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05 Haziran 2024

CHAPTER 1

Nizām al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, “Chief Qadi of China and the East”: an Ilkhanid Man of Letters at the Court of the Juwaynīs

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In an article published in 1999, Jürgen Paul drew attention to the importance of neglected *inshā* collections – letters written in a highly rhetorical style – as sources for Ilkhanid history. Paul’s article focused on the manuscripts which preserve the personal correspondence of the Juwaynī family who played a major role in the administration of the Ilkhanate in the thirteenth century.¹ Paul showed that the letters, despite their elaborate style and lack of hard historical “facts,” can not only be used as sources for the personal affairs of the Juwaynīs, but also can shed light more generally on the networks of patronage in the Ilkhanid state.² Despite their shortcomings in terms of dates and information about events, they are thus of use in reconstructing the broader social and intellectual history of the period.

In this article, following in Paul’s footsteps, I shall investigate another neglected *inshā* source, the letters and poems of a close associate of the Juwaynī family, Nizām al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, who was active in western Iran between roughly the 1230s and 1270s. Although Nizām al-Dīn’s works have been known to scholars in Iran and the Arab world for many years, and were recorded by Brockelmann in his monumental history of Arabic literature,

- 1 On the Juwaynīs, see George Lane, *Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth Century Iran: A Persian Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 171–212; Hashem Rajabzadeh, “Jovayni family,” *EIr*, vol. 15, pp. 61–3.
- 2 Jürgen Paul, “Some Mongol *insha* Collections: The Juvaini Letters,” in Charles Melville (ed.), *Proceedings of the Third European Conference of Iranian Studies, held in Cambridge, 11th–15th of September, 1995, Part 2: Medieval and Modern Persian Studies* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1999), pp. 277–85. In general see also his article “Enšā,” *EIr*, vol. 8, pp. 455–7, and for other examples of the utility of *inshā* as an historical source from earlier periods see Klaus Hachmeier, “Private Letters, Official Correspondence: Buyid *inshā*’ as a Historical Source,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 13/2 (2002), pp. 125–54 and David Durand-Guédy, “Diplomatic Practice in Salḡūq Iran: A Preliminary Study Based on Nine Letters about Saladin’s campaign in Mesopotamia,” *Oriente Moderno*, 87/2 (2008), pp. 271–96.