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SIAR AL-MOLUK

SIAR AL-MOLUK (The ways of kings), also known as *Siāsat-nāma* (The book of statecraft) and in some references as *Panjāh faṣl* (Fifty chapters), a manual on statecraft written for the Saljuq sultan Malekšāh (d. 1092) by his vizier Neẓām-al-Molk (1018-92).

Contents and contextualization. In 1086, according to *Siar al-moluk,* Malekšāh asked Neẓām-al-Molk to prepare a manual for good governance, shedding light on the ways and manners of kings, just rule, and stable polities. A short note appended to the preface, presumably by a librarian at the Saljuq court, states that *Siar al-moluk* was first composed in thirty-nine chapters and presented to the sultan. The vizier then revised it, "and because of the constant anxiety that was in his mind on account of the enemies of this dynasty he added another eleven chapters, and in each chapter he set forth what was relevant to it" (*Siar al-moluk*, p. 8; tr., p. 5). The original thirty-nine chapters were prepared between 1086 and 1091, and the second part probably around 1091. Neẓām-al-Molk was dismissed from office early in 1092. The author of the appended note claims that he was given a copy of the manuscript just before Neẓām-al-Molk's fateful departure for Isfahan, several months after his dismissal from office (*Siar al-moluk*, p. 10; tr., pp. 5-6). The vizier was murdered before he reached Isfahan; and his sovereign, Malekšāh, died some thirty days later. The succession dispute following the sultan's death was finally resolved in 1105 when Moḥammad b. Malekšāh subdued all claimants to the Saljuq throne. This long span of uncertainty and crisis is cited by the librarian to explain his delay in revealing the book to the public (*Siar al-moluk*, p. 8; tr. p.6).

The opening chapter, “On the turn of Fortune’s wheel and in praise of the Master of the World,” is followed by another “On recognizing the extent of God’s grace towards kings,” which leads on to a discussion “On holding court for the redress of wrongs and practicing justice and virtue.” After chapters dealing with taxation, the necessity for constant inquiry into the affairs of viziers, land tenure, and ensuring the welfare of the peasantry, on gathering information on the performance of judges, governors, military men, landowners, and tax collectors, and the crucial role played by spies and informers, the author moves on to the topic of regal conduct. He advises the king against dispatching messages or orders while inebriated, to pick his boon companions wisely, to consult learned and experienced men, and other such matters of varying degrees of gravity. He reminds the king that envoys should be treated with a mixture of firmness and tact, and that there is a proper decorum for using bejeweled weapons, and that fodder should be kept ready at posting-houses and halting stations. The king should also refrain from making hasty decisions, a frequent plea in most mirrors for princes. He should pay his troops regularly, include soldiers from many ethnic groups in his army, and ensure that “the Torkmanān” (singular Torkman, as in the sources) are brought into his service as pages and part of court retinue. This section also includes chapters on the conduct of public and private audiences, military affairs, the role of various administrative and domestic employees of the king, the proper arrangements for feasting and banquets, and the importance of responding to petitions and pleas from soldiers, servants, and retainers.

The second part of *Siar al-moluk*, presumably written after the souring of the relationship between the king and the vizier, contains its more baffling and problematic sections. It begins with a discussion on the necessity of being compassionate, restoring tradition and custom, and the significance of titles. Neẓām-al-Molk advises the king not to bestow two appointments on the same individual, to secure employment for the needy, to enlist those of orthodox faith and sound lineage, and to keep followers of heretical sects and pernicious doctrines away from his government. The ending is conventional; the final three chapters deal with financial administration, the dispensing of justice, and provincial accounting practices. After his general introduction to the topic of heresy, and before his closing chapters on economic matters, he turns to a discussion of women, “those who wear the veil,” and underlings (*Siar al-moluk*, pp. 242-53; tr., pp. 179-87), which is linked to the subject of heresy. A literal interpretation of the conjunction of women and heresy (Spellberg, pp. 113-15) in *Siar al-moluk,* a rhetorical topos frequently appearing

