

## *Sultāniyyāt*: Governmental and Administrative Letters

In this and the following chapter, we consider the two main types of letters found in Ibn ‘Abbād’s *KM* collection: governmental letters (*sultāniyyāt*) and social letters (*ikhwāniyyāt*). It is important to note from the outset that the distinction we make in this chapter and the following between governmental and social letters was neither as fixed nor as firm as letter-writing manuals portray. Al-Tha‘ālibī, in his manual of epistolary techniques *Siḥr al-balāgha wa-sirr al-barā‘a*, makes the distinction between *sultāniyyāt* and *ikhwāniyyāt*, but only at the end of a long introduction on various topics that the two types of letters share.<sup>1</sup> Letter writers were far more inventive than the critical literature would suggest.

*Sultāniyyāt* letters, as they are described in manuals of letter writing, reflect the many different concerns and functions of Muslim rulers. The first subcategory of these letters consists of formal edicts that the ruler issued directly to his subjects: celebrations of victories, announcements of the conclusion of treaties with other states, investitures of the appointment of officials, and other such formal proclamations. The second subcategory is comprised of government correspondence: letters to the rulers of other dynasties, correspondence with local officials and members of the judiciary, letters concerning the collection of taxes, and letters concerning other administrative matters.

Because of the poor state of preservation of state epistles from the first to third/seventh to ninth centuries, the letters of Ibn ‘Abbād often represent the first, and in some cases, only surviving examples of many particular types of government correspondence from the first four centuries of Muslim rule. This situation makes the process of comparison to other documents of similar types difficult. However, the Buyids based their administrative apparatus to a large extent on the Abbasid administrative structures present in western Iran and Iraq before their conquest of the region. Therefore, while the evidence presented here is difficult to contextualize historically, it does provide some important insights into earlier Abbasid state epistolary practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Tha‘ālibī, *Siḥr al-balāgha wa-sirr al-barā‘a*, 4.

## Government Proclamations, Edicts, and Other Formal Documents

### *Letters of Conquest*

Letters of conquest were official proclamations by rulers upon the defeat of opponents in battle. Chancery writers composed them shortly after the actual conquest; these announced the acquisition of new territory by the ruler. Written in the name of the ruler, they were powerful and lengthy displays of the dynasty's real and rhetorical powers.

Throughout the period of Abbasid rule in the second and third/eighth and ninth centuries, the caliphal chancery produced letters of victory, however, very few appear to have been recorded. The caliph al-Mu'taṣim's (r. 218–27/833–42) letter written upon the capture of the heretic Bābak al-Khurramī in 222/837 is the sole extant example of this letter type.<sup>2</sup> Given the often important documentary and exemplary literary qualities of these letters, one wonders why more did not survive.

Prose descriptions of important battles also appear to have been a theme for earlier letter writers. The third/ninth century epistolographer, Sa'īd b. Ḥumayd wrote a description of the battle between al-Musta'īn and al-Mu'tazz which he composed in 251/865. Interestingly, this piece was commissioned by the governor and read aloud in the mosque, perhaps a foreshadowing of the later Buyid practice of composing letters of conquest.<sup>3</sup>

In the Buyid period, the *amīrs*, as the main holders of military power, issued letters of conquest. Ibn 'Abbād's letter (1.1) announcing Mu'ayyid al-Dawla's defeat of Qābūs b. Wushmgīr in Jurjān written in Jumādā 11 371/December 981 is a notable example.<sup>4</sup> Historical accounts agree that the immediate cause of the battle between the Buyid *amīrs* and Qābūs was the latter's decision to harbor Fakhr al-Dawla.<sup>5</sup> In 370/980, 'Aḍud al-Dawla, acting as the leader of the Buyid dynasty, removed Fakhr al-Dawla as the ruler of Hamadhān, on account of his prior collaboration with 'Aḍud's enemies. Fakhr al-Dawla fled to Jurjān seeking the support of Qābūs. 'Aḍud al-Dawla sent Mu'ayyid al-Dawla to demand that Qābūs deliver Fakhr al-Dawla to

<sup>2</sup> al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, 6:400–404.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfhart P. Heinrichs, *ET*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Sa'īd b. Ḥumayd."

<sup>4</sup> Ibn 'Abbād, *Rasā'il*, 3–8 [1.1].

<sup>5</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi l-tārīkh*, 9:11; al-Rūdhrawārī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, 15, notes that the battle began when 'Aḍud al-Dawla detected a hidden duplicity in a letter he wrote to Qābūs asking him to show his obedience. While al-'Utbī, *al-Yamūnī fi sharḥ akhbār*, 57, by contrast, states that although 'Aḍud al-Dawla made promises of territory to Qābūs, he refused, stating that he was loyal to Fakhr al-Dawla.

him. When Qābūs refused, the Buyids launched their attack against Qābūs' strongholds in Jurjān.

Ibn 'Abbād composed his letter (1.1) shortly after the siege of Astarābādh and the flight of Qābūs and Fakhr al-Dawla. The conclusion of this letter reveals that the vizier wanted his letter announced to the public; in his words to its recipient, "make the wooden beams of the *minbars* and the voices of the gatherings (*alsinat al-maḥāḍir*) speak of it."<sup>6</sup> The chancery sent letters to the major cities in Buyid territory. The letter is the longest in his collection and is a tour de force of rhetorical and literary techniques.

In its structure, the letter conforms to a basic form of letters of conquest, sharing several features with the third-/ninth-century letter written for al-Mu'taṣim on the defeat of Bābak. It is divided into five main sections: a prologue enumerating God's blessings (*ta'dād al-ni'am*) to the ruler through this victory; a narrative of the events prior to the battle; a stylized description of the action of the battle; a narrative of the conclusion of hostilities; and an expression of praise to the ruler and thanks to God for victory.<sup>7</sup>

Letter 1.1 frames the Buyid conquest of Jurjān as a legitimate battle by the Islamic state against Muslim rebels who had deviated from the religious law (*sharī'a*). This is in sharp contrast to reports of the battle from the historical chronicles, which describe the battle as a military action. Ibn 'Abbād specifically mentions that the caliph al-Ṭā'ī wrote to 'Aḍud al-Dawla sanctioning his conduct of war<sup>8</sup> and stating that Qābūs b. Wushmgīr, Fakhr al-Dawla, and their supporters were Muslim rebels (*bughāt; khawārij*), and therefore legitimate opponents of Muslim armies according to Qur'ān 49:9.<sup>9</sup>

Letter 1.1 not only sanctions the Buyids' battle, it narrates the Buyids' actions as conforming to *sharī'a* judgments on the proper conduct of Muslim armies. According to the letter, the Buyids repeatedly warned and admonished Qābūs and his men, gave them an opportunity to repent, and did not initiate hostilities.<sup>10</sup> Their use of legitimate weapons and tactics also accorded with the *sharī'a*. At the conclusion of the battle, Ibn 'Abbad mentions the correct

6 Ibn 'Abbād, *Rasā'il*, 8 [1.1].

7 Ibid., 3–8 [1.1]; the letter of al-Mu'taṣim is also divided into five parts: an enumeration of blessings (*ta'dād al-ni'am*); narrative of the events leading to battle; a description of military actions; a description of the conclusion of hostilities; an expression of thanks to God and the caliph.

8 Ibid., 6 [1.1].

9 On the interpretations of this verse, see Khaled Abou el Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37–47.

10 Ibn 'Abbād, *Rasā'il*, 6 [1.1].

manner in which the Buyids divided the booty,<sup>11</sup> and notes that they did not kill their prisoners of war, in accordance with the *sharī'a*'s rules on the treatment of Muslim rebels (*bughāt*).<sup>12</sup>

The letter also characterizes the actions of the Buyids as legitimate in terms of their rational conception of God's justice (*'adl*). The introduction asserts that 'Aḍud al-Dawla received a special grace (*ni'ma*) that descended to him from God, when he took upon himself many of the duties and functions traditionally associated with the Abbasid caliphs.<sup>13</sup> As such, the Buyids' special possession of grace obligated their clients to thank them as benefactors. According to rationalist theologians, the giving of thanks for a grace received was a rational obligation incumbent upon all men.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the letter refers to Qābūs as an "ingrate" (*ghāmiṭ*) who violated his rational obligations to other men and God, in opposition to the Buyids' grace and acts of gratitude to their benefactor.<sup>15</sup> According to the letter's narrative, the battle came about as the result of Qābūs' basic lack of gratitude toward his benefactor 'Aḍud al-Dawla. This led to his eventual corruption and his adherence to the paths of injustice (*sunan al-ẓulm*).<sup>16</sup> Qābūs' ingratitude also violated his covenant with God. The misconduct of Fakhr al-Dawla, whose name is not directly mentioned in the letter,<sup>17</sup> is compared to that of disobedient child to his father (*'uqūq*).<sup>18</sup> Thus, the letter seems to suggest that on rational grounds, too, the Buyid military action was just.

