant maxims, hadîths, and adages of a moral/religious tone that were current in his circles and which re-
semble hadîth traditions. In other words, although the text considered here does not strictly belong to the genre of Mirrors for Princes, it contains — intentionally or otherwise — a faint dependence on the more literary genres that deal with moralising counsel or even conversations with rulers, whose intention is to provide such counsel.  

These conflicting aspects of the work will be treated below in greater detail. It will be shown that despite the overwhelmingly practical character of the work, and despite the deep aversion of our author to the scribes engaged in epistolary stylistics, the writer himself is clearly not impervious to literary influences.

The practical character of the author’s work

It is important to note that although the author does not state so explicitly, it is readily clear that he was an experienced functionary in the dîwân al-kharâg, dealing with the state finances. His kharâg-affiliations are discernable even though he is careful to treat the content of the manual from the detached distance of an observer rather than as a key player recording his memoirs. He avoids direct references to his own work, although the fact that a disproportionately large part of the work is dedicated to financial issues suggests both that he considered this branch of the administration to be the most important administrative bureau and that it is concerning this bureau that he has the most detailed and practical information. Moreover, the author’s detailed fa-

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12 Fols. 11a-16a are dedicated to the kharâg bureau but many other references to it and to the various kinds of the kharâg functionaries, as well as to the problems of deficit are scattered all over the treatise. Of course, we accept that in many ways assessing lands and collecting taxes were among the most important functions of the administration. Nonetheless, it is clear that the author has close and thorough acquaintance with this aspect of government.
miliarity with even the lowliest of functionaries within this department \(^{13}\) and the simple (and often drastic) methods for resolving deficits \(^{14}\) indicate that we are dealing with a numerate man of financial calculations, who is acquainted with the entire apparatus of government. Such wide-ranging knowledge was essential for a kharāg functionary due to the all-encompassing nature of tax-collection in extensive and complex empires.

The extraordinarily thorough treatment of the diwān al-kharāg is complemented by other chapters that, taken together and individually, provide invaluable information for the study of the social and imperial history of the Middle East. Thus, the chapter concerning the institution of the hisba (“public morals and market inspection”) easily pre-dates al-Māwardī’s (d. 1058) \(^{15}\) treatment of the same subject, which is frequently taken as the starting point for discussion of this institution in modern studies. There is little doubt that the hisba chapter in our manual draws on even earlier hisba practices than the mid-tenth century CE date of its composition would suggest. \(^{16}\) Only the text published by R. B. Serjeant represents an earlier tradition, \(^{17}\) albeit a tradition that is particular to a province rather than to the central caliphal lands treated in the present manual. This is supported by the statements of our anonymous author to the effect that for such institutions – the hisba, the police services, the royal physician and the keeper of the stables and so forth – there are useful professional “notebooks” (or at least some kind of records of events that happened before and of the measures taken by the sovereigns) kept by the officials of some diwāns and police-stations that are worth consulting. \(^{18}\)

These pamphlets were the oldest records of the collected experience that had not been written down in formal manuals or guides, but rather remained in the form of notebooks and pamphlets for the use of a limited circle of bureaucrats. This sort of administrative pamphlets were also employed in the organisation and administration of other

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\(^{13}\) Fol. 8b ff.

\(^{14}\) Fols. 7b, 10a, for instance.

\(^{15}\) Al-Māwardī, al-Akhabār al-sultāniyya, Cairo 1960, 241 ff. (Mawerdi, Les status gouvernementaux, traduit par E. Fagnan, Alger 1915, 513 ff.)

\(^{16}\) Fol. 33a ff.


