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Kingship and Religion in a Mediaeval *Fürstenspiegel*: The Case of the *Chahār Maqāla* of Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī

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It is by virtue of the *Chahār Maqāla*, and that alone, that Niḏhāmī-‘Arūḏī of Samarqand deserves to be reckoned amongst the great names of Persian literature.

Edward Browne (1921:xi)

In the mediaeval period, works in the *Fürstenspiegel* (mirror-for-princes) genre were composed by members of diverse intellectual and social groups in the Iranian cultural sphere. The rich variety of the genre, combining the various themes of statecraft, ethics, history, and homiletic discourse, testifies to the widespread mediaeval preoccupation with problems of kingship and governance. Designed for the edification of rulers and princes on the ethical and practical aspects of government, the mirror-for-princes genre displays a notable contrast between works written by court officials and secretaries, whose political and social ideals were formed largely by the Persian royal tradition, and Islamic scholars, whose vision of the ideal polity was dictated by religious norms. This distinction can be observed most clearly in their conflicting conceptions of the relationship between kingship and religion. The ancient Persian view, which is championed, for instance, by the Saljūq minister Niẓām al-Mulk (d.1092) in the *Siyāsatnāma* (The Book of Statecraft), seeks to maintain equilibrium between the secular and religious domains of power. It represents a desire for a perfect state of parity and social harmony between kingship and religion based on the natural balance of the universe. In contrast, the Islamic view, as envisaged in homiletic mirror-for-princes literature, such as *Baḥr al-favā'id* (The Sea of Precious Virtues) and *Laṭā'if al-ḥikma* (The Subtleties of Wisdom) of Sirāj al-dīn Urmavī (d. 1283), insists on the supremacy of the spiritual over the mundane in a divinely ordered hierarchy.¹

In her study on the notion of kingship in the *Naṣiḥat al-Mulūk* (The Book of

¹ Mirror-for-princes is a universal genre which can be defined most broadly as “ethics of statecraft” or “advice on how to rule”. In contrast to philosophical and legal works on statecraft, the genre does not primarily address the theory of the state, but revolves around the personality and conduct of the ruler and his counsellors. Mirror-for-princes is also to be distinguished from other genres, such as instruction in etiquette and political philosophy, which it substantially overlaps. Considerable attention has been paid to the religious aspects of the Persian mirror-of-princes literature by Patricia Crone (1987), A. K. S. Lambton (1954 and 1971), Louise Marlow (1995) and Julie Scott Meisami (1991). Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds (2003:27–31) have discussed the tension between Persian and Islamic notions of governance in their study on religious authority in early Islam. The Iranian origin of the concept of social parity between kingship and religion has been evaluated by Molé (1963:51f) and Crone (1987:182–185).

Counsel) of Muḥammad Ghazālī (d. 1111), A. K. S. Lambton draws attention to the inherent tension between Persian and Islamic elements in the mediaeval mirror-for-princes literature.² Without much further elaboration she suggests that this tension can be observed most noticeably in the *Chahār Maqāla* (Four Discourses) of the twelfth-century literary scholar Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī. In her view, Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī initially makes a concession to the classical theory of the Islamic caliphate and subsequently rejects it altogether (Lambton 1954:49). In this short essay I would like to explore the relationship between kingship and religion in the preface of the *Chahār Maqāla* in order to examine whether Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī’s position should be seen as a revival of the Persian concept of kingship or as a justification of Islamic political theory. The apparent tension in his discussion can be interpreted, as Lambton seems to suggest, as a form of intellectual inconsistency, but it can also be seen as an attempt to synthesize opposing doctrinal tendencies and cultural legacies. Before delving into this topic, it is, however, necessary to explore Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī’s biography and literary production on the basis of the mediaeval sources in order to understand the historical and cultural milieu in which the *Chahār Maqāla* was composed.

The Life and Times of Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī

Aḥmad Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī was born in Samarqand during the latter part of the eleventh century, probably around 1085.³ He received his early education in his hometown and acquired extensive learning in the profane sciences such as grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and ethics, which comprised the heart of humanistic education in the Iranian cultural sphere. This curriculum was particularly aimed at training and educating court officials and secretaries. Besides his secretarial education Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī was also well-versed in astrology and medicine. To judge from his autobiographical accounts in the *Chahār Maqāla*, he was in all respects a multifaceted scholar and a man of great reputation in his own lifetime. For more than forty-five years, he served as secretary and poet to the Ghurid court in the city of Bāmiyān in central Afghanistan. In the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, Persian literature experienced a renaissance in flourishing trade towns along the Silk Road, and cities like Bāmiyān, Balkh, and Harāt were not only vital financial centres, but also major centres of literature and art.

What we know about Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī is primarily derived from his short autobiographical accounts in the *Chahār Maqāla*. This work informs us that in his youth he heard stories about the pioneer of the Persian literary renaissance, the poet ‘Abdulla Rūdagī of Bukhārā (d. 941), which perhaps inspired him to become a poet. In his twenties, he travelled around in Transoxania and Khurāsān collecting information

² Alexey Khismatulin (2008) has convincingly questioned the ascription of the *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* to Ghazālī in his discussion of counterfeiting and forgery in Mediaeval Persian literature.

