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## **CRITERIA FOR THE DISMISSAL OF OFFICIALS IN THE TĪMŪRID EMPIRE**

### **Abstract**

This article analyzes the criteria for the dismissal of officials during the Tīmūrid era based on historical sources. In particular, Khwāndamīr's *Dastūr al-wuzarā* ("The Manual of Viziers") and his other prominent work *Rawḡat al-ṣafā* ("The Garden of Purity") are examined as key sources within the scope of this study. These works not only recount historical events but also shed light on the ethical and administrative principles of public service, outlining the responsibilities and accountability of state officials.

Furthermore, the article explores how concepts such as authority distribution, loyalty, honesty, justice, and responsibility influenced the conduct of officials within the Tīmūrid administrative system. The main objective is to assess the role of dismissal criteria in ensuring political and social stability in the medieval period through the example of the Tīmūrid state and to evaluate this experience as a historical model that can contribute to a deeper understanding of modern theories of public administration.

**Keywords:** Tīmūrid Empire, public administration, officials, dismissal from office, political oversight, Khwāndamīr, *Dastūr al-wuzara*.

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## **КРИТЕРИИ УВОЛЬНЕНИЯ ЧИНОВНИКОВ В ТИМУРИДСКОЙ ИМПЕРИИ**

**Аннотация** В данной статье анализируются критерии увольнения чиновников в эпоху Тимуридов на основе исторических источников. В частности, рассматриваются такие ключевые труды Хвандемира, как «Дастур ал-вузара» («Наставление визирям») и «Равзат ас-сафа» («Сад чистоты»). Эти произведения не только повествуют о исторических событиях, но и проливают свет на этические и административные принципы государственной службы, раскрывая обязанности и ответственность государственных служащих.

Кроме того, в статье исследуется, как такие понятия, как распределение власти, верность, честность, справедливость и ответственность, влияли на поведение чиновников в административной системе Тимуридов. Основная цель — оценить роль критериев увольнения в обеспечении политической и социальной стабильности в средневековый период на примере государства Тимуридов, а также рассмотреть этот исторический опыт как модель, способную углубить понимание современных теорий государственного управления.

**Ключевые слова:** Империя Тимуридов, государственное управление, чиновники, отстранение от должности, политический надзор, Хвандемир, Дастур ал-вузара.

### **Introduction**

The governance practices of the Timurid Empire offer a rich case study in how premodern states exercised control over their bureaucracy. Among the many dimensions of governance, the

appointment and dismissal of high-ranking officials, especially viziers, played a critical role in maintaining political balance and administrative efficiency. Frequent reshuffling of officials, as recorded by contemporary historians such as Khwāndamīr, was both a practical and political tool aimed at preventing the consolidation of power and ensuring loyalty to the ruler.

### **Literature Review**

The primary sources for this study are Khwāndamīr's *Dastūr al-wuzarā* and *Rawḍzat al-ṣafā*, which provide detailed accounts of the careers of Timurid viziers. These texts are supplemented by other works such as Ḥabīb al-siyar, Majālis al-nafā'is, Mujmal-i Fāsiḥī, and contemporary chronicles. These sources document the various political, ethical, and personal factors that contributed to the dismissal of state officials. While earlier scholarship has largely focused on the grandeur of Timurid cultural achievements, this study shifts attention to the internal mechanisms of governance, particularly the accountability of state administrators.

### **Methodology**

This research is based on textual analysis of primary Persian sources, particularly manuscript variants of *Dastūr al-wuzarā*. Comparative manuscript study was employed to detect discrepancies between different copies (e.g., Tashkent, Tehran, Berlin). Biographical data of viziers was reconstructed using cross-references from multiple sources, with a special focus on terminologies of dismissal (e.g., qatl, azl, habs) and the political contexts surrounding them. This qualitative historical approach enables a nuanced understanding of how dismissal operated as a tool of governance.

