

Original Research Article

The Monarch's Spatial Accessibility: Examining Six Mirrors for Princes in the Medieval Islamic Period

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Received: 10/06/2025

Accepted: 08/09/2025

Available online: 22/11/2025

Abstract

Problem statement: In contemporary architecture and urban planning, accessibility is recognized as a value, and in the politics of space, it refers to the accessibility of political–social public spaces and the right to the city. Given that contemporary spatial and political frameworks primarily originate from Western theories and practices, this study investigates the notion of accessibility within the historical context of spatial politics in Iran.

Research objectives: This research examines the necessity and mechanisms of accessibility to the king during the Islamic Middle Ages. This period, often regarded as the Islamic Golden Age, produced significant theoretical works in which political thought evolved dynamically in tandem with political power.

Research method: Six mirrors for princes from the Islamic medieval period—namely Qabus-nama by Unsur al-Ma'ali, Siyasat-nama by Nizam al-Mulk, Nasihat al-Muluk by Ghazali, Tuhfat al-Muluk, Akhlaq-i Nasiri by Nasir al-Din Tusi, and Mirsad al-Ibad by Najm Razi—were analyzed. The aim was to extract micro-level mechanisms and patterns of spatial accessibility, reflecting a micro-narrative of the political elites' ideals of that era.

Conclusion: The mirrors for princes aimed to sustain the regime, not mirror modern state–citizen relations. Nevertheless, shifting focus from the essence to modes of accessibility reveals discursive changes in the mirrors for princes. A linear reading shows the texts evolved beyond simple petitioning. For instance, two texts—Siyasat-nama and Nasihat al-Muluk—explicitly reference spatially grounded models of accessibility, drawing on narratives from early Islam and pre-Islamic Iran. Later mirrors for princes place greater emphasis on the populace and on the signifier of beneficence alongside justice. In practice, benevolence toward the people created conditions that highlighted accessibility. The peak of this emphasis appears in Mirsad al-Ibad, where accessibility is regarded as equivalent to justice and, rather than being merely a virtue, is considered a defining attribute of the Shah.

Keywords: *Iran, Nizam al-Mulk, Najm al-Din Razi, Politics of space, micropolitics. material politics.*

Introduction

In conventional usage, accessibility is defined as the quality or condition that enables all individuals to enter or use a given space or service ([Cambridge Dictionary Online, n.d.](#)). Contemporary discourse essentially links accessibility to the

needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities. Within the socio-political domain, however, accessibility is more broadly construed as access to public spaces and as an expression of the right to the city. In this sense, accessibility has become a significant normative paradigm in architectural design and urban analysis.

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This study aims to move beyond the dominant theoretical frameworks that currently shape the notion of accessibility. Contemporary understandings of architecture and its knowledge have largely emerged within the institutional setting of the modern university. At the same time, Iranian social and political thought has developed under the pervasive influence of Western epistemologies. Although the rupture from indigenous Iranian intellectual traditions cannot be overlooked, recourse to historical experience offers a fruitful path toward more substantive and contextually grounded conceptual and prescriptive insights.

This study examines the accessibility of sovereign authority in historical Iran. As the political order was monarchical, the focus was on the king's accessibility to the populace. Material remains, such as royal complexes and miniature paintings, reveal aspects of Iran's political history. Yet, they provide limited evidence for understanding the everyday spatial mechanisms through which royal accessibility was structured. For this reason, the primary sources of this research are books written as *Mirrors for Princes* (*Siyasat-nama*). Authored by jurists, philosophers, mystics, and statesmen, these texts were addressed to rulers and composed as practical guides responsive to their era. Tabatabai (2000, 25–26) identifies the mirrors for princes tradition as the most influential current of political thought in Islamic-era Iran, while also noting the insufficiency of existing scholarship. Studying these texts offers a crucial means of understanding the politics of space in historical contexts. To delimit the scope, this research concentrates on the medieval Islamic period—often termed the “Islamic Golden Age”—when *siyāsat-nāmas* exhibited particular theoretical vitality. According to Feirahi (2007, 90), this period of Islamic civilization was grounded in knowledge, especially ‘practical knowledge,’ with political power evolving alongside it. It is therefore assumed that mirrors for princes of this era project a dynamic conception of the sovereign–subject relation and address the necessity and forms of royal

accessibility. Accordingly, the research questions of this study may be formulated as follows:

1. Was accessibility to the monarch considered a necessity in the mirrors for princes of the Medieval Islamic Period?
2. To what extent, and through what spatial dynamism, was the monarch's accessibility structured?