³ Concerning Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī’s name, Edward Browne (1997:337) writes: “His name, according to his own statement [...] was Aḥmad b. ‘Umar b. ‘Alī, and his title (*laqab*), Najmu’-d-Dīn, but he is always known by his pen-name (*takhalluṣ*) of Niḏḥāmī. Even amongst his contemporaries, however, there were, as will directly appear, several Niḏḥāmīs more celebrated than himself, not to mention his later, greater namesake, Niḏḥāmī of Ganja, who is the Niḏḥāmī *par excellence* of Persian literature; so the poet with whom we are now concerned is always spoken of as Niḏḥāmī-‘Arūzī (*i.e.* ‘the Prosodist’) of Samarqand.”

about prominent, contemporary men of learning. In 1112, he visited Balkh, where he enjoyed the society of the astronomers 'Umar Khayyām och Muẓaffar Isfizārī, who had devised a new solar calendar which was inaugurated by the Saljūq sulṭān Malikshāh (d. 1092). Nizāmī 'Arūzī probably also visited the famous schools, scientific academies, and libraries of that city. Some years later, he was gathering information about the poet Abū al-Qāsim Firdausī in the district of Vāzh in the province of Tūs. At this time, he had started to compose his first poems, since he relates that in 1116, he wrote a panegyric poem and joined the court of Sulṭān Sanjar on his way from Harāt. In the *Chahār Maqāla*, he relates this occasion in the anecdote which portrays the early successes of Amīr Mu'izzī:

In the year A.D. 1116, the King of Islam, Sanjar the son of Malikshāh (may God prolong his existence and continue his exaltation to the heights!), chanced to be encamped in the spring season within the marches of Tūs, on the plain of Turuq, where he remained for two months. There, I, in hopes of obtaining some favour, joined his court from Harāt, having then nothing in the way of equipment or provision. I composed a panegyric poem and went to Mu'izzī the Poet Laureate (*malik al-shu'arā*), to seek an opening through him. (Nizāmī 'Arūzī 2003:67–68)⁴

Amīr Mu'izzī was the most celebrated poet in the court circle of Sulṭān Sanjar and an arbiter in literary matters. The literary historian Daulatshāh Samarqandī (1901: 60) (d. 1507) describes Nizāmī 'Arūzī as one of his pupils. With his support and encouragement Nizāmī 'Arūzī attracted the attention of the sulṭān. We do not know for sure when he first entered service at the court or when he made his breakthrough as a poet but for some reason he left the court of Sanjar. Perhaps he lost favour or felt neglected in the shadow of more celebrated writers. His journey went to the Ghurid capital Bāmiyān. For more than forty-five years, he served as a secretary and court poet for various Ghurid monarchs. His prose work *Chahār Maqāla* was composed rather late, in his late sixties, under the auspices of the Ghurid prince Husām al-Daula 'Alī and his father, king Fakhr al-Daula Mas'ūd. To judge from its panegyric prologue, the former seems to have been the author's special patron and benefactor.

The Ghurid dynasty was of ancient Iranian ancestry and belonged to the Shansabān family which was descended from the prehistoric king Ṣahhāk (M. P. Dahāg). This ancestry, even if completely fictional, is important as far as political legitimacy is concerned, since it endowed them with the dignity of a royal Iranian ancestry. Ṣahhāk ruled over the Iranian Plateau in prehistoric, mythological past. In the national epic *Shāhnāma* (The Book of Kings), Abū al-Qāsim Firdausī (d. 1020) relates that Ṣahhāk's tyranny lasted for one thousand years before he was deposed by king Farīdūn with the help of the blacksmith Kāva. The historian 'Uṣmān ibn Sirāj al-Dīn Jūzjānī (1963:323) explains that Ṣahhāk was imprisoned on the mountain of Damāvand and that his descendants escaped to the east and found refuge in the district of Ghur, between the valley of Harāt and Hilmand.⁵ The name Shansabān stems, however, from the historical ancestor of the family, a nobleman at the

⁴ All translations are my own except when otherwise stated.

⁵ It is from this district that the Ghurid dynasty, also called Shansabān, derives its name.

Sāsānid court who witnessed the Arab invasion of Iran in the seventh century. He was forced to escape to the east from bloody persecution with other members of the Persian nobility and finally settled in the inaccessible mountains of Ghur. The Umayyads launched several military raids into Ghur, which the local inhabitants successfully repulsed. The Ghurids did not convert to Islam before Sulṭān Maḥmud's military conquests (d. 1030), which initially only yielded a token submission to the new religion.⁶

In Niẓāmī 'Arūzī's lifetime, the Saljūq and Ghaznavid dynasties were the dominating political constellations in the eastern parts of the Iranian cultural sphere. The Saljūqs ruled over Khurāsān and Persia proper, while the Ghaznavids had been forced to withdraw to the northern border of India. The 'Abbāsīd caliph, addressed with the pious honorific "The Prince of Believers" (*amīr al-mu'minīn*), was the highest religious authority of Islam. Yet in practice, he was a shadow ruler under the Saljūq sulṭāns, who exerted the real secular power. His only authority was to legitimize the worldly rulers by bestowing upon them an investiture comprising among other things a sword, a standard, and robes of honour. Situated between the Saljūq and Ghaznavid power spheres, the buffer district Ghur stood intermittently in a vassal relationship to both empires. In the beginning of the twelfth century the formerly so powerful Ghaznavid dynasty was, however, in decline and famine prevailed in the capital Ghazna. In 1117, Bahrām Shāh (d. 1152) declared himself sulṭān after executing his own brother, Sulṭān Arslān Shāh. Bahrām Shāh was a great patron of the arts, but his political recklessness brought an end to Ghaznavid dynastic power. His celebrated circle of court poets was led by Sanā'ī, who composed the masterpiece *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa* (The Garden of Truth) under his auspices.

Fearing growing Ghurid influence and claims of self-autonomy Bahrām Shāh had the Ghurid vassal Quṭb al-Daula in Pīrūzkūh poisoned and staged a conspiracy against his brother, prince Saif al-Daula Sūrī in Ghazna. In wintertime, as the roads to the city were blocked by heavy snowfall, Bahrām Shāh arrested the prince, forced him to run the gauntlet and then had him crucified. Enraged at the treacherous execution of his two brothers, 'Alā al-Dunyā Ḥusain fell upon Ghazna in 1151 and had its entire population slaughtered after luring them from their hiding-places by the call to prayer. Bahrām Shāh was forced to permanently retire to India, where he spent his last years in solitude. With good reason 'Alā al-Dunyā Ḥusain was thereafter called "Burner of the World" (*jahānsūz*), a nick-name that endured among the people of Iran until the Mongol period.⁷ After his conquest of Ghazna, which marked the beginning of the Ghurid dynasty, 'Alā al-Dunyā Ḥusain returned to Pīrūzkūh.⁸ On the journey he demol-

⁶ The major historical source about the Ghurids is the *Tabaqāt-i nāṣirī* (Nāṣirī's Chronicles) written by 'Uṣmān ibn Sirāj al-Dīn Jūzjānī in the middle of the thirteenth century. The father of Sirāj al-Dīn served as a judge under the Ghurids and the work gives valuable information regarding the early history of Islam in Afghanistan and India. Cf. Bosworth 1968:157–166.

