

The Concept of Ministry in the Arabic Political Tradition

Its origin, development, and linguistic reflection

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of an analysis of the term “ministry” (*wizāra*) as one of the pivotal concepts in the Arabic/Islamic political tradition. The ministry as key political/administrative institution in the Arabic/Islamic traditional state machinery is researched from a historical/institutional perspective. The concept of *ministry* is treated from the point of its origin and historical development, as well as its changeable role and meaning in the variable Arabic political system. The paper is primarily dedicated to the investigation of the realization of the concept of *ministry* and its different types and branches in the Arabic language through the etymological and semantic examination of the terms used to denote this institution during the long period of administrative development of the Arabic world from its establishment as such and during the inception of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate to its usage in administrative apparatus of modern Arab states. The paper is based on Arabic narrative sources such as historical chronicles, collections of the official documents of modern Arabic states, and the lists of its chief magistrates (with special reference to government composition and structure).

Keywords: term, terminology, concept, semantic, etymology, value, derivation

Introduction

The term *wazīr* is traditionally used to denote the position of vizier who was the state secretary, the aide, helper and councilor of the caliph/sultan of the highest rank in the administrative apparatus of ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate and its successor states (e.g., Būyids, Fāṭimids, Ayyūbids and Salḡūqs). In the modern administrative interpretation this term signifies the *minister* in all Arab and some Muslim states. The notion of *minister/ministry* passed through different stages of its lexical and institutional development from Umayyad scribe (secretary, *kātib*) to modern *wazīr*. The present paper is the investigation of the etymology of the term *wazīr* and political formation of the institution of *vizierate* up to the establishment of ‘Abbāsīd caliphate in 750 CE.

1. The term *wazīr* and its etymology

The lexeme *wazīr* occurs in the Qur’ān where Aaron (*Hārūn*) is twice called “the helper” (*wazīr*) of Moses (*Mūsā*):

wa-ğ'al lī wazīr^{an} min ahlī (XX: 29) “And appoint for me a helper from my family”;¹

wa-laqad ātaynā Mūsā al-kitāb^a wa-ğ'alnā ma'a-hū aḥāhu Hārūn^a wazīr^{an} (XXV: 35) “And indeed We gave Mūsā (Moses) the Scripture [the Taurāt (Torah)], and placed his brother Hārūn (Aaron) with him as a helper”;² where, according to classical commentators, it means “helper”; “supporter” (*'awn*; *mu'īn*; *zahīr*; *mu'āzīr* (*li-anna-hū yaḥmilu 'ani-s-sultāni wizra-hū ay tiqla-hū*); “the prophet-helper and supporter” (*nabiyy muwāzīr wa-mu'ayyid wa-nāṣīr*).³

The question of the etymology of the term *vizier* (*wazīr*) is thoroughly treated in the works of Sh.D. Goitein and D. Sourdel. They examine views of Classical Arabic and Western scholars on the problem of etymology of the term *wazīr* and come to the conclusion that both term and institution of vizierate (*wizāra*)⁴ have an Arabic origin.

The views of the majority of scholars of *vizierate* are divided regarding the question of the origin of the title *vizier* (*wazīr*). Some early Western scholars suppose that this term has Persian origin. F. Babinger states that the word *wazīr* and the idea of vizierate (*wizāra*) comes from Iran (in the Avesta *vicira* means “decider”, “judge”, in Pehlevi *v(i)čīr* “judge”, “decision”). He claims that the Arabs undoubtedly took over the term in the Sassanid period and it was only in later times that modern Persian took back *wazīr* from the Arabic as if it were originally Arabic.⁵

Th. Nöldeke holds the term *wazīr* likely to be of Pehlevi origin, but he states that the Pehlevi term *wačīr* has only an abstract meaning. He advances the theory that the term *wezīrpat* (= *gezīrpat*, *pat* “ruler”, “monarch”, “potentate”) probably meant “subaltern minister” and was borrowed into the Arabic language with the omission of *pat*.⁶

J. Darmesteter supports the idea put forward by Th. Nöldeke and argues that the term *vicīr* (< *vī-cira* “decider”) was borrowed by the Arabs and became *Vizīr*.⁷ It appeared in the Talmud in the form *gezīr* in the term *gezīrpaṭēy* / *gezīrīpaṭēy* (pl., ὄξαραπατεῖς, Pers. *hazār paiti* < **vicirō-pati*)⁸ “name of a class of oppressive Persian officers (*chiliarchi*)”: Ta'ānith, 20a; Sanhedrin, 98a; Sabbath, 139a).⁹

Sh. D. Goitein and D. Sourdel refer to M. Sprengling, who in his article “From Persian to Arabic” tries to find the Persian etymon of the term *wazīr*. He affirms that the Pehlevi term *vicir* meaning “a legal document” or “decision” is not used alone to designate an office, rank, or any functionary great or small within the Sassanian Empire. This etymon is

1 HILĀLĪ / KHĀN 1997: 416.

2 HILĀLĪ / KHĀN 1997: 482.

3 IBN KAṬĪR 1998, VI: 100; MAḤALLĪ/SUYŪṬĪ: 313, 363; QURTŪBĪ 2006, XIV: 53; ṬABARĪ 2001, XVI: 55, XVII: 451.

4 GOITEIN 1966; SOURDEL 1959-60.

5 BABINGER: 1135.

6 NÖLDEKE 1879b: 53 n. 1, 444 n. 3.

7 DARMESTETER 1883: 58 n. 3.

8 DARMESTETER 1883: 58 n. 3.

9 JASTROW 1903, Vol I: 230.

also found in the Persian loan-word *gezirpat* that was initially noticed by Th. Nöldeke (see above). It was used in the Babylonian Talmud in the mid-fifth century as title of a village official of low rank, who supervised arable lands and irrigation and who was compared by G. Hoffman with the Syriac term *reš geziraye* that was used in “Actes syriaques des martyrs” (fifth century) to denote the chief of police.¹⁰ M. Sprengling states that the term *gezirpat* was no more than the chief of village or the commissar of police; thus he couldn’t have even a remote connection with the vizier who was minister of state, often Prime minister in Muslim states and empires.¹¹

