

MORAL-ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNANCE IN ANCIENT EASTERN STATES: THE BABURIDS, SELJUQS, AND SAFFARIDS

Shonazarov Jamshid Shukhratovich

PhD in Philosophy, Associate Professor Department of Social Sciences

Shahrisabz State Pedagogical Institute Uzbekistan

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8046-029X>

e-mail: jshonazarov1981@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper investigates the moral-ethical principles underlying governance in the Baburid, Seljuq, and Saffarid states of the Ancient East. Integrating historical chronicles, philosophical treatises, and contemporary scholarship, the study analyzes how values such as justice, compassion, wisdom, and honesty shaped administrative culture, state-building traditions, and rulers' legitimacy. The research applies comparative-historical methods to reveal both commonalities and distinctions in social ethics, bureaucratic accountability, and legal norms. Findings suggest lasting influence of spiritual ideals in governance across diverse regions and eras.

Keywords: Ancient East, Baburids, Seljuqs, Saffarids, ethics, governance, justice, social responsibility

Аннотация

В статье исследуются нравственно-этические принципы, лежащие в основе управления в государствах Бабуридов, Сельджуков и Саффаринов Древнего Востока. На основе исторических хроник, философских трактатов и современных научных исследований анализируется, каким образом такие ценности, как справедливость, сострадание, мудрость и честность формировали административную культуру, государственные традиции и легитимность власти правителей. В работе применяется сравнительно-исторический метод, что позволяет выявить как сходства, так и различия в социальной этике, ответственности бюрократии и правовых нормах. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о долговременном влиянии духовных идеалов на управление в различных регионах и эпохах.

Ключевые слова: Древний Восток, Бабуриды, Сельджуки, Саффарины, этика, государственное управление, справедливость, социальная ответственность.

INTRODUCTION

Governance in ancient Eastern states evolved amid rich intellectual, spiritual, and cultural traditions that saw rulers as both political leaders and moral exemplars. From the formation of the Baburid Empire in South Asia to the rise of the Seljuqs in Persia and Anatolia and the Saffarids in eastern Iran, governance was grounded in a framework of religious, social, and philosophical values. Leaders recognized that consolidating effective rule required not only military and economic power but also foundations of virtue, wisdom, and social trust. Historic sources such as Babur's memoirs, literary chronicles, and legal codes illuminate the pivotal role of moral and ethical principles in the definition of legitimate authority, social cohesion, and administrative effectiveness¹.

Classical thinkers, including Saadi, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina, and court literature emphasized that rulers' moral character—justice (adl), mercy (rahm), honesty (amal), and wisdom (hikmat)—was at the heart of statecraft. Such standards continued to shape public expectations of governance, as well as the design of elite training, bureaucracy, and law.

METHODS

This research adopts a comparative-historical methodology, grouping the Baburid, Seljuq, and Saffarid experiences by their approach to spiritual ethics in administration. Primary sources—including dynastic chronicles, legal treatises, and mosque records—are reviewed alongside modern Uzbek and international academic literature. Key documents include Babur's "Baburnama", Seljuq legal codes, Saffarid administration records, and philosophical texts from the Ancient East².

The study utilizes thematic analysis to systematically uncover both universal and unique aspects of ethical governance among the Baburids, Seljuqs, and Saffarids. This approach begins by examining how key virtues—such as justice, wisdom, compassion, and honesty—are explicitly articulated in foundational documents, legal records, official decrees, and the speeches of rulers. For instance, Babur's memoirs and the Seljuq edicts often frame state laws as an extension of moral duty, reiterating that the welfare of the population depends upon the integrity and righteousness of those in power. Rulers across these dynasties consistently emphasized the paramount importance of justice and mercy, presenting these qualities as indispensable to legitimate authority and societal harmony.