in medieval historiography, has been criticized in recent scholarship (Meisami, 2006, pp. 56-57; Yavari, 2004). Women twined with heresy is an avatar of the incessant conflict between reason and passion, a topos frequently deployed in advice literature, where they are cast as the nemesis to both beneficent counsel and to its purveyor (Yavari, 2004, pp. 330-37). Drawing on the experiences of monarchs in the past, before and after the rise of Islam, Neẓām-al-Molk recounts in considerable detail the history of twenty uprisings against the state (including those of Mazdak, Bābak, Qarmaṭis [Carmatians], Bāṭenis), each and everyone motivated by religious ideologies (*Siar al-moluk*, pp. 254-330; tr., pp. 187-244).

To rule well, Neẓām-al-Molk prescribes that the king must learn to cultivate wisdom, control his passions, and love knowledge. Self-restraint is the cornerstone of just rule. Only if the king learns to rule himself will he be able reign over his subjects. Likewise, correct manners and an efficient administration of his household are a prerequisite for the successful administration of his kingdom and the setting in order of its affairs. Finally, what the king needs to do is to meditate on the past and the ways of his fallen predecessors, if only to avoid their mistakes. To avert God's wrath, he needs to be fair and equitable to his subjects; and to enjoy a long and peaceful reign, he needs to bridle his passions, avoid the errors of past rulers, and keep women, flatterers, and people of bad religion at a distance.

Much has been read into the depictions of variegated forms of alterity and forensic pathology in Neẓām-al-Molk's *Siar al-moluk.* However, and since tropes of bad religion, bad ethnicity, and bad gender (women) are found in the vast majority of mirrors from various historical and cultural provenances, pinning down such discussions as textual evidence for Saljuq policy or the vizier's personal preferences is questionable. It should be borne in mind, when reading the sections on bad religion, for example, that the vizier-cum-author is of a rite *(maḏhab)* other than that of his Saljuq masters. Neẓām-al-Molk writes of his *maḏhab*, and Ālp Arslān's (r. 1063-72) disapproval of it:

In all the world there are only two doctrines which are good and on the right path; one is that of Abu Ḥanifa and the other that of al-Šāfeʿi (Allah's mercy be upon them both) and all the rest are vanity and heresy. Now The Martyr Sultan (Allah's mercy upon him) was so strict and exact in his religious observances that he was often heard to say, 'What pity! if only my vazir were not of the Shafiʿi persuasion.' He was so exceedingly imperious and awe-inspiring and because he was so earnest and fanatical in his beliefs and

disapproved of the Shafiʿi rite I lived in constant fear of him (*Siar al-moluk*, p. 129; tr., p. 96).

The pairing of contraries is a recurrent feature of the complex political language of medieval advice literature, and although a superficial reading would yield an example of partisanship, Neẓām-al-Molk was praised in the medieval sources for his non-partisan politics (Hendušāh, p. 278; Yavari, 2008, pp. 47-69; 2014, pp. 95-142). Similarly, depictions of Shiʿis and Ismaʿilis in *Siar al-moluk*, which have been conventionally read as indications of Saljuq state policy or the personal views of its author, are in essence a recasting of a longstanding trope in political thought in Late Antiquity and throughout the medieval period. The heresiarch, or the revolutionary armed, not just with an ambition to overthrow the state, but also with an ideology that offered an alternative vision for political and spiritual fulfillment, was considered the gravest of threats. In an early manual of advice, *ʿAhd-e Ardašir*, for example, the ruler is warned against allowing a disguised heresiarch to coexist with a king, for eventually the heresiarch will triumph over the king, exploiting the inevitable incipient discontent among some of the royal subjects, and winning their hearts through his message (Anon., *ʿAhd-e Ardašir*, pp. 66-71). In *Siar al-moluk,* the king is advised to familiarize himself with religious precepts and law, for heresy and rebellion are considered coeval and co-terminous (*Siar al-moluk*, pp. 79-81; tr., pp. 59-60). In a similar vein, the sultan is warned against the Bāṭenis, whose religious propaganda is infused with a call to mutiny and sedition (*Siar al-moluk*, pp. 254-56, 282-311; tr., pp. 187-89, 208-31; Yavari, 2004, pp. 322-46).

