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Nizam al-Mulk, Hasan b. ‘Ali b. Ishaq, al-Tusi (1018-1092) was a long-reigning Saljuq *wazir* (prime minister). He was born into a family of Khurasani *dihqans* (landed aristocracy) in Tus. His father, a Ghaznawid official, educated him and provided his early religious training. By the age of eleven, he had memorised the Qur’an (Khwandamir, 150). After serving under a governor of Khurasan, he went over to Chagri Beg Da’ud b. Mika’il Saljuqi (d. 1060), the co-founder of the Saljuq dynasty, who made Hasan b. ‘Ali the *atabeg* (guardian and mentor, Lit. father-prince) to his son, and future sultan, Alp Arslan (r. 1063-1073, q.v.). He commanded the prince: “Consider him as a parent, and disobey not his counsels” (Ibn Khallikan, I:413; Hillenbrand 262). When Alp Arslan became sultan, he appointed Hasan b. ‘Ali as *wazir* with the honorific Nizam al-Mulk and set him up as the *atabeg* over his own son, Malikshah (r. 1073-1092, q.v.). Many other earlier and later *wazirs* have been bestowed the honorific “Nizam al-Mulk”; however, historically, this title (one who orders the realm) is synonymous with Hasan b. ‘Ali, al-Tusi (Safi, 44). Nizam al-Mulk was pivotal in securing the successions of both Alp Arslan and Malikshah by helping fend off their competitors to the throne (Ibn al-Athir, X:36; 76). Over his thirty years as *wazir*, especially when the seventeen-year-old Malikshah began his reign, Nizam al-Mulk was the most powerful person in the Saljuq Empire (Ibn Khallikan, I:413-415; Yavari, 79ff). He accumulated this power by expanding and centralising the state bureaucracy and controlling the distribution of *iqta’at* (pl. of *iqṭā’*, tax farms, q.v.) granted to powerful members of society and military commanders. During Nizam al-Mulk’s wazirate, the Saljuqs developed general principles of military organisation and administration which Ann Lambton argued persisted in Iran “in a more or less modified form down to the [1906] Constitutional Revolution” (Lambton, 53 and 57).

To maintain centralised control, Nizam al-Mulk advocated that grant of an *iqta’* should only extend over two to three years lest the assignees “become too securely established and entrenched, and begin to cause anxiety” (Darke Trans., 43); however, he, himself, acquired enormous tracts of land which he then distributed among his twelve sons and *amirs* (military commanders q.v.). Like his contemporary, the Fatimid *wazir*, Badr al-Jamali (r. 1073-1094 q.v.),

Nizam al-Mulk also led troops into battle and maintained sizeable military forces loyal to himself (Hillenbrand, 257-259). The roles of *atabeg* and military wazirates are often associated with the Turko-Mongol nobility; however, Nizam al-Mulk's undertaking of these roles illustrates that the neat categories such as of Turk versus Tajik (Iranian) or "men of the pen" versus "men of the sword" in Islamicate historiography readily adopted in modern scholarship must not be immutably accepted (Hillenbrand 257-264).

Despite a reputation for being merciless towards those who opposed him or threatened his power, Nizam al-Mulk was also known for his patronage of Sufis and scholars' (Safi, 43-81). At the beginning of Alp Arslan's reign, Nizam al-Mulk instigated the killing of 'Amid al-Mulk Kunduri (r. 1054-1063), the trusted wazir of the first Saljuq sultan, Tughril Beg (r. 1040-1063) (Nishapuri, 47-48). Many other opponents, including the 'Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadi (r. 1075-1094) suffered his disfavour (Bowen and Bosworth, EI2:VIII:69-73). Ibn Khallikān records that "the court of the vizir Nizam al-Mulk was greatly frequented by doctors of the law and Sufis, towards the latter of whom he was very beneficent. Being asked the reason of the fervour which showed them, he answered: "I was in the service of a certain emir when a Sufi came to me and made me a pious expectation and said 'serve him **whose** service will be useful to you and be not taken up with one whom dogs will eat tomorrow.' I did not understand his meaning; that the emir used to drink from morning to evening and had some dogs which were ferocious like beasts of prey, and devoured strangers at night; now, it happened that being once overcome with intoxication, he went out alone, and was torn to pieces by the dogs, which did not recognise him. I then knew that this Sufi had received a revelation on the subject, and I therefore treat these people with respect, in hopes that I may obtain a similar grace" (Ibn Khallikan I:413-414). Omid Safi wrote: that "Sufi hagiographies and historical chronicles alike depict Nizām al-Mulk as a patron and a disciple of the Sufis. Again, this is important evidence of Sufism not being a marginal social and intellectual phenomenon, but rather as appropriating (and as being appropriated by) the most important political figure of the Saljūq era." (Safi, 50).

