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COURTS AND COURTIERS III. IN THE ISLAMIC PERIOD TO THE MONGOL CONQUEST

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iii. In the Islamic period to the Mongol conquest

In Persia the organization of courts (Pers. *bār*, *bādrgāh*, *dargāh*, *darbār*; in Arabic, there exists no more precise designation than *majles*, lit. “session”), including the formation of a circle of courtiers in the early centuries after the Islamic conquest, was directly inspired by the court life of the ʿAbbasid caliphs at Baghdad and Sāmarrāʾ. The latter was itself, however, largely based on the elaborate ceremonial that had both protected the theocratic ruler and regulated his relations with his entourage in pre-Islamic Persia (see ii, above).

By the time of the caliph Hešām (105-25/724-43) the Omayyads (41-132/661-750) had already moved some distance from Bedouin simplicity and the tradition of general accessibility to the shaikh or ruler toward formation of a regular court circle (for Omayyad court ceremonial, see Sauvaget, pp. 129ff.). The caliphs displayed such insignia of authority as the Prophet Moḥammad’s sword, mantle (*borda*), staff (*qażīb*), and seal ring (*ḵātam*; by the 10th century a manuscript of the Qurʾān that had been copied on the orders of the caliph ʿOṯmān [23-35/644-561 was also mentioned among

the insignia of the ʿAbbasids (Helāl Ṣābeʾ, apud Sourdel, p. 135). One year after he came to power the ʿAbbasid ʿAbd-Allāh al-Saffāḥ (132-36/749-54) began to conceal himself from public view by means of a curtain (*setr*), a practice that Masʿūdī (*Morūj* V, pp. 121-22; ed. Pellat, sec. 2334) connected with the old Persian kings, specifically with the Sasanian Ardašīr I. In the mosque he sat apart in a special enclosure (*maqṣūra*), a practice introduced by the first Omayyad caliph, Moʿāwīa, after an attempt on his life by the Kharijites (Ebn Ḵaldūn, pp. 42-65, esp. 44; tr., II, pp. 48-73, esp. 50, noted that Persian and Byzantine clients had shown the early caliphs the way to court luxury and ostentation).

After the triumph of the ʿAbbasids in 132/750 the location of their successive capitals in the former Sasanian province of Iraq and their considerable support among Arabs previously settled in Persia, as well as among Persian clients (mawālī), naturally meant greater Persian influence at court. The caliph gradually became more and more removed from his subjects, a process that was accelerated by the transfer of the capital to Sāmarrāʾ, with its array of new palaces and audience halls, in 221/836. By the early 10th century, as Dominique Sourdel has noted, the elaboration of ceremonial both served as compensation for the caliphs' loss of actual power and also reflected "a result of the profound iranization of customs and society." Caliphal audiences were ever more minutely regulated, under the supervision of a chamberlain (ḥājeb); the caliph sat on his dais (sarīr, ṣoffa) concealed behind the curtain, which was drawn back to initiate the audience; rows of courtiers, in their assigned ranks and places (marāteb, whence probably the general designation of courtiers as aṣḥāb al-marāteb, possibly equivalent to Persian martabadārān, though the precise meaning of these terms is somewhat uncertain), would then greet him with verbal formulas of blessing (aḍʿīa), kissing the ground before him (proskynesis, taqbīl al-arż) or his stirrup if he was mounted, and so on. The caliph wore black robes and a tall cap (qalansūwa), black being the ʿAbbasids' official color; the court dignitaries also wore black as tokens of their support for the dynasty (Helāl Ṣābeʾ, pp. 91-92; Sourdel, pp. 147-48). To put on garments of a different color, for example, white, red, or green, was a conscious declaration of support for some other sectarian religious or political group. Green was the color of the ʿAlids; according to Ebn Ḵāldūn (p. 45; tr., II, p. 51), the caliph Maʾmūn adopted it in place of the traditional ʿAbbasid black when he named Imam ʿAlī al-Reżā as his heir. Obviously Persian features in these ceremonies included holding the ceremonial parasol (Ar. meẓalla, šamsīya, Pers. čatr) above the ruler's head, a practice familiar from

Achaemenid iconography (see i, above); the use of banners and standards (Ar. ʿalam [see ʿalam va ʿalāmāt], lewāʾ, meṭrād, Pers. derafš; cf. derafš-e Kāvīān, the Persian national flag allegedly captured by the Arabs at the battle of Qādesīya), known from Parthian and Sasanian times; bestowal of robes of honor (Ar. *ḵeleʿa*), the borders often richly embroidered with koranic inscriptions (*ṭerāz*), similar to the ornamental borders of Byzantine and Sasanian court dress; an ensemble of drums and trumpets (Ar. *nawba*, Pers. *naqqāra-ḵāna*) at audiences and festivals; and the caliph's elevation on a proper throne (Pers. *taḵt*), rather than a dais, on certain occasions (Sourdel, p. 131).