That heresy and bad religion serve as synonyms for political turbulence and revolt is evidenced by the lumping together of uprisings against many religions, and in various historical periods. The culprit in every instance is the ruler who, lacking vigilance and rectitude, falls prey to falsehood, and cannot distinguish between good and bad faith. The passages chronicling the chilling atrocities of Abu Ṭāher Jannābi, the Carmatian rebel leader (Canard, p. 453) is one such instance. Abu Ṭāher is to have lambasted the established monotheistic religions to proclaim that three men have brought about the downfall of mankind: a shepherd, a healer, and a camel herder (*Siar al-moluk*, p. 309; tr., pp. 229-30). The allusion to Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad is plain enough. In essence, the rebel leader's diatribe against monotheistic religions and his subsequent atrocities graphically depict the horrors of revolutionary attempts to challenge established beliefs and reverse all hallowed norms in

order to create a new world order, through shock and awe, if need be. The sections on bad religion in *Siar al-moluk* are reflections on the considerable sway of ideology over any given political order and its potential detrimental impact rather than reiteration of hidebound religious conservatism.

Authenticity debate. The question whether *Siar al-moluk* was entirely or partially penned by the great vizier himself, or whether it is a case of later attempts to enhance the importance of the text by appending the name of an eminent statesman to it, has been the subject of scholarly debate ever since Boris N. Zakhoder posed the question in the mid-twentieth century (see below). Hubert Darke, arguing for sole authorship by Neẓām-al-Molk, pointed, inter alia, to internal evidence in chapter 21, where the author relates a conversation in which other parties refer to him as the vizier of Malekšāh's father, Sultan Ālp Arslān (*Siar al-moluk,* ed. Darke, "Editor's Introduction," p. 21; tr., pp. xi-xii). Extra-textual evidence adds credence to his views. *Siar al-moluk* is mentioned, without naming its author, in Abu Ḥāmed Moḥammad Ḡazāli's (d. 1111) *Naṣiḥat al-moluk* (Book of counsel for kings), indicating that the book was already known to the public sometime between 1105 and 1112 (Ḡazāli, p. 122, nn. 4 and 5). Explicit reference to Neẓām-al-Molk as *ṣāḥeb-e Siar al-moluk* (Ebn Bibi, p. 217) is made in Ebn Bibi's a*l-Awāmer al-ʿalāʾiyyeh fi'l-omur al-ʿalāʾiyyeh,* completed in 680/1281. Ebn Bibi, a secretary at the court of the Saljūq ʿAlā-al-Din Keyqobād (r. 1284, 1293-94, and 1301-03), devotes a section (Ebn Bibi, pp. 211-18) to his late master's manifold qualities as an ideal prince and praises him for following the virtuous conduct and the ethical precepts set by Maḥmud the Ghaznavid (r. 998-1030) and Qābus b. Vošmgir (r. 978-81 and 997-1012), the Ziārid prince. He further praises the late monarch for his constant perusal of *Kimiā-ye saʿādat* and *Siar al-moluk* of Neżām-al-Molk (Ebn Bibi, p. 217).

Explicit attribution of *Siar al-moluk* to Neẓām-al-Molk is also found in Hendušāh's history completed in 1323 (Hendušāh, pp. 194-95) and in Moʿin-al-Din Moḥammad al-Esfezāri's late fifteenth century history of Herat (Esfezāri pp. 121-9). The story of Rāst Ravešn, the bad vizier, in *Naṣiḥat al-moluk* (pp. 154-56) is in places a verbatim iteration of *Siar al-moluk* (ed. Darke, pp. 31-40; tr., pp. 22-31). *Siar al-moluk* is also mentioned in a medieval prose version of the Alexander legend in Persian (its anonymous compiler fl. sometime between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries; *Eskandar nāma*, p. 240). *Siar al-moluk* was popular enough by the late twelfth century for Neẓāmi Ganjavi (d. ca. 1209) to follow it closely in much of his own rendering of several moral

