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An analytical study on ministerial organizations status in the historiography of Ravandi, Iran

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Abstract

The ministry organization as a symbol of Iranian sreaming is the important element in Iranian historiography. Reproduction of many of Iranshahri thoughts teachings in Seljuk's period provided background for note historians to ministry organization. With the domination of Turks on Iran was established ministry s status until free rulers of the art of government benefit of ministry's knowledge. Ravandi was one of the important historians in Seljuk's period. However, he extracted his historical narratives from Saljuknameh, but with the completion of them with other sources and analyzing of dates. His book was changed to an important source with a different style. Ministry organization was High-Frequency concept in Ravandi historiography. His historiography has been set as useful epistle for express reasons. The ministry in his historiography was a symbol of foresight that was a cause of stable government. This article is going to enter a descriptive and analytical methodology to analyzed Ravandi's approach to ministerial organization and answered to these questions what impact of ministry status on Seljuk's period in Ravandi's historiography? And this approach has been influenced by what factors shape?

Key words: Ministry, Historiography of Iran, Seljuk, Ravandi, Iranshahri Thought.

1. Introduction

The institution of the Ministry is one of the long-standing political and administrative institutions of Iranian history that was the representative of defeated people during the reign of foreigners. The Ministers, with the education of the governance, played a major role in moderating the invaders' military power. This institution, which sought the political and cultural goals of Iranians, was considered by historians. Despite the historical Shah-based texts in the tradition of Iranian historiography, some historians emphasized the effective presence of the Ministry in developments. This approach led to the formation of the Iranian historiography movement, the writers of which were literati and actuaries. In the viewpoint of the Seljuk historiography that was written in the last years of this government, the Minister was responsible for improving the affairs of the country, and he has been called for development, handling people's affairs and justice. Ravandi's¹ historical attitude in describing the events has made him one of the main representatives of the Iranshahri² thought in the historiography of the Seljuk era. Ravandi's approach to the Ministry had many aspects that can be analyzed.

¹ RĀVANDI, Qoṭb-al-Dīn Sa'īd, Imami author, traditionist, and jurist (d. Qom, 14 Šawwāl 573/5 April 1178; his birthday is not known). His full name is Abu'l-Ḥosayn Sa'īd (or Sa'd) b. 'Abd-Allāh b. Ḥosayn b. Hebat-Allāh b. Ḥasan b. 'Isā, often abbreviated to Sa'īd b. Hebat-Allāh. He belonged to a scholarly family from Rāvand, located 12 km west of Kāšān. He studied with both Sunni and Imami masters; the latter include Faḏl b. Ḥasan Ṭabresi (d. 1154) and 'Emād-al-Dīn Ḍu'l-Faqār b. Moḥammad Marvazi. For a time he must have stayed in Isfahan, as many of his teachers came from there. There are also indications that he lived in Rey; he is thus mentioned in the *Ta'riḫ al-Rayy* by his contemporary Montajab-al-Dīn Qomi (cited in Ebn Ḥajar, III, p. 59; see further Ṭabāṭabā'i, p. 256). Rāvandi's students included some of the best-known Imami authors of the 12th century, such as Ebn Šahrāšub and Moḥammad b. source: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ravandi-qotb-al-din-said>

² IRĀNŠAHRI, ABU'L-'ABBĀS MOḤAMMAD b. Moḥammad (fl. 2nd half 3rd/9th cent.), mathematician, natural scientist, historian of religion, astronomer, philosopher, and author. He was from Nišāpur, the city known also as Irānšahr (Moqaddasi, pp. 299-300; Ebn Faqih, p. 321), hence his title Irānšahri. Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow mentions him as the teacher of Moḥammad b. Zakariyā' Rāzi (b. 251/865), and Abu Rayḥān Biruni, who calls him an objective,