P. Horn proposes a Persian etymology for the term *wazīr* (*gezīr*, *gizīr*, < Avestan *vīčira* “decider”, Pehlevi *v(i)čīr* “decision”, “decider”, “judge”).¹² H. Masse states, referring to A. Meillet, that this term is of Persian origin and ultimately comes from Avestan *vīčira* (*vi-čira*) “decider”, in Pehlevi *wčyr*.¹³

E. G. Browne suggests that the term *wazīr* is derived from Arabic *wizr* “a burden” because the vizier bears the burden of administration but, referring to J. Darmesteter (see above), and that this term was identical with Pahlavi *vi-chīr* (< *vi-chirā* “to decide”, *gazīr* in the Talmud).¹⁴

Traditional Arabic historiographers and political thinkers insist on the exclusively Arabic provenance of the term *wazīr*. For example, al-Māwardī, Badr ad-Dīn ibn Ğamā’a and Halīl az-Zāhirī suggest an exclusively Arabic derivation of this term:

1. *wizr* (pl. *awzār*) “a heavy load or burden (*tiql*)”, because he takes up the heavy burdens of the king;
2. *wazar* “a place of refuge (*malġa*)”, because the king takes refuge in his judgement and his aid;
3. *azr* “back (*zahr*)”, because the king gains strength in his minister just as the body is strengthened by the back.¹⁵

‘Abd al-Malik at-Ta’alībī proposes combined Arabo-Persian source of the derivation of the term *wazīr*:

1. *wizr* “a heavy load or burden (*tiql*)”, because he takes up the heavy burdens of the king;
2. *i’āna* “aid”, “help”, “assistance”, because the minister assists the king with taking up heavy burdens.
3. Arabicized (*mu’arrab*) Persian *zūr*, *zor* “strength”, “power”, “force”.¹⁶

Hilāl aš-Šābī presents a purely Arabic derivation of this term:

10 GOITEIN 1966: 170; SOURDEL, I: 45-6.

11 SOURDEL, I: 45-6.

12 HORN 1893: 242-3 n. 1084.

13 IBN EL-ĈAĪRAFI 1914: 80 n. 2.

14 BROWNE 1908: 255-6.

15 IBN ĞAMĀ’Ā 1985: 75; MĀWARDĪ 1976: 64-5; MĀWARDĪ 1979: 137-8; MĀWARDĪ 1989: 33; ZĀHIRĪ 1894: 93.

16 TA’ĀLIBĪ 1993: 21-2.

1. *wazar* “a place of refuge (*malġa*)”, because the king takes refuge in his judgement and his aid;
2. *awzār* (singular *wizr*) “clothing (*amti’a*)”, because he is in charge of the wardrobes and clothing of the king;
3. *wizr* “a heavy load or burden (*tiql*)”, because he takes up the heavy burdens of the king;
4. *azr* “back (*zahr*)”, because the king gains strength in his minister just as the body is strengthened by the back.¹⁷

Traditional Arabic lexicographers¹⁸ present the detailed network of derivatives of the root *w-z-r* with the following values:

1. “a heavy burden”; “a sin (sense development “burden of soul” > “sin” by metaphorical extension)”:

wizr “a heavy load or burden (*tiql*, *al-ħiml at-taqīl*)”; “a bundle that is carried on the back”; “a weight”; “(pl. *awzār*) a weapon (*silāħ*)”; “an instrument of war (*ālātu-hā wa-atqālu-hā*), because heavy upon the wearer” > “a sin (*iṭm*, *danab*)” >

- vb. I *wazara* (vn. *wazr*, *wizr*) “he bore, or carried a heavy load, or burden (*ħamala-hū*)”;
- vb. I *wazira* (vn. *wizr*, *wazr*, *zira*, or *wizra*) “he sinned (*aṭima*), or he bore a burden of sin” >
 - act.part. I *wāzīr*, pass.part. I *mawzūr* “bearing, or carrying a heavy load or burden” > “sinning or bearing a burden of sin”;
- vb. VIII *ittazara* “he committed a *wizr* (*iṭm*), i.e. a sin”;
- vb. I *wazara* (vn. *wazr*) “he overwhelmed him”.¹⁹

2. “refuge” >

- *wazar* “a mountain: a mountain difficult of access or strong, or a mountain to which someone betakes himself for refuge” > “a place of refuge (*malġa*, *ma‘qil*, *mu‘taṣam*, semantic shift by metaphoric extension” >
 - vb. I *wazartu aš-šayʿ* (*aħraztu-hū*) “I afforded someone a safe refuge”;
 - vb. IV *awzara-hū* (vn. *īzār*) “he appointed someone a *wazar* i.e. a place of refuge to which he could save himself” > (*aħraza-hū*, *ħaba’a-hū*) “he afforded a safe refuge to someone” > (semantic shift) “he concealed

17 ṢĀBĪ, n. *ħ*.