\(^{18}\) MS, fols. 32b, 36r, 46b, 48b, for instance.
bureaus, such as the imperial road-system, where detailed lists of way-stations, distances, sources of water, villages and towns, were used by officials and couriers, but also informed the works of the major Arabo-Islamic geographers. 19

The author’s thorough understanding of the entire administrative machinery of the central Islamic lands is reflected in detailed chapters dedicated to the following governmental divisions: The King (al-malik), the Vizier (al-wazîr), the various categories of secretaries and scribes (ifiant min al-kuttāb); the bureau of taxation (kharāq, literally “land-tax”, the ministry dealing with the state finances, as explained supra) and the description of distinct departments within the diwān, the bureau of sealing (khâtam), approval (tawqīf), and opening (faqīd) of documents; the diwān’s of the military (al-ğaysh), the confidential scribe (kātib al-sirr), correspondence (al-rasā’il), the postal system (al-barîd), the hisba (as discussed), and that of the chief of the police force (ṣâhib al-shurtâ), various local posts such as the [land] tax collector (‘āmil al-kharāq, “the financial governor”) as well as courtiers such as the chamberlain (hâgib), the official envoys of the king (rusul, sing. rasûl), the royal steward (qahramân), the treasurer (khâzin), several kinds of servants, such as the room-attendant (farrāf), the royal physician (tabīb), the keeper of the royal stables (al-qayyim bil-dawwâb), the chef (tabbâkh), and the royal butler (ṣâhib khizānat al-sharâb, «master of the wine-cellar»). 20

19 Hence, Qudâma ibn Ǧā’far, Kitāb al-kharāq (in P. Heck, op. cit., 88) where the inter-dependence of route-lists and Qudâma’s own work is articulated.

An excellent example of the author’s wide-ranging, yet specialized knowledge is his treatment of the imperial postal system (al-barîd). Not only does the author provide the single most detailed description of this institution in pre-Mamluk sources, but throughout the work the various ways in which the function of the barîd overlaps with that of other administrative offices are explained. This illustrates the author’s command of the entire administrative apparatus and the intricate interconnectivity of the various offices. To this extent, the practical character of the manual is unmistakeable.

The author’s aversion to epistolary stylistics

Our author only thinly masks his dislike of the functionaries involved in the composition of documents in the bureau of correspondence (diwân al-rasâ’il, mentioned above). In this bureau the most gifted stylists were employed for their talents in fluency, style, and poetic citation, as one of the most important roles entrusted to these officials was to draft letters in the name of the ruler, using an elevated style befitting of a sovereign. The prestige associated with this bureau was such that outstanding writers competed fiercely for the opportunity to work in this capacity and, once successfully employed, competed with one another for eminence. Unfortunately, it would seem that our author suffered from pangs of jealousy towards these secretaries, particularly those who had distinguished themselves as a result of their talents. At the core of his resentment was the fact that while these stylists were celebrated and rewarded handsomely for their im-


22 The term diwân al-rasâ’il was but one of a handful of terms used in various periods and regions of the Islamic world to describe the department of correspondence. Other terms include diwân al-mukâtabât and, famously, diwân al-insâh.

23 For instance, the great ninth-century writer, al-Gâhîz, had to compete with other kuttab of diwân al-rasâ’il; see Pellat, Ch., “Gâhîz à Bagdad et à Samarrâ’”, R.S.O., 27 (1952), 48; al-Najam, W., al-Gâhîz wal-hâdîra al-‘abâsâyya, Baghdad 1965, 86 ff; Farrûkh, ‘U., Ta‘rikh al-adab al-‘arabî, Beirut 1968, I, 304. Although the kuttab had a prestigious social status, certain Adab writers criticized their knowledge.
pressive (but relatively inconsequential) talents, he was relegated to obscurity despite toiling in the complex and pivotal bureau of taxation, where his likes would routinely be charged with warding off the threat of insolvency and other financial problems that infected the government coffers. According to our disgruntled author, only the first generation of state-secretaries was truly gifted with stylistic abilities, knowledge of poetry, ancient letters and speeches, and deserving of the stature afforded them. Conversely, the subsequent generations of secretaries knew only to copy the works and letters of their predecessors, while the current (i.e., mid-tenth century) secretaries could not even copy their predecessors competently. It is for this reason that the author’s rant against his colleagues in the dīwān al-rasā‘īl has been labelled “Literature as seen through the eyes of a frustrated administrator”.  

