

# The appointment of wazirs in the Timurid empire

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**Abstract:** The article examines the appointment and dismissal of wazirs in the Timurid Empire (1370–1507), emphasizing the rigorous selection process employed by Amir Timur (1336–1405) and his successors. The rulers prioritized noble lineage, intelligence, administrative skills, and military awareness in their choices, as documented in historical sources like “«Tuzukat-i timuri»” and “«Dastūr al-wuzarā»”.

One key observation is the frequent rotation of wazirs. This practice, noted by historians such as Khwandamir (1474–1535), was likely a mechanism to prevent officials from amassing excessive power and challenging royal authority. However, some officials managed to hold long-term positions due to their exceptional administrative capabilities, strategic importance, and noble ancestry.

The article categorizes the appointment of wazirs into three main patterns. The first category involves the continuous service of individuals from esteemed backgrounds, particularly from regions like Simnan, Khwāf, and Kerman. Persian language proficiency and an understanding of local governance were essential qualifications. Several prominent wazirs, such as Khwāja Imad al-Dīn Mas’ud Simnani and Khwāja Ghiyath al-Dīn Pir Ahmad Khwāfi, rose to power through this route.

The second category highlights the selection of highly talented individuals, irrespective of their noble lineage. Specialists in finance, administration, taxation, and military logistics were particularly valued. Figures such as Khwāja Na’im al-Dīn Ni’matullah Kuhistani and Khwāja Abu Ishaq gained prominence due to their expertise and problem-solving abilities.

The third category explores appointments facilitated by influential patrons. Some wazirs secured positions through connections with powerful amirs, poets, or court figures. While patronage played a role, personal merit and competency were also considered.

Overall, the article underscores the dynamic nature of Timurid governance, where meritocracy coexisted with aristocratic privilege, ensuring a balance of power within the imperial administration.

**Keywords:** Timurids, wazirs, «Dastūr al-wuzarā», «Rawdat al-safa», «Āthār al-wuzarā», Amir of the Supreme Dīwān, Dīwān, Sahib-i Tawjih.

## Introduction:

## DISCUSSION AND RESULT

The rulers of the Timurid Empire paid special attention to the appointment of state officials, particularly wazirs. Amir Timur himself approached the appointment of wazirs with great scrutiny and vigilance. This is also mentioned in the «Tuzukat-i timuri», where it is emphasized that wazirs should be chosen based on their noble and pure lineage, intelligence and wisdom, awareness of both the

military and the common people, patience, and commitment to peace. Amir Timur and his descendants followed these advices.

The Timurid rulers frequently replaced state officials. In «Dastūr al-wuzarā», Khwandamir states that after listing the names of the Timurid rulers, he emphasizes, «These sultans generally appointed and dismissed wazirs frequently». Additionally, in the seventh volume of «Rawdat al-safa», he mentions that Sultan Husayn Mirza (1438–1506) often dismissed and reappointed

wazirs.

In our opinion, this constant rotation of wazirs was necessary to prevent them from gaining excessive power and to keep their influence in check within the administration. History shows that officials who remained in office for too long could eventually challenge supreme authority.

Nevertheless, some officials in the Timurid court held their positions for an extended period. Among them were Khwāja Imad al-Dīn Mas’ud Simnani, who served in Amir Timur’s Dīwān for many years; Khwāja Ghiyas al-Dīn Pir Ahmad Khwāfi, a trusted official under Shahrukh Mirza; Khwāja Qutb al-Dīn Tawus Simnani, who served in the courts of Baysunghur Mirza and Abu’l-Qasim Babur Mirza; and Khwāja Qiwan al-Dīn Nizam al-Mulk Khwāfi, who held high positions under Sultan Abu Sa’id Mirza and Sultan Husayn Mirza.

Naturally, the question arises as to what qualities the Timurid rulers considered when appointing wazirs and for what reasons they dismissed them. These issues are also discussed in «Dastūr al-wuzarā» and other sources.

The appointment mechanism can be divided into several categories:

### **1. The continuous service of esteemed or noble lineage representatives in the royal court.**

For this, we can mention the wazirs from Simnan, Khwāf, and Kerman. In the Timurid Empire, accounting and administrative record-keeping were conducted in Persian and based on sedentary culture. Beatrice Manz emphasizes that, regardless of their ethnic origin, those working in the Dīwān were required to have a strong command of the Persian language and a deep understanding of local culture. In our opinion, this is why there were many Iranian specialists in the Timurid court, some of whom rose to high-ranking positions.