18 AZHARĪ 1964-1967, XIII: 246-7; FIRŪZĀBĀDĪ 2005: 492; IBN MANZŪR 1981, VI: 4823-4; IBN SĪDAH 2000, Vol IX: 103-4; ĞAWHARĪ 1990, II: 845; LANE 1968, VIII: 2938-9; MA‘LŪF 1996: 898; RĀZĪ 1986: 299; ZABĪDĪ 1965, XIV: 358-362; ZAMAḤṢARĪ 1996: 482.

19 DE BIBERSTEIN KAZIMIRSKI 1860, II: 1527.

someone”; “he carried something off”, “he took something away”; “he abducted, stole something”; “he destroyed/annihilated something/someone”.

Verbs I-IV have denominative character. They established common value “to use someone as place of refuge” from “place of refuge” by semantic extension “a thing” > “to use this thing”.

As was stated above, the term *wazīr* is thought by Classical Arabic lexicographers to be the derivate of:

1. *wizr*: (i.e. *muwāzīr* < *wāzara* (see below), pl. *wuzarāʾ*, *awzār*) “someone who bears a burden or burdens (*yaḥmilʿ wizrʿ*, i.e. *ṭīql*) with another, or someone who aids, assists or helps and strengthens another (*muʿāwin*)” > “the person who bears with the king the burdens of the of the royal office and aids him with his counsel (*ḥabaʿ al-malik yuwāzīru-hū, yaḥmilʿ ṭīqla-hū yuʿīnu-hū bi-raʿyi-hi*)”;
2. *wazar*: “someone upon whose counsel the caliph relies in his affairs, and to whom he saves himself for refuge or safety (*wazīr al-ḥalīfa al-lādī yaʿtamidu ʿalā raʿyi-hi fī-umūri-hi wa-yaltaḡiʿu ilay-hi*)”.
 - In the Classical Arabic lexicographic and historiographic sources a whole number of the denominative verbal derivatives of the term *wazīr* with the general value “to be/became a vizier/to be appointed a vizier” acquired by the semantic shift “the name of a institution” > “to be appointed as head of this institution”, are attested:
 - vb. I *wazara* (*li-*, vn. *wazāra*); vb. V *tawazzara* (*li-*) “he was, or became vizier (*wazīr*) to someone”:

wa-wazara la-hū Faḥru d-Dawla Abū Naṣr ibn Ğuhayr, tumma Abū Šuġāʿ, tumma ʿAmīdu d-Dawla Abū Maṣṣūr ibn Ğuhayr “Faḥr ad-Dawla Abū Naṣr ibn Ğuhayr was his vizier and after him—Abū Šuġāʿ and after him—ʿAmīd ad-Dawla Abū Maṣṣūr ibn Ğuhayr”,²⁰

wa-kāna qad tawazzara li-ʿAḍudi d-Dawla “He was the vizier of ʿAḍud ad-Dawla”,²¹
 - *wizāra/wazāra* (vn. of vb. I *wazara*, *wazāra* is the variant (*luġa*) of *wizāra*, which is more approved (*aḡlā*) “the condition or office of a *wazīr*”):

fī ḥādīhi s-sana, fī šahr ramadān, ʿuzila Abū ʿl-Qāsim al-Ḥāqānī ʿan wizārat al-ḥalīfa “In this year, in the month of Ramadān, Abū ʿl-Qāsim al-Ḥāqānī was dismissed from the *vizierate* of the caliph”,²²
 - vb. X *istawzara-hū* “he took someone, or chose someone as a *wazīr*”: *ustūzira fulānʿ* “someone was taken, or chosen as a *wazīr*”:

20 IBN AL-AṬĪR 1987-2003, VIII: 487.

21 IBN TAĠRĪBIRDĪ 1992, IV: 133.

22 IBN AL-AṬĪR 1987-2003, VII: 24.

wa-fī-hā istawzara s-Sulṭān Tuḡril-bik wazīra-hū Abā l-Qāsim ‘Alī ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Ġuwaynī wa-huwa awwal wazīr wazara la-hū “Sultan Tughril-bik took Abū ‘l-Qāsim ‘Alī ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Ġuwaynī as his vizier (*wazīr*) and he was the first who was his vizier”.²³

The root *w-z-r* is firmly established in the Arabic root corpus. Its reflections are attested in several Semitic languages where the root is regarded to be secondary, shared by the lexemes proposed to be related to Arabic or simply Arabic loanwords.

- The Old Hebrew hapax legomenon *wāzār* is attested in the Bible (occurring Proverbs 21:8) in the word combination *šš wāzār* “crooked, guilty” (probably related to Arabic *wazara* “he bore a burden” or to *wazira* “was guilty”);²⁴
- Gə‘əz *wazara* “to plaster, overlay (with wood), decorate a wall” (probably from Arabic *wazara* “fill up a fissure” (see below));²⁵
- Amharic *wāzzārä* “to decorate, adorn” (probably derived from *wäyzäro* (1));²⁶
- Amharic *tāwāzzārä* “to be decorated, adorned”; “to sit idly, to be idle, unoccupied”;²⁷
- Gə‘əz *wezaro* “lady”²⁸ (from Amharic *wizäro* (*wezäro*, *wäyzäro* “madame, lady, dame”²⁹));
- Amharic *wäyzäro* (1) “vizier, chief of the palace, highborn (all those who are descended from the royal family)”;³⁰
- Amharic *wäyzär* “noble who has received office and awards, handsome person of royal descent”.³¹