This phenomenon of seemingly venomous competition is not, however, beyond explanation. To begin with, there was an unofficial rivalry between poets and prose-writers (the latter including the kuttāb secretaries). As we have seen, those who triumphed in these competitions enjoyed prestigious employment in the bureau of correspondence. Both Hilāl al-Šābī (d. 994) and al-Tha‘ālibī (d. 1038), the latter of whom copied the former and expanded on his works, exult the virtues of the kātib, prose-writer, and consider him superior to the poet. This is due to the overriding preference amongst the Arab public at the time for poets and their œuvre. The united, anti-poet front of the prose-writers was not maintainable for long and eventually vocational bickering erupted between the rival categories within prose-writing: the epistolary “artists” (as they no doubt regarded themselves) had a condescending attitude towards the functionaries

24 MS, fol. 17b.  
25 Sadan, J., “La littérature vue par un administrateur frustré”, Studia Islamica, 71 (1990), 29-36; the article is dedicated to our anonymous author’s “literary” ideas and his above-mentioned paragraph.  
27 Al-Tha‘ālibī, Nathr al-nazm, in Rasā‘īl al-Tha‘ālibī, Beirut 1972 (apparently a re-print of the 1317 A.H. edition), 2-3. Al-Tha‘ālibī copies from al-Šābī but does not mention his name; J. Sadan, “La littérature”, 30 (and n. 5), treats this text and proves, relying on a MS from Istanbul University of excerpts from al-Tha‘ālibī, that the latter mentioned al-Šābī in the original version and that the omission is due to a copyist or a printer.
employed in administrative, financial matters – and *vice versa*. G. J. van Gelder has analysed Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī’s (d. first quarter of the eleventh century CE) stance in the context of an argument between a “man of letters” and a “man of numbers”, the latter being represented by al-Tawḥīdī himself. 28 Thus, it is in this broader context of vocational jealousies and competition that the perceived cattiness displayed by the author of the present manual towards the *kuttāb* in the bureau of correspondence 29 is to be understood.

**Literary concepts and *Adab* works reflected in the text**

Scattered throughout the text there are indications that the author had a direct acquaintance with – or passing knowledge of – works of *Adab*, such as the lost work of al-Ḡāhīz (d. 869 C.E.) on the ruses of brigands, *Ḥiyāl al-*luṣūṣ, 30 although it should be stressed that this work is referred to for its practical value (as a guide for the *ṣāḥib al-shurṭa*) rather than for its literary merit. 31 We have collected the various instances in which the author slips into *Adab*-mode, employing moral adages, traditions (including those that are not formally recognized as such through inclusion in “formal” collections and concordances), elegant maxims, and parables. 32 One such parable has already enjoyed a full analysis. 33

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29 Supra, note 23.
30 Pellat, Ch., “Essai d’inventaire de l’œuvre gāhizienne”, *Arabica*, 3 (1956), 164; *idem*, “Nouveau essai d’inventaire de l’œuvre gāhizienne”, *Arabica*, 31 (1984), 146. Our author’s attitude is not mentioned in these lists, although it is contained in Sadan, “A New Source”.
32 The following quotations are taken from fols. 1b (three quotations), 4b, 5a-5b, 7a bis, 10a, 26b, 31a, 31b, 33b, 36a, 45a, 46b, 48b. These examples, as well as others, will be analysed in greater detail in our complete edition of the text.
These references will now be presented with quotations from the text being divided into two sections: 1. sayings of a religious or literary character, and 2. encouragement to read literary works.

Sayings of a religious or literary character

1. “It is incumbent upon the King to be diligent in four matters: the hereafter, that it may protect him; this world, that it may bring him pleasure; the elite (khâssa), that it may perpetuate his power; and the general public (‘âmma), that it may support him”.