For example, Khwandamir, when providing information about Khwāja Imad al-Dīn Mas’ud Simnani, emphasizes that he was among the notable figures of Simnan. Accordingly, his father, Khwāja Yahya Simnani, was also a wazir of Amir Timur. Another wazir of Amir Timur from Simnan was Khwāja Ali Simnani. Khwāja Ghiyas al-Dīn Solor, who was constantly engaged in administrative affairs for the development of the empire in Amir Timur’s court and later entered the service of Shahrukh Mirza, was also from Simnan. Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Ali Bolicha, another prominent noble from Simnan, was appointed as a wazir during the reign of Shahrukh Mirza. Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Ali Bolicha’s brother, Khwāja Wajih al-Dīn Mahmud ibn Ismail Simnani, initially served in the courts of Baysunghur Mirza and Alaiddaula. After Abu’l-Qasim Babur Mirza ascended the throne of Khorasan, he took

him into his service and appointed him to the high position of Amir of the Supreme Dīwān. After Abu’l-Qasim Babur, his son Mirza Shah Mahmud also entrusted him with managing the financial affairs of the empire. Khwāja Qutb al-Dīn Tawus Simnani’s lineage traced back to the renowned Bahromi tribe of Simnan on his father’s side and the Bolicha tribe on his mother’s side. According to Khwandamir, it was precisely this noble ancestry that elevated his status. Khwāja Nizam al-Dīn Bakhtiyar Simnani, before being appointed as a wazir of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, served as the governor of the city of Badghis during the reign of Sultan Abu Sa’id Mirza.

Security specialists also held significant positions in the Timurid court. One of the most famous ministers from among the Khwāfis, as mentioned above, was Khwāja Ghiyath al-Dīn Pir Ahmad Khwāfi, the wazir of Shahrukh Mirza. In 820 AH / 1418 CE, he was appointed to oversee property affairs. Mirzo Ulugh Beg’s wazir, Nasir al-Dīn Nasrullah Khwāfi, as well as Sultan Husayn Mirza’s wazirs, Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Muhammad (the son of Khwāja Ghiyath al-Dīn Pir Ahmad Khwāfi) and Khwāja Qavam al-Dīn Nizam al-Mulk Khwāfi, rose to the highest ranks of the state administration. This indicates that officials from the regions of Simnan and Khwāf held significant influence and prestige from the time of Amir Timur to Sultan Husayn Mirza.

We can also see that some wazirs from Kerman rose to high positions. Khwāja Burhan al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Hamid, the son of Haji Mahmud, who served as mustawfi during the time of Shahrukh Mirza, came from Kerman to Khorasan during the reign of Sultan Abu Sa’id Mirza. He was appointed as Sahib-i Tawjih in the high council by Sultan Abu Sa’id Mirza. Prior to this, he served as the head of the financial and accounting affairs of the wazirs in Iraq. Another wazir of Abu Sa’id Mirza, Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Muhammad Marwarid, was described by Khwandamir as «not only of noble lineage but also one of the distinguished figures of Kerman in terms of his status and prestige». After suffering oppression from the Turkmens in Kerman, he moved to Herat, where Sultan Abu Sa’id Mirza appointed him as a wazir. Another famous wazir from this region was Khwāja Afzal al-Dīn Muhammad Kermani, a close associate of Alisher Navoi and a renowned wazir of Sultan Husayn Mirza. Regarding him, Khwandamir stated, «In his praiseworthy biography, he was the leader among the great figures of the world». Khwāja Afzal al-Dīn’s brother, Khwāja Amin al-Dīn Mahmud (d. 910/1504), also began serving in Sultan Husayn Mirza’s administration in 889/1484.