The root *‘z-r* with the common meaning “strength”; “assistance” is perceived in traditional Arabic lexicography³² as a variant of the root *w-z-r* (see above). The latter root is seen as being derived from *‘z-r* by the omission of *hamza* (*taḥfif al-hamza*). The *‘z-r*- derivatives are represented with the following values:

23 IBN AL-AṬĪR 1987-2003, VIII: 268.

24 KLEIN 1987: 190; COHEN 1996, II, fasc. 6: 518-9.

25 LESLAU 1991: 624.

26 KANE 1990, II: 1554; LESLAU 1991: 624.

27 KANE 1990, II: 1554.

28 LESLAU 1991: 624.

29 KANE 1990, II: 1554, 1561; LESLAU 1996: 174.

30 KANE 1990, II: 1561.

31 KANE 1990, II: 1560.

32 AZHARĪ 1964-1967, XIII: 247-8; FIRŪZĀBĀDĪ 2005: 342-3; IBN MANZŪR 1981, I: 52-3; IBN SĪDAH 2000, IX: 75-76; ĠAWHARĪ 1990, II: 578; LANE 1968, I: 52-3; MA‘LŪF 1996: 9; RĀZĪ 1986: 6; ZABĪDĪ 1965, X: 42-8; ZAMAḤṢARĪ 1996: 5.

1. “surrounding”, “covering” >

- *izār*³³ “long wrapper for covering the lower part of the body from the waist downwards, loincloth” > e.g., “any structural device which goes all round a room” (e.g., skirting-board, decorative groove between wall surface and ceiling surface, < “loincloth”, metaphorical extension on the common meaning “support”)³⁴ >
 - vb. I *azara* (vn. *azr*) “to surround something”;³⁵ “he put on him, or clad him with an *izār*”;
 - vb. II *azzara* “he put on him, or clad him with an *izār*”; “to clothe someone with an *izār*”; “it covered it”; “to cover, wrap up something/someone”;³⁶ “he cased the lower part of a wall and thus strengthened it”;
 - vb. V *ta’azzara*; vb. VIII *i’tazara/ītazara* “to put on an *izār*, wrap oneself in an *izār*”.³⁷

Verbs I–VIII are evidently of the denominative type. They developed a general value “to surround”, “to cover” from “loincloth” by semantic extension “a thing” > “to perform the action by this thing”;

2. “strength” > “help”, “assistance” >

- *azr*: “strength (*quwwa*)”, “weakness (*ḍaʿf*³⁸); “the back (*zahr*)” >
 - vb. I *azara-hū* (vn. *azr*);
 - vb. II *azzara-hū* (vn. *ta’zīr*);
 - vb. III *āzara-hū* (vn. *mu’āzara*) “he aided, assisted, or helped someone, and strengthened someone (*qawwā-hu; āwana-hū; a’āna-hū (‘alā-l-amr)*)”.

Verbs I–III can clearly be classified as denominative with a semantic shift “strength” > “to give the strength” > “to help, aid, assist”.

Some ²*z-r-* and *w-z-r-* derivatives are lexical duplicates:

- *izār, izr* ↔ *wizra*³⁹ / *wazra*⁴⁰ “loincloth” that is suggested to be the derivate of the root ²*z-r*⁴¹ >

33 In all Classical Arabic lexicographical sourced referred to in the present paper the terms *izr, izāra, mi’zar, mi’zara* are given as synonymous to *izār* (e.g., LANE 1968, I: 52-3).

34 BADAWI / HINDS 1986: 16.

35 WEHR / COWAN 1980: 1064.

36 WEHR / COWAN 1980: 1064.

37 WEHR / COWAN 1980: 1064.

38 In this case *azr* can be considered an auto-antonymous (enantiosemmatic) lexeme.

39 WEHR / COWAN 1980: 1064.

40 DE BIBERSTEIN KAZIMIRSKI 1860, II: 1528; DOZY 1881, Vol, II: 799; WAHRMUND 1887, II: 1180.

41 COHEN 1996, II, fasc. 6: 518-9.

- vb. III *āzara-hū* ↔ *wāzara-hū* “he bore a burden with someone”: *yuwāzīr^u l-wazīr^u l-malik^a a‘bā^s l-mulk* “he bore with the king the burden of the royal office”; *wāzara-hū ‘alā l-amr* “he aided, assisted, or helped someone and strengthened him to do the thing” (*āwana-hū / a‘āna-hū wa-qawwā-hu*); “he was, or became *wazīr* to someone”;
- vb. VIII *i‘tazara / i‘tazara* ↔ *ittazara* “to wear a loincloth”; “to put on (a garment)”.⁴² Its value “wear a loincloth” emerged as a result of semantic extension “a thing” > “to perform the action by this thing”;
- *wazara* “skirt, skirting (*arch.*)”⁴³ (< “loincloth”, metaphorical extension of the common meaning “surrounding”; “covering”; “putting on”);
- Egyptian *wazara* “any structural device, such as a baseboard, which goes around a room”; “lintel”⁴⁴ (< “loincloth”, metaphorical extension of the common meaning “support”);
- vb. I *wazara* (vn. *wazr*) “fill up a fissure” (< “loincloth”, metaphorical extension of the common meaning “covering”).⁴⁵

