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Akmaldin SAIDJONOV[a]

[a] *Assistant Lecturer, Kokand State University*
Ferghana, Uzbekistan
E-mail: saidjonovakmaliddin9@gmail.com

THE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM AND ACTIVITIES OF DEPARTMENTS IN THE SAMANID STATE (9TH–10TH CENTURIES)

Abstract. *This study presents a scholarly analysis of the administrative governance system and the activities of departments (divans) in the Samanid state, which advanced centralized statehood traditions in Transoxiana and Khorasan during the 9th–10th centuries. The primary objective of the article is to identify the continuity of the Samanid administrative apparatus with the statecraft experience of the Abbasid Caliphate and the mechanisms of its refinement based on local traditions. Utilizing historical-comparative, chronological, and systemic analysis methods, primary sources by medieval historians such as Narshakhi, Nizam al-Mulk, Utbi, and Khwandamir were examined. As a result, the study reveals the functional duties of the two core pillars of central administration–the dargah (royal court) and ten specialized divans (Vazorat, Mustavfiy, Rasail, Sahib ash-Shurat, Barid, Muhtasib, Mushrif, Qaza, Az-Zi'a, Avqaf)–alongside the activities of vizier dynasties and the interaction mechanisms of the military, financial, and judicial systems. In conclusion, it is substantiated that the centralized governance model established during the Samanid era laid the foundation for the statehood development of subsequent Eastern Muslim dynasties.*

Keywords: *Samanid state, central administration, dargah, divan system, vizierate, administrative reforms, taxation and finance, judicial system, 9th–10th centuries.*

INTRODUCTION

Research relevance. The Samanid dynasty, which ruled Transoxiana and Khorasan in the ninth and tenth centuries, not only laid the foundations for an economic, intellectual, and cultural flourishing often described as the Eastern Renaissance but also established a highly developed centralized administrative system for its time. In the history of statehood in Uzbekistan and beyond, the Samanid administrative apparatus, including

the royal court (dargah) and government departments (diwans), served as a model for later dynasties such as the Qarakhanids, Ghaznavids, and Seljuks. A detailed study of Samanid central government is therefore important for understanding institutional continuity in the history of regional statehood.

Statement of the problem and literature review. Although medieval Eastern statehood has been widely studied, the internal organization of the Samanid central administration, the duties of court officials and the ten principal diwans, and the mechanisms of coordination and oversight among them have not always been examined comprehensively. Existing scholarship frequently addresses these topics separately. Valuable accounts of the administrative system appear in Narshakhi's History of Bukhara (Narshakhiy, 1966), Nizam al-Mulk's Siyasatnama (Nizomulmulk, 2008), al-Utbi's Al-Yamini (Utbiy, 2004), and Khwandamir's Vuzaro salotin ad-davlat as-Somoniyya (Xondamir, 1980). Modern scholars, including V. V. Barthold (Bartold, 1900), R. N. Frye (1944, 1965), Sh. Kamoliddin (2017), A. Ziyo (2001), and E. Merçil (2011), have discussed the Samanid administrative structure and its fiscal and military institutions. Nonetheless, further source-based analysis is needed to consider these bodies as an integrated system of centralized government.

Research aim. This study aims to analyze the organizational structure, hierarchy of offices, and executive mechanisms of the two principal pillars of Samanid central government in the ninth and tenth centuries–the dargah (royal court) and ten specialized diwans–on the basis of primary historical sources.

Research objectives:

1. To identify the roles of Abbasid administrative practice and local traditions in the formation of the Samanid system of government.

2. To examine court administration, including the hajib institution, the sahib al-haras, and palace household offices.

3. To classify the functions of the ten principal diwans using Narshakhi's account.

4. To investigate the vizierial families (Jayhanis, Bal'amis, Uzayrs, and Utbis) and the connections among military, fiscal, and judicial institutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article employs historical, systemic, chronological, and historical-comparative methods to investigate the central administration of the Samanid state and the activities of its diwans.

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The historical-comparative approach is used to identify continuities and differences between Samanid administrative, fiscal, and military practices and those of the Arab Caliphate (Umayyad and Abbasid periods), as well as the Tahirid and Saffarid states (Bartold, 1900:239; Kamoliddin, 2017:28–29).

The chronological method traces changes in the officeholders serving as viziers–from Abulfazl Bal'ami to Abu Hasan Hamavi–and in the military command of Khorasan, from the rule of Ismail Samani to the final decades of the dynasty (Merçil, 2011:139–150; Xondamir, 1980:212–218).

