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the king sovereign over religion. Similarly, Farabi believes that theoretical and practical wisdoms are conceptually and practically prior to virtuous governance (hence, the related.²⁵ The rationalist Sasanian doctrine considers wisdom sovereign over the king, and philosopher-king), and that a virtuous sovereign has conceptual authority over revelation and practical authority over religious laws (hence, the philosopher-king-prophet).²⁶ Ibn al-Muqaffa` (1989, 245-246) praised the Sasanian polity and political thought for its nobility, and Farabi believed that the ancient Persians actually established the second type of virtuous city in which the citizen-philosophers governed the city.²⁷

We may now return to the question of whether or not Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s idea of sovereignty incorporates a political theology proper. A summary of the previous points, I hope, justifies a negative answer. A political theology proper has inseparable intellectual and political dimensions. Intellectually, it is conditioned by a metaphysical theology that divides existence into two realms with a hierarchy of value, power, and reality. And, politically, a political theology proper is capable of shaping mass mentality and claiming hegemony over the common sense. At Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s time, metaphysics is absent among the Islamic Arabs²⁸ and the Islamic god is far from being the *falasafā's causa sui*. This vacuum of hegemonic theologies and political theologies, granted Ibn al-Muqaffa` the opportunity to communicate his rational and pragmatic political theory that incorporates the hierarchy of authority between reason, political sovereignty, and religion.

25. Farabi's contemporaneous thinker, Ferdowsi Tusi (940–1020; 1905-1925, 6: 286-87) offers another version of Ardashir's doctrine:

Faith then it and royalty are brothers,
For they are mingled so that thou wouldst say:
'They wear one cloak.' The Faith endureth not
Without the throne nor can the kingship stand
Without the Faith; two pieces of brocade
Are they all interwoven and set up
Before the wise. [...]
Each needeth other, and we see the pair
Uniting in beneficence.

Highlighting the Sasanian idea of the prophet-king, Ferdowsi (1905-25, 9: 101) quotes the archimage Raduy, "whose mind wore wisdom's bridle":

The royal and prophetic offices

Are two gems set within one finger-ring,
To break one is to trample life and wisdom beneath thy feet.

Shaul Shaked traces the brotherhood doctrine in a series of Zoroastrian texts and states, "There can be little doubt that this is a genuine conception of the Sasanian period; it is attributed by Sasanian commentators to the *Avesta*, and may thus have had deeper roots in Iran than the Sasanian dynasty" (Shaked 1984, 40).

26. Pursuing the linkage between Farabi's philosopher-king-prophet and the Sasanian Rational-king-prophet would take us too far afield from our topic. Suffice it to suggest that there is a link between the two, and that perhaps Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s thought can shed further light on it.

27. Patricia Crone (2003a, 318) meticulously reconstructs Averroes's paraphrasing of Farabi: "The power that (Aristotle) mentions here (i.e. *judat al-tasallut*) is of two types, kingship (*ri'asat al-malik*)—which is the city in which both the opinions and the actions are in accordance with the requirements of the theoretical sciences and in which there is a single ruler imitated by all; and secondly, the rule of the best (*ri'asat al-akhyar*), in which the opinions and actions are also virtuous, but in which the qualities required in the ruler are dispersed among several. This (i.e. *judat al-tasallut*) is known as *al-imamiyya*, and it is said that it existed among the ancient Persians."

28. According to Farabi (1990, 147), the Arabs' cultural and intellectual standing between the years 90 and 200, after the appearance of the religion of Islam, indicates that **during this** period the most advanced field of inquiry among them was not philosophy, but the knowledge of Arabic language and its diverse dialects in different tribes—and, this knowledge was developing in the Iraqi cities of the time, rather than in the Arabian Peninsula. The demonstrative philosophy and metaphysics began to transfer from Greece to the Islamic societies more than a century after the emergence of Islam (see Mahdi 1972, 16).

authority over religious creeds and laws. The primacy, therefore, is at once conceptual and political. This point is traceable in the *Letter of Tansar*, also translated by Ibn al-Muqaffa', where the brethren of governance and religion are both entrusted to their guardian who is practical reason.

In the words of Ardashir's advisor Tansar (1975, 53), "governance and religion [*din*] are attached twins, born of the same womb and never to be severed. One's wellbeing or corruption and health or ailment are of the same nature as those of the other's."²⁴ The term *daēnā* (in Avesta)—or *dēn* (Middle Persian) and *dīn* (New Persian)—indicates "the sum of man's spiritual attributes and individuality, vision, inner self, conscience, [and] religion" (Shaki 1994, 279). Religion, therefore, signifies mass mentality, collective spirit, or the conscience of society—in the attached twins of the state-religion. Another statement by Tansar epitomizes the Sasanian view on the relationship between reason and the conjoined twins of religion and governance. Commenting on the loss and corruption of many Zoroastrian credos, narratives and laws after Alexander's invasion of Persia, Tansar (1975, 56) states that now—that is, at the very founding moment of the state—"the virtuous and solid/pertinent reason must revive religion," and that this necessity informs Ardashir's political efforts. In other words, the idea of the conjoined brethren means, in part, that founding the state and founding religion are mutually implicative: they are politico-religious acts.

Tansar's statement, communicated by Ibn al-Muqaffa', suggests the link between Farabi's (872-950) political philosophy of religion and Sasanian thought. The editors of *Nameh-ye Tansar beh Goshnasb* (Tansar 1975, 142) agree with the nineteenth-century scholar and translator of the *Letter of Tansar* into French, James Darmesteter who observes that, considering the magnitude of corruption that Tansar detects in Zoroastrianism, Tansar's task is practically a "creating religion anew"—rather than reviving or "restoring" (Boyce 1968, 37) the old religion. According to the *Denkard*, Ardashir-e Papakan commanded Tansar, the high priest who had access to the *Avesta's* interpretation, to codify the Zoroastrian canon, and to "found *Avesta* and recombine it, using such interpretation" (quoted in Tansar 1975, 6-7). Perhaps one can never know how Tansar himself felt about the true nature of his undertaking: Did he see it as a revival or a restoration of Zoroastrianism? Did he perceive that he was indeed creating a new religion—even though prudence required that he and Ardashir propagate their project as a revival of Zoroastrianism (in whose name vassal kings like Goshnasb could be called to compliance, and the Sasanian unifying state could be founded)?

The point, however, is to keep the brethren under reason's supervision. Thus, the Sasanian doctrine of brotherhood lodges two concurrent dialectics: the dynamism of priority-posteriority between reason and religion, as well as the mutual implication of governance and religion. This two-fold meaning of the doctrine, I believe, is the kernel within the husk of Ibn al-Muqaffa''s literary works. Almost a century and a half later, this kernel germinated into a philosophically rigorous theory in Farabi's political thought. Farabi's idea of the philosopher-king-prophet, and the Sasanian concept of the prophet-king are closely

24. In the words of Ardashir-e Papakan (180-242 AD; 1969, 22; see also 67), the founder of the Sasanian kingdom of Persia, religion and political governance are "twin brethren, non can live separated."

laws, is the pivot of just sovereignty and its ensuing noble polity. Though reason is distributed unequally among men, it can improve through practice (*phronesis*)—which, in its turn supplements individuals' inherent though unequal shares of rationality.²³ Accordingly, political prudence (*hilm*) as the central element of practical rationality must guide the sovereign in distinguishing wrong and right in the moment of decision-making.

