

## 19 The Guidance for Kingdoms

### Function of a “mirror for princes” at court and its representation of a court

*Syrinx von Hees*

Political advice literature is regarded as forming an integral part of court culture in the Muslim world. This genre—which is often referred to as “mirrors for princes”—was certainly widespread in Arab and Persian Islamic cultures. Over the centuries many such counselling works were composed anew. In most cases these texts were written for one particular ruler. Since advice literature addresses the sovereign directly, these works are deliberately placed in close proximity with the ruler. In this sense, political advice literature has a clear role in courtly life.

Within court culture several functions for advice literature can be discerned. The most important function, of course, was to advise the sovereign on political matters. In this context it is interesting to explore how advice was given and how the rulers used these texts. Did they really read them? And if so, at what point and how often? Did princes deal with such a text on their own or did they discuss the advice with someone else? If the latter proves to be the case we might ask with whom they did so—maybe even with the author himself? How far did the advice given in the text play any role in a real political situation or have an impact on the daily actions of a monarch?

Another function of advice literature was its use in establishing a patronage relationship between the author and the sovereign. This, of course, was not the case when a father was writing for his son, which characterizes some of the genre’s works. In the first part of this chapter I will discuss the questions raised above on the function of political advice literature at court. I will use as an example the book *The Guidance for Kingdoms* written in the fourteenth century CE in Arabic by the well-known man of letters Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī for the last Ayyubid king reigning at Ḥamāh.

It is well known that a large amount of political advice literature was written in Arabic and Persian. This literary genre has provoked the interest of many scholars.<sup>1</sup> Most of them have raised the following question: Which political theories formed the basis of these counselling texts? Scholars have thus demonstrated a keen interest in understanding the influence of pre-Islamic Persian as well as Greek political thought. They have pointed out the dominant presence of Iranian hierarchical models of rule that can be seen in texts written by Muslims. Following this observation, the main focus within the research conducted on political advice literature has been to analyze the position that Muslim authors allocate to

the Islamic religion in this context. One of the main issues is the way in which sovereigns and their politics were legitimized in these works. To demonstrate this, some scholars have carefully examined not only the models of rule, but also the models of society as they are presented by different authors. The legitimization of rule is without doubt another key function of this literary genre. However, these issues will not be discussed in this chapter.

The second part of this chapter will address the model of a court, which is presented in *The Guidance for Kingdoms*. At this point a terminological issue arises: what do we actually mean by the term “court”? The problem becomes even more obvious when we are looking for an Arabic equivalent. In modern texts the European concept of court is translated as *balāt*,<sup>2</sup> a term that literally means paved ground, tiled floor or flagstone, and this is how it was mainly used in pre-modern Arabic texts.<sup>3</sup> The term court, as it is used in many European languages, indicates in its original meaning a place. In a figurative sense it is also used to describe the society that is connected with this space. Hence court denotes the seat of the ruler, his residence, as well as the society that surrounds him.

Due to this problematic, the second part of this chapter will address the issue of what terms are actually used in late medieval Arabic works in order to speak about the ruler’s court as a place. In addition, I will analyze the personal networks that surround the king as they are depicted in this text.

### Function at court

The particular fourteenth century Arabic mirror for princes, which is the focus of this study, will be discussed first with regards to its function at court.<sup>4</sup> Existing research on advice literature does not seem to have been aware of this text,<sup>5</sup> which was only recently edited and published with a good introduction.<sup>6</sup> However, a major part of the text is missing in this edition.<sup>7</sup> For this reason I refer to an older version of the manuscript in my possession.<sup>8</sup> This manuscript bears the title *Kitāb sulūk dawwal al-mulūk*, which can be translated as *The Guidance for Kingdoms*. The subtitle informs us that this work is: “A selection [*ikhtiyār*] by Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī”.<sup>9</sup>

The author of the mirror for princes under discussion was one of the most distinguished men of letters in the Mamluk period.<sup>10</sup> He was born in Cairo in 686/1287, where he studied *hadīth* and started writing poetry at a young age. In 716/1316, at the age of 30, he left Cairo for Damascus in order to make his first work known to the Damascene circle of literati working in the chancellery. This work was a thematically arranged literary anthology (*maṭlaʿ al-fawāʿid*), described by Thomas Bauer as defining the importance of an *adīb* in his society.<sup>11</sup> In his work Ibn Nubāta shows his mastery of prose and verse and his thorough knowledge of language and literature. He dedicated this anthology to the ruler of Ḥamāh, Abū ʿl-Fidāʾ ʿImād al-Dīn.