2. “It is incumbent upon the King to maintain his kingdom with [military] men, just as these men are maintained through funds, and [just as] the funds are maintained through built-up lands (‘imâra: crucially here, cultivated lands that are subject to taxation), and just as justice is maintained through [the inhabitants and institutions of] the built-up lands”. 34

3. “For Allah, the exalted, says (Qur’ân, 3: 159): «Consult them in the matter. Then, when you have taken your decision put your trust in Allah»”.

4. “Both the King and the Vizier require a wise inspector, a gentle physician, a reliable informant, an efficient secretary, a careful tax-collector, a repetitive preacher, an alert and admonishing friend, a humble chamberlain, a skilful horse-trainer, and an austere tutor”.

5. “‘Umar ibn al-Khattab said: «Separate the trustees» (umanâ, i.e., those entrusted with wealth)”.

6. “The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: «You do not know; perhaps Allah protects you on account of the prayers of wretched ones among you»”.

7. “Allah is most cognizant of that which benefits his created [people], and judges His worshippers most justly”.

8. “And let the party of believers witness their punishment” (Qur’ân 24: 2).

9. (Interpretation of the Qur’ânic verse 12: 55) “Joseph, peace be upon him, said to Pharaoh: «Appoint me over the store-houses of

the land...». And after Joseph, peace be upon him, kings avoided appointing a single person over the store-houses since this worried them and they feared that such [an influential] man would bring an end to their rule. This is because of what happened to Pharaoh at the hands of Joseph’s, peace be upon him, descendents, as many transmitters have related that the Pharaoh of Joseph’s time was the very same Pharaoh of Moses’s time, peace be upon him and upon all the prophets of Allah and his apostles”.

Encouragement to read literary works

1. “It is incumbent upon the Vizier to peruse carefully the records of the history of kings, their viziers, and their policies”.
2. “The chamberlain must study and memorize the history of kings and their conduct”
3. “It is desirable that the chief of police (sāhib al-shurta) reads the books and chronicles of kings and learn from the events that occurred to them... He must frequently consult the work by Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr ibn Bahr al-Gāhīz, The book of brigands. It is a distinguished work, describing the various ruses (of brigands) and the best ways to pre-empt them. While there were those who chastised [al-Gāhīz] for writing this book, these people entirely lacked understanding of the organisation of books and of the fabric of expression (kalām), and of the proper arrangements [of such texts]... and I hope that al-Gāhīz has been rewarded (in the afterlife) for having brought warning of these sinners (fussāq)”.
4. “The keeper of the royal stables must study books on horse-training and veterinary sciences”.
5. (Following a typically Hippocratic description of the four humours, the author writes) “These are the foundations of medicine, and many books [concerning these subjects] are at the [royal] physician’s service, and he must study them...”

35 Pellat, Ch., “Essai d’inventaire”, 164 quotes al-Isnafārīyīnī (d.1027) who blames al-Gāhīz for writing on brigands, but this author is later than ours (on al-Isnafārīyīnī’s attitude to al-Gāhīz, see idem, “Gāhīz jugé par la postérité”, Arabica, 27 [1980], 41).
6. “The function of the ‘agoranomos’ (muhtasib) is extremely important and covers other subjects as well; there is a treatise that describes this function that the muhtasib must obtain and read regularly”.

The combination of references to literature and exhortations to others to consult such works shows that – despite any reservations he may have harboured concerning Adab – the author appreciates the role of literary works in the affairs of state.

Stylisation of Advice-Literature

Having seen that our anonymous author takes derogatory shots at the secretaries (kuttâb) in the bureau of correspondence (diwân al-rasâ’il) out of vocational rivalries and personal vendettas, it is worth considering those occasional instances where the author reverts to ornate prose himself.