What can be described as the background of this study falls into three categories of research. The first includes the books and articles written on the history of the Ministry: *The Bureaucracy in the Seljuk Era* by Klausner[1] and *The Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia* by Lambton[2] are among the most significant ones. These books have referred to the historical developments of the Ministry rather than the historians' approach to the Institution of Ministry. The second category falls into the field of stylistics. The article “*Stylistic Analysis of Rahat al-Sudur*” written by Yadullah Bahmani-Motlagh *et al*[3] is a good example of this category. The third category includes the research that has been emerged with the emphasis on the methodology and historicism of the historians of Iran after Islam. This research focuses on the knowledge, insight and mental structure of Iranian historians. Such studies include the article “*Historicism and Historiography of Emadeddin Kateb Esfahani*” by Ismail Hassanzadeh[4] and the article “*Comparative Study of Historicism and Historiography of Neyshabouri and Ravandi*” by Parvin Turkamaniazar and Shahnaz Jangjou Qolanji[5]. One of the most important of these texts is the book “*Historiography in Iran in the Seljuk era*” written by Naser Sedghi[6]. The author of this book deals with the study of the Seljuk historiography and pointed to the historiography of the monarchy and the Ministry, emphasizing the geographical origin of the historians. Sedghi, in addition to political life and the origin of historians and their intellectual positions, points to the issues raised in the historiography.

What distinguishes this article from previous studies, especially *Historiography in Iran in the Seljuk era*, is its focus on the effective elements in collecting, selecting, and writing data related to the Ministry in the Seljuk historiography, especially in Ravandi's historiography. This research is not related to the history of the Ministry rather it is more closely related to the historiography of Ministry. This article seeks the answer to these questions: Considering the institution of Ministry's role in Iranian governance thought, to what extent did Seljuk historians and specifically Ravandi address the importance and role of the institution of the Ministry in developments? How has Ravandi's companionship with the institution of Ministry led to the formation of a Ministerial discourse?

2. Institution of the Ministry in Seljuk Historiography

Some argue that “the Islamic era of Iran is more the era of great Ministers than the era of the kings, and in fact it was those Ministers who maintained the territorial unity of Iran” [7]. In the Iranian thought, the development of the country and the comfort of the peasant depended on the wisdom and knowledge of the Minister; and the wise Minister directed the king to justice. If there was not the active role of Ministers against the invaders, the Iranian tradition, which had a strong tendency to concentrate power in the center of the monarchy, could not overcome the tradition of the Turks, who considered authority as more family-oriented. The behaviors of the kings who came from a tribal structure required special care which was entrusted to the institution of Ministry.

Meanwhile, *Khajeh Nizam al-Mulk*, as the strongest person in the Seljuk empire after the Sultan, and at times even more powerful than the Seljuk Sultan[8], with the drafting of the *Siyasatnama* took a long step in maintaining the unity of the land of Iran. He, being deeply concerned about the devastating effects of the Isma'ilism influence, set up the *Siyasatnama* in the form of advices and warnings for the *Malik-Shah* [9]. In the thought of *Khajeh*, the Ministry has been of great importance.

An important part of the thought of Iranian historians around the institution of Ministry has been reflected in *Siyar al-muluks*. What is common in these *Siyar al-muluks* is the tune of advices and offering practical proposals for the sustainability of governments. *Onsor-al-Ma'ali* in his book *Qabus-Nama* describes the most important features of the Minister and his relation and obligations to the Sultan[10]. *Al-Ghazali*, who was considered a theologian and jurisprudent, refers to the features of the Minister in *Nasihah al-Muluk*[11]. In his *Siyasatnama*, *Khajeh Nizam al-Mulk* also advised the Minister as well as the king; in his view, the Minister, like the king, should be aware of the royal customs and governing knowledge[12]. The good Minister, in the belief of *Khajeh Nizam al-Mulk*, contributes to the development of the country, the satisfaction of the army and the comfort of the king [13]. Apart from the *Siyar al-muluks*, which often deal with the Ministry's customs and etiquette and the importance of the institution of Ministry, there are books that have also been independently written in the narrations of the Ministers, such as *Nafsat-al-Masdur* by *Anushirvan ibn Khalid Kashani*, and the *History of Al-vozara* by *Abu al-Raja Qomi*.