Abū ʿl-Fidāʾ is known today mainly as a historian and geographer. He was born in 672/1273 as a late descendant of the Ayyubid family and in his youth participated in the last campaigns against the crusades. The principality of Ḥamāh was

ruled independently for three generations. Ṣalāh al-Dīn ibn Ayyūb (r. 1171–93 CE) had granted his nephew, al-Malik al-Muzaffar I the rule over Ḥamāh in 574/1178–9 and his descendants were able to retain at least their local independence under the first Mamluk Sultans. Only in 698/1299, when al-Malik al-Muzaffar III died without direct descendants, was the governorship turned over to a Mamluk governor (*nā'ib al-salṭana*), subordinate to Damascus. Abū 'l-Fidā' was a nephew of al-Malik al-Muzaffar III and well connected to the Mamluk Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Through his networking abilities he was able to acquire this governorship and at a later stage he was even appointed independent ruler of Ḥamāh with the honorary title of al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad. In him, Ibn Nubāta found one of his patrons to whom he addressed many poems of praise. Al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad granted him a yearly stipend and bestowed many gifts upon him.<sup>12</sup> When al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad died in 732/1331, his son, at the time in his twenties,<sup>13</sup> became his successor with the honorary title of al-Malik al-Afḍal. He reigned for 10 more years, but lost interest in kingship and turned towards asceticism. As an ascetic he not only neglected his administrative duties, but also stopped making the regular payments to Ibn Nubāta. Eventually he was deposed by the Mamluk governor of Damascus in 742/1342, shortly before he fell ill and died.<sup>14</sup>

It is for this young man that Ibn Nubāta wrote his mirror for princes. Louise Marlow has argued that many of these works containing political advice, especially the later ones, were composed by authors who were not yet famous, whose main aim was to introduce themselves to the ruler.<sup>15</sup> In the introduction of many mirrors for princes they are presented as a gift worthy of a monarch.<sup>16</sup>

Ibn Nubāta wrote his book as a gift to a sovereign. In his extremely short preface, he hopes that “it will be carried to the treasury of the Sultan al-Malik al-Afḍal”; however, since he used only adjectives (*al-khizāna al-sulṭāniyya al-malikiyya al-afḍaliyya*), it could also be read as “the sultanic, kingly and most distinguished treasury.”<sup>17</sup> But, the intention of his mirror for princes was no longer to gain access to the ruler, but rather an attempt to educate and remind the last Ayyubid king of his duties. Ibn Nubāta does not address the king directly by name nor does he praise him. Furthermore, in his advice, he does not employ any outstanding literary styles to advertise his abilities; he does not pretend to be well-read, for he does not include a long list of sources used while composing his work. He simply states that he collected useful pieces from books on the sciences of politics and administration (*min ba'd kutub 'ilm al-siyāsa wa-l-tadbīr*).<sup>18</sup>

Ibn Nubāta divides his work into six chapters. The first deals with the king's distinction (*faḍīlat al-mulūk*) and is very short. He explains that God has distinguished the human being from all other animals. While they share the faculties of desire (*shahwa*) and anger (*ghadab*), mankind exclusively possesses the power of judgement (*tamyīz*) and speech (*nuṭq*).<sup>19</sup> Ibn Nubāta stresses the importance of these three categories: reason, desire and anger, and goes on to relate all specific groups in society to these faculties. He continues that God raised some humans above others: first the prophets, then the kings, whose duty it is “to construct the world and secure law and order.”<sup>20</sup> At this point he introduces his one and only Qur'ānic quotation: “When he raised up prophets among you, and made you

kings.”<sup>21</sup> In this short chapter Ibn Nubāta presents, in a very concise manner, the most standard Muslim argument for legitimizing the ruler.

