

Wilāyat al-Maẓālim during Abbasid Caliphate: Institutional Development, Structure, and the Practice of Redress

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the institution of *Wilāyat al-Maẓālim*, the department of grievance redress, as it developed under the Abbasid Caliphate. Although often mentioned only briefly among the ten departments of the Abbasid *dīwān* system, the institution played a distinctive role in classical Islamic governance, operating alongside the *qāḍī* courts to address wrongs that formal judicial procedure could not always reach, particularly those committed by powerful officials against ordinary subjects. Drawing on both the theoretical framework set out largely by al-Māwardī in *Al-Aḥkām al-Sultāniyyah* and a range of recorded case examples from the reigns of al-Manṣūr, al-Mahdī, Hārūn al-Rashīd, al-Ma'mūn, and al-Muhtadī, the article traces three interrelated dimensions of the institution: its historical formalization under the early Abbasids, its structural composition and jurisdictional boundaries, and the practice of personal caliphal supervision in specific cases of redress. The study argues that the institution's durability rested on its capacity to adapt as caliphal power itself evolved, shifting from a personally exercised prerogative of the caliph to a more delegated institutional function, a flexibility that allowed *Wilāyat al-Maẓālim* to survive the political fragmentation of the later Abbasid period and to serve as a template for subsequent Muslim dynasties.

Keywords: *Wilāyat al-Maẓālim*; Abbasid Caliphate; Islamic judicial administration; al-Māwardī; grievance redress.



I. Introduction

A study of the early history of the Islamic state reveals that the Abbasids were the first dynasty to pay full attention to the establishment and development of state institutions as never before. There was a marked policy difference between the Umayyads and the Abbasids. The Umayyad period was mainly one of conquest, whereas one of the great objectives of the early Abbasids was the consolidation of the empire, and in order to attain this end, aggressive enterprises and foreign conquests were largely abandoned. The political machinery that existed under the Abbasid Caliphate, and was afterwards adopted either wholly or with some modifications by the states that came into existence on the breakup of the Arab Empire, was founded by al-Manṣūr and derived its character from his genius.¹ The government of the caliph was called *al-Dīwān al-ʿAzīz* (the August Board). The grand *Wazīr* presided over the board and received the designation of *Wazīr al-Dīwān al-ʿAzīz*. The administrative machinery under the Abbasids, in its effective distribution of work and its control of detail, ranks with the best modern systems. The principal departments of the state included: the *Dīwān al-Kharāj* (Control Office of Taxes, or Department of Finance); the *Dīwān al-Dhimam* (Audit or Accounts Office); the *Dīwān al-Jund* (War Office); the *Dīwān al-Mawālī wa al-Ghilmān* (the office for the protection of clients and slaves, in which a register was kept of the freed men and slaves of the caliph and whence their support was assigned to them); the *Dīwān al-Barīd* (the Post Office); the *Dīwān al-Dhimam wa al-Nafaqāt* (Household Expenses Office); the *Dīwān al-Rasāʾil* (Chancery Office); the *Dīwān al-Tawqīʿ* (Board of Requests); the *Dīwān al-Nazar fī al-Maẓālīm* (Board for the Inspection of Grievances); and the *Dīwān al-Aḥdāth wa al-Shurṭah* (Militia and Police Office).²

This proliferation of specialized departments was not merely an administrative convenience; it reflected a deliberate reconception of the caliphate's relationship to its subjects. The Abbasid Revolution of 132/750 had been waged, at least rhetorically, in the name of restoring justice to a community that its propagandists claimed the Umayyads had governed unjustly. The slogan of *al-riḍā min ʿāl Muḥammad*, satisfaction from the family of the Prophet, carried with it an implicit promise that the new dynasty would govern differently, and that promise required institutional expression once the revolution had succeeded and the business of actually running an empire began.³ It is in this context that the *Dīwān al-Nazar fī al-Maẓālīm*, inserted into the list above among offices of finance, war, and correspondence, assumes a

significance disproportionate to its brief mention. Of all the departments enumerated, it alone was concerned not with the routine extraction and management of state resources but with the moral character of the state's exercise of power over its own subjects.

