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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Image of Sulṭān in Islamic Mirror of Princes

Fadi Zatari[*] , **Omar Fili**[**]

Abstract
This article seeks to explore the claims that *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature legitimized tyranny, involving subverting religion to be a tool in the hands of political authorities and legitimizing the absolute authority of the ruler above the people, justifying his actions on a religious basis to establish an unquestioned and consequence-free rule. The article questions this approach for its anachronism and misunderstanding of *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature's nature and objectives regarding its views on political authority and tyranny. The work's significant focus is the primary sources of *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* authors to get a more comprehensive image in order to affirm whether there was a systematic effort to legitimize tyranny or whether it an affirmation of just rule. As a result of this study and a close reading of *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* works, not only was it made clear that the *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* genre and its authors did not intend to legitimize tyranny, but In fact, the genre and its authors vehemently opposed the transgressions of rulers.

Keywords
Al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah, Ādāb al-Mulūk, Tyranny, Justice, Consultation, and Mirror of Princes

* **Corresponding Author:** Fadi Zatari (Asst. Prof. Dr.), Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Istanbul, Turkiye. E-mail: Fadi.zatari@izu.edu.tr ORCID: 0000-0002-6413-7407

** Omar Fili (Research Assistant), Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, The Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA), Istanbul, Turkiye. E-mail: Omar.fili@std.izu.edu.tr ORCID: 0000-0003-0421-1350

Introduction

Islamic political thought is a broad field that covers a multitude of concerns and topics while diverging into different genres according to the topic of primary concern, ranging from arguments for legitimacy and governance to social conditions and normative-practical guides. The three main genres that comprise Islamic political thought are: first, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭānīyah*, which are concerned with legal arguments for governance and its legitimacy embodied by works such as al-Māwardī's *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭānīyah wa-al-Wilāyāt al-dīnīyah* and Ibn al-Azraq's *Badā'i' al-Silk fī Ṭabā'i' al-Malik*; second, philosophical works like that of Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-Shifā'* and al-Fārābī *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah,* which were under the influence of Hellenic thought. Finally is *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* or*, Ādāb al-Mulūk*,[1] which is the Islamic world's equivalent of Mirrors for Prince's writings in the West.[2]

The third genre, *Ādāb al-Mulūk*, is the concern of this paper. *Ādāb al-Mulūk* received significant attention starting from the Abbasid period with its effort to glean wisdom from past civilizations and reformulate it in an Islamic framework. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d.759) is attributed with pioneering this genre, whose works, such as *al-Ādāb al-Kabīr*, were an inspiration for similar works later on. This genre is concerned with the context of the ruling power as it is, and seeks to elaborate on its basis according to a rich background of histories of past rulers, be it the Arabs or the Caliphs. It weaves together a tradition that deals with the reality of the world, in the sense of establishing certain precepts which could guide rulers for the betterment of their lands.[3] The main differences between the *Al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* genre, on the one hand, and the Islamic Philosophers tradition and *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭānīyah*

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1   Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah and Ādāb al-Mulūk are used interchangeably.

2   *Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭānīyah wa-al-Wilāyāt al-dīnīyah* [The Ordinances of Government] by al-Māwardī is considered the main source and example for jurisprudential writings on politics, covering arguments for legitimacy, authority and legal discourse on the Caliphate*. Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭānīyah* was such a seminal work that a genre of Islamic political thought was named after it. *Badāsilk fī Ṭabā'i' al-Mulk* [Marvel of State Conduct, and the Nature of Authority] by Ibn al-Azraq falls into the same genre and covers the same topics, though it shows much influence from the *Al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* works with its engagement with the ethical-moral essence of politics and community, arguing that a political order with a sound moral system enjoys prosperity and outlives a corrupt one. Meanwhile, the works of *Kitāb al-Shifā'* [The Book on Cure] and *Kitāb Ārā' ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* [The Book on Opinions on the People of the Virtuous City], were an effort by Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī to synthesize Hellenic cosmology, philosophy, and political thought with Islamic thought, giving a naturalistic and reason-based system of how sound politics should be and why philosophers are best suited for ruling a perfect social order.

3   Makram Abbès. *Al-Islām wa-al-Siyāsīyah fī al-'aṣr al-Wasīṭ* [Islam and Politics in the Classical Age]. Trans. Muhammed Haj Salim. Beirut: Nohoudh Center for Studies and Publications, (2020): 22.

genres on the other lie in the reasons of writing and focus, which resulted in its unique handling of political authority that warranted a separate genre.

Al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah did not engage in the theoretical basis of government or its legitimizing factors. Political association was taken as a fact of reality which was necessary due to human nature needing a stable social order for its survival.[4] This approach was also the opposite of what philosophers worked on. There was no ideal political order that ought to be materialized in order to achieve good rule; thus, there were no philosopher-kings or perfected states and populations. *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* was only concerned with the here and now, and how to make it work efficiently with minimum harm or incompetence. It simply did not concern itself with legitimizing political authority or defining its ideal form. The method used examples from the ancients and their collective experiences as beneficial tools for society regardless of any regime's structure or longevity. If it was beneficial,[5] a change in ruling authority was welcome. As such, *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* genre was made as a guide for rulers on how to best run their respective realms with maximum benefit for collective human existence. It is a practical manual centered on the ruler's best conduct.