Sh. D. Goitein states that the term *wazīr* is often found in poetry, both contemporaneous with Muḥammad and in the Umayyad period.⁴⁶ In poetical and historiographical sources it is used in the general meaning “helper”, “assistant”, “aide”, “advisor”. For example, it was conveyed by the Arabic historiographic tradition that the first caliph Abū Bakr responded to the *Anṣār* who claimed the emirate: “*min-nā-l-umarā’ wa-min-kum al-wuzarā’*”; “*Naḥnu-l-umarā’ wa-antum al-wuzarā’*” (We are the *amīrs* (*umarā’*) and you are the *wazīrs* (*wuzarā’*)).⁴⁷ Abū Bakr complained about being called *amīr*. Instead of being addressed as *amīr* he preferred to be simply *wazīr*.⁴⁸ Ziyād ibn Abīhi, Abū ‘l-Muḡīra (622 or 623/4—673), the secretary (*kātib*) of the governors of al-Kūfa, Baṣra, and once more al-Kūfa, Abū Mūsā ibn Qays al-Aṣ‘arī is called *wazīr*.⁴⁹ ‘Abdallāh ibn Ġāfil ibn Ḥabīb ibn Ḥuḍayl ibn Maṣ‘ūd (died 652/3), who was appointed as the assistant to the Governor of al-Kūfa, ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir ibn ‘Āmir ibn Mālik Abū ‘l-Yaqzān (died 657), is called by aṭ-Ṭabarī “councilor” and “assistant” (*mu‘allim* and *wazīr*).⁵⁰ The governor of al-Kūfa, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥaḡḡāḡ ibn Yūsuf ibn al-Ḥakam ibn ‘Aqīl aṭ-Ṭaqafī (born about 661—died 714) named ‘Āmir ibn Abī Mūsā Abū Burda al-Aṣ‘arī (died in 721/722 or 722/723) *qāḍī* (judge) of al-Kūfa and also appointed Sa‘īd ibn Ġubayr (665-714) his assistant, who is

42 WEHR/COWAN 1980: 1064.

43 WEHR/COWAN 1980: 1064.

44 BADAWI, HINDS 1986: 935.

45 LESLAU 1991: 624; MA‘LŪF 1996: 898; DE BIBERSTEIN KAZIMIRSKI 1860, II: 1527.

46 GOITEIN 1966: 170.

47 ṬABARĪ 1960, III: 202-203, 220.

48 ṬABARĪ 1879-1901. Prima series. IV: 2140.

49 ĠAḤŠIYĀRĪ 1988: 18.

50 ṬABARĪ 1960, IV: 139.

called *kātib* (secretary) and *wazīr*.⁵¹ *Qāḍī* (judge) of Baṣra, Abū Wāḥila Iyās ibn Mu‘āwiya ibn Qurra al-Muzanī (died 739 or 740) appointed Ḥālid al-Ḥaḍḍā’ his councilor and assistant (*šāra wazīr^{am} wa mušīr^{am}*).⁵² ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yahyā ibn Sa’d (died 750), the chief secretary of Umayyad caliph Marwān ibn Muḥammad (died in 750, ruled 744-750) occupied the vizierate (*taqallada ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd wizārat Marwān*).⁵³

The leader of the early Šī‘i (pro-‘Alīd) revolt in al-Kūfa, al-Muḥtār ibn Abī ‘Ubayd at-Ṭaqaḥī (622—687) styled himself “the helper of the family of Muḥammad (*wazīr Āl Muḥammad*)”.⁵⁴ Abū Salama Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān al-Ḥallāl, the leader of the Šī‘i movement in al-Kūfa (killed in 750), was named “the helper of the family of Muḥammad (*wazīr Āl Muḥammad*)” and later was appointed vizier (*wazīr*) by the first ‘Abbāsīd caliph Abū ‘l-‘Abbās as-Saffāḥ (died 754, ruled 750-754) in 749.⁵⁵

From its original general meaning of “helper”, the term *wazīr* gradually acquired the sense of “representative (or deputy)”, and, under the ‘Abbāsīds, designated the highest-ranking civil functionary of the state next to the caliph.

The semantic development of Arabic *wazīr* can be correlated with the semantic shift in English *minister* (Old French *menistre* “servant”, “valet”, “member of a household staff”, “administrator” < Latin *minister* “inferior”, “servant”, “priest's assistant” (in Medieval Latin, “priest”) < *minus*, *minor* “less” > “subordinate” + comparative suffix *-teros*, formed on model of *magister*) from “one who acts upon the authority of another” to “high officer of the state” (in political sense, from notion of “service to the crown”).⁵⁶

One can see that the denominative verbs *wazara*, *tawazzara* and *istawzara*, derived from the term *wazīr*, acquired their semantics on the basis of the meaning shift “the name of position” > “to hold this position” / “to appoint someone to this position”.

2. The origin and establishment of the institution of vizierate

The majority of scholars investigating the institution of the vizierate (*wizāra*) is divided concerning the question of its origin. Most early Western scholars suppose that this institution has Persian origin. F. Babinger suggests that the idea of vizierate (*wizāra*) originates in Iran.⁵⁷

A. Christensen believes that the position of vizierate (*wizāra*) as it became to be known in Caliphate times and later was conserved in all Muslim states, was directly borrowed from the Sassanid Empire and suggests that the prototype of vizier (*wazīr*) was the

51 IBN QUTAYBA, I: 62.

52 WAKĪ’, I: 317.

53 ĞAḤŠIYĀRĪ 1988: 55.

54 ZAMAN 2002: 185 (with reference to Goitein S.D. The origin of the vizierate and its true character. Studies in Islamic History and Institutions. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966. Appendix on the origin of the term vizier: 194-6).

55 ĞAḤŠIYĀRĪ 1988: 56-7; ZAMAN 2002: 185.

56 *Online Etymology Dictionary*; available online at <<http://etymonline.com>> .