The term *mazālim* (sing. *mazlīma*), meaning “injustices” or “wrongs,” denotes both the grievances themselves and, by extension, the institution created to hear and redress them. Unlike the ordinary judiciary of the *qāḍī* courts, bound by the formal procedural and evidentiary requirements of *fiqh*, the *mazālim* jurisdiction operated on the principle that certain wrongs, particularly those committed by the powerful against the weak, or by officials against the very subjects they were meant to serve, required a forum with the authority and coercive means to act where ordinary judicial process could not. This made *Wilāyat al-Mazālim* a distinctly political-judicial institution, straddling the line between formal *sharī'a* adjudication and the ruler's own discretionary authority (*siyāsa*). Recent scholarship has emphasized that this hybrid character is precisely what gave the institution its durability and its practical value to successive Muslim states, since it allowed rulers to be seen, and in many documented cases, to genuinely act, as guarantors of justice even against their own appointees.⁴

The present study examines the development of this institution specifically within the Abbasid period, a span of five centuries during which the caliphate moved from the height of centralized power under al-Manṣūr, Hārūn al-Rashīd, and al-Ma'mūn to the fragmented and largely symbolic authority of the later caliphs under Buyid and Seljuk tutelage. This trajectory makes the Abbasid *mazālim* institution a particularly instructive case study, since its history is not one of static practice but of continuous adaptation: an office conceived as an expression of direct sovereign justice proved flexible enough to migrate from the person of the caliph to his viziers, and eventually to the military rulers who came to dominate Baghdad in fact if not in name, all while retaining its essential function and vocabulary.

Three aspects of this history are taken up in turn in the sections that follow. The first traces the institutional development of *Wilāyat al-Mazālim*. The second examines the structure and jurisdiction of the institution in more technical detail: the qualifications required of the *Ṣāhib al-Mazālim*, the constituent elements Māwardī considered indispensable to a properly functioning tribunal, and the specific categories of dispute that fell within its competence rather than that of the ordinary courts. The third turns from institutional theory to recorded practice, surveying the instances in which

individual Abbasid caliphs personally presided over grievance hearings and the particular cases of redress associated with their reigns, from al-Manṣūr's dealings with a wrongfully imprisoned subject of Hamzan to al-Ma'mūn's handling of a widow's complaint against his own son. Taken together, these three lines of inquiry are intended to show that *Wilāyat al-Maẓālim* under the Abbasids was neither a peripheral curiosity of medieval Islamic administration nor a purely theoretical construct confined to the pages of jurists like Māwardī, but a functioning institution whose structure responded to real administrative needs and whose practice, however unevenly applied across different reigns, left a documented record of caliphs acting, or being expected to act, as the ultimate guarantors of justice for their subjects.

II. Institutional Development of *Wilāyat al-Maẓālim* under the Abbasids

1. Pre-Abbasid Antecedents

The institution of *Wilāyat al-Maẓālim* did not emerge fully formed under the Abbasids; rather, it was the product of a long process of accretion, beginning in pre-Islamic Arabia and reaching administrative maturity only under the centralizing impulse of the early Abbasid state. Tracing this development reveals how a largely informal practice of grievance-hearing was transformed into a standing organ of government, embedded within the wider bureaucratic apparatus of the caliphate. After the assassination of 'Alī and attempt on the life of Mu'āwiyah, the Caliphs became less and less accessible to the public. However, most of the Umayyad caliphs set apart some time for hearing appeals and the inspection of grievances. According to Ibn al Athīr, Abdul Malik was the first caliph to devote a special day for hearing cases of *Maẓālim*. 'Umar bin 'Abdul Azīz followed the precedent established his uncle with great zeal. The Abbasids continued this practice and established a regular department which was the highest court of criminal appeal.⁵

The practice of a ruler personally hearing the complaints of his subjects against the powerful predates Islam altogether. Pre-Islamic Arabia knew informal councils (*ḥilf* and tribal arbitration) in which chieftains redressed wrongs that lay outside the scope of customary tribal law.⁶ Islam absorbed and reoriented this practice: the Prophet Muhammad personally heard complaints against his companions and officials, setting a precedent that the Rāshidūn caliphs continued.⁷ Under the Umayyads, the practice gained a more institutional character. Ibn al-Athīr records that 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān was the first caliph to set aside a specific day of the week for hearing cases of *maẓālim*, and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz pursued this precedent with particular zeal,

using it as a vehicle to reverse specific injustices of Umayyad administration.⁸ Even so, under the Umayyads the practice remained tied to the personal initiative of individual rulers rather than constituting a fixed department of state; it rose and fell with the temperament of the reigning caliph and was largely discontinued after the assassination of 'Alī and the attempt on Mu'āwiyah's life narrowed caliphal accessibility to the public.⁹