The organization of the ʿAbbasid court was emulated, with varying degrees of elaboration, by provincial governors and successor autonomous rulers in Persia from the 9th century onward, perhaps with stronger emphasis on indigenous Persian elements. There is little specific information on practices at the Taherid court at Nīšāpūr, but governors like ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ṭāher (213-30/828-45) and his two successors, Ṭāher II (230-48/845-62) and Moḥammad (248-59/862-73), gathered around themselves some of the leading Arabic poets and grammarians of their day as boon companions (Ar. *nadīm*), already a feature of ʿAbbasid court life; this group included drinking companions, storytellers, jesters, comedians, and the like (Bosworth, 1969b, pp. 58ff.; Kaabi, pp. 272-312). As for the early Saffarids (253-88/867-901), they spent much of their time in military conquests; virtually nothing is known about their court life, though Yaʿqūb b. Layṯ (253-65/867-79) had a circle of court poets and eulogists, including Moḥammad b. Waṣīf, author of some of the earliest known verse in New Persian.

There is, however, more information on the elaborate court life of the Samanids (204-395/819-1005) in Transoxania and then in Khorasan. At least as early as the reign of Esmāʿīl b. Aḥmad (q.v.; 279-95/892-907) they surrounded themselves with an elite court guard composed of Turkish military slaves (*ḡolām*) comparable to that developed in the middle decades of the 9th century at Sāmarrāʾ (see barda and bardadāri v) and a hierarchy of military officials, including the commander of police (*ṣāḥeb al-šorṭa*) and the commander of the guard (*ṣāḥeb al-ḥaras*). The domestic organization of the court was in the hands of a *wakīl* (Barthold, *Turkestan*[3], pp. 227-29). We know from Naršaḵī (pp. 28-29; tr. Frye, pp. 19-20) that there was a *ṭerāz* workshop in Bukhara from the 8th century, supplying local court ceremonial needs but also exporting fine products to the ʿAbbasid capital and even as far as Egypt and the Byzantine empire. The 11th-century Qāżī Ebn al-Zobayr (pp. 139-50) provided a particu-

larly useful description of Samanid court procedure and ceremonial for the reception of distinguished foreign embassies (though the historicity of the specific occasion is in doubt). It includes details on the magnificent uniforms and bejeweled weapons of the court guards, among whom are mentioned "the keepers of the wild beasts," *ḥajabat al-sebāʿ*, in the presence of Amīr Naṣr b. Aḥmad (301-31/914-43) seated on a gilded throne, wearing a crown (*tāj*)and covered by a sumptuous embroidered quilt (Ar. *dowwāj*; cf. Bosworth, 1969a, pp. 5-6).

The Daylamite Buyids of northern and western Persia emerged as part of the resurgence of Iranian mountain peoples, including the Kurds, in the 10th century. The Daylamites, only recently converted to Islam, showed particularly strong indigenous Iranian traits in their attitudes and ways of life. Mardāvīj b. Zīār conquered Ray and Isfahan in 315/927; seated himself on a golden throne, with a silver throne at a lower level for the person especially in his favor at that moment; and adopted a crown that he believed to have been modeled on that of Ḵosrow Anōšīravān. On ceremonial occasions his troops were drawn up in lines before him, and he liked to picture himself as Solomon son of David controlling an army of subject demons (Masʿūdī, *Morūj* IX, pp. 27-28; ed. Pellat, sec. 3600; Ebn Meskawayh in Margoliouth and Amedroz, *Eclipse* I, p. 162, IV, p. 182; cf. Bosworth, 1973, pp. 57-58). He also revived the celebration at Isfahan of Sada, the ancient Persian festival of fires on 10 Bahman (Ebn Meskawayh in Margoliouth and Amedroz, *Eclipse* I, p. 311, IV, p. 351). Once the Buyids had settled in their various provincial capitals in Persia and at Baghdad, the influence of ʿAbbasid practice naturally grew stronger at their courts, and the luxury of the court levées held by the second generation of Buyid amirs, for example, ʿAżod-al-dawla and his son Bahaʾ-al-Dawla, was in no way inferior to that of the caliphs in Baghdad, who were at a particularly low ebb of effective power (Busse, pp. 222-26).