Therefore, sovereignty and statecraft are rational and pragmatic affairs. Due to the different levels of intellectual aptitude among citizens, practical reason necessitates the use of rhetoric, including religious rhetoric, as the educational apparatus of the State. This religion presents obedience to the sovereign as the very kernel of religious piety and subordination to divine laws (Yavari 2014, 50). In doing so, such religion proves its brotherhood to governance. For the rationalist and not religious Ibn al-Muqaffa', therefore, the relative value of religion resides in its potentially positive political function—that is, educating the mass believers and shaping their common sense about sovereign authority. In a political juncture such as Ibn al-Muqaffa's own time, the new state's dire need for the Khorasanian army's loyalty proves to him the political significance of *the* right belief or religious creed—which must settle in minds through systematic religious and disciplinary education—, uniting the Persian Khorasanians around the new caliph. And, in general, such a religion is truthful and right in pragmatic and moral senses—since the true sovereign is practical reason, and the just king is subordinate to reason. In this sense practical wisdom—including *phronesis* and/or prudence—is the final arbiter of religion *cum* administrative and educational apparatus. The same practical rationality assists the sovereign to take effective counter-measures against *fortuna*, and to resist his own egoistic greed and injustice. The same practical wisdom teaches the politician that legitimacy (*zīna*) and power (*qovva*) are mutually implicative, and that the politician needs two concurrent processes of deliberation that together strengthen governance: one that advances practical efficiency and another that attends to the legitimacy of the power in the public eyes (Ibn al-Muqaffa' 1998, 253). Therefore, for Ibn al-Muqaffa' the governance-religion brotherhood means that good governance depends on religion (mass mentality) to secure its legitimacy and thus its noble functioning, while religious credos and laws find their meaning and relevance in their posteriority to rational sovereignty and through the dialectics of brotherhood—hence, *the* central theme with its description and prescriptive components. As mentioned erstwhile, the prescriptive component demands reason's supremacy over the brethren so that neither governance nor religion may escape the requirement of moral-rational justifiability. In other words, political sovereignty is not absolute and unconditional. Moral-practical reasoning qualifies—or, better, ought to qualify—the sovereign's decisions from above, and the need for legitimacy in the eyes of the mass believers puts qualification on his actions from below.

Ibn al-Muqaffa' represents a conception of reason-religion relationship that acknowledges the distinction between the two, and affirms reason's primacy without discarding religion as irrational or politically irrelevant. Religion's posteriority to reason implies that the god of religion must be a rhetorical representation of reason alone. Such a god, in Arthur Arberry's (1950, 11) words, must be “a very rational and reasonable God, a God we might almost say, with a sense of humor, an eminently Persian God.” What is of essence, however, is that for Ibn al-Muqaffa' the primacy of reason over religion must be materialized exclusively—that is, by excluding the jurists—through the political sovereign's

23. For the frequent reappearance of this point see Sabzianpour and Hassanzadeh 2013, 108-111.

For the rationalist Ibn al-Muqaffa`—I would like to surmise—the true sovereign is reason alone. Accordingly, we may conclude that his demand for the total subordination of religion to the political sovereign is in fact a requirement for religion’s subordination to practical rationality. This requirement crucially differentiates between, on one hand, Ibn al-Muqaffa`’s conception of the sovereignty–religion relationship and, on the other hand, the political theology of sacral kingship. While the latter regards the office of sovereignty as protector and executor of divine religion and laws, the former’s sovereign is to establish what the divine entity is in the first place (religious creeds), and initiate the divine laws (religious laws). As previously mentioned, political theology comes only after the onto-theo-logic, when metaphysics has already divided reality into the most real, transcendent *being* versus the transient *becoming*. In other words, theology is older than political theology: the latter may appear only after the founding faith has established the new politico-legal order, and sufficiently transformed itself into a theology. Only then, may a certain political theology find its meaning and political relevance through its hegemonic legitimizing power at the state and national levels (in this sense, political theology serves as a political propaganda and, in so doing, further distinguishes itself from political philosophy). Accordingly, political theology’s posteriority to theology is at once historical and conceptual. Conceptually, the rationalist Ibn al-Muqaffa` would state, the political sovereign is subordinate to reason and superior to theology. This doctrine is evidently not a political theology. Nevertheless, the doctrine allocates a room to political theology in the hierarchical order of: practical reason, political sovereign, religion, theology, and political theology. And, historically, we may add, the metaphysical and theological cacophony of the first centuries of Islamic society hardly permits the appearance of a dominant political theology.

The gradual decline of the Persian sacral kingship (*descending*) political theology throughout the last two centuries of the Sasanian era, as well as the dwindling primacy of Zoroastrian theology and metaphysics after the Arab invasion of Persia, contributed to the context in which Ibn al-Muqaffa` deliberated on sovereignty. Moreover, the sacred monarchy (*ascending*) political theology could not be born because its precondition—that is, the paradigmatic new theology—did not exist. Also from an individualistic perspective, Ibn al-Muqaffa` himself was not a true believer in the new faith.²² The introductory chapter to his translation of *Kalila wa Dimna* from Pahlavi to Arabic reveals Ibn al-Muqaffa`’s deep doubts about religious truth-claims, as well as his intransigent commitment to pure reason and rationalism. This chapter is esoterically assigned to Borzuya (Biruni 1958, 123) who opposes religious convictions to rational deliberation, highlights the particularistic nature of religious convictions that results in antagonism and conflict, and accordingly bases the worldly noble individual life as well as eternal happiness on following reason alone. Reason—that is, knowledge of good and evil and practicing the noble deeds (or, the moral-practical wisdom)—, as Ibn al-Muqaffa` rephrases the Sasanian minister Bozorgmehr, is the real meaning behind the simile “water of life which bestows immortality” (Bozorgmehr 2009, 40). Political administration, therefore, is to facilitate the nobility of life through the rational management of the city. In a sense, the ultimate message of the *Kalila wa Dimna* is that good political acumen, rather than ideological commitment to a set of fixed dogmas and

22. As Joseph van Ess (1981) observes, at this phase, the institutional need for administrative cadre could make Ibn al-Muqaffa`’s disbelief in the new faith relatively irrelevant.

political theory—rather than a political theology for the sake of legitimization. In the following statements, I briefly comment on this alternative interpretation.

As previously mentioned, Ibn al-Muqaffa` is situated within the interregnum, where movement is altering into institution: the Muslim state is transmuting into a “kingdom” (Goitein 1968, 149) modelled after the Sasanian dynasty, and the founding faith is gradually transforming into theology and jurisprudence. Against this context, Ibn al-Muqaffa` deliberates on religion and sovereignty, and offers a blueprint for overcoming the ideological and political sectarianism that hampers the centralization of the new state. Accordingly, his advice to the new Prince/Caliph is not so much an ideological outlook as it is a pragmatic solution expressing the *raison d'état*, and stemming from a rationalist political philosophy. In Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s (1989, 248) words, “know that you [the king] do not need reason in order to boast about being rational. Rather, you need reason to [act rationally and thus] benefit from it. [While acting rationally, if] you wish to also be praised, then know that the most valid praise is that which is issued by the virtuous who would attest that this king does not make his mind without first requesting counsel from judicious” advisors. In a sense, Ibn al-Muqaffa` transmits the Sasanian rationalist political theory—not political theology—to the new kingdom and strategizes a “complete political program” (Goitein 1968, 154) of statecraft. In Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s view, the political sovereign is the sole source of religious and political authority (Crone 2003, 69).