2. Administrative Formalization and Its Significance under the Early Abbasids

It was under the Abbasids, and specifically in the context of al-Manṣūr's broader reorganization of the state, that grievance-hearing was converted from an occasional royal prerogative into a recognized department of government. The Abbasid Revolution had brought with it an explicit ideological commitment to justice ('*adl*) as the legitimating basis of the dynasty's claim to the caliphate, displacing what Abbasid propaganda characterized as Umayyad misrule.¹⁰ Al-Manṣūr's restructuring of the central bureaucracy into a network of specialized *dīwāns* created, for the first time, an institutional slot into which the grievance function could be permanently fitted: the *Dīwān al-Nazar fī al-Maẓālim*, the Board for the Inspection of Grievances.¹¹ This was a structural innovation of real consequence. Whereas earlier grievance-hearing had been an event, a caliph deciding, on a given day, to make himself available, it now became an office, with a continuous institutional existence independent of any single caliph's personal inclination.

The *maẓālim* institution filled a gap that the *qāḍī* courts, bound by strict procedural and evidentiary rules of *fiqh*, could not always fill, particularly where the wrongdoer was a powerful official whom an ordinary judge lacked the practical authority to summon or discipline.¹² Its formalization, in other words, answered a genuine administrative need created by the very success of Abbasid state-building: a larger, more bureaucratized empire generated more numerous and more consequential disputes between subjects and officeholders than informal caliphal audiences could absorb.

What makes this developmental arc significant is that formalization did not depend on doctrinal innovation in *fiqh*; no new category of substantive law was created to justify *maẓālim*. Rather, the institution's growth was driven by administrative necessity and political utility, the need of a large, bureaucratized empire for a flexible mechanism of executive justice that could act where formal judicial procedure could not.¹³ This pragmatic, state-driven character explains both its rapid institutionalization

under the early Abbasids and its remarkable durability: because the office was defined by function rather than by a fixed doctrinal mandate, it could migrate from caliph to vizier to sultan without losing its essential character, ultimately providing later dynasties, the Ayyubids, Mamluks, and Ottomans among them, with a ready-made institutional template for executive justice long after the Abbasid caliphate itself had ceased to wield effective political power.¹⁴

The Abbasid institutional development of *maẓālim* was also significant because it contributed to the continuity of the principle that governmental authority was not beyond scrutiny. Although the caliph occupied the highest political position, the development of an institution dedicated to the examination of grievances indicated that the administration of the state could itself become the subject of official review. This principle was particularly important in an empire where governors, tax officials, military authorities, and other state functionaries exercised considerable power over the population. From an institutional perspective, therefore, the Abbasid contribution can be understood as a process of formalization, specialization, and integration. Formalization occurred through the establishment of a regular governmental department dealing with grievances. Specialization occurred through the incorporation of *maẓālim* into the system of *dīwāns* that divided governmental responsibilities among distinct offices. Integration occurred through its incorporation into the wider administrative and judicial order of the Abbasid state. These developments gave *Wilāyat al-Maẓālim* a more permanent institutional identity than it had previously possessed.

III. Structure and Jurisdiction of *Wilāyat al-Maẓālim*

The administration of justice, besides judges, in this period was in the hands of *Ṣāhib al-Maẓālim*. The moral qualities required in person exercising the jurisdiction were set out. Practically he was to combine vigilance with firmness. *Wazīrs* and governors with full powers had the jurisdiction inherent in them; if they had restricted powers, it was necessary that special mandate should be obtained and in as much as the jurisdiction was general in scope, the nominee should be apt for the office of successor-designate to the caliphate, *Wazīr* or governorship of the large province. If, however, the jurisdiction was limited to supplementing the deficient authority of the judges, persons of lesser rank were eligible so long as they were not suspended of injustice or bribery. The highest tribunal of the *Maẓālim* was *Dīwān al-Nazar fī al-Maẓālim*. It was presided over by the sovereign himself or in his absence, by a special

officer known as the President. Other members of the board included the chief justice, the *Ḥājib*, the principal secretaries of the state with some nominated *Muftīs* or jurists.¹⁵