In this era when Sunni factions competed and even battled each other for supremacy, the Saljuqs patronised Hanafi interpretations of Islam and the 'Abbasid caliphs instigated the Hanbalis in Baghdad while Nizam al-Mulk patronised the Shafi'i-Asharis. He founded a network of *madrasas* (schools) in Baghdad, Isfahan, Nishapur and several other cities, eponymously

named Nizamiyyas q.v.). These institutions became centres of learning which attracted scholars such as Imam al-Haramayn Juwayni (d. 1085), ‘Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri (d. 1072) and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 q.v.) (Ibn al-Athir, X:33). Daphna Ephrat postulated that “the madrasas were designed to present the endowing rulers as champions of what they assumed to be an orthodox (sic) and normative view of Islam and propagate the state-sponsored orthodoxy (sic).” Cadres of ‘ulama’ (pl. of ‘ālim, scholars of religious sciences, legists q.v.) were trained in these institutions and participated in the Sunni revival (Ephrat, 139-156).

In Islamic literature and historiography, Nizam al-Mulk is construed as a literary paradigm of the quintessential “good *wazir*”. Such accounts of him intertwine legend and history so much so that it may be argued that the biography of Nizam al-Mulk is more the product of his biographers’ imagination than his own past actualities (Yavari, 61-62). His renown was burnished by the attribution to him of the authorship of the *Siyasat-nama* (*Treatise on Government*, or *Siyar al-muluk*, *Virtues of Kings*). This book, written in the “mirror for princes” genre, combined practical advice with moral philosophy. Drawing on Sassanid and early Muslim paradigms, it expounds on various aspects of administration, ruler’s comportment and diplomacy while emphasising justice, ethics, and effective governance. The prologue of the *Siyasat-nama* states that “Nizam al Mulk composed this book *ex tempore* in thirty-nine chapters and delivered it [to Sultan Malikshah]. Then he revised it, and because of the anxiety that was in his mind on account of the enemies of this dynasty he added another eleven chapters”. This is repeated in the epilogue (Darke Trans, 5-6, 252).

There is no agreement on dating the text. Based on the prologue by the unnamed copyist-librarian, Hubert Darke proposed a commencement date of 1086 when Malikshah requested his courtiers to write manuals on governance (Darke Trans, xiv-xv, 1). Julie Meisami, on the other hand, stated that the manual was written in 1091 and revised in the following year (Meisami, 146). Charles de Fouchécour postulated that Nizam al-Mulk may have composed the first version of this work while he was *atabeg* to the young prince, Malikshah (de Fouchécour, 382-383). At the other end of the spectrum, Alexey Khismatulin has argued that around 1107, Muhammad Mu‘izzi Nishapuri (d. 1124-8), Malikshah’s court poet and boon companion, “fabricated the *Siyar al-mulūk* - a strongly anti-Isma‘īlī and even generally anti-[Shi‘i] text” to reclaim his standing in Malikshah’s court at the court of Muhammad b. Malikshah (r. 1105-1118 q.v.). While the literary analysis is plausible, Khismatulin does not explain how

misattribution of authorship to the famed *wazir* would have gained favour for the poet (Khismatulin, 99). Although Nizam al-Mulk gave a daughter in marriage to an Ithna‘ashari Shi‘a (Qazwini-Razi, 261) and visited the shrines of Imam-caliph ‘Ali (r. 632-661, 656-661 q.v.) and Imam Husayn (r. 669-680 q.v.) (Ibn al-Athir, X:156), his policies, actions and writing were vehemently anti-Shi‘i and particularly against the Ismailis.

Nizam al-Mulk’s connections with the Ismailis can be plotted along four principal nodes: i) In the *Siyasat-nama*, Nizam al-Mulk wrote a refutation (*radd*) of the Ismailis. He denounced Ismaili penetrations into the Saljuq realm and, perhaps, into the heart of the court. In this process, he provided details of early Ismaili history (Darke Trans, 191-245). He patronised scholars such as al-Ghazali to refute Ismaili thought; ii) The Ilkhanid era chronicles of Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah (d. 1314 q.v.) and Abu al-Qasim Qashani (d. after 1337 q.v.) record the “three school fellows” story in which the poet ‘Umar Khayyam (d. 1131), Hasan-i Sabbah (r. 1090-1124 q.v.), the Ismaili *dā‘ī* and founder of Nizari Ismailism and Nizam al-Mulk were students together at a *madrassa* in Nishapur. They made a childhood pact that if one of them were to reach a high status, they would help the others. In this narrative, later in life, the *wazir*, out of jealousy, betrayed Hasan at the Saljuq court, who then fled to the Ismailis (Rashid al-Din, 110-113; Qashani, 146-148). A conjectural analysis of this otherwise spurious narrative suggests that it may have been written to cultivate favourable relations between the fledgling Nizari movement of Hasan-i Sabbah and Bark-yaruq b. Malikshah (r. 1094-1105 q.v.) as he struggled for the sultanate against his half brothers and other opponents (Hajiani, 305-309; 319ff). iii) In February 1092, Nizam al-Mulk convinced Malikshah to commit the imperial armies to attack the Ismailis at Alamut and in Quhistan (Juwayni, 201-203 tr: 674-676; Rashid al-Din, 108-109; Qashani, 144-145; Hodgson, 74-75; Daftary, 318-319). iv) Nizam al-Mulk was purportedly assassinated by the Ismailis (Juwayni, 204 tr: 676-677; Rashid al-Din, 110; Qashani, 146; Hodgson, 75; Daftary, 318-319; Hillenbrand, 121-135). While each of these topics is worthy of extensive studies; here, we examine the assassination of Nizam al-Mulk.

