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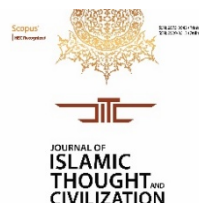
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Review Article

Classical Islamic Political Thought: A Perspective on *Al-Ādāb As-Sultāniyya*

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al-Māwardī, Abū al-Ḥasan. *Tas'hīl al-Nazar wa-Ta'jīl al-Zafar: fī akhlāq al-Malik wa siyāsāt al-Mulk*. Ridwan al-Sayyid (Ed.). Beirut: Ibn Al Azraq Center for Political Heritage Studies, 2012. 407 pages. ISBN: 52-87000-41427-2.

Al-Ṭurūshī, Abū Bakr. *Sirāj al-Mulūk*. Beirut: Dar al-Minhaj, 2016. 832 pages. ISBN: 978-9953-498-18-8.

Introduction

From the raw egalitarian Quranic narratives on the idea of justice to the varied aspects of the prophetic idea of the *polis*, the genre of political thought has emerged as an extension of the larger epistemic worldview of Islam. The relationship between the ruler and the ruled has remained, for long, a part of a larger political project of Muslim imagination and a theoretical framework for political thinking. Yet, sub-genres like *al-Ādāb As-Sultāniyya* (literature of *Sultanic* ethics) and other concepts such as *Hisba* have not been generally well served by scholarship except within rather narrow constraints of the political history insofar as only a small number of individual thinkers have been the focus of particular interest. Basic research and monographic studies in the field of *al-Ādāb As-Sultāniyya* have generally been rather sparse. Consequently, systematic and synthetic studies – as opposed to summary statements – have been few and far between. This review article is part of the researcher's larger project to excavate a few works in the genre of *al-Ādāb As-Sultāniyya* and investigate the development of this field in the classical period.

Classical Islamic political thought was not an independent field of study, and its contributions can be found in different types of writing that span three disciplines with distinct methods, aims, orientations and conclusions. These disciplines are: *fiqh*, such as *al-Ahkām As-Sultāniyya w'al-Wilāyat al-Diniyya* by al-Māwardī; Islamic philosophy such as *al-Madīna al-Fādila* by al-Farabi; and *al-Ādāb As-Sultāniyya* (the main focus of this article). For instance, unlike *al-Ahkām As-Sultāniyya* books, *al-Ādāb As-Sultāniyya* does not deal with *fiqh* and legal issues related to the legitimacy of authority i.e., when a sultan should be removed from his position, and how he can be appointed. And unlike the philosophy concentration on the city like in *al-Madīna al-Fādila*.

Also known as *Ādāb al-Mulūk*¹, *al-Ādāb As-Sultāniyya* is at best comparable to the genre of “mirror of princes” in the Western Academia. In that sense, *al-Ādāb As-Sultāniyya* focuses on the normative aspects of the leader and political authority in general. It is a genre related to classical Muslim contribution to politics, predominantly directed at the political leaders. It can be defined as a code of conduct for political power. It comprises advice on the behavioral rules and ethical instructions to leaders, judges, advisors, ministers, and generally all who work in the area of governance. For instance, modalities of establishing and promoting the idea of justice, how the ruler

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¹In most of the books on *al-ādāb As-Sultāniyya*, ‘*mulk*’ and ‘*sultan*’ indicate authority. For more details see Makram Abbès, *al-Islam wa al-Siyāsa fī al-Asir al-Wasīt*, [Islam and politics in the classical age] trans., Mohamed Haj Salem (Beirut: Nohoudh Center For Studies and Publications, 2020), 25-27.

should behave with his subjects, select his ministers and servants, and act with his enemies. *Al-ādāb As-Sultāniyya* does not aim to theorize; instead, it contains practical norms of conduct. Thus, this genre is typically written in a simple language – in comparison to *Ahkām As-Sultāniyya* and *al-Siyāsa al-Shar‘iyya* – since it focuses primarily on the Prophetic notion of reminding.