The author is writing in the tenth century, by which point the composition of rhyming texts devoid of rhythm or meter, that is to say “prose” texts, was an acceptable and well-known literary device that had occurred in noteworthy phrases of rhetorically well-constructed speeches (khitâb), in some samples of ancient descriptive texts, and in the opening (and even in the body) of literary compositions, such as epistles and other specimens of short Adab works. But it was in the tenth century that the form of prose writing developed and from the second half of this century impressive specimens of ornate prose made their appearance. It is, thus, pleasing to discover that our anonymous author who is partial to administration and finances, and whose “literary” tastes tend towards the practical manuals rather than the spirit of Adab, makes (infrequent) use of ornate prose and enriches his style with occasional rhymes. The following quotes from the text illustrate this point adequately, and are presented in full-vocalisation (save the rhyme, which is in waqf):

30 Mubârak, Zâki, La Prose arab au IVe siècle de l’Hégire (Xe siècle), Paris 1931; also in Arabic: idem, al-Nathr al-fanni fî al-qarn al-râbi’ al-hâji, Cairo 1934. Since Mubârak numerous studies on this subject have been published, although his work is the best introduction to the subject. See also Abbasid Belles-Lettres (The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, II), edited by J. Ashtiany et al., Cambridge 1990, chapters 1, 3-8, 20-21.

31 Fols. 2a, 3a, 10a, for instance.
The rhyme ān: yasāsu l-ʿāmmata bi-siyāsati l-qurʿān, wal- khāssa bi-siyāsati l-zamān («He must ruler over the general public [ʿāmma] according to the policy of the Qurʿān and over the elite [khāssa] according to the policy [suitable at the given] time»). 38

The rhyme... ba: yaʿtaqilu gundahu bil-raghba, là bil-rahba («The ruler must bind the army to him through [exciting] their desires, not through [playing on] their fear»). 39

The rhyme... āl: akhdhu l-māl, wa-sūʿi l-fīʿāl («confiscating monies and inappropriate behaviour»)

It would appear that such sentences occur naturally, in the context of the author’s flow of composition; thus, it is unlikely that he was simply copying existing tropes and more likely to view these examples as being the style of the author himself. That said, the author does normally favour a dry style, and he is not averse to the extreme repetition of such terms as yanbaghī («it is necessary [that the official...])’ and yaḥtāq (“[the official] needs to...”) at the beginning of nearly every issue (and often repeatedly within a chapter). In this sense, our author resembles writers such as Qudāma ibn Gaʿfar who writes dryly and factually about the state bureaus. 40

In our view, the existence of such minor (but unmistakable) literary hints in the work of such a practical-minded author who does not possess significant literary talents attests to the influence that advice-literature, Mirrors for Princes, and Adab literature, wielded even outside of their natural frameworks. The author’s bitter rivalry with the employees of the dīwān al-rasāʾīl on the one hand, and his ability to use simple rhymes on the other, would suggest that at one point the author may have aspired to join the ranks of the kuttāb, an aspiration that was not met with success.

This interpretation of the author and his work allows us to establish the status of the work in relation to other genres of advice literature. It is clear that there were indeed specific and varied subdivisions within this genre: advice and political guidance in the spirit of Islam as a religious system, writings in the spirit of Mirrors for Princes, ad-

38 This sentence resembles somewhat the first example in “Sayings of a religious or literary character”, but is nonetheless entirely distinct from it.

39 Another, previous sentence (which we have not quoted here) also contains the ...ba rhyme twice.

40 Mentioned supra, notes 11, 19, 20.
vice in the spirit of Adab; but despite the obvious demarcations amongst these subdivisions, there is a noteworthy measure of overlap between them. We do not pretend to be rewriting the history of Adab or Mirrors for Princes here, but simply to stress that the styles of the various genres have influenced each other, thereby sharpening our understanding of the present author and his style.