Therefore, the *Epistle Concerning the Entourage* requires that the caliph should assume responsibility over the religious affairs, take the administration of the religious laws in his own hands, and legislate based on (1) the precedent and usage, (2) the tradition and analogy, and (3) his own decision-making (Goitein 1968, 163-64; Arjomand 1994, 15, 32). Ibn al-Muqaffa` stresses the “intrinsic unity of all spheres of life within the Muslim state under the caliph” (Rosenthal 1968, 254), and seeks to amend the doctrinal diversity of legal systems, which is harmful to the centralization of governance. His political sovereign is religiously sovereign as well, capable of authoring the law—be it religious or secular. Hence, the clerics are theoretically, normatively and/or politically under the politico-religious sovereign's rule. They may attempt at codifying the laws under the politico-religious sovereign's final authority—similar to the Sasanian political system, in which the clerics they lack any right for personal initiation of laws (Zaryab Khoei 1988, 675). The clerics also lack any privilege to intervene in the sovereign's political and religious decisions (Kristó-Nagy 2009, 296). A unified legal system is required for the new state to centralize and solidify its dominance, and to properly function. Accordingly, for Ibn al-Muqaffa`, the initiation and reformation of the Sharia must be the exclusive right of the sovereign so that the unifying legal system can both emerge and be pragmatically modified. This proposal meant that the caliph's sovereignty was not subordinate to that of that of the Prophet's. Rather, Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s political sovereign enjoys the authority of religious legislation, and is capable of both codifying the laws of religion and establishing a unified creed to which all believers should ascribe. Although the *Epistle* does not phrase the latter point bluntly, Ibn al-Muqaffa` allocating equal sovereignty to the caliph and the Prophet, juxtaposed with the doctrine of hierarchy between sovereignty and religion, invites us to read this point between the lines: the subordination of religion to the political sovereign is total. And, the ability of the sovereign to establish the unified creed means that religious concepts, dogmas, and laws come after the sovereign. The establishment of the new state, requires the establishment of the new unifying creed—read, religion. This is a *part of* what the Sasanian governance-religion brotherhood implies.

God's laws from the Quran and the Sunna. As Crone and Hinds (2003) state, up to the emergence of the *four caliph thesis*, the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs sought equality with the Prophet in initiating the religious laws, and preserving a right to sovereignty in both political and religious spheres. The Umayyad caliph required that he officially be called the deputy/successor of God—in contrast with the successor of the God's prophet—so that the union of political and religious leadership would make his sovereignty absolute. The caliph's being God's deputy, however, would put the use and material interests of the clerics in question: if the head of the State inherits the Prophet's religious *and* political status, and "if God manifests His will through the caliph here and now, [then] there is no need to seek guidance from scholars who remember what a prophet had said in the past" (Crone and Hinds 2003, 21). Consequently, the jurists elected to oppose the caliph's adoption of this title. They offered in its place the title Deputy of God's Prophet, and, accordingly, denied the caliph's claim to religious authority.

By the end of the third century, the failure of the inquisition project (*mihna*) signaled the inadequacy of the last attempt by the Abbasid caliph to claim direct deputyship of God and reclaim authority over initiation of the religious laws. This phenomenon potentially signals that in subsequent centuries, *ascending* political theologies would hardly receive intellectual support from the Sunnis. Contrastingly, the presence of metaphysical philosophy and theology among the Shi'as/Isma'ilis and Mu'tazilis of the subsequent centuries could account for the emergence of such *ascending* political theologies. In the fifth century, the Persian Muhammad Ghazzali (1058-1111; 2001, 22) vehemently resisted the Isma'ili Shi'as' *ascending* political theology, objecting that the Shi'a imam's authority to make allegorical interpretations destroys religious laws and frees believers from religious obligations. Moreover, the Arab Ibn al-Jawzi (1116-1201; quoted in De Somogyi 1932, 255) declared that the Isma'ili political theology was the secret plot of "a host of Persians; [...] a group the reign of whose ancestors—that is, the Khosrows, the Dihqans and the children of the Magi—had been cut off by the rise of the empire of Islam." A considerable number of those pre-Islamic Persians, Ibn al-Jawzi believes, follow the philosophers who consider religious laws as nothing more than positive laws (see De Somogyi 1932, 264).²⁰

Consequently, it may seem reasonable to link Ibn al-Muqaffa's idea of sovereignty, reflected most directly in his *Epistle Concerning the Entourage*, to the Deputy of God doctrine.²¹ After all, Ibn al-Muqaffa's accusation of heresy and his execution by the jurists' pressure can be seen as a critical development in the caliph-jurist battle over the religious and political meaning of sovereignty (see Crone 2003, 71). One may also envision Ibn al-Muqaffa's idea of sovereignty as a version of the Sasanian Court's *descending* political theology—or, the sacral king doctrine. While I acknowledge the explanatory value of these readings, I would like to suggest that the peculiarities of Ibn al-Muqaffa and his time extend another horizon for understanding his thoughts on sovereignty. According to this alternative understanding, Ibn al-Muqaffa's *Epistle* harbors a rationalist and pragmatic

20. Ibn al-Jawzi is right in this latter belief: Religious laws being positive laws initiated by reason, is indeed part and parcel of *the* central them (A). As we will see, according to the Sasanian counselor Tansar, religious laws are ultimately posited by reason, the true sovereign over the brethren of governance and religion: reason is the judge who decides on reviving and/or modifying a certain religion.

21. Ibn al-Jawzi's diagnosis about the Sasanian sources of the Isma'ili *ascending* political theology may also suggest a new dimension to Ibn al-Muqaffa's role in transmitting Sasanian philosophy to the Islamicate thought.

legitimizes a sovereign without mystery.¹⁹ It is noteworthy that the existence of an interval in which the body politics ideology holds popularity does not necessarily indicate a “secularization” of mass mentality—though it may express a relative weakening in a certain political theology’s consent-building role. For example, the sacred kingship political theology gradually lost its hegemonic power during the last two centuries of Sasanians rule and in part facilitated the collapse of the regime at the hands of the Arabs (Daryaei, 2010, 243). Perhaps another example of a historical interval with a relative weakness of political theology is the founding phase of a new politico-legal system, where a hyperactive faith effectively mobilizes mass believers behind *charismatic* leaders, even though the theological articulation of the faith’s content is yet to be formulated. This example displays the condition of the faithful Arab conquerors who sought a new politico-legal order in place of the Sasanian Empire, and in a vacuum made by the decline of the Zoroastrian political theology. The interregnum between the demise of the Sasanian [political] theology and the birth of the Islamic theologies and political theologies lasted for a few centuries.

The first three centuries of Islam witnessed incessant reorganization, rearranging, and refocusing for the sake of institutionalization. This phase reflects the gradual, and by no means deterministic, metamorphosis of the *founding faith* into *the* religion of Islam. The very meaning of religious creeds is in a constant flux of creation and contestation. Paradigmatic theologies are simply absent and, as an indicator—or, better, a constituent—of this state of fluctuation, jurisprudential schools have not been established yet—though, the transmutation of *the* Sharia from its original connotation—that is, the path to the water of life and salvation—into a systematic legality is currently in the making, and the conversion of *fiqh* from its original meaning—that is, free individualistic understanding and practicing—into strict jurisprudential disciplines has been set in motion (see Rahman 1979). Furthermore, particularly in the third century, a dichotomy between *aql* (that is, reasoning) and *sam`* (that is, Sharia, tradition and authority) is gradually emerging. Consequently, the *aql-sam`* binary opposition is to underwrite the Mu`tazili-Ash`ari theologies of following years and pave the path for the arrival of contending political theologies with resemblances to the *ascending* and *descending* families. Within these first three centuries, many different Islamic cults and branches are in the making. They express sometimes wild and morbid theologies, quarrel with their theological and jurisprudential rivals, either perish or survive, and together create a cacophony of Islamic religions (as well as political, military, and ideological sects).