exempla and even signal his familiarity with the wording of the text by directly incorporating some phrases from it in his *Haft peykar* (ed. Ritter, pp. 270-89; especially the episode concerning Rāst Ravešn). Advice from Neẓām-al-Molk to Malekšāh, without specific reference to *Siar al-moluk*, features prominently in medieval mirrors for princes and didactic manuals. One such example is found in the Andalusian Sufi Abu Bakr al-Ṭorṭuši's (d. 1126) *Serāj al-moluk*. Neẓām-al-Molk tells Malekšāh that by befriending men of learning and piety (i.e., Sufis and jurists), he has procured for the sultan majesty in this world and salvation in the next (Ṭorṭuši, II, pp. 513-15).

The authenticity of the text was first questioned in Zakhoder's Russian translation, completed from Charles Schefer's edition of *Siar al-moluk* and published in 1949. He claimed that at least in the iteration that has come down to us, *Siar al-moluk* is a reworking of a shorter but authentic text by Neẓām-al-Molk the vizier. He argued that the text displays disparate genres when it oscillates from instructions to the sultan to stories and anecdotes more befitting a less august audience, that it is replete with anachronisms and factual inaccuracies irreconcilable with Neẓām-al-Molk's stature, and that it mentions people and events that postdate Neẓām-al-Molk. The anachronisms are not found in the Naḵjavāni manuscript copied in 1274, on which Darke's edition (pp. 11-15; tr. p. xi) is based. The eclectic mix in question is a standard feature of mirrors for princes, with a genealogy going back to didactic texts in ancient Greece and India, as well as in medieval Europe. Inasmuch as mixed origins and hybrid content are common to mirrors from various cultural and historical milieus, it makes for a weak argument to use them to question the authenticity of specific works (Yavari, 2004, pp. 322-46; 2014, pp. 7-44).

Two recent studies also question Neẓām-al-Molk's authorship. Marta Simidchieva (pp. 675-84) concedes that most of the inconsistencies and inaccuracies highlighted in the Schefer and Zakhoder editions are absent from the Naḵjavāni manuscript. However, she still does not fully agree with Darke's claim that in the Naḵjavāni manuscript we have a text directly and entirely descended from Neẓām-al-Molk's autograph (Simidchieva, pp. 663-65). Darke's manuscript, she concludes, contains a preface by the librarian at Malekšāh's court—or scribe, as Schefer has it—which would have been absent in a direct descendant from the autograph. Focusing on structural aspects of *Siar al-moluk*, Simidchieva objects to Zakhoder's assertion that its eclectic mix undermines its authenticity. She agrees with Darke that both parts of the text, as Darke had them divided, were penned by the vizier himself (Simidchieva,

pp. 670-71).

Alexey A. Khismatulin's argument against Darke and Simidchieva is at least partially based on a refutation of Ḡazāli's authorship of *Naṣiḥat al-moluk* (Khismatulin, 2008, pp. 30-66). As mentioned earlier, Ḡazāli's advice manual contains a direct reference to a book called *Siar al-moluk* authored by Neẓām-al-Molk. Khismatulin contends that "[t]he part in question, however, is wrongly ascribed by some scholars to al-Ghazāli" (p. 32). But Ḡazāli's is not the only early reference to *Siar al-moluk's* authorship as noted above.

For the most part, Khismatulin has argued, after a detailed collation of discrepancies in the various manuscripts of the text, that logical contradictions and inconsistencies within the text make its attribution to Neẓām-al-Molk highly unlikely. According to Khismatulin, *Siar al-moluk*, as we have it, is a forgery, authored by Moḥammad Maḡrebi, librarian at Malekšāh's court, based on a shorter piece by the vizier himself. "Evidently, Maghrebi, working as a scribe in the sultan's private depository, had access to the state documents" and used them to embellish and decorate with tales and stories an authentic shorter text by Neẓām-al-Molk. The foreword, the last eleven chapters, and the afterword "are the work of Maghrebi from beginning to end" (Khismatulin, 2008, p. 46).