Al-Ādāb As-Sultāniyya began with Ibn al-Muqaffā² (724-759), who can be considered the founding father of *al-Ādāb As-Sultāniyya*. The tens of books and manuscripts are found under the genre of *al-Adab As-Sultāniyya*. The genre itself can be traced to three main sources: Persian-Sassanian political experience, Greek wisdom, and the Arab-Islamic experiences. Basically, *al-Adab As-Sultāniyya* scholarship have relied on marrying the knowledge and wisdom of the above three sources within an Islamic framework to provide sources of ethical codes and advice for political authority. Looking at the historical trajectory of literature produced in the field of Islamic political thought, it is safe to claim that *al-Ahkām As-Sultāniyya* and Islamic philosophy have received a much greater attention in academia compared to *al-Ādāb As-Sultāniyya*. Despite the latter’s rich depth and variety, it remains understudied. This review article analyzes two landmark books in this genre, *Tas’hīl al-Nazar wa-Ta’jīl al-Zafar: fī akhlāq al-Malik wa siyāsāt al-Mulk* (Facilitation consideration and acceleration the victory in the ethics of the King and Kingdom’s policy) by al-Māwardī (977-1058), and *Sirāj al-Mulūk* (Lamp of the kings) by al-Ṭurtūshī (1059-1126). This specific selection was made due to insightful contributions of these two profound thinkers and the comprehensive as well as seminal nature of these engaging works. Likewise, it can also be argued that the choice reflects a geographical distribution: al-Māwardī from Iraq, and al-Ṭurtūshī from Andalusia. Though each of them is from a different continent, many of the issues considered are common.

2. Tas’hīl al-Nazar

Abū al-Hasan al-Māwardī was one of the most famous Shafi’i jurists of the 11th CE, and arguably the first Muslim political theorist, and ethics scholar.³ Mustafa Çağrıncı maintains that it is conceivable to say that al-Māwardī was the leading figure among all scholars and intellectuals in the classical period of Islam.⁴ *Tas’hīl al-Nazar* has an introduction and two main parts. In his concise introduction, al-Māwardī asserts that the differences among peoples, division of labor, and diversity of needs are the fundamental reasons for humanity to establish ties, band together, aid each other, and cooperate. Moreover, he contends that people’s diversity necessitates for them to have a sultan who has the power to subordinate in order to achieve righteousness and justice. The first part is devoted to the norms and ethics that the king or the sultan ought to have. Al-Māwardī elaborates on ethics and human nature. He classifies two types of *akhlāq* (ethics): *gharizī* (innate) and *muktasab* (acquired). Then he emphasizes that the possessor of authority must pay more attention to ethics and self-reform than ordinary people because ethics is the instrument of his power and the pillar of his command. The order of everything depends on ethics; thus, the ruler should constantly refine his acquired ethics, character, and self-discipline to maintain his rule. Al-Māwardī explores the concept of *fadīlah* (virtue), arguing there is a basis and outcome for virtue. The basis is reason, and its result

²For instance, his book *Kitāb al-Ādāb al-Kabīr*.

³There is good amount of academic resources, which illuminate al-Māwardī’s personality, judicial and political positions, and scholarship. For instance, see, Bekir Alboğa, *Lehranalytische Betrachtung bei Abū 'l-Ḥasan al Māwardī (974-1058): Oberster Richter des 4./10. Jahrhunderts im islamischen Kalifat der Abbasiden; sein Leben und seine Gedankenwelt* [Teaching-Analytical Examination in the Case of Abu al Hassan al Mawardi (974-1058): Chief Judge of the 4th/10th Century in the Islamic Caliphate of the Abbasids; His Life and his World of Thought] (Köln: Divanverlag, 2014), 1-129. Also, Ahmad Mubarak al-Baghdadi, “The Political Thought of Abu Al-Hassan Al-Mawardi,” Ph.D. diss. (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1981), 1-54.