The intellectual turmoil of the first three centuries points to the fact that even the semi-consensual thesis of the *Four Caliphs of the Prophet* has not yet fully emerged. According to this thesis, *only* the sovereignty of the first four caliphs’ is both religious and political, and constitutive of the Sunna’s authority. Hence, the successive caliphs are only the executors of the religious laws while the jurists enjoy the privilege of extracting and interpreting

19. The body politics doctrine legitimizes political sovereignty as a product of fixed nature and not human convention. According to this doctrine the whole world has an immutable nature with a universal harmony between its elements. The whole is inviolably lawful and “all the laws of nature point toward monarchy” (Walzer 1974, 24). In the absence of a theological reinforcement, the doctrine provides a naturalistic basis for authority by making the concept of sovereignty legitimate and accessible to the common people who are “intimate with [their] own bodies” (Walzer 1974, 22) way before any possible exposure to theoretical arguments. The doctrine *assimilates* human society to a natural organism which must have only one head that is, the sovereign with no political equal. The head is not elected by the organs, and its loss brings death to the whole organism. The organs cannot think of or dispute what the head does. Hence, the sovereign is naturally “inviolable” (Walzer 1974, 35).

“inveterate by revelation, distinction and the privilege of imamate” (Kermani 1977, 32). The Isma`ili sovereign imam is “the essence of the whole universe” (Kermani 1977, 385) and, as the epiphany of God’s *Word*—or, edict to create—the living imam’s sovereignty resides in his performative authority and in the fact that he initiates/creates religion and religious laws *ex nihilo*. His sovereignty is absolute in the sense that it lays the grounding foundation of laws, beliefs, morality and truth; the sovereign is *law unto himself* and subject to no moral or legal restraint. For the Isma`ilis, the Fatimid Caliph enjoys the status of the prophet in holding and identifying the kernel of religion, and in adjusting the husk, the religious credos and laws, to it (Naser-e Khosrow 1953, 162).

Accordingly, the sovereign is neither the God’s prophet’s deputy, nor God’s deputy—rather, he is God incarnate.¹⁷ In Naser-e Khosrow’s (1004-1088; 1960, 224) words, the Fatimid Caliph “is in virtue and superiority but God personified in the transient world,” and “in the world of religion he is God’s *Word*—that is, the order to create.” Such a “right imam,” Naser-e Khosrow (1953, 308) states, is the true meaning of “God’s House” in which “God’s knowledge is deposited.” The unfathomable difference between the supremely sanctified sovereign and the ordinary man indicates that the political sovereign’s authority stands above the moral and religious standards of human beings, and his political behavior cannot be comprehended or criticized by the incompetent intellects of the masses. The sanctity of the sovereign stems from his divinity; he is a sacred personal sovereign whose resolute personal decision creates religion. Here, sovereignty is not that of a political office. Rather, *this* person, in an enigmatic unity with the divine, is the sovereign whose authoritative decision transcends the institutional boundaries of an office or an established dogma. According to this *decisionist* model, political sovereignty is of an *ascending* order, in which an individual is elevated to divinity and becomes the absolute sovereign.

Evidently, the spectrum of Irano-Islamicate political theologies does not have a time dimension: one may witness cases of the ascending and descending orders resurfacing in different moments of Iranian history, including the present time.¹⁸ In other words, there is no historical determinacy that would impose a temporal sequence on political theologies: the emergence and endurance of a certain political theology is a sociopolitical phenomenon. Accordingly, an empirical investigation may reveal short or long intervals in which the legitimation of sovereignty takes place in the absence of a hegemonic political theology, or, in the presence of a legitimation theory that is not a political theology proper. Here one may think of the *body politics* doctrine as a historical current of political ideologies parallel to that of political theologies. The following sentence by Ibn al-Muqaffa` (1989b, 341) recaps this familiar doctrine: “The relationship between the governor and the commanded subjects [including the viziers] is the same as the relationship between the head and the other members of the body.” Whereas the pair of *ascending* and *descending* political theologies mystify the sovereign in their respective ways, the *body politics* idea

17. The poet, Ibn Hani of Andalusia (936-973; 1980, 146) was revealing the belief of his fellow Isma`ilis when reciting in praise of the Fatimid caliph/imam that: “Whatever you will—and not what the powers will” will be obeyed, “So, do command and you are indeed the Unique and Overpowering God; it is as if you are the Prophet Mohammad himself and your friends are his associates.”

18. For the contemporary Twelver Shi`a orthodoxy the Prophet and the Imam have the same status—though the juristic wording ascribes a higher status to the Prophet. The Prophet and the Shi`a Imam hold the same religious/political authority as “the living entity of the infallible divine law, its interpreter-maker and executor” (Eliash 1969, 24-25).

political sovereignty as a *descending* structure, the other incorporates an *ascending* notion of sovereignty. While for one, in accordance with its sense of descending authority, the political sovereign is *sacral* but distinct from God, the other's sovereign is *sacred*, ascending to unity with God. Let us briefly review a representative member of each family.

The Zoroastrian political theology, as expressed in the *Denkard*,¹⁶ considers the Shah to be not divine but rather a mortal and ordinary man, chosen by Ahura Mazda as His supreme representative on earth. The Shah enjoys divine support and assistance, and is endowed with royal glory (*farreb izadi*) and wisdom by Ahura Mazda and other deities. Thus Kingship—a sovereign office—originates from the gods and is sacred. The sacred office of kingship itself was believed to originate from Ahura Mazda and the Zoroastrian religion, and to have been transferred through successive dynasties to the Sasanians. However, according to the *Denkard* (quoted in Choksy 1988, 37) “all corporeal kings are men,” not gods: kingship is god-given and sacred but the king is not united with the divine, nor is he god-incarnate. Whereas kingship is sacred, the king is *sacral* in terms of being Ahura Mazda's mortal representative in the corporeal world. The Shah is the lord over all people. He possesses a sovereignty that is conferred to him by gods through religion. The Shah's role is to protect the religiously sanctioned social structure of the empire, and thus, to secure law, order, and righteousness—while his will is supreme over religious and secular affairs. Through his sacral status, the Shah unites governance and religion. Hence, rebellion against a just and divinely appointed king, who possesses royal glory, constitutes rebellion against religion and god. However, if the Shah does not fulfill his duties according to the tenets of the religion, he loses sovereignty, sanctity, and god's deputyship: royal glory flees from kings who violate their covenant with the gods. Thus, we may conclude that according to the Sasanian-Zoroastrian political theology, the true political sovereign is not personal. Rather, it is the office of the kingship as an institution that deserves the title—though in order to occupy such office and have royal legitimacy, an individual must be of a royal blood or, “good lineage” (see Adhami 2003, 229). The sanctity of the king is contingent; he is *sacral* but not *sacred/divine*. As a divine deputy, he is subject to God's decrees and bound by laws of nature (he is mortal). Political sovereignty, therefore, is of a *descending* order. It passes down from God to an office, and downward to an individual king. The king remains separate from deity, can never lay claim to divinity, and is not involved in a *unio mystica*—that is, an interpersonal oneness with God.

The idea of *ascending sovereignty* is best represented by the Isma`ili political theology of *Imamate* cum “sacred monarchy” (Walker 2004, 372). Here, theology legitimizes the sovereign in a way that is distinct from the legitimation of a king who primarily earns his sanctity through protecting the official religion and enacting its laws. The *sacred imam/caliph* is not God's representative or deputy, nor is he constrained by the primacy of religious creeds and laws. Indeed, the Isma`ili imam's authority transcends both religious beliefs and laws—that is, the husk. The Isma`ili leader is “the ever Incarnating Universal Reason—according to the intellectual development of the age in which he incarnated himself” (Iqbal 1908, 48; see also Naser-e Khosrow 1924, 60). Hence, the Isma`ili sovereign has the authority to initiate and revise the Sharia and religious credos. He is “a supra-creature whose truth the ordinary intellect of man cannot grasp” (Mohaqeq 1958, 311), and his privilege over the rest is at once natural, cognitive, and political. He is a “divine entity” (Kermani 1977, 26-27) whose intellect is

16. In my description of sacral kingship, I entirely rely on Jamsheed Choksy's (1988) seminal study.

the absolute and the supremely perfect being. Metaphysics, or onto-theology, harbors the binary of the real that is, God, versus the unreal that is, the world or man. This dichotomy lodges a power relationship that embodies itself in the political State's sovereignty and tutelage. Consequently, political theology indicates that the metaphysical onto-theological God and the political sovereign are counterparts.