Some modern studies have engaged with *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* and attempted to explain their goal and nature without taking into consideration its logic, methodology, and goals; the resulting outcome was a misinterpretation of what *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* authors intended by their works. The writings of Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī (d.2010) and ʿAlī Ūmlīl (1940-) are a case in point. They both delved into the al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah genre and accused it of establishing tyrannical rule void of any principles of equity and justice. The genre legitimized unjust governance in Islamic political thought, making it unquestionable. In an almost conspiratorial fashion, these writers fused what they saw as tyrannical in pre-Islamic imperial traditions with Islam. This study aims to reassess al-Jābirī and Ūmlīl's conclusions by looking at the original *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* works to see if there was in fact an establishment of authoritarian ideals, or whether it merely a misunderstanding of the context of *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah*. The goal of the study is to pinpoint how political authority was perceived, what its purpose was, and what its ethical limits according to *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* classics were.

Another criticism of *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature is that the Persianized Quranic and prophetic discourse caused this political discourse to follow principles that are not found in Islamic doctrines. This meant that the goals and form of *al-*

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4   Abbès, al-*Islām wa-al-siyāsīyah fī al-ʿaṣr al-Wasīṭ*, 27.

5   Abbès, *al-Islām wa-al-siyāsīyah fī al-ʿaṣr al-Wasīṭ*, 32-33.

Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah are not necessarily Islamic but subservient to Persian rule. The emphasis on obedience, for example, is not something taken as a part of Islamic doctrines and does not fit its religious narrative.[6] The study draws upon a methodology, through which it analyzes and compares the foremost classical works of *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* for a better understanding of some main concepts such as *Naṣīḥa* (Advice), *Shūrá* (Consultation) and *ʿadl* (Justice). The goal is to understand the role of these concepts and their relation to the ruler to arrive at whether *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature legitimized tyranny or just governance and general welfare.

Perception of Al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah as a source of tyranny

According to its critics, *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature rationalizes tyranny as the natural order of things and clothes submission to authority as an ethical duty. In the view of its critics, while the authors of *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* are to blame, scribes get the greatest part of the blame because they implanted ideas of unconditional obedience, unquestioned authority, and the centralization of power. Islam is placed under the power of rulers to ensure control and to trivialize power sharing or the role of *Shūrá* (i.e., consultation). Political power is only held by the singular figure, and only the highest circles of society may have some say in decision making. Critics of the genre claim that scribes imported imperial Sasanian political culture and subverted Arab-Islamic culture, which ultimately imposed tyranny all the while disguising their arguments as religious precepts.

The Moroccan scholar, ʿAlī Ūmlīl claimed that *Ādāb al-Mulūk* authors had close ties with ruling authorities, and they pushed for the idea that political power is a craft with a specific set of rules; they resorted to teaching the new Islamic imperium what these rules were. To Ūmlīl, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ saw the Arab conquerors as new to politics, they had to be taught properly the ways of governance, and what better example to follow than Sasanian imperial culture.[7] Ūmlīl argued that Ibn Muqaffaʿ believed both political and religious authority should be under the ruler's control. The sharīʿah could be a source of opposition to tyranny and therefore it had to be controlled. According to Ūmlīl, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ argued that religion is limited to specific fields, and the rest is up for the intellect to explore. Of course, the ruler's intellect has the exclusive right to political thinking.

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6   Muḥammad Jabrūn, *Nash'at al-Fikr al-siyāsī al-Islāmī wa-taṭawwuruh* [The origin of Islamic Political Thought and its Evolution], (Doha: The Forum for Arab and International Relations, 2015), 164-165.

7   ʿAlī Ūmlīl, *al-Sulṭah al-Thaqāfiyah wa-al-Sulṭah al-Siyāsīyah* [The Cultural Authority and the Political Authority], (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies 1998), 62-63.

The result is that no form of *Shūrá* is binding, since it is there only when a ruler desires; it is also not accepted except by the top elites.[8] *Shūrá* is not an obligation, but a function used by authorities whenever convenient. As for the common people, Ūmlīl sees that they were disregarded as "senseless masses." To further his argument, he quotes al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868) to showcase how commoners are negatively perceived and should not be educated, for it would pose a risk to rulers if they were educated. On the other hand, the livelihood and welfare of scribes are with the rulers and not the commoners. This latter group are close for their importance but kept at distance for the threat they pose to the elites.[9] Knowledge of politics is an elitist field of study which is accessible to rulers and taught by philosophers and scribes, establishing a paternalistic image of politics focused on a top-bottom reform system. Umlil summarizes his point by saying:

> And he (the scribe) does not wait for reforms from the commoners, and there is no sign of it in this literature. There is a paternalistic image of authority in the literature, the ruler has to be the caretaker of the common people as a father or a shepherd, they are his responsibility. The care of the father in exchange for the obedience of the sons.[10]

According to Ūmlīl, the embedded imperial culture in the *Ādāb al-Mulūk* genre heralded a fundamental change in Islamic political thought, particularly in the writings of jurists who appropriated the genre and clothed it in religious garb. It was an attempt to preserve their influence on the political scene, as well as to claim that they were the only ones who could testify to the legitimacy of a ruler. The result, per his argument, was the ultimate victory of the scribes over the jurists in the battle for ideological political influence. The state took an authoritarian form of government.