The following chapters deal with the way the king should conduct his life (*fī siyāsāt al-malik nafṣahū*), with the guidance of his family and relatives (*fī siyāsatihī li-ahlīhī wa-dhawī qirābatihī*) and how he should guide his elite (*fī siyāsāt al-malik khāṣṣatahū*) and his commoners (*fī siyāsāt al-malik li-‘āmmatihī*). The sixth and last chapter of the book is dedicated to warfare (*fī siyāsāt al-ḥurūb*).

In the text Ibn Nubāta gives very concise and general pieces of advice on how the ideal ruler should behave. He refers to the ideal sovereign as *al-malik al-ḥāzim*, which can be translated using a variety of adjectives such as determined, resolute, vigorous, firm, strong, clever, witty, intelligent, wise, sound or prudent. In this chapter I have adopted the translation, “the clever king.” To give one example, in the second chapter Ibn Nubāta advises the king on how he should protect himself: “The clever king does not use the same road again when riding and travelling.”<sup>22</sup> These short instructions are followed by stories that explain and illustrate the brief lines of advice. These exemplary stories have been collected from the biographies of historical personalities. The protagonists in Ibn Nubāta’s stories are mainly figures from Umayyad, Abbasid, Buyid, Fatimid and Ayyubid history, with Mu‘āwiya, Ḥārūn al-Rashīd and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūb referred to the most, as well as local rulers from the Fertile Crescent. He also includes Byzantine, Frankish and Christian-Andalusian rulers, who occasionally make the right decisions and are presented as good examples.

Apart from the one passage above, Ibn Nubāta does not cite any *ḥadīth*, or verses from the Qur’ān. The prophet and his companions as well as biblical figures are never used as good examples to follow. Persian kings, be it from pre-Islamic or Islamic times, are absent as well. He does not cite any wise sayings and keeps his use of poems to a minimum.

Regarding the question of how al-Malik al-Afdal actually used this text, there is no definitive answer. We can only speculate that he probably simply ignored the book altogether. However, Ibn Nubāta’s text gives clear indications on how he envisaged the “correct” usage of such counselling works.

In the second chapter, which deals with the king’s self-control, Ibn Nubāta explains that the excellence of a person is apparent from how much reason, courage and virtue he possesses.<sup>23</sup> In order to sharpen his reason, the author continues, the clever king first “associates himself with intelligent people and such that possess life experience and wisdom” and second “reads the biographies of kings and books on politics [*siyar al-mulūk wa-kutub al-siyāsa*].”<sup>24</sup> Thus Ibn Nubāta recommends that the ruler should actually read his political advice literature, which is filled with biographical anecdotes of bygone rulers. However, it seems that he considered a simple reading of the book as insufficient. Instead he clearly encourages active examination and use of the lessons offered by the counselling work: clever kings “reflect on the opinions that are presented to them and they correct their own characters through them until they are refined and improved.”<sup>25</sup>

In order to illustrate “how the king should spend his day and night,”<sup>26</sup> Ibn Nubāta narrates a story about Mu‘āwiya. The first Umayyad caliph Mu‘āwiya I (r. 661–80 CE) is regarded in the Arabic tradition as a wise and mild sovereign, who

was clever in attending to the interests of his allies, excelling in his fairness and self control.<sup>27</sup> In the anecdote offered by Ibn Nubāta it is said: “When night arrived, he passed one third of the night in pleasant conversation and listened to poetry and stories of the Arab heroes [*akhbār al-‘arab*].”<sup>28</sup> According to Ibn Nubāta the latter are useful to stimulate the ruler’s courage: “Then he slept for one third of the night, and then got up again, sat down and the lives and stories of the kings [*siyar al-mulūk wa-akhbārihā*] and the politics of the Persians [*siyāsāt al-‘ajam*] were read to him.”<sup>29</sup> This exemplifying story points out that Ibn Nubāta suggests that a ruler should ideally occupy himself on a daily—or more precisely on a nightly—basis with political advice literature that deals with the life of previous kings in an exemplary way. In the example given, Mu‘āwiya does not read such stories to himself, but they are read to him. Bearing that in mind it is easy to imagine a conversation between the ruler and the narrator about what has been read.

