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THE INSTITUTION OF THE HAJIB AND THE ISSUE OF THE TURKIC ELITE IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE SAMANID PERIOD

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Annotation:

The article examines the history of the hajib institution and the Turkic elite in the Samanid state from a source-study perspective, using written records from the 9th to 15th centuries. Through a comparative analysis of local historical chronicles, bio-bibliographical dictionaries, and historical-geographical literature, the study evaluates their scientific significance. Relying on the works of scholars such as as-Sallami, Narshakhi, Gardizi, Ibn Khallikan, and Ibn Hawqal, the author highlights the role of Turkic ghulams and hajibs within the court hierarchy, their involvement in provincial administration, and their direct impact on the decline of the dynasty. The systematic analysis demonstrates that the hajibs were not merely court officials but a powerful military and administrative force.

Keywords Samanid state, institution of hajib, hajib al-hujjab, Turkic elite, Turkic ghulams, source study, local chronicle, bio-bibliographical dictionary, historical geography.

During the history of medieval Central Asian statehood, particularly in the socio-political developments that took place in Transoxiana and Khurasan between the 9th and 15th centuries, the Samanid period occupies a special place. In the formation of the state administrative system, palace hierarchy, and military elite



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of this period, the Turkic ghulams (military slaves) and their leaders, the hajibs (*ḥājib al-ḥujjāb*), exercised remarkable political influence. A comprehensive study of this military-political elite, which effectively controlled administrative and military authority at the Samanid court and later played a significant role in the decline of the dynasty, remains one of the pressing tasks of contemporary historiography. However, an objective and comprehensive examination of this subject requires a comparative analysis of the rich corpus of medieval historical sources, particularly works written in Arabic and Persian during different periods. Information concerning the status of the hajibs at court, their participation in provincial administration, and their role in military campaigns has generally survived only in scattered references or brief passages preserved in various historical works. The primary objective of this article is to analyze the institution of the hajib and the Turkic elite in the Samanid state from a source-critical perspective by synthesizing evidence contained in local historical chronicles, biobibliographical dictionaries, and historical-geographical literature. The following sections examine the principal categories of these sources, their scholarly significance, and their contribution to reconstructing the history of the hajib institution.

One of the earliest historical sources concerning the Samanid period is *Ta'rikh Wulāt Khurāsān* (*The History of the Governors of Khurasan*), written by Abu Ali Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Sallami. The work describes events up to the middle of the tenth century [18:7–8]. Unfortunately, the original text has not survived. Nevertheless, fragments of the work have been preserved in the writings of later historians, including Gardizi, Ibn al-Athir, Hamdallah Mustawfi, Ibn Khallikan, Yaqut al-Hamawi, and others [17:352]. Even these surviving excerpts contain valuable information regarding the activities and political position of the hajibs.



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Beginning in the tenth century, historical and scholarly works also started to be composed in Persian (Tajik). Among the most important examples are Narshakhi's *History of Bukhara*, Bal'ami's *Tarjumayi Tarikh-i Bal'ami*, Gardizi's *Zayn al-Akhbar*, and Nizam al-Mulk's *Siyasatnama*. These works significantly enriched the historiography of the Samanid state and provide valuable evidence concerning the relationship between the ruling dynasty and the Turkic military elite.

Later Persian chronicles offer additional information that supplements earlier Arabic sources. These data usually appear as brief passages incorporated into more extensive narratives based upon earlier Arabic historical accounts. By the fifteenth century, historical works devoted to the history of Transoxiana were predominantly written in Persian, which had become the principal language of state administration and scholarship. During this period, many earlier Arabic historical works were translated into Persian.

One of the earliest translations from Arabic into Persian was Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ja'far Narshakhi's *History of Bukhara* [1]. Originally written in 944 CE, it was translated into Persian in 1128 by Abu Nasr Ahmad al-Qubawi, who deliberately omitted passages that he regarded as unnecessary or tedious for readers. Later, in 1178–1179, Muhammad ibn Zufar ibn Umar produced an abridged version of the Persian translation. The surviving manuscripts also contain accounts of events covering the period between 1178 and 1220 [1:85]. In addition to its historical narrative, the work preserves valuable information concerning the political relationship between the Samanid rulers and their Turkic military deputies.

Another outstanding scholar and statesman of the eleventh century was Nizam al-Mulk (Abu Ali al-Hasan ibn Ali ibn Hasan al-Tusi), who served as the grand vizier of the Seljuk sultans Alp Arslan (1063–1072) and Malik Shah I (1072–



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1092). His celebrated *Siyasatnama* contains important observations concerning the role of Turkic ghulams in the political and administrative life of the Samanid state and provides significant evidence regarding the political and social conditions of the period [5:101].

