

Figura for the Mirror for Princes:
Alexander's Encounter with the Amazons and the Brahmins
in the *Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour**

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The *Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour* (hereafter, the *Buik*), a poem of 19,363 lines in decasyllabic couplets, is the most detailed version of the Alexander legend from late medieval Britain.¹ Its narrator says it was 'translaitit' from 'þe Latine buik' (18561) and romances of 'the Frensche leid' (19334),² and it details Alexander's life from his conception to his death with considerable freedom in order to present it as an exemplary story not only for princes, but also for all men who wish to live righteously:

This buke is not compyllit allanerlie
For kingis and princis and lordis þat ae mychtie,
Bot till all men that richteouslie wald life,
It sall thame g[u]id teitheing and exampill gife,
To governe thame with vertew and iustice. (19275–79)

According to the narrator, his book will be such an appropriate 'mirroure' for everyone, so that whoever longs for honour and virtues will not need anything else:

Quha wald haue honour, conquest, or victorie,
Wirschip, hie vassaleg, or chaulrie'
Thame neidis nane vther teching na doctor
Bot þis storie to be to þame *mirroure*,
For it contenis so gret wisdom and wit
That euir þe maire þat men oure-reid of it,

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¹ Joanna Martin, "'Of Wisdome and of Guide Governance": Sir Gilbert Hay and the *Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour*', in *A Companion to Medieval Scottish Poetry*, ed. by Priscilla Bawcutt and Janet Hadley Williams (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), pp. 75–88 (p. 75).

² All of the quotations and references of the *Buik* in this paper is from *The Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour by Sir Gilbert Hay*, ed. by John F. Cartwright, Scottish Text Society 4th Series 16–18, 3 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986–), II (1986), III (1990). Line numbers are given in parenthesis, instead of page number.

The mair þai sall haue pleasance and lyking,
For ay the langar þe mair gudelie thing. (268–75, emphasis added)

Anna Caughey argues that the narrator's description of his poem as a 'mirroure' is problematized as the narrative develops and that the genre definition is nothing but an 'alleged identity'.³ Certainly, the decline of Alexander depicted in the latter part of the poem does not seem like an appropriate example of how to live righteously. Nevertheless, it would be necessary to investigate both the elements of the *Buik* that serve as a piece of advice literature and the *Buik*'s connection with the *Secretum secretorum*, which was believed at the time to have been written by Aristotle for his student, Alexander. The relationship between the two texts has not been sufficiently investigated, despite John Cartwright's assertion that the ideas expressed in the *Secretum secretorum* 'give shape and direction to the numerous interpretive and reflective remarks interpolated by Hay throughout the narrative'.⁴ In this paper, I will examine Aristotle's teachings in the *Buik* (9269–10555), which contain both knowledge about kingship based on the accounts from the *Secretum secretorum* and allegories of the body politic, in order to demonstrate how these precepts are challenged during Alexander's encounters with the two Eastern races, the Amazons and the Brahmins. I will analyse their exchanges and arguments with Alexander, for the two encounters make the king reflect on the learning he received from Aristotle. The inhabitants of the East help Alexander understand his learning more deeply through questioning the validity of the body politic and kingly virtues, thus serving for the *Buik*, a 'mirroure' for the conqueror.

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The ultimate authorship of the *Buik* 'has been conventionally attributed to'⁵ Sir Gilbert Hay (c. 1397–d. after 1465), a Scottish soldier and poet who is believed to have fought for Charles VII of France and written prose works such as the 'buke of the law of armys', the 'buke of the ordre of knyghte', and the 'buke of the gouernaunce of princis'. The epilogue of the *Buik* says that it was first translated from French to Scots by 'Schir Gilbert þe Hay' at the

³ Anna Caughey, "'Als for the worthynes of þe romance": Exploitation of Genre in the *Buik of King Alexander the Conqueror*', in *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, ed. by Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjević and Judith Weiss (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 139–58 (p. 148).