Information is particularly rich on the court ceremonial of the Ghaznavids, ethnically Turkish but deeply imbued with Persian and Islamic courtly and administrative traditions; most notable is the detailed account of court life during the sultanate of Masʿūd b. Maḥmūd (421-32/1031-41) by Abu'l-Fażl Bayhaqī (see Fallāḥ Rastgār). The Ghaznavids, who had plundered the rich temple treasures of India, spared no expense in beautifying their capital, Ḡazna, building palaces and laying out gardens there and at such provincial centers as Herat, Balḵ, and Laškarī Bāzār (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 139-41). Bayhaqī described in minute detail the various occasions when the sultan

received embassies from the ʿAbbasid caliphs or from the Qarakhanids of Central Asia, and it is clear that great efforts were made to maximize the impression of Ghaznavid wealth, splendor, and might. For example, when the envoy of the new caliph al-Qāʾem (422-67/1031-75) arrived at Balḵ in December 1031, 4,000 Turkish *ḡolām*s in ceremonial uniforms were arrayed around the palace; the sultan received the envoy seated on a dais with the vizier Aḥmad b. Ḥasan Meymandī beside him and the rest of the courtiers standing. The ceremonial deployment of elephants hung with brass plates was also mentioned; combined with drums and trumpets, they produced a most impressive din, "just as if it were the Day of Resurrection" (Bayhaqī, ed. Fayyāż, p. 382; cf. Bosworth, 1965, pp. 406-07). On formal occasions involving solemn processions (Ar. *mawākeb*) the sultan rode an elephant, as in September 1031, when Masʿūd proceeded to the plain of Šābahār outside Ḡazna to hold a session of the *maẓālem* court (for redress of wrongs; Bayhaqī, ed. Fayyāż, pp. 372-73). The throne, probably originally made of wood, was replaced in July 1038 by a luxurious gold version that had taken three years to make; when the sultan took his seat on it he was surrounded by the usual concourse of richly attired courtiers and elite guards. Other practices normally associated with such occasions included showering of money and presents (Ar. *neṯār*) on the spectators and giving feasts for the great men of state and the troops (in fact, an ancient Turkish custom from the steppes, one that was continued by the Saljuqs; see below; Bayhaqī, ed. Fayyāż, pp. 713-15; tr. in Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 135-37; cf. Neẓām-al-Molk, pp. 162-65, tr., pp. 127-30).

The opulent attire of the sultan, the great men of state, and the elite troops on such occasions was frequently described in the literary sources, and some idea of what it actually looked like can be obtained from fragments of wall paintings preserved in the audience hall of one of the Ghaznavid palaces at Laškarī Bāzār (*Lashkari Bazar . . .* , pls. 121-24). There must have been workshops within the empire for the production of rich clothing on the extensive scale required; royal workshops (*kār-ḵāna*) for the making of *ṭerāz* embroidery and other such items were mentioned during the reign of the later Ghaznavid sultan Bahrāmšāh (512-52/1118-57). One important office at court, normally held by a slave soldier, was that of *jāmadār*, keeper of the sultan's wardrobe (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 104-05, 137).

