

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

J. SADAN

(Tel Aviv University)

A. SILVERSTEIN

(Cambridge University)

This article concerns an important work, the text of which has yet to be published in full.<sup>1</sup> The title of the manuscript (Hacı Mahmud Efendi 2041, Istanbul) is *Siyāsat al-mulūk*, 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-mulūk* 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-

<sup>1</sup> 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 būyide*, Tel Aviv University [Ḥaḍāra 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-mulūk* appears at the start of the manuscript, on the first page – which at first was apparently a blank, flyleaf or cover-page of sorts.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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”.<sup>4</sup> 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 and that of the author of the text itself is readily discernable. The Arabic letter *sīn*, for instance, which recurs twice in the word *siyāsa(t)* on the title page does not resemble the *sīn* 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.<sup>5</sup> At

<sup>2</sup> MS, fol. 1a.

<sup>3</sup> Fol. 45a ff.

<sup>4</sup> Similar Arabic treatises with the title *Siyāsa* (of kings) existed in Arabic; a lost early one is mentioned in Crone, P., *God's Rule. Government in Islam*, New York 2004, 152; another lost treatise (by al-Māwardī, d. 1058 C.E.) with a similar title is mentioned by F. ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Aḥmad, *al-Māwardī wa-kitāb Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, Alexandria n.d., 10-11, who explains that Ibn Khallikān, Ḥaḡḡi Khalīfa and others refer to a book by al-Māwardī as *Siyāsat al-mulūk*, but ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Aḥmad explains that it could constitute an early version of al-Māwardī's *Tashīl al-naẓar* and that he saw a MS in Turkey bearing the title *Durar al-sulūk fī Siyāsat al-mulūk* by al-Māwardī which is partly similar to *Tashīl al-naẓar*.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

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 <sup>6</sup> 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 *amīrs*.

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‘taṣim, al-Wāthiq, 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; <sup>7</sup> 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

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

<sup>7</sup> Fol. 7a (‘Ubaydallah, the son of the vizier Ibn al-Zayyāt [the latter having died in 847 C.E.], was still alive when our anonymous author heard him reporting [*haddathanī*, «he told me»] on his father’s account of the Abbasid court); see also fols. 6a-6b, 18b, 25b-26a (a report in which the chief Qāḍī of the ninth century C.E., Ibn Abī Du‘ād [d. 854 C.E.], is involved is told personally to the author affirming that there was only one transmission link [a certain al-Thawrī who “told me”]).

where the Abbasid crown-prince had his offices.<sup>8</sup> 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-Shīʿī*”, 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 *amīrs* 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 *dīwān al-kharāj* – the author seems almost obsessively jealous of the practitioners of ornate epistolary writing serving in the bureau of correspondence (*dīwān al-rasāʾil*),<sup>10</sup> as we shall see below.

And yet, inexplicably, when writing on state affairs the author chooses to sprinkle the text with elegant maxims, *ḥadīths*, and adages of a moral/religious tone that were current in his circles and which re-

<sup>8</sup> Fol. 13a.

<sup>9</sup> Fols. 13a, 16b, 17a.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. note 22 below.

semble *ḥadīth* 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 *dīwān al-kharāğ*, dealing with the state finances. His *kharāğ*-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<sup>12</sup> and that it is concerning this bureau that he has the most detailed and practical information. Moreover, the author's detailed fa-

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Richter, G., *Studien zur Geschichte der älteren arabischen Fürstenspiegel*, Leipzig 1932; Lambton, A.K.S., "Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship", *Studia Islamica*, 17 (1962), 91-119; *idem*, *State and Government in Medieval Persia*, Oxford 1981; F.R.C. Bagley's introduction to *Ghazālī's book of Counsel for Kings* (*Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, translated by F.R.C. Bagley from the Persian text, Oxford 1964); Bosworth, C.E., "An Early Arabic Mirror for Princes", *JNES*, 29 (1970), 25-41; Marlow, L., *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge 1987, 128ff.; Muḥammad Aḥmad Damağ, *Marāyā al-umarā'*, Beirut 1994; Heck, P., *The Construction of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization: Qudāma ibn Ja'far and his Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Ṣinā'at al-Kitāba*, Leiden 2002, 225-39; and Crone, P., *God's rule*, 145-196.

<sup>12</sup> Fols. 11a-16a are dedicated to the *kharāğ* bureau but many other references to it and to the various kinds of the *kharāğ* 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<sup>13</sup> and the simple (and often drastic) methods for resolving deficits<sup>14</sup> 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 *kharāğ* functionary due to the all-encompassing nature of tax-collection in extensive and complex empires.

