

Happiness, virtue and wisdom: elements of ancient Greek philosophy in Islamic advice literature

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Abstract

This essay examines the profound influence of ancient Greek philosophy on Islamic advice literature, particularly in political ethics and governance. It aims to trace the integration of Greek philosophical ideas into Islamic advice literature, focusing on four key areas: Plato's theory of happiness, Aristotle's virtue ethics, the concept of "the three governances," and the ideal ruler-advisor relationship. Employing a meticulous analysis of a dozen Islamic sources from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, it uncovers the extent of Greek thought's impact. Findings reveal that Islamic political elites, including philosophers, secretaries, religious scholars, and historians, adopted and adapted Greek philosophical theories to align with Islamic political goals and strategies. Plato's notions of happiness through just rule and the pursuit of knowledge and justice are echoed in the works of Islamic luminaries. Aristotle's virtue ethics, emphasizing prudence, temperance, courage, and justice, are seamlessly woven into Islamic governance literature. The concept of "the three governances" reflects Aristotelian governance principles, while Greek gnomology is used to validate political concepts especially the ideal ruler's wisdom, showcasing the rhetorical power of invoking Greek authorities. The study concludes that Greek elements were frequently combined with Arabic, Persian, and other influences in Islamic advice literature, suggesting caution in interpreting Islamic political ethics through an exclusive lens. The research underscores the convergence of cross-cultural ideas and the Islamization of Greek philosophy to support political demands within a religious framework.

Artikel ini mengkaji pengaruh mendalam filsafat Yunani kuno terhadap literatur nasihat Islami, terutama dalam etika politik dan pemerintahan. Tujuannya adalah untuk menelusuri integrasi ide-ide filosofis Yunani ke dalam literatur nasihat Islam, dengan berfokus pada empat area utama: teori kebahagiaan Plato, etika kebajikan Aristoteles, konsep "tiga pemerintahan," dan hubungan ideal antara penguasa dan penasihat. Dengan menggunakan analisis cermat terhadap belasan sumber Islam dari abad kesepuluh hingga kelima belas, esai ini mengungkapkan sejauh mana pengaruh pemikiran Yunani. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa elit politik Islam, termasuk filsuf, penulis, ulama, dan sejarawan, mengadopsi dan mengadaptasi teori-teori filosofis Yunani untuk disesuaikan dengan tujuan dan strategi politik Islam. Gagasan Plato tentang kebahagiaan melalui pemerintahan yang adil dan pengembangan pengetahuan serta keadilan tercermin dalam karya-karya tokoh-tokoh terkenal Islam. Etika kebajikan Aristoteles, yang menekankan kehati-hatian, pengendalian diri, keberanian, dan keadilan, terjalin dengan baik dalam literatur pemerintahan Islam. Konsep "tiga pemerintahan" mencerminkan prinsip-prinsip pemerintahan Aristotelian, sementara gnomologi Yunani digunakan sebagai validasi konsep-konsep politik terutama kebijaksanaan penguasa yang ideal, menunjukkan kekuatan retorika dalam mengutip otoritas Yunani. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa unsur-unsur Yunani sering diakulturasikan dengan pengaruh Arab, Persia, dan lainnya dalam literatur nasehat Islami, menunjukkan kehati-hatian dalam menafsirkan etika politik Islam melalui pandangan eksklusif. Penelitian ini menekankan konvergensi ide-ide lintas budaya dan Islamisasi filsafat Yunani untuk mendukung kepentingan politik dalam kerangka agama

Keywords: *Happiness, Virtue, Wisdom, Greek philosophy, Islamic political ethics, Islamic advice literature.*

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Introduction

Previous research on the impact of Greek philosophy on Islamic political theory has mostly focused on the legacy of the classical Platonopolis model, Aristotelian concepts, and Neo-Platonism in Islamic political philosophy, particularly in the works of al-Fārābī (d. 950), Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) and Ibn Rushd

(d. 1198), (Mahdī, 2001; Gannagé *et al.*, 2004). The study of the infiltration of ancient Greek philosophy into Islamic political advice literature has only been briefly discussed in the scholarly discussions of Islamic advice literature or the Greek influence on Islamic civilization.

The phrase "Islamic advice literature" in this article refers to ethical-political writings that are written for rulers or other members of the political elite (Lambton 1980; Gutas, 1981; Tor, 2011; Marlow, 2013; Yavari, 2014; Forster and Yavari, 2015 ; Marlow 2023 ; Lohlker 2024). The word "advice," or *naṣiḥa*, has a deeply ingrained Islamic connotation that dates back to the *ḥadīth* literature which states that true religion requires offering sincere counsel (*al-dīn al-naṣiḥa*) that includes advice to the rulers and other leaders by helping them to do what is right and gently alert and remind them in the most appropriate ways of what they have neglected (al-'Uzayr, 2019, p. 97).

