

HUKÛMET AND DEVLET

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In an essay written in about 1837, the Ottoman statesman Sadık Rıfat Pasha uses the phrase *düvel-i Avrupa hükûmetleri*, in a context where these words clearly mean “the governments of the states of Europe”¹. The words *devlet* and *hukûmet* were already in common use at that time, but the formulation in this phrase, with the implied distinction between the state (*devlet*) as an abstract and permanent embodiment of authority, and the government (*hukûmet*) as the human and impermanent body of persons exercising that authority, is new in Ottoman and therefore in Islamic usage.

The normal word for government in modern Turkish and Arabic is *hukûmet*, *hukûma*. Used in much the same sense as English “government” or French “gouvernement”, it is standard and common throughout the Arabicspeaking lands and in Turkey at the present time—so common indeed that in word-counts which have been made of modern Arabic prose, *hukûma* ranks among the words of most frequent occurrence, ahead of several quite ordinary prepositions². The word is old, and is attested in Arabic from the earliest of times; its use in the sense of “government” however dates only from the 19th century. In classical Arabic usage it was a verbal noun meaning the act or office of adjudication, of dispensing justice³. It could be used in this sense irrespective of whether the person so acting was a sovereign, a judge, or merely an arbitrator. The frequently quoted *hadîth* that “an hour of justice in

¹ *Avrupanın ahvaline dair risale, in Muntahabat-i asar-i Rıfat Paşa* (İstanbul, n.d.), p. 5.

² See for example J.M. Landau, *A Word Count of Modern Arabic Prose*, (New York, 1959), p. 333; M. Brill and others *The Basic Word list of the Arabic Daily Newspaper*, (Jerusalem, 1940), p. 21.

³ See for example Abu'l Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. Cairo, 1345/1926-1927), xii, p. 134 “*fa-innaka qāḍīn bi'l-hukūmati 'ālim*”—“you are a qadi skilled in the administration of justice”. Other examples in *Aghānī*, xi, pp. 63, 165; Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-Akhhbār*, (Cairo, 1383/1963) i, p. 67; Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-Tarbī wa'l-Tadwīr*, ed. C. Pellat, (Damascus 1955), i, 16, and in the verses cited in the classical Arabic lexica, e.g. *Lisān al-'Arab*, xiv, p. 95; xv, pp. 31, 177, 304, xvi, p. 41, *Tāj al-'Arūs*, ix, p. 68.

hukūma is better than 60 years of worship”⁴ refers clearly to the administration of justice and not -as in some modern interpretations- to the conduct of government.

The root *ḥ.k.m.*, in Arabic and in some other Semitic languages, expresses the related basic notions of judgment and wisdom. In some Semitic languages, notably Hebrew, it is the sense of wisdom that prevailed. In Arabic the sense of wisdom or even knowledge is present, as for example in *ḥakīm*, a sage, and hence a physician, but it is the sense of judgment or adjudication that is most usual. In the course of time, the root came to connote political as well as judicial authority. Under the Seljuqs and later rulers, the term *ḥukūma*, usually in its Persian or Turkish form (*ḥukūmat*, *ḥukūmet*), was used to denote the office or function of the governor, *ḥākīm*, usually provincial or local. In Ottoman usage, while retaining its judicial connotation, it often occurs in the sense of governorship, i.e., the obtaining, holding, or tenure of office of a governor. By the 17th century the word is in common use in Ottoman texts. In addition to the specialized sense of governorship, it occurs in the more general sense of government or administration, e.g., in the expression *mahall* or *makarr-i ḥukūmet*, meaning the seat of government or administrative center of a country or province. It is also used when discussing different types or forms of government, abroad as for example in Kâtib Çelebi’s discussion of the different types of government or regime prevailing in Europe, namely monarchy, aristocracy and democracy⁵

By the end of the 18th century, we find the word *ḥukūma* / *ḥukūmet* used in both Turkish and Arabic in a wider and more general sense of rule, of exercising authority. It appears in this sense in the Arabic version of a letter sent by General Menou to the Diwan in Cairo, in January 1801, in which he is described as representative of the authority of the French republic (*muḏāhir ḥukūmatiha*)⁶. The term also occurs in some early Turkish and Arabic translations of European historical writings, in the broad sense of rule,

⁴ Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, *Al-‘Iqd al-Farīd*, (Cairo, 1953), i, p. 5.

