Forster Regula, Yavari Neguin (eds.)
Global Medieval:
Mirrors for Princes Reconsidered

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Given the recent renewal of interest for the particular genre of the '*mirrors for princes*', Regula Forster and Neguin Yavari's proceeding volume *Global Medieval: Mirrors for Princes Reconsidered*, surely comes at the right time to contribute to the ongoing debates. This, especially, since the volume aims to address two major issues found in the literature, in a new "reconsidered" way. On the one hand, it aims "to explore possibilities for a genuine comparative framework to study the works of authors from disparate cultural origins and in the distant past" (p. 7). And, on the other hand, it wishes to do so by assuming the global nature of the political theory. While those two points have been often debated in the field of modern political thought, the volume shifts the debate to a rather neglected realm of premodern political writings, namely the Medieval *mirrors for princes* of the Christian and Islamic traditions. In this, the editors wish to respond to recent calls in the field asking for "internationalization and globalizing intellectual history in the Western academy" (p. 2) and aiming to go against the teleological approach that has long characterized the discipline. Against the previous trends, the volume proposes to focus on questions related to the context, transmission, comparison and incommensurability, and the chronology of globalization.

The eleven contributions in the volume can be classified according to four major themes:

1. the conceptualization of sovereignty and common good in Islamic and European traditions (Stefan Leder and Hans-Joachim Schmidt);

2. the contextualization of European and Greco-Roman traditions (Charles F. Briggs and Matthias Haake);

3. "Mirrors as palimpsests" (p. 8), including two sub-themes: the conceptualization of Islamic Mirror in Arabic and Persian traditions (Seyed Sadegh Haghighat and Mohsen Zakeri) and the reception of (Indian) mirrors in Islamic and Byzantine traditions (Olga M. Davidson and Johannes Niehoff-Panagiotidis); and

4. finally the question of classification of specific works as mirrors for princes in the Islamic traditions (Hinrich Biesterfeldt, Isabel Toral-Niehoff and Edwin P. Wieringa). The articles in the volume however, are not organized according to those themes.

The first chapter by Hinrich Biesterfeldt, "Ibn Farīghūn's *Jawāmiʿ al-ʿulūm*: Between Classification of sciences and Mirror for Princes" (p. 11-25), is a good illustration of the difficulty of classifying the genre of the *mirrors* in early Islamic tradition. Through the analysis of this 10th-century work on the classification of knowledge (in *tashjīr* format), Biesterfeldt is able to show how particular sections of the work (i.e., History, virtues of the ruler, integrative elements) truly feature some of the *mirrors*' characteristics – borrowed from "foreign"-Greek fields of knowledge.

Charles F. Briggs' second chapter, "Scholarly Intellectual Authority in Late Medieval European Mirrors" (p. 26-41), addresses the very question of the political nature of Medieval European mirrors through his thorough analysis of four works produced by members of religious orders in the 13th-14th century: Enrico da Rimini, Engelbert of Admont, Luca Mannelli and Michael of Prague. He successfully shows how the specific context of those works can reveal strong discrepancies between their assumed and intended purposes.

In the third chapter, "Aetiologias of the *Kalīla wa Dimna* as Mirror for Princes" (p. 42-57), Olga M. Davidson reviews the general assumption concerning the nature and purpose of the aetiological narratives in the famous Arabic book of fables, *Kalīla wa Dimna*. Conversely to François de Blois' study (1990), Davidson focuses on the multiform character of those statements, and stresses that these are deeply bond to oral tradition. This chapter addresses the broader issue of the reception of such texts, and also sets the basis for further comparative research of narratives strategies between the *Kalīla wa Dimna* and Western European parallel.