In the context of the mirror for princes such an exemplary story serves to illustrate the general advice. In this way the historical event is placed within an abstract space and needs to be interpreted. The monarch, who is reading these stories or is listening to them and is discussing them, will in most cases not be able or willing to follow precisely the conduct of the former kings. The stories leave broad room for interpretation. The same holds true for the general, abstract instructions for action, that is, how the ideal ruler should behave. They also need to be interpreted by the recipient in order to be transferred into concrete action. Hence such political advice literature could not be consulted as a governmental manual. It does not offer any concrete instruction for specific situations.<sup>30</sup> The king who received Ibn Nubāta’s book as a present could have read it as intellectual training, but would have needed to draw his own lessons from it.

In one of the short narratives it becomes evident that in the ideal case one would possess these lessons. Everyone, not only the ruler in this case, should have internalized the moral from these anecdotes. Sayf al-Dawla (d. 316/967), the founder of the Hamdanid Emirate of Aleppo, is said to have provoked his assembly by asking for a very harsh punishment for someone. However, as no one dared to contradict, he admonished his court ushers: you behave in such a miserable way “as if you had never in your life met a human being and never heard the narratives of the kings [*akhbār al-mulūk*].”<sup>31</sup>

## **Presentation of a court**

### *In search of Arabic terms designating a courtly space*

As already mentioned, in this second part I will discuss the ways in which a “court” is presented in Ibn Nubāta’s mirror for princes. First, I will examine the way Ibn Nubāta speaks in his text about the court of the ruler. “Court” in the English language, as well as in other European languages, refers first of all to a place. It designates an open space around which several buildings can be grouped. In connection with a monarch such an architectural complex is the very seat of the sovereign or in other words, his residence. On the basis of architectural monuments

we know that a ruler like al-Malik al-Afdal lived and governed in a building containing a court, possibly in a building complex with several courts.<sup>32</sup>

However, in the general advice that Ibn Nubāta introduces with “the clever king does this-and-that,” we do not come across any reference to such a courtly space. There is not one instruction with regard to how the ruler should build his palace or how he should locate his buildings around it. There is no advice on how he should use the space at his disposal, for instance for a possible court protocol, for a ceremony, a banquet or a council meeting. That is to say, the text remains silent about the court as a space.

In the illustrative anecdotes the court as a space is not a prominent theme either. However, one can find certain terms referring to a space that can be connected to the ruler’s court. As for example, one of the anecdotes states that the ruler of Khilāt, a town situated on the north-west shore of Lake Van, is seated (*jālis*) when a man comes to his door (*bāb*) offering ten cucumbers.<sup>33</sup> In another story the ruler of al-Andalus regrets that he has cursed his jurists: “They had just arrived at the door of the palace [*bāb al-qasr*], when they were called to come back and the chamberlains [*hujjāb*] received them with grandeur and honour and elevated their seating places [*majālis*].”<sup>34</sup> One anecdote narrates how Kāfūr (d. 357/968), the black eunuch who grasped power in Egypt, went for a ride with a Sharīf and when they arrived at the door of his house (*bāb dārihī*), the Sharīf said farewell.<sup>35</sup> In one story a curtain (*sitr*) is rolled down in order to create a private space for the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705 CE) and someone who requested to speak to him privately.<sup>36</sup> Another anecdote mentions that it was a custom for the Byzantine ruler to sit on his throne (*sarīr*) behind a small door (*bāb*), so that any envoy to the monarch had to enter on his knees with his hands on the floor, a posture reminding the Muslim envoy of prayer.<sup>37</sup>

In these few stories that I have mentioned, the sovereign is shown as separated spatially from his surroundings. However, the narratives do not depict the space of the ruler’s seat, but rather take it for granted.<sup>38</sup> What the anecdotes discuss, on the contrary, is the door (*bāb*) that marks the border offering controlled access to the ruler.<sup>39</sup> It appears to be of lesser importance what exactly one finds behind the door—be it a house, a tent or a luxurious palace. Of crucial importance however is the spatially controlled access to the ruler and his clearly defined separation from his surroundings.