A second line of analysis focuses on administrative practices, exploring how morality is embedded in the daily enactment of governance. Mechanisms for selecting officials, structuring bureaucratic hierarchies, and adjudicating disputes were constructed to reward honesty, competence, and loyalty, while discouraging corruption, favoritism, and abuse of

¹ https://uz.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boburiylar_davlati

² https://uz.wikipedia.org/wiki/Safforiylar_davlati

office. The use of ceremonial appointments—often accompanied by public oaths or religious blessings—reinforced the link between ethical conduct and governmental responsibility. Charitable policies, educational patronage, and inclusive laws promoted not only the physical wellbeing but also the spiritual growth of society, showing that administration was regarded as fundamentally connected to moral stewardship³.

Finally, the study analyzes social mechanisms that ensured accountability and mediated the distribution of power. These mechanisms included advisory councils (shura), community assemblies, and the regular consultation of religious scholars and elderly leaders. Such practices created a framework in which collective wisdom and societal consensus played central roles in major decisions. Legal checks, transparent tax systems, and avenues for public grievance provided the population with tools to hold rulers and officials answerable for their actions. The convergence of moral ideals and practical governance in these systems fostered trust, social order, and resilience—demonstrating that ethical values were not limited to philosophy but were actively materialized in day-to-day administration and policy development⁴.

Overall, these thematic lenses enable a nuanced and multi-dimensional understanding of the ways ancient Eastern societies translated moral principles into concrete administrative realities, creating enduring legacies for ethical governance⁵.

RESULTS

Baburid statecraft grounded legitimacy in the ruler's personal virtue, intellectual wisdom, and commitment to justice and benevolence. Babur's treatises defined state power as a trust granted by God, to be used for the well-being of all subjects. Administrative practices emphasized inclusivity and tolerance—exemplified by Akbar's abolition of the jizya tax and his religious reforms—to build harmony among Hindus and Muslims. Charity (zakat), promotion of learning, and support for the poor were core state policies. Bureaucratic appointments valued merit and uprightness, and court life centered on hospitality, scholarly debate, and the encouragement of culture⁶.

Seljuq rule developed sophisticated systems of checks and balances, from grand vizier appointments to the advisory "shura" system. Here, state legitimacy depended on consultative decision-making, respect for religious scholars, and protection of the rights of all citizens—especially the weak. Seljuq law enshrined both Islamic principles (adl, ihsan) and Turkic

³ Gulyamova, G. (2021). Moral norms of the aristocratic environment of the Babur era. *International Scientific Journal of Media and Communications in Central Asia*, 1, 64–71.

⁴ Tashkulov, D. Ancient Eastern Scholars on State Governance // *Eurasian Research Bulletin*. – 2022. – №14. – P. 234–242. – URL: <https://geniusjournals.org/index.php/erb/article/view/2667>

⁵ <https://san.beck.org/AB14-IslamCulture750-1095.html>

⁶ Gulyamova, G. Moral norms of the aristocratic environment of the Babur era. *International Scientific Journal of Media and Communications in Central Asia*, 2021.1, 64–71.

traditions of communal solidarity. Elders, jurists, and religious leaders participated in governance; social and economic questions were resolved through consensus. Justice in taxation, land-use, and legal processes was prominent in administrative records⁷.

The Saffarids' rise was rooted in popular movements seeking justice and social equity. Leaders such as Ya'qub bin Lays as-Saffar gained legitimacy by advocating discipline, honesty, and spiritual piety. Governance was marked by the reduction of arbitrary taxation, accountability of officials, the abolition of corruption, and the protection of faith and community. Merit-based appointments and rewards for self-sacrifice were institutionalized. Chronicles document their attention to religious integrity, courage, and public consultation⁸.

In the governance systems of the Baburid, Seljuq, and Saffarid dynasties, classical sources consistently highlight the profound interconnectedness between administrative process and moral norms. Rather than seeing bureaucracy solely as a tool for managing power, these cultures embedded spiritual and ethical standards directly into the workings of statecraft. Appointments to key positions were not just based on lineage or military achievement, but fundamentally relied on assessments of honesty, wisdom, and devotion to public service. This meritocratic spirit was reinforced by written law codes and decrees, which were not merely vehicles for centralized control but also mechanisms for disciplining officials and promoting fairness throughout the bureaucracy⁹.