⁴Mustafa Çağrıncı, *İslam Düşüncesinde ahlâki*, (Istanbul: Dem Yayınları, 2014), 29.

is justice. Reason and justice are associates, and all other virtues locate between them, and there are no virtues without reason and justice. Likewise, vice has a base and an outcome; the former is foolishness and the latter ignorance.

Al-Māwardī explains that acquired ethics, be it virtue or vice, are generated from three drives: reason, judgment and *hawá*. The first, reason, determines with high certainty what is right - and what is wrong. Reason has a stable, and firm independence to decide and judge. The second, judgment, which gives correct thoughts superiority over wrong and false thoughts, depends on reason. Consequently, reason, through the process of judging and thinking, becomes the fundamental source of virtues. The third, *hawá* (strong passion), is the opposite of reason and the source of evil and immorality. Thus, the sultan ought to endeavor and work hard to eliminate any portion of *hawá* when acting deliberately upon his will. Al-Māwardī quotes Wahb b. Munabbih, who articulates, “*Hawá* and reason wrestle in the heart, so whichever prevails will have the upper hand [on the personality].”⁵ The emphasis is that one should start with oneself in applying, discipline, and virtues, and then apply these in interacting with others. Al-Māwardī says that “if he [the king] starts with mastering himself, he could be more capable of mastering others.”⁶ Al-Māwardī describes a set of ethics that the king should assume, such as being patient, trustworthy and honest, generous, and deferring to the advice of those who are trustworthy, while avoiding negative attributions such as arrogance, jealousy, and pessimism.

The second part of the book is dedicated to how politics functions and how the political leader ought to pursue politics. Al-Māwardī elaborates on the functioning of politics in the public sphere. For him, the foundations of kingship are two. First, instituting the kingship which has three elements. One element is establishment of religion. He highlights the significance of religion by quoting the founder of the Sasanian Empire, Ardashir I, who declares that “Religion and kingship are twins, one cannot maintain itself without the other [...]”⁷. The second is establishment of power. Still another is establishment of wealth. Furthermore, to al-Māwardī the kingship's policies contain four imperatives: a) constructing towns and cities, b) guarding the people, c) administering the army (the most crucial matter according to al-Māwardī), and d) managing the treasury and wealth.

Al-Māwardī warns the ruler of the potential decline of his authority which, he observes, occurs in times of corruption. This supposed corruption is the outcome of either divine decree or human causes. Al-Māwardī suggests that the former must be treated by reforming the intention of the leaders and people and cleansing the corruption of hearts. However, if corruption originates from human reasons, it must be treated according to the particular cause and by implementing more justice and equality. The second reason for a potential decline is when the leader's servants and ministers fail in their obedience and loyalty; the leader can tackle this issue by being just. For instance, he should not stand with the strong against the weak, and he must apply the rules to everyone equally. In the end, al-Māwardī reassert that the ruler must start employing all kinds of virtues and imitating the virtuous.

3. Sirāj al-Mulūk

Abū Bakr al-Ṭurtūshī⁸ was one of the most noteworthy Andalusian Muslim political scholars of the 12th century; nevertheless, there are almost no studies on him in comparison to al-Māwardī. Al-Ṭurtūshī was born a year after al-Māwardī's death. *Sirāj al-Mulūk* is his most well-known work.

⁵Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī, *Tas'hīl al-Nazar wa-ta'jīl al-Zafar*, Ridwan al-Sayyid (ed.), (Beirut: Ibn Al Azraq Center for Political Heritage Studies, 2012), 165.

⁶Ibid., 169.

⁷Ibid., 249.

⁸There are almost no academic resources in English on al-Ṭurtūshī personality, positions, or scholarship. See, Muharrem Kılıç, “Turtūşe: Endülüslü Mâlikî fikhî âlimi ve muhaddis” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 41, no. 1, (2021): 430-1.