Since this study is centered on written texts, its geographical scope cannot be reduced to a specific region within the Iranian or Islamic realm. The interweaving of Islamic ideas with Iranian kingship was extensive and can be traced to the Umayyad caliphate, where military domination replaced tribal solidarity, hereditary succession replaced kinship ties, and fiscal practices such as *kharāj* and royal estates were shaped under Sasanian influence, thereby contributing to a new configuration of power that intensified under subsequent dynasties, such as the Abbasids (*ibid.*, 170–198). For this reason, the focus of the present study is restricted to the temporal horizon of the mirrors for Princes. The analysis follows a linear trajectory of their conceptual development, with specific attention to how they articulated the issue of ordinary people's accessibility to the monarch, who is referred to as Shah in Iranian kingship.

Literature Review

Although a variety of historical written sources—such as endowment deeds (*waqf-nāmas*), codes of chivalry (*futuwwat-namas*), poetry, *ḥadīths*, and the Qur'an—have been examined in spatial studies, the mirrors for princes (*Siyasat-nama*), as prescriptive texts addressed to rulers, have received relatively little attention in architectural scholarship. Existing studies on these treatises have concentrated within the fields of the social and political realm, where, given their specific problematics, questions of space have been mainly overlooked. For instance, while the study by Zakeri et al. (2021) focuses on rereading justice and tyranny, its metaphorical orientation precludes a spatial analysis. Similarly,

Sadeghi and Reisi Nafchi (2021), though attentive to the ideal image of the king in three *siyasat-namas* and two other works, aim primarily at reconstructing the king's social image. Consequently, in these studies, the question of accessibility to the king has been reduced to a merely supplicatory or petitionary image of the monarch.

Saremi & Jalali (2022), by examining the views of Nizam al-Mulk, have cited some of his general recommendations regarding urban development. However, their discussion remains at the macro level of state prosperity and does not extend to architecture or to the micro-level prescriptions of space. Meysami & Amir Arjmand (2020) have provided a valuable account of the king's coexistence with the people in the *Siyasat-al-Molouk* and *Nasihah al-Molouk*. Yet their study likewise focuses on the theme of coexistence, without addressing the spatial dimensions, nor does it extend to other medieval mirrors for princes or their comparative analysis.

It is worth noting that other valuable works have examined the mirrors for princes and their position within the socio-political context of Iranian history. These studies have been instrumental in providing contextual understanding and have significantly informed the preliminary stages of this research. Among them are the works of Javad Tabatabai (2000; 2004; 2006), Davood Feirahi (2007), as well as other articles cited throughout this article. Nevertheless, in light of the research questions and objectives, the primary focus here remains on the mirrors for princes themselves, thereby foregrounding the often-neglected signifier of space.

• Political legitimacy in the medieval period and Its historical foundations

Legitimacy, according to scholars of Iran's political history such as Roger Savory (1974, 187), has been understood as the right to rule. Feirahi (2007, 21–22) defines it as the justification of the sovereign's authority to command and the people's duty to obey. In effect, legitimacy constitutes an

active effort to align the political order with the normative frameworks of its time and to render it normative. On this basis, legitimacy is manifested in the cultural forms of governance and is expressed in architecture and art. Accordingly, the ideals that generate legitimacy can be traced within the architectural mechanisms of a dynamic political system.

Prior to Islam, the Shah was conceived as a distinguished and infallible figure by virtue of the *farr-e īzadi* (divine glory). Consequently, the need to substantiate his legitimacy was minimal. That is, the legitimization of his authority was embedded within a socio-cosmological framework that located its source in the heavens, thereby rendering earthly justification largely redundant. Busse (1977, 61–63) observes that in the pre-Islamic Iranian monarchical tradition, the king held a quasi-divine status. "Epigraphic evidence, rock reliefs, and other historical sources indicate that the accessibility of kings—particularly Sasanian monarchs—was severely limited. While specific occasions, such as the Nowruz ceremony, permitted some relaxation of these restrictions, the monarch was generally seated upon an elevated throne and enclosed within ceremonial entourages.

This arrangement underwent a profound transformation with the introduction of Islamic principles, whereby the monarch's authority became increasingly contingent upon his accessibility to the populace and his capacity to dispense justice. Ideally, subjects were expected to present their petitions or grievances directly to the ruler. Although such practices were characteristic of the early Islamic caliphs, the chronological focus of this study pertains to a period following the formative Islamic era and the territorial expansion of the Islamic empire. Accordingly, this study focuses on a period in which royal accessibility was reconfigured, while still bearing the influence of the dual legacies of pre-Islamic Iranian governance and the early Islamic caliphate.