This essay aims to investigate the relationship between Islamic advice literature and ancient Greek philosophy by tracing some ideas and patterns found in Islamic political ethics back to Greek sources. This article also explores the relevance of Islamic advice literature's adoption of Greek philosophy and looks at how Greek ideas were incorporated into Islamic literature to suit the political goals and strategies of the Islamic political elites.

This article argues that four main ideas from ancient Greek philosophy are recurrent in Islamic advice literature: Plato's theory of achieving happiness, Aristotle's virtue ethics, the concept of "the three governances," and the theory of the ideal ruler and his ideal advisor. These four ideas will be investigated in the following twelve Islamic sources: the *Naṣiḥat al-mulūk* (*The Advice to the Kings*) by Pseudo-Māwardī (tenth century); the *Kitāb fī l-siyāsa* (*The Book of Politics*) by Abū l-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn al-Wazīr al-Maghribī (d. 1027); the *Durar al-sulūk fī siyāsat al-mulūk* (*The Pearls of Behavior in the Politics of the Kings*) attributed to al-Māwardī (d. 1058); the *Siyar al-mulūk: Siyāsatnāma* (*The Conduct of the Kings: The*

Book of Politics) attributed to Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 1092); *al-Ishāra ilā adab al-imāra* (*Indications to the Right Manners of Rulership*) by Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥaḍramī al-Qayrawānī al-Murādī (d. 1096); and *al-Tibr al-masbūk fī naṣīḥat al-mulūk* (*The Molded Gold for the Advice of Kings*) attributed to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111); the *Sirāj al-mulūk* (*The Lamp of the Kings*) by Muḥammad b. al-Walīd al-Ṭurtūshī (d. 1126); *al-Nahj al-maslūk fī siyāsat al-mulūk* (*The Path to be Followed in the Politics of the Kings*) by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Naṣr al-Shayzarī (d. 1193); *al-Jalis al-ṣāliḥ wa-l-anīs al-nāṣiḥ* (*The Righteous Comrade and the Counseling Companion*) by Yūsuf b. Qizughlī Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1256); *al-Shubuh al-lāmi‘a fī l-siyāsa al-nāfi‘a* (*The Bright Shooting Stars in the Useful Politics*) by ‘Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf Abū al-Qāsim b. Riḍwān (d. 1381); *al-Durra al-gharrā’ fī naṣīḥat al-salāṭin wa-l-quḍāt wa-l-umarā’* (*The Splendid Pearl in the Advice of the Sultans, the Judges and the Commanders*) by Maḥmūd b. Ismā‘īl al-Khayrbaytī (d. after 1440); and the *Badā’i‘ al-sulūk fī ṭabā’i‘ al-mulk* (*The Marvels of the Necklace in the Characteristics of Kingship*) by Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. al-Azraq (d. 1491).

This article makes the case that Islamic elites of all shades, not just a select few well-known philosophers, employed Greek philosophical theories and concepts, including secretaries, religious scholars, and historians. From the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, a sustained influence spans five centuries. Its impact is not linear or consistent, though. Greek political ideas found their way into Muslim advice books and were combined with Persian and Islamic traditions to create a hybrid administration system. Using examples from various Islamic sources, this article examines how Greek concepts are applied in Islamic ethical reasoning; it does not purport to be a comprehensive discussion of the topic.

Plato's idea of the attainment of happiness

Neoplatonism and Islamic philosophy were greatly influenced by Plato's thesis that politics, virtue, wisdom, and happiness are all related (Plato, 2006, pp. 450–451). Yet, this idea's impact on Islamic political advice literature has only been studied little. In this paper, the author will use three Muslim writers who lived in different eras and places to demonstrate how Plato influenced Islamic advice literature: pseudo-al-Ghazālī, who lived in Iran and Iraq at the end of the 11th and early 12th centuries, al-Khayrbaytī (d. after 1440), who lived in Egypt under the Mamluks, Ibn al-Azraq (d. 1491), who lived in Andalusia and Syria. The notion that Plato's influence on Islamic political theory extended beyond geographical boundaries and reached a variety of theologians and historians informed the selection of these writers. First, let us discuss pseudo-al-Ghazālī. The following quote from *al-Tibr al-masbūk fī naṣīḥat al-mulūk* (*The Molded Gold for the Advice of Kings*) attributed to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) serves as an example of Plato's idea of the attainment of happiness:

This is that (the ruler) should first of all understand the importance, and also the danger, of the authority entrusted to him. In authority there is great blessing, since he who exercises it righteously obtains unsurpassed happiness; but if any (ruler) fails to do so, he incurs torment surpassed only by the torment for unbelief (al-Ghazālī, 1964, p. 14).