### **Results**

The article identifies several key categories for the dismissal of officials: (1) untimely death, (2) voluntary resignation, and (3) dismissal by the ruler. Each category is substantiated with detailed historical cases, such as the battlefield deaths of viziers under Timur, the forced resignation of Khwāja Qutb al-Dīn Tāwūs, and the executions of corrupt officials under Sultan Husayn Mīrzā. The findings demonstrate that dismissals were rarely administrative formalities; they were often politically charged events with far-reaching consequences.

### **Discussion**

Timūrid rulers frequently replaced state officials. Khwāndamīr, in his *Dastūr al-wuzarā*, after listing the names of various Timūrid rulers, notes: "It was customary for these Sultāns to frequently appoint and dismiss viziers" [1, p. 93a]. Additionally, in volume VII of *Rawḍat al-ṣafā*, he remarks that Sultān Husayn Mīrzā also regularly removed and appointed viziers [2, 99b].

In our view, such frequent changes of viziers served to prevent them from amassing excessive power and to keep their influence in state governance in check. History shows that an official who remains in office for an extended period may eventually vie for supreme authority. Nonetheless, there were officials at the Timūrid court who held office for a long time. Among them were Khwāja Imad al-Dīn Mas'ud Simnani, who served in Amīr Tīmūr's dīvān for many years<sup>1</sup>; Khwāja Ghiyāth al-Dīn Pīr Ahmad Khwāfī [3, p. 221], who served under Shāhrukh Mīrzā; Khwāja Qutb al-Dīn Tāwūs Simnani, who served in the courts of Baysunghur Mīrzā and Abul-Qasim Babur Mīrzā for several years [4, pp. 380–390]; and Khwāja Qavam al-Dīn Nizām al-Mulk Khwāfī, who held office during the reigns of Sultān Abu Sa'id Mīrzā and Sultān Husayn Mīrzā.

Based on the analysis above, several criteria for dismissing officials are outlined in *Dastūr al-wuzarā*, which can be examined as follows.

#### **1. Dismissal due to the official's untimely death.**

Upon the death of any official, regardless of rank, all of their powers and responsibilities naturally come to an end. However, not all viziers mentioned in Khwāndamīr's works died of natural causes. Some who met an untimely death perished on the battlefield, while others died of natural causes.

For instance, Khwāja Imad al-Dīn Mas'ud Simnani died after being struck by an arrow during Amīr Tīmūr's siege of Baghdad. In 805 AH / 1402 CE, following the battle between Amīr Tīmūr and Bayezid Yildirim, Jalāl al-Islām, a vizier of Tīmūr, was killed by an arrow while participating in the capture of the fortress known as Ulugh Burlagh<sup>2</sup> in the same region. Khwāndamīr gives the

date of his death through a chronogram in verse<sup>3</sup>, calculating it as Rajab 805 AH / February 1403 CE [5, p.–342]. According to the *Zafarnāma*, this fortress was razed to the ground in retaliation for his death [6, p.–398].

Khwāja Ghiyāth al-Dīn Sayyid Ahmad ibn Khwāja Nizām al-Dīn Ahmad Andkhudi served as vizier to Shāhrukh Mīrzā for just over a year before passing away on 20 Sha‘bān 839 AH / 9 March 1436 CE in Arran (Karabakh) [7, p.–358]. Relying on the account of his son, Shams al-Dīn Muhammad, Khwāndamīr notes that Khwāja Ghiyāth al-Dīn Sayyid Ahmad’s coffin was brought to Herat and buried near the shrine of Pīr Khwāja Abulwalid [8, p.–358].

Mīrzā Ulugh Beg’s vizier, Nasir al-Dīn Nasrullah al-Khwāfī, fell ill around 845 AH / 1441 CE, and when physicians were unable to cure him, he died. According to Fasih Khwāfī, he was buried in Samarqand, near the mausoleum by Darb-i Shaykhzada [9, p.–306].