• Architecture and politics at the micro-spatial scale

Analyzing macro-political conditions through

a micro-spatial scale provides a crucial tool for historical understanding, allowing macro-narratives to be enriched by localized perspectives. Architecture, when combined with case-based studies, can reflect or represent social contexts. In recent decades, scholarship has sought to deepen this relationship by emphasizing the bidirectional interaction between space and socio-political structures. Space is no longer treated merely as an outcome of the political situation (Awan et al., 2011). Later ontologies, such as Actor-Network Theory (ANT), shift attention from the symbolic dimension to relational dynamics between humans and nonhumans, highlighting the importance of studying buildings-in-use (Yaneva, 2017, 162–163). This approach allows neglected nonhuman actors, such as architecture and spatial accessibility, to be considered alongside human actors in analyses of power (Latour, 1993). Such a networked perspective parallels Foucauldian notions of the *dispositif*, enabling the simultaneous study of ‘a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions-in short, the said as much as the unsaid’ (Foucault, 1980, 194). Power, in Foucault’s view, is productive, diffused,

and manifests beyond formal governance, including in technology, architecture, and objects (Shiner, 1982, 390–392). While scholarship in Iran has often focused on Foucault’s discursive dimension, alternative interpretations allow for the examination of non-discursive and extra-discursive facets of social life (West-Pavlov, 2009).

Research Methodology

In this study, accessibility to the monarch was approached as a micro-political sphere, providing a lens through which the spatial mechanisms favored by political elites can be empirically examined. The spatial mechanisms and their patterns were extracted through direct study of the six primary mirrors for princes (Siyasat-nama)- composed as prescriptive guides for rulers during the so-called medieval period, spanning from the second half of the fifth century to the first half of the seventh century AH. To address the central research question regarding accessibility, relevant passages were analyzed across multiple levels to identify patterns and enable comparative evaluation. To contextualize the six Siyasat-nama analyzed in this study (Fig. 1), the Qabus-nama by Unsur al-Ma’ali was composed in 475 AH. The Siyasat-nama by Nizam al-Mulk was first written in 485 AH, with its final version completed between 492 and 505 AH

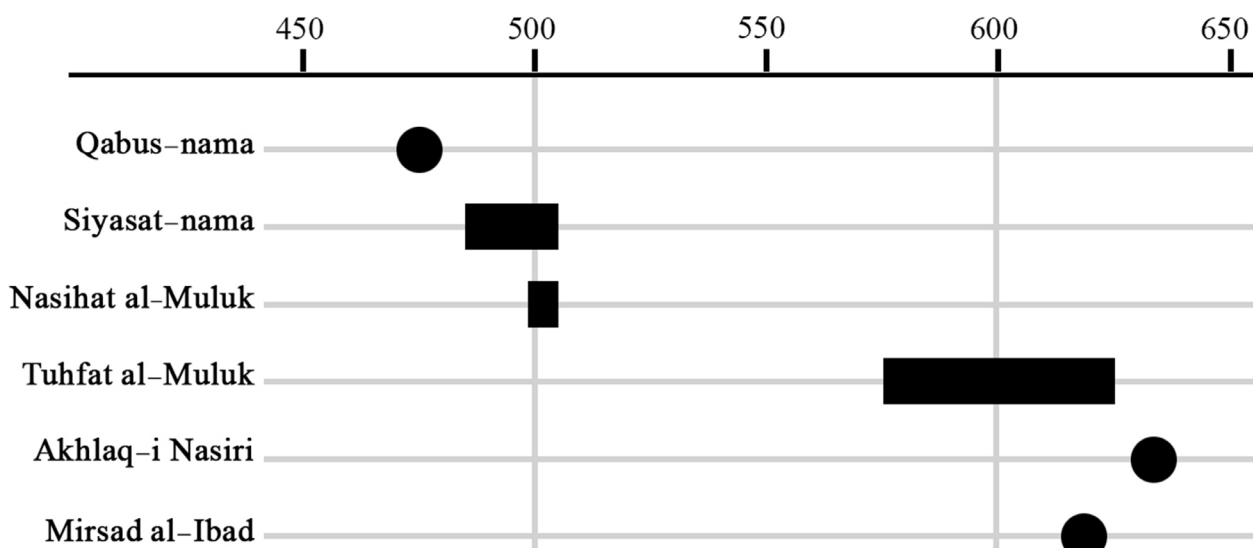


Fig. 1. The Examined Mirrors-for-Princes and Their Dates of Composition (AH). Source: Author.