There is one story that combines several space indications connected directly to the sovereign. It is the already mentioned story about Mu‘āwiya, given as an example of “How the king spends his day and night.”<sup>40</sup> In this story it is said that Mu‘āwiya started his day with a consultation with some of his *khāṣṣa* and was joined later by officers of his *dīwān*:

At midday they had lunch together. After that, he stood up, went to his dwelling [*manzil*], and stayed there until afternoon. From there, he went to the mosque, sat down on the stool [*kursī*], and leaned his back at the lodge [*maqṣūra*] while his guard was there at his service. The weak and the young, the Bedouin and the women came with their complaints, which he ordered to be examined and redressed. When no one was left, he went to his dwelling

[*manzil*], sat down on the throne [*sarīr*] and asked the people to sit down according to their rank [*martaba*] in order to report the problems of those who were not able to come to him in person.<sup>41</sup>

We have already heard how he used to spend the night. This story provides some details on how later writers have described the space used by Mu'āwiya. The fact that Ibn Nubāta takes this story as an example tells us that he may have wished for this kind of spatial order as an ideal setting, which he was eager to present to the ruler al-Malik al-Afḍal.

However, the examination of terms that refer to a specific space used by the ruler does not produce much information and perhaps just indicates yet again that it is a difficult undertaking to search for an equivalent Arabic concept for something that was formed in a European context.

#### *How does Ibn Nubāta present the people that surround the ruler?*

If we understand court in the figurative sense of a personal network that a monarch builds around himself, then Ibn Nubāta's texts offer a type of model court.

It is obvious that the king in his text is represented as the centre of power responsible for controlling himself and all others. In order to achieve this, the ruler needs reason, courage and virtue. Ibn Nubāta explains: "The full mastery of the arts of politics, the ability of building a good opinion and making a right judgement, are necessary in order to deserve the title 'king.'"<sup>42</sup> As already mentioned, Ibn Nubāta recommends, "the company of judicious and experienced sage men."<sup>43</sup> This will help the ruler to "sharpen his reason," as well as reading and discussing the "biographies of kings and books on politics."<sup>44</sup>

Apart from conducting himself in an exemplary fashion, the sovereign has to guide different groups of people. According to Ibn Nubāta his own family comes first. The author actually speaks only of the ruler's son who the king should prepare to inherit the government by endearing him to the people. The best way to achieve this is to make the son responsible for an office in charge of distributing money.

Next comes the *khāṣṣa*. This term is, of course, crucial for understanding the kind of personal network Ibn Nubāta recommends to surround the king. We may at first translate it in a general way as referring to the elite as opposed to *'amma*, the "commoners."<sup>45</sup>

According to Ibn Nubāta, the *khāṣṣa* include viziers, counsellors (*ashāb al-ra'y*), judges, secretaries, the intelligence services, envoys and interpreters, all of whom are led by the power of intellect. Military commanders, the chieftains of the army, the governors of the frontier strongholds as well as the soldiers (*jund*), all belong to the *khāṣṣa* and all are led by the faculty of anger. Finally, those of the *khāṣṣa* who are led by desire include the tax collectors.

All those whom Ibn Nubāta discusses as belonging to the *khāṣṣa* hold official posts. It seems that he presents a group of people that were chosen by the ruler for their specific offices and who are directly dependent on the ruler who gives them orders and pays them. As noted, even the soldiers are part of this group. If this is

a convincing reading, then Ibn Nubāta is talking about court officers in the service of the king. He draws a picture of a very well-structured and controlled court state.

The function of most of these offices and their use to the ruler are not discussed. Rather, they are taken for granted. The clever ruler should know the characters and capabilities of each and every one of them and should guide them by using motivation and intimidation in the right measure, that is to say, the carrot and stick method. The clever king is mainly instructed to be aware of the intrigues employed by viziers and to control the judges and take care that they do not give a judgment that might cause an uprising. The ruler should closely observe his secretaries, who tend to falsify letters and seals. He should know all the different groups of reporters and the best way to avoid the spread of false information is to pit each reporter against another.