The scribes mandated authoritarianism, and the jurists gave it religious legitimacy by aligning the logic of the political with the general goals of Sharī'ah.[11] Sharī'ah was subdued ultimately to political protocols and not the opposite; legitimacy was dictated by political protocols and not the opposite. This is reflected in the works of jurists, Ūmlīl gave a list of scholarly opinions as an example to prove his point as the following. He starts with Abū Bakr al-Ṭurṭūshī (d.1127), pointing toward political systems not based on religion, that sound policies are sufficient to build a successful political order while religion alone is not enough. Then Ibn 'Aqīl (d. 1119) commented that the claims of the absence of politics when not compliant with Sharī'ah are false, showcasing a divide between religion and competent

8   Ūmlīl, *al-Sulṭah al-Thaqāfīyah wa-al-sulṭah al-siyāsīyah*, 67.
9   Ūmlīl, *al-Sulṭah al-Thaqāfīyah wa-al-sulṭah al-siyāsīyah*, 99.
10   Ūmlīl, *al-Sulṭah al-Thaqāfīyah wa-al-sulṭah al-siyāsīyah*, 128-129.
11   Ūmlīl, *al-Sulṭah al-Thaqāfīyah wa-al-sulṭah al-siyāsīyah*, 135.

policies. Ūmlīl completes his list with al-Māwardī (d.1058),[12] who, Ūmlīl claims, agreed on the same theme that religion alone cannot establish political authority, but rather the former was subdued to the latter despite claiming that they are two sides of the same coin. The affirmation of authoritarian-style political order was accompanied by jurists defending the system while advocating the maintenance of an Islamic facade, an attempt to cover the subjection of religion to political whims while legitimizing an imported Sassanid political ethos.

> The Caliphate became a legitimacy made by authority and not a legitimacy that makes the authority, the jurists had to accommodate all of this.[13]

Al-Jabiri's criticism does not diverge from Ūmlīl's, but he adds what he calls "the crisis of ethos". The argument al-Jābirī proposes is that Arab cultural heritage depended on imported elements from Persian, Greek, and Gnostic legacies; purer Arab-Islamic writings only emerged as a response to this intrusion.[14] The importing was part of a crisis in the ethical system, which prompted different responses to fill the gap. This was reflected in the early civil wars of Islamic history and the formation of early sects. The chaos of internal strife needed external ethos to shore up cracks and secure the unity of state and society. Religion served as a unifier and a source of legitimacy for rulers. Obedience to rulers became part of obeying God; such ideas were readily available in Persian legacies and only needed its adoption under Islamic terms.

Al-Jābirī puts the blame on scribes and authors; their messages were the first to establish principles of obedience in the Umayyad period. Al-Jābirī saw it as a shift from Bedouin ideals of equality and humility to imperial cultures of unquestionable authority by using religious rhetoric.[15] Essentially, the shift to an imperial centralized political system from a Bedouin one was seen as necessary for having a functioning state, which involved using religion as justification for obedience. This process does not have its origin in al-Qur'ān and al-Sunnah for al-Jābirī, for there are no

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12 For more on al-Māwardī see, Bekir Alboğa, *Lehranalytische Betrachtung bei Abū ˏl-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

13 Ūmlīl, *al-Sulṭah al-Thaqāfīyah wa-al-sulṭah al-siyāsīyah*, 136-137.

14 Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī, *al-ʿAql al-akhlāqī al-ʿArabī: dirāsah taḥlīlīyah naqdīyah li-nuẓum al-Qayyim fī al-Thaqāfah al-ʿArabīyah* [The Arab Ethical Mind: a Critical Analytical Study of ethical systems in Arab Culture], (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2001), 59.