Ibn 'Abbād's letter of conquest balances two discourses about the legitimacy of the Buyid *amīrs'* military actions. The Buyids' adherence to the *sharī'a* is reinforced on the linguistic level by the continuous use of language and imagery drawn from the Qur'ān and *sunna* of the Prophet. At several critical points in the narrative, Ibn 'Abbād's letter explicitly defines the Buyids' conformity to the Prophet's *sunna*. For example, Ibn 'Abbād describes how, prior to the conflict, they spoke with Qābūs "of his obligations according to Islamic law"

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 7 [1.1].

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 8 [1.1].

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 3 [1.1], states that 'Aḍud al-Dawla protected the community and dispelled anxiety, spread justice and mercy in the land, made the pilgrimage and *jihād* flourish, exercised good politics among the people, and protected the borders.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3 [1.1]; see A. Kevin Reinhart, *Before Revelation: The Boundaries of Muslim Moral Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 105.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn 'Abbād, *Rasā'il*, 4 [1.1].

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 5 [1.1] refers to him as *fulān*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

(*nubaṣṣiruhu ḥaqq al-sharīʿa*).<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Ibn ‘Abbād states that “we granted the prisoners [of war] favor in accordance with the tradition that has been followed concerning sparing blood after the majority had returned to peace” (wa-qad taqaddamnā bil-mann ‘alā l-asrā iqtidā’ al-sunna al-matbū’a fī ḥaqq al-dimā’ ba’d sukūn al-dahmā’).<sup>20</sup>

The language of the letter is specific with regard to the particularities of theological categories and usage. Ibn ‘Abbād deploys the language of iniquity (*fisq*) and deviation from religion (*murūq*) to describe Qābūs’ wrongdoing, instead of calling them a sin (*dhanb*; *khaṭrā*). Similarly, he identifies Qābūs’ wrongdoing with the neutral term of *ghamṭ* as opposed to the legal term *kufr*. He identifies the fault of Fakhr al-Dawla as *‘uqūq*, to reflect his disobedience to his benefactor, as mentioned; thus, he evokes the common rationalist theological trope of God as the beneficent father.<sup>21</sup> Resorting to this language allowed Ibn ‘Abbād to reframe the acts of Qābūs and Fakhr al-Dawla within the abstract discourse of rational obligations.

The letter thus involves a complex argument about the grounds upon which one could justify the Buyid *amīrs*’ military actions. Ibn ‘Abbād designed this letter’s argument to appeal to the conceptions, language, concerns, and anxieties of the Muslim *‘ulamā’* of western Iran, those who may have had reservations about the Buyids’ possession and use of military power. To this end, Ibn ‘Abbād consciously crafted this letter to demonstrate to the *‘ulamā’* that the Buyids’ rule and exercise of force was consonant with God’s justice and law. Ibn ‘Abbād’s broad learning, as both a theologian and a jurist, allowed him to write a letter such as this, which effectively combines the acts of narration, legitimation, and celebration.<sup>22</sup>

### *Celebrations of Victory (bishārāt)*

In addition to drafting letters about the victories of Mu’ayyid al-Dawla, Ibn ‘Abbād also wrote letters in celebration and in response to victories achieved by other Buyid *amīrs*. The *KM* includes three letters of celebration written by Ibn

19 Ibid., 4 [1.1].

20 Ibid., 8 [1.1].

21 Sophia Vasalou, *Moral Agents and Their Deserts: The Character of Mu’tazilite Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 130, aptly describes the common Mu’tazilī description of the relation of God to believer as that between father and child as being “ubiquitous in Mu’tazilite ethics” and notes that it stands in contrast to the Ash’arī model of God’s relationship to man as being a “relationship between *mālik* and *mamlūk*, in which the latter had no claims and the former no obligations.”

22 It would be of great interest to compare and contrast the letter of victory to the *qaṣīda*, as two long ceremonial forms that often highlight the ruler’s victory.

‘Abbād over the course of the years 367–69/977–79: letter 1.7 announces ‘Aḍud al-Dawla’s conquest of Basra, al-Ahwāz, and al-Wāsiṭ in 367/977;<sup>23</sup> letter 1.4 celebrates ‘Aḍud al-Dawla’s victory and execution of the Hamdanid ruler, Abū Taghlib b. Ḥamdān<sup>24</sup> in Muḥarram 369/July 979;<sup>25</sup> letter 1.6 announces victory over the Salarid ruler Wahsudān b. Muḥammad.<sup>26</sup> Ibn ‘Abbād also wrote two replies (*jawābāt*) to letters of celebration that he received from other *amīrs*: letter 1.2 is a response to a letter received in celebration of the conquest of a fortress (*qaḥ’a*) by ‘Aḍud al-Dawla; letter 1.5. is a response to a letter announcing the above-mentioned conquest of Basra by ‘Aḍud al-Dawla.<sup>27</sup>

Letters of celebration, like letters of victory, were read aloud in the mosques of the territory ruled by the *amīr*.<sup>28</sup> They informed the population of the victories won by the *amīr* or the dynasty. The chancery also issued celebratory letters specifically for victories by other *amīrs*. Such documents seem to demonstrate that the Buyid *amīrs* acknowledged the sovereignty of each *amīr* over his territory and were thus designed to forestall any rivalries, which were common in the history of the dynasty.

At times, celebratory letters offered particular benefits to the population. Ibn ‘Abbād sent a letter (1.9) to his subordinate in Iṣfahan, Abū l-‘Abbās al-Ḍab-bī, directly after the victory over the Samanids in 371/982.<sup>29</sup> The letter is an announcement that, after this important defeat, the customs, tariffs, and other non-Islamic taxes that had been unlawfully levied in Iṣfahān should be abolished in celebration of this event. In particular, the letter appears to be concerned with the extortionate practices of the tribes that demanded protection money (*badhraqa*) from merchants.

### *Acknowledgments of Peace Agreements and Treaties (mu‘āhada; ṣulḥ)*

Ibn ‘Abbād wrote several letters that acknowledged the terms of peace agreements (*hudna*) and peace treaties (*ṣulḥ*). According to Islamic legal theory, the power of negotiating with non-Muslim states belonged to the *imām*, who then

23 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 18–22 [1.7].

24 See M. Canard, *ET*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Ḥamdānids.”

25 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 11–13 [1.4]; Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam* (ed. Ḥasan), 5:447.

26 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 15–18 [1.6].

27 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi l-tārīkh*, 8:67.

28 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 18 [1.6], indicates this with the expression: “We have informed you of this event so that you may speak about it from the *minbars*” (*al-tahadduth bihi ‘alā l-manābir*).

29 Ibid., 30–3 [1.9].

delegated this power to his military commanders in the field.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, ‘Aḍud al-Dawla, and not the Abbasid caliph, concluded a peace treaty with the Byzantine emperor in 372/982. Ibn ‘Abbād, in letter 1.3, acknowledges a letter from the vizier of Baghdad, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Yūsuf, informing him of the ten-year truce that the delegate Ibn Shahram concluded with the Byzantines in 372/982.<sup>31</sup> Ibn ‘Abbād’s letter praising the sovereignty of ‘Aḍud al-Dawla signaled his acceptance of ‘Aḍud al-Dawla’s right to make treaties on behalf of the Muslim community.

Similarly, Ibn ‘Abbād confirmed his adherence to a peace treaty (*ṣulḥ*) contracted with another Muslim state. In letter 1.8, written after the Buyid victory over Samanid forces in Jurjān on 22 Dhū l-Qa‘da 371/19 May 982, Ibn ‘Abbād discusses the terms of the peace treaty that the Buyids had concluded with the Samanids a decade earlier in 361/971.<sup>32</sup> He clarified this for real political reasons: the Buyid attack upon the Samanids was legitimate because the Samanids had violated the terms of their treaty by harboring Fakhr al-Dawla, and Qābūs b. Wushmgīr.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Decrees of Appointment (‘ahd; ‘uhūd)*

Ibn ‘Abbād drafted decrees of appointment (*‘uhūd*) for public officials employed by the state. The vizier’s appointment letters closely follow Abbasid models in both form and content.<sup>34</sup> Ibn ‘Abbād, however, wrote his letters in the name of the *amīr* Mu‘ayyid al-Dawla, identified in the documents as the client (*mawla*) of the Abbasid caliph.<sup>35</sup> The letters were read aloud during ceremonies for the appointments of officials to their posts.

30 Majid Khadduri, *ET*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Mu‘āhadah.”

31 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā‘il*, 10 [1.3]. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Yūsuf, *Rasā‘il*, fols. 16b–17a, provides the letter announcing the conclusion of the treaty with the Byzantines, to which Ibn ‘Abbād was responding. The letter describes the gifts that the Byzantines offered to ‘Aḍud al-Dawla through the Byzantine envoy.

32 Donohue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq*, 71.

33 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā‘il*, 25 [1.8], “and it was among the rules of the peace accord and its judgments that neither side would accept the escapees of the army of the other, nor the run-aways or the fugitives, and would not protect the one who had rebelled and then fled.” These lines are clearly a reference to Fakhr al-Dawla and Qābūs.