⁵ Kâtib Çelebi, *Irşād al-ḥayārā ilā tārīḥ al-Yūnān wa’l-Rūm wa’l-Naşārā*, ms. TTK library no. 19, no pagination. Other Ottoman examples in ‘Ayn-i ‘Ālī, *Kavānin-i Āl-i Osmān*, (Istanbul 1280/1863-1864), pp. 29-30, on certain hereditary sanjaks, with a measure of political and financial autonomy, called *ḥukūmet*; Naima, v, p. 405; Raşid, i, p. 328.

⁶ Jabartī *Muḏhir al-Taqdīs*, (Cairo, n.d.), ii, p. 91. Cf. the Turkish text of Bonaparte’s letter to the governor of Egypt, published in Cevdet, *Tarih* (2nd edition, Istanbul 1309/1891-1892), vi, p. 405.

dominion, political authority, or even regime⁷. Though common in early 19th century Turkish, the use of the word in this sense in Arabic remains comparatively rare. The Arabic translation of Machiavelli's *Prince*, made in 1824-25, does not use the word *hukûma* for government, but prefers such words as *siyāda* and even *amīriyya*⁸. Shaykh Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī, in his Arabic translation of the French constitutional charter, renders the word "gouvernement" by *tadbīr al-mamlaka*⁹.

The present-day meaning - government, in the sense of the group of men exercising the authority of the State - seems to date from the second quarter of the 19th century. The changeover is gradual. Thus Sadık Rifat Pasha, who wrote a number of political memoranda and essays, habitually uses the word *hukûmet* in the earlier sense of type of government, administration or regime. However, in the essay cited above, he uses it in a context which clearly indicates the modern meaning. The distinction he makes between the State (*dawla*, *devlet*) and the government (*hukûma*, *hukûmet*) thereafter becomes increasingly common in both Arabic and Turkish, though the use of the term in the earlier, more abstract, sense continued for some time¹⁰.

In modern Turkish and Arabic the distinction between *dawla* and *hukûma* is clear and general, and usage does not differ greatly from that of English or French. In Persian the change came somewhat later. During the 19th and much of the 20th century, *dawlat* was used indiscriminately for both the state and the government, no clear distinction being made between the two either as concepts or as terms. The earlier Arabic loan word *hukûmat* was used in the general sense of political authority and sometimes of administration. Since the 1930's, there has been a tendency by Persian journalists to use the term *hukûmat* in the Anglo-French or Turko-Arabic sense but this is still far from general.

⁷ E.g. *Bonapart tarihi* (a Turkish translation of the first part of Carlo Botta's *Storia d'Italia 1789-1815*), (1st edition, Cairo 1249/1834, 2nd edition, Istanbul 1293/1876), i, pp. 4,6,10,13,16-17, 33; cf. *İthāf al-Mulūk* (Arabic translation of William Robertson's *History of the Reign of Charles V*), Būlāq, 1258/1842), passim.

⁸ Ms. in Egyptian National Library, History 435, translated by Father Anṭun Rafā'īl Zākhūr. Cf. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl, *Ta'rīkh al-Tarjama wa'l ḥaraka al-Thaqāfiyya fī 'aṣr Muḥammad 'Alī* (Cairo, 1951), p. 216.

⁹ Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz*, (1st edition Cairo, 1250/1834 ed./Mahdī'Allām Aḥmad Aḥmad Badawī, and Anwar Lūqā, Cairo, n.d. ? 1958), p. 142.

¹⁰ For Turkish examples, see *Tarih-i Cevdet*, i, pp. 17-20; for an Arabic discussion of the term and its meaning see Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī, *Al-Kilām al-thamān*, (Cairo, 1298/1881), pp. 30-35.