⁴ John Cartwright, 'Sir Gilbert Hay and the Alexander Tradition', in *Scottish Language and Literature, Medieval and Renaissance: Fourth International Conference 1984 Proceedings*, ed. by Dietrich Strauss and Horst W. Dresher (Frankfurt: Lang, 1986), pp. 229–38 (p. 236).

⁵ Martin, p. 75; Sally Mapstone, 'The Scots Buke of Phisnomy and Sir Gilbert Hay', in *The Renaissance in Scotland: Studies in Literature, History and Culture Offered to John Durkan*, ed. by A. A. MacDonald, Michael Lynch and Ian B. Cowan (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 1–44 (p. 2).

request of Lord Erskine (19319–25), and later, it was ‘endit’ and amended ‘pairt of faltis’ (19342–43). Thus, as Cartwright maintains, the narrator of the epilogue was probably a scribe faithful to his source, and the *Buik* might have preserved Hay’s original work. In fact, Hay is thought to have completed a work about Alexander’s exploits around 1460 for his patron. However, the *Buik*, which is extant in two sixteenth-century manuscripts, British Library Additional MS 40732 (c. 1530) and National Archives of Scotland MS GD 112/71/9 (c. 1580–1590), might be far from Hay’s original. Matthew P. McDiarmid even says that ‘[i]t was no scribe but the poet who wrote his epilogue’; according to him, one does not find Hay’s Gallicisms (his propensity to use French words and occasionally grammar in his prose works) in the *Buik*.⁶ Therefore, this paper assumes, with Mapstone, Martin and Caughey, that authorship of the *Buik* is not attributable to Hay, but to an anonymous Scottish poet.

Aristotle’s roles and teachings in the *Buik* should be compared with those in the *Buik*’s two most influential sources, a Latin chronicle, the *Historia de preliis*, and a French romance, *Le roman d’Alexandre*, because Aristotle plays a vital part in the *Buik*’s self-definition as a mirror for princes. In the *Historia de preliis*, Alexander acquires vast knowledge of the liberal arts from Aristotle, Callisthenes and the Athenian Anaximenes;⁷ Aristotle is but one of the teachers and is not more prominently featured than other teachers. However, according to Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas, Alexandre de Paris, the poet of *Le roman d’Alexandre*, identified Aristotle as Alexander’s most indispensable preceptor, although Aristotle ‘seems to oscillate between the image of a virtuous master and that of an accomplice in the Greek king’s desire for total power’.⁸ In the French romance, thanks to the master’s education (which is constituted of the seven liberal arts and quasi-Christian monotheism), the king embodies ‘the ideal union of *clergie*, royalty, and chivalry’.⁹ However, as the romance approaches its end, Aristotle’s authority is shaken, and eventually the Greek philosopher cannot mitigate his pupil’s thirst for worldly power. He is ultimately equated to Alexander’s

⁶ Matthew P. McDiarmid, ‘Concerning Sir Gilbert Hay, the Authorship of *Alexander the Conqueour* and *The Buik of Alexander*’, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 28.1 (1993), pp. 28–54 (pp. 45–54).

⁷ *The History of Alexander’s Battles: Historia de preliis, the J1 Version*, ed. and trans. by R. Telfryn Pritchard, *Mediaeval Sources in Translation*, 34 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1992), p. 21.

⁸ Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas, ‘Alexander and Aristotle in the French Alexander Romances’, in *The Medieval French Alexander*, ed. by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 57–73 (p. 59); Alexandre de Paris, *Le Roman d’Alexandre*, ed. by Laurence Harf-Lancner and E. C. Armstrong (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1994), pp. 92–95.

⁹ Gaullier-Bougassas, ‘Alexander and Aristotle in the French Alexander Romances’, p. 58.

other moralistically dubious educator, Nectanabus.¹⁰ Compared with these two sources, the presence of Aristotle in the *Buik* is conspicuous from beginning to end, for he has been ‘evir chief of his [Alexander’s] governing’ (7272). The Greek philosopher teaches not only the subjects described in the *Buik*’s sources, but also ‘[b]aith artmagik and necromancie, | Off weird of fortune be physinomie, | And als þe practik of þe palmastrie’ (410–12). These subjects, which consist not only of traditional university learning and ethical teachings, but also of magical skills and the knowledge to discern his subjects’ characteristics through their appearance, suggest that Aristotle in the *Buik* is a preceptor for all knowledge, skills and virtues as well as a master of scholarship.

