

question arises particularly in the case of materials associated with different figures in different sources, a phenomenon that Askari acknowledges. It would be interesting, moreover, to trace in the Arabic and Persian literary corpora the processes by which Ardashīr, as Askari observes, retains his status as an expositor of consummate political wisdom but is, in terms of his exemplary kingship, eclipsed in stature by Anūshīrvān. In this fine study, Askari furthers our awareness of the broad dissemination in the Persian mirror literature of Sasanian political wisdom, and the spectrum of uses to which it was put.

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*Counsel for Kings: Wisdom and Politics in Tenth-Century Iran.* By LOUISE MARLOW. 2 vols. Edinburgh Studies in Classical Arabic Literature. Edinburgh: EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. Pp. xv + 344 (vol. 1), viii + 384 (vol. 2). \$220, £150.

Louise Marlow has written a fascinating and probing study of one of the earliest Arabic mirrors for princes. She greatly advances our understanding of not just the early tenth-century *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* or even of the genre, but of the general eastern Iranian, Samanid intellectual and political context in which the text was produced. There have been a number of important studies in recent years on this region and its intellectual, social, and political currents (e.g., by Bilal Orfali, Arezou Azad, Étienne de la Vaissière, and Deborah Tor, among others) but it still is badly in need of studies that meticulously document the possibilities and constraints created by the contexts in which authors worked. Its Arabic literary and intellectual heritage, in particular, requires much more study, and Marlow has now added enormously to our understanding.

The origins of the text and its attribution—surely incorrectly—to the great Shāfiʿī jurist al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) are the first problems that Marlow must tackle. This attribution has long come under fire, not least because none of the period’s authoritative biobibliographers refers to a *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* among the works of al-Māwardī (though, as Marlow points out, medieval titles pose a host of problems). Nor does careful reading of the lone manuscript witness to the text support this attribution (100 fols. within a late sixteenth-century three-part *majmūʿa* held in Paris, BnF, MS Arabe, No. 2447). Marlow notes that the title and author given in the manuscript are merely provided by a copyist (possibly from an exemplar, but still *hors de texte*), but the most convincing argument against attributing the text to al-Māwardī turns out to be the way in which the text makes the most sense if read as responding to the specific situation of eastern Iran, and especially Balkh, of the first part of the fourth/tenth century. For these reasons, then, Marlow refers to the author throughout her book as “Pseudo-Māwardī.” Though rather clunky, it seems the best option.

Marlow was afforded what few authors today receive: ample space—two volumes!—to roll out her arguments. This allows for unusually detailed comparisons that shed light on the specific context, choices, and meanings of Pseudo-Māwardī and his text. For example, part one of the first volume (*The Naṣīḥat al-mulūk of Pseudo-Māwardī: Contexts and Themes*) focuses on “Situating the Text,” and here Marlow shows the likelihood that the text was composed in Balkh during the tumultuous reign of the Samanid Naṣr II b. Aḥmad II (r. 301–31/914–43), when the sons of another Samanid, Ishāq b. Aḥmad, unsuccessfully asserted their own claims to rule. Whereas Pseudo-Māwardī, reflecting a possibly regional point of view, held Ishāq in high regard, his fellow historians relate stories about Ishāq that foretell the dissipation of his children’s authority or treat him as a plotter of rebellions (e.g., al-Balʿamī, writing in Buyid Iraq; al-Narshakhī, who presented his *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā* to the ruling son of Naṣr II, Nūḥ; or al-Gardīzī, who flourished in the fifth/eleventh century). Citation and discussion of passages from these other historians aid enormously. Similarly, when Marlow considers various settings for the composition of *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, her discussion of Balkh, at the edges of the Islamic world, is expansive. Most fascinatingly, she shows that Pseudo-Māwardī’s understanding of the person and significance of the Buddha differed in kind from that of his contemporaries. These insights involve a close reading of a number of other texts, and a worthwhile digression into the confusions of other

tenth-century authors (e.g., al-Masʿūdī, al-Maḡdisī, Ibn al-Nadīm, and al-Bīrūnī). Likewise, in terms of genre and the development of ideas on rulership, through comparisons Marlow differentiates *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* from its closest predecessor, *Akhlāq al-mulūk* (known as *Kitāb al-Tāj*), and subsequent mirrors, including that of the famed Seljuk vizier, Nizām al-Mulk. She also shows, through careful and extensive citation, Pseudo-Māwardī's intellectual debt to and interaction with both Muʿtazilī thought (especially that of the theologian al-Kaʿbī, who was resident and teaching in Khurasan at the very time when Pseudo-Māwardī wrote) and also the Kindian philosophical tradition.