Therefore, as long as theology and metaphysics stay mutually-implicative, theology and the political reality of authority maintain the same structure, and political theology continues to give legitimacy to a political sovereign that is either the representative of the omnipotent God or God incarnate. The spectrum of pre-Islamic Iranian and Irano-Islamicate political theologies includes both varieties. While the former—best represented by the Sasanian doctrine of “sacral kingship”—recognizes the political sovereign as a deputy of the divine entity, the latter—best represented by the Shi`a and Isma`ili political theologies—affirms a personal, single, and sacred monarchic entity, best described as a personified God, that makes decision *ex nihilo* and, thus, deserves the title of the true sovereign. Both families of political theology exclude collective sovereignty and stay nondemocratic. The authorship of laws is exclusively reserved for the personal sovereign or his office and, therefore, political egalitarianism is negated. Hence, we may conclude that the democratic sovereignty of *We the People* can be legitimized on condition that either political theology in general is negated or a democratic political theology has emerged. The negation of political theology in general, however, presupposes the negation of metaphysical theology/religion in general. An idea that may hardly be materialized, at least in the foreseeable future. Alternatively, democratic sovereignty may find legitimacy from a political theology that, while reflecting the commonality of structure between theology and politics, harbors a theology that is not metaphysics; a *weak theology* of a non-Sovereign god whose divinity would not impoverish men's autonomy and right to self-governance.¹⁴

The functional or political definition of religion accounts for the possibility of political theology. In other words, political theology is meaningful and effective insofar as religion is *political religion*. According to the political or functional understanding of religion, religion is political in its meaning, function, and relevance. In its basic formulation, this functional understanding may be presented as follows: Religion qua a diverse set of spiritual, symbolic, legal, authoritative, and ritual phenomena, facilitates political integration and individuals' solidarity in the city. Religion encompasses practices, rituals, and attitudes that indicate a mutual sharing of the sacred amongst believers. It contributes to societal cohesion at occasions of both normalcy and crisis. Religion is also of essence to the political processes of state and nation building. At the moment of founding the politico-legal order, the act of institution consists of a violent and faithful character, highlighting the irreducible interrelation of religion and politics.

The functional understanding of religion portrays a common motif throughout the history of Irano-Islamicate thought.¹⁵ Therefore, one may expect corresponding political theologies in both phases of political thought in the pre- and post-Islamic Iran. To my understanding, the spectrum of corresponding political theologies hosts at least two families of ideas that—though reflecting family resemblances—are separable based on their respective perspectives on the nature of political sovereignty. As is expected from political theology, both families of ideas link the political sovereign to gods. However, whereas one portrays

15. I have developed this point in Shomali 2016 and 2017.

later): “all that the king needs [for good governance] is two types of rational deliberation; one strengthens his forceful dominance, and, the other, legitimizes his dominance in his people’s eyes. The former type of deliberation is more appropriate and effective for initiating king’s dominance, whereas the legitimacy-producing deliberation [*al-ray al-tazyin*] yields more satisfaction [in people’s hearts] and better stimulates their assistance to the king. This is true since [the state’s] power comes from legitimacy [or, propaganda], and legitimacy is in its turn producible by power”—though, observers “tend to” prefer one or the other as the more effective element in the art of statecraft. In other words, for Ibn al-Muqaffa` political domination and legitimacy are mutually constitutive, and the king must take heed of the task of manufacturing mass consent. Hence, religion qua mass mentality must be formed/preserved by rational deliberation. Moreover, the king must “oversee the affairs of religion” and, since the masses’ hearts are “most vulnerable to religious propaganda,” the king should not allow anyone—including the religious experts—to “carve for themselves an independent sphere” of control over the community’s religious beliefs, affection, and fear (Yavari 2014, 33, 77). Ibn al-Muqaffa`’s “religion-based ruler,” therefore, observes the religion of his people, lest he should jeopardize his legitimacy.¹² This ruler “enacts the laws of his people’s religion, as it is such religion/sharia that bestows, or inflicts upon, them what [they believe] they deserve” (Ibn al-Muqaffa` 1989, 250). In other words, religion gives the masses their ideas of distributive and rectificatory types of justice. Accordingly, the enactment of the laws that are considered as religious “brings the mass believers consent and makes the unhappy and dissident among them, conforming and compliant” (Ibn al-Muqaffa` 1989, 250).

Section 2; Ibn al-Muqaffa`, Normative Political Theory, and Political Theology

Political theology is not a political form of theology resembling, say, liberation theology. Rather, it is a depiction of politics analogous to theology. Political theology is founded on the premise that politics, legislation and sovereignty have an essence that can be found in theology as well: that there exists a systematic structural affinity between political sovereignty and deity. Accordingly, political theology theorizes the political dominance of the sovereign based on a metaphysics that is at once a theology. “[T]he fundamental character of metaphysics is onto-theo-logic” (Heidegger 2002, 69-70; see also Kearney 1999, 52-54). Metaphysics hosts God “in the sense of the ground, only as *causa sui*” (Heidegger 2002, 70); in the sense of *causa prima* and the *ultima ratio*. In other words, the being of universals (that is, the subject of ontology) and the being that is the highest (that is, the subject of theology) unite in metaphysics. Hence, the ontological primacy of universals—that is, “the *real*,”¹³ over worldly phenomena—is simply an alternate label for the supremacy of God that is,

12. Hence, Ibn al-Muqaffa`’s insistence in the *Epistle Concerning the Entourage* that—though, as I shall argue, the Caliph is indeed sovereign over religion and unbounded by the Sharia—the Caliph must observe religious rituals and rites and refrain from conducts that appear inconsistent with the Sharia’s highest obligations including daily prayers, fasting, pilgrimage etc. While, *in his lines*, Ibn al-Muqaffa` (1989a, 312) clearly mentions that “a ruler cannot be followed in a course of action that is contrary to God’s” command as reflected in religion, *between the lines*, he assures the hierarchy of authority between reason, political sovereign and religion/sharia. Section 2, further expands on this point.

13. According to Aristotle’s metaphysics, only the universals are worthy of the name “real.” The rest is but the world of “pure possibility” (see Adorno, 2001, 35-37).

14. For the idea of a *weak* and non-sovereign God see Caputo 2006.

Thus, the political role and the intellectual value of an advice treatise come to the fore: since the setting is not democratic—and, because the monarch is high-spirited and, oftentimes, his intellect is subjected and weak—the nobility of advice rhetoric resides in its encouraging the king, its primary recipient, to care for truth and for the justness of his decisions; to develop a more moral and thereby moderate self that honors the parrhesiastic pact. Such a care, enticed by the edificatory and charming spell of the treatise's exhortations, fables, flatteries, poetic and religious utterances, historical fictions, etc., will ultimately serve the well-being of the city because it demands from the king that he exercise power judiciously. The parrhesiastic contract between the monarch and the vizier-counselor requires the latter to be courageous and sincerely reveal the whole truth when counseling the king. In return, the king is required to exhibit courage; to be receptive to truth, criticism, and counsel. As a cardinal virtue, therefore, courage is demanded from all parties of the pact.