1. The Constituent Elements of the Tribunal

Beyond this basic composition, Māwardī sets out the constituent elements considered indispensable to a properly functioning *mazālim* tribunal, a list of ten requirements that together distinguish it structurally from an ordinary court of *qaḍā*.¹⁶ The presiding officer required a military escort or armed protection (*a'wān*) sufficient to enforce his rulings against powerful or recalcitrant defendants, a resource ordinary judges, dependent on voluntary compliance, typically lacked.¹⁷ He needed jurists (*fuqahā'*) at hand to consult on points of law where the case touched on matters of *fiqh*, since the presiding officer, even when himself learned, was expected to defer to specialist opinion in doubtful cases. Judges (*quḍāt*) were to be present or represented, both to lend judicial legitimacy to proceedings and to allow the tribunal to review and, where necessary, correct decisions issued by lower courts. Scribes (*kuttāb*) recorded proceedings, complaints, and judgments, producing the documentary record on which enforcement and later appeal depended.¹⁸ Witnesses (*'udūl*) of established probity were required to verify claims, particularly where the accused was too powerful to be compelled by ordinary evidentiary procedure. The tribunal also required the authority to summon litigants regardless of rank, extending, at least in principle, to governors and even the caliph's own relatives, and the coercive means to compel appearance and compliance once a judgment was issued, a power that lay at the heart of what distinguished *mazālim* from the *qāḍī* courts.¹⁹

The qualifications demanded of the *Ṣāhib al-Mazālim* reflect the hybrid nature of the office, situated between judicial and political authority. Unlike an ordinary *qāḍī*, whose primary qualification was mastery of *fiqh*, the *mazālim* officer needed a combination of legal competence, administrative experience, and personal standing sufficient to overawe powerful wrongdoers.²⁰ Māwardī describes the ideal combination as one of *hayba* (commanding presence) and *'iffa* (integrity), the office demanded someone who could not be intimidated by a governor's rank nor tempted by a litigant's wealth.²¹ This explains why, as the passage above notes, the general jurisdiction was reserved for individuals of the highest social and political standing: *wazīrs*, senior governors, or those fit to be considered for the succession itself. Where such a candidate's authority was inherent in the powers already vested in his office, a *wazīr* with delegated general authority (*tafwīd*), for instance, no separate mandate was

required; his existing office carried the *mazālim* function within it. Where authority was more narrowly defined (*tanfīdh*), by contrast, a specific commission had to be obtained before the officer could exercise grievance jurisdiction, since his ordinary mandate did not extend to it automatically.²²

2. Competence and Institutional Composition of the Dīwān

At the level of jurisdiction proper, the *Dīwān al-Nazar fī al-Mazālim* was understood to possess a wider scope than that of the ordinary judiciary, precisely because it was not bound by the same procedural constraints. Classical jurists enumerate several categories of cases as falling distinctly within *mazālim* competence rather than that of the *qāḍī*: oppression by governors and tax officials against subjects under their administration; disputes over the salaries and stipends (*ʿaṭāʾ*) owed to soldiers and state employees by the treasury; encroachment upon or misappropriation of religious endowments (*awqāf*); supervision of the enforcement of judgments already issued by the *qāḍī* courts, where the losing party refused compliance; and review of complaints against the judges themselves, where a litigant alleged that a *qāḍī* had erred or acted with bias.²³ This last category is particularly significant structurally, since it placed the *mazālim* tribunal in an appellate-like position vis-à-vis the ordinary judiciary, even though classical theory was careful to avoid describing it in terms of a formal court of appeal in the modern sense.²⁴

The composition of the board (combining the chief justice, the *Hājib* (chamberlain, responsible for controlling access to the sovereign and managing the order of proceedings), state secretaries, and nominated jurists) was designed to ensure that the tribunal's exercise of discretionary authority (*siyāsa*) remained tethered to recognized legal expertise, even as it operated with a flexibility of procedure that the ordinary courts did not enjoy.²⁵ The presence of the *Hājib*, for instance, reflects the tribunal's character as an extension of the ruler's own court rather than an independent judicial body: complaints reached the *Dīwān* through channels of access controlled by the palace, and the *Hājib*'s role in managing this access made him a structurally indispensable, if non-juristic, member of the board.²⁶ Taken together, this composition allowed the *mazālim* institution to combine the coercive and political authority of the state with a degree of juristic legitimacy, a structural balance that explains both its effectiveness in redressing grievances against the powerful and its persistence as a distinct branch of governance throughout the Abbasid period and beyond.²⁷