The pseudo-scientific subjects like palmistry, physiognomy and kingly virtues, which Aristotle teaches to Alexander, indicate the influence of the *Secretum secretorum* upon the *Buik*. The *Secretum secretorum* is one of the pseudo-Aristotelian texts and was partially translated from Arabic into Latin around 1120. A little over one hundred years later, a complete version appeared in the Catholic West.¹¹ Of course, it is not Aristotle’s work but a compilation made in the Islamic Near East during the eighth through eleventh centuries, and it includes various tracts about statecraft, medicine, ethics, talismans, physiognomy and so on. During the Middle Ages, however, the *Secretum secretorum* was widely believed to have been written by Aristotle, and it acquired considerable popularity among university scholars as well as lay readers.¹² It is not surprising that the Scottish poet interpolated it into his poem. The *Secretum secretorum* says, in its preface, that it was written for the guidance of Alexander in place of Aristotle, for the philosopher could not go to the East with his beloved pupil because of his infirmity.¹³ This preface is included in the *Buik* as a part of its narrative (9445–63), and the adaptation of the *Secretum secretorum* appears as ‘[a]ne Regiment [...] | quhilk salbe of princis gouernance, | off all þare conduct and þare ordinance’ (9356–58). In

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 65–69.

¹¹ Steven J. Williams, *The Secret of Secrets: The Scholarly Career of a Pseudo-Aristotelian Text in the Latin Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 1 and pp. 183–84.

¹² Steven J. Williams, ‘The Pseudo-Aristotelian *Secret of Secrets* as a Didactic Text’, in *What Nature Does Not Teach: Didactic Literature in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods*, ed. by Juanita Feros Ruys (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 41–57 (p. 42).

¹³ *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum*, ed. by Robert Steele, EETS, e.s. 74 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1898; repr. Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1973), p. 5, 42, 127; Mahmoud Manzalaoui, *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*, EETS 276 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 10, 27, 122, 205, pp. 270–71, p. 401.

the *Buik*, Aristotle is also a writer and compiler of the ‘Regiment’, or the rules for good conduct or healthful living, which leads his pupil even in his absence.

The Scottish poet ‘appears to rearrange the order [of the *Secretum secretorum*], paraphrases, and adds many striking details’,¹⁴ and it is difficult to identify a specific source for each passage in the ‘Regiment’ section. Thus, some precepts seen in both the *Buik* and the *Secretum secretorum* will be briefly pointed out, for, before proceeding to the argument about Alexander’s encounter with the Eastern inhabitants, some of Aristotle’s teachings should be clarified in order to analyse the challenge that the Amazons and Brahmins would give to the Macedonian king. According to Aristotle in the *Buik*, the first duty of a sovereign is to administer and preserve justice, which is the ground of a king’s honour:

It is þe first point of a kingis croun,
Of gude and ill to mek diuisioun,
Punys þe tane, and gud till vþer do,
And hald the law evinly till he and scho,
For kingis honoure standis maist in iustice,
Till honoure vertew and to punys vice. (9897–9902)

Furthermore, Aristotle advises Alexander to choose a wise man as his attendant, and to hear and humbly obey his councillors, whether they are of noble birth or not:

Wise men ar nocht ay grettest of estate,
Bot chosin for þe wisest þat men wate,
For wisdom followis nocht to dignitie,
Na takis na hede to gre[te]nes of degree,
Bot quha most luffis God, vertew, and iustice,
To mannys sicht is here maist haldin wise,
And to do law to be reddie boun,
The kirk honoure, and proffette to þe croun.
Sen kingis may nocht all lawis haue in mynd,
Thai suld haue wise men with þame quhare þai wynd,
Wise, wourthy men, þat has þe lawis in wrette.
In mony hedis is oft tymes mekill witt—
Ane king is bot a man be him allane. (9959–71)

¹⁴ Cartright, ‘Sir Gilbert Hay and the Alexander Tradition’, p. 234.