Most of the Seljuk historiographies were written in the decadence era of this dynasty. One can say: “The history of the Seljuks was not written at all until they were seriously weakened by the internal struggles for power, which characterized the last century of their rule”[14]. Along with the historical conditions of the formation of historiographies, attention to the historicism of the Seljuk historians is important in analyzing their approaches. Historicism of historians emerges from the intellectual life of the society, the personal beliefs of the historians themselves, and beliefs and culture of the society that is reflected in their writing. Despite the dominance of Iranian thought in the Seljuk historiography, many historians in this era recorded the history under influences of the *Sunnit* values and adherence to the *Shariah*.

3. Ravandi's Approach to the Institution of Ministry

Among the historians of the Seljuk era, who has an important place in the historiography of this era, is Mohammed ibn Ali ibn Soleyman Ravandi. Ravandi's family was interested in the arts and skillful in the calligraphy. His religion was Hanafi, and his bias in this religion and the insistence on the prosperity of the believers in it, is clear in his historiography. Ravandi began writing his works, *Rahat al-Sudur* and *Ayat al-Surur*, in 599 Lunar Calendar. The historical value of *Rahat al-Sudur* is undoubtedly related to the late Seljuk era events that the author has witnessed. The main source of *Rahat al-Sudur* is *Seljuk-Nama* by *Zahir al-Din Neyshabouri*, although there are many additions compared to *Seljuk-Nama* in this book.

3.1. The Influence of Iranshahri Thought in Ravandi's Historiography

By studying Ravandi's book, we will find out the extent of the influence of the ancient Iranian governance thought and the teachings of Iranshahri thought in his historical attitude. He refers to the attitudes and methods of the Sassanid kings when referring to the perfect traits of governance, and talks about their justice [15]. In the description of the Saljuk *Sultan Sanjar*, he states that *Sultan Sanjar* possesses the “Solemnity and Glory of Kings”[16]. Ravandi, who more than anyone has cited Ferdowsi's poems [17], at the end of each part of his speech, with an appreciative tone reminisces Sultan Keykhosrow ibn Qalaj Arsalan[18].

Another sign of Iranian thought dominance in Ravandi's historiography is the use of the term “Iran” in his work. According to some researchers, the use of this word in the historiography of this period was not so common [19]. Ravandi in a part of his appreciation of the king of time refers to the conquering of the whole of Iran [20]. It seems that the independent existence of “the land of Iran” as an important element in Iranian identity has been accepted and emphasized by Ravandi.

The emphasis on the Ideal King and his features is one of the most important elements of the Iranshahri thought in the Seljuk historiography. In Ravandi's thought, in accordance with the principles of Iranian thought, the reign and kingship was due to the will and the confirmation of God. Ravandi introduces the Seljuk government that uses subjects, and writes of their attention to the construction of religious buildings, and talks about the Saljuks kindness to the *Ulema*[21]. The help to religion-spreading, justice, and the

attention to prosperity and development, all of which are important components in the Iranshahri thought are clearly seen in this biased narrative of the Seljuk dynasty.

Ravandi considers the promotion of religion as the Seljuk fundamental principles[22], and believes that the observance of religious affairs is the basis of government, and the state must be strengthened with religion[23]. The combination and correlation between religion and government is one of the most important teachings of Iranshahri thought; and they are not separable from each other in the *Letter of Tansar* as the main source of Iranian thought[24]. Justice as one of the most important features of the political system of Iran and the functions of the ideal King has a special place in Ravandi's historiography. The beginning of the main part of his book is dedicated to "mentioning of justice and praise of fairness" [25]and he cites a verse from the Quran and a *hadith* from the Prophet (pbuh) in confirming and emphasizing the importance of justice. He also quoted verses from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, in order to remind the king of justice and its good effects on the kingdom[26]. In Ravandi's point of view, religiosity and helping the religion along with justice are at the heart of the kingship; and a state based on justice will be sustainable and will not be harmed [27].