15 Al-Jābirī, *al-ʿAql al-akhlāqī al-ʿArabī: dirāsah taḥlīlīyah naqdīyah li-nuẓum al-Qayyim fī al-Thaqāfah al-ʿArabīyah*, 126-129.

teachings of obedience to rulers in scripture. That process began with Muʿāwiyah's rule and the later literary add-ons by scribes to justify rule of force which were taken from Persian traditions. The resulting mixture was then adopted and furthered by Abbasid authority.[16]

Al-Jābirī sought to observe how political authority shifted from a tribal system devoid of religious-political terms to one that uses religion for its purposes and legitimation. To that end, he went on to elaborate on the Persian origins of using religion as a method of maintaining political power, and his reference was Ardashir I (d.242), the founder of the Sassanid Empire and the scribes' role model. The Persian model, as shown by Ardashir, was focused on controlling religion. Al-Jābirī used this example to showcase the danger of letting religion loose without utilizing it; thus it had to be used as a tool to secure the stability of the political order over the people.[17] Al-Jābirī perceived this as the exclusion of the people from political processes and an establishment of a rigid hierarchy justified by both religion and force, political authority thus became a divine gift from God and justice became a voluntary offering from the ruler.[18] The ultimate result, as al-Jābirī proposes, is the establishment of political authority on the basis of faith via hijacking the latter for the purposes of the former, wherein a system is established that prevents religious figures from turning on the rulers, while using faith as a chain to control the population and turn people into servants within a social hierarchy. The import of Persian Sassanid political ethos had turned tyranny into the norm, which is supported by the idea of the divine rule of kings.[19]

Justice vs. Tyranny in Al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah

Observing the nature of authority in the works of *Al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah*, however, shows a different image. Unlike what was argued by Ūmlīl and al-Jābirī, justice, consultation, and advice are looked upon as cardinal necessities for good governance. When scrutinized, one finds that primary sources attempt to establish justice as the hallmark of a good ruler. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, the father of *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature, emphasized this in his works, for instance, in *al-Adab al-Kabīr*:

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16   Al-Jābirī, *al-ʿAql al-akhlāqī al-ʿArabī: dirāsah taḥlīlīyah naqdīyah li-nuẓum al-Qayyim fī al-Thaqāfah al-ʿArabīyah*, 149-150.

17   Al-Jābirī, *al-ʿAql al-akhlāqī al-ʿArabī: dirāsah taḥlīlīyah naqdīyah li-nuẓum al-Qayyim fī al-Thaqāfah al-ʿArabīyah*, 157.

18   Al-Jābirī, *al-ʿAql al-akhlāqī al-ʿArabī: dirāsah taḥlīlīyah naqdīyah li-nuẓum al-Qayyim fī al-Thaqāfah al-ʿArabīyah*, 164.

19   Al-Jābirī, *al-ʿAql al-akhlāqī al-ʿArabī: dirāsah taḥlīlīyah naqdīyah li-nuẓum al-Qayyim fī al-Thaqāfah al-ʿArabīyah*, 170.

There is no wealth better than reason, and no amicable comrade better than consultation.[20]

All other Muslim authors of the genre followed suit.[21] Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ states that a ruler cannot do without aid and a minister, and they, in turn, cannot benefit without mutual fellowship and sound advice; no sense of fellowship can be cultivated without advice and consultation.

It is safe to argue that justice is the chief of political virtues, as shown in different works of *al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah;* by setting it as the bedrock on which creation stands, a state will risk corruption and total collapse if justice is not observed, and *ipso facto* human existence in its entirety is under threat. For instance, Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī (d.1038) affirms in his work *Ādāb al-Mulūk* that the heavens and earth were established on justice, which makes it an integral part of existence's well-being. All nations agree on the centrality of justice around which politics, authority, and dominion revolve.[22] Just authority is the undisputed best governance that lasts the longest, brings security, eliminates fear, disciplines the unruly, and prospers the most; a ruler causes destitution and corruption if he transgresses. Besides, unjust rulers are examples for others for their abysmal records and disastrous reign, for they suffer shaking dominion and poverty; such rulers are better off falling from a high cliff, according to al-Thaʿālibī.[23]

Moreover, al-Māwardī corroborates this vision by placing justice as the chief virtue rooted in sound reason; the resulting good intellect produces all virtues as a consequence of the victory of man's good instincts over the bad ones.[24] Cultivation of goodness has plenty of emphasis as part of Muslim beliefs. Al-Māwardī quotes a Ḥadīth to drive this point home in regard to rulers. The Prophet said, "Two types

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20   Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *Aal-Adab al-kabīr wa-al-adab al-Ṣaghīr* [The Major Ethic and the Minor Ethic], (Dār Sader, [nd]), 27.

21   For More on Ibn al-Muqaffa›, see Judith Josephson. «The Multicultural Background of the Kitāb al-ādāb al-kabīr by Abdallāh Ibn al-Muqaffa.» *Current Issues in the Analysis of Semitic Grammar and Lexicon* 56, no. 3 (2005): 166.

22   For more on al-Thaʾālibī, see, Bilal Orfali. "The Works of Abū Manṣūr Al-Thaʾālibī (350-429/961-1039)." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 40, no. 3 (2009): 273–318. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20720591.

23   Abū Manṣūr Al-Thaʿālibī, *Adāb al-mulūk* [The Ethics of Kings], edit. Jalīl al-ʿAṭīyah. (Beirut, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2005), 89-91.

