
TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

A. Khismatulin

THE ART OF MEDIEVAL COUNTERFEITING: THE *SIYAR AL-MULŪK* (THE *SIYĀSAT-NĀMA*) BY NIẒĀM AL-MULK AND THE “FULL” VERSION OF THE *NAṢĪḤAT AL-MULŪK* BY AL-GHAZĀLĪ [1]

From time to time, in modern catalogues and scholarly publications we encounter a medieval book, said to be “ascribed” to such-and-such an author. This formulation implies that the authenticity of the book attributed to the author is uncertain. Sometimes, to emphasize that fact, the “title” *pseudo-* is added to the author's name. This problem especially concerns the texts written in the genre of medieval advice literature and ascribed to famous statesmen or outstanding Muslim scholars. Modern researchers have yet to pay more attention to what some medieval authors say about counterfeiting texts during the Islamic Middle Ages and to discuss seriously this issue. Most prefer to pass in silence the possibility that an un-authentic text could have been forged intentionally for selfish, ideological, and other reasons since, on the one hand, one needs sufficient evidence to disclose a forgery, while on the other hand, any fake necessarily follows a recognizable and well-known pattern, which, sometimes, makes it hard to distinguish the fake from a genuine work. For example, *imām* al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) clearly states in his letters to the *malik* Sanjar that there were, at least, three attempts to counterfeit his writings, and one of the three was successful (see below, *Letter 3*). If this could happen to him within his lifetime, we may assume what could have occurred after his death. In the second part of the *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, wrongly ascribed by some scholars to al-Ghazālī, its author tells us how an educated person from ‘Irāq became bankrupt and decided to solve his financial problems by counterfeiting a letter from Yaḥya b. Khālīd al-Barmakī to ‘Abd Allāh b. Mālik al-Khuzā‘ī, a favourite of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd [2]. Interestingly enough, the author excuses the counterfeiter. In both cases

the Arabic term *tazwīr* is used to define such action, qualified by al-Ghazālī also as *talbīs* (“falsification”).

Muslim authors mention yet another curious issue, closely related to the art of medieval counterfeiting, which deals with bald-faced plagiarism (المسقة). Al-Hujwīrī (d. between 465 and 469 / 1072 and 1077) indignantly says that the only copy of his *dīwān* was brazenly plagiarized by a contemporary of his. Furthermore, there was an attempt to change al-Hujwīrī's name for that of another person in the author's inscription to one of his *ṣūfī* books entitled “An Approach to the Religion” (*Minhāj al-dīn*), but fortunately, the attempt failed [3]. In order to help expose plagiarisms, the prominent Muslim scholar Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) even wrote a treatise with the title “The Distinguisher Between a Composer and a Thief” (*al-Fāriq bayna al-muṣannif wa al-sāriq*) [4].

Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, medieval plagiarism should be treated separately from medieval counterfeiting. Therefore, the present article deals only with the latter, focusing on two outstanding cases of medieval counterfeiting: the *Siyar al-mulūk* (the *Siyāsat-nāma*), ascribed to the famous Saljūqīd *wazīr* NiẒām al-Mulk (killed 485/1092), and the second part of the *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, attributed to al-Ghazālī. The first text was compiled obviously prior to the second one, but both were written in the same 6th / 12th century. Their fates are so closely entwined and so similar to each other, that they deserve to be studied and compared in one article. After due consideration of these cases, the technology of counterfeiting and the reasons for undertaking such a risky endeavour would hopefully become clear.