

thought within Islam sees itself as an authentic expression of the Prophetic message and as the guardian of that tradition. One has to remember that Shi'ī theologians of past and present see themselves as inhabiting not a marginal, 'sectarian' space, but as articulating the original vision, as they see it, of the revelation. This is the understanding that the volume could provide to wider courses in the study of Islam. But as it stands it is unlikely to be adopted as a volume on introductory courses on Islam because it does not locate itself within that context. Haider could have done more to sell his product on that point – and it can indeed be used profitably as such. (s.h.rizvi@exeter.ac.uk)

SAJJAD H. RIZVI
University of Exeter

ADVICE FOR THE SULTAN: PROPHETIC VOICES AND SECULAR POLITICS IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM. BY NEGUIN YAVARI. pp. 197. London, Hurst, 2014.
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Islamic advice literature, of which the two most celebrated examples are *Kalīla wa Dimna* and Nizām al-Mulk's *Siyār al-Mulūk*, was central to political thought across the diverse cultures of the pre-modern Islamic world but has latterly become an intellectual orphan. In the modern Islamic world, it has no traction in political debates, a lamentable caesura between the present and the past. In the West, it was used experimentally as a colonial language teaching tool and briefly read with enthusiasm for its literary value (see, for example, the preface to Rev. Wyndham Knatchbull's 1819 translation of *Kalīla wa Dimna*) before going out of fashion. It was ignored for some time because it appeared to be neither a good source for historical information nor for morals, apparently disqualified by the high body count of viziers meeting gruesome ends and so on. Eventually scholars rethought the texts' historicity and embarked on a campaign of reading between the lines, often finding themselves frustrated by the texts' stubbornness in giving up the historical facts they sought. A great deal of recent scholarship has focussed on reconstructing the transmission of the texts and the stories contained in them.

Negin Yavari has breathed new life into the study of these texts, also called Mirrors for Princes, by producing what this reviewer unhesitatingly thinks of as "an important book" with all that that entails. It is an admirably thorough account of the advice literature that the author has studied for years, but is outstanding and relevant well beyond its field in its attempts to rethink how intellectual history outside of the West should be pursued. Rather than considering the texts as reflections of their historical context and to be interpreted as such, Yavari instead explores the texts' rhetorical strategies to get at the thought behind them. By engaging robustly with structure and rhetoric across centuries of material, she offers a compelling portrait of a tradition of political philosophy and its forms of literary expression, providing an unprecedented synthetic analysis of what authors within this tradition were trying to convey to their readers. She strikes the right balance of historical contextualisation with rhetorical analysis, providing a model for how we might approach other pre-modern systematic disciplines such as philology, which map awkwardly onto modern academic disciplines.

The impetus for approaching the texts in this way is the need to reconsider the intellectual assumptions that undergird the current political order, which, in Yavari's words, are "a celebration of the felicitous birth of the modern world that was European, and that enjoyed continuity between its past and present" (1). But the West's easy claim on modernity (and by the same token the historical disjointedness of present-day Islamic political thought from its past forms) is anomalous in light of "remarkable affinity between pre-modern Islamic and Christian political thought" (3). This book

considers the Islamic and Western traditions in the same frame not to engage with the usual questions of how one might have influenced the other but rather to show that the two traditions shared a set of rhetorical strategies. This insight, which seems simple enough, can and should lead to sweeping re-evaluations. Key among these is unmasking the prejudicial assumption that political thought in the West's past is necessarily part of the golden thread leading to modern political thought while ignoring similar features appearing elsewhere because these lead to historical dead ends.

The forcefulness of Yavari's demands for a new scholarly methodology would have been a damp squib had the research in this book not been suitably impressive. Fortunately, it lays a solid foundation by providing rich summaries of where our knowledge stands in the various subfields of advice literature (footnotes rise the top of the page in several places). It demonstrates the author's command over a vast and unruly body of sources in both the Islamicate and European traditions. By putting the traditions in dialogue without privileging the question of who said what first, the rhetorical strategies of the texts come into relief. Yavari thus comes to an important conclusion about the texts: "They work through obfuscation, deploying ambiguity and ambivalence as protective shields to veil their political polemics . . . In form as well as in content, mirrors thrive on heterogeneity and equivocation . . ." (p. 7). In other words, scholars have been wrong to criticise the mirrors as choppy and inconsistent in their story-telling because that was the point. The texts themselves were possibility engines.