Systemic analysis allows the functional structure, hierarchy, and executive procedures of the dargah and the ten specialized diwans to be considered as parts of a coherent administrative apparatus (Narshakhiy, 1966:105–106).

The primary source base consists of medieval historical and political works: History of Bukhara by Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ja'far Narshakhi (Narshakhiy, 1966), Siyasatnama (Siyar al-Muluk) by Nizam al-Mulk (Nizomulmulk, 2008), Al-Yamini by Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Abd al-Jabbar al-Utbi (Utbiy, 2004), and Vuzaro salotin ad-davlat as-Somoniyya by Ghiyath al-Din Khwandamir (Xondamir, 1980). The analysis also compares interpretations by Barthold (Bartold, 1900), Frye (1944, 1965), Kamoliddin (2017), Ziyo (2001), Azizullah Bayot (1975), and Merçil (2011).

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Analysis of primary historical sources indicates that Samanid government drew on the Abbasid administrative model, with the dargah and diwans functioning as its central governing institutions. Just as the supreme ruler of the Arab Caliphate bore the titles caliph and amir al-mu'minin, while provincial governors were called amirs, Samanid rulers held the title amir in their capacity as governors of Transoxiana and Khorasan (Kamoliddin, 2017:28).

Court Administration and Palace Offices

The ruler of the state was also the head of the dargah. The study identifies the following principal components of palace administration:

The hajib institution. The amir's personal guard, composed of Turkic ghulams, played an important role in the administration of the Samanid court. According to Nizam al-Mulk's Siyasatnama, a purchased ghulam followed a strictly regulated, eight-

year progression of service before becoming eligible for advancement toward the rank of hajib (Nizomulmulk, 2008:101–102):

Year 1 – served on foot at the stirrup, wearing Zandanachi clothing and ordinary boots; riding a horse was prohibited.

Year 2 – received better clothing and a Turkic horse with a simple saddle.

Year 3 – received a qarachuri sword to wear at the waist.

Year 4 – received a belt fitting and a scabbard.

Year 5 – received improved riding equipment, a decorated bridle, red clothing, and an iron mace suspended from a ring.

Year 6 – received special riding boots and was assigned the duties of a cupbearer, carrying a drinking cup at the waist.

Year 7 – attained the right to wear a robe.

Year 8 – received a sixteen-pole tent and eight newly purchased ghulams, acquired the designation visaqbashi, and was granted a silver-ornamented headdress and Ganj-style clothing. With further increases in his troops and rank, he could become khaylbashi and only thereafter hajib (Nizomulmulk, 2008:101–102).

Sahib al-haras (amir al-haras). This was a senior court official, a position originally introduced under the Umayyad caliph Mu'awiya (Bartold, 1900:236). Under the Samanids, its holder implemented the amir's judgments and commanded twenty attendants carrying golden maces, twenty carrying silver maces, and ten carrying wooden maces (Nizomulmulk, 2008:126). During the rule of Nasr ibn Ahmad, the office at the Samarkand palace was held by the amir's brother Ismail (Narshakhiy, 1966:149).

Palace household personnel. Internal palace affairs were managed by a vakil, alongside officials such as the aghachi, secretary (katib), master of the stables (mirakhur), chamberlain or curtain-keeper (pardadar), and other attendants.

The Diwan System and Its Functions

The diwan system, which emerged during the caliphate of Umar and was further developed under the Umayyads–including Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, and Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik–and the Abbasids, was adopted by the Samanids. According to Narshakhi's History of Bukhara, buildings for ten diwans were erected near the ruler's palace during the reign of Nuh ibn Ahmad (Narshakhiy, 1966:105–106). Their functions were as follows:

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Diwan al-vizarat (vizierate). The most important department was headed by the vizier (wazir), also called khwaja-i buzurg. The vizierate had first attained a formal institutional status under the Abbasids. In the Samanid period, the vizier supervised the political, administrative, and economic departments of central government as well as military administration. Viziers sometimes also acted as military commanders and secretaries, following precedents such as al-Fadl ibn Sahl, vizier to the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun.

Diwan al-mustawfi (finance). Headed by an official known as the khazin, treasurer, or mustawfi, this department recorded revenue received by the treasury and expenditure incurred, with the assistance of subordinate accountants (Kamoliddin, 2017:29). Modeled on the Abbasid diwan al-kharaj, the fiscal system is presented as more organized and effective than those of the Tahirid and Saffarid periods (Bartold, 1900:239). Under Abu Salih Mansur ibn Nuh, taxes were collected twice annually, at six-month intervals, and annual collections reportedly amounted to four million dirhams (Bayot, 1975:145–146).