⁷ Cf. Jūzjānī 1963:333–334 and 379.

⁸ Pīrūzkūh is located near the modern city of Ahangarān in central Afghanistan. Today, nothing remains of it except the minaret of Jam.

ished all the glorious buildings that had been raised by the Ghaznavids. Nizāmī ‘Arūzī (2003:47), who devotes praise to him in the prologue of the *Chahār Maqāla*, emphasizes that the new conqueror, despite his antipathy towards the Ghaznavids, cherished the poems which had been written in the praise of their sultāns.

The Monarch of the World, Sulṭān ‘Alā al-Dunyā Ḥusain, the helper of the Prince of Believers (may his life be long, and the umbrella of his dynasty triumphant!), marched on Ghazna to avenge those two monarchs, the martyred prince and the laudable king, and Sulṭān Bahrām Shāh fled before him. In revenge for those royal victims, whom they had treated with such indignity, and of whom they had spoken so lightly, he sacked the city of Ghazna, and destroyed the buildings raised by [the Ghaznavid sultāns] Maḥmūd, Mas‘ūd and Ibrahīm, but he purchased with gold the poems written in their praise, and placed them in his library.⁹

‘Alā al-Dunyā Ḥusain declared himself king of the Shansabān dynasty in Pīrūzkūh, but his victory was short-lived. He was defeated the following year by Sulṭān Sanjar at the gates of Auba (Obah) and taken captive together with his son at the hands of the Saljūq Commander-in-Chief Yaranqush. In one of his autobiographical accounts, Nizāmī ‘Arūzī (2003:107) relates that the son was released for fifty thousand *dīnār* while the king was freed without ransom and granted a robe of honour. As is evident from the concluding anecdote of the *Chahār Maqāla*, the author wandered about in Harāt “in the guise of a fugitive” following this event, since he was connected with the Ghurid court (Nizāmī ‘Arūzī 2003:107 and 137). Afterwards, he travelled to the district of Bāmiyān where he wrote down his life’s work under the auspices of ‘Alā al-Dunyā Ḥusain’s brother Fakhr al-Daula Mas‘ūd, who bore the title “king” (*malik*). The later life of Nizāmī ‘Arūzī is unknown, but it seems incontestable that he continued to be involved in the politics of his time. The Ghurid dynasty experienced a period of greatness under ‘Alā al-Dunyā Ḥusain’s nephew, Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Muḥammad, and the latter’s brother, Mu‘izz al-Dīn Muḥammad, who conquered Bengal and established a Persian empire in India. They forced the last Ghaznavid to withdraw from Lāhūr and also reached westwards to Iṣfahān. Ghurid expansion was not halted until 1204 when ‘Alā al-Dīn Khārazmshāh Muḥammad II won a decisive victory over them.

The *Chahār Maqāla*

Nizāmī ‘Arūzī served as a court poet and secretary, but of his poetry only four scanty fragments (*qiṭa‘āt*) and one quatrain (*rubā‘ī*) have survived in the *Lubāb al-albāb* (Sublime Intellects) of the literary historian Muḥammad ‘Aufī (1903: 207–208) (d. 1242). Notwithstanding the satisfaction displayed by Nizāmī ‘Arūzī regarding his own poetical talent, his poems have not been judged by posterity as being of the highest order. As the literary scholar Edward Browne (1921:xi)

⁹ It must, however, be mentioned that ‘Alā al-Dunyā Ḥusain had less interest in philosophy, since a collection of Abū ‘Alī Sīnā’s books, which had been confiscated at Iṣfahān and brought to Ghazna in 1034, was put to the torch.

argues “it is far inferior to his prose, which is admirable, and in my opinion, almost unequalled in Persian”.¹⁰ It is by virtue of the *Chahār Maqāla*, and not his poetry, that Nizāmī ‘Arūzī has gained merit as a writer through the centuries. This prose work was composed around 1156 as a mirror-for-princes under the auspices of king Fakhr al-Daula Mas‘ūd, and addresses contemporary monarchs and aristocrats. As such, it is permeated not only by the attitudes that informed the Ghurid political activities in the region, but also by the general cultural atmosphere of the contemporary Persian renaissance. The *Chahār Maqāla* has thematic similarities with earlier mirrors, such as the *Qābūs-nāma* (The Book of Qābūs), in its aristocratic and secular orientation. The *Qābūs-nāma* was composed by the Ziyārid prince ‘Unsur al-Ma‘ālī Kay Kāvūs (d. 1098) in 1082 for his son Gīlān-Shāh. It specifies the conduct of kingship and offers advices in matters of court etiquette, such as chess, wine, love, horses, poetry, and rearing children. The didactic sections are augmented with illustrative anecdotes, often of amusing content.

A. K. S. Lambton (1971:419, 421), who has discussed the mediaeval evolution of mirror-for-princes literature, observes that this genre generally is characterized by an assimilation of Islamic political and ethical norms to traditions of kingship drawn from ancient, mostly Persian sources.¹¹ The mediaeval mirror-for-princes owes particularly much to concepts of the ruler, justice, and good religion envisaged in the old Persian manuals of court etiquette (*ā’in-nāma*). Persian belles-lettres flourished in the Sāsānid period and later served as models for mediaeval mirrors-for-princes in Persian as well as Arabic and Turkish. The Sāsānid king Khusrau I (d. 579), known as Anūshīrvān-i Dādgar (“The Just of the Immortal Soul”), and his prime-minister Wuzurgmihr Bukhtagān were the epitome of ideal rule and wise government. Many collections of maxims and sage proverbs about kingship and administration have been attributed to them. The most famous collection of Wuzurgmihr is the *Ganj-i shāhagān* (“The Treasures of Kings”). He also figures prominently in a work known as *Pandnāmag* (The Book of Counsel), which is known from a ninth century Middle Persian version.¹² In the *Qābūs-nāma*, Kay Kāvūs devotes a whole chapter to the counsels of Anūshīrvān to his son Shāpūr I. According to the mediaeval historian Abū al-Ḥasan Mas‘ūdī (d. 956), Wuzurgmihr summarized his counsel on governance in twelve points, which the king inscribed in golden letters. These commands (paraphrased below), can be said to adequately represent an Iranian ideal of kingship:

Fear God; be trustworthy and loyal; seek the advice of wise men; honour scholars, the nobles, and the officials; supervise judges and tax collectors strictly; check on the condition of prisoners; ensure the safety of roads and markets; punish the guilty according to their

¹⁰ This is also the opinion of Muḥammad Mu‘īn. See his preface to Nizāmī ‘Arūzī 2003.

¹¹ Lambton (1954:48) writes: “The writers of these manuals were not as concerned with the legal aspect as had been the jurists and thus they were not limited in the material on which they could draw; in fact they drew largely on pre-Islamic tradition, which meant in the eastern part of the Islamic world, where this type of work was especially popular, Sasanian tradition, and their works were in part inspired by the old Persian manuals of court etiquette.”

¹² The *Pandnāmag* was also translated into Arabic and included in the *Jāvidān khīrad* (Eternal Wisdom) by Ibn Miskavay (d. 1030). Cf. Christensen 1930:97–98.

crime; provision the army; honour the family; defend the borders; and watch government officials closely and remove the disloyal and incompetent.¹³

In the period more or less contemporary with Nizāmī ‘Arūzī several important mirrors were composed on government and ethics as well as homiletic subjects. The most influential was perhaps the *Siyāsatnāma* of the famous premier minister Nizām al-Mulk, who founded several Saljūq universities and scientific academies. The *Siyāsatnāma* is made up of fifty chapters of advice to rulers, interspersed with illustrative anecdotes. It is not merely a theoretical handbook but also an administrative blueprint according to which the author expected the Saljūq realms to be governed. His ambition was to maintain the vast empire, especially against internal rebellion, and to promote stability. Nizām al-Mulk maintained that the king is responsible for ensuring the welfare of the people by nominating wise and loyal counsellors. Drawing from the Sāsānid model of court administration he considered the vizier or premier-minister, who often exerted much influence on the king, to be the most important person under the monarch in the central government. He also sought an ideal model for the entire society in the Sāsānid social structure and upheld the correctness of its division into priests, warriors, scribes, farmers, and artisans (Nizām al-Mulk 1990:22–34).

In contrast to the *Siyāsatnāma*, the *Chahār Maqāla* belongs to the literary current of mirror literature. Like the above-mentioned works, it is a textbook directly instructing kings. Nizāmī ‘Arūzī’s main interest, however, is not the king, but his officials and administrators. Initially, he draws attention to Nizām al-Mulk’s notion that the king needs wise and effective counsellors whose opinions he should follow. But in contrast to the latter, his purpose is not to specify the attributes and virtues of the king, but those of his ministers so that the king can govern in a wise and effective way. In the preface, Nizāmī ‘Arūzī (2003:5) specifies that his aim is to serve the “supreme royal court” (*majlis-i a’lā-yi pādshāhī*) by defining kingship according to “the canon of wisdom (*qānūn-i hikmat*) with decisive proofs and trenchant arguments”. As the title suggests, the *Chahār Maqāla* formally consists of four sections that separately discuss the offices of the court. According to Nizāmī ‘Arūzī, these influential professions are the secretaries, the poets, the astrologers, and the physicians. The very structure of the book indicates that the author identifies the *sine qua non* of kingship with the king’s incumbents; that is, the government or public administration. He states:

¹³ The French translation of Mas’ūdī’s (1962:235) original reads as follows : (I) Craindre Dieu, lorsqu’on est près de céder à la concupiscence, à la convoitise, à la peur, à la colère ou à la passion ; redouter, dans les conséquences de ces passions, non pas l’homme, mais Dieu. (II) Être sincère dans ses paroles et exécuter fidèlement ses promesses et ses engagements, les pactes et les traités. (III) Prendre l’avis des sages en toute affaire. (IV) Honorer les savants, les nobles, les gouverneurs des frontières, les officiers, les secrétaires et les employés, chacun suivant son grade. (V) Surveiller les juges, examiner avec équité les comptes des agents du fisc ; récompenser les bons services et punir les malversations. (VI) Connaître par de fréquentes visites la situation des prisonniers, afin de redoubler de surveillance envers les coupables et de délivrer les innocents. (VII) Assurer la sécurité des routes et des marchés, contrôler les prix et les transactions. (VIII) Punir les coupables dans la mesure de leur faute et appliquer les sanctions légales (IX) S’approvisionner d’armes et de tout le matériel de guerre. (X) Honorer sa famille, ses enfants, ses proches, et rechercher ce qui peut leur être profitable. (XI) Avoir l’œil ouvert sur les frontières, afin de connaître le danger et de le prévenir. (XII) Surveiller les ministres et les employés, et révoquer ceux dont la déloyauté ou l’incapacité est manifeste.