The extraordinarily thorough treatment of the *dīwān al-kharāğ* 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 *ḥisba* (“public morals and market inspection”) easily predates al-Māwardī’s (d. 1058)<sup>15</sup> 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 *ḥisba* chapter in our manual draws on even earlier *ḥisba* practices than the mid-tenth century CE date of its composition would suggest.<sup>16</sup> Only the text published by R. B. Serjeant represents an earlier tradition,<sup>17</sup> 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 *ḥisba*, 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 *dīwāns* and police-stations that are worth consulting.<sup>18</sup> 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

<sup>13</sup> Fol. 8b ff.

<sup>14</sup> Fols. 7b, 10a, for instance.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya*, Cairo 1960, 241 ff. (Mawardi, *Les status gouvernementaux*, traduit par E. Fagnan, Alger 1915, 513 ff.)

<sup>16</sup> Fol. 33a ff.

<sup>17</sup> Serjeant, R. B., “A Zaidī Manual of Ḥisba of the 3rd Century”, *R.S.O.*, 28 (1953), 1-34.

<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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-wazīr*), the various categories of secretaries and scribes (*ḡumal min al-kuttāb*); the bureau of taxation (*kharāḡ*, literally "land-tax", the ministry dealing with the state finances, as explained *supra*) and the description of distinct departments within the *dīwān*, the bureau of sealing (*khātām*), approval (*tawqīr*), and opening (*faḍḍ*) of documents; the *dīwāns* of the military (*al-ḡaysh*), the confidential scribe (*kātib al-sirr*), correspondence (*al-rasā'il*), the postal system (*al-barīd*), the *hisba* (as discussed), and that of the chief of the police force (*ṣāhib al-shurṭa*), various local posts such as the [land] tax collector (*āmīl al-kharāḡ*, "the financial governor") as well as courtiers such as the chamberlain (*hāḡib*), the official envoys of the king (*rusul*, sing. *rasūl*), the royal steward (*qahramān*), the treasurer (*khāzin*), several kinds of servants, such as the room-attendant (*farrāsh*), the royal physician (*ṭabīb*), the keeper of the royal stables (*al-qayyim bil-dawwāb*), the chef (*ṭabbākh*), and the royal butler (*ṣāhib khizānat al-sharāb*, «master of the wine-cellars».<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Hence, Qudāma ibn Ḡa'far, *Kitāb al-kharāḡ* (in P. Heck, *op. cit.*, 88) where the inter-dependence of route-lists and Qudāma's own work is articulated.

<sup>20</sup> For a breakdown of these chapters within the manuscript see: Sadan, J., "A New Source for the Buyid Period", *I.O.S.*, 9 (1979), 356-7. For another description of the bureaucratic divisions of the empire from a near-contemporary source, see Mez, A., *Die Renaissance des Islams*, Heidelberg 1922, 68-74, who derives his information from Qudāma ibn Ḡa'far's *Kitāb al-Kharāḡ* (using MS Köprülü 1076). According to Qudāma (whose work has now been edited by M. H. al-Zubaydi, Baghdad 1981, 610-11, for a list of the various ministries), the state apparatus included: *al-ḡaysh*, *al-nafaqāt*, *bayt al-māl*, *al-rasā'il*, *al-tawqīr wa l-dār*, *al-khātām*, *al-faḍḍ*, *al-nuqūd wa l-'iyār wa l-awzān*, *al-mazālim*, *al-shurṭa wa l-aḥdāth*, and *al-barīd wa l-sikak wa l-ṭuruq*. It is clear that Qudāma's organisation of the bureaus is entirely different from that of *Siyāsāt al-mulūk*. For studies of the period in general and of Qudāma's work in particular see: Donohue, J. J., *The Buwayhid dynasty in Iraq 334H/945 to 403H/1012: shaping institutions for the future*, Leiden 2002, and Heck, P. L., *op. cit.*, respectively. See also Amedroz, H. F., "Abbasid Administration in Its Decay", *J.R.A.S.* (new series), 45 (1913), 823-4; Duri, 'A.- 'A., "Dīwān", in *E.I.2*, 323-7; Kabir, M., *The Buwayhid Dynasty*, Calcutta 1964, 119-33, 145-66; Busse, H., *Chalif und Grosskōnig*, Beirut 1969 respectively; Sāmarrā'i, H. Q., *al-Mu'assasāt al-idāriyya fi al-dawla al-abbāsiyya khilāl al-fatra 247-324*

An excellent example of the author's wide-ranging, yet specialized knowledge is his treatment of the imperial postal system (*al-barīd*).<sup>21</sup> 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 *barīd* 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 (*dīwān al-rasā'il*, mentioned above).<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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-

(A.H.), Damascus 1971; Mottahedeh, R., "Administration in Būyid Qazwīn", *Islamic Civilization*, edited by D.S. Richards, Oxford 1973, 33-45.