24   Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī. *Taḥṣīl al-naẓar wa Taʿjīl alẓafar* [Facilitation Consideration and Acceleration the Victory in the Ethics of the King and Kingdom's policy], edited by Ridwan al-Sayyid. (Beirut: Ibn Al Azraq Center for Political Heritage Studies, 2012),134. For an English comprehensive review of *Taḥṣīl al-naẓar wa Taʿjīl alẓafar,* see Zatari, Fadi. 2022. "Classical Islamic Political Thought: A Perspective on Al-Âdāb As-Sulṭāniyya". Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization 12 (1), 247-52. https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.121.14.

of people if they are good then the people will be good, and if they are corrupt then the people will be corrupt, they are the scholars and the rulers."[25]

It is the duty of the Ruler to diligently oversee public affairs so he will not derail justice by either incompetence or heavy handedness. Departing from the median path kills virtue per al-Māwardī.[26] Justice is to ensure the welfare of the governed population, without which a ruler cannot achieve justice or fulfill his duties. This includes ensuring the safety of their abodes, resolving differences, enforcing laws, and presiding over their general affairs. Establishing a good welfare order ensures justice is served, if this is not observed then a state will not function since its people are riddled with disputes and injustice devours rights. This shows that a little transgression by rulers causes great harm since they follow disastrous desires, which leads to the breakdown of social order.[27]

Virtue is essential for sound governance, as Ibn Nubātah al-Miṣrī (d.1366) gives details on essential virtue sources that bring about justice. In his work, he considers justice as an outcome of reason, bravery, and modesty; such things are earned by intermingling with sages and learning from wise men regarding the great affairs of politics and governance, which sharpens the mind and facilitates the practice of justice.[28] The ideal result of virtue cultivation is the median path, by which Ibn Nubātah defines politics as the management that leads to the betterment of both the world and hereafter; a path with discipline without cruelty and leniency without weakness; that is, basing decisions on what is beneficial which is included under the rubric of justice.[29]

On another level, scholars of *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature have warned against injustice, and how it harms worldly affairs as God takes away blessings from the lands run by transgressors and tyrants. Abū Bakr al-Ṭurṭūshī (d.1127) elaborates

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25 Al-Māwardī, *Taḥṣīl al-naẓar wa Taʿjīl alẓafar*, 169.

26 Al-Māwardī, *Taḥṣīl al-naẓar wa Taʿjīl alẓafar*, 231.

27 al-Māwardī, *Taḥṣīl al-naẓar wa Taʿjīl alẓafar*, 264-276.

28 For more on how rulers are perceived to be in constant need of others to fulfill justice, see also al-Māwardī's *Kitāb Durar al-sulūk fī Siyāsat al-mulūk* [the Book of Pearls of Conduct in the Governance of Kings]. 91-93.

29 Al-Miṣrī Ibn Nubātah, *Al-Mukhtār min Kitāb tadbīr al-Duwal* [Excerpts from the book of governing states]. Ed. Salwá Qandīl. (Beirut, Ibn al-Azraq Center for Political Heritage Studies, 2012), 102.

on this by giving experienced examples.[30]. One is that the Sulṭān in the Maghreb knew of a sugarcane orchard owned by a woman from which a single cane could fill a goblet. The Sulṭān wanted that orchard for himself. He visited the orchard and spoke to the woman to verify the claims, but he questioned her on seeing sugarcane only producing less than half a goblet. The woman said the plentiful nature of her orchard is true, but perhaps the Sulṭān's intentions changed it for the worse so the blessing of the sugarcane was taken away.[31]

In other words, the warning against tyranny transcends worldly dangers as it threatens the soul and its fate in the afterlife. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d.1111) expounds on this aspect in his *al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*. He considers authority a blessing for the one who fulfills its duties but an unmatched misery for those who fail in their tasks; justice is of such religious importance, as signaled by a number of Ḥadīth al-Ghazālī quotes such as, "The Justice of one day by the ruler is favored by God more than worshiping for seventy years."[32] Also, "Two from my Ummah are barred from my intercession, a tyrant king and an innovator in the faith who transgressed its boundaries."[33]

Al-Ghazālī mentions these reports and several other Ḥadīths to emphasize the piety-value of Justice.[34] For a ruler to maintain the soundness of his soul and to avoid injustice, they must consult the scholars and also be wary of corrupt scholars who may put their position in the afterlife in jeopardy. A genuine consultant is known for his lack of greed and selfish desire by which his advice is known to be sincere.[35] The ruler's duty of upholding justice becomes personal. He must oversee officials and balance the activity of scholars so that injustice does not have a place to grow since if it does, then it will be his responsibility too.

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30 For more on Abu Bakr   al-Ṭurṭūshī see, Kılıç, Muharrem. "Turtûşe: Endülüslü Mâlikî fıkıh âlimi ve muhaddis" [al-Ṭurṭūshī: Andalusian Maliki Jurist and Narrator Prophetic Tradition] *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* 41 (2021): 430-1. For an English comprehensive review of *Sirāj al-Mulūk*, Zatari, Fadi. 2022. "Classical Islamic Political Thought: A Perspective on *Al-Âdāb As-Sulṭāniyya"*. Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization 12 (1), 247-52. https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.121.14.