34 Compare the letter of appointment written for the vizier of the caliph al-Muqtadir, Ḥāmid b. al-‘Abbās preserved in Ibn Ḥamdūn, *al-Tadhkira al-Ḥamdūniyya*, ed. I. ‘Abbās (Beirut: Ma‘had al-Inmā‘ al-‘Arabī, 1983), 3:363–364.

35 Hachmeier, *Die Briefe Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Ṣābi’s*, 237–238. Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā‘il*, 34 [2.1], 39[2.2], 42 [2.3], 46 [2.4], 53 [2.7], 55 [2.9], 57, [2.10]. In two letters (Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā‘il*, 50 [2.5]; 51 [2.6]) Ibn ‘Abbād appointed administrators without referring to the caliph. Letter 2.8 (p. 54), concerning the appointment of a supervisor over water in the Zarrīnrūdḥ (Qa-

Ibn ‘Abbād’s appointment letters stipulated the precise duties, obligations, and responsibilities of government officials, and re-affirm the legitimacy of their actions in terms of Islamic law.<sup>36</sup> For example, in his letter for the appointment of the market inspector (*muḥtasib*) of Rayy, Ibn ‘Abbād enumerated the functions of the office.<sup>37</sup> For those actions of the *muḥtasib* where there was clear Qur’ānic sanction the vizier supplied appropriate verses.<sup>38</sup> However, the vizier also applied general Qur’ānic verses to specific situations, as in the imposition of modest dress upon women,<sup>39</sup> or in the maintenance of order in the marketplace.<sup>40</sup>

The vizier’s letters for the appointment of judges, such as his two letters appointing ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī as chief *qāḍī*, are particularly interesting. In these letters, Ibn ‘Abbād makes explicit references to Mu‘tazilī jurisprudential methodology.<sup>41</sup> While those outside Mu‘tazilī theological circles would have understood these verses simply as references to the Qur’ān, for those well versed in rationalist jurisprudence they had specific import. This suggests the fact that the vizier’s letters were understood differently by different groups, depending on the orientation and knowledge of the audience.

### *Letters of Safe Passage (amān)*

Ibn ‘Abbād also wrote numerous letters of safe passage guaranteeing the right of rebels to return to the territory controlled by the Buyid *amīr*. A small number of extant documents can be compared to those found in the *KM*. The evidence that survives suggests that the form and content of letters of safe passage were well established by the fourth/tenth century.<sup>42</sup>

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ra-su; Garmas-rūd), was written in the name of the vizier alone.

36 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 34 [2.1] 3.9 [2.2]; 42 [2.3]; 46 [2.4]; 53 [2.7]; 55 [2.9]; 57 [2.10].

37 Ibid., 40–41 [2.2].

38 For example, *ibid.*, 41 [2.2], quotes from Qur’ān 83:1–2 with regard to the rectitude of measurements.

39 Ibid., provides a quotation from Qur’ān 24:29 that urges men to avert their gaze and practice modesty, but indicates nothing explicit about women’s clothing.

40 Ibid., cites Qur’ān 12:52, which refers to the failure of trickery (*kayd*) in this life. The blockage of paths in the market place was apparently an example of unfair market practices.

41 For example, *ibid.*, 35 [2.1], quotes Qur’ān 4:115 when discussing the matter of adhering to the consensus of the community (*ijmā’ al-umma*). Wael B. Hallaq, in his article “On the Authoritativeness of Sunni Consensus,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (1986): 427–454, demonstrates that the verse was central to the attempts of Mu‘tazilī rationalist jurists; ‘Abd al-Jabbār devotes a long portion of his *Mughnī* (17:212) to offering a Qur’ānic proof text for the authoritativeness consensus (*hujjiyyat al-ijmā’*).

42 Robinson and Marsham, “The Safe-Conduct,” 247–281, discuss two examples of *amān* texts from the second/eighth century: the aforementioned *amān* of ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alī,

The three *amān* letters of Ibn ‘Abbād preserved in the *KM*<sup>43</sup> all begin with the identification of the *amīr* as the issuer of the decree, and open with the phrase “This letter is from (*hādihā l-kitāb min*) Mu’ayyid al-Dawla.”<sup>44</sup> They then provide an account of the general circumstances necessitating the issue of an *amān*: in letter 3.2 the addressee took control of a fortress (*qal‘a*);<sup>45</sup> in letter 3.3 the addressee wrongfully harbored a fugitive;<sup>46</sup> and in letter 3.6 the addressee fled his territory because he could no longer pay his taxes.<sup>47</sup> The letters then stipulate the conditions upon which the particular grant of safety depended: in letter 3.2, the decree demanded the surrender of the fortress; in letter 3.3 it required a renewed pledge of loyalty; in letter 3.6 there was a demand to return to the territory that the individual had fled. Significantly, in all three of these letters, the actual decree of *amān* is based on the *amān* of God and His Prophet.<sup>48</sup> In each letter, the addressee is enjoined to return to his former state of loyalty and obedience to the ruler. In letters 3.3 and 3.6 there is a final clause alerting readers of the letter to heed its contents and not harass the addressee upon his return to Buyid territory.<sup>49</sup>

#### *Letters relating to the Pilgrimage (ḥajj)*

Ibn ‘Abbād wrote letters on behalf of the *amīr* concerning the conduct of the *ḥajj*. Five letters in the *KM*<sup>50</sup> address the issue of the transit of pilgrims across Buyid territory. The letters are responses to inquiries made by the leader of the army (*ṣāhib al-jaysh*), Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Sīmjūr (d. 378/989) about the status of the Khurāsānī pilgrimage caravans.<sup>51</sup> In two of these letters, Ibn ‘Abbād assures Ibn Sīmjūr that the pilgrims coming from Khurāsān would be

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drafted by Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ (d. c. 138/756), the two versions of an *amān* written for Yazīd b. Hubayra in 132/740.

43 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 60 [3.2]; 60 [3.3]; 62 [3.6].

44 Ibid., 60 [3.2]; 60 [3.3]; compare to *ibid.*, 62 [3.6] in which Mu’ayyid al-Dawla claims the title *mawlā amīr al-mu’minīn*. At least some *amān* letters of the second/eighth century began with an identical opening formula; see Robinson and Marsham, “The Safe-Conduct,” 252, where the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136–158/754–775) grants the *amān* decree directly.

45 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 60 [3.2].

46 Ibid., 60 [3.3].

47 Ibid., 62 [3.6].

48 Ibid., 60 [3.2]; 60 [3.3]; 62 [3.6]. Compare the long list of other prophets in the earlier *amān* decrees, see Robinson and Marsham, “The Safe-Conduct,” 253.

49 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 60 [3.3]; 62 [3.6].

50 Ibid., 67 [4.1]; 71 [4.4]; 73 [4.6]; 73 [4.7]; 74 [4.8].

51 Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties: A Chronological and Genealogical Manual* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 175.

offered protection by the Buyid *amīrs*.<sup>52</sup> Several letters also contain responses to the *amīr*'s request for information regarding the status of the pilgrims' caravans as they transited Buyid territory.<sup>53</sup>

In his correspondence with Ibn Simjūr, Ibn 'Abbād refers to the importance of maintaining the pilgrimage for the general welfare (*maṣāliḥ*) of the Muslims and the religion of Islam. Such a concern demonstrates the extent to which the Buyids, as political leaders, envisioned themselves as guarantors of the religious order as well.

### *Letters relating to Jihād*

Ibn 'Abbād also wrote letters encouraging *jihād* against the forces of the Byzantines and their allies. In the *KM*, several letters are addressed to the guardian of the borders (*ṣāḥib al-thaḡhr*) in the city of Ardabīl in Āzarbayjān.<sup>54</sup> This indicates the importance that the Buyid rulers placed on Muslims' religious duty to encourage *jihād*.

