



DASTUR AL-MOLUK

DASTURAL-MOLUK. A manual of administration in Persian from the end of the Safavid period. It was composed by Moḥammad Rafi‘ Anṣāri (known as Mirzā Rafi‘ā) who had the title of *Mostawfi al-mamālek* (accountant-general), a high-ranking position in the central administration at Isfahan (the then capital of Safavid Persia). Together with a similar work, *Taḍkerat al-moluk*, the two books provide much information on the administrative structure and social conditions prevailing in Persia at that period. They are in fact the only two surviving administrative manuals from the end of the Safavid period, aside from Naṣiri’s later work, *Alqāb wa mawājeb-e dawra-ye ṣafawiya* (written 1730 or 1731). As will be argued later, *Taḍkerat al-moluk* should be considered as a derivative of *Dastur al-moluk*, although thanks to the well-known bilingual edition by Vladimir Minorsky, *Taḍkerat al-moluk* has attracted more scholarly attention and is far better known. *Dastur al-moluk* was translated and published in facsimile by Marcinkowski (2002).

Author. Although not much is known about Mirzā Rafi‘ā himself, the Iranian scholar Moḥammad-Taḳi Dānešpažuh (d. 1997) was able to find some details about the author’s family, which, through the *nesba* “Anṣāri,” claimed descent from Jāber b. ‘Abd-Allāh (d. 692), the celebrated Companion of the Prophet. According to Dānešpažuh, they were an eminent family from Fārs and among the earliest supporters of [Shah Esmā‘il I](#) (r. 1501-24). Throughout the Safavid period, the family held important posts: Mirzā Mas‘ud Jāberi-Anṣāri, for instance, the earliest member of the family cited by Dānešpažuh, was a vizier at the courts of Esmā‘il I and Ṭahmāsp I (r. 1524-76). Originally the family had



come from Isfahan and had settled in Shiraz toward the end of the rule of the [Āq Qoyunlus](#). Another member of the family, Jalāl-al-Din Jāberi, is even reported to have been vizier under *two* dynasties, the Shiʿite Safavids, and the Āq Qoyunlus, their Sunnite predecessors. Later another Jāberi, Eʿtemād-al-dawla Mirzā Salmān, was superintendent (*nāẓer*) of the imperial workshops (*boyutāt-e salṭanati*) under Ṭahmāsp I, Esmāʿil II (q.v.; r. 1576-77), and Moḥammad Ḳodābanda (r. 1578-88). More importantly, Mirzā Salmān was also grand vizier under the two last mentioned rulers and thus an extremely influential personality until he was murdered in 1583 at Herat. Aside from temporary setbacks under ʿAbbās I (r. 1588-1629), the Jāberi family continued to flourish in the 17th and early 18th centuries. Towards the latter part of the rule of Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn (r. 1694-1722), when *Dastur al-moluk* was written, Rabiʿ-al-Din Jāberi-Anṣari, the author’s son, is mentioned by Dānešpažuh as *Mostawfi al-kāṣṣa* (accountant-general of the crown domains) in connection with the festivities at the inauguration of Isfahan’s famous *Madrasa-ye solṭāni* in 1710. Apparently, he died in the reign of Nāder Shah (r. 1736-47; see [AFSHARIDS](#); for more details on the family see Anṣārī [Mirzā Rafiʿā], “Dastur al-moluk,” intro. and ed. M-T. Dānešpažuh, *MDAT* 63-64/5-6, July 1968, pp. 475-504, intro.).

Contents. *Dastur al-moluk* and *Tadkerat al-moluk* describe in a succinct style and without artifice the practical duties of the offices of the religious, military and civil administration towards the end the Safavid period, from the high officials (whether those at the imperial capital or in the provinces) to the lower staff, such as those at the palace-kitchens. Both manuals are written in Persian, but because the subject necessitates extensive use of technical terms, they require the reader to have some knowledge of the complicated mechanism of Safavid bureaucracy. Besides, both texts draw heavily on Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Mongolian technical administrative terms. These borrowings, as well as the insertion of other loanwords from Turkish and Mongolian, are also interesting in the more general context of the historical development of Persian language. The wording of the two manuals is very similar and, at times, almost identical. *Dastur al-moluk* appears in general more detailed and contains more information on offices of lower rank, such as those connected with the supplies to the palace and alike. Some of these minor posts do not appear at all in *Tadkerat al-moluk*. In this respect *Dastur al-moluk* is a valuable source of information on the daily life of the lower strata of Persian society.