31 Abū Bakr al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Sirāj al-Mulūk* [Lamp of Kings] (Beirut: Dar al-Minhaj, 2016), 179.

32 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* [The Spilled Gold Dust in the Advice of Kings], (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 1988),16.

33 al-Ghazālī, *al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, 16

34 al-Ghazālī, *al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, 16-17.

35 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, 18.

Furthermore, al-Ghazālī emphasizes that for justice to set foot, it needs a sound reason to realize reality as it is and not be lost in false appearances. Thus, a ruler who wants authority for luxury is like a beast. If it is for the crown, then it is of womanly traits unfitting for kingship, and seeking power for executing anger-driven desire is ignorance; these cloud reason, and if so, then justice cannot take root, and the ruler responsible for this corruption will be thrown in hellfire.[36] Thus, a ruler has the duty to maintain and protect them as they are the basis of civilization, and so with this, justice is achieved; if such weight is placed on good governance, then how come *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* authors advocate tyranny?

Al-Shūrá and Naṣīḥa vs. Tyranny

The importance of virtue, and its centrality to justice and its practice are demonstratively tied into the connection between the ruler and their environment. As mentioned above, the interaction between rulers and sages, with its virtue-bringing nature, leads to the principles of *al-Shūrá* "consultation" and *Naṣīḥa* "advice," for how would virtues be cultivated without them? Al-Māwardī emphasized both *al-Shūrá* and *Naṣīḥa* by pointing out how a ruler needs both when faced with a decision on an ambivalent affair; it is demanded from them to take the advice of wise men and consult experienced people who possess perseverance and trust, finishing his point by quoting the Ḥadīth that goes as follows:

> Consult, for the one seeking counsel receives aid, and the consultant is trusted, and beware of desire as it is the lead for the miserable.[37]

A single man's opinion is flawed as it could fall under the influence of desire and other emotions that cloud judgment, a decision could be made according to these, which could lead to corruption of governance. Listening to advisors eases work as they guide towards what is objectively beneficial. This avoids the pain of regret and brings happiness by achieving maximum gains with less effort than going on to govern alone.[38] Al-Thaʿālibī's instrumental rationalization of it showcases another approach to the indispensability of *al-Shūrá*, it is a tool to be used in managing governance and different opinions about it. *Al-Shūrá* is an instrument to achieve the best results in the world of politics, if that tool is weakened or abandoned then the whole apparatus becomes corrupt.[39]

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36 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, 22-23

37 al-Māwardī, *Taḥṣīl al-naẓar wa Taʿjīl alẓafar*, 207.

38 al-Māwardī, *Taḥṣīl al-naẓar wa Taʿjīl alẓafar*, 210.

39 In the work of the Andalusi scholar Ibn al-Azraq, it is argued that both the ruler and ruled need consultations to bring about sound opinion; al-shūrá is one of the foundations of politics and political authority, with all actors needing it indispensably. See Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Azraq, *Badāʾiʿ al-silk fī Ṭabāʾiʿ al-mulk* [Marvel of State conduct, and the nature of authority]. ed. ʿAlī Sāmī al-Nashshā. (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2008), 261-264.

Thus, consulting and depending on people of wisdom is a must, even if they are challenging to handle for a ruler, with them a healthy political order is established, harm is prevented; it is a pillar of competent governance and the first step before decision making, *Shūrá* brings patience in difficult times since a collectivity of the wise is further from making mistakes than the single one.[40]

Likewise, *Naṣīḥa* is central for al-Thaʿālibī. He quotes from the prophetic tradition, which supports his argument that advice has a religious role in government as well as being instrumental. It is the duty of the ruler to listen to advice on all matters; it is the source of the correct opinions that whenever they become clear, they must be followed, as shown by the Ḥadīth: "The religion is *Naṣīḥa*, they said, to whom O Messenger of Allah? The Prophet said, To Allah, His Book, His Messenger, and to the leaders of the Muslims and their commoners."[41]

Ibn Nubātah goes into detail regarding the relations between the ruler and his advisors and councils; it is a state of cooperation bound by the goal of the common good, which all attempt to achieve. Ibn Nubātah points to how crucial it is to refer to people of sound opinions during decision-making, for they are the ones of experience, and *Shūrá* becomes the pillar of sound policymaking as a result of this particular dynamic. It is important also to avoid people of desire and ignorance when rulers consult and that whoever is on his council should be picked carefully.[42] Aside from his consulters of *Shūrá*, a ruler also needs those who inform him of the state's general affairs, especially those who give him *Naṣīḥa* regarding their governance and their enemies as well.