according to the editor (Nizam al-Mulk, 1965, 7). The third work, *Nasihāt al-Muluk* by Ghazali, was composed contemporaneously with the *Siyasat-nama*, between 498 and 505 AH, according to the editor's research (Ghazali, 1938, z). The fourth work, *Tuhfat al-Muluk*, is subject to greater chronological uncertainty. Earlier manuscripts and initial editions placed it in the seventh or eighth century AH (Mahmudi Isfahani, 1938). More recent studies by Saeed Nafisi and subsequent critical editions by Ali Akbar Ahmadi Darani (2003) suggest its composition around the second half of the sixth century or the first half of the seventh century AH. *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* by Nasir al-Din Tusi is dated to 633 AH (Homaei, 1941), and *Mirsad al-Ibad* by Najm Razi is dated back to 618 AH according to the editor (Riyahi, 2003). Thus, the first three works correspond to the late fifth–early sixth century AH, and the latter three to the late seventh century AH, forming the two chronological groups used in this study.

Discussion

• Mirrors for princes in the late fifth and early sixth century ah

- *Qabus-Nama* by Unsur al-Ma'ali

The *Qabus-nama* (Unsur al-Ma'ali, 1964) is one of the educational texts of the Fifth century AH, containing a chapter devoted to the principles of kingship. This work offers limited references to the accessibility of the king, which, given their indirect nature, can only be evaluated interpretively:

And make all deeds and words apparent to your eyes, so that in all matters you may discern right and wrong; for when the king observes and lacks wisdom, the path of right and wrong will not be apparent. Always speak truthfully, but speak little, and smile sparingly, so that your inferiors do not gain audacity against you, for it has been said that the worst act for a Shah is to be challenged by his subjects... and be esteemed in appearance [aziz-didar], so that you are not humbled before your army and subjects' (ibid., 180).

In this passage, the importance of observation and seeing with one's own eyes is emphasized; however, it is immediately cautioned that such observation should not provoke boldness among subjects, so that the Shah's dignity remains intact. Thus, the monarch's accessibility is generally not recommended, except for the purpose of adjudicating grievances in a manner that does not undermine the monarch's authority. The necessity of awareness and observation of the army and the populace stems from the need for the ruler to remain just, as justice constitutes the principal marker of his authority. Consequently, the ruler must not stay in seclusion:

The source of prosperity and felicity in the world lies in a just Shah... and do not remain constantly in private, for if you are alienated from the army and the people, they too will become estranged from you (ibid., 185).

Although the *Qabus-nama* advises the Shah to be aware of his society, it does not provide specific procedures or operational models. Its anecdotes are merely illustrative, indicating that petitions and grievances were generally addressed indirectly, through intermediaries or correspondence, except when circumstances made direct action necessary. For instance, one account mentions an elderly woman who wrote a letter to the court to complain; when this proved ineffective, she went in person to the *mazālim* (court of grievances) and her issue was resolved directly by petitioning the Sultan (ibid., 184). Thus, the text's recommendations do not translate into a spatially organized accessibility of the ruler for the general populace. In contrast, there is concern that such accessibility might undermine the dignity of the Shah.

- *Siyasat-Nama* by Nizam al-Mulk

In the *Siyasat-nama* (Nizam al-Mulk, 1965), the importance of petitioning (*tazallum*) and the ruler's awareness of the people's grievances and conditions is repeatedly emphasized. Nizam al-Mulk explicitly recommends that the king should devote two days each week to sit in the *mazalim* court and 'listen with

his own ears to the words of the subjects, without any intermediary' (*ibid.*, 13). He even recounts a striking example from the ancient kings of Iran, which goes beyond his initial recommendation:

I have read in the books of the ancients that most of the Shahs of Persia would erect a high platform, and standing upon it on horseback, they would see all those who had gathered in that plain with complaints and would grant justice to each. The reason for this was that if the Shah sat in a place enclosed by gates, vestibules, and curtains, the self-serving and oppressive officials would prevent petitioners from reaching him (*ibid.*, 13).

In this model of justice, the ruler not only heard the grievances of the people directly but also eliminated the spatial mediations and restrictions of the palace, allowing him to dispense justice in a freer environment. At the same time, however, even this direct encounter maintained a symbolic hierarchy, as the kings of Persia stood elevated upon a platform and on horseback, thereby preserving royal dignity. Thus, the *Siyasat-nama* advocates for a form of accessibility that is immediate yet stratified.