Plato's conception of the pursuit of happiness, the relationship between knowledge and justice, and the belief that happiness comes from knowledge are also echoed in *al-Tibr al-masbūk*:

The intelligent man is the one who sees the spirit and reality of things and is not deceived by their forms. The real nature of the above-mentioned activities is as we have described and explained. A man who will not let himself be assured of this is not intelligent; and a man who is not intelligent will not be just, and his last abode will be Hell-fire. The capital from which all forms of happiness are derived is intelligence (al-Ghazālī, 1964, p. 25).

Additionally, *Al-Tibr al-masbūk* links felicity to justice in a manner reminiscent of Plato, but regarding the Sassanid rulers and reflecting the conception of the circle of justice (London, 2011):

The efforts of these kings to develop the world were (made) because they knew that the greater the prosperity, the longer would be their rule and the more numerous would be their subjects. They also knew that the sages had spoken rightly when they said: 'The religion depends on the monarchy, the monarchy on the army, the army on the supplies, supplies on prosperity, and prosperity on justice. They would not tolerate any (infraction), small or great, because they knew beyond all doubt that where injustice and oppression are present, the people have no foothold; the cities and localities go to ruin, the inhabitants flee and move to other territories, the cultivated lands are abandoned, the kingdom falls into decay, the revenue diminishes, the treasury becomes empty, and happiness fades among the people. The subjects do not love the unjust king, but always pray that evil may befall him (al-Ghazālī, 1964, p. 56).

Furthermore, *al-Tibr al-masbūk* reworks al-Fārābī's thesis of Platonian inspiration on prophecy (Walzer, 1957):

Since God on High has predestined that some of a man's actions and circumstances will cause him happiness and others unhappiness, and since no man can himself recognize which of these actions and circumstances are, God on High in the exercise of His favour and mercy created angels and commanded them to disclose this secret to persons whose happiness He had determined since eternity, namely Prophets. To them he gave messages, which He (thus) transmitted to His creatures, in order that (the Prophets) should acquaint them with the paths of happiness and unhappiness, whereby no person might have any longer an argument against the God on High (al-Ghazālī, 1964, p. 12).

I shall now turn to two later Muslim authors from the 14th-15th centuries to illustrate the profound and enduring impact of the Platonic idea of achieving happiness in Islamic advice literature. On the one hand, as evidenced by the dedication of his *al-Durra al-gharrā' fī naṣīḥat al-salāṭīn wa-l-quḍāt wa-l-umarā'* (*The Splendid Pearl in the Advice of the Sultans, the Judges and the Commanders*), al-Khayrbaytī (d. after 1440) was a Sunni theologian and jurist who served the Mamlūk sultan al-Zāhir Sayf al-Dīn Jaqmaq (ruled 1438–1453) (as far as I am aware, this author has not been the subject of any research). Following in the

footsteps of *al-Tibr al-masbūk*'s author, al-Khayrbaytī claims that a king who understands the significance and worth of ruling might achieve endless happiness:

Rulership is a divine grace, he who assumes its responsibility could gain infinite happiness, where no more supreme happiness is possible and he who fails to practice it responsibly falls into misery, and there is no worse misery than disbelief in God (al-Khayrbaytī, 1996, p.14).

On the other hand, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Azraq (d. 1491) was an Andalusian historian, jurist, and envoy (d. 1491), born in Granada and passed away in Jerusalem in 1491. It should be noted that the political concepts developed by the historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) are widely employed in Ibn al-Azraq's work. In Western Islamic studies, the latter remains virtually unnoticed (Sánchez 1980; Isahak, 2010). Ibn al-Azraq quotes Plato when he links the ruler's happiness to his merit in *Bada'i' al-sulūk fī ṭaba'i' al-mulk* (*The Marvels of the Necklace in the Characteristics of Kingship*). He states unequivocally that building enduring monuments that honor the monarch's greatness is one of the paths that lead to the king's satisfaction and glory:

The happy one is through whom the leadership of his ancestors is accomplished, and the miserable one is the one through whom the leadership of his ancestors came to an end (Ibn al-Azraq, 2008, p. 349).

Then, Ibn al-Azraq goes on to say that achieving bliss (*taḥṣīl al-sa'āda*) should be a desired goal for two reasons: the reward of paradise in the afterlife and the glory that comes from serving Islam, which makes a person's fame immortal (Ibn al-Azraq, 2008, p. 349). This exemplifies how Muslim political thinkers have Islamized Plato's views.

Plato's idea of the attainment of happiness has had a significant influence on Islamic political advice literature, as evidenced by the works of al-Ghazālī, al-Khayrbaytī, and Ibn al-Azraq. These Muslim writers from different eras and regions demonstrate how Plato's concepts permeated Islamic thought. Al-Ghazālī, in his work *al-Tibr al-masbūk*, emphasizes the importance of

understanding the authority entrusted to rulers, linking righteous rule to unsurpassed happiness, and warning of torment for failing to do so. He connects intelligence, justice, and happiness, echoing Plato's belief that happiness stems from knowledge. Moreover, he correlates felicity with justice, reflecting Plato's ideas on the relationship between virtue and happiness.