Ibn Nubāta accords to the *aṣḥāb al-ra’y* second place in his list of people belonging to the *khāṣṣa*. He explains that these “are the experienced and knowledgeable sage men.”<sup>46</sup> It seems that he is referring to exactly those people who help the king sharpen his reason. In the exemplifying stories it turns out that these are ordinary people, mainly old men, who might meet the king accidentally and give him the right advice. If we take Ibn Nubāta’s description of the *khāṣṣa* as referring to court officers, it is difficult to include these counsellors (*aṣḥāb al-ra’y*). It is clear that they are not financed directly by the ruler but they provide him with good service and in this way they, too, belong to the ruler’s court servants.

In the chapter devoted to the guidance of the commoners, they are also divided into those who use the faculty of speech such as preachers, jurists and ascetics, those led by the faculty of desire such as traders and those who act according to the faculty of anger such as the people of Sharifian and noble descent (*aḥl al-sharaf wa-dhaw al-ḥasab*).

The clever king needs to deal with the commoners with caution and ensure that especially the first group do not generate *fitna* by taking too radical a stance in religious affairs. As far as the people of noble descent are concerned, Ibn Nubāta writes: “The clever king respects and helps them so that they love and obey him.”<sup>47</sup> This instruction is illustrated by one story only, where Kāfūr, after riding out with a Sharīf, does not invite him into his house, but rewards him with a well-equipped horse for his courteous behaviour.<sup>48</sup>

In general, Ibn Nubāta states:

The clever king endorses the diffusion of the arts and sciences and the virtues. He supports the theoretical and practical arts by employing the masters of each branch in his administration and by distributing grants to them.<sup>49</sup>

The following words illustrating this advice are put in the mouth of an *Amīr al-umarā’* in Baghdad:

Even though I am not a man of learning, I want to have the masters of all handicrafts [*ṣana’āt*] and the chairmen of all virtues [*faḍīla*] and the best of all sciences and knowledge [*‘ilm wa-ma’rifa*] in my entourage [*jumla*].<sup>50</sup>



In the next anecdote the ruler of Ifrīqiya attracts to his service with a large sum, a famous scribe and a skilful doctor from far away Baghdad. We thus learn that Ibn Nubāta envisages the sovereign choosing from among his commoners the most professional for service in his government. Through such an appointment they would become part of his *khāṣṣa*.

For the remaining subjects, “the clever king insures himself that the ‘*amma* remain always under his control by making sure that they are occupied with their arts and will not interfere in the affairs of the ruler.”<sup>51</sup> In case of doubt, the king is expected to take care of individuals even among his commoners. He is, for example, advised to support someone who had sunk into poverty after having lived a wealthy life<sup>52</sup> and to check the prisons for innocent people who were imprisoned unjustly and free them.<sup>53</sup>

In his mirror for princes, Ibn Nubāta draws a picture of an absolute ruler who has full command over his whole kingdom. He employs the best professional officers and ensures their loyalty by a balanced use of motivation and intimidation. In order to secure the stability of his rule, he cultivates relationships with many different people. Ibn Nubāta distinguishes different grades of intensity in these relationships: the family, the elite and the commoners.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to contrast the picture that we have drawn from the late medieval Arabic mirror for princes about the ruler’s court, considering the historical circumstances of the text, with the concept of a court as developed by European historians.

The definition of court, as developed by Norbert Eliás from the example of the seventeenth century French court, is still relevant today. For him, the court is the enlarged household of the king, which offers accommodation not only to his family, but for the whole court society.<sup>54</sup> More recent research distinguishes between the household of the monarch and the communicative act of “holding court.”<sup>55</sup> In this respect, the household consists of the ruler, his family and those among the elite that occupy a court appointment, together with the lower personnel. The event of holding court on the contrary excludes the latter, but ties a much wider circle of the elite to the ruler. The elite are the people who belong to the court society and take part in courtly events. The court society distinguishes itself further through a hierarchical order and through an extremely high esteem for courtly manners, that is, to use the French word, *etiquette*. Orders of rank and *etiquette* are expressed and displayed in ceremonies and court festivities, that is to say, in the events of holding court.