<sup>21</sup> A bi-lingual, annotated edition of the chapter on the *barīd* has been published in Silverstein, A., "A New Source on the Early History of the *Barīd*", *al-Abḥāth*, 50-1 (2003), 121-34; and cf. *idem.*, "On Some Aspects of the Abbasid *Barīd*", in *Abbasid Studies*, edited by J.E. Montgomery, Leuven 2004.

<sup>22</sup> The term *dīwān al-rasā'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 *dīwān al-mukātabāt* and, famously, *dīwān al-inshā'*.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, the great ninth-century writer, al-Ġāḥiẓ, had to compete with other *kuttāb* of *dīwān al-rasā'il*: see Pellat, Ch., "Ġāḥiẓ à Bagdad et à Samarrā'", *R.S.O.*, 27 (1952), 48; al-Najam, W., *al-Ġāḥiẓ wal-ḥāḍira al-'abbāsiyya*, Baghdad 1965, 86 ff; Farrūkh, 'U., *Ta'rīkh al-adab al-'arabī*, Beirut 1968, I, 304. Although the *kuttāb* 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.<sup>24</sup> It is for this reason that the author's rant against his colleagues in the *dīwān al-rasā'il* has been labelled "Literature as seen through the eyes of a frustrated administrator".<sup>25</sup>

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-Ṣābī (d. 994)<sup>26</sup> and al-Tha'ālibī (d. 1038), the latter of whom copied the former and expanded on his works, extol the virtues of the *kātib*, prose-writer, and consider him superior to the poet.<sup>27</sup> This is due to the overriding preference amongst the Arab public at the time for poets and their *oeuvre*. 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

<sup>24</sup> MS, fol. 17b.

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> Arazī, A., "Une épître d'Ibrāhīm b. Hilāl al-Ṣābī", *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of Professor David Ayalon*, ed. by M. Sharon, Jerusalem and Leiden, 1986, 493-4, 502-3.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Tha'ālibī, *Nathr al-naẓm*, in *Rasā'il al-Tha'ālibī*, Beirut 1972 (apparently a reprint of the 1317 A.H. edition), 2-3. Al-Tha'ālibī copies from al-Ṣābī 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-Ṣābī 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.<sup>28</sup> 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<sup>29</sup> 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-Ġāḥiẓ (d. 869 C.E.) on the ruses of brigands, *Ḥiyal al-luṣūṣ*,<sup>30</sup> although it should be stressed that this work is referred to for its practical value (as a guide for the *ṣāhib al-shurṭa*) rather than for its literary merit.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> One such parable has already enjoyed a full analysis.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Van Gelder, G. J., "Man of Letters v. Man of Figures", *Scripta signa vocis: studies about scripts, scriptures, scribes and languages in the Near East, presented to J. H. Hespers*, ed. by H.L.J. Vanstiphout et al., Groningen 1986, 53-63.

<sup>29</sup> *Supra*, note 23.

<sup>30</sup> Pellat, Ch., "Essai d'inventaire de l'oeuvre ḡāḥizienne", *Arabica*, 3 (1956), 164; *idem*, "Nouveau essai d'inventaire de l'oeuvre ḡāḥizienne", *Arabica*, 31 (1984), 146. Our author's attitude is not mentioned in these lists, although it is contained in Sadan, "A New Source".

<sup>31</sup> Sadan J., "A New Source", 362.

<sup>32</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> Sadan, J., "A 'Close-Circuit' Saying on Practical Justice", *JSAL*, 10 (1987), 325-341 (our anonymous author is mentioned in 337-8); since the publication of this study: Essid, Y., *At-Tadbīr/Oikonomia: pour une critique des origines de la pensée économique arabo-musulmane*, Tunis, 1993, 70; Marlow, L., *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism*, 78; Crone, P., *God's rule*, 160.