Arabic language sources do not mention the encouragement of *jihād* in Āzarbayjān. However, the Armenian historian Stephen of Taron (fl. first half fifth/eleventh century) described raids by the *amīr* Aboutlough of Golthn with 905 pious warriors.<sup>55</sup> These Muslim *mujāhidūn* were raiding the region of Vaspurakān, around 100 miles to the west of the city of Ardabīl, controlled by a vassal of the Bagratid kings of Armenia. In his letters to this *ṣāḥib al-thaḡhr*, Ibn 'Abbād exhorted him and his fellow warriors (*mujāhidūn*) to continue to inform him of their progress and to seek his support and aid.<sup>56</sup> Significantly, Ibn 'Abbād writes expressing the support of the *amīr* for the *jihād* and makes no mention of the Abbasid caliph. Rather, his letters frame the *jihād* as a prerogative of the Buyid *amīr*. The letters suggest one of the ways in which the Buyids assumed the roles and duties of the caliph for themselves.<sup>57</sup>

52 Ibn 'Abbād, *Rasā'il*, 67 [4.1]; 71 [4.4].

53 Ibid., 73 [4.6]; 73 [4.7]; 74 [4.8].

54 Ibid., 67–69 [4.2]; 69–71 [4.3]; 75–76 [4.10].

55 Stephen of Taron, *Histoire Universelle par Asolik de Taron*, ed. F. Macler (Paris: Leroux, 1917), 54.

56 Ibn 'Abbād, *Rasā'il*, 69 [4.2].

57 Ibid., 76 [4.10].

## Government Correspondence

The second main category of *sultāniyyāt* consists of government correspondence. The production of this correspondence came under the direct control of the vizier. As head of the administration, Ibn ‘Abbād was responsible for appointing agents (*tawliyat al-akfā*).<sup>58</sup> He educated government officials in the proper execution of their tasks and trained his scribes by establishing particular themes on which they should compose letters.<sup>59</sup>

Ibn ‘Abbād inspected government communiqués, and demanded that all correspondence be executed with the greatest efficiency and precision. Al-Tawḥīdī, who was a scribe for Ibn ‘Abbād, reported many examples of harsh judgments that Ibn ‘Abbād meted out on scribes who failed to live up to his standards.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Ibn ‘Abbād’s reputation for finding fault with the writing of his scribes was so great that even the educated and eloquent Buyid vizier of Baghdad, Abū ‘Abdallāh Ibn Sa’dān (d. 374/984), was hesitant to write a letter to Ibn ‘Abbād for fear of the vizier’s critical response.<sup>61</sup>

In letter 19.2, Ibn ‘Abbād chastises one of his officials for the decline in his scribal skills. The letter demonstrates the vizier’s concern for the correct performance of administrative tasks and his relationship with his subordinates:

كُتِبَتْ أَبْتَدَأُكَ بِالْمَخَاطَبَةِ وَخَصَصْتُكَ فِي آلَاتِ الْكِتَابَةِ عَلَى الْمَدَامَةِ وَالْمَوَاطَبَةِ  
فَأَجِدُ خَطَّكَ يَزْدَادُ عَلَى الْأَيَّامِ وَيَسْتَجَادُ ثُمَّ أَهْمَلْتُ التَّعَهُدَ وَاسْتَعْمَلْتُ التَّجَوُّزَ  
وَصَارَ مَا تَكْتُبُهُ مُضْطَرِبَ الْحُرُوفِ مُتَضَاعِفَ الضَّعْفِ وَالتَّحْرِيفِ . جَعَلْتَ أُنْأُولُ  
لَكَ يَوْمًا بِقَلَمٍ لَمْ يَسْتَجِدْ بَرِيهَ وَيَوْمًا بِمَدَادٍ لَمْ يَسَاعِدْ جَرِيهَ إِلَى أَنْ صَارَتْ رِدَاءَةُ الْخَطِّ  
سِتَّةَ لَكَ وَسِنًّا وَرَسْمًا ثَابِتًا وَمُرْتَهَنًا فَقَدِمْتُ هَذَا الْخُطَابَ مَذْكُرًا وَرَجُوتَ الْأُ  
تَحُوجُ إِلَى مِثْلِهِ مِنْكَ .

وَأَيَّاكَ إِيَّاكَ وَاضْطِرَّارِي فَتَابِرْ عَلَى الْمَشَقِّ وَالتَّسْوِيدِ وَاهْتَمَّ بِالتَّصْحِيحِ وَالتَّجْوِيدِ  
وَاعْمَلْ عَلَى أَنْ تَقُومَ حَرْفًا حَرْفًا مِنْ خَطِّكَ وَتَتَصَوَّرَهُ فِي نَفْسِكَ قَبْلَ تَصْوِيرِهِ بِيَدِكَ

58 Sourdel, *Le vizirat ‘abbāsīde*, 2:649–659.

59 Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-udabā’*, 3:1153–1155.

60 See, e.g., al-Tawḥīdī, *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn*, 119.

61 Al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Risāla fi ‘ilm al-kitāba*, 47.

وليكن لك من يوفئك على مواضع التقصير والتضجيع لأتئين الزيادة فيما يرد منك  
وقتهاً وقتاً قبل أن أوسعك تهجيناً ومقتاً والسلام. <sup>62</sup>

I wrote to you before, mentioning to you the skills of the scribal art continuously and assiduously. I found that your hand increased in beauty over time and was highly esteemed. Then you decided to forgo care and you began to pass over things hastily. Thus, the letters of the alphabet that you wrote were all mixed up and had multiple weaknesses and confusions. I first believed that one day you had a pen that did not have a fine enough point, or that, on another day, you had ink that did not flow properly, until its faulty nature became your habit and course, as well as a fixed and well-established custom.

So I wrote this letter to you pointing these things out, and I hoped that you would not need another reminder of the same warning. Beware, beware—I order you!—persist in writing rough drafts and copies, and pay attention to corrections and embellishments. Try to make every letter of your handwriting distinct. Imagine it within yourself before you form it with your hand. And may there be for you One who will support you in the areas of shortcoming and inadequacy, so that I will be able to perceive an improvement in that which comes from you from one time to the next, before I need to heap abuse upon you in disparagement and disgust. Farewell.

#### *Letters to Other Viziers, Rulers, and Local Dynasts*

Ibn ‘Abbād wrote numerous diplomatic letters intended to solidify his political relationships across the territory that he ruled. His most frequent correspondent in the *KM* was to his subordinate in Iṣfahān Abū ‘Abbās al-Ḍabbī.<sup>63</sup> Ibn ‘Abbād also wrote numerous letters to the viziers who served the other *amīrs* of the Buyid dynasty, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Yūsuf<sup>64</sup> and Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Ṣābī,<sup>65</sup> who were both noted epistolographers and resided in Baghdad.

Ibn ‘Abbād also corresponded with local dynasts within Buyid territory. He wrote one letter to the Bavdanid Iṣfahbad of Shahriyārkūh who ruled from

62 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 224 [19.2].

63 Ibid., 167 [12.6]; 175 [13.2]; 181 [13.6]; 228 [19.8]; 239 [20.4]; 240 [20.6].

64 ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Yūsuf, *Rasā’il*, fols. 30a–31b; 39a–40a; 54b–56a; 69b–70b; 70b–71b; 71b–72b; 83b–84a (fragmentary).

65 Al-Ṣābī, *Rasā’il al-Ṣābī*, MS Paris 3314, fols. 203b–204a.

Firīm in Ṭabaristān,<sup>66</sup> and a letter to one of the hereditary rulers of Rūyān who held the title *ustandār*.<sup>67</sup>

Ibn ‘Abbād maintained ties with important allies in the territory adjacent to the Buyids. He frequently wrote letters to the ruler of Khurāsān, the leader of the army (*ṣāhib al-jaysh*) Muḥammad b. Sīmjūr, as we have seen,<sup>68</sup> and to an unidentified member of the Salarid dynasty, ruling from Ṭārum in Āzarbayjān.<sup>69</sup>

### *Letters concerning the Judiciary*

Ibn ‘Abbād was responsible for the appointment of judges in the cities under his control and he supervised this system along with his chief *qāḍī* ‘Abd al-Jabbār.<sup>70</sup> While he attempted to remain impartial when legal differences arose between the legal schools, on occasion Ibn ‘Abbād redressed the misconduct of judges if he discovered that they engaged in corruption.

The most common way for the vizier to intervene in legal matters was through his supervision of the redress of complaints (*maḏālim*) that arose because of abuses by judges, governors, or other state-appointed agents. Ibn ‘Abbād’s supervision of his appointees was legendary for its care and efficiency. Niẓāmī ‘Arūḍī (d. last quarter sixth/twelfth century) reported in the *Chahār Maqāla* (The four discourses) that Ibn ‘Abbād once dismissed a judge in the following fashion:

There was a *qāḍī* in Qumm who was appointed by Ibn ‘Abbād. The vizier had a strong belief in the man’s piety and fear of God. Little by little, however, word came to him of something different, until such time that two witnesses from the trustworthy people of Qumm approached Ibn ‘Abbād and said that the *qāḍī* had accepted, in the course of a dispute, a bribe of 500 *dīnārs*.

Al-Ṣāhib immediately picked up his pen and wrote:

In the name of God, the Merciful and Beneficent—Oh you *qāḍī* from Qumm, we have removed you from office, so go! (*qum*).<sup>71</sup>

66 Madelung, “The Minor Dynasties of Northern Iran,” 216–218.

67 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 104 [7.6]; Madelung, “The Minor Dynasties of Northern Iran,” 218–219.

68 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 67 [4.1]; 71 [4.4]; 74 [4.8]; 77 [5.1]; 82 [5.6]; 158 [11.7]; 172 [12.10].

69 Ibid., 87 [6.1]; 89 [6.4]; 96 [6.8]; 99 [7.1]; 111 [8.1]; 124 [9.2]; 125 [9.3]; 164 [12.2]; Madelung, “The Minor Dynasties of Northern Iran,” 223–226.