Another recommended model that preserved accessibility while maintaining hierarchy was the practice of public audience (*bar-i 'am*).

It is said that the custom of the Persian kings was such that on the days of *Mihrgān* and *Nowrūz* the Shah would hold a public audience for the ordinary people... On such days, the royal herald would stand in the market and proclaim that whoever prevented another from presenting a petition would be disavowed by the king. Then the king would hear the people's grievances and adjudicate them all himself (*ibid.*, 48).

According to this account, the ruler granted a public audience at least twice a year, during which even the intermediaries themselves stood in the marketplace, signaling their openness to receive petitions directly. Elsewhere, *Nizam al-Mulk* elaborates on the etiquette of wine gatherings and public and private audiences for different social groups, recommending that such assemblies be held

once or twice weekly. Here, too, the emphasis lies in preserving hierarchical seating arrangements, while ensuring that dignitaries could behold the ruler and not suspect his absence. For *Nizam al-Mulk*, no arrangement was preferable to abundant and repeated audiences. He also underscores the need to maintain order with respect to the demands of soldiers, servants, and retainers (*ibid.*, 140-144). *Nizam al-Mulk* even anticipated the potential disorder caused by the presence of large numbers of petitioners at court, which could present the appearance of a realm beset by chaos. To resolve this, he prescribed a practical remedy:

There are always many petitioners lingering at the palace gate, and even when their cases are not answered, they do not depart. When strangers or envoys arrive and witness such outcry, they imagine that great injustice is being done. Therefore, the Shah must order that a gate be set apart for them, where their petitions may all be listened to and recorded. Once a royal decree has been issued, they must be required to depart at once, so that the commotion does not remain (*ibid.*, 261).

In sum, *Nizam al-Mulk* articulated structured and hierarchical modalities—rooted in pre-Islamic precedents—that enabled royal accessibility while simultaneously preserving the sanctity of sovereign authority.

- **Nasihāt al-Muluk by Ghazali**

In *Nasihāt al-Muluk*, justice is presented as the ruler's paramount duty and the principal bond between sovereign and subjects: 'A true sovereign establishes justice among his servants' (*Ghazali*, 1938, 40). *Ghazali*, recalling the lifestyle of the 'ancient kings,' (*Khosrowan-e pishin*) notes that they divided the hours of the day into four parts, one of which was explicitly devoted to kingship, hearing grievances, rendering judgments, deliberation, issuing commands, and drafting correspondence (*ibid.*, 71). In this respect, the themes of justice and petitionary redress, articulated with reference to pre-Islamic models of governance, align *Nasihāt al-Muluk* closely with *Nizam al-Mulk's Siyasat-nama*.

More significantly, however, is the emphasis on the early Islamic period, particularly the caliph Umar. Ghazali explicitly recommends that the paradigm for royal justice should be sought in the example of Umar. Numerous anecdotes are cited to this effect: Umar is portrayed as personally engaging with the people in matters of grievance, redistributing resources from the treasury, and even conducting nocturnal rounds to discover and alleviate the suffering of the poor and hungry (*ibid.*, 58–60).

By juxtaposing narratives from pre-Islamic Iran with those of early Islam, Ghazali sought to fashion a model that transcended the limitations of his own time. His deliberate contrast between Umar and the Umayyad-Marwanid caliphs underscores a forgotten aspect of early Islam: ‘Consider the reports about ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, for none among the Marwanids or Umayyads possesses such blessedness as he’ (*ibid.*, 59). Drawing also upon hadith, Ghazali stresses the ruler’s obligation to care for subordinates: ‘Ibn ‘Umar reports that the Messenger of God said: There are lofty abodes in Paradise reserved for those who have shown kindness to their families and subordinates’ (*ibid.*, 51); ‘It is incumbent upon the ruler that, when his subjects fall into hardship and destitution, he must come to their aid’ (*ibid.*, 91). Yet the principal shortcoming of *Nasihah al-Muluk* lies in its failure to articulate a clear, prescriptive framework of action. While affirming the importance of justice and accessibility, Ghazali does not provide a systematic spatial or procedural model. Like Nizam al-Mulk, he invokes the precedent of public audiences (*bar-i ‘am*) practiced twice annually by the ancient kings (*ibid.*, 91), yet his account remains descriptive rather than prescriptive. Thus, despite his marked attention to the ordinary people and his innovative juxtaposition of ‘Umar and Anushirvan, his recommendations ultimately stay on the same prescriptive level as those found in Nizam al-Mulk’s *Siyasat-nama*.