When Sultān Abu Sa‘id Mīrzā launched his campaign toward Iraq and Azerbaijan in 872 AH / 1469 CE, he summoned his vizier, Khwāja Na‘im al-Dīn Ni‘matullah Kuhistani, from Astarabad to Iraq. However, Khwāja Na‘im al-Dīn Ni‘matullah died at the beginning of the journey.

In 874 AH / 1474 CE, when Sultān Husayn Mīrzā launched a campaign against Mīrzā Yadgar Muhammad in Chinuran, he left Khwāja ‘Abdallah Akhtab in charge of the capital, Herat. Taking advantage of the situation, Khwāja ‘Abdallah collected excessive taxes from the population, leading to widespread discontent among the people of Herat. Upon hearing of this unrest, Sultān Husayn Mīrzā ordered his arrest. After managing to escape imprisonment, Khwāja ‘Abdallah fled to Hisar-i Shadman, where the local ruler, Sultān Mahmud Mīrzā, appointed him as his vizier.

On one occasion, Khwāja ‘Abdallah Akhtab set out to inspect tax collections in the region of Termez. Upon reaching one of the tributaries of the Amu Darya, he decided to cross the frozen and seemingly calm river on horseback. Despite the warnings of his companions, he spurred his horse forward, but the ice gave way, and he drowned [10, p.–393].

Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Muhammad Marwarid also died a natural death on 10 Rabi‘ al-Awwal 904 AH / 27 October 1498 CE. After his passing, Sultān Husayn Mīrzā offered condolences to his family and bestowed gifts upon them [11, p.–397]. Khwāndamīr also records that ‘Alī Shīr Navāi composed a rubā‘ī (quatrain) noting that Khwāja Shams al-Dīn had left behind two orphaned children [11, p.–397].

Sultān Husayn Mīrzā’s most renowned vizier, Khwāja Afzal al-Dīn Muhammad Kirmani, died in Rajab 910 AH / December 1504 CE. His funeral was attended by Badi‘ al-Zaman Mīrzā, Muzaffar Husayn Mīrzā, and all the Amīrs, scholars, and sayyids. He was buried near the shrine of Khwāja ‘Abdallah Ansari<sup>4</sup>, adjacent to the Fayḍ al-Anwār mausoleum.

His brother, Khwāja Amin al-Dīn Mahmud, who had transferred his service from Sultān Husayn Mīrzā to Muzaffar Husayn Mīrzā in the final years of his life, also passed away in early 910 AH / mid-1504 CE [9, p.–1067;].

Following the death of Sultān Husayn Mīrzā on 11 Dhu ‘l-Hijja 911 AH / 5 May 1506 CE, his last vizier, Khwāja Ahmad Darvish Qabiz, was appointed *ṣāhib-i dīvān* by Muzaffar Husayn Mīrzā. However, in Dhu ‘l-Hijja 912 AH / April 1507 CE, during a night gathering at the house of Amīr Yusuf ‘Ali Kukaldash, the former governor of Herat, Khwāja Ahmad Darvish Qabiz got into a quarrel with the Amīr’s brother, Tarkhanibek. The conflict escalated, and Tarkhanibek killed him with his own sword [4, p.–456].

Such was the extent of the suffering the people endured under Khwāja Ahmad’s tyranny that news of his death brought joy to the inhabitants of Herat. According to Khwāndamīr, when two people met, they would congratulate one another on his passing, or if a group gathered, they would curse him while recalling his injustices [4, p.–456].