Sirāj al-Mulūk consists of 64 chapters. In the introduction, al-Ṭurṭūshī articulates that he has composed advice from the great experiences of several previous nations such as the Arab, the Persians, and the Greeks. Al-Ṭurṭūshī maintains that he has taken from their pearls of wisdom and benevolent insights and united these with wisdom from the holy Quran. He has incorporated a number of biographies of the Prophet Mohammad in his book, as well as the rightly-guided Caliphs, the Prophet's companions. Unlike al-Māwardī, al-Ṭurṭūshī offered his book as a present to the Caliph.

Chapter 1 is the biggest, and it is dedicated to 'the preaching to kings'; here al-Ṭurṭūshī asserts the urgent need of kings to listen to warnings and advice. Among other questions, he wonders where the previous nations and kings are. "Where are the previous owners of power and authority? Where are those who led armies? Where are the constructors and residents of palaces?" Then he directly advises the sultan, "O man, contemplate those who have passed away from among the kings, the descendants of the kings, who have passed away from the nations and generations."⁹ Al-Ṭurṭūshī asserts the inevitability of death; he wants to make the sultan humble and ascetic. In the following chapter, al-Ṭurṭūshī emphasizes the role of scholars and righteous in offering good counsel to the sultan. For instance, al-Ṭurṭūshī shares the words he said to one of the kings of Egypt, where he advised him to support the oppressed, and help the deprived.

In chapters 3-5, al-Ṭurṭūshī explains how important the governors and judges are in establishing and administering justice. He asserts that there is no higher rank in the eyes of God than a just ruler except a prophet or a close angel.¹⁰ If the sultan is fair, justice spreads among his subjects, who as a result feel themselves compelled to establish equality, deal truthfully, and adhere to the laws of justice, where injustice disappears. The just character of the ruler will be reflected in every aspect of the subjects' lives. In chapters 6-9, office of the sultan has been evaluated. Al-Ṭurṭūshī argues that without a strong sultan, people will neither have order and well-being nor will they enjoy life. If the sultan's rule is disturbed, corruption prevails on everyone. Chapters 10-20 discuss the qualities and virtues of the sultan. For instance, being moderate, and leaving rudeness. Also, justice has been explained; al-Ṭurṭūshī observes that justice is the basis of authority [*mulk*], the permanence of states, and the basis for all sovereignty. He contends that there are qualities that destroy *mulk*: such as arrogance and self-admiration. Self-admiration leads to despotism and to a disregard for consultation.¹¹ He suggests several good qualities that the sultan should adhere to, such as patience, forbearance, reliance, and generosity. Chapters 21-22, pertain to the sultan's necessity for acquiring knowledge. Al-Ṭurṭūshī quotes Ali ibn Abi Talib, who says that "‘ilm [knowledge] is better than wealth, ‘ilm guards you, while you have to guard wealth [...], ‘ilm is ruler while wealth is ruled over by it [...]"¹²

In chapter 23, al-Ṭurṭūshī expounds on the meaning of reason. Chapters 24-25 concern ministers and associates and their attributes. Al-Ṭurṭūshī asserts that the kings should mingle only with people of reason and learning, people of noble and valuable opinions, those of experience and consideration. Chapters 26-30 concern the qualities that enhance the sultan's qualities and capacities, such as tolerance. Al-Ṭurṭūshī reminds the sultan that "Be aware that it is better to make mistakes in pardoning a thousand cases than to commit one mistake in punishment".¹³ He argues that forbearance is one of the noblest virtues, and generosity is one of the pillars and crowns of *mulk*. In chapter 31, he warns against greed and stinginess. Chapter 32 exhorts the ruler to observe patience and its worthy consequences. Patience is seen as the basis of every virtue, and every noble trait and advantage can be gained through it. Chapter 33 covers the maintenance of secrets. Chapters 34-37 are dedicated to

⁹Abū Bakr Al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Sirāj al-Mulūk* (Beirut: Dar al-Minhaj, 2016), 105.

¹⁰Ibid., 186.

¹¹Ibid., 212.

¹²Ibid., 241.