Wisdom is not often accompanied by an estate or good birth, but comes from one's devotion and virtue. A king should elect a wise man as his councillor even if the man is poor, for a king himself is nothing but a man. The humbleness or humility of a king to govern wisely is underlined. These teachings—the indispensability of justice, the humility to hear and obey counsel from his wise men, and the assertion of the possible incompatibility of wealth and wisdom—are presumably based on the passage from the *Secretum secretorum*.¹⁵

The teachings by Aristotle in the 'Regiment' section of the *Buik* also consist of detailed allegories regarding the relationship between the body, the soul, and the workings of the mind (9703–9823). Of these allegorical teachings, the lesson about the body politic both in heaven and on the earth is worth noting in relation to Alexander's following adventures. Aristotle explains the analogy of the order of the heavenly kingdom and the earthly one:

A realme als to ane man may liknit be,
 Off quhilk the hede is callit spiritualetie—
 The prince and nobill suld be þe body þan,
 The lauberaris to þe leggis of þe man:
 Bot gif þe leggis in law manteinit be,
 And body and armes kepe þe spiritualetie,
 And all the memberis to ressoun obey,
 That sall gar sone baith hede and body swey:
 [...]
 Thus spedefull is þat all þis world here down,
 As is the Hevin, war gouernit with a croun,
 For all kyn vertew fro þe Hevin dependis,
 All grace and gudnes fra þe Hevin ws send is,
 And, as He governis the Hevynis in vnitie,
 Sa suld in erde all thingis governit be.

¹⁵ In a Middle English prose version of *Secreta secretorum*, keeping the justice among his realm and the willingness to hear counsel from wise men are also underlined, although the praise of justice is more exaggerated there than the *Buik*: 'Rightwisnes is forme and vndirstondyng, whiche god made and sent to his creaturis. and bi rightwisnes was þe erthe bildid, and kyngis made to mayntene it, for it makith sugetis obeyshaunte, and prowde men meke, and savith the persones from harme [...] Onys it was found written in a stone of þe tunge of Caldee, that a kyng and rightwisnes are bretheryn, and that þe which on hath nede of an other need of þe same, and þat on may nought do without þat other. ffor alle kyngis were made to mayntene Iustice and rightwisness, for it is the helthe of sugetis. Dere sone, whan þou hast oughte to do be governyd bi counselle, for þou art but on sool man, ne telle nought alle þi thought of thyn owen cast to thi counselle, but here what eche man wolle say, and than maist þou deme in thyn owen witt þe best of hir witt, and of þyn owen witt, and þus shalt thou be holden wijs and worshipfulle for thi governaunce. [...] [C]onsidir welle which persone counselid the beste, and haue him in cherte.' See Steel, pp. 33–34.

For mannis saul weil may be liknyt like
As till a king þat governis his kinrik: (9659–66, 9670–77)

Aristotle teaches Alexander about the body politic of a king and the other estates, which is paralleled by the hierarchy of the God and angels. The rule of a king's 'kinrik' is depicted as a body whose head is 'spiritualetie' (clergy or ecclesiastical law), whose body is a king and nobles, and whose legs are 'lauberaris' (labourers). The lowest part, the legs, are governed by the law, while the highest part is overseen by a king and nobles. The whole body of a realm must obey the order, and each must do duty according to his station. This body politic presupposes the hierarchy of the three estates. These precepts of Aristotle, especially concerning justice as a supreme virtue for kingship, the election of counsellors, and the body politic as an ideal political system, should be noted, for they are questioned during Alexander's encounters with the Amazons and Brahmins in the *Buik*.