• **Mirrors for princes in the early 7 century aH** - **Tuhfat al-Muluk**

In *Tuhfat al-Muluk* (1938), a chapter is devoted to kingship, and—as in earlier works—the justice

of the ruler is foregrounded: ‘It is related that on the Day of Resurrection, the first to be sheltered under the shade of God Almighty will be the just sovereign’ (*ibid.*, 63). The work seeks to articulate the notion of justice more systematically, enumerating ten principles in which the role of the subjects is repeatedly emphasized. Among these are: ‘Whatever he does not deem permissible for himself, he should not deem permissible for his subjects’; ‘He should not consider those seeking petitions at his court to be insignificant’; ‘He should deal gently with his subjects’; ‘When they seek judgment from him, he should act with justice; when they seek mercy, he should show clemency’; and ‘He should abandon pride and arrogance, for the haughtiness of kingship engenders excessive wrath toward servants and subjects’ (*ibid.*, 63–65). Unlike earlier mirrors for princes, this text explicitly condemns royal pride and arrogance, instead recommending that the ruler embody a more merciful and compassionate persona. In an anecdote about Anushirvan, it is noted that one reason for the people’s lack of opposition to him was that Anushirvan claimed: ‘I softened the hearts of my subjects through justice and truthfulness’ (*ibid.*, 68). Thus, *Tuhfat al-Muluk*—like *Nasihah al-Muluk*—projects a gentler, more merciful conception of justice, repeatedly highlighting the blessed compassion of God and the needs of the ruled. Significantly, the hierarchical imagery of earlier works, such as the *Qabus-nama* or the *Siyasat-nama*, is largely absent in this work and is, in fact, openly repudiated.

- **Akhlaq-i Nasiri by Nasir al-din Tusi**

Although a section of *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* (1967) is devoted to practical political wisdom, the work as a whole is philosophical in nature and encompasses a broader set of concepts. Like *Tuhfat al-Muluk*, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* seeks to articulate notions such as justice in greater detail and in a more systematic manner. For example, Tusi explicitly declares that the ruler’s foremost virtue is justice, and the second is beneficence (*Ehsan*). He thus accords beneficence a lofty status, placing it immediately

after justice. Tusi defines beneficence as ‘acts of goodness... beyond what is strictly obligatory’ (Nasir al-Din Tusi, 1967, 284). His simultaneous emphasis on justice and beneficence leads him to highlight the ruler’s awe-inspiring presence (haybat), which requires, in his view, that the sovereign ‘must not close the gates of hope [Reja’] and fear [Khowf] to the people’ (ibid., 284). Tusi further advises the ruler that ‘he should not keep petitioners veiled (mahjub) from himself’ (ibid.). The term mahjub signifies being ‘withheld’ or ‘prevented,’ but it also carries concrete spatial connotations such as ‘distanced,’ ‘concealed,’ or ‘hidden’ in Islamic and Farsi literature (Dehkhoda, 1998, 20369). Thus, in this work, the compassionate dimension of rulership once again becomes prominent—this time under the rubric of beneficence, set alongside justice. While the spatial accessibility of the monarch is not directly elaborated, the recurrence of spatially inflected terms, such as ‘gates’ (abwb), ‘closed’ (masdud), and ‘veiled’ (mahjūb), powerfully evokes concrete imaginings of space.

- Mirsad al-Ibad by Najm Razi

To understand the ruler’s relationship with his subjects, one must turn to the second chapter of the fifth book of Mirsad al-Ibad (Najm Razi, 1933). Najm Razi opens this chapter with Quran 16:90:

Indeed, God commands justice [adl], beneficence [Ehsan], and giving to kindred [ita’ dhi al-qurba]; and He forbids indecency, wrongdoing, and aggression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed.

Based on this verse, Najm Razi identifies three ‘states’ [halat] that characterize the sovereign: first, ‘adl (justice); second, Ehsan (beneficence); and third, ita’ dhi al-qurba (giving to kindred). In the preceding work, Akhlaq-i Nasiri, Nasir al-Din Tusi referred to the first two, though without citing this verse. Razi, however, appears to add the third element explicitly drawn from the Quran. A further, and more fundamental, difference lies in the conceptual register: whereas Tusi describes justice and beneficence as ‘virtues’ of the ruler, Razi

presents them as ‘states’ (ahwāl) of the ruler—thus treating them as more foundational than virtues.