The word *dawla*, by far the most widely used in Islamic languages in the sense of state or government, seems to date as a political term from the accession to power of the Abbasids. It comes of course from the Arabic root *d.w.l*, which has parallels in other Semitic languages and which has the basic meaning of to rotate, turn, change, alternate, or to succeed one another, as for example when speaking of the seasons. The noun *dawla* is attested at a very early stage in Arabic in the sense of turn, meaning not only a rotation, but something rather like the idiomatic English use of the word. In the Qur'ān (iii, 140) we find the verbal form *nudāwiluhā* "we cause them to alternate", speaking of the good days and the bad days, and there are many passages in ancient Arabic poetry in which the word *dawla* has the meaning of someone's turn at success, power or good fortune. The word *dawla* is in common use in both *ḥadīth* and early poetry in the sense of turn. It is not limited to the more familiar meaning of someone's turn at success or power but is used more generally, as for example of a wife's "turn", in a polygamous household, with her husband. The form *dūlatan* occurs in the Qur'ān (LIX, 7) in the sense of something which is held in common, i.e., the ownership of which is passed around a number of persons. These and similar expressions are based on the underlying image of the wheel of fortune, the slowly turning wheel which brings one man or group up and another down. It is, of course, an image which long antedates Islam and of which probably the best known classical exposition is that of the Greek author Polybius. Polybius, at discussing revolution (*anakyklosis*), describes the slowly turning wheel driven by the force of *tyche*, fortune, and its expression in the cycle of political changes which follow and repeat one another¹¹. Kingship leads to tyranny, tyranny breaks down into aristocracy, aristocracy gives rise to oligarchy, oligarchy splinters into democracy, democracy degenerates into mob rule, mob rule brings men back to the state of nature, out of which a new kingship emerges and a new cycle begins. This idea reappears in Islamic literature at a later date with some variation in the terms, and *dawla* is the word used for the turning of the wheel.

The word *dawla* occurs a number of times in works written by or attributed to Ibn al-Muqaffa'. In a well known passage in the *Ṣaḥāba*, he refers to the accession of the Abbasids in the phrase *كانت هذه الدولة*¹² Pellat

¹¹ Polybius, *History*, vi, 9, x. For a discussion see Arthur Hatto, "Revolution": an enquiry into the usefulness of an historical term", in *Mind*, lviii, (1949), pp. 495-517.

¹² Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Risāla fī'l-Ṣaḥāba*, in Muhammad Kurd 'Alī, ed., *Rasā'il al-Bulaghā'*, (4th edition, Cairo 1374/1954), p. 125; edited and translated into French by Charles Pellat, *Ibn al-Muqaffa' : "Conseiller" du Calife*, (Paris, 1976), p. 38.

is certainly right in reading this not as "then came this dynasty" but rather as "then came this change" (*changement, revirement*). This interpretation is confirmed by several other occurrences in these texts. Thus in a passage in the *Adab Şaghîr*, we find the phrase "*al-dunya duwal*"¹³. In the context it is clear that Ibn al-Muqaffa' does not mean that the world consists of dynasties or states, as the phrase would mean in modern Arabic. His meaning is that the world is full of ups and downs, of vicissitudes, and he continues to say: "what is for you will come to you despite your weakness; what is against you cannot be averted by your strength." In a passage in the *Adab Kabîr* the writer draws his reader's attention to certain differences in the situation at the beginning of a new regime *دولة عند جدّة*¹⁴. This may be understood to mean: If your rule or power occurs at the beginning of a new turn or phase or regime.

An interesting example of the use of the term occurs in the text of a sermon delivered in Mecca in the year 130/747-8 by a Kharijite rebel, and preserved by several authors. The speaker is at pains to inform his listeners, the people of Medina, that he and his companions did not leave their homes and their possessions in a spirit of wantonness or folly or frolic, nor *ولا لدولة ملك نريد أن نأخذ فيه ولا لثار قديم نيل منّا*¹⁵ a phrase which appears to mean neither in quest of new dominion nor in search of old vengeance.

These and similar passages make it easier to interpret the term *dawla* as used in the early Abbasid period. When Ṭabarî and other historians of the Abbasids describe the Caliph Şaffāh and others speaking of *dawlatuna*, our *dawla*, they do not mean "our state", nor do they mean "our dynasty". They mean "our turn". The implication is that the Umayyads have had their turn and now it is the Abbasids' turn. This is confirmed by the early texts in which the same word *dawla* is used of persons who are not sovereigns and do not found dynasties. Şaffāh for example in one of his speeches is reported as speaking of "the *dawla* of Abū Muslim"¹⁶ i.e., of the time when Abū Muslim was so to speak on the upturn of the wheel. Other passages speak of the *dawla* of the Barmakids. The term is used several times in connection with Abū

¹³ *Al-Adab al-Şaghîr*, in *Rasā'il al-Bulaghā*, p. 17, *Al-Adab al-Kabîr wa'l-Adab al-Şaghîr*, (Beirut, 1956), p. 124.