The position of the caliphate in Ravandi's historiography was not important and he did not mention the Abbasid Caliphate unless the necessity calls for it. Ravandi even blames Caliph Rasheed when he invades Massoud Saljuk[28]. It should not be forgotten that Ravandi correlates the characteristics of governance with Islamic emphasis based on his religious beliefs, and when he speaks of the kingship, he believes: "The sultan is the

shadow of God, and the ruler in the religion of *Mustafa* has the right to do so; and he is elected to the kingship by the Almighty and Upright God to rule and observe the rights of the people”[29].

3.2. Position of the Ministry in Ravandi's Historiography

“With the dominance of the Turks over Iran, the Ministry became an important institution because the Turkish kings did not have any other art at the best, except in *Jahangiri* (conquesting), while the affairs of the country were generally assigned to the Ministers”[30]. The Ministers became partners of the king in this era. Hence, one of the important approaches of historians is to pay attention to the role of the institution of Ministry in developments.

3.2.1. Ravandi and the extent of attention to the Institution of Ministry

The concept of institution of Ministry has been repeatedly mentioned in Seljuk historiography and a large volume of historians' writings is dedicated to Ministers. Ravandi establishes a relationship between the monarchy and the Ministry; that is, wherever he speaks about the circumstances of the monarchy in its ideal form, he refers to the presence of a wise Minister as an instrument of it. He cites the importance of the Ministry in the ancient Iran thought, and when he commends justice and fairness, he quotes Anushirvan by stating “justice of the king resolves the injustice of the Minister”[31]. Ravandi, in proving the importance of the Minister, reach out to the original sources of the Iranshahri thought. His tales are expressed on the behalf of the Sassanid kings and their Ministers. Ravandi has set his book as a necessary *Siyar al-*

muluk for the rulers and the Sultans. As such, he quotes from Ardeshir Babakan that “the Minister is the backbone and strength of the kingdom”[32]. Also, in the description of Amid al-Malek Al-Kunduri, he narrates a tale that the best Ministers are those who solve the affliction of the kings and create morality and hope in them[33]. In this tale, Ravandi has placed heavy burdens on the Minister and the institution of Ministry. He narrates a tale, that is narrated in other chronicles, which tells that, when the Malik-shah’s army crossed *Gihon*, Nizam al-Mulk ordered to pay the salaries of sailors in a distant city, which prompted them to protest; Nizam al-Mulk said in response to this that he attempts to show them the magnanimity of the kingdom and its extent. Ravandi, while praising this view, regrets remembering the era when the Ministers were wise and knowledgeable, and continues to call the Minister as eyes [34].

What Ravandi expect from his ideal Minister has been reflected in the traits he uses for the Ministers of that time. Once, he calls Taj al-Malik Abolghanaem, the Minister of Turkan Khatun, a “qualifies and worthy” man[35]; and somewhere else, he considers Mu'ayyed al-din Taqraei, the Minister of Mas'ud ibn Muhammad ibn Malik-shah as aware of the knowledge of literary, poetry and Arabic text, and calls him “the adornment of the crown of the throne of Sultan”[36]. Ravandi, with regret, points out that today the more ruthless ones became the Minister, and Ministers are not literary-man like before[37]. What attracts attention in this talk of Ravandi is not his emphasis on the poetry of the Ministers, but his belief for the Minister to be knowledgeable. He asserts that the wrongdoers do not deserve to be appointed as the Minister, and in his view, the

Minister must be more an intellectual man. The Minister in Ravandi's thought helps the king to establish justice. He sees justice as a kingship imperative and believes that the king should be just[38]. Ravandi writes about Nizam al-Mulk that, since Nizam al-Mulk and his sons had gentility and wisdom, they were trained by the Sultan and reach greatness[39]. According to Ravandi, the king is the creditor of the Minister, but the Minister must also have the necessary conditions.