After the surrender of Darius, Emperor of the Persian Empire, and the flight of Porrus, King of India, the aim of Alexander's conquest is no longer to vanquish his enemies:

Than chesit thai [Alexander and his men] out a certane of cumpanye,
For þai bad nocht of peopilloure money,
Because that Alexander desirit to se
The syndrie kyndis of folkis in þat cuntre [India];
And furth þai past, and seik thare aventure,
Ane wourthy ost of sturdy men and sture. (12541–46)

After the military conquests of the Eastern rulers, Alexander commences an expedition to fulfil his desire to see 'syndrie kyndis of folkis'. This 'folkis' presumably implies not only wonderful or even monstrous races but also animals. Alexander's adventure in the East can be said to be a story of his encounter with creatures unknown in the West.

Regarding the medieval view towards the creatures, the Augustinian hermeneutics was still dominant, for the paradigm shift to the Aristotelian empirical view had not entirely happened yet.¹⁶ Aristotle in the *Buik* does not yet have an empirical view that knowledge should be gained only through observation and perceptions of the senses,¹⁷ so it is necessary

¹⁶ According to Mary Franklin-Brown, Aristotelian empiricism had also been introduced in other Arabic texts by the twelfth century. Aristotelian texts and his view towards the natural world coexisted with the traditional Augustinian view. See Mary Franklin-Brown, *Reading the World: Encyclopedic Writing in the Scholastic Age* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), pp. 38–56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

to consider, in brief, the Augustinian view towards things in the world in order to consider the ‘syndrie kyndis of folkis’ in Alexander’s expedition. In the Augustinian view, visible things and events became signs, or *figurae*, of the invisible truth of God. As Erich Auerbach said, reality in the earthly life was regarded as ‘only *umbra* and *figura* of the authentic, future, ultimate truth, the real reality that will unveil and preserve the *figura*’.¹⁸ According to Mary Franklin-Brown, this view of visible, material things has its root in the passage of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: ‘For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; his eternal power also, and divinity’ (Romans 1. 20).¹⁹ In *De doctrina christiana*, citing this passage, Augustine warns his fellow Christians to use things in this world properly: ‘[W]e must use this world, not enjoy it, in order to discern “the invisible attributes of God, which are understood through what has been made”, or in other words, to ascertain what is eternal and spiritual from corporeal and temporal things.’²⁰ Although the visible world and its creatures are transient, they were considered as *figura*, which preserves within and reflects the invisible immaterial things, or the ultimate truth. Therefore, they should not be understood only through the observation of their physical appearance, which is the basis for Aristotelian empiricism. Rather, they must be interpreted as having ‘further levels of truth’.²¹ If a viewer of a *figura* does not relate it to any other higher spiritual meaning, he will fall into ‘a miserable kind of spiritual slavery to interpret signs as things, and to be incapable of raising the mind’s eye above the physical creation so as to absorb the eternal light’.²²

¹⁸ Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature, Theory and History of Literature*, 9 (New York: Meridian Books, 1959; repr. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 72.

¹⁹ The quotation and further references to both Testaments are *Douay-Rheims Bible + Challoner Notes* <<http://www.drbo.org/index.htm>> [accessed 25 August 2016].

²⁰ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. by R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), III. 4.

²¹ Franklin-Brown, p. 47. Also, Auerbach relates that ‘the figures are not only tentative; they are also the tentative form of something eternal and timeless; they point not only to the concrete future, but also to something that always has been and always will be; they point to something which is in need of interpretation, which will indeed be fulfilled in the concrete future, but which is at all times present, fulfilled in God’s providence, which knows no difference of time. This eternal thing is already figured in them, and thus they are both tentative fragmentary reality, and veiled eternal reality’. See Auerbach, pp. 59–60.

²² Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, III. 9.

As this ‘semiotic system’,²³ or ‘signifying system’²⁴ that integrates things into signs implies, things in nature should be read and interpreted like words in Scripture. The visible world itself is a text, or the Book of Nature.²⁵ Both things in nature and words in Scripture are a kind of signifier, metaphor, or *figura*, which can be interpreted in order to understand the divine truth. In this system of ‘[m]etaphorical transforming of eternal into natural’,²⁶ the semblance was not disliked. Although any writing originating in this world could not be Words of God but merely a semblance, or *figura* of divinity, writings concerning not only the interpretation of the expressions in Scripture but also things in nature were regarded as a revelation of the eternal truth.