¹⁴ *Rasā'il al-Bulaghā*, p. 50; Beirut edition, p. 26.

¹⁵ Ṭabarî, *Tārīkh*, ii, p. 2009, Cf. *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, (Būlāq, 1285/1868-1869), xx, p. 104; Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *Al-'Iqd al-Farīd*, ii, p. 197.

¹⁶ Ṭabarî, iii, p. 86.

Muslim. Thus, discussing the number of people killed by Abū Muslim in the course of his activities, Ṭabarī uses the phrase *fi dawlatihi wa-hurūbihi*¹⁷. This would seem to mean something like “in the course of his career and his wars.” In another passage quoted by Ṭabarī from Madā’inī, Abū Muslim himself is quoted as using the word in a very revealing context. Discussing which are more valiant, the Syrians or the Khurasanis, Abū Muslim remarks *الناس أشدّ قوم في دولتهم* - every people is the most valiant of mankind at the time of its “turn” i.e., when it is on the upturn of the wheel¹⁸.

Since the accession of the Abbasids was the *dawla* par excellence, the word came to mean the Abbasid dynasty, which had a rather longer turn than any other, and then more generally the Abbasid state. We find it for example in such expressions as *abnā’ al-dawla*, literally the sons of the *dawla*, meaning certain groups of persons adopted into the service of *dawla*; *‘arab al-dawla*, the Arab tribes in the service of the *dawla*. Later it comes to mean the state or the dynasty more generally, and not merely the reigning Abbasid house.

Even as late as the 10th century, when the word *dawla* had become fairly standardized in the meaning of dynasty or state, we still encounter it in the earlier sense. Thus the authors of the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Safā*, presenting a cyclical theory of political regimes, uses the word *dawla* commonly in this sense. The affairs of this world are *دول ونوب تنور بين أهلها قرناً بعد قرن* - ¹⁹ *ومن أمة إلى أمة ومن بلد إلى بلد*

The titlature of sovereigns and of lesser rulers is a good indication. In this *dawla* is often associated with *mulk*, kingship, and contrasted with *dīn*, religion. The best titles are the paired ones-indicating that the holder of the title holds a position in relation to *al-dawla wa’l-dīn*, which comes to mean of the state and of the faith. Such titles already contain the beginnings of the idea that these are two themes, contrasted or complementary. Titles in *al-dawla* and *al-dīn* were much used by the Buyids and their successors, probably because they felt it necessary to use something with a connotation of real authority. Titles in *al-dawla* were also used by the Fatimids in Egypt and granted by them to their viziers and other functionaries. We find the word *dawla* being used by dynasties of themselves, usually with some honorific adjective. Thus the Fatimids were *al-dawla al-hādiya*, the rightly guided

¹⁷ Ṭabarī, iii, p. 115.

¹⁸ Ṭabarī, iii, p. 96.

¹⁹ *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Safā* (Cairo, 1347/1928), i, pp. 130-131. Cf. i, p. 106; iii, p. 258; iv, pp. 234-237.

dynasty. In Egypt the Ayyubids used the formula *al-dawla al-'aliya*, the lofty or sublime or exalted dynasty. This was in due course taken over by the Ottomans and became their standard way of referring to themselves -*devlet-i 'aliye-i osmaniye*, the high Ottoman state or dynasty. By Ottoman times we also find the word *dawla* (Turkish *devlet*) used of foreign states and even of infidel states in Europe. By this time the word *dawla* in the sense of state or dynasty has a plural as well as a singular form. Indeed the usual term for foreign states in Ottoman administrative usage is *duvel-i ecnebiye*. In other words, *dawla/devlet* has become the normal word for the state. It may be noted that it is however in the main limited to practical and administrative use. The word is not much used in theoretical discussions of the state, whether in the juridical or in the philosophical literature, the authors of which still prefer to use other terms when discussing the acquisition and exercise of political authority.