57 BABINGER: 1135.

Sassanid *wuzurg framadār/framādhār/framātār*⁵⁸ (“the grand vizier”, in Arabic sources—*buzurgframādār*⁵⁹)—the highest ranking official of the Sasanian state, the head of the central administration.⁶⁰ In Old Persian, the substantive *framātar* (composed of the prefix *fra-* “before”, “forth” + root *mā* + agent suffix *-tar*) is translated as “master”, “lord (giver of judicial decisions)”.⁶¹ The Achaemenids used this term in their royal titles. The term was passed into Parthian in the form of *prmt̄r* in order to designate an office, probably that of the director of public supplies (e.g., wine, barley, etc.).⁶² A. Christensen states that in the beginning the title of the head of the central administration was *hazārbadh*. Already in the Achaemenid Empire *hazārapati* (χίλιαρχος, *chiliarchus* “commander of a thousand men”, in Armenian sources - *hazarapet*) was the chief officer of the Empire. This title continued to be used in Parthian times till the Sassanian period.⁶³

Sh.D. Goitein supposes that A. Christensen used the description of the vizierate by al-Māwardī, Muslim lawyer and political theoretician of XI century, due to the considerable lack of material.⁶⁴

The classical Arabic lexicographers tell us that the Laḥmid kings of al-Ḥīra appointed their assistants and helpers, which were called *ridf* (*ridf al-malik*). The term *ridf* (pl. *ʾardāf*) is attested in the classical Arabic dictionaries with its original values “one who rides behind another on the back of the same beast”; “a sequent of a thing, whatever that thing be”; “the consequence of an event or affair”; “aids, assistants or auxiliaries (as being man’s follower) because when any one of them is fatigued, another take his place”; “the hinder part of anything”; “the posteriors or buttocks (or peculiarly, according to some, of a woman)”.⁶⁵ Thus, it is evident that the word *ridf* obtained its terminological meaning “the aide, assistant and co-ruler of the king” from the value “one who rides behind another on the back of the same beast” by metaphorical extension.

In the pre-Islamic times (*al-Ġāhiliyya*, the “Time of Ignorance”) *ridfs* supplied the place of the king (*malik*) in the management of the affairs of the realm, like the *wazīr* or the *ṣāḥib aš-šurṭa* in the time of Islam. They sat on the right hand of the king and, when the king drank, drank after him, before others, and, when the king went to war, sat in his place, and were his vice-regents (*ḥalīfa*) over the people until he returned, and, on the return of

58 CHRISTENSEN 1907: 19, 30, 32-4, 56, 80; CHRISTENSEN 1944: 99, 114, 130, 136, 265, 271, 352, 411-2, 519.

59 JA’QUBI 1883, Vol I: 202; MASŪDĪ 1894: 103; MAS’ŪDĪ 1938: 91 (explained in Arabic as *wazīr, akbar ma’mūr*); YA’QŪBĪ 2010, I: 222 (interpreted in Arabic as *wazīr, mutaqaḥḥid al-umūr*).

60 CHAUMONT 2001: 125-6; CHRISTENSEN 1907: 33; CHRISTENSEN 1944: 113-6.

61 KENT 1950: 197-8.

62 CHAUMONT 2001: 125-6.

63 CHRISTENSEN 1944: 113-4.

64 CHRISTENSEN 1907: 33-4; CHRISTENSEN 1944: 115-6; GOITEIN 1966: 168.

65 AZHARĪ 1964-1967, XIV: 96-7; FIRŪZĀBĀDĪ 2005: 812; IBN MANZŪR 1981: III: 1625-6; IBN SĪDAH 2000, IX: 302-4; ĠAWHARĪ 1990, IV: 1363-4; LANE 1968, III: 1068; MA’LŪF 1996: 256; RĀZĪ 1986: 101; ZABĪDĪ 1965, XXIII: 328, 335.

the king's army, took the fourth of the spoil (*mirbā'*). He also rode behind the king upon his horse.⁶⁶

The term *ridāfa* (vn. with general value “the name of office from *ridf*”) denotes the function of the *ridf* of a king (*ridf al-malik*) in the pre-Islamic (*al-Ġāhiliyya*) times. It was similar to *hilāfa* and *wizāra* in the Islamic period. The position of *ridāfa* pertained to Banū Yarbū', because there were not among the Arabs any who waged war more than they did against the kings of al-Ĥīra, who therefore made peace with them on the condition that the *ridāfa* should be assigned to them and that they should abstain from waging war against the people of al-ʿIrāq.⁶⁷

The term *ridf* motivated the derivation of the value “to act as a *ridf* or as *ardāf* to the kings” in vb. III *rādafa* (vn. *murādafa: murādafat al-mulūk* “the acting as a *ridf* or as *ardāf* to the kings”) and vb. IV *ardafa* (vn. *irdāf*) on the basis of semantic shift: “the name of a position” > “to hold a position”.