## **2. Voluntary Resignation of an Official.**

Voluntary resignations by viziers serving in the Tīmūrid state administration are rarely attested in *Dastūr al-wuzarā*. One such instance involves Khwāja Qutb al-Dīn Ṭāwūs. When Sultān Husayn Mīrzā first ascended the throne of Khurasan, he appointed him to the post of *ashraf* (chief of protocol) [4, p.–388]. In Dhu ‘l-Hijja 874 AH / June 1470 CE, after Mīrzā Yadgar Muhammad temporarily seized control of Khurasan, he appointed Khwāja Qutb al-Dīn as head of the *Amorāt-i*

Dīwān (Department of Administration). However, when Sultān Husayn Mīrzā swiftly regained power and offered him once again a leadership role in the dīwān, Khwāja Qutb al-Dīn declined. He withdrew from politics and spent the rest of his life devoted to worship and agriculture [4, p.–389].

According to Khwādamīr, after Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Muhammad assumed the vizierate, Khwāja Qutb al-Dīn, fearing political rivalry, was forced to leave for Iraq and Azerbaijan, where he passed away in 900 AH / 1475 CE at the age of 72 [4, p.–388].

Another example is Khwāja Kamal al-Dīn Husayn, who was appointed vizier to Sultān Husayn Mīrzā by Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Muhammad. His tenure was brief, and as Khwādamīr notes, “because of his profound knowledge and humility, he could not bear the dangers of this office” [4, p.–443]. For this reason, he voluntarily resigned and returned to the city of Marv.

### **3. Dismissal by the Ruler.**

This was one of the most frequently observed circumstances, and in some cases, it even led to the execution of viziers. It can be said that the majority of punished viziers incurred the ruler’s wrath as a result of the efforts, cons Pīracies, or false accusations of other officials.

In 809 AH / 1407 CE, after Khwāja Ghiyāth al-Dīn Sālār Simnānī was appointed vizier in place of Sayyid Fakhr al-Dīn under Shāhrukh Mīrzā, many Amīrs and officials bore hostility toward him [3, p.–187]. In 811 AH / 1408 CE [3, p.–199], Sayyid Fakhr al-Dīn managed to prove that Khwāja Ghiyāth al-Dīn had embezzled 300 tūmāns from the treasury and had committed numerous acts of betrayal toward his staff, leading to his execution [1, p.–94a].

Sayyid Fakhr al-Dīn was then reinstated. However, when Mīrzā Baysunghur audited his work, it was discovered that 200 tūmāns had been misused from the treasury [4, p.–347–349]. As a result, he was dismissed from office with the condition that the sum be repaid within a year [4, p.–351].

During this period, he suffered from constant grief, anxiety, and various illnesses, ultimately dying of dropsy – a condition said to have developed after jaundice – on 25 Jumada al-Awwal 820 AH / 10 July 1417 CE [3, p.–242]. As recorded in Dastūr al-wuzarā, many prominent figures of Khurasan and Iraq reportedly congratulated one another at condolence gatherings held for his death<sup>5</sup> [4, p.–351], as during his tenure as vizier, he had forcibly extracted large sums from his subordinates – at times amounting to as much as 300 tūmāns [1, p.–94a].

After the death of Shāhrukh Mīrzā on 25 Dhu ’l-Hijja 850 AH / 13 March 1447 CE, Khwāja Ghiyāth al-Dīn Pīr Ahmad Khwāfi briefly entered the service of ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Mīrzā, and later that of Sultān Muhammad Mīrzā, the son of Baysunghur Mīrzā. After this period, Khwāja Ghiyāth al-Dīn set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca [4, p.–356]. Upon his return, he was arrested in 857 AH / 1453 CE by order of Abulqasim Babur Mīrzā, who had defeated Sultān Muhammad Mīrzā [4, p.–356]. Babur Mīrzā’s retainers also extorted 200 tūmāns from him [4, p.–357].

As a result of psychological pressure and torture, Khwāja Ghiyāth al-Dīn died in captivity and was buried near the shrine of Shaykh Muhammad Khwāfi in the Fayḍ al-Anwār cemetery [4, p.–357].