Another distinguished historian of the eleventh century was Abu al-Hay Gardizi, whose fame rests primarily on his work *Zayn al-Akhbar* (*The Ornament of Reports*). This chronicle narrates events from the pre-Islamic rulers of Iran to the year 1041 and provides extensive information about the Turkic peoples of Central Asia as well as the political history of Khurasan and Transoxiana from the Arab conquest until the eleventh century. The critical edition of the work was published in Tehran in 1954 by Said Nafisi, while a Russian translation was prepared by A. K. Arends [4]. Particularly noteworthy are the detailed accounts of Turkic hajibs who served during the Samanid period, supplementing information preserved in other historical works. It is in *Zayn al-Akhbar* that one finds relatively comprehensive information about prominent Samanid military commanders and hajibs such as Alptegin, Abu al-Abbas Tash, Fa'iq al-Khassa, and Bakr al-Farghani.

Another important source is *Tarikh-i Tabaristan*, written by Ibn Isfandiyar between 1206 and 1217. The work combines historical, geographical, and biographical materials and is also of considerable literary importance because it preserves several poems composed in the Tabaristani dialect. *Tarikh-i Tabaristan* likewise contains valuable references to the activities of Turkic hajibs [16:221–222]. Some of the information presented in this work was later incorporated into the well-known historical chronicle *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, further enhancing its historiographical significance.

Military and political developments at the Samanid court, as well as the activities of the hajibs, are reflected not only in the local chronicles discussed above but



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also in biobibliographical dictionaries that provide detailed accounts of the lives and careers of prominent members of the contemporary elite. One of the most valuable works of this genre is Ibn Khallikan's *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān* (*Deaths of Eminent Men and Biographical Notices of Their Contemporaries*), compiled between 1256 and 1274. The work contains biographies of distinguished scholars, writers, and statesmen, including numerous intellectuals from Transoxiana, as well as valuable information on the socio-political developments that took place in Khurasan and Transoxiana during the period of the Arab Caliphate [15]. The work has been published in Göttingen (1835–1843), Paris (1838–1842), Cairo (1892), Tehran (1867), and Istanbul (1863).

Another prominent historian, biographer, and traveler was Abu Sa'id Abulkarim Muhammad al-Sam'ani (12th century), who belonged to the distinguished scholarly family of Merv. Among his surviving works, *Kitab al-Ansab* (*The Book of Genealogies*) occupies a special place. This work contains important information on the history, culture, and historical geography of Central Asia. It presents biographical accounts of notable figures who lived in the Muslim world—from the establishment of Islam until the author's own lifetime—with particular emphasis on Iran and Transoxiana. Especially valuable are the accounts of scholars and intellectuals who flourished in Khurasan and Transoxiana during the Samanid period [3].

Another important source for the present study is *Kitab al-Qand fi Dhikr 'Ulama' Samarqand* (*The Book of Qand on the Scholars of Samarkand*), written by Najm al-Din Umar ibn Muhammad al-Nasafi, a prolific scholar who authored nearly one hundred works on Islamic jurisprudence, hadith, Qur'anic exegesis, literature, linguistics, history, and other disciplines. Until recently, it was believed that the original Arabic text of the work had been lost, and only its abbreviated Persian



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translation and adaptation, known as *Qandiya-yi Khurd*, was available. In the 1990s, however, the original Arabic manuscript was discovered and later published in Saudi Arabia by Nazar Muhammad al-Faryabi, a scholar originally from the region. *Kitab al-Qand* contains biographical information on more than one thousand religious and secular scholars who lived in medieval Transoxiana and was translated into Uzbek in 2001 [9]. The sections devoted to the history of the Samanid state in the tenth century are of particular significance. For example, the work notes that Fa'iq al-Khassa, who served during the decline of the Samanid state, was distinguished not only as a military commander but also as one of the most learned religious figures of his time [9:222].

Information concerning the political history of the Fergana Valley during the Arab period is also preserved in Jamal Qarshi's Persian work *Mulhaqat al-Surah* (*Supplement to al-Surah*). Jamal Qarshi was born in Almaliq in 1230. According to Muhammad Haydar Dughlat, his father was a hafiz from Balasaghun, while his mother came from Merv. After receiving his early education in Almaliq, he entered the service of Sultan Mahmud al-Zawali, the ruler of Ghazna and Herat, and later served in the administration of the Chagatai Ulus [2]. Throughout his career, he enjoyed the patronage of several regional rulers, which earned him the epithet Qarshi (derived from the Mongolian word meaning "palace"). He also served as the *atabeg* (guardian and tutor) of the heir to the ruler of Almaliq. Jamal Qarshi's earliest work was *As-Surah min as-Sihah*, an Arabic-Persian dictionary based on Abu Nasr al-Jawhari's famous dictionary *as-Sihah*. In its supplementary commentary, *Al-Mulhaqat as-Surah*, the section devoted to the Samanid sultans briefly describes the blinding of Mansur ibn Nuh by the hajibs Tekin and Bektuzun, who served at the Samanid court [5].

In addition to the biographical dictionaries that preserve information about prominent personalities and political events, the historical-geographical writings



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of contemporary Arab geographers constitute fundamental sources for identifying the territorial authority and administrative role of the Samanid court elite.

Among these, the tenth-century Arab geographer and traveler al-Mas'udi, in his celebrated work *Muruj al-Dhahab (The Meadows of Gold)*, provides valuable information concerning the emergence of the hajib political elite [12]. His account indicates that the institution of the hajib as an influential political and military office had already existed at the Abbasid caliphal court before its adoption and further development under the Samanids.