This term has cognates in the Semitic languages (Hebrew *rādap* “to pursue, chase”; “to persecute”; Jewish Palestinian Aramaic-Syriac *r^edap* “he pursued, chased, persecuted”; Mandaic *rdp* “to pursue, chase, persecute”).⁶⁸

M. Enger mentions the “Acta S. Arethae” (also called “Martyrium sancti Arethae” or “Martyrium Arethae”), in which the institution of the co-ruler of the king (*συνκἀθεδρος τοῦ βασιλέως*) of Naġrān and the narrative of Classical Arabic lexicographers about the existence of the institution of *ridāfa* in al-Ĥīra (see above) are attested, and states that the institution of vizier in the form known in Islamic times was passed to the kingdom of al-Ĥīra as vassal state of Sassanid Empire from Iran because it was the part of Persian political system and was transmitted to the ʿAbbāsīd caliphate. He says that with the advent of Islam this institution changed its name from *ridf* to *wazīr*.⁶⁹ But, as D. Sourdel notes, M. Enger doesn't take into consideration the interruption of the period of Umayyad caliphate.⁷⁰

W. Barthold criticizes the views of A. Christensen about the direct borrowing of the position of *vizierate* from the Sassanid Empire with its prototype in *vuzurg framādhār*. He affirms that the term *wazīr* is definitely of Arabic origin and rules out its development from Sassanid *buzurg-framādhār* because this institution was maintained until the sixth century and disappeared in the late Sassanid period. He underlines the idea that the *buzurg-framādhār* was the omnipotent Chief Minister and military commander of the Sassanid Empire whose institution looked more like the Frankish *majordomus* than the ʿAbbāsīd *vizier*.⁷¹ In one of the oldest Middle Persian (Pahlavi) texts of ancient Iranian epic poetry “Yātkār-i Zarīrān” (Memorial of Zarēr) the title of Chief Minister written in Aramaic in the

66 AZHARĪ 1964-1967, XIV: 97-8; DE SACY 1822: 278-9; IBN MANZŪR 1981, III: 1626; IBN SIDAĤ 2000, IX: 303; ĠAWHARĪ 1990, IV: 1363-4; LANE 1968, III: 1068; MA' LŪF 1996: 256; FĪRŪZĀBĀDĪ 2005: 812; ZABĪDĪ, XXIII: 328-9, 331.

67 AZHARĪ 1964-1967, XIV: 97-8; DE SACY 1822: 278-9; FĪRŪZĀBĀDĪ 2005: 812; IBN MANZŪR 1981, III: 1626; ĠAWHARĪ 1990, IV: 1363-4; LANE 1968, III: 1068; MA' LŪF 1996: 256; ZABĪDĪ 1965, XXIII: 331.

68 KLEIN 1987: 608.

69 ENGER 1859: 240-1.

70 SOURDEL 1959-60, I: 42.

71 BARTHOLD 1912: 257-60.

form of *bytʾh* was compared by the translator of the text with the New Persian *hānegī* (domesticus).⁷²

R. A. Nicholson believes that the office of vizier is probably of Persian origin but he refers to M. J. de Goeje's opinion that the term *wazīr* itself is Arabic.⁷³

In the Sassanid state the scribes (secretaries, *dabīr/dibhēr*⁷⁴ (pl. *dabīrān*⁷⁵/*dibhērān*⁷⁶ "bureaucracy" < Mid. Pers. *dibīr* < Achaemenid Elamite *tup-pi-ra*,⁷⁷ in the Persian translation of "the Letter of Tansar" – *kottāb*⁷⁸) constituted one of the four classes in Sassanian society. Secretaries were commissioned to handle the royal correspondence and record the orders of the king and his high officials. They were also charged with recording everyday events and chronicles, and some of them served in various state offices (*dīvāns*) or were engaged in writing, compiling, and copying books.⁷⁹

The chief secretary of Sassanid Iran had the title *dibīrbed* (attested in the Parthian documents from Nisa as *dpyrpty*).⁸⁰ In the Arabic and Persian sources this title was given as *dabīrbaḡ*⁸¹/*dabīrbedh*⁸²/*dibhērbadh*,⁸³ or *dabīrfad*⁸⁴/*dabīrfaḡ*.⁸⁵ Another title for the chief secretary was Pahlavi *dabīrān/dapīrān/dibhērān mahišt* (more officially *Ērān-dabīrbad/dapīrbad/dabīrbedh/dibhērbadh*),⁸⁶ which was translated in the Persian sources as *mehtar-e dabīran*,⁸⁷ *mehtar dabīr*,⁸⁸ or *bozorg dabīr*.⁸⁹

The institution of *kātib* (secretary) apparently corresponded with the Sassanid *dabīrpat*.⁹⁰ Morphologically, the lexeme *kātib* is an act.part. from vb. I *kataba* "to write"

72 GEIGER 1891: 53.

73 NICHOLSON 1907: 256.

74 CHRISTENSEN 1944: 57, 132.

75 CHRISTENSEN 1907: 19, 38.

76 CHRISTENSEN 1944: 98.

77 RAJABZADEH / TAFAZZOLI 1993: 534-9.

78 DARMESTETER 1894: 214.

79 RAJABZADEH / TAFAZZOLI 1993: 534-9.

80 RAJABZADEH / TAFAZZOLI 1993: 534-9.

81 ĞĀHĪZ 1914: 77, 160, 173 (explained by Arabic *hāfiẓ al-kitāb* (with reference to al-Mas'ūdī), in the opinion of editor *al-Kitāb* means the Sacred Book of Zoroastrians (*al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas 'inda-l-Maḡūs*)); JA'QUBI 1883, vol. I: 202 (compared with Arabic *al-kātib*); MAS'ŪDĪ 1938: 91 (correlated with Arabic *hāfiẓ al-kitāb*); YA'QŪBĪ 2010, I: 222.

82 CHRISTENSEN 1907: 19, 30, 40.

83 CHRISTENSEN 1944: 99, 265, 519.

84 EBN AL-BALĪ 1385 SH: 49.

85 MISKAWAYH 2003, I: 78 (interpreted in Arabic as *al-mutaqallid li-dīwān ar-rasā'il*)

86 BOYCE 1968: 41, 61; BROWNE 1900: 231 (*dabīr-badh*); CHRISTENSEN 1907: 20, 32, 40, 55, 81, 94; CHRISTENSEN 1944: 99, 134-6, 302, 395, 412; DARMESTETER 1894: 544; GEIGER 1891: 48; NOLDEKE 1878: 62.