Hence, a king must be surrounded by such men – since on their counsel, judgment and deliberations depend the loosing and binding of the world (*ḥall va 'aqd-i 'ālam*) and the well-being of the servants of the God Almighty – as are in every respect the most excellent and most perfect of their time. Now of the counsellors (*khavāṣṣ*) necessary to kings are the secretary, the poet, the astrologer, and the physician, with whom he can in no wise dispense. The maintenance of the administration is done by the secretary; the perpetuation of immortal renown by the poet; the ordering of affairs by the astrologer; and the health of the body by the physician. (Nizāmī 'Arūzī 2003:18)

Like other mediaeval Persian writers, Nizāmī 'Arūzī begins his work with a panegyric praise of God, the prophet Muḥammad, and his benefactor, who is portrayed as a magnificent and just ruler. Following this short opening, he gives a learned explanation about the creation of the universe, minerals, plants, animals, and humans. As has been suggested by 'Abbās Mīlānī (1998:320), his scientific outlook is largely based on an Aristotelian taxonomy filtered through the works of Muslim peripatetic philosophers (in particular Abū 'Alī Sīnā). Nizāmī 'Arūzī thereafter deals with the classes of human society and the meaning and function of kingship. Each of the four main sections begins with a theoretical discussion on the foundations and methods of each art (i.e. the secretarial art, poetry, astrology, and medicine), which also describes the qualifications and education necessary for their practitioners. The theoretical introductions, which are largely based on Greek, Persian, and Islamic learning, are in each case followed by ten or more biographical anecdotes about learned men (and one woman), which illuminate the offices in various respects. The anecdotes are charming, more or less literary, and a few contain humorous elements.

The *Chahār Maqāla* offers a rich overview of the Iranian cultural history in the two centuries preceding its composition and the literary conditions of Nizāmī 'Arūzī's own time. In this respect, it serves as an invaluable original source not only about the literary development in that period but also about contemporary political events in West and Central Asia. Reflecting the prevailing cultural trends among the ruling elite and the social norms of the period, it can be used as a rich resource for studying social, intellectual, and literary tendencies. The anecdotes about the poets Firdausī, Khayyām, and Amīr Mu'izzī as well as those about the scientists, Abū Rayhān Bīrunī och Muḥammad Zakariyya Rāzī are particularly valuable in this respect. To a modern reader it is perhaps surprising that the anecdote about Khayyām, which is the only contemporary of its kind, is not included in the section on poetry but in that on astrology. However, Khayyām was, until recently, mainly known as a mathematician and astronomer in his land of origin.

To judge from Nizāmī 'Arūzī's own accounts, he was held in high esteem for his sober scholarship and stylistic genius already by his contemporaries. The *Chahār Maqāla* soon became a model for prose elaboration, and even imitation, and was referred to by many great authors of the following centuries. Muḥammad 'Aufī, who also served at the Ghurid court, wrote his *Lubāb al-albāb* in the form and style of Nizāmī 'Arūzī. Among other writers who were influenced by him are the historian Ibn Isfandiyyār and the biographer Daulatshāh Samarqandī, composer of the famous *Tazkirat al-shu'arā* (The Memoirs of the Poets). The *Chahār Maqāla* is actually among the most frequently cited prose works in the whole Persian literature. It has

continued to influence writers and intellectuals in modern times, such as Muḥammad Taqī Bahār (d. 1950) and Muḥammad Qazvīnī (d. 1950). Bahār was a journalist, Member of Parliament, and writer of classical poetry. Qazvīnī looked upon Nizāmī ‘Arūzī as a stylistic model and underlined his importance for secular thought, insisting on the central role of the Persian language for Iranian national identity (Bahār 194-:298–318).

Kingship and religion in the *Chahār Maqāla*

In the preface to the *Chahār Maqāla*, Nizāmī ‘Arūzī presents his views on nature and human society, and delves into the meaning and function of kingship. In his natural philosophy or physics he follows to a large extent Aristotle through the writings of peripatetic philosophers such as Muḥammad Fārābī (d. 950) and Abū ‘Alī Sīnā (d. 1037). Nizāmī ‘Arūzī (2003:114) describes the *Qānūn* (Canon) of Abū ‘Alī Sīnā as the richest source of natural philosophy after Aristotle in its systematic and empirical approach.¹⁴ His view of nature is essentially an evolutionary one in a pre-modern sense, from the mineral and vegetable kingdoms to the animal kingdom. He begins his discussion by elucidating in how man developed from the natural world. Interestingly, he defines man as a “perfect animal” (*ḥaivān-i kāmil*) that differs from other animals by reason of his intellectual faculty (Nizāmī ‘Arūzī 2003: 13). Referring to the well-known tradition of prophet Muḥammad, which recalls the ancient Greek aphorism “Know thyself”, Nizāmī ‘Arūzī (2003:15) asserts that the fundamental pre-eminence of man lies in his ability to understand abstract ideas.

So by reason of intelligence he [i.e. man] became king over all animals and brought all things under his control. From the mineral world he made jewels, gold, and silver his adornment; from the vegetable kingdom he made his food, raiment, and bedding; and from the animal kingdom he obtained steeds and beasts of burden. And from all three kingdoms he produced medicines wherewith to heal himself. Whereby did there accrue to him such supremacy? By this, that he understood abstract ideas (*ma‘qūlāt*) and, by means of these, recognized God. And whereby did he know God? By knowing himself; for *He, who knows himself, knows his Lord*.

Nizāmī ‘Arūzī’s conception of human society and the division of classes is heavily influenced by Greek political thought, most likely through Abū ‘Alī Sīnā whom he considers a model in science and philosophy. Like Plato, his ideal state is aristocratic and comprised of three classes of citizens corresponding to the three souls of men: the appetitive soul (emotion or desire), the spirited soul (will or volition), and the rational soul (mind or intellect).¹⁵ Nizāmī ‘Arūzī differs, however, from Plato in his definition of each class. According to him, the *first* class is the wild men and women who inhabit the wasteland; the *second* class is the merchants and craftsmen who dwell in the cities and collaborate with each other; the *third* class is the scientists and philosophers, who devote their time to intellectual activities, such as writing and teaching.

¹⁴ Nizāmī ‘Arūzī’s reliance on Aristotelian philosophical and scientific foundations has been demonstrated by ‘Abbās Milānī (1998:390) in his study of the *Chahār Maqāla*.

¹⁵ Cf. Plato 1930:IV 436e–441c.