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 (*khāṣṣa*), that it may perpetuate his power; and the general public (*‘āmma*), 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 (*‘imāra*: 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".<sup>34</sup>

3. "For Allah, the exalted, says (Qur’ān, 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-Khaṭṭāb said: «Separate the trustees» (*umanā’*, 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’ān 24: 2).

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

<sup>34</sup> For the Persian old historical background (in short), see Lambton, A.K.S., "Reflections on the Role of Agriculture in Medieval Persia", in *The Islamic Middle East, 700-1900*, edited by A.L. Udovitch, Princeton 1981, 286-7.

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 (*ṣāhib al-shurṭa*) 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 Baḥr al-Ġāḥiẓ, *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-Ġāḥiẓ] for writing this book,<sup>35</sup> 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-Ġāḥiẓ 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..."

<sup>35</sup> Pellat, Ch., "Essai d'inventaire", 164 quotes al-Isfarāyīnī (d.1027) who blames al-Ġāḥiẓ for writing on brigands, but this author is later than ours (on al-Isfarāyīnī's attitude to al-Ġāḥiẓ, see *idem*, "Ġāḥiẓ jugé par la postérité", *Arabica*, 27 [1980], 41).

6. “The function of the ‘agoranomos’ (*muḥtasib*) is extremely important and covers other subjects as well; there is a treatise that describes this function that the *muḥtasib* 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 (*kuttāb*) in the bureau of correspondence (*dīwān al-rasā'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 (*khiṭāb*), 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<sup>36</sup>. 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.<sup>37</sup> The following quotes from the text illustrate this point adequately, and are presented in full-vocalisation (save the rhyme, which is in *waqf*):

<sup>36</sup> Mubārak, Zaki, *La Prose arab au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'Hégire (Xe siècle)*, Paris 1931; also in Arabic: idem, *al-Nathr al-fannī fī al-qarn al-rābi' al-ḥigri*, Cairo 1934. Since Mubārak 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.

<sup>37</sup> Fols. 2a, 3a, 10a, for instance.

The rhyme *ān*: *yasūsu l-‘āmmata bi-siyāsati l-qur’ān, wal- khāṣṣa bi-siyāsati l-zamān* («He must ruler over the general public [*‘āmma*] according to the policy of the Qur’ān and over the elite [*khāṣṣa*] according to the policy [suitable at the given] time’).<sup>38</sup>

The rhyme... *ba*: *ya‘taqilu ġundahu bil-raghba, lā bil-rahba* («The ruler must bind the army to him through [exciting] their desires, not through [playing on] their fear’).<sup>39</sup>

The rhyme... *āl*: *akhdhu l-māl, wa-sū‘i l-fi‘āl* («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 *yaḥtāġ* («[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 Ġa‘far who writes dryly and factually about the state bureaus.<sup>40</sup>

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-rasā’il* 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-

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

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

<sup>40</sup> 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,<sup>41</sup> 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 ‘Abdallāh 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-kabīr* and *al-Adab al-ṣaghīr*,<sup>42</sup> and both of which are reminiscent of *Mirrors for Princes*. S. D. Goitein<sup>43</sup> objected to speaking of these two works in the same structural context as works such as Ibn al-Muqaffa’s *Risāla fī al-ṣaḥāba* (“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-Māwardī also delicately combines genres in his *al-Aḥkām al-sultānīya* («The Book of Governmental Ordinances»), an important and influential book in which the author presents issues of governance from an Islamic, jurisprudential standpoint.<sup>44</sup> 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-Māwardī quotes verses of ancient Arabic poetry, composed by al-Afwā al-Awdī, 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-Māwardī is an excellent example of the fluidity of both the material and the style of such works. It is also not surprising that

<sup>41</sup> See *supra*, note 11.

<sup>42</sup> It has been argued that the *Adab al-ṣaghīr* 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 oeuvre, ses idées*, Damascus 1965, 181-6.

<sup>43</sup> Goitein, S. D., “A Turning Point in the History of the Muslim State”, *Islamic Culture*, 23 (1949), 120-35.

<sup>44</sup> For details, see *supra*, note 15.

al-Māwardī 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.<sup>45</sup> Thus, we can catch glimpses of al-Māwardī'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-mulūk* 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.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, al-Māwardī, *Tashīl al-naẓar wa-ta'ḡīl al-ẓafar fī akhlāq al-malik wa-siyāsāt al-mulk*, edited by R. al-Sayyid, Beirut 1987; *idem*, *Adab al-dunyā wal-dīn*, Beirut 1981 (this book is popular and has been printed several times).



## 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 aislar 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.