The overall number of offices (including the minor ones), which appear in individual entries, totals 171 in *Dastur al-moluk*. Almost all of them consist of a description of different offices and a statement on the amount and source of income of their respective holders. *Tadkerat al-moluk*, in turn, comprises 164 entries. However, some of the entries in *Tadkerat al-moluk* appear twice, once in their own specified chapter, and again for a second time in the *kātema* or “epilogue,” which is in fact more of an appendix, concerned for the most part with salaries and other kinds of income. Also the number of major divisions in *Dastur al-moluk* is higher than in *Tadkerat al-moluk*: whereas *Tadkerat al-moluk* consists of a preamble, five chapters (*bābs*) and a *kātema*, *Dastur al-moluk* comprises a preamble, six chapters, but no *kātema*. This last mentioned point, i.e. the lack of a *kātema* in *Dastur al-moluk*, is perhaps the most striking difference between the two manuals. The compiler of *Tadkerat al-moluk* divided his entire text categorically into (1) description of offices (chapters) and (2) pecuniary matters (“epilogue”). This kind of stringent separation is not to be found in *Dastur al-moluk*. However, it should be noted that the *kātema* of *Tadkerat al-moluk* contains also considerable information on provincial revenues. The overall impression with regard to *Tadkerat al-moluk* is that it was arranged as a “practical” manual, for the benefit of the Sunnite Afghan conquerors of Persia, since it omits any mention of offices bearing special Shiʿite implications, such as the custodians (*motawallis*) of the various shrines and alike, which would be of no relevance to the Sunnite Afghans. An exception in this regard is the office of *kalifat al-kolafā*, which is to be found in both manuals. Therefore, *Tadkerat al-moluk* might be considered as a “revision” or “modification” of *Dastur al-moluk*, which would suggest that it was compiled after it.

Manuscript. The Central Library of Tehran University has a microfilm copy (see bibliography) of the (apparently unique) *Dastur al-moluk* manuscript, which is preserved at the Sar-Yazdi-Library at the ‘Abd-al-Raḥim Khan Madrasa, in Yazd (see Marcinkowski 2003b; 2005; Dānešpažuh 1966; 1968; Afšār 2001, pp. 477-78). The manuscript appears to be in a good condition. Contrary to *Tadkerat al-moluk*, however, *Dastur al-moluk* has no colophon, although there is a proper space provided for it by the scribe. This particular circumstance is significant with regard to the conditions of its production, which shall be addressed later. The overall impression derived from the manuscript is that of a first draft. *Tadkerat al-moluk*, on the other hand, is complete and is preceded by an extremely beautiful colophon bearing the title



of the work. There are no seals or stamp marks in *Dastur al-moluk* to indicate the names of previous owners. We also do not know whether the manuscript, which has been written in a somewhat hasty *nasta'liq*-script, is an autograph or a copy. All that can be said is that the manuscript consists of 161 pages (1a-81a), 16 lines on each page, with the exception of the first page, which has 11 lines plus a *basmala*. The text ends abruptly at the bottom of page 81a, while describing the responsibilities of the Chief-Architect (*me'mārbāši*). Apparently, the text had been written throughout by a single scribe. Insertions such as “*faṣl*” (“subdivision”) and alike have apparently been written in a color different from the main text (perhaps in red).

Editions. Between, 1968 and 1969, Dānešpažuh published for the first time an edition of *Dastur al-moluk* (Anšāri [Mirzā Rafī'ā], ed. Moḥammad-Taqi Dānešpažuh, November 1968, pp. 62-93; February 1969, pp. 298-322; April 1969, pp. 416-40; August 1969, pp. 540-64). Unfortunately, this edition contains several faulty readings and lacunae in the transcription (Afšār, ed. 2001, p. 478). However, scholarship benefited enormously from Dānešpažuh's pioneering work, since, as already mentioned, research on Safavid administration had been based mainly on Minorsky's study and edition of *Taḍkerat al-moluk*. Recently, the Iranian scholar Iraj Afšār has published a new edition of *Dastur al-moluk* which includes recently discovered parts of the text (Afšār, ed., 2001, pp. 475-621; see also Marcinkowski 2005).

Translations in European languages: Dr. A. B. Vil'danova (1991) of Tashkent published the first annotated translation of *Dastur al-moluk* (in Russian). Unfortunately, her painstaking work has so far not received the attention of international scholarship. In 2002, the present author published for the first time an English translation with detailed annotations, commentary and glossary of technical terms (Marcinkowski 2002), which was based on Dānešpažuh's edition and the manuscript. This was followed by an English translation (Marcinkowski 2005) of Afšār's additions (Afšār, ed., 2001, pp. 609-621).

