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# *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*

*The Siyar al-Muluk or Siyasat-nama  
of NIZAM AL-MULK*

*Translated from the Persian by  
HUBERT DARKE*

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close. A dog came and put its head into the frying-pan to take out a bone, so burning its mouth; it raised its head and the ring of the frying-pan fell round its neck. On feeling the heat of the fire it leapt up and carried off the frying-pan. When 'Amr ibn Laith saw that, he turned towards the soldiers and guards and said, 'Take warning: I am that man whose kitchen in the morning was transported by four hundred camels; at evening a dog has picked it up and taken it away.' Then he said [in Arabic], 'I was an *amir* in the morning: I became an *asir* [prisoner] in the evening.' (That means: In the morning I was an amir: at evening I am a prisoner.) And this event too is one of the wonders of the world.

19 In connection with the amir Isma'il and 'Amr ibn Laith, even more remarkable than these two events is the fact that when 'Amr was captured, the amir Isma'il turned to the nobles and chiefs of his army and said, 'God granted me this success, and to no one am I indebted for this favour except to God (His name be magnified).' Then he said, 'Know that this 'Amr ibn Laith was a man of lofty purposes and great generosity; he was well provided with equipment and supplies, and possessed wisdom and prudence besides. In the conduct of affairs he was vigilant, and he was abundantly hospitable and liberal in his expression of gratitude. It is my idea to see to it that he suffers no harm and is freed from his bonds.' The nobles said, 'The amir's opinion is best; let him command whatever is advisable.' He then sent someone to 'Amr ibn Laith to say, 'Do not fear, because I am planning to ask the caliph for your life to be spared. Even if it costs the whole of my treasury. I shall not mind so long as you suffer no mortal harm and can pass the rest of your life in safety.'

20 When 'Amr ibn Laith heard this, he said, 'I know that there will never be any escape for me from these bonds; I have not long to live; the caliph will not be satisfied but with my death; nevertheless, thou who art Isma'il, send me a confidant, for I have some words to say; let him report them to you just as he hears them from me.' The man came and told Isma'il what 'Amr had said. Isma'il at once sent him a confidant, and 'Amr said to him, 'Tell Isma'il: it was not you that defeated me, but it was your piety, faith and character, together with the displeasure of The Commander of the Faithful. God (to Him be power and glory) has recently taken away this realm from me and given it to you, and you are more worthy and deserving of this favour. I have surrendered

to God (to Him be power and glory), and I do not wish you anything but good. Meanwhile you have acquired a new kingdom, but you have no wealth or backing. Now I and my brother have many treasures and buried hoards, and the list of them is in my possession; I offer them all to you, so that you may gain backing and power; you should procure supplies and stores, and replenish your treasury.' Thereupon he produced the treasure list from his sleeve and sent it to Isma'il by the hand of that confidant.

21 When the confidant came and repeated what he had heard and placed the treasure-list in front of Isma'il, he turned towards the nobles and said, 'This 'Amr ibn Laith is so cunning that he thinks he can escape from our cunning hands and catch us in the traps and snares of eternal ruin.' He picked up the treasure-list and threw it in front of the confidant, saying, 'Take this treasure-list back to him and say: You with your wiles think you can escape from everything. Whence fell treasure to you and your brother, for your father was a coppersmith and taught you that trade? Through some celestial chance you seized dominion, and by reckless ventures your affairs prospered. This treasure with its dirams and dinars is all that which you have taken from the people by extortion; it comes from the price of thread spun by decrepit old women and widows, from the provisions of strangers and travellers, and from the property of weaklings and orphans. Tomorrow you will have to answer for every grain before God (to Him be power and glory) and taste divine retribution; so now you promptly want to cast these wrongs about our neck, so that on the morrow at the resurrection when creditors seize you and ask you to give back all the property which you wrongfully took, you will say, "All that we took from you, we gave to Isma'il; seek it from him." You will transfer it all to me and I shall be powerless to answer the creditors and to withstand the wrath and interrogation of God.' Such was his piety and fear of God that he did not accept the treasure-list but sent it back to 'Amr. So he was not deluded by worldly goods.