Thus we find that ‘Abdallah Ibn al-Muqaffa’ composed two works in the style of Adab, both of which were influenced by a Persian tradition of writing: al-Adab al-kabûr and al-Adab al-şaghûr, and both of which are reminiscent of Mirrors for Princes. S. D. Goitein objected to speaking of these two works in the same structural context as works such as Ibn al-Muqaffa’s Risâla fî al-şâhâba (“The Epistle of Friendship”), as the latter was written for strictly political purposes and includes guidance and advice on practical matters specific to the contemporary political reality. Here we find, therefore, an instance instructive of the fluidity between the moral advice literature and the works that offer practical guidance.

In a diametrically opposed manner (that is instructive nonetheless), al-Māwardî also delicately combines genres in his al-Ahkâm al-sultânîya («The Book of Governmental Ordinances»), an important and influential book in which the author presents issues of governance from an Islamic, jurisprudential standpoint. The apparent tone of the work is austere, juridical, dry, and, of course, religious. But it is telling in this context that at the very beginning of the work al-Mâwardî quotes verses of ancient Arabic poetry, composed by al-Afwâ al-Awdî, in which the principle that man cannot do without political administration (literally, “leaders”, and “aristocracy”) is supported. The other references to poetry sprinkled in his work demonstrate that al-Mâwardî is an excellent example of the fluidity of both the material and the style of such works. It is also not surprising that

41 See supra, note 11.
42 It has been argued that the Adab al-şaghûr was only ascribed to Ibn al-Muqaffa’, having been written at the same time or, according to others, later. The controversy was already treated in Richter, G., op.cit.; idem, “Über das kleine Adabbuch des Ibn al-Muqaffa’”, Der Islam, XIX (1931), 278-281; Gabrieli, F., “L’opera di Ibn al-Muqaffa’”, R.S.O., XIII (1931-2), 227-230; see also Lecomte, G., Ibn Qutayba: l’homme, son œuvre, ses idées, Damascus 1965, 181-6.
44 For details, see supra, note 15.
al-Mawardî was himself a man of letters who authored a compilation of maxims. In writing advice-literature in the style of Adab, he expressed himself in other works that concerned, amongst other things, the moral and public conduct of the King and the policies of the kingdom, as some of the titles of these works show. Thus, we can catch glimpses of al-Mawardi’s method in differentiating between different genres; furthermore, we can appreciate the path of numerous verses of poetry into a work that is ostensibly concerned with religion and jurisprudence, just as occasional hints at ornate prose found their way into the work of our anonymous author.

Having analysed the content and context of our anonymous author’s work we may now return to the question posed in the title of this article. Does Siyāsat al-mulûk represent a practical manual embellished with literary jewels and decorations, or are we dealing with an Adab work whose content was of use to rulers and bureaucrats? Although the content of the work, the attitude of the author, and the literary context in which he operated all support the former option, we hope to have shown through the example of this work that such demarcations within and amongst genres are to a certain extent superficial and artificial.

ABSTRACT

This article addresses key concepts pertaining to Adab on the one hand and Abbasid administrative practices on the other, by focusing on an unpublished work that straddles both themes. It is shown that Arabic works on both Adab and bureaucracy are difficult to isolate and categorise conclusively as both genres were receptive to diverse flavourings, be they of an ornamental or of a strictly practical nature. Although the article adopts a comparative approach to these issues, detailed attention is paid to the character of the particular work under discussion and its author.

RESUMEN

Este artículo estudia conceptos claves que se encuentran, por un lado, en el *Adab* y por otro en las prácticas administrativas abbasíes a partir de una obra inédita que versa sobre ambas cuestiones. Muestra la dificultad de aislarse y de colocar en categorías diferentes las obras de *Adab* y las dedicadas a la burocracia, ya que ambos géneros eran susceptibles de una coloratura tanto ornamental como estrictamente práctica. Aunque el artículo adopta una metodología comparativa, se dedica atención particular a la obra discutida y a su autor.