¹³Ibid., 275.

advising the king to be calm in dealing with difficulties and crises. Chapters 38-43 are on the subjects of the sultan. Like, al-Māwardī, al-Ṭurṭūshī believes that one central pillar to reform the ruled people is when the sultan reforms himself. He approaches the sultan and recommends, “it is impossible to reform your subject when you are corrupt”.¹⁴

In Chapters 44-45 al-Ṭurṭūshī counsels the sultan's companions that “Teach the sultan as if you are learning from him, and direct him as if you are consulting him”.¹⁵ Chapters 46-51 are on administering the army, tax, public treasury, and minority. Al-Ṭurṭūshī warns the sultan to save, not to extravagantly spend, money; he claims this mistake was the primary reason for losing Andalusia. Chapters 52-54 pertain to regulating governors and state employees. Al-Ṭurṭūshī elucidates that for governors, state employees are like weapons: if the governors lose trustworthy employees, it is like a fighter losing his weapon.¹⁶ Chapter 55 concerns *husn al-khulq* (noble manners). Chapter 56-57 concerns oppression, slandering, and their calamitous consequences for the individual and society. Chapter 58 is about the wisdom of retribution. Chapter 59 is on how relief comes after hardship; al-Ṭurṭūshī narrates several examples to prove this. He tells the story of the Prophet Yusuf and the difficulties he experienced leading, however, to an auspicious end. Chapter 60 discusses bravery and its outcomes. For al-Ṭurṭūshī, bravery is the mother of good qualities and the fountain of virtues, and whoever loses it will not have the completed virtue. Chapter 61 is about managing wars. He counsels the warriors that “O soldiers, reduce the disagreement over the leaders; there is no victory if there are disputes”.¹⁷ Chapter 62 concerns fate and destiny: nothing that occurs in the world is outside of the purview of God’s knowledge and will. The last two chapters comprise stories and reports about previous kings along with scattered wisdom and proverbs. He reminds the sultan that the most challenging thing is to know oneself; it is the lucky person who learns from others’ mistakes, and it is the unfortunate who learns from his own.

4. Conclusion

This review article has tried to focus on the contents of two leading books in *al-ādāb As-Sulṭāniyya* as a genre within the classical Islamic corpus. However, there is a noticeable lack of literature on *al-ādāb As-Sulṭāniyya*. Al-Māwardī’s book represents a seminal example; he quotes Greek philosophers like Aristotle, Sasanian ones like Anushirvan, and many Islamic sources. Al-Māwardī was engaged in writing on politics as he worked under the auspices of two caliphates besides his work as a chief judge. He was also a scholar of ethics, which is remarkably apparent in almost every page of his book. In a similar vein, al-Ṭurṭūshī exhibits broad knowledge and wisdom. He cites from different civilizations and nations. It is safe to argue that al-Māwardī’s book is more innovative than al-Ṭurṭūshī. Al-Māwardī structures his book and elaborates his ideas more systematically. However, al-Ṭurṭūshī depends predominantly on citations and stories: one can read several pages of quotations with his own words amounting to a few paragraphs. The last chapter (64) is a good example of this, being primarily a collection of proverbs and maxims. Additionally, al-Ṭurṭūshī repeats many quotations and paragraphs from al-Māwardī, for instance those regarding patience and the meaning of reason. Yet, this is not to undervalue al-Ṭurṭūshī’s contribution since, in *al-ādāb As-Sulṭāniyya*, there are recurring themes such as justice, advice on how to manage the army, mastering the self before mastering others, and being trustworthy. To conclude, *al-ādāb As-Sulṭāniyya* is a genre which deals with moral prescription to political authority. It peers deep into the inalienable connection between politics and ethics. Having many works that remain untranslated into

¹⁴Ibid., 409.

¹⁵Ibid., 422.

¹⁶Ibid., 474.

¹⁷Ibid., 603.

English, the genre of *Al-ādāb As-Sulṭāniyya* holds rich potential for deeper research and consideration in the academia.

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