IV. Personal Supervision and Cases of Redress

According to the report of Māwardī among the Abbasid caliphs many paid personal attention to the redress of public grievances particularly against public servants. So among them those who heard such cases personally were Mahdi, Hadi, Al Rashīd, Māmūn and the last one who did that personally was al Muhtadī who reinstated owners in their properties.²⁸

Once al Manṣūr asked his son Mahdī about the number of his livestock, and the later showed ignorance. Manṣūr told him that he did not know about his cattle while the responsibility of the empire was much greater. Likewise Manṣūr at the time of his death wrote a letter to this son Mahdī reminding him of the obligations towards Allah and the public.²⁹ Once al Manṣūr was sitting in his palace when an arrow fell near him. He took it and noticed that something was written on it. He read it; it was quite a long statement in which he has been warned of his destiny if he did not care for the wrong deeds done by him. Among other things it read:

“It is destiny which goes on by itself. So wait and see, the destiny keeps changing. It elevates a mean person to high ranks and humiliates a dignified person sometimes.” At the end it was written, “From one of your prisoners belonging to Hamzan.”

Al Manṣūr sent his men to find out in the prison about the person. There they found an old man in fetters reciting the Qur’anic verse: “*And the wrong doers will see what a come-back they shall have.*”³⁰

They asked him if he belonged to Hamzan. He replied in positive. They brought him to al Manṣūr. He told the caliph that he was a feudal of Hamzan where the Abbasid governor wanted to occupy his estate and on refusing he was imprisoned by him for four years then. Manṣūr ordered him to be released, returned his estate to him, offered him governorship of his area and told him to decide the fate of that Abbasid governor. The man thanked him, regretted to accept the governorship and forgave the governor. However, Manṣūr dismissed the accused governor of his post.³¹

It is reported that whenever Manṣūr dismissed an official, he used to confiscate his property too.³² It is narrated that Manṣūr, on learning that a group of his scribes had made some fabrications and alteration in the record, ordered them to be brought before him and be punished. One of them recited some poetic verses in which he said, “O commander of the faithful, May Allah prolong your life in prosperity and power. We seek protection in your forgiveness, for if you grant us protection, it is by virtue

of your being able to afford safety to the whole world. As for us, we are merely scribes who have committed mistakes so forgive us for the sake of noble recording angels". Thereupon he ordered them to be released and bestowed gifts on the young man as he had shown his sense of trust.³³

Al Manşūr though was very harsh for rebels and criminals but was very merciful for masses. He had told the people to complain to him without hesitation if any official of the government did any injustice to anyone. Once a farmer complained against a government official. Manşūr told him that if he was true, he was allowed to bring the official with his hands tied. Likewise 'Isā bin Mūsā, governor of Kūfa killed a man. When Manşūr came to know he intended to kill him in retaliation. However, he found out that he was killed by mistake therefore he reprimanded him severely.³⁴

It is narrated that Mūsā al Hādī was sitting in a court hearing for claims and grievances and Umārah bin Hamzah who had influence in the court was sitting next to him. A complainant claimed that Umārah had taken his property illegally. Al Hādī ordered Umārah to sit with the complainant for the hearing. Umārah, however said, "O, commander of the faithful, if the property belongs to him, then I don't oppose his claim and if it is mine I gift it to him. I do not want to sell my position in the royal court. It may happen that the magistrate act graciously when according to him the victim is right but at the same time maintain a respect for the defendant, which safeguards his honour from suspicion of using force or preventing a rightful claim. Thus 'Awn bin Muḥammad relates that the people of Nahr al Mirghab at Basra claimed against Mahdī about the area through his judge Ubaidullah bin al Hasan al Anbari, but neither he nor al Hadi, his successor handed it over to them. When al Rasheed came to power and they sought redress from him before Ja'far bin Yahya who was the incharge of *Wilāyat al-Maḏālīm* but al Rasheed did not cede it to them either. Then Ja'far bin Yahya purchased it from al Rasheed for 20,000 dirhams and gave it to them saying, "I am doing this so that you may be aware that the commander of the faithful holding to his right did not want to cede it to you and that his servant has purchased it from him and has granted it to you."