A medieval encyclopaedia was supposed to describe the whole world and interpret such revelations. As Franklin-Brown says, ‘The encyclopaedia, filled with figures of all the figures in the world, could be taken as the “book of the world” *par excellence*.’²⁷ Medieval encyclopaedias interpreted visible creatures as a semblance, or *figura* of the Book of Nature, which could reveal invisible truth.

The ultimate sources of the Wonders of the East section of vernacular romance cycles of Alexander were often traced back to ancient or early medieval encyclopaedias like Solinus’ *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* and Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*. The view of the romance cycles including the *Buik* towards the creatures inevitably has similarities to that of an encyclopaedia. As the creatures straddle the genre boundary between encyclopaedias and the romances of Alexander, his expedition to see sundry kinds of ‘folkis’ can also be considered a journey to encounter various *figurae*.

However, the similarities between encyclopaedias’ and Alexander romances’ views towards creatures do not mean that the interpretations made in the two genres of texts are the same. Rather, they are different according to the expectations determined by their genres. As the purported genre identity of the *Buik* is a ‘mirroure’, the creatures of the East would be interpreted as *figurae* that helps the king understand something related to his sovereignty or

²³ Franklin-Brown, p. 45.

²⁴ Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 35.

²⁵ The metaphor of the world as a book appears in both Testaments: ‘The heavens shall be folded together as a book’ (Isaiah 34. 4); and ‘The heaven departed as a book folded up’ (Revelations 6. 14). The God is also likened to a writer, as ‘His finger wrote two stone tablets of testimony’ (Exodus 31. 18), and His tongue is a ‘pen’ (Psalms 44. 2).

²⁶ Gellrich, p. 34.

²⁷ Franklin-Brown, p. 48.

as precepts to gain the order in his realm. While encyclopaedias theoretically offer information about the whole world and provide general ethical principles through the interpretation of creatures, the Eastern inhabitants of the *Buik* would encourage its readers or audience to develop more specific knowledge of statecraft and kingly virtues.

Of course, it cannot be said that all of the inhabitants and animals in the *Buik* work as *figura* for the mirror for princes, because some of them are explained through detailed information about their lives and have conversations or battles with Alexander, while others are only briefly mentioned. According to Gaullier-Bougassas, two different ways of describing the wonders of the East can be seen in the two Anglo-Norman romances, *Le roman d'Alexandre ou le roman du toute chivalerie* (c. 1180) by Thomas de Kent and *Le roman d'Alexandre*. In the former, the wonderful races and animals are simply enumerated by repeating 'Un autre pople i ad [...]',²⁸ or 'Un[e] autre beste i ad [...]',²⁹ and almost all their descriptions appear as digressions from the plot of Alexander's expedition. The Eastern inhabitants in Thomas de Kent's romance are listed without any connection to Alexander and his army. On the other hand, in *Le roman d'Alexandre*, the Eastern creatures are integrated into Alexander's adventure, and those who have no relation to the plot of the king's expedition are often omitted from the narrative.³⁰ Because these two styles of description are also seen in the *Buik*, I will analyse the relationship of the Eastern inhabitants to Alexander in this Scottish poem using Gaullier-Bougassas's categorisation according to their descriptive styles.

The inhabitants of India, who are mentioned just after Alexander's victory over Porrus, provide an example of the former case where the Eastern inhabitants are only briefly mentioned. In their description, only names are given:

Thay fand ane pepill callit was Stalbianis,
And efter, ane wther þat callit was Voreanis;
The third pepill callit was Perymones,
Quhilkis ilkane of sindrie langage was.
Syne fand he ane pepill callit Asprios,
And syne ane wthir, þe quhilk was callit Mangos. (12547–52)

²⁸ Thomas de Kent, *Le roman d'Alexandre ou le roman du toute chivalerie*, ed. by Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas and Laurence Harf-Lancher, *Lettres gothiques*, 4542 (Paris: Champion, 2003), p. 466, 522, 524, 526.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 532, 534.