70 See Sourdel, *Le vizirat ‘abbāsīde*, 2:640–9.

71 Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī, *Chahār maqālah* (Tehran: Chāpkhānah-i Dānishgāh, 1956), 30–31.

Ibn ‘Abbād’s terse treatment of this corrupt *qāḍī* was a model of how state power should be wielded against judges who strayed from their appointed tasks. And indeed, in the letters we see several cases in which Ibn ‘Abbād replaced members of the judiciary, although none matches this example in the brevity (*ījāz*) of the vizier’s composition.<sup>72</sup> Such examples, while fanciful, point to the vizier’s role as a safeguard of the judiciary—his oversight was necessary for the just government of the state.

### *Maintaining Law and Order*

Ibn ‘Abbād was responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the areas that he ruled. While city life often went on unhindered by the larger and weaker structures of state authority, there were occasional matters that required the ruler’s attention. However, reading the letters reveals that there was a steady stream of matters that required the vizier’s attention.

When there was a disturbance in the cities over which he ruled, Ibn ‘Abbād’s first recourse was to call upon the agents of government loyal to him and provide them with advice on how to deal with situations on their own. Government agents, however, did not always remain loyal to the vizier, and their distance from the ruler gave them a sense of latitude that was at times illusory.

For example, in letter 13.9, Ibn ‘Abbād wrote to a government agent blaming him for the release of two prisoners, an action about which he had previously cautioned his addressee. The two men, who Ibn ‘Abbād states were “known as Ibn ‘Alūya and Ibn Ḥammād,” were responsible for inciting disorder that caused a particular *qāḍī*, Abū Ṭāhir, who had been appointed by Ibn ‘Abbād, to abandon the city. The *qāḍī*’s expulsion appears to have been directly related to his beliefs.<sup>73</sup>

In his letter, Ibn ‘Abbād insists that any judge (*ḥākim*) sent from the ruler’s court ought to be obeyed. He then adds that the legal schools (*madhāhib*) in the community were not compulsory (*lā ijbār fihā*) and were tantamount to differences that were inherited from the past (*mawrūth ‘alā l-ayyām*). He then commands the local official to reinstate Abū Ṭāhir and others in their positions.<sup>74</sup>

Throughout the letter, the Ibn ‘Abbād implores the agent to look to his example as a model for his behavior. In the beginning of the letter he counsels his addressee to examine “our own practice (*sīratunā*) concerning those who stir up discord and raise up a minaret of evil in the most important centers of the dynasty and the settled areas” (*al-amṣār al-mumaṣṣara wa-l-buldān*

72 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 184 [13.9].

73 He was probably a Mu‘tazilī.

74 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 183–184 [13.9].

*al-mukawwara*). The implication is that the vizier's action should be a living example of how just government should be applied even in the small city this agent controlled.

### *Communicating with Local Notables*

Given the divided character of Buyid society, it was not possible to rule simply by depending on government officials. Rather, Ibn 'Abbād exerted his will through the cooperation of local notables (*a'yān*). These notables, important jurists and *sharīfs* and other leaders of communities, were a particularly important group with which the vizier interacted.

Letters 6.5 and 6.6 describe Ibn 'Abbād's response to disturbances among the *ashrāf* in Qazvīn that led to violence and the prohibition of some 'Alids from selling their goods in the market.<sup>75</sup> A group of 'Alids embroiled in this violence traveled to the court of Ibn 'Abbād and made a formal complaint to the vizier. Ibn 'Abbād attempted to resolve the issue by corresponding with two groups.

In letter 6.5, addressed to two *sharīfs*, Ibn 'Abbād calls upon the leaders of the *ashrāf* to settle the differences among themselves, as these were apparently at the root of the disturbances. Although he mentions in this letter his particular regard for the 'Alid *ashrāf*, he clearly places the burden upon these two men to resolve the situation.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, Ibn 'Abbād's letter 6.6, addressed to a close confidant of the vizier in Qazvīn, urges him to convene a meeting of the notables of the city (*wujūh al-balad wa-l-a'yān*) and to read his letter aloud to them. He insists that they must tolerate differences in the community with regard to doctrine, and that the ruler will punish those who willfully incite disorder (*fitna*). The final section of this letter urges the notables to respect the 'Alid *ashrāf*, and noting their place historically in the community, he suggests that differences in doctrine might have played some role in these disturbances.<sup>77</sup> In these two letters, we can see the way in which the vizier sought to use the power of local community leaders to resolve issues within their own groups, rather than to attempt to insert the power of the state into every affair.

### *Letters addressing the General Population (al-ʿamma)*

On occasion, Ibn 'Abbād found it necessary to communicate directly with the larger population of the cities he ruled. In three letters, the vizier warns against

75 See Roy P. Mottahedeh, "Administration in Buyid Qazvīn," in *Islamic Civilisation: 950–1150*, ed. D.S. Richards (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1973), 33–45.

76 Ibn 'Abbād, *Rasā'il*, 91 [6.5].

77 Ibid., 92 [6.6].

the spreading of false rumors (*arājīf al-‘amma*) among the general population. Letter 19.3 describes in detail the military conquests of ‘Aḍud al-Dawla over the Hamdanids and the control that ‘Aḍud al-Dawla possesses over the Buyid empire.<sup>78</sup> In letter 13.2, he provides a long list of assurances that the Buyid state was strong and its borders were secure, in spite of rumors that were spread within Iṣfahān to the contrary.<sup>79</sup>

Letter 13.6, written after letters 19.3 and 13.2, identifies the precise actions that the subordinate of Ibn ‘Abbād should take to punish those he believes were involved in the spreading of false rumors in Iṣfahān. In the course of this letter, Ibn ‘Abbād equates the act of stirring up the populace with ingratitude for blessings (*kufr ni‘ma*) and mandates that the wrongdoers be punished with a lashing. He further describes the importance of the city of Iṣfahān in the Buyid state, and states that such rumors would be unheard of in Rayy, which is the seat of the ruler, “where the shepherd meets his flock” (*majma‘ al-rā‘i bil-ra‘īya*). And these rumors were no less grave an offense for the people of Iṣfahān, who were living in a land traversed “by the sun of [the *amīr*’s] generosity and the moon of [his] justice.”<sup>80</sup> These letters are interesting for the way they illuminate the concern of the Buyid rulers for their subjects’ political opinions.

### *Letters to Kurdish Tribes*

One of the major preoccupations of the Buyid vizier was defending the safe passage of travelers and traders between the major cities within the territory that he ruled. Kurdish and Arab tribes who had settled in the region were a constant problem. The vizier attempted to control these tribes through a variety of methods. His tactics were similar to those used by other states attempting to control populations traditionally structured along tribal lines.

Kurdish tribes often engaged in acts of brigandage, causing serious disruptions to the economic life of the cities. Under Islamic law brigandage (*qaṭ‘ al-ṭuruq*) was a crime that requires the *ḥadd* penalty, therefore the Buyid government was able to take decisive actions against the perpetrators of such acts. On occasion, the Buyids punished tribal members in accordance with Qur’ānic sanctions. For example, in letter 8.6, Ibn ‘Abbād instructs a subordinate on how to deal with Kurds engaging in acts of theft and disruptions in the area surrounding Iṣfahān. He states that that they can be killed immediately or cru-

78 Ibid., 225 [19.3].

79 Ibid., 175–178 [13.2].

80 Ibid., 181–182 [13.6].

cified in accordance with the *ḥadd* penalty. He even advises the official that he can raid their camps and take their women and children as prisoners.<sup>81</sup>

The use of such harsh penalties, however, was not in the government's interest, nor would it actually have been effective in stopping brigandage. This is why Ibn 'Abbād dealt with the problem of brigandage by taking oral oaths and written agreements with Kurdish leaders in order to assure their loyalty; he effectively sanctioned those leaders to manage the problem on their own. Letter 3.9 is a letter of safe passage from Ibn 'Abbād to the Kurdish chieftain Ṣadaqa b. Aḥmad and his sons, asserting that they had become loyal supporters of the ruler and distinguished themselves from the Kurds responsible for spreading corruption (*al-akrād al-muḥsidūn*).<sup>82</sup> Ibn 'Abbād requested that these tribes come to the court with the ruler to exchange loyalty oaths with him face to face. The tribes would then pledge their loyalty to the ruler in exchange for rights to pasturage in particular areas and to collect protection fees from travelers.<sup>83</sup>

In order to coopt the most powerful Kurdish chieftains, Ibn 'Abbād offered some Kurdish leaders exclusive rights to protect the trade routes (*khifāra*) from major cities. Letter 3.5 is a document (*shart*) ordering a certain chieftain to secure the roads and guard the caravans and travelers between the cities of Rayy, Qazvīn, Qumm, Sāwah, Ābah, Taymurtayn, and Iṣfahān. The document specifies that the addressee is responsible for protecting the area from acts of corruption and maintaining the obedience of the other members of his tribe. In particular, it specifies that the tribes should charge only a stipulated amount for the protection of caravans.<sup>84</sup>

By promoting particular chieftains to positions of leadership, Ibn 'Abbād could force them to constrain the actions of their tribal members or suffer the consequences. In letter 13.10, Ibn 'Abbād addresses a certain Abū 'Īsā l-Kurdī, whom he says Mu'ayyid al-Dawla appointed to protect the roads (*ḥimāyat al-subul*) near Qumm. In the course of this letter Ibn 'Abbād faults Abū 'Īsā for not controlling the actions of brigands on the roads between Qumm and Rayy and states that Mu'ayyid al-Dawla will punish the brigands with exile, imprisonment, or death. He urges Abū 'Īsā to fulfill his part of the agreement in order to protect his own status with regard to the *amūr*.<sup>85</sup>

81 Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence*, 57–59; 253–255, discusses the punishment for bandits.