The structure of Marlow's study is somewhat complicated, which she seeks to clarify with repeated sign-postings. Generally speaking, volume one is contextual, made of up three parts: "Situating the Text," "Governance and Society," and "The Religious Landscape." The second volume (*The Naṣīḥat al-mulūk of Pseudo-Māwardī: Texts, Sources and Authorities*) translates and analyses extensive parts of the work, especially three of the volume's ten chapters: "The King's Self-Governance," "The Governance of the Élités," and "The Governance of the Common People." But this division is not absolute, as topics and themes run through both volumes, most prominently pertaining to kingship, hierarchy, and the limits and obligations of rulers. While the material is generally presented well, I believe that it would have been preferable to contain the analytical discussion to one volume, and then to follow, in volume two, with a full translation with explanatory notes. My sense of *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* as a book, I think, would have been stronger, and likewise, as a teaching resource, or for nonspecialists, such access to the work would be useful.

Marlow shows that the Samanid context involved a "decentralised model of cooperation," with power dispersed among a number of elite groupings, so that "cooperation of these intermediaries with the dynasty was essential to the functioning of the Samanid system" (vol. 1, p. 107). Rebellions were frequent, and challengers aplenty. *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* reflects this environment, and puts forward a vision of sacralized kingship, with the king's status at the top of a hierarchy, below God and his angels and prophets, but above humanity, including the ruling elite (*khāṣṣa*) and the common mass (*ʿamma*, "subjects" generally). Central to Pseudo-Māwardī's view is the concept and practice of *khidma* (lit. service), which involved an exchange of obedience to a ruler's commands for his honoring expectations and acting in a trustworthy manner.

It is impossible to know if any Samanid ruler actually read Pseudo-Māwardī's book, but his forthrightness—for which many other advisors suffered a ruler's wrath—is noteworthy nonetheless. In the first chapter of *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, Pseudo-Māwardī emphasizes the duty of subjects to offer sincere counsel to the ruler and the reciprocal duty of the king to receive and heed salutary advice. He goes on to enumerate six reasons for kings being the most fitting of people to accept advice and listen to admonition. Pseudo-Māwardī's longest chapter is in fact devoted to the king's governance and discipline of the self (*siyāsāt al-naḥs wa-riyādatuhā*), where, as Marlow discusses, the paired terms *siyāsa* and *riyāda* evoke training and discipline. The crucial idea underpinning Pseudo-Māwardī's approach is that "the ruler should emulate the divine qualities" (vol. 2, p. 74), which entails, among other things, that he cultivate the virtue of *taqwā Allāh* ("godliness, consciousness of God, fear of God," vol. 2, p. 76). His governance should be based on "rational and religiously derived principles" (vol. 2, p. 88), with knowledge—a divine attribute—listed first among the virtues required of kings, and knowledge of "the science of religion" (*ʿilm al-dīn*) being the highest in value. Among the other divine attributes worthy of emulation is forbearance. As Pseudo-Māwardī writes, God is forbearing towards his creatures, and is not quick with his punishments. A ruler should follow his Maker: "His extraordinary power and limitless dominion should not move him to iniquitous vengeance and hasty reprisal, nor should he abandon the custom of waiting before inflicting punishment. Let him remember God's power over him, the abundance of His gifts to him, and His goodness to him. Let him remember also his manifold disobedience to God and God's forbearance of him, so that he should not treat those subject to his power (*man taḥta yadihi*) in a manner different from that which he loves in God's action (towards him)" (vol. 2, p. 117).