Date of compilation. According to Dānešpažuh, *Dastur al-moluk* served as an update of a “directive sample” which “had been compiled at the beginning of the Safavid period, and [...] which was constantly updated in the course of time” and whose “preface was always written anew in the name of the



[respective] Shah” (Anṣārī [Mirzā Rafī‘ā], July 1968, pp. 484 [intro.]). However, the manuscript lacks any marginal notes, chronograms (*mādatārikò*, particular in the two poems that appear in Mirzā Rafī‘ā’s introduction), or seals and alike which might have helped to clarify the issue. Related to this is the fact that the promised epilogue by the author of *Dastur al-moluk*, is obviously missing. In the light of these obstacles, we have to rely on what the author himself has to tell us about the reason for the compilation of *Dastur al-moluk*: in his preamble he states that he set out work on *Dastur al-moluk* by the order of the Shah, who is clearly identified by him as Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn and alluded to as being still alive at the time of compilation. The preamble, however, presents at the same time a further problem: an extensive praise of the four “Rightly Guided Caliphs” (*al-ḳolafā al-rāšedun*), a most unusual eulogy given the strongly Shi‘ite Safavid milieu in which it was written.

It is furthermore difficult to say whether the preamble and the main text, as well as the preamble in itself, have been laid out and written as one single part and by a single author, or whether the passage on the four caliphs is a later addition. If we decide in favor of the first option—and there seems to be so far no indication contrary to this—a date of composition *after* 1722, which marks the collapse of the Safavid state (thus after the abdication of Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn), has to be envisaged. Furthermore, since Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn has been spoken of as still alive, a date of composition *before* his death at the hands of the Afghans, which took place in September 1726, has to be considered. As stated by the present author (Marcinkowski 2003b, with additional considerations), a date of composition between 1722 and 1726 might be envisaged (the factors that contributed to the collapse of Safavid rule in 1722 during the Afghan invasion, i.e. the historical background for the composition of *Dastur al-moluk*, have been dealt with elsewhere and from different angles: see e.g. Dickson 1962; Foran 1992; Fragner 1975; Lockhart 1958; Perry 1971).

Significance to scholarship. The various geographical and etymological characteristics contained in *Dastur al-moluk*, as well as the wealth of information on minor offices and services, give the work its special significance. Besides the application of a technical terminology in both manuals which is based on four languages, i.e. Persian, Turkish, Mongolian and Arabic, and related to that, the utilization of Turkish as the court language until the very end of the Safavid period (for which there is plenty of evidence),



cannot be emphasized enough. The answer to the question for the reasons, as well as the general context, for the compilation of *two* manuals towards the end of the Safavid period is consequential, as is the issue of whether these two handbooks go back to a much earlier common source. The latter assertion—a common source—was put forward by Dānešpažuh in the introduction to his edition of *Dastur al-moluk*, contrary to the view which tends to emphasize a supposed need at that particular time for the re-arrangement or ordering of the entire administrative system, he maintained that the *Dastur al-moluk* was just a sample which was rather “upgraded” from time to time. It is difficult to comment further on these assertions, due to the lack of conclusive evidence. However, the degree of accuracy with which some of the European 17th-century observers (among them Kaempfer, Du Mans, and Chardin) have described the structuring of the later Safavid state during their respective sojourns at Isfahan, more than half a century before the compilation of the *Dastur al-moluk* and *Taḍkerat al-moluk*, is striking. With regard to Du Mans, who must have had an excellent command of the Persian language, and Kaempfer, who is heavily indebted to him, the present writer cannot help to assume, after a study of their accounts, that they must have had a Persian text similar to our two manuals as a guide at their disposal (on this, as well as on earlier, apparently not extant *Dastur al-ʿamals* [Regulations], a genre which was even known as *Dasturlamali* in the Safavid vassal kingdom of Georgia, see Marcinkowski 2003b).

Lastly, the great significance of *Dastur al-moluk* and *Taḍkerat al-moluk* as two of the apparently only three surviving manuals of Safavid administration should be emphasized, since dominating the genre of administrative literature is “advice” (*naṣiḥat*) literature, which dwells on *desired* states and conditions, whereas information on the *actual* circumstances is mostly scattered over other genres, such as chronicles or foreign travel-accounts and alike.



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