Similarly, al-Khayrbaytī and Ibn al-Azraq further illustrate the enduring impact of Plato's notion of achieving happiness in Islamic literature. Al-Khayrbaytī underscores that rulership, when practiced responsibly, leads to infinite happiness. At the same time, Ibn al-Azraq emphasizes the connection between a ruler's happiness and the perpetuation of their leadership through enduring monuments. Both authors draw parallels between achieving bliss and serving Islam, aligning with Plato's views on pursuing happiness through virtuous actions.

These Islamic writers' incorporation of Plato's ideas into their works showcases the transcultural and transhistorical nature of philosophical influences. By Islamizing Plato's concepts, they adapt ancient Greek philosophical ideals to fit within Islamic political thought, emphasizing the significance of knowledge, justice, and virtuous rule in attaining happiness.

Aristotle's virtue ethics

The list of moral requirements for the ideal ruler is a common topic in nearly all treatises of Islamic advice literature. The influence of *The Nicomachean Ethics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Topics* of Aristotle is visible in this literature, especially in the ideas of the mean and the cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, courage, and justice). Aristotle's four cardinal virtues are the foundation of ethics for some Muslim political thinkers, while others focus on two or three of the four cardinal virtues—usually justice and courage. Similarly, Muslim authors frequently caution the ideal king against being irascible and voracious in line with Plato's notion of the soul.

Let us begin with the work of Abū l-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn al-Wazīr al-Maghribī (d. 1027). The latter was born in Aleppo in a family of Persian governors. Serving under the caliph al-Qādir, he was known as the *wazīr* (vizier) and was an accomplished writer and politician. Knowledge, chastity, patience, charity, and courage are the five virtues of the soul that he believes the ruler should nurture, according to his most famous work, *Kitāb fī l-siyāsa*, or *The Book of Politics*. Chastity is not giving in to one's subordinates' demands for material items and allocating his income according to the dignity of his position (*manzila*) and rank (*qadr*). A ruler must not violate religion or moral dignity (*murū'a*), nor should he injure or treat his subjects unfairly. Along with being patient, he should discipline justly rather than arbitrarily (al-Maghribī, 1948, p. 64). The ideal leader is also described as having a strong heart, being fearless in everything he does, and not letting timidity get in the way of overseeing his people. A monarch of this kind never offers his allies or foes the opportunity to take advantage of his mercy to get away from him. The ideal king according to al-Maghribī ought also to prioritize amassing troops, armor, and horses (al-Maghribī, 1948, p. 65).

Similarly, Aristotle's four virtues are also echoed in *al-Tibr al-masbūk fī naṣīḥat al-mulūk*. Thus, in a chapter on the characteristics of a king, the author told the following story about Alexander and Aristotle:

Alexander asked Aristotle whether courage or justice is higher. He answered, 'If the king has ruled justly, he will not need courage.' (al-Ghazālī, 1964, p. 75).

This anecdote paraphrases Aristotle's statement in the *Topics*:

Take the case of justice and courage; if everybody were just, there would be no use for courage, whereas all might be courageous, and still justice would be of use (Aristotle, 1984, III/2, 38, 117b2).

Comparably, the highly influential vizier of two Saljūk sultans, Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 1092), is credited with writing the *Siyar al-mulūk: Siyāsatnāma* (*The*

Conduct of the Kings: The Book of Politics), which defines the ideal prince as having “a handsome face, good character, the spirit of justice, courage, valour, skill in handling a horse and using all the weapons, benevolence and concern for people, and well-trained to perform the wishes and keep his promises.” (Nizām al-Mulk, 1893, p. 7.) Significantly, *Siyāsatnāma* emphasizes the two cardinal virtues of justice and courage in particular.

Another example of the Aristotelian notion of virtues' influence on Islamic advice literature is found in *Sirāj al-mulūk* (*The Lamp of the Kings*) by Muḥammad b. al-Walīd al-Ṭurṭūshī (d. 1126). Al-Ṭurṭūshī was born in Spain and lived in Iraq, Egypt, and Syria. He was a Mālikī jurist, theologian, ṣūfī, and political thinker. Al-Ṭurṭūshī quotes the wise men, *ḥukamā'* (commonly used to denote philosophers), on the virtue of courage in Chapter 60, titled "On the moral quality which is the mother of moral qualities and the source of virtues, so that who lacks this virtue could not acquire any other virtue in a complete way: courage, which is also called patience and the power of the self." (al-Ṭurṭūshī, 1994, p. 667.) He adds that the wise men assert that all good comes from the steadiness of the heart, which implies being firm and strong in accordance with knowledge and law (al-Ṭurṭūshī, 1994, p. 667). He also warns against both excess and lack of bravery, stating that one should refrain from lying and not submit to every attack (al-Ṭurṭūshī, 1994, 670), which is akin to Aristotle's golden mean.