Most strikingly, Yavari identifies in the advice literature what in the Western context would be thought of as a precursor to secularism: The king with his divinely-ordained right to rule is often paired with a vizier who is beholden not directly to God but to rationality for his position. The king is associated with wisdom [*khirad* or *hikmat*], an innate gift, while the vizier is master of reason [*'aql*], a worldly trait (a similar pairing is *sharī'ah* and *ijtihād*). This contrast between the two men is often symbolically expressed, for example, by difference in age or in doctrinal orientation. For the polity to function, they must work together, bridging their opposing tendencies through dialogue. Interpretation is therefore central to politics, and "the call to interpretation is echoed in advice literature's narrative form of choice," that is, in the anecdote (75ff). The rulers to whom the books are addressed were meant to see themselves in descriptions of the ancient worthies, such as Alexander the Great and his teacher Aristotle. Yavari argues that the contradictions and anachronisms in the portrayals of these well-known figures were not the result of the authors' credulity about historical facticity but rather because they understood the heuristic nature of the texts they were composing: Whether the stories' details were literally true was immaterial so long as they provided sound moral guidance. Likewise, scholars have made a great deal of the fact that the insights in advice literature tend to be ascribed to faraway places, like India or Greece, and that the descriptions of these distant lands are often inaccurate according to what we know from other sources. The key to understanding this apparent sloppiness is that alterity rather than a particular culture's insight was being sought. Yavari is rightly sceptical of positivist attempts to map mentions in the texts to particular practices in India or wherever not because these are always misguided but because scholars who have chased such questions have often excluded far more significant strands of enquiry. Yavari's method requires us to eschew easy historical correspondences but nonetheless is full of historical insights, such as providing a convincing explanation of Nizām al-Mulk's factional politics (109ff).

The arguments are advanced across eight chapters. An introduction and conclusion (Chapters 1 and 8) lay out the polemical framework for the project. Chapter 2 introduces the reader to the contours of the *Mirrors for Princes* genre in both the Islamicate and European context. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on *Kalīla wa Dimna*. The summary of the state of our knowledge in Chapter 3 manages to be clear enough to be useful as an assigned reading for students but also of interest to specialists. Chapter 5 offers general observations on how governance was understood. Chapters 6 and 7 nuance the idea, usually taken at face value, that religion and statecraft were two sides of the same coin in the

Islamic world. These chapters also include a lengthy discussion of the seemingly crassly anti-Semitic but in fact philosophically significant story of the Magus and the Jew (102ff).

This book has the virtues of both accessibility and completeness in its field, but in terms of the sweeping polemic framed by the first and last chapter, it is necessarily a beginning rather than a conclusive account. Since Yavari builds her study around questioning trajectories of historical interpretation, this reviewer would have liked to see more of a structured account (perhaps even a whole chapter) tracing the Western engagement with these texts. Do the ways that Europeans previously read these texts continue to influence how they are interpreted today? There is a gap in the discussion spanning roughly the time of Shakespeare to the rise of the Cambridge School of historical interpretation in the 1970s. Additionally, the introduction and conclusion, while thought-provoking and convincing in identifying the limits of Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock's intellectual historical methods, are a missed opportunity to sketch out a programme that future scholars might follow instead. Since the whole book is a testament to the possibilities of a new approach, however, one cannot fault the author for showing it in action rather than describing it. adudney@gmail.com

ARTHUR DUDNEY
Oxford University

AFGHANISTAN IN INK LITERATURE BETWEEN DIASPORA AND NATION. Edited by NILE GREEN and NUSHIN ARBABZADAH. pp. xvii, 303. Hurst & Company, London, 2013.
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Afghanistan in Ink Literature between Diaspora and Nation originates in a conference held at UCLA in 2010. Its focus is language and literature in twentieth and twenty-first century Afghanistan, and their relationship to developments in other areas of Afghan society, culture and politics. One of its central themes is the efforts of the Afghan state and Afghan elites to develop a national language and a literature to go with it. This was a challenging task, since the country's principal languages, Persian and Pashto, were also the mother tongues of so many people living outside its borders. In the first chapter Green and Arbabzadah explore efforts to develop identifiably Afghan versions of both, which were supported by the creation of cultural institutions such as the Kabul Literary Society and the Pashto Academy. The moderniser Mahmud Tarzi (1865–1933) made a major contribution to this, and to the development of twentieth century Afghan literature, as Chapter 2 explains. Among his other achievements, in 1911 he founded the first regularly published Afghan newspaper, the *Siraj al-Akhbar Afghaniya* ('Torch of Afghan News'). He was also the first to refer to Afghan Persian as Dari and claim it was a distinct language.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the development of various forms of Pashto literature and their relationship with the Afghan state, in some detail. As Pashto was reimagined as the language of the new modern Afghanistan, Pashto print literature was increasingly used to reinforce state power and ideology. But as Wide explains, efforts to make Pashto an Afghan national language were undermined by an efflorescence of Pashto language and literature, particularly poetry, among the Pashtuns living across the Durand Line in British India, because this literature often evoked an inclusive cross-border Pashtun solidarity. Moreover, as Caron explains in Chapter 5, this Pashto nationalist poetry could be understood as a critique not just of British imperialism, but of local power relations as well.

Another important theme is the introduction of new literary genres – newspapers and journals, short stories and novels, and developments in existing ones, poetry in particular. So for example, after World