In modern democratic societies, the parrhesiastic pact is embodied in the constitutional arrangement of power positions. Hence, the existence of institutional sites for democratic parrhesiastic game between citizens and rulers has in part lessened the need for advice treatises and their persuasive role. In other words, in democratic societies, the Platonic correlation between philosophy and governance (as two modes of being) takes place within the public arena. In pre-modern settings and under autocratic rulers, however, the populace is largely absent from the game of “monarchic parrhesia” between the king and the counselor (Foucault 2011, 59). Finally, it is noteworthy that from a methodological point of view, the idea of the parrhesiastic pact resembles concepts such as social contract and the state of nature, in being a *heuristic device*. The social contract thinkers apply the idea of a contract between individuals in a hypothetical situation. As a heuristic device, this idea, however, helps those thinkers to articulate the nature of political sovereignty and to explain the bond between citizens. Similarly, the idea of parrhesiastic contract refers to a putative situation that accounts for the bond between the pre-modern monarch and the vizier-counselor. Furthermore, it explains the nature and political function of advice literature.

To conclude, the persuasive and impressive effect of an advice treatise's rhetorical genre mediates its noble political function—that is, opening a site for *raison d'état's* engagement in the ruler's decision-making. Medieval Persian, Arabic, and Turkish mirror works—including their paradigm case, the *Kalila wa Dimna*—generally represent rhetorical renditions of theoretical wisdom's themes on justice and noble life. In their prudent political function, the mirrors for princes partially reflect practical wisdom's attempt to facilitate rational governance. The central theme, or, the grounding rational intelligible that mediates the rhetorical exterior of many a mirror treatise implies that justice and truth are greater than the king, and that well-being, “proper conduct, proper faith [please take heed: proper faith/*religion*] and proper rule” (Yavari 2014, 75) are realizable under the rule of Reason (that is, the theoretical and moral-practical wisdoms). In other words, Reason should govern the king's soul, the city, and its religion.

In Persian sources such as the Mazdean encyclopedia entitled *Denkard* and *Abd-e Ardashir*, the philosophical theme of the absolute sovereignty of Reason finds a figurative form in the simile of brotherhood between religion and kingship. And, this formulation continues its presence in “almost every specimen of medieval Islamic advice literature” (Yavari 2014, 37). In his *Great Book of Conduct*, Ibn al-Muqaffa` (1989, 253) tersely, and less metaphorically, reveals the rational ground of the brotherhood metaphor to his advisee (discussed more

requires the vizier-philosopher to also assume the role of the rhetorician and apply diverse genres such as rhetoric, poetry, dialectic, and, even, sophistry (anything but demonstrative abstract arguments) to perform his task (A). In this capacity—that is as the detached intellect whose prudence suggests the use of rhetorical genres in performing task (A)—the vizier-philosopher-counselor may author an advice treatise. Task (B)—diplomatic counseling—, however, requires the counselor to apply an unembellished, sincere, and realistic language.

The art of rhetoric's primary purpose is persuasion and thus not communication of universal intelligibles in philosophical languages. Rhetorical speech does not necessarily presuppose a care for the freedom of the addressee, nor does it require the rhetorician's personal commitment to mirroring reality through the narrative. Rather, rhetoric usually involves power imposition on the addressee; i.e., it seeks to establish “a constraining bond, a bond of power between what is said and the person to whom it is said” (Foucault 2008, 14). As a detached intellect, the author aspires, or, better, feels a responsibility, to persuade—that is, to foist ideas upon—the king's soul and, in so doing, improve the king's moral status. After all, in medieval Islamicate philosophers' view, the well-being of the city, as well as the happiness of the king, requires the *nous*'s control over the king's *eros* and *thumos*. And, if the king's own intellect is weak and subjected, it becomes the ethical responsibility of the vizier qua detached intellect to seek control over the king's spirit and its whims. Whereto, we may ask, does the advice treatise conduct the king? The question can be posed from another angle: What is the expected outcome of the “bond of power” that advice literature aspires to establish between what is said and the addressed king? Michel Foucault's concept of the “parrhesiastic pact” (Foucault 2008, 203; see also Foucault 2011, 12, 142-143) helps us answer this question.

It is my contention that the rhetorical discourse of advice is to persuade the king to enter a parrhesiastic contract with the vizier, and, thus, empower the latter to fulfill his task (B). Accordingly, as I have already pointed out, an advice treatise, properly speaking, is not political counseling inasmuch as sincere political counseling presupposes outspokenness, gives precise and conjunctural recommendations or unreserved criticisms, tells all that is truthful without flattery or embellishment, and, of course, accepts the risk of death. In other words, political counseling proper—that is, task (B)—is a parrhesiastic discourse while the advice treatise is a strategy of persuasion or a technique for facilitating the parrhesiastic pact. In its turn, the parrhesiastic pact is to increase the safety of the future “parrhesiastic games”—that is, discourses of frank and realistic counseling and criticism—between the counselor and the king. The parrhesiastic pact is to reduce the risk of death and, in so doing, open a guaranteed site for truth-telling in the forthcoming rounds of counseling. In the absence of a democratic institutionalization of power relationships in pre-modern societies, and under autocratic rulers, the *guarantee*, however, is at best a moral obligation that each side of the pact may carry on his shoulder.¹¹

11. “The long history of doomed glorious viziers preserved in virtually all medieval Islamic writings,” Yavari (2014, 127) states, shows that, “the procurer of advice is inexplicably eradicated by its intended recipient.” Ibn al-Muqaffa' (1989, 249) calls the Caliph to respect the parrhesiastic pact—“make it a habit of yourself to endure those advisors and sincere counselors who oppose you, and whose advice is bitter and just. And, simultaneously, do not let anyone besides the wise, the reasonable, the experienced and the virtuous oppose you this way [that is, by imitating the Wise's *parrhesia*]. Otherwise, the unwise subject takes heart and opines that advising the king is a trivial matter.”

perspective on the composition of the human soul, the king's is a high-spirited soul (*al-nafs al-ghaḥabīya*) in which, both *nous* and *eros* are subject to the might of *thumos*—that is, a complex of passions including anger, ambition, arrogance, and affection. In other words, the internal structure of the soul distinguishes a king from, say, a philosopher. Through philosophic life the latter's soul converts from a tripartite structure (*nous*, *thumos*, and *eros*) to a bipartite one in which “the fusion of mind (*nous*) and desire (*eros*) holds out the prospect of a unified soul” (see Ludwig 2007, esp. 227-28). In a king's soul, however, *thumos* (spirit) and *eros* (desire) are not detached. Rather than controlling *thumos/eros*, the *nous* is indeed an instrument for fulfilling *thumos*'s will to conquer. Under *thumos*, the king's desire is always possessive, domination-seeking, violent and, accordingly, imperfect in justice. Whereas the converted soul of the philosopher has an almost erotic lust for universal truth, the spirited king has a lust for power and supremacy. In other words, in their universal, demonstrative, and non-metaphorical formulations, the truths about justice and *the good things* are neither appealing nor comprehensible to the monarch's spirited soul which, “wrapped in fire,” subjugates the *nous* (intellect).

The vizier-philosopher-counselor-cum-author of the advice treatise knows very well—experimentally and philosophically—that the monarch's ignorance of justice shall destroy the city and the state; that good governance requires the king's care for, and awareness of, the noble life and its cardinal virtues (justice, wisdom/prudence, courage/fortitude, and moderation/self-control). After all, for Plato, and his numerous followers in the medieval Islamic period, “until philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide, while the many natures who at present pursue either one exclusively are forcibly prevented from doing so, cities will have no rest from evils...nor will the human race” (Plato 1997, 1100). The vizier-philosopher recognizes that his time and Plato's are not that different: being a king—that is, the mode of exercising power—still does not coincide with philosophizing—that is, the mode of rational living. An available option, however, presents itself in the form of the vizier-philosopher taking up a role similar to that of a detached intellect (*al-aql al-munfasil*), residing outside the monarch's soul (in modern terminology, the vizier must represent *raison d'état*)⁹ and, accordingly, help the *politeia* and its *nomos* accord with *logos*.