3.2.2. Ravandi and the position of the Ministry in the structure of Seljuk government

The Institution of Ministry in the medieval Persia was a symbol of prosperity, and Iranian historiography places the Ministers at a higher position of the wisdom than the kings. It is the Minister who has to think, so that politics goes on its right path. Iran's historiography sought its desires and hopes in the institution of the Ministry.

Ravandi referres to the animosity of Turkan Khatun, Malik-shah's wife, with Nizam al-mulk, reports a narration about the effects of defamiation against the Seljuk Minister, saying that when Malik-shah became pessimistic about Nizam al-Mulk, he told him that you consider yourself partner with me in government and do whatever you want without consulting me; and he threatened him to dismiss him from the Ministry. Khajhe Nizam al-Mulk replied that if he was dismissed from the Ministry, the kingdom of Malik-shah ends[40]. This story has been reflected with minor changes in most of the Seljuk chronicles [41]. This talk between Malik-shah and his Minister, Nizam al-Mulk, indicates the power of the Minister as the second person in the Seljuk government. The belief that the Minister's pen is equal to the crown of the king, illustrates the role of the Seljuk

bureaucracy in the consolidation of the Seljuk government. The correlation of the crown and the pen is clear either in practical experience of the institution of Ministry or in the theoretical models of this era. For example, Alp-Araslan in a letter that grants the Ministry of his son Malik-shah to Khajeh Nizam al-Mulk, points out the points that make the position of the Minister more visible in the structure of Seljuk power system[42]. The historians of the Seljuk era, who often wrote their history in the era of Seljuk's decadence, believe that with the end of the age of Nizam al-Mulk, Seljuk's monolithic and centralized government collapsed, leaving nothing of the Ministry except its name and firmality.

3.2.2. Ravandi and the role of the Ministry in developments

The Seljuk government created a new structure of power, relying on a combination of tribal customs and Iranian bureaucracy. The Seljuk sultan, by giving power to the Iranian Ministers to administer the affairs, used their guidance in the administration of the country[43]. The institution of Ministry has always been concerned in the historiography; however, the approaches to the impact of the Minister on the various developments have not been the same. Given the powerfulness or weakness of the institution of Ministry, historians' texts have showed its role as important or with little or no importance.

Ravandi was a literary man-historian from Persian Iraq and Iranian tendency is featured in his writings. He has closely witnessed the events of the late Seljuk rule in Iraq. For this reason, in many cases, after mentioning an event from the Seljuk period, he analyzes it and draws a moral or political conclusion in the form of poetry or tale. Ravandi considers

a great role for the Minister and sees his hand open in organizing affairs. He considers a lot of responsibilities for the Minister and recommends the king to have a worthy Minister. He believes that the incompetent Minister causes the kingdom to collapse[44]. Ravandi refers to the role of Minister in the events of the Seljuk time. For example, he talks about Amid al-mulk al-Kunduri's mediation for the marriage of caliph' sister to Tugrul[45], or writes on Amid al-mulk's murder that Nizam al-Mulk was consent to this and tried to do it. He who was upset by this act of Nizam al-Mulk has spoken in his condemnation[46]. Ravandi, like Bulliet, believes that Amid al-mulk did not find the opportunity to prove his policies and became the victim of the incompatibility of his ideas with the views of Nizam al-mulk[47]. Muayyed al-mulk, the Minister of Barkiyaraq and Muhammad, the sons of Seljuk Malik-shah, who was praised by Anushirvan ibn Khalid Kashani, the author of the *Nafsat-al-Masdur*, was criticized by Ravandi. After telling the story of Amir Onar's rebellion against Barkiyaraq under provocation of the Minister Muayyed al-mulk, Ravandi quotes a tale saying that anyone who appoints the fools to the Ministry would jeopardize his government, and anyone who trusts the traitor will be destroyed[48].

