



## ‘ĀMEL

---

‘ĀMEL, the holder of an administrative office in the pre-modern Islamic world. In earliest Islam, the Arabic term *‘āmel* was one which denoted, at its most general, a provincial governor; hence it was correlative with such designations as *amīr* and *walī*. The basic sense of “agent, person involved in some activity” is clearly discernible here, and this general sense persisted in administrative usage well into ‘Abbasid times. But *‘āmel* also came to acquire the more specific sense of “official charged with the collection of taxation,” whether the land tax in general (*karāj*, this also designating what was stipulated as the tax liability, *zamān*, *qabāla*, of a province, district or town) or the poll tax (*jezya*) incumbent upon the *Ḍemmīs* or Protected Peoples. As is well-known, the usage of all these terms is shifting and imprecise in the early Islamic centuries.

Where the governor personally retained control of all the chief functions necessary for the defense and administration of a region, he was described as appointed *‘ala ‘l-ḥarb wa‘l-ḳarāj* “with military and fiscal responsibilities” (see R. Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam*, Cambridge, 1957, pp. 358-59). But after the financial side was separated from the military and general administrative duties and given to a different official—certainly by the 5th/11th century—*‘āmel* had become the standard term for the official primarily charged with financial responsibilities; Māwardī, the 5th/11th century writer on constitutional theory, was probably already becoming out-of-date in using the term *‘āmel* for both the office of the high-level *‘āmel* or governorship of a province (the *‘emālat al-tafwīz*) and the lower-level *‘āmel* appointed by that governor for specific tax-collecting duties (the *‘emālat al-tanfīd*; see *al-Aḥkām*



*al-soltānīya*, chap. XVIII).

When the Arabs entered Iran, they took over much of the Sasanian financial system, the Iranian officials remaining substantially in post in both Iran and Iraq. The traditional story of the establishment of the *dīvān* or financial department under the first four caliphs assigns a dominant role to Iranian functionaries, in particular to one Pīrūz and his son Zādān-Farroḡ in the reign of ‘Omar I; the arabization of the *dīvāns* in the time of ‘Abd-al-Malek (actually accomplished by an Iranian *mawlā* from Sīstān, Ṣāleḡ b. ‘Abdallāh) cannot seriously have diminished the part of Iranians in the day-to-day running of the financial departments, though it may have facilitated Arab supervision at the top (see M. Sprengling, “From Persian to Arabic,” *AJSL* 56, 1939, pp. 175-224, 325-36; ‘A. Zarrīnkūb, in *Camb. Hist. Iran* IV, pp. 45-48).

Under the provincial dynasties which arose in the Iranian world from the 3rd/9th century onwards, the term *‘āmel* certainly remained in usage for tax collector in general, but side by side with native Iranian terms like *kārdār* and *bondār* (the latter originally meaning “a trader who has sufficient resources to increase his capital by buying and selling,” according to Sam‘ānī [Hyderabad], II, pp. 335-36, but both terms are probably taken over from pre-Islamic usage, just as was that denoting another financial official, the *ḡahbaḡ*, literally “assayer, money changer”). We find *‘āmel* used in a Samanid context (Narṣaḡī, p. 15). Under the Ghaznavids, the financial aspect of the central administration was directed by the vizier himself, through the *dīvāns* of *estīfā’* (properly concerned with tax assessment and accounting procedures) and of *eṣrāf* (properly concerned with the oversight of lesser financial officials and the disbursement of collected revenues), so that in the 5th-6th/11th-12th centuries one finds here *mostawfī* and *moṣref* used as near synonyms of *‘āmel* (see Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 80f.). Under the Saljuqs, Neḡām-al-molk used the term *‘āmel* as “tax collector” in his *Sīāsāt-nāma*, where the *‘āmel* is enjoined to behave reputably and courteously, to take only the amount of taxation stipulated, and not to demand this last before the harvest or the time when the cultivators are able to pay; we may infer that *‘ommāl* often behaved in a tyrannical and extortionate fashion (ed. M. Qazvīnī and M. Modarres Čahārdehī, Tehran, 1334 Š./1955, pp. 20f.; tr. H. Darke, London, 1960, pp. 23f.; for other examples of Saljuq usage of the term *‘āmel*, see C. L. Klausner, *The Seljuk Vezirate, a Study of Civil Administration 1055-1194*, Cambridge, Mass., 1973, index). In the chancery documents of the Ḳvārazmšāhs, the term *‘āmel* is frequent at the side of the parallel, but not quite identical one of *motaṣarref*



“financial inspector;” see H. Horst, *Die Staatsverwaltung der Grosselgüen und Hōrazmšāhs (1038-1231)*, Wiesbaden, 1964, pp. 57-58 and passim.

With the Mongol invasions of Iran, other terms also appear for tax collector, such as *moḥaṣṣel* and *taḥṣildār*, though the usage of *‘āmel* persisted, e.g., in Safavid usage (see K. M. Röhrborn, *Provinzen und Zentralgewalt Persiens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1966, pp. 59, 61). It further passed to those neighboring regions influenced by Iranian culture and administrative practices: to the Ottomans and even to the Crimean Tatars, but above all to Muslim India, where it is found from Tughluqid to Mughal times (see W. H. Moreland, *The Agrarian System of Moslem India*, Cambridge, 1929, p. 270; Ibn Hasan, *The Central Structure of the Mughal Empire*, repr. Delhi, 1970, p. 205).

In modern Iran, *‘āmel* has become obsolete as a fiscal term, but in contemporary agricultural usage it is used for a crop-sharing agreement (*mozāra‘a*) to denote the person who is given a piece of land for a specified period to cultivate on a crop-sharing basis, i.e., in something like the modern Arabic sense of “worker, laborer” (Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*, London, 1952, p. 423).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

See also Spuler, *Iran*, pp. 338f., 462f.

M. Fuad Köprülü, “Âmil,” *IA* I, pp. 402-04.

The latter gives considerable coverage to the Iranian world in contrast to “Âmil,” *EI*<sup>2</sup>, which concentrates on the Arab world.