Diwan al-rasa'il (diwan al-insha / diwan amid al-mulk). Its head was known as the sahib diwan amid al-mulk and, in later periods, khwaja-i amid (Kamoliddin, 2017:29). This department prepared the ruler's written orders and decrees and handled official correspondence with other states and the Abbasid caliphs.

Diwan sahib al-shurat (military affairs). Modeled on an Abbasid department responsible for Turkic troops, it managed military recruitment, personnel, supplies, and regular payment of salaries. The sahib al-shurat was assisted by an ariz. A specialized diwan al-arz oversaw the bistagani system of quarterly military pay, discipline, weapons, and food supplies (Kamoliddin, 2017: 29). The Samanid army consisted of the amir's elite guard, recruited largely from Turks; the regular army, commanded by a sipahsalar who was commonly of Turkic origin; troops from subordinate territories; and volunteers.

Diwan sahib al-barid (postal and intelligence service). The postal institution, introduced under the Umayyad caliph Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan (661–680) and developed under the Abbasids as diwan al-barid, was adopted by the Samanids. It transmitted official messages from the center to the provinces and secretly reported on the activities of provincial officials. Horses and couriers were stationed in many towns and villages. Local personnel of the service answered directly to the central department rather than to provincial governors and received salaries and travel allowances from the treasury (Frye, 1965:142).

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Diwan al-muhtasib (market and public conduct oversight). The hisba institution, traced in the source account to the time of the Prophet Muhammad and formally organized during the caliphate of Umar, was led by the muhtasib. In each city, the official supervised market prices, weights and measures, and fair commercial conduct, while also undertaking the duty of enjoining right and forbidding wrong (Nizomulmulk, 2008:48). Under the Samanids, a courtier or an impartial senior Turkic servant could be appointed muhtasib (Bartold, 1900:241). The office also monitored public behavior, moral conduct, attendance at mosques, and the consumption of wine (Kamoliddin, 2017:29).

Diwan al-mushrif (financial inspection). This department monitored the use of treasury funds and resources allocated to palace expenditure (Kamoliddin, 2017:29). According to Nizam al-Mulk, trusted individuals familiar with palace affairs were appointed as mushrifs. They sent reliable deputies to towns and districts to safeguard state property and investigate the concerns of agricultural communities (Nizomulmulk, 2008:65). Cases were examined by the diwan al-ishraf, whose findings could lead to the punishment of provincial administrators, military commanders, and even judges.

Diwan al-qada (judicial affairs). This department supervised the judiciary and was headed by the qadi al-qudat (chief judge). Appointments were reportedly given to pious, upright scholars and ascetics free from greed; adequate salaries were intended to protect their integrity. Provincial governors were required to comply with judicial decisions and Islamic law (Nizomulmulk, 2008:45). Since the Samanids adhered to Sunni Islam, cases were considered within Hanafi and Shafi'i jurisprudence; centers of Sunni legal learning existed in Bukhara, Samarkand, Ferghana, and other cities (Frye, 1944:43). Non-Muslims were treated as dhimmis and subject to distinct judicial procedures.

Diwan al-diya' (administration of royal estates). Also known as the diwan-i amlak-i khass, it supervised lands and properties belonging to the amir (Bartold, 1900:240). Samanid rulers, notably Ismail ibn Ahmad, generally retained their estates or donated them as waqf endowments.

Diwan al-awqaf (endowments). This department managed land and other properties endowed as waqf (Kamoliddin, 2017:29). Endowment income was directed chiefly toward medical, educational, social, and religious needs. In later periods, responsibility for waqf affairs came within the remit of the judiciary (Bartold, 1900:241).

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Vizierial Families and Chronological Succession

The families most prominently associated with the office of vizier under the Samanids were the Jayhanis, Bal'amis, Uzayrs, and Utbis. On the basis of the cited sources, the following sequence of viziers is identified (Utbiy, 2004:51; Xondamir, 1980:212–218):

Abulfazl Bal'ami – one of the earliest viziers under Ismail Samani.

Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad – served as vizier under Amir Ahmad ibn Ismail and suppressed a rebellion led by Abu Ishaq.

Abulfazl Muhammad ibn Ahmad Hakim – served as vizier during the reign of Amir Nasr.

Abu Ja'far Utbi – served as vizier under Abd al-Malik ibn Nuh and was a noted literary figure; he was killed by political opponents (Xondamir, 1980:212–214).

Abulhasayn Utbi – served as vizier under Nuh ibn Mansur, assisted the commander Abulabbas Tash in the struggle against the Daylamites, and was assassinated in 982 (Utbiy, 2004:51).