So this kingdom [of man] became divided into three classes. The first is that which is proximate to the animal kingdom, such as the wild men of the waste and the mountain, whose aspiration does not suffice more than to secure their own livelihood by seeking that which is to their benefit and warding off what is to their harm. The second class comprises the inhabitants of towns and cities, who possess civilization, the ability to cooperate, and the aptitude to discover arts and crafts; but whose scientific accomplishments are limited to the organization of such association as subsists between them, in order that the different classes may continue to exist. The third class comprises such as are independent of these things, and whose occupation, by night and by day, in secret and in public, is to reflect. (Nizāmī ‘Arūzī 2003:15–16)

Like the Greek philosopher, Nizāmī ‘Arūzī (2003:49–50) bases this tripartite division, as well as the division of professions, on the natural talent and education of the individual. This is also evident from his discussion on the competence and talent of the poet. But in contrast to Plato’s ideal state, which is governed by philosophers, Nizāmī ‘Arūzī views the monarchy as the best form of government. This viewpoint, which is in accordance with the Persian tradition, also corresponds to that of Aristotle. They both maintain that the king’s ministers and counsellors should issue from the “middle class” of society, i.e. the class between the king and the common people. In Nizāmī ‘Arūzī’s (2003:18) case this means that they belong to the third class whose “arduous functions and noble arts are amongst the branches of the science of philosophy”.

In the prologue to the *Chahār Maqāla* Nizāmī ‘Arūzī departs from the customary mediaeval praise of his patron. Instead of conventional doxology he mentions the favours that God has ordained and vouchsafed to his patron. His primary goals are this-worldly and the theme of *realpolitik*, with its aspiration for temporal prosperity, stability, and prestige, is present from the very beginning. Nizāmī ‘Arūzī is careful not to assign a lot of religious honorifics to his benefactor. The prince is the “Helper of Islam and Muslims” (*nuṣrat al-islām va al-muslimīn*) and the “Majesty of the Faithful” (*jalāl al-ummat*), but these are his only religious titles among a resplendent string of more than thirty honorifics. His supreme title is the “Learned and Just Monarch” (*malik-i ‘ālim-i ‘ādil*), which is profane and also evokes the ancient Persian emphasis on justice as the most essential criterion of kingship.¹⁶ Although Nizāmī ‘Arūzī (2003:1–2) asserts that the king should be recognizant of the special grace with which God has endowed him, piety and religious zeal are not among his distinctive attributes. He even suggests that the eternal name that the righteous prince will leave behind in this world is more important than his gaining salvation in the next. The prince is a secular sovereign; protecting religion and safeguarding the faithful are merely a part of his political function.

Nizāmī ‘Arūzī does not attach much religious significance to the royal office and he uses religious vocabulary very sparingly in connection with kingship. The *Chahār Maqāla* contains few quotations from the Qur’ān, and its author does not appear to have been greatly interested in the role of religion in government. In con-

¹⁶ Cf. Lambton 1971:421–422. According to the *Dēnkart* (Acts on Religion) good kingship manifests itself as justice, prosperity, and happiness. Zoroastrian literature generally emphasizes the importance of justice and the crucial role played by the king in the moral and material welfare of the world. This role, as Patricia Crone (1987:183) has shown, was taken very seriously in practice by the Sāsānid kings.

trast to Muḥammad Ghazālī's exposition in the *Naṣiḥat al-Mulūk*, he does not depict the king as the "shadow of God upon Earth" (*ẓill allāhi fī al-arḡ*) or claim that obedience to him as the chosen of God is incumbent upon the people. In this respect, it is also noteworthy that the ancient Iranian concept *farr* (divine glory, Av. *x'ārena*) is absent in Nizāmī 'Arūzī's discussion on political authority. This symbol of divine protection or sanction was adopted, for instance, by Firdausī in the *Shāhnāma*, as a continuation of the divine aura and regal authority of Iranian kingship. Its roots go back to the first world empire, the Achaemenid dynasty, which was established by the Persian king Cyrus II in the sixth century BC. In the royal ideology of the Achaemenids and later Persian dynasties, the king was the embodiment of justice and fortune. He dispenses justice as the sun dispenses light; and the fortune of his realm is symbolized by his aureole of glory (Widengren 1959:242).

Although the temporal goals are in the forefront for Nizāmī 'Arūzī, religious, other-worldly motives are also present. Usually one of the main thrusts of the mirror-for-princes literature, to which the *Chahār Maqāla* belongs, was to promote a conception of kingship having a sacral foundation. Even if the theological element is much less conspicuous in the *Chahār Maqāla* than in other mediaeval mirrors-for-princes, such as the *Naṣiḥat al-Mulūk* or the *Baḥr al-favā'id*, his position on the relationship between religion and political authority is quite ambivalent. His point of departure is that the king's position is subordinate to that of the prophet (i.e. religion is superior to kingship), since God is the Creator of the Universe. Referring to the frequently cited Qur'ānic verse (4:52) on obedience, he asserts that the king is second in rank to the prophet of Islam and third in rank to God in a divinely ordered hierarchy.

For even so had God in His incontrovertible Scripture and eternal Word [i.e. the Qur'ān], coordinated on one thread and sewn forth on one string the pearls represented by these three exalted titles. *Obey God*, said He, *and obey the Apostle, and those with authority amongst you*. For in the grades of existences and the ranks of the intelligible, there is no rank higher than kingship after the prophetic function, which is the supreme limit of man's attainment. (Nizāmī 'Arūzī 2003:6)

It is significant that Nizāmī 'Arūzī interprets the Qur'ānic phrase *ūli al-amr* ("those with authority amongst you" in E. H. Palmer's translation) as referring to the king. This famous verse has been the object of many disputes and controversies among Muslim commentators on the Qur'ān. In general, Shī'i commentators have linked "those with authority amongst you" to the doctrine of *imāmat* (i.e. the belief in infallible *imāms*), and have interpreted this phrase as referring to the family of the prophet, and in particular the hidden *imām* Muḥammad al-Mahdī. The majority of Sunnī commentators, on other hand, have interpreted "those with authority amongst you" as referring to the worldly rulers. By relating this phrase to the concept of kingship, Nizāmī 'Arūzī's assumption is that kingship is inferior to religion as far as authority is concerned. In his definition of the "prophetic function" (*nubuvvat*), he classifies the prophets among the third category of human society together with the philosophers. In his view, the prophets differ, however, from the philosophers in that they reach the extreme limit of human understanding without access to acquired knowledge or education.