Taking these concepts that were developed in the context of European history as our reference, the analysis of the late medieval Arab mirror for princes has shown that this text described a very different phenomenon. With regard to the household of the monarch, Ibn Nubāta’s short account suggests that the ruler’s household consisted mainly of his family. In the chapter on the guidance of family and relatives Ibn Nubāta assumed a hereditary monarchy. This, of course, is

central to the European concept of “court.” It is most likely that the family members together with the lower household servants were the people living in the palace at Ḥamāh. However, the text does not tell us about their life there. Furthermore, Ibn Nubāta does not include any advice concerning court appointments. In one of the exemplary stories the term *ḥujjāb* (sometimes rendered in English as “chamberlain”) is used. However, in connection with the ruler, for whom this mirror was composed, such a court appointment or anything comparable was not mentioned. Without further investigation, it is impossible to know whether al-Malik al-Afḍal employed such personnel at his palace. However, Ibn Nubāta’s political counselling work is silent about such court appointments, which implies that Ibn Nubāta did not consider them as an important function in the political duties of the ruler.

With regard to the group that surrounds the ruler, Ibn Nubāta talks about “the elite,” *al-khāṣṣa*. The *khāṣṣa* are depicted as a group of professionals working under the direct control and support of the ruler. These people do not have much in common with the European concept of “court society.” Their function is more that of state employees, be it in the administration or the military service. The ruler is strongly encouraged to build personal ties with the latter from which in turn his administration would benefit. Furthermore, he should also be well informed about the affairs of his commoners and attend to individual cases.

What is completely missing in Ibn Nubāta’s text is any advice concerning the holding of court. Ibn Nubāta did not provide any information about any kind of ceremony or court protocol nor is any sort of etiquette discussed. Banqueting and dancing are left out completely and so is the subject of giving audiences or receiving poets, just to mention a few examples. The ruler he presents is not in need of this kind of representation—so it seems—but simply chooses as his officers the best professionals from all branches who work for him, but who do not spend much leisure time with the king.

Through other sources we might be able to reconstruct some sort of courtly activity for the last Ayyubid king of Ḥamāh. We know for example about the wonderful poetry of praise that Ibn Nubāta wrote for al-Malik al-Afḍal and more prominently in honour of his father. Ibn Nubāta used to travel in person to Ḥamāh, at least once a year, from where he received his yearly stipend. And, it was the courtly life of al-Malik al-Mu’ayyad that offered him the opportunity to meet other poets such as Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. c. 749/1348).<sup>56</sup> The outstanding significance of poetry at different courts in the Muslim world has been rightly stressed.<sup>58</sup> From a poem by Ibn Nubāta commemorating a hunting party we also know that al-Malik al-Afḍal around the year 728/1328, that is prior to his father’s death, enjoyed going out for hunting together with the Mamluk governor of Syria, Tankiz.<sup>58</sup> The hunt was an important part of court culture in the Muslim world. How such events were used to communicate who belonged to court society and/or to indicate the hierarchies within this society needs to be investigated and lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

The mirror for princes written in the fourteenth century CE by Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī can be precisely positioned historically. He wrote this text for al-Malik

al-Afdal who from Ibn Nubāta's perspective was incited and led astray by asceticism. He tried to persuade him to take firm action in his reign. Because the danger of losing control was imminent, he advised him first and foremost to control his administration. It may be for this reason that the more entertaining "courtly life" is not discussed in this specific text.