Competent rulers always keep those who give advice close to them; they also honor them and reward them for their efforts.[43] *Naṣīḥa* is as crucial as *Shūrá*. Ibn Nubātah warns the ruler against corrupt advisors. He gives the example of the Caliph Abū Muḥammad Mūsá ibn al-Mahdī al-Hādī (d.786), publicly proclaiming that the only advice that should be accepted is one that is for the sake of Allah and the general public of the Muslims. He continues by adding that *Naṣīḥa* and *Shūrá* are essential for the principle of Justice because of their relevance to the general well-being of Muslims, and with them, decisions related to appointing governors and organizing the military are taken. It is therefore important to be vigilant about what state officials are doing and how their duties are carried out.

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40 Abū Manṣūr Al-Thaʿālibī, *Tuḥfat al-Wizāra* [The Ornament of the Ministers], (Cairo, Dār al-Āfāq al-ʿArabīyah, 2000), 86-87.

41 Al-Thaʿālibī, *Tuḥfat al-Wizāra*, 104.

42 Ibn Nubātah, *Al-Mukhtār min Kitāb tadbīr al-Duwal*, 132.

43 Ibn Nubātah, *Al-Mukhtār min Kitāb tadbīr al-Duwal*, 148.

Ibn Nubātah adds that a ruler should approach officials with discipline that is balanced with affability. In the practice of advice and securing their livelihood, a ruler should not overburden advisors with duties nor punish them for every mistake, and above all, the ruler must accept consultation and verify the truth of what he receives.[44] Above all what has been said, though Ibn Nubātah makes *Naṣīḥa* and *Shūrá* exclusive in the elite elements of society, he did not forget the common person; they are never forgotten, for they have intrinsic value as they are the pillar of civilization, the center of the circle of governance. With them the state's territories are maintained, frontiers are secured, and the fruits of governance appear in the lands.[45]

Rethinking al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah

The flourishing of *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah's* works coincided with the rise of Islamic political doctrines and the resurrection of Sunni power during the 10th and the 11th centuries, with narratives full of exalted kings conditioned by how much service they rendered the Muslim community and how just and competent they were. *Al-Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah's* narrative grouping authority and religion together is a way to bring Islamic doctrine and ethics into circles of power in the form of advice that resonates most with new dynasties seeking to learn from older ones.[46]

In *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature, perceiving power and how authority is exercised is not a simple justification of tyranny. It is a multi-dimensional realm connected to certain precepts of religion, ethics, and history. Authors of the *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* were concerned with the functional aspect of political practice. Their works were manuals to be learned for the purpose of practicality. *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* paints an image of authority laden with rituals and protocols that define where power lies and how it is practiced, so the political structure is governed by symbols of power and legitimacy even though the socio-political system is hierarchical. This system of symbols of legitimacy showcases how power is practiced as a witnessed reality that rulers cannot escape.[47] In addition, it is simplistic to say that *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* authors placed religion as a servant of political forces which fully controlled it; critics by researchers like al-Jābirī and Ūmlīl had, as a result of such simplicity, fallen into a misinterpretation of the genre and its purpose.

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44   Ibn Nubātah, *Al-Mukhtār min Kitāb tadbīr al-Duwal*, 177.

45   Ibn Nubātah, *Al-Mukhtār min Kitāb tadbīr al-Duwal*, 178.

46   Black Anthony, *The History of Islamic Political Thought. From the Prophet to the Present.* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011.) 113.

47   'Izz al-Dīn Al-'Allām, *Al-Ādāb al-sulṭānīyah dirāsah fī Binyat wa thawābit al-khiṭāb al-siyāsī* [The Mirror of Sulṭāns: a Study in the Structure and Principles of Political Writing], (Kuwait: 'Ālam al-Ma'rifah, 2006), 126.

The position of *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* authors towards phrases like "the Sulṭān is God's shadow on earth" is to be understood in their methodology of how they dealt with political reality, one that was taken as a natural force without a desire to change it into some ideal form. The state and political authority are not questioned for how they came about or how one could further their theory; the *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* authors dealt with them as realities to be understood for their importance. As a result, any phrase like the aforementioned one is to be taken as indeed an exaltation of the ruler and his rank, but an exaltation based on an instrumental view of said rank within a larger nomos that governs all humanity so as to avoid destructive chaos. That said, nomos and its human affairs are encompassed in *Sharī'ah* and its stipulations of justice, so following the nomos of justice is considered a religious activity.

The instrumental understanding of why authority is revered is not directed towards breaking religion so it would be a tool in the hands of monarchs, but to build a logic-based ethics discourse that can create harmony in both power and faith so that *Sharī'ah* and the 'Ulamā' (i.e., Muslim scholars) remain engaged with reality since faith holds the soul of any political entity.[48] There is no true division between faith and politics as a result of understanding what *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* authors aimed for; it was an attempt to organize the role of both in tandem, believing in a separation, or the subservience of one to the other, make it seem that the 'Ulamā,' or the Rulers, were either hypocrites in their beliefs or unaware of what was happening.