22 Is that like the amirs of these times who think nothing of making ten forbidden things lawful or nullifying ten just claims for the sake of one ill-gotten dinar? They have no regard for the consequences.

23 Now it was the custom of this Isma'il ibn Ahmad that on days when the cold was severe and snow was falling heavily, he

would mount his horse and go alone to the square [of Bukhara], remaining there on horseback until the midday prayers. He used to say, 'It may be that a complainant will come to the court with a petition, and he may not have any money for expenses or anywhere to stay. If we excused ourselves from appearing because of the snow and cold, it would be difficult for such a person to stay and gain access to us. If he knows that we are standing here, he will come and discharge his business and go away in peace.'

24 There are many stories of this kind; only a few have been repeated here. And all this care has been taken for the sake of the answer in the next world.

#### *Chapter IV*

#### *Concerning tax-collectors and constant enquiry into the affairs of Vazirs*

1 Tax-collectors,<sup>1</sup> when they are given a fiscal district, must be instructed to deal honourably with their fellow creatures, and to take only the due amount of revenue, and to claim that too with civility and courtesy, and not to demand any taxes from them until the time comes for them to pay; because when they demand payment before the time, trouble comes upon the peasants, and to pay the tax they are obliged to sell their crops for half [of what they would be worth when they ripen], whereby they are driven to extremities and have to emigrate. If any peasant is in distress and in need of oxen or seed, let him be given a loan to ease his burden and keep him viable, lest he be cast out from his home into exile.

2 I heard that in the time of King Qubad there was famine in the world for seven years, and blessings [rain] ceased to come down from heaven. He ordered the tax-collectors to sell all the grain which they had, and even to give some of it away as charity. All over the kingdom the poor were assisted by gifts from the central treasury and [local] treasuries, with the result that not one

person died of hunger in those seven years – all because the king chid his officers.

3 One must enquire constantly into the affairs of the tax-collector. If he comports himself in the manner just described, the fiscal district can be kept in his hands, but if not, he must be changed for someone suitable. If he has taken more than is due from the peasants, it must be recovered from him and given back to them; after that if he has any property left, it must be seized and brought into the treasury. The officer should be dismissed, and never employed again. Others will then take warning and give up practising extortion.

4 It is also necessary to enquire secretly into the affairs of vazirs and confidants, to see if they are fulfilling their function properly or not. The good or ill of king and kingdom depends on the vazir. When the vazir is of good character and sound judgment, the kingdom is prosperous, the army and peasantry are contented, peaceful and well supplied, and the king is free from anxiety. But when the vazir is bad, irreparable harm is done to the kingdom; the king is constantly perplexed and distressed and the provinces are in a state of disorder.

#### *The story of Bahram Gur and Rast-ravishn*

5 They say that Bahram Gur had a vazir whom they called Rast-ravishn [Right-Conduct]. Bahram Gur had put the whole country in his hands, and placed reliance upon him; he would not hear any word against him. He himself was occupied day and night with entertainments, hunting and drinking. This Rast-ravishn said to a certain person who was the [so-called] 'deputy' of Bahram Gur, 'The peasantry have become unruly and refractory because of our abundant justice; unless they are chastised I am afraid a catastrophe will occur. The king is busy drinking and hunting, and is heedless of the condition of his subjects. Chastise them, before a catastrophe occurs; and know at once that chastisement has two aspects – getting rid of the bad, and fleecing the good. Whomsoever I tell you to seize, seize him.' From everyone that the 'deputy' caught and held in custody Rast-ravishn extracted a bribe for himself and then ordered the 'deputy' to let him go; until eventually all the property in the country, whether houses, or pages, or beautiful girls, or estates, or farms, was seized by him.