Matthias Haake's chapter "Writing to a Ruler, Speaking to a Ruler, Negotiating the figure of the Ruler; Thoughts on 'Monocratological' Texts and their Contexts in Greco-Roman Antiquity" (p. 58-82) elaborates on the important – yet debated – question of terminology regarding the use and misuse of the "Mirrors for Princes". Furthermore, he addresses the no less problematic assumption of the universality of such genre. Doing so, he uses the case of Greco-Roman tradition and reviews previous scholarship on that topic.

Rooted in the Foucauldian discourse analysis tradition, Seyed Sadegh Haghighat's chapter "Persian Mirrors for Princes: Pre-Islamic and Islamic Mirrors Compared" (p. 83-93) proposes an original analysis of the overstated influence of pre-Islamic Iranian tradition on the Islamic mirrors. By focusing on particular themes and concepts (i.e., *farra*, governance, expediency, justice and goodness), he is able to

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demonstrate that Islamic mirrors did not develop as mere imitation of the Iranian tradition, but instead were as equally influenced by their own political context.

Concerning the conceptualization of sovereignty, "Sultanic Rule in the Mirror of Medieval Political Literature" (p. 94-111) by Stefan Leder represents a good overview of the evolution in the Islamic political tradition over time. Beyond the normative aspects of the Islamic mirrors, Leder is able to show how rulers' agencies and their quest for the common good have influenced the notion of good rule. The role of context in the understanding of specific tradition is, like in the other chapters, predominant.

Johannes Niehoff-Panagiotidis' chapter "Avoiding History's Teleology: Byzantine and Islamic Political Philosophy" (p. 112-121) is a comparative analysis of Byzantine and Islamic tradition based on their shared roots in the Late Antique context. This postulate would explain translation of Arabic texts such as the *Kalīla wa Dimna* at the Byzantine court.

Hans-Joachim Schmidt's chapter "The King's Beautiful Body: On the Political Dilemmas of Ideal Government" (122-133) brings us back to the European tradition of political governance. Central in his study is the analysis of the body metaphor found in authors such as Giles of Rome, that was used to counter Medieval dilemmas concerning the question of perfect rule.

Isabel Toral-Niehoff presents in "The "Book of the Pearls on the Ruler" in the *Unique Necklace* by ʿAbd Rabbih: Preliminary Remarks" (p. 134-150) a preliminary study of ʿAbd al-Rabbih's *ʿal-Iqd al-Farīd* as early representative of the genre of the Mirrors. Based on the analysis of the first section of the book on rulership (including a comparison with Ibn Qutayba's *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, and a focus on the paratexts), Toral-Niehoff paves the way for further investigation of this promising work.

Edwin P. Wieringa's chapter "A Scholar's Claims on Practical Politics: Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's Seventeenth-Century Malay *Bustān al-salāṭīn*" (p. 151-173) once more demonstrates the difficulty of classifying a specific work of the Islamic tradition as Mirrors for princes. The example Wieringa analyses is particularly challenging due to its context, purpose and intended audience.

Finally, Mohsen Zakeri's contribution "A Proposal for the Classification of Political Literature in Arabic and Persian: Folk Narrative as a Source of Political Thought?" (p. 174-197) perfectly closes the volume with a thorough overview of the themes and debates peculiar to the definition and forms of the Islamic Mirrors. This he does by establishing a new typology and by questioning the integration of Persian folk narratives into the genre. His analysis of *Samak-i ʿAyyār* is particularly promising.

While most of the contributions in the volume address in diverse ways the lines of inquiry stated by the editors (context, transmission, chronology), the volume falls short to offer the comparative approach and the global perspective as aimed for in the introduction. Furthermore, the volume is somehow unbalanced: out of the eleven contributions, only two deals with Medieval Europe. The greater proportion of articles devoted to the Islamic tradition of the mirrors is however quite welcome, due to the relative lack of study in that field compared to its Western counterpart. Most of the topics and works dealt with in the volume are nevertheless innovative (even if sometimes in a very preliminary stage) and will surely help initiating more promising research in the field of Islamic mirrors for princes.

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