Additionally, Ghiyath al-Dīn Khwandamir noted that some wazirs were of noble lineage. In particular, he described Khwāja Ghiyath al-Dīn Sayyidi Ahmad ibn

Khawāja Nizam al-Dīn Ahmad Andkhudi (better known as Khawāja Sayyidi Ahmad Shirazi), who was appointed as a wazir by Shahrukh Mirza in 838 AH / 1434 CE, as follows: «Among his peers and contemporaries, he stood out for his intelligence, respectability, noble ancestry, and the high status of his forefathers». Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi also emphasized his noble lineage, the greatness of his family, and the high status of his father. Regardīng his son, Khawāja Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Khawāja Sayyidi Ahmad Shirazi, who served as a wazir to Sultan Abu Sa’id, Khwandamir stated: «With his noble ancestry and virtuous character, he was the leader among the wazirs of the world». Regardīng his son, Khawāja Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Khawāja Sayyidi Ahmad Shirazi, who served as a wazir to Sultan Abu Sa’id, Khwandamir stated: «With his noble ancestry and virtuous character, he was the leader among the wazirs of the world».

Another wazir of Shahrukh Mirza, Sayyid Imad al-Dīn Mahmud Janabadi, was the son of Sayyid Zayn al-Abidīn, who had also served as a wazir during the reigns of Amir Timur and Shahrukh Mirza. Sayyid Imad al-Dīn was later appointed as a wazir by Mirzo Ulugh Beg in 825 AH / 1448 CE. Khawāja Ala al-Dīn ibn Ali al-Sanayi, who rose to the position of wazir in the early years of Sultan Husayn Mirza’s reign, was from the nobility of the Boharz region. In «Dastūr al-wuzarā», he is described as follows: «His honorable lineage traced back to the Barmakids, and he always took pride in this». Another wazir of Sultan Husayn Mirza, Khawāja Sayf al-Dīn Muzaffar Shabankara, was described as «one of the great nobles of the lands of Fars and Iraq». Khawāja Atiqullah, who was appointed as a wazir in the early years of Sultan Husayn Mirza’s reign, was also of noble descent. His father, Mawlana Nasir al-Dīn Muhammad, served as a muhtasib during the time of Shahrukh Mirza. Mawlana Nasir al-Dīn Muhammad’s father, that is, Khawāja Atiqullah’s grandfather, was also considered one of the great figures of his time. In «Dastūr al-wuzarā», he is described as «Janab-i Shariat wa Fazilatpanah» (a master of religious law and a refuge of virtue), which indicates that he was a distinguished scholar of Islamic sciences. Additionally, his mother was also from a distinguished family of the time, being a granddaughter of Khawāja Sharaf al-Dīn Haji. Khwandamir reports that Sayyid Zayn al-Abidīn Mahmud’s father «carried out great and important tasks for the administration over a long period.» Regardīng his mother, he states, «She was from the household of the Sayyids of Khujand. The renowned figure, Sayyid Zayn al-Abidīn Khujandi, was her brother». Sayyid Zayn al-Abidīn Mahmud first served as a wazir to Amir Mahmud Burunduq Barlos. After

learning about his competence, Sultan Husayn Mirza appointed him as his own wazir.

From the information provided above, a small conclusion can be drawn: most of the great wazirs were not only highly capable, knowledgeable, and diligent but were also connected to high-ranking households and traced their lineage to noble families. This was characteristic of governance in medieval states, where individuals of high status were naturally closer to the court. As a result, they had a much easier path to rising through the ranks compared to ordinary people. Nevertheless, there were also officials who attained high positions despite not belonging to exceptionally noble lineages.

## **2. The Appointment of Individuals with Exceptional Talent and Ability.**

There has always been a need for such individuals in every era and region. Accordingly, skilled specialists were relied upon in various fields such as finance, accounting, tax collection, correspondence, construction, and agriculture. In Rabi’ al-Awwal 865 AH / December 1460 CE, Khawāja Muzaffar al-Dīn Mukhtar Sabzavari was appointed as a wazir to Sultan Abu Sa’id. Khwandamir, in his work, emphasized that his resourcefulness made him superior to most other wazirs. Khawāja Na’im al-Dīn Ni’matullah Kuhistani, the son of Khawāja Ali—who served as a treasurer in Amir Timur’s court and later managed the accounts of the deputies in Shahrukh Mirza’s administration—studied extensively from a young age and mastered the sciences of istifa (financial administration) and siyāq (accounting).

During Shahrukh Mirza’s reign, when two thousand tuman were reported missing from the treasury, Khawāja Ali was imprisoned. To secure his father’s release, Khawāja Na’im al-Dīn meticulously recalculated all the records and proved to Shahrukh Mirza that the actual shortfall was not two thousand tuman but only two hundred tuman, successfully demonstrating the error. After this incident, Shahrukh Mirza released Khawāja Ali from prison and disregarded the two hundred tuman shortfall. Following this, he appointed Khawāja Na’im al-Dīn as a mustawfi (chief financial officer).