One of the longest chapters in Islamic advice literature on the ethics of kingship (roughly thirty pages) can be found in *Durar al-sulūk fī siyāsat al-mulūk* (*The Pearls of Behavior in the Politics of the Kings*), attributed to the Shāfi'ī jurist al-Māwardī (d. 1058), author of *Kitāb al-Aḥkām al-sultāniyya* (*The Ordinances of the Government*). In this chapter of *Durar al-sulūk*, he draws on Aristotle's idea of virtues as habits and on Plato's idea of self-government as a prerequisite to governing others. The *akhlāq mutaḳābila* section on opposing characters attests

to the impact of Aristotle's idea of virtues on Islamic political thought. The author asserts that kindness and generosity—two qualities that the perfect king must possess—can turn into vices if they are abused or utilized excessively (al-Māwardī, 1997, pp. 76–80). The moderation principle, which is central to Aristotle's ethics, is referenced in this section as well. In this way, the author challenges the ideal monarchs to consider their actions: "Either they have been deficient or excessive, which are both departures from truth and moderation, or they have been moderate and respected the limit, justly in every matter." (al-Māwardī, 1997, pp. 81).

Aristotle's virtue ethics have profoundly impacted Islamic advice literature, particularly concerning the moral requirements for ideal rulers. The influence of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Topics* is evident in Islamic political thought, emphasizing the importance of virtues such as prudence, temperance, courage, and justice. Muslim political thinkers often draw parallels between Aristotle's four cardinal virtues and the qualities expected of rulers, with a focus on justice and courage. Additionally, akin to Plato's concept of the soul, Muslim authors frequently caution against negative traits like irascibility and voracity in ideal rulers.

Abūl-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn al-Wazīr al-Maghribī, Niẓām al-Mulk, and Muḥammad b. al-Walīd al-Ṭurṭūshī exemplify how Islamic writers incorporated Aristotle's virtues into their works. Al-Maghribī, in his *Kitāb fī l-siyāsa*, outlines five virtues of the soul that rulers should cultivate, including courage and charity. Similarly, *al-Tibr al-masbūk fī naṣiḥat al-mulūk*, *Siyar al-mulūk* and *Siyāsatnāma* by al-Ghazālī and Niẓām al-Mulk respectively, emphasize the importance of justice and courage in defining the ideal prince. Al-Ṭurṭūshī, in *Siraj al-mulūk*, discusses the virtue of courage as essential for acquiring other virtues, echoing Aristotle's concept of the mean.

Islamic advice literature often reflects Aristotle's emphasis on virtues as habits and the importance of self-governance in governing others. Al-Māwardī's *Durar al-sulūk* draws on Aristotle's idea of virtues as habits and Plato's concept of self-government, challenging monarchs to practice moderation in their actions. The incorporation of Aristotle's ethical principles into Islamic political thought underscores the enduring relevance of ancient Greek philosophical ideals in shaping ethical and political discourse.

The Idea of “the three governances”

Islamic advice literature has generally accepted Aristotle's thesis of the three governances—the management of the individual, the management of the elite, and the management of the common people. Thus, this theory is also included in *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* by Pseudo-Māwardī, whose fifth chapter discusses politics and self-education, its sixth chapter addresses the government of the elite, and its seventh chapter addresses the governance of the common people ([Pseudo-]al-Māwardī, 2016, pp. 113–225). The author begins chapter eight by claiming that:

After we finished the anecdotes on governance in the chapters of the three governances, the obligation of arrangement now requires us to follow up with a chapter on the governance of property ([Pseudo-]al-Māwardī, 2016, p. 227).

Pseudo-Māwardī lists the *Sirr al-asrār* (The Secret of Secrets), which is mistakenly credited to Aristotle, as one of his sources, repeating four aphorisms from this work and saying that "we read in the letter of Aristotle to Alexander." ([Pseudo-]al-Māwardī, 2016, pp. 84–85). One of the most important pieces of medieval political advice writing in both the Islamic and European worlds was the *Sirr al-asrār*. As Louise Marlow notes, “the text enjoyed broad diffusion across linguistic, cultural and confessional boundaries” (Marlow, 2013, p. 23) and that “its contents [are] still flexible, its associations and attributions shifting

from Indic to Greek as they circulated in their Arabic forms.” (Marlow, 2013, p. 23).

The Book of Politics, Kitāb fī l-siyāsa, written by al-Maghribī, and previously mentioned, is divided into three chapters that represent the three governances of a ruler: the governance of the ruler over himself (his body), the governance of the elites, and the governance of the common people (al-Maghribī, 1948, p. 56). However, in his *Kitāb al-Ishāra ilā adab al-imāra (Indications to the Right Manners of Rulership)*, Abū Bakr al-Murādī (d. 1096), a North African jurist, judge, and theologian who lived under Almoravid rule, does not support the tripartite structure; instead, he devotes an early chapter to the education of the self and later chapters to the practical aspects of power (al-Murādī, 2003, p. 27).