82 Ibn 'Abbād, *Rasā'il*, 65–66 [3.9].

83 *Ibid.*, 64–65 [3.7].

84 *Ibid.*, 61 [3.5].

85 *Ibid.*, 184–186 [13.10]. Ibn 'Abbād, *Rasā'il*, 64–65 [3.7] similarly states that although the leading members (*wujūh*) of a particular tribe were loyal to the ruler and remained settled in the particular areas that they had been assigned by the government, the lower-ranking

When Kurdish groups made agreements with the government and then broke them, the vizier took further punitive actions. In Letter 8.7, Ibn ‘Abbād describes the actions of ‘Ukbar b. Ibrāhīm, a Kurd from the tribe of Shāhjān,<sup>86</sup> who repeatedly pledged loyalty to the Buyid *amīrs*, but later engaged in brigandage.<sup>87</sup> As in instances where the situation was out of control, the *amīr* sent Buyid troops to secure the roads. In letter 8.6 Ibn ‘Abbād reports to Abū ‘Īsā l-Kurdī that he would send 700 Turkish troops to Iṣfahān to secure the outskirts of the city in order to prevent further Kurdish pillaging.<sup>88</sup>

One of Ibn ‘Abbād’s letters (16.2) contains advice to his subordinate Abū l-‘Abbās al-Ḍabbī on how to manage the problem of supervising the taking of customs (*māl al-arṣād*) by Kurdish tribes. In the course of this letter, Ibn ‘Abbād recounts that a young scribe (*kuwaytib*) came to him and explained that he had been managing the situation by making the various tribal members swear oaths of loyalty. Ibn ‘Abbād, on the contrary, urged al-Ḍabbī to inquire into these affairs personally and hear the complaints of those unfairly forced by particular tribes to pay customs, and said that then al-Ḍabbī should establish punishments and penalties. Ibn ‘Abbād encouraged his subordinate to “instill fear into the hearts of the tribesmen.”<sup>89</sup>

#### *Letters concerning the Collection of Taxes*

The nature of Ibn ‘Abbād’s work is also reflected in his letters that relate to the supervision and management of tax collection in western Iran. These letters display the vizier’s important role in managing and justifying the taxes owed to the Buyid *amīr*. The letters to agents display Ibn ‘Abbād’s knowledge of the theoretical requirements of Islamic law, as well as the practicalities of state finance.

Ibn ‘Abbād attempted to ensure that his agents collect taxes efficiently and justly. Toward this end, he employed agents who were competent in tax collection and record keeping;<sup>90</sup> at times he personally selected agents based solely on their accounting skills.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, he continually urged agents to carry out

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(*aṣāghir*) members of the tribe left these regions and began to engage in brigandage.

86 Pierre Oberling, EIR, s.v. “Kurdish Tribes,” notes that the Shāhjān tribe was located in the vicinity of Hamadhān in the tenth/sixteenth century.

87 Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’l*, 116–118 [8.7].

88 *Ibid.*, 115–116 [8.6].

89 *Ibid.*, 206 [16.2].

90 *Ibid.*, 57–58 [2.10], specifies the duties of his agent charged with the collection of taxes, focusing on the maintenance of accurate records in the *dīwān* of the taxes collected throughout the year.

91 *Ibid.*, 208–9 [16.4]. Ibn ‘Abbād chose one agent for the competence he displayed in Yazd

their duties with diligence and sincere effort.<sup>92</sup> In letter 16.4, for example, Ibn ‘Abbād admonishes an agent for complaining excessively about the laxity of the official whom he replaced. He encourages the agent to devote his “days, nights and hours” to the collection of taxes, and to inform him of what he had rectified, rather than the problems caused by his predecessor.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to these general encouragements, Ibn ‘Abbād’s letters to his officials also contained specific advice and his attempts to solve particular problems that his agents encountered. In letter 16.3, after thanking the agent for his diligent oversight, Ibn ‘Abbād responded to various concerns: he provided a monthly salary (*mushāhara*) to one of his confidants living in the agent’s territory, and offered advice on how to deal with a man who was close to the *amīr* yet appeared to owe the treasury money for taxes.<sup>94</sup> At times, as in letter 16.1, Ibn ‘Abbād supplied account records (*ḥisāb*) from the central registry (*dīwān al-ma‘mūr*) in order to aid his agents in carrying out their assigned tasks.<sup>95</sup>

By far the most common issue that Ibn ‘Abbād addressed in his letters was the delay in sending tax revenues. For example, in letter 16.7, he expressed his displeasure at an agent who did not send the payment at the appropriate time, and noted the previous good service of the agent. He further states that he attempted to make excuses on the agent’s behalf before the *amīr*. Since there was a great need for money, however, Ibn ‘Abbād feared that his further intercession with the *amīr* on the agent’s behalf would cause the *amīr* to be angry with him as well. Therefore, he could no longer argue for lenient treatment in this matter, and threatened to send an army contingent to collect the money directly.<sup>96</sup>

In other letters, Ibn ‘Abbād blamed his agents for specific lapses in judgment, lapses that he had identified in previous communications. For example, in letter 16.6, Ibn ‘Abbād states that he “inferred” (*istidlālānā*) that an agent in Qāshān was too lax in executing the tasks required of him. The vizier states that the agent’s letters provide significant indications of mismanagement, such as the fact that the holders of fiefs refuse to abide by the government’s cadastral surveys (*‘ibar*); or that there are no reliable money changers (*qubbāḍ*) in Qāshān, and that he needs them to be sent from Iṣfahān; or that the residents of Rāwand detest the Turkish military slave (*ghulām*) and his command over

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in managing the affairs of Dīnawar.

92 E.g., *Ibid.*, 205–206 [16.1].

93 *Ibid.*, 208–9 [16.4]

94 *Ibid.*, 207 [16.3].

95 *Ibid.*, 206 [16.1].

96 *Ibid.*, 212 [16.7].

their affairs (*wilāyatuhu*).<sup>97</sup> In this letter, Ibn ‘Abbād addresses each of these three conditions individually and provides a course of action for his agent to follow. For example, in the case of the people of Rāwand’s opposition to the Turkish *ghulām*, he states that “It is not for the subjects (*ra’īya*) to determine who should be in office and who should step down—the military slaves and soldiers reside in that region for the purposes of protection (*ḥimāya*).” Indeed, he then argues, they deserve to be paid a salary for their actions.<sup>98</sup>

### *Letters Dealing with Corruption and Injustice*

Identifying and stopping corruption by local officials was another of the duties that Ibn ‘Abbād fulfilled. As vizier, Ibn ‘Abbād was accountable for the actions of his administrators and attempted to ensure the rectitude of their dealings. Letter 8.10, written “in censure of the one who cheats his benefactor and in blame of his methods” (*fī tahjīn ghāshsh li-walī l-ni‘ma wa-dhamm ṭarīqatihi*), describes the attempts of the vizier to uncover the corruption. In this letter, likely addressed to his subordinate in Iṣfahān, Abū l-‘Abbās al-Ḍabbī, Ibn ‘Abbād states that Mu‘ayyid al-Dawla alerted him to the presence of a man who was “deceitful in his conduct” (*yulabbis hādhihi al-mudad ṭarīqatahu*). Ibn ‘Abbād then describes how he examined the man’s affairs in greater detail and discovered that he had profited from the unlawful seizure of unclaimed properties and from the receipt of bribes, and that he had stolen money intended for the poor (*mustaḍ‘afin al-ra’īya*). Ibn ‘Abbād states that he tolerated all of these actions until it was time for this man to renew the oaths of his office, whereupon he removed him from his position and took away the fief granted to him by the government. He intended thereby to warn other agents not to engage in similar activities.<sup>99</sup>

As head of the *mazālim* administration, referred to above, Ibn ‘Abbād possessed the formal means of registering complaints with the ruler for injustices brought about by his agents.<sup>100</sup> He indeed investigated the circumstances of these complaints and then attempted to redress the situations surrounding them. Often the vizier would dispense his judgment on these matters by writing brief signatory notes (*tawqī‘āt*) that summed up the action to be taken in a particular case.