Now the peculiar virtues of the prophet are three: first, that, without instruction, he knows all forms of knowledge; second, that he gives information concerning yesterday and tomorrow otherwise than by analogical reasoning; third, that he has such a psychical power that from whatever body he will he takes the form and produces another form, which thing none can do, save such as are in conformity with the angelic world. (Nizāmī 'Arūzī 2003:16)

For this reason Nizāmī 'Arūzī concludes that no one is above the prophet in the human world. Since the prophet communicates with the angelic world, his command is also effective for the well-being of the world. This is the foundation of his definition of the prophetic function. But in order to preserve the religious teachings of Islam, i.e. "revealed law and practice" (*shar' va sunnat*), the prophet must have a successor or deputy (*nā'ib*) who must be "the most excellent of that community and the most perfect product of that age" (Nizāmī 'Arūzī 2003:16). In Nizāmī 'Arūzī's parlance, this person is called "leader" (*imām*). Yet, he insists that the leader, due to political expediency, requires deputies, i.e. worldly sovereigns or monarchs, to establish law and order in Muslim realms.

But this leader cannot reach the horizons of the East, the West, the North, and the South in such a wise that the effects of his care may extend alike to the most remote and the nearest, and his command and prohibition (*amr va nahī*) may reach at once the intelligent and the ignorant. Therefore he must have deputies to act for him in distant parts of the world, and not every one of these will have such power that all mankind shall be compelled to acknowledge it. Hence there must be an administrator or compeller, who is called a "monarch" (*malik*), that is to say, a king; and his specific function is called "kingship" (*pādshāhī*). (Nizāmī 'Arūzī 2003:16–17)

Hence, according to Nizāmī 'Arūzī, the king constitutes the fourth category of existence and power. He is the representative and the deputy (*nā'ib*) of God, the prophet and the leader, just as the prophet is the representative of God. While he refrains from identifying the office of the leader, it seems obvious that he is referring to the caliphate, which was the established political leadership of the Muslim community both in history and juristic theory. As he acknowledges, the caliph's position is based on the notion of a successor to the political authority of the prophet Muḥammad. In his lifetime, the Ghurid kings as well as the Saljūq sultāns regarded themselves as deputies of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs. In the panegyric prologue of the *Chahār Maqāla* Nizāmī 'Arūzī (2003:2) affirms that prince Husām al-Daula 'Alī is the "helper of the Prince of believers" (*nuṣrat-i amīr al-mu'minīn*). As already noted, this nominal allegiance to the caliph was often a pure formality since the latter's authority was restricted to bestowing legitimacy upon the worldly rulers as symbolized by the handing over of an investiture. As Lambton (1954:49) argues, after the eleventh century, the kings endeavoured to obtain the caliph's recognition largely to strengthen themselves against rivals.

In this respect, Nizāmī 'Arūzī's view is in agreement with the Islamic legal theory of the caliphate as expounded by religious scholars, such as Abū al-Ḥasan al-Maḥdī (d. 1058), who view the Qur'ān as the source of all political authority. It also corresponds to Ghazālī's assertion that the caliph is permitted to delegate political authority to a king or sultān although he is subject to God's will. Yet, after explain-

ing that the king is the deputy of the caliph, Nizāmī 'Arūzī substantially modifies his position by claiming that kingship and religion are of equal rank. In a stylistic twist, he not only asserts that the two have a comparable rank, but that they serve a common function and objective.

Religion and kingship are brothers and equals, since in form and essence (*shikl va ma'nā*) neither differs from the other, either as regards increase or defect. (Nizāmī 'Arūzī 2003:17–18)

This remarkable statement, which implies that kings and prophets are equally important players in a balanced universe, is compatible with Iranian socio-cultural ideals. It not only demonstrates that the king is of a rank equal to that of the prophet, but that kingship and religion should have complementary functions. This point of view is also evident in the prologue of the *Chahār Maqāla* where Nizāmī 'Arūzī suggests that kings and prophets belong to different realms and perform separate functions. The prophets bring guidance to the world through revelation, while the kings and viziers bring order to the world through the sword and the pen (Nizāmī 'Arūzī 2003:1). In this respect, his use of language implies a dissociation of religious and temporal authority, but it also suggests the complementary and equally indispensable roles of kingship and religion. To this effect, he cites a verse by Firdausī from the *Shāhnāma* in which king and prophet are likened to two fine stones in a single ring.

چنان دان که شاهی و پیغمبری
دو گوهر بود در یک انگشتری

Then learn that the functions of king and prophet
Are set side by side like two stones in one ring.¹⁷

According to the literary scholar Muḥammad Mu'in (d. 1971), this saying is attributed to the first Sāsānid king Ardashīr Pāpakān, who ruled in Iran from 226 to 241 A.D. Ardashīr was of priestly background and had a religious counsellor Tansar, who formulated and strengthened the Zoroastrian orthodoxy (Boyce 1968). In 240 he had his son Shāhpūr I crowned as joint monarch. On that occasion he counselled his son to govern by the principles of the Zoroastrian faith and enlightened him about the religious duties that he had to perform (known in the literature as "Ardashīr's Testament"). The Sāsānians saw themselves as heirs to the Achaemenids and attempted to establish Zoroastrianism as the state religion. For this reason, the religious functionaries attained positions of high eminence under Shāhpūr's reign, partly to meet the challenge posed by the rise of Christianity in the Roman-Byzantine Empire. By allying themselves with the religious leaders the kings sought to create a stable balance in society between the temporal and the spiritual order. According to Firdausī (1968:187), Ardashīr counselled Shāhpūr I as follows during the son's coronation:

¹⁷ This saying, which is attributed to Ardashīr is mentioned by Firdausī in the last chapter of *Shāhnāma*, i.e. the chapter on the kingdom of Yazgird III. In the following verse Firdausī (1971:355) says:

If you break the one or the other	ازین دو یکی را همی بشکنی
You'll ruin both spirit and wisdom.	روان و خرد را به پا افگنی