To understand the third state, it is essential to examine the meaning of the term. In general usage, itā’ dhī al-qurbā is defined in the Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam (Dehghan & Baghestani, 2014) as ‘the giving of rights to relatives.’ Yet, in this interpretive context, it is read more precisely as a mode of accessibility (Lambton, 1962, 110). Najm Razi explains: ‘As for the third state that pertains to the sovereign—namely, itā’ dhī al-qurbā—it is the recognition of the rights of the generality of subjects, for the people stand to the sovereign as kindred, indeed as household and family’ (Najm Razi, 1933, 246–47). In Razi’s framework, then, itā’ dhī al-qurbā—that is, accessibility—is placed on the same level as justice. One may therefore infer that a ruler’s inaccessibility does not simply diminish his virtue but undermines his very state of being and, consequently, his legitimacy.

Conclusion

Before addressing the research questions, it is necessary to revisit the central problem of this study—namely, the exploration of the notion of accessibility within the historical context of Iran’s politics of space. It must be emphasized that the scope of this investigation has been delimited to the corpus of mirrors for princes of the medieval period. Such a delimitation, however, should not result in overlooking the broader historical trajectory of accessibility in more recent times, nor should it obscure the historical anachronisms and substantial transformations of meaning that have occurred around this concept in the contemporary age. Accordingly, the fundamental differences between the ruler–subject relation in the medieval era and the citizen–state relation in modernity must not be conflated, since a significant portion of the ruler’s legitimacy was grounded in divine rather than civic authority. Within the fields of social and political studies, mirrors for princes have often been examined in terms of their nature and purpose. Yet, alongside such inquiries

into what these texts are, one may also ask how the conceptual configurations within them developed over time. In this light, it becomes evident that spatial qualities gradually entered the discursive field of these texts. Put differently, even if one accepts that the mirrors for princes were primarily intended to prolong royal rule, their linear development throughout the medieval centuries reveals discursive shifts in which space became an explicit concern. Justice (‘adl) emerged as a central signifier in the discourse of the examined texts, demanding a degree of accessibility for petition and the redress of grievances. Although case-by-case analysis indicates that such accessibility often remained at a symbolic or anecdotal level, the later medieval mirrors began to incorporate additional signifiers that, inevitably, heightened the importance of accessibility. In response to the research question—namely, the modes of accessibility to the monarch—it may be concluded that each Mirror for Princes articulated a distinct quality of accessibility, expressed through different signifiers and exemplified in a range of anecdotes and prescriptions (see Table 1). For a closer examination of accessibility in the Six Mirrors for Princes (Table 2), it can be observed

that the Qabus-nama addresses accessibility only to the extent necessary for petitioning purposes, with the author expressing concern that expanding accessibility might compromise the dignity and authority of the monarch. As expected, the structured spatial accessibility of the ruler is minimal, both at the theoretical level and in the anecdotes provided, and it does not result in a clearly defined model of practice. The Siyasat-nama by Nizam al-Mulk, while attentive to the preservation of royal dignity and hierarchical order, draws on pre-Islamic Iranian practices—such as public audiences—to evoke both a concrete and spatial sense of royal accessibility. Its recommendations, including hearing the subjects’ complaints directly and being visibly present to the elites, constitute explicit and structured prescriptions that are not present in any of the other five texts. Nonetheless, in this text, accessibility functions primarily as an instrument for realizing and legitimizing justice; it does not possess independent conceptual significance at a theoretical level. Nasihat al-Muluk similarly incorporates specific anecdotes and narratives from the Siyasat-nama by Nizam al-Mulk. Its weakness

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings. Source: Auther.

Period	Book	Keywords	Accessibility
Second half of the fifth or early sixth century AH	Qabus-nama	Observing with the eye, not remaining in private, being honorable to behold (aziz-didar) for the army and subjects	The necessity of the ruler’s awareness of society for the administration of justice No prescription for structured or spatialized accessibility Concern for the dignity and prestige of the ruler
	Siyasat-nama	Wine gatherings with various social groups, public audiences twice a year, maintaining hierarchy, the ruler’s visibility to elites, and hearing subjects’ petitions directly	Royal accessibility maintained within hierarchical structures during public and private audiences, emphasizing the ruler’s visibility to elites Hearing the subjects’ petitions directly twice a week
	Nasihat al-Muluk	Caliph Umar, public audiences of Persian kings, subjects (ra’yat)	Attention to subordinates Engagement with the populace based on early Islamic caliphs’ precedents and the ruler’s proactive approach to understanding public concerns No new models of structured or spatialized practice provided
First half of the Seventh century AH	Tuhfat al-Muluk	Kindness toward subjects, condemnation of pride and arrogance	More detailed and structured elaboration of justice Presentation of a benevolent or compassionate image of the ruler’s justice No structured model for accessibility prescribed
	Akhlaq al-Nasiri	Justice and benevolence as rulers’ virtues, unblocked gates of hope and fear, not keeping petitioners hidden	Benevolence and justice as key virtues of the ruler Development of a more humane and comprehensive image of justice Use of terminology with spatial and structured connotations
	Mirsad al-Ibad	ita’ dhi al-qurba	Development of the concept of the ruler’s three states Accessibility equated conceptually with justice