When Sultān Abu Sa’id Mīrzā set out for Astarabad to suppress the revolt of Sultān Husayn Mīrzā, he left one of his viziers, Khwāja Mu’izz al-Dīn Shirazi, as his deputy in Herat [4, p.–370]. During the Sultān’s absence, Khwāja Mu’izz al-Dīn embezzled a significant portion of the state treasury. Upon returning to Herat and learning of this, Sultān Abu Sa’id ordered him to be thrown into a cauldron of boiling water [4, p.–371].

As Khwādamīr reports, “the cruelty and aggression of Khwāja Mu’izz al-Dīn Shirazi were washed away by the waters of justice and charity” [4, p.–371].

In Rabi’ al-Awwal 865 AH / December 1460 CE, Khwāja Muzaffar al-Dīn Mukhtār Sabzavari entered the service of Sultān Abu Sa’id Mīrzā. Although he was considered superior to many other viziers, he lacked sufficient expertise in the critical operations of the siyāq dīwān (fiscal administration) [4, p.–372]. As a result, not long after his appointment, he was accused of negligence and mismanagement and was subsequently dismissed from office [4, p.–372].

Around the same time, another official with a similar name – Khwāja Muzaffar Mukhtār Sabzavari – who had also begun working in the dīwān, was removed from his post after a group of dīwān staff substantiated charges brought against him [1, p.–96a].

Khwāja Isma‘il Khwājani, nicknamed “the Wolf,” was dismissed from his post and imprisoned by Sultān Abu Sa‘id Mīrzā in 868 AH / 1464 CE on charges of embezzling state funds [6, p.–544;]. In order to secure his release from prison, he was forced to surrender all of his property and was never reappointed as vizier [4, p.–377].

Another case involved Khwāja ‘Ala’ al-Dīn ‘Ali al-Sānāyī, a vizier under Sultān Husayn Mīrzā, who was known for his harshness in tax collection. He deceived his associates and mistreated the poor and the helpless [3: 97b]. His conduct drew disapproval even from ‘Alī Shīr Navāī [4, p.–397]. After returning all misappropriated funds to the dīwān, he was imprisoned [1, p.–97b]. According to Khwāndamīr, he spent six years in custody [1, p.–97b], during which he memorized the Qur‘an and studied the qaṣīda of Khwāja Salman Sawajī [4, p.–399].

He was executed on the same day as another vizier, Khwāja Sayf al-Dīn Muzaffar Shabankara. The latter had been accused by other dīwān officials of theft and embezzlement of state funds, and Sultān Husayn Mīrzā ordered his execution as well [4, p.–399]. When asked about Khwāja al-Sunayī at the same time, Sultān Husayn likewise commanded his death. Consequently, Khwāja ‘Ala’ al-Dīn ibn ‘Ali al-Sunayī was hanged at the entrance to Herat’s Chārsu market, while Khwāja Sayf al-Dīn Muzaffar Shabankara was executed at the Malik Gate of Herat [4, p.–399–400]. According to Ḥabīb al-siyar, the execution took place in Muḥarram 891 AH / January 1486 CE [9, p.–1066].

Even the most influential viziers of Sultān Husayn Mīrzā – Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Muhammad and Khwāja Qawam al-Dīn Nizam al-Mulk – were ultimately dismissed from office by the ruler. Over the course of three years following 892 AH / 1486–87 CE, Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Muhammad's improper conduct toward ‘Alī Shīr Navāī, as well as his disparaging treatment of other Amīrs and viziers, led to a growing number of opponents. As a result, Sultān Husayn Mīrzā’s attitude toward him changed, and he ordered Majd al-Dīn’s dismissal and the confiscation of his property [4, p.–410].

Despite this, Sultān Husayn Mīrzā did not wish any harm to befall him. Nevertheless, Khwāja Majd al-Dīn’s adversaries demanded a large sum of money from him, threatening execution if he failed to pay [4, p.–417]. Unable to meet this demand, Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Muhammad fled to the Hijaz, but died shortly after reaching the city of Tabuk [4, p.–417]. According to Ḥabīb al-siyar, his death occurred in Dhu ‘l-Qa‘da 899 AH / August 1494 CE [9, p.–821].