## Notes

- 1 The best recent overview of the genre, including a long bibliography is Marlow (2007).
- 2 See, for example, 'Umrān (2002); Farrūkh (1950).
- 3 See Ibn Manzūr (1988), II:58f.
- 4 I would like to thank Thomas Bauer, who brought this mirror for princes to my attention and provided me with copies of two of its manuscripts, namely [Oxford 29] and [Vienna 474].
- 5 For example, it is not mentioned at all in the above cited overview on advice literature by Marlow (2007).
- 6 See al-Miṣrī (2006). The introduction includes pp 9–88, followed by the edition, pp 89–139, which is based on [Topkapı 1822].
- 7 In al-Miṣrī (2006), 122, the text that deals with the *aṣḥāb al-akḥbār*, the people of the intelligence service, in the fourth chapter, is interrupted and followed without any indication of a break with stories from the fifth chapter. In the manuscript [Oxford 29], this gap includes fols. 37b–86b.
- 8 This is manuscript [Oxford 29] from which very probably the manuscript [Vienna 474] was copied. Evidence for this can be seen for example in the blank space after the word *amwāl* in [Oxford 29], fol. 6a, line 9. In [Vienna 474], fol. 4b, line 15, we can read in a smaller script "blank in the original" (*bayād al-aṣl*). Manuscript [Oxford 29] consist of 110 folia with 11 lines per page.
- 9 [Oxford 29], fol. 1a.
- 10 On the biography of Ibn Nubāta see Bauer (2008).
- 11 See Bauer (2003), 93.
- 12 See Bauer (2008), 17.
- 13 See al-Miṣrī (2006), 51.
- 14 See *ibid.*, 49–52; Bauer (2008), 16f. 21–3; Gibb (1960); Sourdell (1971).
- 15 See Marlow (2004), 177–80.
- 16 See *id.* (2007), 41–55.
- 17 al-Miṣrī (2006), 90, based on [Topkapı 1822]. This seems to be the version given to al-Malik al-Afdal. [Oxford 29] and [Vienna 474] represent most probably a version intended for a broader public where in this quote all the adjectives are missing. See [Oxford 29], fol. 1b.
- 18 See *ibid.* fol. 1b.
- 19 See *ibid.* fol. 2a.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 See *ibid.* fol. 2a-b. The Qur'ānic passage is 5 (al-Nisā'):20.
- 22 [Oxford 29], fol. 12b.
- 23 See *ibid.* fol. 3a.
- 24 See *ibid.* fol. 3b.
- 25 See *ibid.*
- 26 See *ibid.* fol. 11b.
- 27 See Hinds (1992).
- 28 [Oxford 29], fols. 3b–5a.
- 29 *Ibid.* fol. 12a.
- 30 See Graßnick (2004), 207.
- 31 [Oxford 29], fol. 5a.

- 32 Al-Malik al-Muzaffar I had a palace built at the end of the twelfth century CE that was still used in the fourteenth century CE, after the death of al-Malik al-Afdal, by the Mamluk governors. However, this palace does not exist anymore. See Sourdel (1971), 121. This residence might have been similar to the Artuqid palace in Diyarbakir that is described in the contribution by Lorenz Korn in the present volume.
- 33 See [Oxford 29], fol. 10b.
- 34 Ibid. fols. 86a–b.
- 35 See ibid. fol. 88b.
- 36 See ibid. fol. 41b.
- 37 See ibid. fol. 44a.
- 38 The reason for this may very well be found in the literary nature of the *akhbār* that usually follow a scenic narrative without long descriptions of the scenery, but only a few stage directions. I thank Sara Binay for sharing her insights in these matters with me.
- 39 It is interesting to note, that “the custom of calling the palace, court or government of a ruler ‘porte’ or ‘doorstep’ was very prevalent in ancient times” (Deny (1960), 836), and that it was used in this way under the Ottomans.
- 40 [Oxford 29], fol. 11b.
- 41 See ibid. fols. 11b–12a.
- 42 Ibid. fol. 10a.
- 43 Ibid. fol. 3b.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 See Beg (1978), as well as the discussion of this term by Nadia El Cheikh in the present volume.
- 46 See [Oxford 29], fol. 20a.
- 47 See ibid. fol. 88a.
- 48 See ibid. fol. 88a–b.
- 49 See ibid. fol. 86b.
- 50 Ibid. fol. 87a.
- 51 Ibid. fol. 90a.
- 52 See ibid. fol. 91b.
- 53 See ibid. fols. 92a–94b.
- 54 See Elias (1999), 68.
- 55 Here and in the following I refer to the discussion of the terms “Hof” (*court*), “Hofhaltung” (*running the court*), “höfische Gesellschaft” (*court society*) and “Herrscherhaushalt” (*household of a ruler*) in Konrad (2008), 21–30.
- 56 Bauer (2008), 17, speaks in this context of “the court of Ḥamāh”.
- 57 See, for example, Ali (2008); Meisami (1987).
- 58 See Bauer (2008), 21.

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