Table 2. Analysis of Accessibility in Six Siyasat-namas. Source: Auther.

Book	Necessity of Accessibility for Justice	Shifting beyond Justice	Theoretical Elaboration of Accessibility	Spatialized Recommendations or Anecdotes for Accessibility
Qabus-nama	✓	✗	✗	✗
Siyasat-nama	✓	✗	✗	✓
Nasihah al-Muluk	✓	✗ (emphasis on subordinates)	✗	✓
Tuhfat al-Muluk	✓	✗ (emphasis on benevolent justice)	✗	✗
Akhlaq-i Nasiri	✓	✓ (benevolence as a virtue)	✗ (theoretical spatialized expressions)	✗
Mirsad al-Ibad	✓	✓ (benevolence and Itā' dhī al-qurbā as states)	✓	✗

lies in omitting some of the spatially oriented anecdotes and in reducing the emphasis on the ruler’s tangible accessibility. Its strength, however, is in its attention to subordinates and subjects, which enriches the signifier of justice. Even so, none of these three texts provides a theoretical articulation of the concept of accessibility.

An examination of the three works from the first half of the seventh century AH indicates that, during this period, greater efforts were made to move beyond the single reference point of justice. In Tuhfat al-Muluk, particular attention is given to the notion of benevolent justice. However, its theoretical concept is not fully articulated and remains subordinate to the broader principle of justice. In the other two works, however, justice is introduced alongside new concepts: in Akhlaq-i Nasiri, benevolence is presented alongside justice as a royal virtue, while in Mirsad al-Ibad, benevolence and itā’ dhī al-qurbā are defined alongside justice as states of the ruler. Although the attention to spatially mediated narratives and case studies remains limited in all three works, innovative efforts to articulate a theoretical understanding of accessibility are evident. In Akhlaq-i Nasiri, metaphorical spatial

expressions are employed, and in Mirsad al-Ibad, accessibility—referred to as itā’ dhī al-qurbā—is defined as a state equivalent in significance to justice, a theoretical elevation not observed in any of the preceding mirrors-for-princes. Overall, it can be argued that during the second-mentioned period of this study—roughly the first half of the seventh century AH—mirrors for princes prioritized the development of theoretical concepts over merely recounting concrete instances or narratives of accessibility. At the same time, in the four later manuals, attention to the subjects and the benevolent aspect of justice increased, resulting in a correspondingly greater visibility of royal accessibility for the populace. Even in the later Akhlaq-i Nasiri, despite the emphasis on the majesty of the ruler, attention is simultaneously given to the ruler’s benevolence and generosity. The conceptual development of accessibility in medieval mirrors for princes reaches its fullest realization in Mirsād al-‘Ibād, where it is treated as independent from the principle of justice and is recognized as a distinct state of the ruler.

Since this study remains at the level of textual analysis of the Siyasat-namas, future research could

examine the relationship between these manuals and their broader socio-political and historical contexts in the medieval period, elucidating the correspondence between prescriptive ideals and the actual conditions of their time. It is likely that the mirrors for princes of the second phase, responding to the decline of macro-political stability and crises of legitimacy and justice, shifted toward more theoretical concerns and the structural articulation of justice. Moreover, it may be possible to trace the influence of spatially informed governance concepts in later studies; for instance, the ideas of the Sufi-oriented thinker Najm Razi were likely considered by the spiritual authorities of the Safavid period and may have subsequently shaped the accessibility of the Safavid political apparatus.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author reported no potential conflict of interest.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Mosleh, M. F. (2025). The Monarch's Spatial Accessibility: Examining Six Mirrors for Princes in the Medieval Islamic Period. *Bagh-e Nazar*, 22(150), 45-56.

DOI: [10.22034/bagh.2025.529276.5846](https://doi.org/10.22034/bagh.2025.529276.5846)

URL: https://www.bagh-sj.com/article_229843.html?lang=en