After the dismissal of Khwāja Majd al-Dīn, the influence of Khwāja Qawam al-Dīn Nizam al-Mulk steadily increased, as there was no other vizier in the realm with comparable prestige. During his tenure, regional governors ceased paying taxes to the capital. In an attempt to offset the resulting shortfall in state revenue, Khwāja Qawam al-Dīn collected two years’ worth of taxes at once from artisans and farmers in Herat [4, p.–429].

Meanwhile, after learning of Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Muhammad’s departure, Khwāja Afzal al-Dīn Muhammad returned from Astarabad to Herat in Ramadan 903 AH / May 1498 CE and began actively working against Khwāja Qawam al-Dīn [4, p.–429]. He regularly reported the vizier’s errors and shortcomings to Sultān Husayn Mīrzā. As a result, on 21 Ramadan 903 AH / 13 May 1498 CE, Khwāja Qawam al-Dīn’s son-in-law, Khwāja ‘Imād al-Islām ibn Khwāja Muhammad ‘Atiq Allah, was arrested and tortured [4, p.–430].

Subsequently, in Shawwal 903 AH / June 1498 CE, Khwāja Qawam al-Dīn, along with his two sons – Khwāja Kamal al-Dīn Husayn and Khwāja Rashid al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Malik – and several of their associates, was imprisoned in the fortress of Ikhtiyār al-Dīn [1, p.–99b]. Prior to their arrest, Sultān Husayn Mīrzā had consulted with ‘Alī Shīr Navāī, who supported the decision [9, p.–860]. Khwāja Afzal al-Dīn Muhammad then confiscated all their property and delivered it to the state treasury [9, p.–861].

A few days later, Khwāja Kamal al-Dīn and Khwāja Rashid al-Dīn escaped from the fortress, but when they were recaptured by the Sultān’s men, Sultān Husayn Mīrzā ordered the execution of

Khwāja Qawam al-Dīn Nizam al-Mulk, his two sons, and their close followers – Khwāja ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, Khwāja Nizam al-Dīn Kurd, and Khwāja ‘Imād al-Islām. They were put to death in Dhu ‘l-Qa‘da 903 AH / July 1498 CE [1, p.–100a].

This event became known in historical sources as the *Kharābī-yi Mulk* (“The Ruin of the State”), a phrase whose abjad (numerical) value corresponds to the year 903 [4, p.–432].

### Conclusion.

The complexity and sophistication of the Tīmūrid administrative system is clearly reflected in the established criteria for assessing officials’ performance and dismissing them from office. These criteria functioned as essential principles aimed at ensuring political stability, enforcing just governance, and strengthening a sense of responsibility among public servants in medieval Central Asia. Drawing on Khwāndamīr’s *Dastūr al-wuzarā* and *Rawzat al-ṣafā*, this article has examined the expectations placed on officials during the Tīmūrid era, as well as the circumstances – ranging from ethical failures to administrative incompetence – that led to their dismissal.

In his writings, Khwāndamīr emphasizes justice, honesty, knowledge, political foresight, and loyalty as core virtues required for public service. Officials who lacked any of these qualities, or who abused their position – even those of the highest rank – were subject to dismissal. This demonstrates that during the Tīmūrid period, personal integrity and moral conduct were decisive factors in political life. Accountability among state officials was under constant evaluation, guided by a combination of written and oral traditions, religious norms, and political interests.

The Tīmūrid experience further illustrates that the process of dismissal carried greater political and ethical significance than appointment itself, as poor decisions could undermine the entire administrative structure. The analysis presented in this article suggests that medieval governance practices, particularly the criteria for dismissing officials, can serve as a valuable theoretical model for evaluating the conduct of modern civil servants.

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