Another wazir of Sultan Abu Sa’id, Mawlana Amir Samarkandi, was a very kind, gentle, and harmless person. Accordingly to Khwandamir, his tenure as wazir lasted long due to his honesty and lack of greed. Regardīng another wazir of Sultan Abu Sa’id, Khawāja Abdullah Akhtab, «Dastūr al-wuzarā» states the following:

«When Sultan Abu Sa’id Mirza recognized his inclination toward state affairs, he appointed him to

the position of wazir». Khwāja Abdullah Akhtab continued to serve in the administration during the reign of Sultan Husayn Mirza after Sultan Abu Sa’id Mirza. One of Sultan Husayn Mirza’s wazirs, Khwāja Imad al-Islam, was «known for his gentleness and good character, as well as his kind treatment of subordinates and his care for their affairs». He served as a wazir for twenty years and was dismissed from his position in Dhu al-Qa’dah 903 AH / July 1498 CE, at the same time as Khwāja Qawam al-Dīn Nizam al-Mulk. From this, it can be inferred that Khwāja Imad al-Islam was likely appointed to office by Sultan Husayn Mirza around 883 AH / 1478-1479 CE.

As we know, in the Middle Ages, individuals with beautiful handwriting and mastery of the art of composition were highly valued. One such figure, Khwāja Ala al-Dīn Ali Mikol, «was renowned for his unique calligraphy». In «Rawdat al-safa», it is mentioned about him: «He gained prominence by writing records in Sultan [Husayn Mirza]’s administration and eventually attained the position of wazir».

Khwandamir, continuing his remarks about him, states: «After serving for several years as sahib-i tawjih under the illustrious Sultan Husayn Mirza, he was ultimately elevated to the rank of wazir». During the reign of Sultan Husayn Mirza, one of the skilled specialists in financial affairs was Khwāja Abu Ishaq. Khwandamir described him as «the leader of the world’s mustawfis (financial officers), and many acknowledged his exceptional expertise in the science of accounting (siyāq)».

In the Timurid dynasty, we can observe that individuals holding military positions later entered administrative service. For instance, Khwāja Darvesh Ahmad Qabiz, who «began his career among the most humble officials,» served as a wazir during the final years of Sultan Husayn Mirza’s reign. Before rising to the wazirate, he held the position of Amir-i Tuman in Herat.

### 3. Attaining Office with the Support of Certain Individuals.

There were also cases where individuals secured positions through the assistance of influential figures. Such instances can be observed in some wazirs mentioned in «Dastūr al-wuzarā». One of the renowned wazirs of Shahrukh Mirza, Khwāja Nizam al-Dīn Ahmad Dawud, rose to the position of wazir in 819/1416 with the help of Mirza Baysunghur.

In 820/1417, Shahrukh Mirza issued a decree in Qandahar, appointing Khwāja Ghiyath al-Dīn Pir Ahmad and Khwāja Nizam al-Dīn Ahmad Dawud as joint administrators of the wazirate affairs.

During the reign of Shah Mahmud, who ruled Khorasan for a short period after Mirza Abulqasim Babur, the individuals serving as wazirs were Khwāja Kalon Buzkush and Khwāja Ali ibn Amir Khwājagan. They attained this position with the assistance of Amir Shaykh Abu Sa’id, who served under Mirza Shah Mahmud in the office of Sahib-i Ikhtiyār-i Umūr (Master of Affairs).

When Sultan Husayn Mirza dismissed Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Muhammad from his position, Khwāja Majd al-Dīn made several attempts to regain his post.

He secretly contacted influential amirs close to Sultan Husayn Mirza, such as Amir ShujaudDīn Muhammad Burundūq and Amir Jahangir Barlas, seeking their support to return to the Dīwān. However, when his efforts did not succeed as planned, Khwāja Majd al-Dīn turned to the great poet ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami for assistance. Following Jami’s advice, Sultan Husayn Mirza eventually allowed Khwāja Majd al-Dīn to resume his service in the Dīwān.