When princes call blessings down upon the faith,	چو بر دین کند شهریار آفرین
Brothers do princes and religion become.	برادر شود شهریاری و دین
Religion is not firm without the royal throne,	نه بی تخت شاهیست دینی بیای
Nor may a prince be secure without religion.	نه بی دین بود شهریاری بجای
The two are one tapestry, interwoven with each other,	دو دیباست یک در دگر بافته
Bringing forward a close-knotted warp and weft.	بر آورده پیش خرد تافته
Religion is not without need of the king,	نه از پادشا بی نیازست دین
nor might the king be blessed in glory without the faith.	نه بی دین بود شاه را آفرین
Thus are they the guardians of each other;	چنین پاسبانان یکدیگرند
You'd say they were beneath a single mantle. ¹⁸	تو گویی که در زیر یک چادرند

The pairing of monarchy and religion under the Sāsānians was perhaps most clearly evident in Tansar's successor Kardēr's inscriptions at Naqsh-i Rostam, which describes his religious services at the Sāsānid court. Kardēr established a religious administration with himself as the head of the magi (*mōbad-i mōbadān*) by the king's appointment. The effort to combine religious orthodoxy with social unity under a rightful dynasty also became the dominant theme of Persian mirrors-for-princes in mediaeval times. In the *Siyāsatnāma* Nizām al-Mulk spares no examples of the praiseworthy qualities of ancient Persian kings. Drawing from the Sāsānid precedents he defines "right religion" as the greatest necessity for the king and reinstates Ardashīr's dictum that "kingship and religion are like two brothers" (Nizām al-Mulk 1990:71). In line with the Iranian royal tradition, the two domains of power are presented as entirely comparable phenomena, the one counterbalancing the other in a divinely ordained system.

The overall impression of the *Chahār Maqāla* is that Nizāmī 'Arūzī is more interested in the Persian tradition of statecraft than in Islamic political theory, and that religion plays a fairly minor role in his ideal polity. Already before his lifetime a political transformation had occurred that was reflected in works touching upon political authority. The weakening of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate and the rise of the Saljūqs in the eleventh century stimulated a revival of Sāsānid notions of kingship and governance in the Iranian cultural sphere. Men of affairs, such as Nizāmī 'Arūzī, became more concerned with stability and order than with the specifically Islamic character of the government. In view of the contemporary state of affairs anarchy may have appeared to them as the greatest evil of all. The Saljūqs and the Ghurids (as well as the

¹⁸ Another version of Ardashīr's dictum is to be found in Abū al-Ḥasan Mas'ūdī's (1962:220) *Murūj al-ḡahāb wa ma'ādīn al-jawhar* (Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems): "O my son, verily are religion and kingship brothers, one of which cannot exist without the other, for religion is the foundation of kingship, and kingship is the protection of religion; that which has no foundation vanishes, and that which vanishes has no guardian and is destroyed." Harking back to Ardashīr's aphorism, Nizām al-Mulk (1990:71) states: "Whenever disarray appears in the realm, disorder in religion comes about too; those of bad religion and inaugurators of corruption appear. Now whenever the business of religion is defective, the realm is confounded and the authors of evil gain strength, and the king is deprived of reverence and his mind distracted, while outrageous schisms become manifest and heretics acquire strength."

Sāmānids and the Ghaznavids before them) relied heavily on Iranian officials, which made the kings adapt themselves in greater measures to the Sāsānid royal tradition and its administrative practices. For this reason, Persian political ethics and court etiquette became increasingly attractive to writers such as ‘Unsur al-Ma‘ālī Kay Kāvūs, Nizām al-Mulk and Nizāmī ‘Arūzī.

Conclusion

Nizāmī ‘Arūzī’s discussion on kingship and religion is characterized by a combination of ancient ethical and political elements, mainly of Persian origin, with materials drawn from the Islamic tradition. This type of intellectual endeavour is not unique to him, since the Persian conception of kingship and religion as comparable counterparts was repeatedly expressed in the mediaeval mirror-for-princes genre. It pervaded the major works closest to the *Chahār Maqāla*, such as the *Qābūsnāma* and the *Siyāsatnāma*, and is an explicit testimony not only to the survival of Sāsānid political culture in mediaeval times but also to the general Persian cultural renaissance of that period. Nizāmī ‘Arūzī represents a literary tradition which attempted to assimilate, although superficially, Islamic notions of political authority to the Sāsānid model of good government. He freely adopts abstract concepts as well as anecdotal material drawn from both sources to substantiate and strengthen his arguments. Although he initially claims that religion is superior to kingship, in accordance with his interpretation of the Qur’ānic verse (4:52) on obedience, he concludes that kingship is an institution as important as (if not *more* important than) the prophetic function. In his view, religion depends on kingship since the ruler guarantees political order and stability.

In his attempt to establish a likeness between kingship and religion, Nizāmī ‘Arūzī’s pre-eminent orientation is towards Iranian political ideals. His ranking of prophets, caliphs, and kings in a divinely ordained hierarchy is only superficially synthesized with Persian political and ethical concepts. Since his emphasis is on the perfect state of parity and social harmony between kingship and religion, this incontrovertible ranking may suggest their extreme proximity and closeness. The king does not, for instance, have to meet any obligations in his dealings with the caliph, and the religious class (*‘ulamā*) is completely omitted from Nizāmī ‘Arūzī’s discussion. The *Chahār Maqāla* is fairly free from religious elaboration and stands in sharp contrast to other mirrors-for-princes, such as the *Naṣīhat al-Mulūk* and the *Baḥr al-favā’id*, in its resolutely profane ethos and tone. In my view, this aspect of his discourse must be considered against the background of the contemporary situation and the growing influence of the *‘ulamā* at the expense of the secretary class (*dabīrān*) in the Saljūq period. Finally, it is also essential to take into account the religious constraints and restrictions that mediaeval authors had to conform to, which perhaps made Nizāmī ‘Arūzī appear a more genuine Muslim for the sake of appearances.

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