The second volume includes very close readings of long passages of *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, and here Marlow gives readers the flavor of the work and especially of Pseudo-Māwardī's schematizing efforts. Marlow deserves special praise for her skill in translating difficult phrases. Her renderings of the term *adab* (pl. *ādāb*) were especially perceptive (as "literary culture," "appropriate and pleasing behaviour," or in the plural, "maxims," "notable sayings," "instructive examples"). Given the audience and genre,

Pseudo-Māwardī's perhaps surprising preference for *kalām* over *fiqh* also comes through clearly (as Marlow discusses, comparing Pseudo-Māwardī's approach to that of al-Fārābī; vol. 2, p. 101). Marlow's book might now usefully be read alongside recent publications treating the Buyid vizier al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād (d. 385/925), who is known to have promoted the teaching of Muʿtazilī theology throughout Buyid territories and beyond (W. Madelung and S. Schmidtke, *Al-Ṣāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād, Promoter of Rational Theology: Two Muʿtazilī kalām texts from the Cairo Geniza* [Leiden, 2016]; M. Pomerantz, *Licit Magic: The Life and Letters of al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād (d. 385/995)* [Leiden, 2017]).

The second volume also includes an impressively detailed identification and analysis of the non-sacred sources for *Naṣiḥat al-mulūk* (chapter two, "Sources and Authorities: The Living Meaning of Ancient Wisdom"). Marlow's discussion of transmission and reception of pre- and early Islamic Iranian texts into Arabic and Persian is nuanced and engages with a very wide range of specialist scholarship—as elsewhere, her bibliography represents the state of the field extremely well. Again, here the comparisons with other works are important and show, for example, that Pseudo-Māwardī, writing in the Islamic East, had a more intimate knowledge of pre-Islamic Persian writings (*kutub al-ʿajam*), such as the Testament of Ardashīr (*ʿahd Ardashīr*), than someone like Ibn Qutayba, and that early writers drew from "a common repertoire," in which accounts circulated in multiple forms (vol. 2, p. 58).

To summarize, Marlow has produced a perceptive and thorough study of *Naṣiḥat al-mulūk*, the result of deep thinking about the literary possibilities available to the text's author. The relevance of her study extends beyond this book, time, and geography, as she sets a high standard for reading even a little-documented text in its full literary and historical context.

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*Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*. By SOPHIA VASALOU. New York: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. Pp. ix + 342. \$74, £47.99.

Sophia Vasalou's most recent work tackles the vast writings of the enigmatic Mamluk-era theologian and jurist, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), in an attempt to understand the place of human nature, *fiṭra*, in his ethical theory. This is no easy task. As Vasalou notes, Ibn Taymiyya's writing on ethics are scattered throughout his vast corpus, an artifact both of his predilection for polemic and his general preference for the genre of the fatwa over that of systematic treatises. Nevertheless, Vasalou argues that Ibn Taymiyya's writings on ethics, scattered and episodic as they are, are sufficiently engaging as to justify our efforts in trying to reconstruct his ethics. After reading this book, most students of medieval Islamic ethics and theology will agree with the author that her efforts were well worth the effort.

This book is not only about Ibn Taymiyya, however. One of its most valuable contributions is its situating Ibn Taymiyya squarely in the middle of the tempestuous array of the diverse and wide-ranging theological and philosophical debates of his era. In fact, based on Vasalou's reading of medieval Islamic ethical thought, Avicenna (d. 428/1037) may be the central figure in understanding the rise of Ashʿarite ethics, and perhaps represents Ibn Taymiyya's principal intellectual opponent. This book also makes an important contribution to comparative ethics, placing Islamic ethical debates within the more familiar framings, to Western readers at least, of Socrates's debate with Euthyphro, Hobbes's rational egoism, Humean sentimentalism, and English utilitarians, among other ethical traditions. It concludes with a nod to the possible influences of Ibn Taymiyya's ethical thought on modern Muslim conceptions of the Sharia. This book deserves therefore a wide readership—not only among those interested in medieval Muslim theories of theology, ethics, and jurisprudence, but also among all who are interested generally in comparative ethics, theology, and jurisprudence.

Vasalou introduces the problem of her book, paradoxically, with references to modern Muslim discourse, and its insistent claim that "Islam is the religion of our original nature" (*al-islām dīn al-fiṭra*). This opening is paradoxical for two reasons—first, because although the substance of the book is osten-