It is possible that Ja'far undertook what he did at his own in order to remove suspicion of wrongdoing from al Rashīd; it is also possible that he did it on the advice of al Rashīd so that neither his father nor his brother be accused of injustice and the latter is more likely. However whichever of the two cases it was, justice was done, honour safeguarded and meanness prevented.³⁵

Many Abbasid rulers presided over *Wilāyat al-Mazālim* personally. Among them were Al Maḥdī, Al Ḥadī, Al Rashīd , Al Māmūn, Al Mu'taṣim and Al Muḥtadī. Mu'taṣim is said to be very strict in this matter. Once a woman complained to him that a military officer has abducted her son. Mu'taṣim called him and on his refusal to confess he pressed him with his hand till the sound of his bones was heard and he fell down on ground. Then he ordered him to produce the child and he did.³⁶

It is narrated that Al Māmūn used to personally sit in the court for hearing grievances of people on Sundays. Once he rose to leave the court when a woman in rags met him saying (in poetic verses):

“O flower of the justice to who even uprightness itself is guided. O, Imam, by whom the whole land has been illuminated. A widow takes her complaint to you, O support of realm, against whom, without means of defence, a lion has made an attack: has seized land from her after she was rendered incapable and had become separated from her family and children.”

Al-Māmūn lowered his eyes for a moment and then raised his head saying: “Before less than what you have spoken of, patience and fortitude they would have weakened; my heart is sickened by your sadness and affliction. Now is the time for the midday prayer, so depart and bring your adversary on the day I shall promise you; the court sits on Saturdays; and if I sit on the day I will see that you receive justice; if not , then at the Sunday sitting.” She then went and attended on Sunday in the first row. Al Māmūn then asked her, “Against whom have you a complaint?” She replied, “The one standing by your side, Al ‘Abbās, your son.” Al-Māmūn told his judge, Yaḥyā bin Akṭham to hold a sitting with both the parties for investigation of the case. He did that in the presence of Al Māmūn. When the woman raised her voice, one of the people reprimanded her; but al Māmūn said, “Leave her, for surely it is the truth which is making her speaking and falsehood is making him silent.” Then he ordered that her land be restored to her. His action of holding investigation in his presence without doing it personally was indicative of good administration in two ways. Firstly; it concerned a judgment which might have been in favour of or against his son. One may not give judgment in favour of his son although it may be done against him. Secondly, the litigant was a woman with respect to whom he was too highly placed to respond; moreover his son by virtue of his rank, found himself in a position in which no one other than caliph could enforce the law. Thus al Māmūn referred the investigation in his son’s presence to someone who was able to converse with the

woman, resolve the claim and elucidate the relevant facts but it was the caliph himself who issued the decree and enforced the law.³⁷

It is recounted that once, while al Muhtadī was holding a court for redress of grievances, various petitions regarding the coins known as *Khusroes* were presented to him. When he inquired about them, Sulayman bin Wahab replied, “‘Umar bin al Khattab, had imposed on the inhabitants of *al-Sawād* and the areas around it to the east and west which he conquered. Payment by instalments of the *kharāj* in silver and gold; the *dirhams* and dinars were minted with the weight of *Khusroes* and of the Ceaser, and the people of these regions would pay the money they had, according to the number required without considering the disparity in weight between various coins. Then the people became corrupt and those who had to pay *kharāj* would give *Ṭabarī* coins, which were four *doniq* and would keep the *wafī* money of full weight, which had the weight of a *mithqāl*. When Ziyad became the governor of Iraq, he exacted payment in *Wafis* and imposed payment in *Khusroes*. The agents of the Banu Umayyad continued the practice until Abdul Malik began his rule. He examined the difference between the two weights and assessed the weight of *dirham* at five and a half *mithqāl*, leaving the *mithqāl* as it was. Later al Ḥajjāj began to demand payment in *khusroes*, something which was annulled by ‘Umar bin Abdul Azīz but was reinstated by those who came after him until the time of al Manṣūr. When, however, as *Sawād* was destroyed, al Manṣūr put an end to payment in silver of the *Kharāj* due on wheat and barley and transformed it into a proportional tax in kind. These two grains are the most common in *al Sawād* and he left a few other grain crops, dates and fruit trees to be assessed in accordance with the *kharāj*, which was till then exacted in *khusroes* and provisions.” Al Muhtadī said, “May Allah guard me from imposing an unjust measure on the people, be it from long ago or recent past- relieve the people of it.” Hassan bin Makhlad said that this abolishment of the commander of the faithful represented an annual loss of 12 million *dirhams* to the treasury-Al Muhtadī replied, “I would establish what is right and will remove what is unjust even if it cause loss to the treasury.”³⁸

From the above mentioned examples it becomes manifest that during Abbasid period there was a particular emphasis upon the institution of *Mazālim*. Although all caliphs were not equal in this respect but no doubt that redress of public grievances and accountability of public servants and that of the influential did receive due care and attention during this period.