Therefore, the vizier must (A) educate the king, and convey universal truths about good things and moral virtues to the monarch. And, (B) he must give diplomatic counsel on specific junctures.¹⁰ Moreover, since the monarch's soul lacks moderation—that is, in it the subjected *nous* cannot dominate *eros* and *thumos*—the intellectual weakness of the king

8. In addition to viziers, administrators, court secretaries, jurists, theologians, judges, Sufis, and philosophers, and other men of letters have contributed to the repertoire of advice literature.

9. In the Peripatetics' view, the detached Ten Intellects emanate the intelligibles to the philosophers in demonstrative formats—and to the less intellectual men through the *sensibilia* and figurative images. Accordingly, a vizier-philosopher-cum-author of advice treatises such as Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201-1274), who counseled an absolute tyrant like Hulagu Khan in his siege of Baghdad, is called the “Eleventh Intellect.” It is noteworthy that my application of the concept of *raison d'état* within the frame of pre-Modern Islamicate political thought does not presuppose a modern separation of fact and value and its corollary, *Realpolitik*.

10. Also, secondary matters of education, such as tutoring the prince about the court's etiquettes, bureaucratic principles, and other practical aspects of kingship might be included in task (A) (see Marlow 2015). A similar service is offered by Medieval European *Mirrors*, see Nederman 1998, 22. What is of essence to our discussion is that tasks (A) and (B) are *analytically* distinct affairs that are *politically* interconnected; and, that the vizier-philosopher-cum-author's primary service in task (A) is translation of theoretical wisdom's intelligibles into the advice treatise's metaphorical language.

Jalal al-Din Molavi's (1207-1273) anecdote signals a horizon of thought within which one may develop an understanding of advice literature as both a political practice and a literary genre in pre-Modern time. Perhaps his Dalqak rephrases the key concern of a thinker/statesman—say, a counselor or a vizier—who may author an advice treatise, yet, also, must offer practical counsels to the monarch at specific political occasions. Likewise, the ordinary citizens who dare to criticize a tyrant or the majority must have preoccupied themselves with the same concern: “How can one tell the truth to thee except under cover?” What is the makeup of this *cover*, we may ask, and what bearing does it have on the literary genre of the advice discourse? A set of questions stems from the same concern: which discursive practice may effectively and justly convey a critique or a counsel to the monarch? Should an advice treatise assume the task of political criticism and consultation? Let's assume that political praxis can indeed have a manual; then, should in its discursive modality and purpose an advice treatise resemble a *manual of governance*—that is, incorporate blunt narratives that supposedly mirror the reality of the moment and include precise rules that presumably enable the monarch to make decisions?

There exists a difference of status between the Shah and Dalqak—the under-*cover* truth-teller. Moreover, Dalqak lacks courage and cannot afford the risk of displeasing the “wrathful man.” He, therefore, literally hides under a cover. Overall, a monarch of the medieval Islamic era is absolute in sovereignty, and his rage can be lethal to the subject/vizier. It takes a strong will to truth and a great deal of courage—that is, the “political virtue par excellence” (Arendt 1998, 36)—to criticize the monarch blatantly; to tell him the whole truth forthrightly without flattering and without rhetorical dissemblance. The same courage is required when a citizen like Socrates criticizes his fellow citizens' opinions and manners of life—and, Socrates is ready to pay with his life for this blunt discursive practice. Respectively, we may expect that the specific social situation—that is, the non-democratic power relationship between the vizier-cum-author⁸ and the monarch—must have somehow affected and contextualized an advice treatise's mode of enunciation. The institutional arrangement must have required the author to apply a *cover*—to shield against the wrath of a king who, in his turn, lacks the courage of receptivity of the naked truth or candid critique. Here, however, the cover has to do with the treatise's very genre of enunciation. In other words, it is the rhetorical modality of the literary tradition of advice that *covers up* a truth—including the truth of practical and theoretical “wisdom” (see Marlow 2015)—, but at once and in part discloses it in a figurative manner, through rhetorical strategies such as allegorical fables, “timeless aphorisms,” and “didactic tales” that may “defy the ascription of definitive meaning and interpretation” (Yavari 2008, 47 and 52; see also 2014, 89-90).

Advice literature, therefore, represents a mode of discourse that is distinct from the modality of unembellished statement of the whole truth (*parrhesia*). As was previously implied, practical reasoning, with its two-fold concern for efficiency and justice, accounts for the discursive modality *and* purpose of medieval advice treatises. In addition to the nondemocratic power relationship between the vizier and the monarch, which makes frank engagement with the latter existentially dangerous, perhaps a second factor has historically necessitated the rhetorical genre of advice literature. From a medieval philosophical

What I consider to be *the* central theme of rationality in Ibn al-Muqaffa's thought, however, bestows content and continuity to the above set of writings, and simultaneously dictates Ibn al-Muqaffa's choice of the specific literary genre that expresses such content. This theme of rationality, it seems to me, harbors two components which together echo the Sasanian political thought: (A) the hierarchy of authority between reason, governance, and religion: the demand that political decisions and conducts, as well as religious creeds and codes, submit to reason. And, (B) the governance-religion brotherhood. While the latter doctrine *describes* the point that without a legitimacy-producing mass mentality the state's coercive dominance cannot last, the former principle *prescribes* that moral-practical rationality ought to supervise the affairs of the state, and that—through the rational/noble governance—reason must shape the good/noble religion qua mass mentality or the conscience of society (*din*).

Section 1, explores the literary genre of the advice literature and in doing so, extends a horizon for understanding the wisdom and expected political functions of many medieval Persian, Arabic, and Turkish works of advice, including the *Kalila wa Dimna*. Section 2, advances a reading of Ibn al-Muqaffa's candor (*parrhesia*) in the *Epistle Concerning the Entourage*—in which the central theme of rationality informs the forthright political advice. I propose that, qua a diplomatic counsel on state-building, the *Epistle* is issued from a normative perspective on politics which harbors the above point (A).⁶ This section briefly examines a spectrum of political theologies in Iranian and Irano-Islamic traditions of thought, and explores whether Ibn al-Muqaffa's idea of sovereignty incorporates a political theology (as a legitimization propaganda), or rather, his ideas are better understood in terms of a normative political theory.

Section 1; *Mirrors and the Rhetorical Enunciation of Truth*

“The *most perfect* advisor is he who does not conceal advice even if such counsel is to be depreciated by the king [...] The *most insightful* among the viziers are those who open the king's eyes on his faults by means of didactic fables.” (Ibn al-Muqaffa` 1989b, 341-42)

“The Shah was playing chess with Dalqak [the Jester]. Dalqak checkmated him: immediately the Shah's anger burst out. Dalqak cried, “Checkmate, checkmate!” and the haughty monarch threw the chessmen, one by one, at his head, saying, “Take it! Here is ‘checkmate’ for you, O scoundrel.” Dalqak restrained himself and only called for mercy. The Prince commanded him to play a second game: Dalqak was trembling like a naked man in bitter cold. He played the second game, and the Shah was defeated again. When the moment for saying “checkmate, checkmate” arrived, Dalqak jumped up and ran into a corner and in his fear hastily flung six rugs over himself. There he lay hidden beneath several cushions and six rugs, so that he might escape from the Shah's blows. The Shah exclaimed, “Hi, hi! What have you done? What is this?” He replied, “Checkmate, checkmate, checkmate, checkmate, O excellent Shah! O wrathful man who art wrapped in fire, O thou who art defeated by me, while I, defeated by thy Majesty's blows, am crying ‘checkmate, checkmate’ under thy house-furnishings! *How can one tell the truth to thee except under cover?*” (Molavi 1987, 1002)⁷

6. The *Epistle Concerning the Entourage* is an attempt to “resolve the question of legitimate rule, a question that loomed large with the third civil war and haunted the victorious Abbasids” (Yousefi 2017, 21). What I would like to highlight here, however, is not so much the intended political function of the *Epistle* as it is the presence of point (A) behind its advice.