All sources and modern studies begin by stating that Nizam al-Mulk was assassinated in October 1092 in the region of Nihawand and that a *fidā‘ī* (devotee, self-sacrificing Ismaili operative q.v.), Bu Tahir Arrani sent by Hasan-i Sabbah fatally stabbed the *wazir*. Beyond this, modern scholarship has noted a complete lack of consensus in the sources as to who ultimately was responsible for the killing. Carole Hillenbrand in her study of the killings and deaths in the

year 1092 identifies: the Assassins (sic, Ismailis), Malikshah, Taj al-Mulk and Turkan Khatun as possibly culpable for the assassination (Hillenbrand, 121-135). The sources yield at least six different explanations: i) Hasan-i Sabbah had Nizam al-Mulk killed because of the enmity between them recorded in the “three school fellows” story; ii) the Ismailis assassinated Nizam al-Mulk to lift the devastating sieges that he had instigated of Alamut and Dara fortress in Quhistan; iii) the *wazir*, Taj al-Mulk Abu’l-Ghana’im (d. 1093 q.v.) coveted Nizam al-Mulk’s position and conspired with the Ismailis to kill Nizam al-Mulk. Taj al-Mulk, himself, was suspected of being an Ismaili; iv) Turkan Khatun (d. 1094 q.v.) wanted her son, Mahmud (r. 1092-1094) to succeed Malikshah and she conspired with Taj al-Mulk to kill Nizam al-Mulk because of his support for her step-son, Bark-yaruq’s succession; v) Malikshah, instigated by Taj al-Mulk, had Nizam al-Mulk killed since he had tired of the *wazir*’s tutelage and corruption; and vi) Malikshah wished to depose the ‘Abbasid caliph and replace him with the caliph’s son who was Malikshah’s grandson. Nizam al-Mulk was opposed to this so Malikshah had him assassinated. The table below shows which of these six explanations are found in the sources.

Why was Nizam al-Mulk assassinated?

Author	Death Year	Reference	i	ii	iii	iv	v	vi
Zahir al-Din Nishapuri	1186	<i>Saljūq-nāma</i> p. 33	☐	☐	☒	☒	☒	☐
Ibn al-Jawzi	1201	<i>K. al-Muntaẓam fī Ta'rikh al-Muluk wa'l-Umam</i> p. XVI:306	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☒
Sadr al-Din Husaini	1226	<i>Zubdat al-tawārikh: akhbār al-umarā' wa'l-mulūk al-Saljūqīyah</i> p. 98	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
Ibn al-Athir	1233	<i>K. al-Kāmil fī'l-Tārikh</i> pp. X:204-206; X:317	☐	☒	☒	☐	☒	☐
Bundari Isfahani	1245	<i>Ta'rikh-i silsilah-i Saljūqī</i> pp. 71-73, 77	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐
Ibn Khallikan	1282	<i>Wafayāt al-ayān: Nizām al-Mulk</i> in Levi & Sela (eds) <i>Islamic Central Asia</i> pp. 91-92	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐
'Ala' al-Din 'Ata Malik Juwayni	1283	<i>Ta'rikh-i Jahān-Gushā</i> p. 204 Tr 676-677	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah	1318	<i>Jāmi' al-tawārikh</i> p. 110	☒	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Shihab al-Din 'Abd Allah b. 'Izz al-Din Fadl Allah Shirazi (Wassaf al-hadrat)	1330	<i>Tahrir tarikh-i Wassaf</i> p. 325	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hamd Allah Mustawfi Qazwini	1334	<i>Ta'rikh-i guzida</i> pp. 519-520	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Abu al-Qasim al-Qashani	1337	<i>Zubdat al-tawārikh</i> 2ed. p. 146	☒	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hafiz Abri	1430	<i>Majma' al-tawārikh</i> p. 202	☒	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
al-Maqrizi, Taqi al-Din Abu'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Alī	1442	<i>K. al-Muqaffa' al-kabir</i> p. III:186	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Muhammad b. Khwandshah Mirkhwand	1498	<i>Tārikh-i rawdat aṣ-ṣafā</i> p. IV:3084	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ghiyath al-Din b. Humam al-Din Khwandamir	1535	<i>Dastūr al-wuzarā'</i> p. 166	☐	☐	☒	☒	☒	☐