87 DARMESTETER 1894: 240, 544.

88 *Šāh-nāme* 1960–71, VII: 127 v. 271.

89 ṬABARĪ/BEL'AMI 1867-1874, II: 260, 267-8, 278, 301.

90 BARTHOLD 1912: 260.

with the basic grammatical value “someone who writes” that was nominalized and extended to “writer”. Then it underwent the semantic shift “writer” > “a scribe”; “a secretary” during its being transformed to term.

The institution of *kātib* already existed in Arabia at the time of Prophet Muḥammad.⁹¹ Al-Ġahšiyārī begins his list of secretaries (*kuttāb*) and *wazīrs* with the secretaries of the Prophet Muḥammad and says that he had different kinds of secretaries (*kuttāb*), among them those who wrote down Qurʾān verses (*kuttāb al-waḥy*)—‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (killed in 661, caliph 656–661), ‘Utmān ibn ‘Affān (killed in 656, caliph 644–656) and in the case of their absence—Ubayy ibn Kaʿb al-Anṣārī al-Madanī (died between 640 and 656) and Zayd ibn Ṭābit (died between 662/3 and 675/6; later was one of the secretaries of caliphs Abū Bakr and ‘Umar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb (killed in 644, caliph 634–644)).⁹²

The late Sassanids had no *wazurg-framaḍār* (chief minister) and the Umayyads had no *wazīr*.⁹³ “Righteous” caliphs (*al-ḥulafāʾ ar-rāšidūn*) and their Umayyad successors regularly appointed the secretaries (*kuttāb*) for themselves. ‘Abbāsīd caliphs gave the name *wazīr* as title to the minister who was formerly called *kātib* (secretary) and it would seem that the Arabic *wazīr* (literally “burden-bearer”), who was at first merely a “helper”, afterwards became the representative and successor of the *dapīr* (official scribe or secretary) or the Sasanian kings.⁹⁴

W. Barthold supposes that the ‘Abbāsīds’ elevation of the *kātib* to the *wazīr* was an innovation called by the development of the cultural life that might be only artificially connected with the Sassanid institutions.⁹⁵

Several denominative verbal derivatives of the term *kātib* are attested in Classical Arabic lexicographical and historiographic sources:⁹⁶

- *kataba* (*li-*) “he was/became a *kātib* (i.e. secretary, to someone)”:
- *wa-kāna yaktubu li-l-Walīd Bukayr ibn aš-Šammāḥ* “Bukayr ibn aš-Šammāḥ was *kātib* (i.e. secretary) to (Umayyad caliph) al-Walīd”,⁹⁷
- *kitāba* “the art of writing”; “the office of secretary”:
- *wa-fti-hā waliya ‘Awn ad-Dīn Yaḥyā ibn Hubayra kitābat dīwān az-zimām bi-Baġdād* “In (this year) ‘Awn ad-Dīn Yaḥyā ibn Hubayra became the secretary of *dīwān az-zimām* in Bagdad”,⁹⁸

91 SELLHEIM / SOURDEL 1997: 754-5.

92 ĠAHŠIYĀRĪ 1988: 15-17.

93 BARTHOLD 1912: 260.

94 MASŪDĪ 1894: 340; NICHOLSON 1907: 257 (with reference to M.J. De Goeje).

95 BARTHOLD 1912: 260.

96 FIRŪZĀBĀDĪ 2005: 128-9; IBN MANZŪR 1981, V: 3816-8; IBN SĪDAH 2000, VI: 775-8; ĠAWHARĪ 1990, I: 208-9; LANE 1968, VII: 2589-91; MAʿLŪF 1996: 671-2; RĀZĪ 1986: 234-5; ZABĪDĪ 1965, IV: 100-7; ZAMAḤŠĀRĪ 1996: 383.

97 ĠAHŠIYĀRĪ 1988: 4.

98 IBN AL-AṬĪR 1987-2003, IX: 348.

- *istaktaba-hū* “he asked him to write a thing for him”; “he took him as a *kātib* (secretary)”:

fa-lamma waliya Muṣ‘ab al-‘Irāq, istaktaba ibn Abī Farwa “When Muṣ‘ab became *wālī* (governor) of Iraq, he took ibn Abī Farwa as a *kātib* (secretary)”.⁹⁹

As we can observe, the denominative verbs *kataba* and *istaktaba* developed their semantic meanings “to be a *kātib* (secretary)” and “to take someone as a *kātib* (secretary)”, respectively, on the ground of the semantic shift “the name of position” > “to hold this position” / “to appoint someone to this position” (see above).

Thus, a bulk of material (basically Classical Arabic lexicographic and historiographic works, Western Orientalist studies) treated in my research permits me to draw the conclusion that the term *wazīr* definitely has an Arabic origin and hence I may corroborate the idea about exclusively Arabic roots of this term put forward in Classical Arabic lexicographic treatises. Concerning the question of the foundation of the institution of vizierate (*wizāra*) as it was known in ‘Abbāsīd era I am inclined to state that it has a native Arabic background, though Persian (namely Sassanid) influence cannot be ruled out. The linguistic and historical development of the notion of *ministry* in Arabic statehood tradition will be investigated in a further paper.

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99 ĆAHŠIYĀRĪ 1988: 33.

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