Another important authority is Abu al-Qasim Ubayd Allah ibn Khurradadhbih, an Iranian scholar born into the family of a high-ranking government official. His most significant contribution to the present study is *Kitab al-Masalik wa al-Mamalik (The Book of Routes and Kingdoms)*, completed in 846 [8]. The critical edition of the work was published in Leiden in 1889 by M. J. de Goeje. Particularly valuable are the author's accounts concerning the reigns of the Samanid rulers Nuh and Ahmad (943–954), as well as his descriptions of the territories administered by Samanid hajibs.

Another distinguished Arab geographer was Shams al-Din Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Muqaddasi, whose work *Ahsan al-Ta'qasim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim (The Best Divisions for the Knowledge of the Regions)* provides extensive information on the historical geography of Khurasan and Transoxiana and remains one of the principal geographical sources for the history of medieval Central Asia [11]. Among the information relevant to the present study is his statement that Mansur ibn Bayqara served as the Chief Hajib (Hajib al-Hujjab) under the Samanid ruler Mansur ibn Nuh.

The tenth-century Arab geographer Abu al-Qasim Muhammad ibn Hawqal al-Mawsili al-Nasibi, who lived and worked in Baghdad, studied the writings of earlier geographers such as Abu Abdallah al-Jayhani, Ibn Khurradadhbih,



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Qudama ibn Ja'far, and others before composing his celebrated geographical work entitled *Kitab al-Masalik wa al-Mamalik* (*The Book of Routes and Kingdoms*), also known as *Kitab Surat al-Ard* (*The Book of the Configuration of the Earth*). The Russian translation of Ibn Hawqal's work was prepared by O. B. Frolova on the basis of the new critical edition edited by J. H. Kramers [14] [7]. (The section devoted to Transoxiana was also translated into Uzbek by Sh. Kamoliddin in 2011.) The work contains valuable information concerning the administrative organization of the Samanid state, its cities, natural environment, and various plant species found within its territory. Moreover, it provides important evidence regarding the transfer of Turkic slave soldiers to Transoxiana, who later constituted the core of the political elite headed by the institution of the *hajib* in the Samanid state [6].

Historical and geographical information concerning Khurasan and Transoxiana is also preserved in the anonymous tenth-century work *Hudud al-'Alam* (*The Regions of the World*). Completed in 982, its full title is *Hudud al-'Alam min al-Mashriq ila al-Maghrib* (*The Regions of the World from East to West*). The work consists of sixty chapters and contains abundant geographical and ethnographic information about Central Asia, particularly present-day Uzbekistan. It includes descriptions of Bukhara, Paykend, Sogd, Tavavis, Karmana, Kushaniya, Samarkand, Kesh, Termez, Kat, Fergana, Shash, and many other cities and regions [13]. The repetition of numerous reports found in earlier Arabic sources clearly demonstrates that the anonymous author made extensive use of those works. In addition, *Hudud al-'Alam* preserves valuable information concerning the Fergana Valley during the administration of the Samanid *hajib* and governor Bakr al-Farghani, making it possible to reconstruct the territorial organization of the military-administrative system of the period.



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Conclusion

A comparative analysis of the extensive body of historical sources dating from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries demonstrates that during the Samanid period, and in the centuries that followed, the military-political elite—particularly the institution of the hajib—became one of the principal forces in state administration. The various categories of sources examined in this study complement one another and illuminate the socio-political realities of the period from different perspectives. Local and general historical works by authors such as al-Sallami, Narshakhi, Gardizi, and Nizam al-Mulk provide concrete evidence regarding the prominent position of Turkic ghulams within the Samanid court, the political influence exercised by leading military commanders and hajibs such as Alptegin, Fa'iq al-Khassa, and Bakr al-Farghani, as well as the processes that contributed to the decline of the Samanid state.

At the same time, the biobibliographical dictionaries compiled by Ibn Khallikan, al-Sam'ani, al-Nasafi, and Jamal Qarshi not only preserve detailed biographical information about statesmen and scholars but also document crucial political turning points, including the rebellions led by influential hajibs such as Tekin and Bektuzun against the central authority.

Likewise, the historical-geographical works of al-Mas'udi, Ibn Khurradadhbih, al-Muqaddasi, Ibn Hawqal, and the anonymous author of *Hudud al-'Alam* demonstrate that the institutional origins of the hajib can be traced back to the Abbasid court. These sources confirm that individuals such as Mansur ibn Bayqara attained the highest office of Hajib al-Hujjab (Chief Hajib) and provide geographical evidence concerning the transfer of Turkic slave soldiers who formed the foundation of this influential political and military elite.

Overall, the sources analyzed in this study clearly indicate that the hajibs of the Samanid state were far more than palace officials. They constituted a powerful



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military-administrative elite responsible for governing provinces and exerting considerable influence over both domestic and foreign policy. Consequently, a systematic and critical examination of these sources is of fundamental importance for reconstructing an objective and comprehensive history of medieval Uzbek statehood.

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