It is further noteworthy, and very explicitly stated in Bayhaqī's narrative (Fallāḥ Rastgār, pp. 431ff.), that the sultan regularly celebrated at court the two

ancient Persian festivals of Nowrūz and Mehragān at the spring and autumn equinoxes of the solar year respectively; those festivals had survived, though stripped of their original Zoroastrian religious significance, under the ʿAbbasid caliphs, as the verses of various contemporary Arabic poets attest (e.g., the Nowrūz poem by Ḥosayn b. Żaḥḥāk Ḵalīʿ and the Mehragān poem attributed to the caliph al-Maʾmūn; see Masʿūdī, *Morūj* VIII, pp. 277-78, 340-42; ed. Pellat, secs. 2962, 3502-03). A feature of such celebrations was the presentation of sets of rich clothing and other presents by the ruler and his receiving in return costly presents from his courtiers; such distribution of clothing is recorded for the Taherid ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ṭāher at both Nowrūz and Mehragān, specifically described as an imitation of the practice of the ancient Persian rulers ([Pseudo] Jāḥeẓ, pp. 168-69). In the sultanate of Masʿūd of Ḡazna the scattering of coins and jewels, the exchange of presents, and much drinking of wine—especially associated with the celebration of Mehragān since Achaemenid times—were recorded by Bayhaqī (Fallāḥ Rastgār, pp. 431ff.); a significant body of poetry composed by the great lyric poets of the early Ghaznavid period in praise of the two festivals and of wine drinking survives (Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* I, pp. 475-76; for the verses of Manūčehrī in particular, see Hanaway, pp. 69-80).

The Turkish Saljuqs—who had become Muslims by the turn of the 11th century but remained socially little assimilated to the traditions of Persian Islamic culture—took over from the Ghaznavids Khorasan and with it a good proportion of Persian Islamic administrative and ceremonial practices. At the time of Ṭoḡrel Beg's first occupation of Nīšāpūr in 429/1038 his advance guard appeared with a banner (the Saljuqs' banner on a slightly later occasion was described as black; Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, p. 255 and n. 33), and subsequently Ṭoḡrel ensconced himself on Sultan Masʿūd's own throne there, at the front of a dais, bearing a strung bow over his arm and three arrows in his belt; these weapons were to become the special emblems of Saljuq sovereignty (Spuler, *Iran*, p. 353; Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, p. 256 and n. 34; Bayhaqī, ed. Fayyāż, pp. 728-33, tr. in Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 252-57); when the Ghaznavid army temporarily recaptured the town Abu'l-Faẓl Sūrī, the governor of Khorasan, ordered that the throne be broken up because of this profanation (Bayhaqī, ed. Fayyāż, p. 809). But the steppe traditions of the Saljuqs were still strong. Their military campaigns and peripatetic way of life, with the corollary lack of a single fixed capital, ensured that their court ceremonial and practices would remain more informal and flexible than those of the Ghaznavids. They continued such customs as awarding robes of honor; sought grandiloquent

titles from the caliphs, as had been the practice of rulers in Persia since Buyid times (see alqāb va ʿanāwīn i); adopted the *čatr*; and attached special importance to the large tents to house the court and administration when, as so often happened, the ruler was on the move (according to Rāvandī, p. 170, in the time of Sanjar, 511-52/1118-57, such tents were red and made from material woven at Jahrom in Fārs: *sarā-parda-ye sorḵ-e jahromī*). The vizier Neẓām-al-Molk thought that the formal procedures and pomp of a properly ordered court, designed to impress the general populace and foreign visitors alike, were not followed strenuously enough by the Saljuq sultans. He therefore included in his *Sīāsat-nāma* chapters (xxix, xxx, xxxv) on the ruler's circle of boon companions and intimates (*nadīmān wa nazdīkān*) and their appropriate ranks at court, modeled on the practices of the Samanids and Ghaznavids; he also prescribed the correct forms for the ruler's regular drinking parties, public and private audiences, and feasts for courtiers, citing as parallels the practices of the Qarakhanids in Transoxania and eastern Turkestan. The beginnings of a court literature, exemplified in the ethical treatise of Yūsof Ḵāṣṣ-Ḥājeb Balāsāgūnī, show that court life and a degree of court organization had definitely already existed among the Turks; he included chapters (e.g., xxxi, xxxvii, xlvii, lxiv-lxv) on the duties of such court dignitaries as chamberlains and cupbearers, manners in serving princes, the etiquette for feasts and invitations to them, and the like (for a useful survey of what is known about Qarakhanid palace organization, see Geṇč, pp. 198-233). The Ḵʷārazmšāhs also maintained circles of writers and eulogists, including Atsïz's secretary and court poet Rasīd-al-Dīn Vaṭvāṭ, but almost nothing is known about the structure of their court. Given the origins of the dynasty as Saljuq military slaves, it was probably similar to that of the Saljuqs (cf. Horst, pp. 6, 16ff.)

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