Moreover, he maintains, somewhat fancifully, that the name Moḥammad Maḡrebi is a pseudonym adopted by Moʿezzi Nišāburi (d. ca 1125-27), the famous poet laureate at the Saljuq court, who concocted the forgery to bolster his credentials as a bona fide adviser to the sultan, thus enhancing his status at the court (Khismatulin 2008, pp. 53-65). More recently, Khismatulin has revised his earlier claims, ascribing the mix-up to an error of a scribe (Khismatulin, 2015, p. 116), who in Moʿezzi's name turned the letter *ʿayn* into *ḡayn*, simply by adding a dot to it, and omitted the dot from the *za*, making it into *ra,* thus transfiguring the poet's name to Maḡrebi. Khismatulin's evidence for Moʿezzi's authorship is based on an anonymous *qaṣida* appended to a single manuscript of *Siar al-moluk* (Schefer, pp. 211-13; Khismatulin, 2015, pp. 109-18), copied in 1294 from a manuscript allegedly scribed in 1168 in Urumiya (Schefer, p. 11). Schefer based his edition on that manuscript, although he noted its poor condition, significant lacunae, and many inconsistencies (Schefer, pp. 11-12; Darke, 1978, pp. xi-xxi).

The attribution of the anonymous *qaṣida* to Moʿezzi, however, is problematic in several regards. ʿAbbās Eqbāl Āštiāni (d. 1956), whose edition of *Siar al-*

moluk was published in 1941, a year after his edition of Moʿezzi's poems, and who was therefore presumably aware of the existence of this *qaṣida*, does not include it in his *divān* of Moʿezzi. Khismatulin mentions the discrepancy without probing the absence or addressing its implications for his hypothesis (Khismatulin, 2015, p. 116-7).

Furthermore, in his position as poet laureate at the Saljuq court, Moʿezzi penned numerous encomia to Malekšāh and his sons, and to Nezām-al-Molk and those of his descendants who later achieved high office. A number of such poems are included in his *Divān* (pp. 223-27, 235-37, 240-51, 405, 406-8, 448), and an excerpt from one of his eulogies for Malekšāh is a staple of medieval accounts of the vizierate of Neẓām-al-Molk (Moʿezzi, *Divān*, p. 405; Rāvandi, p. 135; the same is cited, inter alia, in Ḵᵛāndamir, *Dastur al-wozarā'*, p. 168; and in Moṣleh-al-Din Moḥammad Lāri, *Mer'āt al-advār va merqāt al-aḵbār*, I, p. 527; for a fuller discussion of Moʿezzi's poems to Neẓām-al-Molk, which, incidentally, does not include the *qaṣida* under discussion, see Tetley, pp. 114-27). This frequently cited excerpt allegorizes the passing of the sultan and his vizier in rapid succession to an act of divine justice. But not one of Amir Moʿezzi's known encomia for the vizier or the sultan or their progeny—which together comprise the bulk of his known compositions—includes a reference or an allusion to a book penned by the vizier. The first 21 distiches of the anonymous *qaṣida,* however, are dedicated exclusively to the vizier's book, *ta'lif yādgār-e Neẓām-e niku siar* (Schefer, p. 212; Khismatulin, 2015, pp. 109-15).