The Ḥanafī jurist and historian Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1256), who resided in Syria and Iraq, is another illustration of how Hellenic influence reached even to thinkers who were rather "traditionalist." The third chapter of his book *Al-Jalīs al-ṣāliḥ wa-l-anīs al-nāṣiḥ (The Righteous Comrade and the Counseling Companion)* is devoted to the topic of the proper behavior that the monarch ought to endeavor to conduct, dividing it into the right conduct with regard to himself and with regard to his subjects. The author tells the reader that the political subjects are separated into two primary groups: the common people (*‘amma*) and the elite (*ḵbaṣṣa*) (Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, 1989, 47). Regarding the proper behavior of the monarch personally, the author stipulates that he must research history, contact religious scholars, and have faith in God. When it comes to proper behavior with the elite, they ought to be monitored more than the general public. The latter should be approached with intimidation as well as incitement, with a focus primarily on incitement. Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī advises the ideal king to be visible to his subjects and to treat them with kindness, like a father would treat his children (Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, 1989, pp. 50–54). He also

exhorts the ruler to apply Islamic law because it is perfect politics, *al-sharīʿa hiya al-siyāsa al-kāmila* (Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, 1989, p. 55).

The concept of "the three governances" in Islamic advice literature, influenced by Aristotle's thesis, plays a significant role in shaping the discourse on governance and rulership. The tripartite division of governance into the management of the individual, the elite, and the common people is a recurring theme in works such as *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* by Pseudo-Māwardī. This division reflects the ideal of a just ruler who maintains social harmony, practices virtues, consults advisors, and attends to the welfare of the subjects. The incorporation of Aristotle's principles into Islamic political thought highlights the importance of self-education, governance of the elite, and governance of the common people in ensuring effective and ethical leadership.

Moreover, the diverse interpretations of the three governances by different Islamic scholars like al-Maghribī, Abū Bakr al-Murādī, Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, and others demonstrate the adaptability and evolution of these concepts within Islamic political literature. While some authors adhere to the traditional tripartite structure, others like al-Murādī focus on self-education and practical aspects of power, deviating from the conventional division. The emphasis on virtues, self-discipline, consultation with scholars, and adherence to Islamic law as the foundation of governance underlines the integration of ethical and religious principles into the governance framework.

The Ideal ruler and the ideal adviser

Several researchers, such as Louise Marlow (Marlow 2013) and Dimitri Gutas (Gutas 1975; Gutas 1981), have studied and illustrated the influence of Greek gnomology on Islamic advice literature. Greek proverbs are used as authoritative assertions in Islamic advice literature; these are typically preceded with the phrase "the wise men said," or something similar (*qāla al-ḥukamāʾ*).

Muslim political thinkers use Greek philosophers as role models for wisdom, with the goal of convincing the reader of the validity of the ideas presented in the work. In particular, their frequent occurrence shows the rhetorical effectiveness of quoting Alexander and Aristotle. Nonetheless, most Muslim authors try to reconcile the views of Muslim, Greek, and Persian thinkers. The trilateral chain of Greek, Persian, and Islamic sources has a strong persuasive effect since it establishes the author's ideal ruler as endowed with a variety of wisdoms, while constructing a case for the universality of political wisdom. *Al-Tibr al-masbūk fi naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, for example, juxtaposes two aphorisms by Aristotle and Alexander with stories about the Sassanid kings Ardashīr and Parvīz, and about the Muslim *ḥadīth* transmitter Sufyān al-Thawrī, who passed away in 778:

Aristotle has said that the best ruler is he who, like a vulture, has carrion round about him; not he who, like carrion, has vultures round about him (al-Ghazālī, 1964, p. 96).

King Alexander said that the best king is he who turns the bad customs in his kingdom into good ones, and that the worst king is he who turns the good customs in his kingdom into bad ones (al-Ghazālī, 1964, p. 96).

By sandwiching two Aristotelian aphorisms between a phrase attributed to the Sassanid monarch Anūshirwān and a narrative of the Prophet Muḥammad, Pseudo-al-Ghazālī further exemplifies the pursuit of three legitimacies for his ideal king, thus maintaining a comparable balance of Islamic, Persian, and Greek authority. Aristotle is shown in this balance as the archetype of "the wise man," a significant figure that enjoys the legitimacy of reason and wisdom (which shows clarity of thought and decision-making):

Aristotle has said that when a king has an ignorant minister, his reign will be like a cloud that passes without dropping rain (al-Ghazālī, 1964, p. 110).

(In) the Book of Maxims, (Aristotle) has said: 'Work which is done by another man's hand, both by way of smooth-speaking and by way of rough-speaking, and which serves your purpose and brings you no discredit, will be better than work which you do with your own hand.' (al-Ghazālī, 1964, p. 110).