In one such note, written in response to the unlawful seizure of a certain Magian’s property by Abū Shujā‘, the Muslim ruler of Qazvīn, Ibn ‘Abbād ordered

97 Ibid., 211 [16.6].

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid., 121–122 [8.10].

100 J.S. Nielsen, *ET*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “*Mazālim*.”

the ruler to act in the interest of justice on earth and to fear the punishment in the hereafter:

غرتك بعدنا منك وإمهالنا فيك فاحذر يوم المحاسبة وخزي المعاقبة وقد جف  
ريقك على لسانك وشهد قبج آثارك بسوء فعالك ورد إلى هذا المجوسي ماله فإن  
تلك الدراهم عقارب وأراقم إن غنمتها في يوم غرمتها لعد وسلام<sup>101</sup>

Our distance from you led you astray, as did the respite given to you. Beware of the day of recompense and the shame of punishment, when the saliva has gone dry in your tongue. And the evil results bear witness to your bad actions. Return to this Magian his possessions. For these dirhams and dinars are scorpions and snakes: if you have stolen them in one day, you will be punished for them for tomorrow [viz., in the next life]. Fare thee well.

The brevity of such signatory notes was, in part, a literary device, intended to encapsulate wisdom within a small space.<sup>102</sup> Skill at conveying important rules of comportment without expatiation was a sign of the speaker's command over Arabic and an indication that his status was greater than that of his addressee.

### *Negotiating with Buyid Military Elites*

Ibn 'Abbād's position as vizier also meant that he had to negotiate the demands of the Daylamī military elite. Although the Buyid *amīrs* paid their regular troops from the treasury, they rewarded the most loyal military elites for their service by awarding them land grants (*iqṭā'āt*).<sup>103</sup> The vizier interceded in the

<sup>101</sup> Al-Rafi'i, *al-Tadwīn*, 2:294–5.

<sup>102</sup> See Beatrice Gruendler, "Tawqī' (Apostille): Verbal Economy in Verdicts of Tort Redress," in *The Weaving of Words: Approaches to Classical Arabic Literature*, ed. L. Behzadi and V. Behmardi (Würzburg: Ergon 2009), 101–29, esp. 107, where she writes, "The tawqī's sparseness was dictated by the encounter, in the tiny space of a scrap note, between the highest and lowest ends of society. This economy of medium is mirrored by that of the language: an elliptic phrase, perfectly fitted to the practical limits of its writing support."

<sup>103</sup> Claude Cahen, "L'évolution de l'*iqṭā'* du IX<sup>e</sup> au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Contribution à une histoire comparée des sociétés médiévales," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 8 (1953): 25–52; Frede Løkkegaard, *Islamic Taxation in the Classic Period* (Copenhagen: Branner and Korch, 1950); Roy P. Mottahedeh, "A Note on the 'Tasbīb,'" in *Studia Arabica et Islamica: Festschrift for Ihsān 'Abbās*, ed. W. al-Qaḍī (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1981), 347–351; Donohue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq*, 229–261.

competition of military elites for the most profitable land grants and negotiated the problems unique to this system.

Ibn ‘Abbād wrote two letters (5.1 and 14.1) on the topic of the apportionment of *iqṭā‘āt*. Both letters, addressed to the leader of the Buyid army in Rayy, concern the letter’s request to exchange his lands held in *iqṭā‘* for other more profitable holdings. Writing in the name of ‘Aḍud al-Dawla and Mu‘ayyid al-Dawla, Ibn ‘Abbād states (in letter 5.1) that the *ṣāhib al-jaysh* made a request to ‘Aḍud al-Dawla that certain estates in Rayy held as land grants by other military elites be reassessed and then added to his own estate, and that the other military elites be compensated with grants of equal value. Ibn ‘Abbād reports that while Mu‘ayyid al-Dawla completely agreed with ‘Aḍud al-Dawla’s command that the lands be given to the *ṣāhib al-jaysh* in Rayy, he nonetheless regretted that it would be difficult to carry out the request in a timely manner. Ibn ‘Abbād stated that the problem concerned the Daylamī soldiers’ “character” with regard to land grants. Once these lands are given, the holders are often unwilling to surrender them, even when offered lands of equal value. In the final section of the letter Ibn ‘Abbād apologizes to the *amīr* for the delay and states that the *amīr* Mu‘ayyid al-Dawla ordered him to personally supervise the *amīr*’s request.<sup>104</sup>

Letter 14.1, written in the vizier’s name, is also addressed to the *ṣāhib al-jaysh* and concerns the same issue of the redistributions of *iqṭā‘āt*. It is perhaps significant that in this letter the vizier included an even longer introduction in praise of the *ṣāhib al-jaysh* than he did in letter 5.1. Moreover, it contains a personal apology for being unable to carry out the request of the *ṣāhib al-jaysh*, and states that if it were possible to carry out his request immediately, he would have done so.<sup>105</sup> The effect of this second letter is to assert Ibn ‘Abbād’s personal favor for the *ṣāhib al-jaysh* and to show his deference to the addressee’s superior rank. Writing two letters on the same topic, probably sent at the same time, provided the vizier with the opportunity to show his particular regard to a powerful member of the Buyid military elite.

### *Communicating with the Buyid Amīrs*

Ibn ‘Abbād’s relationship with the Buyid *amīr* Mu‘ayyid al-Dawla was that of close friend and adviser. Like the Abbasid viziers’ relationship with the caliphs, Ibn ‘Abbād had been the tutor of Mu‘ayyid al-Dawla.<sup>106</sup> Such a relationship was necessary for the functioning of government, given that Ibn ‘Abbād was

<sup>104</sup> Ibn ‘Abbād, *Rasā’il*, 77 [5.1].

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 178 [14.1].

<sup>106</sup> Sourdel, *Le vizirat ‘abbāsīde*, 2:626–28.

the *amīr*'s main assistant in the supervision, direction, and management of the state.

Ibn 'Abbād generally communicated with the *amīr* in face-to-face meetings in a 'high' council (*al-majlis al-'ālī*) convened several times during the week. There, the vizier presented (*'araḍa*) specific matters for the consideration of the *amīr*. Ibn 'Abbād reported to the *amīr* on the financial status of the state and the most important political and administrative matters.<sup>107</sup> He explained the contents of his correspondence in an abbreviated form, occasionally reading passages from letters he received during the week.<sup>108</sup>

In his letters to addressees, Ibn 'Abbād frequently refers to the process by which he informed the *amīr* of the contents of their letters. The rhetorical aim of this appears to have been for the vizier to provide the *amīr*'s response to particular requests or actions. For example, in letter 5.10, Ibn 'Abbād stated that he "presented that which had arrived from you [viz., the addressee's letter] and it met the approval of our lord and [he gave] his attention [to it]."<sup>109</sup> Often the vizier described the *amīr*'s approval in terms of the addressee's occupying a certain "place (*mawqī'*) in the *amīr*'s regard," thus he figuratively evoked the rank of members of the court. Ibn 'Abbād also described the *amīr*'s displeasure, as in letter 13.1, where Ibn 'Abbād reports the "anger and dissatisfaction" (*dajār*) of the *amīr* after Ibn 'Abbād informed him of the defiant conduct of one of his officials.<sup>110</sup> Ibn 'Abbād then followed this with the report of the *amīr*'s advice to him as to how to manage a particular situation.

On occasion, the vizier provided his addressees with the verbatim responses of the *amīr* to their letters. Ibn 'Abbād perhaps included the words of the *amīr* to lend greater force to the vizier's message or rather he employed them when the vizier's influence alone would not suffice. In letters 6.1, 6.4, and 6.8, Ibn 'Abbād reported the words of the *amīr* to one of the members of the Salarid dynasty regarding the internal politics of that dynasty.<sup>111</sup> In letter 8.6, the vizier reported to a government official what the *amīr* (here the *sulṭān*) might say in response, if the addressee persisted in following the same errant course.<sup>112</sup>

107 Ibid., 2:621–630.

108 Ibn 'Abbād, *Rasā'il* 90 [6.4]: I explained all of it and he listened to it (anhaytu al-jamī' fī l-majlis fa-aṣghā lahu mawlānā iṣghā'ahu); ibid., 194 [18.9]: I delivered (anhaytu mā warada minka) that which came from you to him [viz., the *amīr*] and he was surprised by it from beginning to end (min awwalihi ilā ākhirihī).