V. Conclusion

The preceding study has traced the institution of *Wilāyat al-Mazālim* across three complementary dimensions: its historical development from a loosely defined pre-Islamic and early Islamic practice into a formal department of the Abbasid state; its structural composition and the jurisdictional boundaries that distinguished it from the ordinary courts of the *qāḍī*; and the recorded instances in which individual caliphs personally exercised this authority in the redress of specific grievances. Taken together, these three perspectives yield a picture of an institution considerably more sophisticated, and considerably more consequential, than its brief mention among the ten departments of the Abbasid *dīwān* system might initially suggest. What emerges most clearly from this study is that *Wilāyat al-Mazālim* cannot be understood as a single, unchanging institution frozen at the moment of its formalization under al-Manṣūr. Rather, it was a living mechanism of governance that adapted continuously to the shifting distribution of power within the caliphate. In its earliest Abbasid form, the institution was closely bound to the person of the caliph, who bore personal responsibility for hearing and redressing the complaints of his subjects, however humble their station or however powerful the official against whom they complained. The cases surveyed in this study (al-Manṣūr's restoration of a wrongfully dispossessed subject of Hamzān, al-Mahdī's and al-Rashīd's handling of the Nahr al-Mirghab land dispute, al-Muhtadī's reversal of an unjust taxation practice despite its cost to the treasury, and al-Ma'mūn's willingness to see justice done even against his own son) together illustrate that this personal dimension of the institution was not merely theoretical. It was, in numerous documented instances, exercised with genuine consequence for the individuals involved, and it served a clear political function: reinforcing the image of the caliph, however distant his rule might otherwise seem to an ordinary subject, as the ultimate and personally accountable guarantor of justice within his realm.³⁹

At the same time, this study has shown that the institution's durability depended precisely on its capacity to function apart from any single caliph's personal engagement. The structural apparatus described by Māwardī (which included the requirement of armed protection to enforce rulings, the presence of jurists and judges to lend legal legitimacy, the authority to summon defendants regardless of rank, and the careful balance of judicial and political competence embodied in the composition of the board) indicates an institution designed from the outset to outlast the individual

disposition of any particular ruler. This structural resilience explains why *Wilāyat al-Mazālim* survived, and indeed continued to be exercised, even as effective caliphal power contracted dramatically over the ninth and tenth centuries. As authority passed from the caliph into the hands of viziers, and later into the hands of military commanders and foreign dynasts who dominated Baghdad while nominally deferring to the caliph's religious authority, the institution proved adaptable enough to migrate with that authority rather than disappear alongside caliphal power itself.⁴⁰ This adaptability carries a broader significance for the study of Islamic administrative history. The Abbasid *mazālim* institution demonstrates that effective governance in the classical Islamic state did not rest on the *sharī'a* courts alone, however central those courts were to the legal and religious life of the community. Alongside the *qāḍī*, operating under a distinct set of procedural principles and answering to a distinct logic of *siyāsa* rather than strict *fiqh*, stood an institution capable of reaching wrongs that the formal judiciary, constrained by its own rules of evidence and its limited coercive authority over the powerful, could not always redress. The coexistence of these two systems, one bound tightly to revealed law, the other responsive to the practical exigencies of governing a vast and diverse empire, offers a more complete picture of how classical Islamic states actually functioned than a study of the *qāḍī* courts alone could provide.

Finally, the persistence of the *mazālim* model well beyond the effective end of Abbasid political power confirms that what the early Abbasids formalized was not a transient administrative expedient but a genuinely useful template of governance, one flexible enough to be adopted by rulers of very different political circumstances and legitimating claims. In this sense, the institutional history recounted in this study extends well beyond the Abbasid period itself, and the questions it raises about the relationship between formal law, political authority, and the practical demands of justice remain of more than merely antiquarian interest.



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