Abulhasayn Mazini – began his career in the diwan al-mustawfi and later became vizier, but was dismissed during the rebellion of Abulhasan Simjuri.

Abdurahman Farsi – a follower of Abulabbas Tash who replaced Mazini and was dismissed when Tash departed for Khorasan.

Abdullah Aziz – was appointed vizier twice and, during his second term, was captured by the Ghaznavid leader Sabuktigin.

Abu Ali Damighani – was dismissed by Amir Nuh on grounds of incompetence after Bughra Khan occupied Samanid territory.

Abu Ali Bal'ami – a scholar who translated al-Tabari's History into Persian with additions.

Abu Nasr Abu Zayd – worked for an extended period in the diwan al-rasa'il, served as vizier under Amir Nasr, and was killed by opponents.

Abu Muzaffar Mahmud ibn Ibrahim – served as vizier under Abulharith Mansur ibn Nuh and was later dispatched to Gurgan and Nishapur.

Abu Hasan Hamavi – was sent to Bukhara as an envoy by Sultan Mahmud and served as vizier for approximately eighteen months at the invitation of Bektuzun and Fa'iq Khassa (Xondamir, 1980:217–218).

Local Administration, Military Command, and Religious Officials

The provincial and urban branches of most diwans were subordinate to local administrative institutions; employees of the diwan al-barid alone reported directly to

the central office (Ziyo, 2001:96). Local administration was exercised by governors or kadkhudas, often drawn from ruling and landowning families. The province of Khorasan was administered by the military commander, or sipahsalar (Merçil, 2011:139–150).

Urban government was led by a ra'is selected by the governor from among landowners or religious scholars. The head of the religious scholars was known as an ustad or shaykh al-Islam, while an influential official authorized to deliver the Friday sermon was called a khatib. Administrative officials, known as ahl al-qalam or dabirs, were largely drawn from local landholding and religious elites. They were expected to know Arabic, the Qur'an, Islamic law, literature, and the Islamic sciences.

DISCUSSION

The analysis suggests that the centralized system developed by the Samanid state in the ninth and tenth centuries constituted a sophisticated administrative mechanism for its period. Samanid rulers adopted Abbasid institutions–including the vizierate, the barid postal service, and the diwan system–while adapting them to the Turkic and local Sogdian traditions of Transoxiana and Khorasan (Kamoliddin, 2017:28–29).

The carefully staged training and examination of ghulams within the hajib institution contributed to court security and political stability (Nizomulmulk, 2008:101–102). The ten specialized diwans also established defined procedures for fiscal administration–including annual tax receipts reportedly amounting to four million dirhams through the diwan al-mustawfi (Bayot, 1975:145–146)–military provisioning through the diwan sahib al-shurat and the bistagani system, and information exchange and oversight through the diwan sahib al-barid (Frye, 1965:142).

In later stages, however, the declining influence of certain departments, such as the diwan al-barid and diwan sahib al-shurat, the growing involvement of military commanders and sipahsalars in politics, and frequent changes in the office of vizier amid rivalries involving the Jayhani, Bal'ami, and Utbi families undermined political stability (Frye, 1965:142; Xondamir, 1980:212–218). Nevertheless, the Samanid administrative model became an important precedent for the Qarakhanid, Ghaznavid, and Seljuk dynasties that ruled the region in subsequent centuries.

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CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the Samanid state developed a comparatively centralized and systematic administrative apparatus in Transoxiana and Khorasan during the ninth and tenth centuries. Drawing upon Abbasid administrative models and adapting them to local social and political conditions, the Samanids established an integrated executive system consisting of the dargah and ten specialized diwans: vizarat, mustawfi, rasa'il, sahib al-shurat, barid, muhtasib, mushrif, qada, diya', and awqaf (Narshakhiy, 1966:105–106).

At the court, the eight-year staged training of Turkic ghulams through the hajib institution and the office of sahib al-haras helped secure the central authority and enforce the amir's commands (Nizomulmulk, 2008:101–102, 126). The division of responsibilities among revenue collection and fiscal discipline (diwan al-mustawfi), military provisioning (bistagani), judicial and moral oversight (hisba and qada), and the centrally controlled confidential postal-intelligence service (diwan al-barid) provided an institutional basis for economic and political stability (Kamoliddin, 2017:29).

During the dynasty's final period, the waning influence of the diwan al-barid and diwan sahib al-shurat, the increasing power of the sipahsalars, and internal rivalries over the vizierate weakened centralized government. Nevertheless, the Samanid administrative system marked an important stage in the history of medieval Eastern statehood and provided a model for the governing institutions of subsequent dynasties.

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