It seems likely that the anonymous *qaṣida* appended to the Urumiya manuscript is a patchwork with verses culled from Moʿezzi's various poems, deliberately emulating the poet laureate's style. This perhaps accounts for Eqbāl's decision not to include it in his edition of Moʿezzi's *divān.* Distiches 28 and 29 of the anonymous *qaṣida,* for example, are culled from an encomium to Moʾayyad-al-Molk b. Neẓām-al-Molk (d. 1101), vizier to Barkiāroq b. Malekšāh (r. 1094-1105; Moʿezzi, *Divān*, p. 252; cf. Khismatulin, 2015, p. 116). Distiches 22 through 47 praise Ḡiāṯ-al-Din Moḥammad b. Malekšāh (r. 1105-18) whereas distiches 1 through 21 that offer a topical summary of the contents of *Siar al-moluk* refer to a past sultan and a fallen vizier. To that point must be added Tetley's claim that Moʿezzi never served as an official panegyrist in Ḡiāṯ-al-Din's court (Tetley, p. 141; Eqbāl's introduction to Moʿezzi's *Divān* (p. *ḥ*) corroborates Tetley), although a few poems dedicated to him are found in his *Divān* (e.g., p. 581 for one example). That this synthetic *qaṣida* is appended to a

highly imperfect compilation, copied almost two centuries after the *Siar al-moluk*'s composition has no bearing on its authenticity.

Other minor problems plague Khismatulin's attempt to disambiguate a mystery he has painstakingly crafted. A good part of his pointillist argument, based on piling up disparate points to convey an overall picture, demands a standardized use of technical vocabulary, bereft of varying nuances, hardly characteristic of pre-modern historiography. For example, fixing the job description of a *nadim* as "keeper of private books" at the Saljuq court (Khismatulin, 2015, p. 177) is problematic, as it jars with, among others, Neẓām-al-Molk's own usage (*Siar al-moluk*, pp. 120-22; tr., pp. 89-90) as "confidant" and "companion." Another example regards the 30 long years spent by the *qaṣida's* composer in Saljuq service (Khismatulin, 2008, pp. 35, 36, 55, 58; 2015, p. 99, 116). The idea of 30 years to indicate long and dedicated apprenticeship or service otherwise, enjoys salient presence in medieval Persian literature. Examples are Ferdowsi's 30 years toil in writing his monumental work, and passages in Rāvandi's *Rāḥat al-ṣodur* (pp. 12-14) where 30 years in search of knowledge, or 20 years spent in religious seminaries, is shorthand for undisputed mastery in the religious sciences. That Moʿezzi elsewhere lamented his 30 long years in service that had not been properly recognized by the sultan (Khismatulin, 2015, p. 116) is hardly evidence for authorship of *Siar al-moluk.*

The work was first edited and published, with a translation into French, by Charles Schefer as *Siasset Nameh-Traité du gouvernement: Composé pour le sultan Melik-Chah par le vizir Nizam oul-Moulk* (3 vols., Paris, 1891-97; Figure 1). Schefer's edition was based on poorly preserved manuscripts containing historical and textual inconsistencies severe enough to cast doubt on the text's authenticity. There were also subsequent lithograph and later print editions in Bombay, and later in Tehran, without any critical apparatus (for a list see the "Editor's Introduction," in ed. Darke, pp, 19-20); the possible exception is the 1941 Tehran edition by ʿAbbās Eqbāl Āštiāni, which contained useful footnotes for students (*Siāsat-nāma,* ed. ʿAbbās Eqbāl, reprinted Tehran, 1990). Using Schefer's text and other manuscripts, Hubert Darke translated *Siar al-moluk* into English (*The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, tr. Hubert Darke, New Haven, 1960). Shortly thereafter, he published a Persian edition of his own (*Siar al-moluk*, Tehran, 1970). Darke revised his earlier edition by using a well preserved manuscript of *Siar al-moluk* in the Naḵjavāni Collection housed in the University of Tabriz (*Siar al-moluk,* 2nd ed., Tehran, 1968). He also

published a new English translation of the revised Persian text (*The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, 2nd ed., London, 1978). Moḥammad Esteʿlāmi published a new annotated edition (*Siar al-moluk, bāzšenāsi, naqd va taḥlil,* Tehran, 2006), as did Ḥojjat-Allāh Aṣil (*Bargozida va šarḥ-e Siāsat-nāma*, Tehran, 2002).

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