Aristotle and Alexander are sometimes cited together as a literary device; Alexander is presented as the perfect king and Aristotle as the advisor. Given that they are cited as an example, this staging could be interpreted as an attempt to emulate Aristotle's role in advising the ruler. As a result, the advice's recipient is expected to emulate Alexander by treating the writer with the same deference that Alexander showed Aristotle. By promising Alexandrian grandeur to the ruler if he listens to the advisor, Alexander's glory is shown as relying on (or at least benefiting from) Aristotle's wisdom, which is a potent rhetorical tactic used to emphasize the advisor's importance. The best example of this tactic comes from *Counsel for Kings'* author:

Alexander was asked, 'Why do you hold your teacher in greater honour than your father?' He answered, 'Because my father is the cause of my transient life, while my teacher is the cause of my eternal life.' (al-Ghazālī, 1964, p. 137).

Plato is also commonly cited, in addition to Aristotle and Alexander, as a principal Greek authority to be consulted. In his *Sirāj al-mulūk*, al-Ṭurṭūshī, for instance, references Plato twice, in chapter 13, “on the inner traits that the wise men described as leading to the destruction of kingdoms, namely arrogance”:

Plato looked at an arrogant person and told him: I wish I was like you in your illusion about yourself, and that my enemies are like you in reality (al-Ṭurṭūshī, 1994, 233).

Al-Ṭurṭūshī quotes Plato between two quotes of the Prophet Muḥammad himself and al-Aḥnaf b. Qays (d. 691), a companion of Muḥammad. After al-Ma'mūn, Ardashīr, 'Umar, Mu'āwiya, and Solomon, he quotes Plato a second time, urging the ideal ruler to forgo cruelty:

Plato was asked: What types of human acts resemble divine acts? He answered: kindness towards people (al-Ṭurṭūshī, 1994, 315).

An aphorism may occasionally be paraphrased and given credit to a different source. For example, in his *al-Nahj al-maslūk fī siyāsāt al-mulūk* (*The Path to be Followed in the Politics of the Kings*), al-Shayzarī (d. 1193), a Shāfi'ite lawyer,

judge, and dream interpreter who lived in Syria under the Ayyubid reign, quotes the following:

Alexander asked the wise men of India: Which is better justice or courage? And they answered: if justice is applied, there is no need for courage (al-Shayzarī, 2003, p. 92).

As we have seen above, in *al-Tibr al-masbūk fī naṣiḥat al-mulūk*, this quote was rightly assigned to Aristotle.

An example of the independent and proactive application of Greek gnology is given by *Siyāsatnāma*'s author. He begins by constructing an argument, describing a pseudo-historical scenario, and employing a tone that is both descriptive (this is how the ideal prince acts) and prescriptive (this is how the ideal prince should act). At the conclusion of the argument, he typically quotes a brief passage from a Greek authority to support his position. Two instances from *Siyāsatnāma* are as follows: The author alerts the prince to his minister's betrayal in the first case, and cautions him against putting his trust in his staff and to keep an eye out for their actions in the second:

The defeat of Darius was attributed to the secret agreement that was established between Darius' vizier and Alexander. The latter said, after the death of Darius: 'The negligence of the sovereign and the betrayal the minister made me lord of this kingdom.' (Niẓām al-Mulḳ, 1893, p. 39).

When the Prince entrusts someone with an important position, he should place near him a secret agent who will monitor him and will continually account for his actions and how he performs them. Aristotle told Alexander, 'Do not appoint any person to a public function, having authority in the empire, and having caused your discontent because he will make all efforts to bring about your ruin'. (Niẓām al-Mulḳ, 1893, pp. 39-40).

Last but not least, in his *al-Shuhub al-lāmi'a fī l-siyāsa al-nāfi'a* (*The Bright Shooting Stars in the Useful Politics*), a later Andalusian author, 'Abdallāh b. Yūsuf Abū al-Qāsim b. Riḍwān (d. 1381), quotes Plato (after the Prophet Muḥammad) on the affection of the ideal king to his subjects; he reports Plato saying that people who exchange kind words make their affinity durable and

approach people easily, solving, thus, the problems; and with the patience of character, one can live well and attain the highest joy (Ibn Riḍwān, 1984, p. 264). Malaga native Ibn Riḍwān also lived in Morocco and Tunisia (during the Marinid Sultanate) and in Granada (under the Nasrid dynasty). Ibn Riḍwān was a diplomat between the Nasrid dynasty and the Marinid Sultanate, as well as a judge and jurist in Malaga. His family was made up of ministers and army commanders (Ibn Riḍwān, 1984, p. 11). As for *Al-Shubub al-lāmi'a*, it is a unique work comprising 25 comprehensive chapters totaling more than 400 pages. Ibn Riḍwān places a strong emphasis on the legitimacy of rulership, obedience to and respect for rulers, the duty of a ruler to hear the opinions of the pious people, the qualities of justice and generosity, the royal court's protocol, the ruler's advice protocol. He also underlines consultation between the ruler and the ruling class, the ruler and the elites of his kingdom, the manners of royal behavior with those in his court, the ruler's duty of caution and patience, his keeping of his word, his modesty toward the common people, the need for the ruler to be ruthless and secretive, the management of various state agencies and war, and the corruption and dissolution of states (Ibn Riḍwān, 1984). As a result, his writings combined political juristic reasoning (Islamic public law based on al-Māwardī's paradigm) with historical philosophy (close to that of Ibn Khaldūn, whom he encountered in Tunisia).