Ritual public ceremonies and acts of charity were core features of governance, helping to foster bonds among diverse communities and reinforce a sense of mutual obligation between rulers and the ruled. Annual festivals, public audiences, and state-sponsored welfare programs were often crafted as both religious observances and explicit demonstrations of ethical commitment. These events not only legitimized authority in the eyes of the populace, but also maintained a living connection between cultural values and political institutions.

A similar spirit guided the inclusive policies toward education and the encouragement of tolerance among various religious and ethnic groups under royal rule. Court patronage of scholars, poets, and scientists ensured that learning and enlightenment were considered royal duties on a par with military and economic defense. Administrators and judges were urged to arbitrate justly, irrespective of status or origin, thus laying a social foundation for both pragmatic administration and the pursuit of virtue.

Ultimately, governance was regarded as both a pragmatic undertaking and a spiritual calling, with effective rule seen as possible only when state efficiency and ethical values operated in harmony. The legacy of these intertwined principles is documented not just in administrative

⁷ <https://san.beck.org/AB14-IslamCulture750-1095.html>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saffarid_dynasty

⁹ Meijer C. Good Governance: the Ideal of Kingship in the Ancient Near East // Münster: Universität Münster. —

URL: [https://www.uni-](https://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/altoriental/good_governance_the_ideal_of_kingship_in_the_ancient_near_east_by_cindy_meijer-1.pdf)

[muenster.de/imperia/md/content/altoriental/good_governance_the_ideal_of_kingship_in_the_ancient_near_east_by_cindy_meijer-1.pdf](https://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/altoriental/good_governance_the_ideal_of_kingship_in_the_ancient_near_east_by_cindy_meijer-1.pdf)

records, but also in the cultural memory, poetry, and philosophical literature that celebrated rulers who embodied both moral and practical excellence.

DISCUSSION

The study demonstrates that in Ancient Eastern states, governance was fundamentally perceived as a moral and ethical undertaking; the legitimacy of authority was derived as much from ethical conduct as from dynastic heritage or conquest. In the empires of the Baburids, Seljuqs, and Saffarids, rulers and their advisors institutionalized codes of conduct that fused spiritual ideals with administrative discipline. These dynasties sought to cultivate a spirit of justice, mercy, and public responsibility not merely through abstract principles, but through everyday policies and the structure of official life¹⁰.

A comparative analysis of these dynasties reveals that despite facing diverse social and geopolitical contexts, their leaders broadly converged on several foundational points. First, the ruler's personal moral excellence—his justice, honesty, and compassion—was seen as central to the stability and vitality of the entire state apparatus. Second, law and bureaucracy were understood not just as instruments of control, but as vehicles for promoting social good, ensuring fairness, and elevating the well-being of all subjects. Administrative systems and legal codes were explicitly harnessed to uphold justice, prevent corruption, and foster accountability throughout the state.

Third, public welfare, charity, and education were regarded as essential duties of government. Investment in schools, religious institutions, and community support networks benefited both the social fabric and administrative effectiveness of the state. Fourth, rituals and legal reforms—from public ceremonies to the widespread practice of consultation and consensus-building—helped promote transparency, collective accountability, and communion between the ruling elite and society at large.

Modern scholarship confirms that the cumulative effect of these principles was the fostering of high levels of social cohesion and mutual trust, the mitigation of internal conflict, and the establishment of enduring models of Eastern statehood that would influence both contemporary and subsequent generations. In these societies, the harmony of moral ideals and pragmatic governance was not only a source of dynastic legitimacy but a foundation for resilient and adaptive civilization.

CONCLUSION

Ancient Eastern governance under the Baburids, Seljuqs, and Saffarids demonstrates that durable state systems are built upon the fusion of moral-ethical ideals and administrative

¹⁰ Tashkulov D. Ancient Eastern Scholars on State Governance // Eurasian Research Bulletin. – 2022. – №14. – P. 234–242. – URL: <https://geniusjournals.org/index.php/erb/article/view/2667>

effectiveness. Religious values, philosophical ideals, and community consensus intertwined to enhance the legitimacy, justice, and productivity of these societies. These case studies offer valuable lessons for contemporary governance reform, emphasizing the continuing relevance of virtue, honesty, and collective responsibility.

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