The observations made in *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature showed the need for politics and faith in one another under a civilizational umbrella that governed them by setting certain objectives, including the greater good of the believers. A ruler may have hard power, but he will need faith on an existential level since it is the soul of his society that gives cohesion, unity, and organization necessary to have political structures in the first place. Authority survives with faith, while faith is strengthened with authority. Religion is a wider system that encompasses a society, including its political sphere. *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature's instrumental approach and its realistic perspective of political authority asserts that certain protocols even govern rulers in their political sphere, and a larger nomos dictated by reality enforced the practice of justice, lest the political order fall apart. The storytelling done by *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* authors is to hammer this point home by bringing religious teachings, historical lessons, and stories that make justice a core principle for survival and prosperity on a metaphysical and worldly level.

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48   Al-'Allām, *Al-Ādāb al-sulṭānīyah dirāsah fī Binyat wa thawābit al-khiṭāb al-siyāsī*, 137.

Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah literature aims beyond the legal prescriptions of Fiqh jurisprudence as part of its focus on human action as a fruit of either good or bad aspects of the self, and it is a guide to proper conduct and prevention from lowliness written as a manual by those close to centers of power. So it is not prescriptive in its nature that a ruler has to follow it like a constitution, but rather it is a manual to guide the ruler to have the best ethical conduct possible; it is a road to God that goes parallel to the legal prescriptions of Sharī'ah.[49] This genre of political literature took virtue from whatever could send the message across, from Ḥadīths, histories of Persians, Romans, and the Arabs before and after the coming of Islam, *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* fits the political reality so it could make it the best version of itself on the pillars of an the Islamic based ethical paradigm that is addressed in a high literary form to the regime of the day. The idea that the literature is Persianized and thus made it lose a large chunk of its supposed Islamic identity is not entirely true as well; there is no definitive opposition against obedience to authority as a tenant, it is also expressed that in *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature that if a ruler and his regime are just then it is only logical to obey, as in complete one's duty, and preserve good order, which is also based on inspired religious ethics.[50]

Conclusion

Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah or Ādāb al-Mulūk literature has received substantial criticism for being an enabler of tyrannical rule via legitimizing Persian style rule, through incorporating religious justifications for authoritarian rule. It is important to note that *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature did not seek to conceptualize political theories or systemize legal stipulations for it; its concern was the ethical dimension of authority by producing works that function as practical manuals for rulers to act according to sound principles.

As for the accusation of supporting tyranny, it is evident that *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature is abundant with warnings against tyrannical rulers, that rulers who transgress doom themselves and their peoples due to their misconduct. Furthermore, the literature hammers home the importance of justice as the main pillar of politics

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49   Jabrūn*, Nash'at al-Fikr al-siyāsī al-Islāmī wa-taṭawwuruh*, 159.

50   It is found in various *Ādāb al-Mulūk* books that obedience is only natural, it is important to keep in mind that the writers took reality as it is, and within Islamic belief, there are no objections to learning from different civilizations which had effective governing philosophies and institutions. This is only an attesting to *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature›s openness to beneficial ideas, of course, granted that such Ideas do not go counter to Islamic doctrine. However, since Persian systems of rule maintained justice and competence at the time better than other systems, it became logical to adopt them since ensuring justice is a religious obligation, as the article explained. For more on obedience, see al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Sirāj al-Mulūk*, 220.

and consulting, along with advice being the basis for decision making. The accusation of tyranny stems from a modernist dislike of pre-modern monarchical governance. It is important to keep in mind that modern concepts of authoritarianism cannot be used to analyze pre-modern states.[51] Al-Jābirī and Ūmlīl were being anachronistic in their analysis of *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature, in addition to not recognizing the anti-tyrannical rhetoric used in the works themselves. For instance, *al-Shūrá* and *Naṣīḥa*, the *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* or Ādāb al-Mulūk "used interchangeably" were simply guides for rulers to improve themselves and the pre-existing political system at the time. Lastly, the accusation that *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* authors of Persianized Islamic doctrines are not quite accurate themselves, the literature shows the ability of Islamic political thinkers to adopt diverse elements from other civilizations without losing primary religious objectives such as justice. These issues come from how understudied *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* are in comparison to *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭānīyah* or Islamic philosophy, which creates a kind of conflation between *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* and its objectives and other genres that have different concerns. More studies ought to be made on the *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* to truly appreciate the projects its authors embarked on.

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51 As an example of this see Kamāl 'Abd al-Laṭīf, *Fī al-istibdād: baḥth fī al-Turāth al-Islāmī* [On Tyranny, a Study on Islamic Heritage], (Beirut, al-Maaref Forum, 2011), in which he clearly states that political authority sought to control religion, and *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* literature legitimized tyranny within the Islamic context by copying Sassanid modes of governance, not realizing that modernist hatred for social hierarchies and the monarchical rule does not serve to understand the *Ādāb al-Sulṭānīyah* genre well and causes unnecessary vilification of an understudied part of Islamic political thought.

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