Another wazir, Khwāja Kamal al-Dīn Husayn Mansur, was described as «a very humble and wise man». Interestingly, he was not appointed by Sultan Husayn Mirza himself but rather by Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Muhammad. According to Sa’id Nafisi’s estimation, he was appointed as a wazir in 893/1488. A similar case is associated with Khwāja Ghiyath al-Dīn Mikol, who entered the service of Sultan Husayn Mirza with the assistance of Khwāja Qawam al-Dīn Nizam al-Mulk. Thus, we can see that some wazirs serving in the Timurid court ascended to the position of wazir with the support of certain high-ranking individuals. However, it was not solely their connections that played a role; their personal qualities, scholarly competence, and administrative skills were also taken into consideration.

### CONCLUSION

The governance of the Timurid Empire, particularly the appointment and dismissal of wazirs, played a crucial role in maintaining stability and preventing excessive concentration of power. Amir Timur and his descendants were meticulous in selecting wazirs, emphasizing noble lineage, intelligence, administrative capabilities, and military awareness. The frequent turnover of wazirs, as recorded by Khwandamir in «Dastūr al-wuzarā» and «Rawdat al-safa», was a deliberate strategy to prevent officials from amassing too much influence and challenging the ruler’s authority.

Despite this frequent rotation, some wazirs managed to maintain their positions for extended periods, suggesting that their expertise, loyalty, and noble lineage were highly valued. The court of the Timurids



saw the rise of prominent administrators from regions such as Simnan, Khwāf, and Kerman. Many of these officials were descendants of previous wazirs, demonstrating a pattern of hereditary governance in the administration. Persian cultural and linguistic proficiency was a prerequisite for Dīwān officials, ensuring the continuity of bureaucratic functions across generations.

One significant category of appointed wazirs comprised those from distinguished noble families. Their connections and lineage provided them with opportunities to secure high-ranking positions. Several Simnani officials, such as Khwāja Imad al-Dīn Mas'ud Simnani and Khwāja Qutb al-Dīn Tawus Simnani, were elevated due to their ancestry. Similarly, Khwāja Ghiyas al-Dīn Pir Ahmad Khwāfi, a trusted official of Shahrukh Mirza, and Khwāja Qawam al-Dīn Nizam al-Mulk Khwāfi, who served under Sultan Abu Sa'id Mirza and Sultan Husayn Mirza, represented the continued prominence of the Khwāf region in Timurid administration. The prominence of Kermani officials, such as Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Muhammad Marwarid, also underscores the importance of noble heritage in gaining administrative positions.

Beyond noble lineage, exceptional talent and expertise were also significant factors in appointment. Skilled specialists in finance, accounting, taxation, and governance were indispensable to the empire's functioning. For example, Khwāja Na'im al-Dīn Ni'matullah Kuhistani demonstrated financial acumen by identifying discrepancies in treasury records, securing his father's release and earning himself a high-ranking position. Similarly, Khwāja Muzaffar al-Dīn Mukhtar Sabzavari rose to prominence due to his resourcefulness. The Timurid court also valued calligraphy and composition skills, as seen in the case of Khwāja Ala al-Dīn Ali Mikol, who was appointed wazir due to his excellence in record-keeping.

Another path to high office was through the support of influential figures. Some wazirs secured their positions through patronage from amirs or other high-ranking individuals. Khwāja Nizam al-Dīn Ahmad Dawud was appointed in 1416 with the assistance of Mirza Baysunghur, while others, such as Khwāja Ghiyath al-Dīn Mikol, benefited from the influence of Khwāja Qawam al-Dīn Nizam al-Mulk. Political maneuvering was also common, as evidenced by Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Muhammad, who sought the support of amirs and even the poet 'Abd al-Rahman Jami to regain his position in the Dīwān after being dismissed.

The Timurid administrative structure reflected a blend of meritocracy and aristocracy. While noble lineage provided an advantage, individuals with exceptional

abilities could also ascend to high positions. The influence of Persian bureaucratic traditions ensured continuity in governance, and the rotation of officials was a strategic measure to maintain balance within the administration. However, personal connections and the ability to navigate court politics were equally crucial in securing and retaining power.

In conclusion, the appointment of wazirs in the Timurid Empire was a complex process influenced by noble lineage, administrative competence, specialized skills, and political patronage. The frequent replacement of wazirs was a deliberate strategy to prevent excessive accumulation of power, yet certain officials managed to maintain their positions due to their expertise and connections. The administrative framework of the Timurids thus reflects a balance between stability and adaptability, ensuring the efficient functioning of the empire while mitigating internal threats to sovereign authority.

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