This analysis illustrated that several authors pointed to: v) Malikshah's frustration with his old mentor; and an equal number identified: iii) Taj al-Mulk's role in the assassination of Nizam al-Mulk. The majority; however, blamed ii) the Ismailis. The sources claim that Niẓām al-Mulk was the first person killed by the *fida'is* and that Hasan-i Sabbah on hearing the news exclaimed: "The killing of this devil was the first happiness" (Rashid al-Din, 110; Qashani, 146). This leads to a seventh possible explanation of the killing of Nizam al-Mulk. If Malikshah wanted to have the *wazir* out of his way, he could simply have ordered the execution and did not need to resort to a hired assassin from the enemy camp. If the killing was at the behest of Hasan-i Sabbah; however, we must entertain the high probability that the primary target was the sultan who sat at the apex of the Saljuq hierarchy and not the *wazir*.

After the First Siege of Alamut in 1091, the *amir*, Yuruntash, who had been given the region around the fortress as an *iqta'*, was not able to dislodge Hasan-i Sabbah and his followers. The

amir had burnt crops and attacked villagers around the fortress. A year later, the larger, more powerful imperial armies led by the *amir*, Arslantash had set up an impenetrable siege around Alamut for eight months. Similarly, the *amir* Qizil Sariq was besieging the Ismailis in Quhistan. Not having been able to collect a harvest or to replenish supplies, the defenders along with the villagers who would have sought refuge in the fortresses, would have been desperate. Hasan-i Sabbah sent a plea for help to Dihdar Bu 'Ali in Qazwin. This *dā'ī* (summoner q.v.) assembled three hundred followers and auxiliaries and led a fierce night-attack that broke the Second Siege of Alamut (Juwayni, 202 Tr: 676; Rashid al-Din, 109; Qashani, 145).

Modern studies have looked at the assassination of Nizam al-Mulk and the lifting of the sieges in isolation. These were two separate events, but part of a single strategy to end the Second Siege of Alamut (Hajiani, ch. 3). Exfiltration from the besieged castle would have been extremely difficult; the *fida'i*, Bu Tahir Arrani and a companion managed to slip out of Alamut under cover of darkness sometime in early October 1092 (Husayni, 66-67). They conveyed Hasan-i Sabbah's urgent request to Dihdar Bu 'Ali in Qazwin and a week later, at Sihna in the region of Nihawand, Bu Tahir came upon the *ordu* (royal encampment) of Malikshah who was on his way to Baghdad. Finding the sultan inaccessible due to a tight cordon of security, Bu Tahir chose to attack Nizam al-Mulk who was more vulnerable as he was carried on a litter from the sultan's tent to his own. Nizam al-Mulk's death; however, did not end the two sieges. According to Rashid al-Din, a month after the killing of Nizam al-Mulk, when the news of the death of the sultan spread, Arslan Tash and Qizil Sariq lifted their sieges of Alamut and in Quhistan and their armies dispersed (Rashid al-Din, 114).

A very significant part of Nizam al-Mulk's biography has focussed on his relations with the Ismailis. This was exaggerated in the narratives of the "three school fellows" story which pitted the *wazir* against Hasan-i Sabbah. The story; however, shifted culpability of the Ismailis for an attempt on the life of the sultan when they were seeking alliances with his successor. As a result, for centuries, historians have reported that Hasan-i Sabbah marked Nizam al-Mulk to be assassinated. He may well have been killed due to the *fida'i*, Bu Tahir's tactical decision in the field (Hajiani, ch. 3). The death of the Malikshah, possibly by poisoning, a month later, created havoc in the Saljuq realms. The Ismailis exploited this internecine chaos to acquire more territory and to spread their *da'wa*. Nizam al-Mulk was prescient about their threat to the Saljuq-'Abbasid establishment. He was an exemplary bureaucrat who charted the course of the

sedentarising nomadic empire of the Saljuqs. Above all, he left a remarkable legacy, in which his championing of the Shafi'i creed and his pivotal role in creating institutions of the Sunni revival at the end of the "Shi'i centuries" have left a lasting imprint on Islamic history and thought.

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