7. The translation from Persian to English is Nicholson's (1925-40, 5: 3505-3316) with slight modifications. The same point of Molavi's anecdote—discussed in the succeeding paragraphs of Section 1—informs the Greek version of the story that is, the encounter between Philoxenus and Dionysius I, the tyrant of Syracuse (see Konstan 2004, 23).

transcends the particularities of nations and religions,² and that the hierarchy of authority between reason, governance, and religion must express itself in the everyday practice/art of politics.³ At least three different genres of writing can be traced in Ibn al-Muqaffa's oeuvre. (1) His translation of *Kalila wa Dimna* from Middle Persian into Arabic introduces a rhetorical genre which sets the paradigm for the subsequent *mirror for princes* literatures.⁴ (2) His *Great Book of Conduct* (*al-Adab al-kabir*) characterizes a political community that strives for the ideals of justice, friendship, and brotherhood under the supervision of the moral-practical reason. In Ibn al-Muqaffa's view, such rational leadership is best represented by the virtuous elites' excellence in judgement as well as *adab*—that is, the course of behavior that embodies rational striving in terms of prudence (*hilm*), righteousness (*salah*), and firm will (*azm*) (see Daiber 2015, 275, 282). The *Great Book of Conduct* tasks religion with facilitating the sovereign-citizen interactions, while the *Letter of Tansar* possesses invaluable hints on the judicious pattern of relationship between reason, governance and a noble religion that fulfils the above task properly.⁵ Distinct from his partial translation of Aristotle's writings on logic from Middle Persian to Arabic (Ibn al-Muqaffa` 1978), the *Great Book of Conduct* and the *Letter of Tansar* do not represent a demonstrative-logical genre. Likewise, their descriptive and dialectical styles of communicating theoretical themes distinguish them from the highly metaphorical and poetic language applied in the *Kalila wa Dimna*. (3) Among Ibn al-Muqaffa's writings, the *Epistle Concerning the Entourage* (*al-Risala fi al-sababa*) stands alone: it espouses a forthright style of diplomatic advice (*parrhesia*).

2. The belief that truth transcends national and religious particularities is a common theme in Ibn al-Muqaffa's oeuvre. In the Sasanian Khosrow I's words—translated from Pahlavi to Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa—"Once we contemplated our ancestor's ways of conduct [...], we studied those of the Indians' and Greeks'. Then, we adopted from them whatever virtuous, and made reason the judge of such examination and differentiation. Among their methods and procedures, we adopted whatever beneficial to us, and made it a custom or an article of the law [...], in so doing, our conscience did not disagree with us [...] we did not refrain from learning from others since confessing to what is right and true knowledge, and following it, are among the most important ways in which the kings obtain legitimacy in the citizens' eyes" (Miskawaih 2003, 137, my translation with modification).

3. In their respective ways (see Kraus 1933, 19-20), the Sasanian court's philosopher, Paul the Persian and the court's physician, Borzuya, stress the supremacy of reason over religion. Paul the Persian demands religion's compatibility with reason. He classifies theoretical and practical reasons similar to Aristotle's way (see Gutas 1983), and in doing so, he anticipates philosophers such as Farabi and Avicenna who classify revelation and the Sharia as subcategories of political science, itself a subdivision of practical reason (see Farabi 1969, 24, 79; 1968, 47; Avicenna 1880, 73-74). Borzuya, as introduced by Ibn al-Muqaffa`, however, chooses a rational life according to moral-practical rationality, and beyond all religions.

4. In Medieval Islamic societies the literature of advice to the king harbors titles such as *Andarḡ Nameh*, *Siyasat Nameh* and *Nasiba al-Muluk*. In Medieval Christian societies, *Speculum Principum* or *Mirror for the Prince* signal a comparable repertoire of the advice literature. Needless to say that to designate *Andarḡ Nameh* or *Nasibat al-Muluk* as *Mirrors* must not blur the nuances between these comparable traditions of political writing.

5. Judith Josephson (2005) resourcefully compares a set of key ideas in the *Great Book of Conduct* with the *Denkard*, the Zoroastrian encyclopedia. In doing so, she reveals the Iranian-Sasanian heritage in Ibn al-Muqaffa's thought. Hans Daiber (2015, 286) compares a number of themes in the *Great Book of Conduct* with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Reminding his reader that the Arabic translation of Aristotle's book was not available at Ibn al-Muqaffa's time, Daiber suggests that the Greek-Stoic sources of Ibn al-Muqaffa's thought are most likely filtered through Persian sources. It is of interest that Tansar, the high Zoroastrian priest and Ardashir-e Papakan's political advisor, is also identified as a follower of Plato's and Socrates' philosophy (Mas'udi 2005, 189). In a sense, the succeeding sections of the present study seek to better understand the ways in which Ibn al-Muqaffa`, Tansar, and their Sasanian thought, can also be rearticulated coherently in terms of Plato's and Socrates' philosophy.

A Gloss on the *Mirror*, and a Proposal for Understanding Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s Political Theory



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Abstract

This study proposes that a *central theme of rationality*—articulated in terms of a hierarchy of authority between reason, governance and religion—bestows content and continuity to the distinct genres of writing in Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s works. Putting an interpretive gloss on the advice literature, Section 1 explores the wisdom and expected political functions of the medieval *Mirrors*—including Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s *Kalila wa Dimna*—and locates the central theme behind the *Mirrors*' rhetorical style. Section 2 highlights Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s candor in the *Epistle Concerning the Entourage* (which is written in a non-metaphorical genre). Here, the *Epistle* is identified as a diplomatic counsel that reflects the central theme by taking a normative stance on politics-religion relationship. Finally, the article ventures a sketch of what Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s political theory might have looked like.¹

The Persian Ruzbeh-e Daduya (Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa`, d. 757) helped a cross-cultural transmission of Sasanian political thought to the nascent Abbasid State, believing that good governance requires the incorporation of perennial wisdom in statecraft. Such perennial wisdom involves persistent rational living as well as openness to truth. It implies that truth

1. One prefatory remark is in order before proceeding to our discussion of these issues. I should like to situate my approach in this study within the framework of critical theorizing. Distinct from, say, orientalist scholarships on Medieval Islamic texts, literally relics, historical phenomena etc., and their claims of political neutrality and objectivity, critical theorizing attempts at re-interpreting a text or a tradition from the standpoint of redemption. To put the point another way, in its hermeneutical treatment of the tradition/heritage, critical theorizing pursues a clear political objective—that is, contribution to a more just society *here and now*. Critical theorizing, therefore, embraces the fact that insofar as its incentives and outcomes are concerned, no articulation of what a significant text or a component of tradition really means can claim political innocence. For critical theoreticians, the significance of a text relies in part on its actual or potential; noble or ignoble; and, just or unjust impacts on the present-day life-world. To inquire about such significance—or, better, to effectively participate in the very makeup of a text-tradition's impact of the present moment—may require the critical theoreticians to adopt an inter-disciplinary approach and read a text against the grain. Accordingly, this article turns to Ibn al-Muqaffa` and re-interprets his thoughts in order to locate, and help revive, a rational component—the central theme—within the Irano-Islamic traditions of thinking about statecraft and religion. The [re-]emergence of rational views about the politics-religion relationship, it seems to me, is a prerequisite of redemption from the present-day decadence in many Islamic societies.