3.2.3. Ravandi and Pathology of the Institution of Ministry

The power of the institution of the Ministry in the Seljuk period has undergone many changes. The dependence of the Seljuk regime on the king led to the weakening of the Ministry simultaneously with the decadence of the monarchy and created the ground for military dominance. According to Lambton, the changes in the power of the Minister

were a result of the nature of power in the medieval Persia[49]. The governors were struggling to weaken the power of the bureaucrats, and the Minister at the top of it. This was clearly demonstrated during the post-Nizam al-Mulk era. Klausner says: “with the weakening of the Minister's position, the sultan did not rely on him, and this was a sign of the demise of the institution of Ministry” [50].

The story of the conspiracy of the governors against Khajeh Ezzat al-Mulk, the Minister of Sultan Mas'ud ibn Muhammad ibn Malik-shah, and provocation of the Sultan to arrest him[51], is an example of the controversy between the governors and the bureaucrats in the Seljuk era. Another example of the decline of the position of Ministers against the governors is the story of Mohammad the Treasurer, the Minister of Massoud ibn Mohammad Malik-shah. Ravandi cites this narrative from his source, i.e. Seljuk-Nama [52]saying that Mohammad the Treasurer, the Minister of Massoud ibn Mohammad Malik-shah, was a brave and powerful man who did not respect the governors; so governors wrote a letter to Atabak Qarasanqar and complained, then he pressured the king and provide the ground for the murder of the Minister[53]. The dominance of Atabak on the Sultan of Seljuk, which led to the assassination of the Minister, tells of the shift in power balance in favor of the governors and Atabak.

According to available evidence, in the days of Ravandi, the Minister was only of power when the monarchy was capable of confronting the governors. The bureaucracy could not restore its lost power because of the weakness of the monarchy. The Ministry was defenseless against any damage from its opponents, and a reflection of this vulnerability

is clear in Ravandi's historiography. It can be said that the constraints imposed on the part of the other claimants of power such as governors and Atabakan caused the Ministry to face many obstacles in the administration of affairs, especially after Malik-shah, when family conflicts emerged within the Seljuk regime and the Seljuk faced gradual decadence.

4. Conclusion

The Ravandi approach to the Ministry can be considered as of important points:

1. Ravandi in his historiography shows sympathy with the Ministers and, expression of the ideals of the institution of Ministry is one of the hallmarks of his book. Ravandi can be considered as having a Minister-driven discourse in the cause of the events of the Seljuk era. As a result, his historiography can not be completely placed among the Shah-oriented texts, which were the prevalent tradition of Iranian historiography.
2. Writers of *Andarz-namas* and *Siyar al-muluks*, believe the way of Iranian kings to be consulting. Ravandi, who was himself close to the Seljuk court, greatly promoted this position, and, with the demand of the Minister, expresses the expectations of the appointment. He teaches the Minister, equal to the king, to restore and maintain morality and hope in the king of Seljuk.
3. Past-orientationism and regret of the glorious days of the Ministry are seen in Ravandi's approach. He twice expresses his regrets for the lack of knowledgeable Ministers. Ravandi believes that the fool Minister will destroy the kingdom. He

establishes a direct relationship between the ideal kingdom and the Ministry and, whenever he speaks of the ideal conditions of reign, he states the necessity of a competent Minister.

4. The Minister is considered in Ravandi's view as the king's arm in the administration of the country. For this reason, Ravandi expects from the King of Seljuk to choose a worthy Minister and give credence to a well-deserved, wise person and raise him up.

5. The expression of narrations and the theorization of the position of the Ministry in the power circle, to the extent that it occurs in the *Rahat al-Sudur*, is notorious among the historiographies of the Seljuk era. On the other hand, Ravandi, who lived in the late Seljuk era, was seeking to find the causes of the fall of the Seljuk, on one hand, and he intended to restore the glory of the past by educating the proper way of administration of the country, on the other hand. He sought to be close to the government. Ravandi's approach to the Ministry is considered to be a conscious act. He arose from the Persian Iraq and was grown up in a family interested in knowledge. Ravandi's belief in the efficacy of the ancient Iranian model of governance is reflected in the resources that he chooses and in the style of his writing.

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