109 Ibid., 86 [5.10].

110 Ibid., 174 [13.1].

111 Ibid., 87 [6.1].

112 Ibid., 115–116 [8.6].

On occasion, in his letters the vizier described his attempts to intercede on his addressee's behalf with the *amīr*. In letter 16.7, for example, Ibn 'Abbād described that the addressee, who was a government agent, delayed his delivery of the tax revenue (*ḥaml*) and caused the anger of the *amīr*. Ibn 'Abbād then states that he "attempted to represent him to the best of his ability and attempted to offer excuses [on his behalf]." Ibn 'Abbād added, however, that when time passed and the money was still required, he felt he could no longer defend the agent, because he feared that if he persisted in this course, the *amīr* would become angry with him.<sup>113</sup> At times the vizier's intercession, however, appears to have been important. In letter 13.10 written to complain to the Kurdish chieftain Abū 'Īsā l-Kurdī about the brigandage of the Kurdish tribes in the area surrounding Qumm, Ibn 'Abbād states that in spite of the anger of the *amīr*, he had acted as guarantor before the *amīr* (*wa-qad kaffaltu 'anka fi l-majlis*). Ibn 'Abbād states that he had informed the *amīr* of Abū 'Īsā's great effort in offering the protection (*ḥimaya*) of Qumm, thus he beseeched Abū 'Īsā not to violate the oath (*damān*) that Ibn 'Abbād made on his behalf before the *amīr*.<sup>114</sup>

### *Sultāniyyāt*: Two Discourses of Power

*Sultāniyyāt* were letters that directly represented the sovereignty of the Buyid state. As we have seen, sometimes this representation came in the form of official pronouncements, decrees, and documents written in the name of the *amīr*. At other times, as in internal government correspondence, the letters represented the personal official power of the vizier as the head of the administration (*mudabbir al-umūr*), the person delegated to act on behalf of the *amīr*. In all of the letters, Ibn 'Abbād's addressees were aware that the vizier's correspondence was part of the requirements of the office that he discharged as an agent of the *amīr* and the Buyid state.

The vizier's letters appeal to two distinct discourses of power and influence. The first is that of *shar'ī* legitimacy. The *sultāniyyāt* assert that the Buyid *amīr*'s actions conform to what is mandated by God's law. In the first place, this was simply the assertion of the legal fiction that the Buyid *amīr* is the representative of the Abbasid caliph, and his actions represent the legitimate exercise of this delegated power, as in the case of the decrees of appointment, in which the

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 212 [16.6].

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 186 [13.10].

*amīr* appoints the agent as the client (*mawlā*) of the Abbasid caliph, identified in his role as the “commander of the faithful” (*amīr al-muʿminīn*).<sup>115</sup>

As we have seen, the *sultāniyyāt* assert that the *amīr*’s conduct conforms to *sharʿī* norms and stipulations. The actions of the *amīr* and his vizier followed various *sharʿī* requirements for the delegates of the caliph: namely, the protection of the *ḥajj*, the negotiation of treaties with non-Muslims, the prosecution of the *jihād*, and the supervision of other affairs that touched upon the general welfare of the Muslim community. These were duties assumed by the Buyid *amīrs*, because the Abbasid caliph was too weak to do so. The vizier was the eloquent voice of their policy.

The letters frequently invoke the *sharʿī* legitimacy of the Buyid state’s actions, especially actions that involved combat. In the *sultāniyyāt*, the dynasties that rivaled the Buyids, such as the Ziyarids and the Samanids, who also asserted their loyalty to the Abbasid caliphs, are referred to as rebels (*bughāt*). Moreover, the *sultāniyyāt* describe how the Buyid *amīr*, in battling his enemies necessarily followed the *sharʿī* rules of war and adhered to treaties and peace agreements. A similar concern for *sharʿī* legitimacy is evident as well in the use of the *ḥadd* penalty in cases of brigandage, in which the vizier was attentive to the latitude that Islamic law provides in dealing with these cases in particular.

The concern with *sharʿī* legitimacy extended into many other areas as well. The vizier framed his appointments in the language of Qurʾānic sanction and advised his appointees to refer to the sources of Islamic law in executing the tasks for which they were responsible. Likewise, his supervision of the conduct of his officials and his oversight of the tax regime and attempt to remove non-canonical taxes such as tariffs and customs duties demonstrate, at the very least, his overall consideration of the propriety of state actions in light of God’s law.

The second important discourse in the *sultāniyyāt* is the language of *siyāsa*. In contrast to *sharʿī* legitimacy, which was based on conformity with the will of God as revealed in texts, *siyāsa* appealed to rational principles of proper state management. *Siyāsa* was the discretionary judgment of rulers to manage the state.<sup>116</sup> The discourse of *siyāsa* was broad enough to justify the *amīr*’s actions independent of the *sharʿī*.

The vizier often made independent appeals to his government officials in the terms of *siyāsa*. In letter 2.10, written to appoint a tax collector, Ibn ʿAbbād

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 46 [2.4].

<sup>116</sup> Bernard Lewis, “*Siyāsa*,” in *In quest of an Islamic Humanism: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Memory of Mohamed al-Nowaihi*, ed. A.H. Green (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1984), 3–14.

refers the Sasanian conception of the circle of justice, and states that “land tax (*kharāj*) is the fundament of the kingdom (*māddat al-mamlaka*), the backbone of the army (*qiwām al-jaysh*), the value of the possessions (*qīmat al-amlāk*), and the souls of the populace (*arwāḥ al-raṭīya*) and the support of the ruler (*ʿumdat al-sultān*).”<sup>117</sup> His aim here is to explain to the tax collector and others the purpose and importance of prompt tax collection, and to do so in ways that appeal to reason.

In letter 13.9, which concerns the case of two men who stirred up disorder (*fitna*) by causing the masses to protest and expel a jurist appointed by the ruler, Ibn ʿAbbād appeals to the notion of *sīyāsa* to affirm the ruler’s power to maintain the just order of society by using his power to ensure that each group remains in its place.<sup>118</sup> Order was beneficial to the state—and this was something that his administrators (and other elites) needed to understand.

The rational basis of *sīyāsa*, however, was a potentially expansive category that in fact, bordered on *sharʿī* norms. For example, in dealing with the Kurdish tribes, the vizier possessed the personal discretion to determine when tribal actions crossed over the bounds into brigandage and to which tribal group or sub-group the ruler should apply the *ḥadd* penalty. The vizier used the power of the state to condone the collection of some fees by these same tribes as a legitimate fulfillment of a contract for the protection of roads made with the government authority, although in fact the very same actions were non-canonical tariffs that were in breach of *sharʿī* legal norms.

The ruler’s reliance upon rational discretion to subvert *sharʿī* norms was great. Moreover, the selective application of *sharʿī* principles might be an even more profound subversion. For those who were interested in upholding the legitimacy of the ruler’s power of discretion, arguments for his justice were based on an absolute criterion of rationality because they freed the ruler to make judgments without fear of violating God’s law. Thus in letter 1.1, Ibn ʿAbbād appeals to the *amīr*’s fulfillment of the rational obligation of “thanking the benefactor” as a justification for their conquest over an enemy, and thus effectively placed the actions of the ruler above reproach.<sup>119</sup> On occasion, Ibn ʿAbbād himself describes the *amīr*’s discretionary power of *sīyāsa* as divinely inspired, and states that God selected (*istakfā*) Muʿayyid al-Dawla and “gave

<sup>117</sup> Ibn ʿAbbād, *Rasāʾil*, 58 [2.10].

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 183 [13.9], begins his letter with the question, “if the just management of affairs (*sīyāsa*) protects against the violence and imposition of the elite, how much more should it do, in the case of the violations of the least members of the population and the commoners?”

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 [1.1].

him *sīyāsa*” and “inspired him to examine the affairs of the population” (al-hamahu an yataṣaffaḥa maṣārif al-raʿīya wa-madhāhibahā).<sup>120</sup>

Viewed from this abstract perspective, the vizier’s *sulṭāniyyāt* were attempts to address the segment of the population that was concerned with the legitimacy of their rulers. The letters, however, also demonstrate a pragmatic side, in which another kind of politics is apparent. Beyond the pristine realm of ideology, politics and power existed in the everyday “push-and-pull” of men attempting to get things done.

Even amidst the formality of these letters, the language only thinly veiled the vizier’s personal anger and violence. The vizier often framed the *amīr*’s power in physical and emotional terms. For example, Ibn ‘Abbād is clear in advising government agents to avoid provoking the *amīr*’s anger and annoyance (*ḍajar*), because he would avenge those who wrong him. The non-payment of taxes would cause the *amīr* to have a reason to blame (*ʿatb*) the agents in his service.

The vizier was the intercessor with the *amīr* on behalf of the agents and other elites. He attempted to assuage the anger of the *amīr* on behalf of government agents and to find solutions that were consonant with the rational conduct of government and God’s law. Over and against the volatility of the *amīr*, the vizier framed himself as a mollifying and protecting influence of rationality and order.

The pragmatic relationship between the *amīr* and the vizier portrayed in the letters demonstrate that the ruler was amenable to some flexibility and intercession. Through these letters the ruler’s power was no longer a remote and inaccessible command, rather it was brought close to his subjects. Indeed, given the right language from the vizier, the ruler was subject to persuasion. Yet it was precisely by exchanging letters with the vizier and relying upon his influence that elites became subject to his eloquent power.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 92 [6.6].