The integration of Greek gnomology into Islamic advice literature, as studied by researchers like Louise Marlow and Dimitri Gutas, reveals the profound influence of Greek philosophical wisdom on the ideals of the ideal ruler and adviser in Islamic political thought. By quoting Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Alexander as authoritative sources, Muslim political thinkers seek to establish the validity and universality of their ideas. The trilateral chain of Greek, Persian, and Islamic sources creates a persuasive argument for the ideal ruler's wisdom, drawing from a diverse range of

philosophical traditions. The juxtaposition of aphorisms from Greek philosophers with narratives of historical figures like Sassanid kings and Islamic scholars serves to construct a multifaceted image of the ideal ruler, blending Islamic, Persian, and Greek authorities.

The use of Greek authorities like Aristotle, Alexander, and Plato as role models for wisdom and governance in Islamic advice literature underscores the importance of seeking wisdom from diverse sources. The emulation of Aristotle's role as the wise advisor and Alexander as the ideal king reflects a rhetorical strategy to emphasize the significance of the adviser in guiding the ruler. By quoting Greek authorities on virtues, governance, and ethical conduct, Muslim authors like al-Ṭurṭūshī and Ibn Riḍwān demonstrate a proactive application of Greek gnology to support their arguments on the qualities of the ideal ruler. The integration of Greek philosophical wisdom into Islamic political thought enriches the discourse on governance, ethics, and leadership, highlighting the enduring relevance of ancient philosophical ideals in shaping political ideals and principles in the Islamic world.

Conclusion

This article presents a meticulous investigation into the extensive influence ancient Greek philosophy has exerted on Islamic advice literature, specifically within the domains of political ethics and governance. By scrutinizing a dozen Islamic sources that span a period of five centuries, from the tenth to the fifteenth, the study pinpoints four pivotal areas where Greek thought has left a lasting imprint: Plato's philosophy of happiness, Aristotle's virtue ethics, the concept of "the three governances," and the assimilation of Greek gnology into the fabric of Islamic political discourse.

Plato's notions on the pursuit of happiness through just rule and the quest for knowledge and justice are conspicuous in the writings of Islamic luminaries such as al-Ghazālī, al-Khayrbaytī, and Ibn al-Azraq. These scholars

underscore the significance of virtuous governance for the prosperity of both the ruler and the ruled, thereby intertwining Plato's ideas with the Islamic context of leadership and its consequences.

Moreover, Aristotle's virtue ethics, with its focus on the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice, have been seamlessly woven into the tapestry of Islamic political thought. Figures like al-Maghribī, Niẓām al-Mulk, and al-Ṭurṭūshī have adapted these virtues to the specifics of Islamic governance, accentuating the necessity of equilibrium and restraint in the conduct of rulers.

Furthermore, the concept of "the three governances," which encompasses the administration of the self, the elite, and the general populace, mirrors the Aristotelian tripartite classification of governance. This theme is a recurring motif in Islamic advice literature, encapsulating the ideal of a just ruler who upholds social harmony and is attentive to the welfare of his subjects.

Lastly, the article underscores the deployment of Greek gnology, wherein maxims and adages attributed to Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Alexander are invoked as authoritative statements to bolster arguments and validate political concepts. This practice exemplifies the rhetorical potency of citing Greek authorities and the amalgamation of cross-cultural wisdom within Islamic political thought

Islamic political ethics endorses Greek political and ethical concepts and patterns (such the relationship between the ruler and the philosopher-advisor) as effective political tools and arguments. However, they were Islamized for Muslim audiences to accept them and for them to be used in religious justifications that supported political demands. For this reason, a crucial disclaimer must be made when discussing Greek influence on Islamic advice literature. Greek elements have frequently been combined with Arabic, Persian, and other influences in this literature. This suggests using caution when interpreting Islamic political ethics through an exclusive lens. Islamic advice

literature provides compelling evidence for the convergence of cross-cultural ideas.

Muslim political thinkers were shown to be interested in all aspects of power, including good and bad governance, the characteristics of the ideal ruler, the roles of the courtier and adviser, the relationships between the ruler and his subjects, the ruler and the elite, and the ruler and the common people. They dealt with institutions and social strata, as well as individual character qualities and the manners (*adab*) needed in various roles. Their views mirror their own social and political realities while expressing political and ethical aspirations.

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