³⁰ Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas, *Les romans d'Alexandre: aux frontières de l'épique et du romanesque*, *Nouvelle bibliothèque du Moyen Âge*, 42 (Paris: Champion, 1998), pp. 239–42.

The contemporary readers of the *Buik* presumably had considerable difficulty in visualizing inhabitants like ‘Stalbianis’, ‘Vareanis’, ‘Adpios’, and ‘Mangos’, for the list of strange names might entertain with its exoticism, but the descriptions lack the respective characteristics of those inhabitants. Thus, the listed creatures do not work as *figurae*, but only serve as a whole to show the diversity in God’s creation.

Concerning the latter case where the inhabitants have arguments or battles with Alexander, they function differently from the listed creatures, for they are integrated into the narrative of the mirror for princes. In particular, the detailed accounts of the two humanoid races, the Amazons and the Brahmins, appear to remind Alexander of Aristotle’s teachings. As Alexander asks the king of the Brahmins and the Queen of the Amazons, in his letters (11739–84, 12623–52), to teach him how to rule ‘with wertew and iustice’ (12629) and how to maintain their ‘seinggeory’ (sovereignty, 11769), both of them arouse his curiosity about their statecraft. They offer Alexander occasions to reflect on his learning about kingship.

The first race, the inhabitants of ‘þe land of Femynee’ (11714), hints at the possibility of the subversion of Aristotle’s teachings about the body politic. The Amazons obey neither princes nor emperors and are not obedient even to their husbands. Deviating from its sources,³¹ the *Buik* has Alexander explain the patriarchal body politic in his realm to Pallissida, the Queen of the Amazons, in his letter to her:

The man is hede to woman, and ledare,
And at his biddin suld be euermare;
Than may ane woman be callit, husbandles,
Like till ane mannys bodie war hedeles,
And greter lak it is, be mekill thing,
To se ane quene be maister oure a king,
For in oure land it wa[r] a frely cais,
A crovnit king to haue a king crounles. (11777–84)

For Alexander, a pupil of Aristotle, the hierarchical body politic should have a male leader as a head.³² Despite the fact that the governance in ‘þe land of Femynee’ is maintained

³¹ In the *Historia de preliis*, Alexander does not mention the body politic. *The History of Alexander’s Battles: Historia de preliis, the JI Version*, ed. and trans. by R. Telfy Pritchard, *Mediaeval Sources in Translation*, 34 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1992), pp. 77–79.

³² In the *Secretum secretorum*, the description of women is rather misogynistic as the episode of the poisoned maiden who is brought up with serpent’s meat to assassinate Alexander illustrates. Women are regarded not as qualified rulers but as an obstacles to good governance. Since the episode also appears in

successfully, it appears ‘hedeles’ or ‘crounles’. The sovereignty of the Amazons presents to Alexander the possibility of ‘radical proto-feminist challenge’,³³ which clearly deviates from Aristotle’s patriarchal teachings in the ‘Regiment’ section of the *Buik*.

However, as Cartwright points out, this deviation from the body politic governed by male leaders ultimately remains a mere possibility and provides confirmation of the alleged general rule.³⁴ While in the analogue to this section, namely, the section from the *Historia de preliis*, the Queen of the Amazons’ decision to send messengers with some colts and horses as a gift for the king is briefly related,³⁵ the Amazons and their Queen in the *Buik* later directly meet Alexander and his men, and even let the hosts of army come onto their island:

And first scho [Pallissida] feistit him [Alexander] apoun þe meane-land,
And euerie ladie hi[r] husband in hir hand,
And syne thai rowit him in within þe ilis—
The flude of brade was [four-and-twenty] milis—
And thare thai festit him richt ryalie,
And he the ladyis made gud company;
An tuke him to *thare lord* and governoure,
And of þame and *thare landis protectoure*. (12005–12, emphasis added)

The Amazons take the king as their lord and protector. Thus, Alexander becomes the head of ‘þe land of Femynee’, and the realm ceases to be ‘headless’ or ‘crounless’. The presence of the Amazons might provide some doubts about the body politic, but the warlike women eventually welcome the king as their head. The possibility of female governance is denied peacefully, and Aristotle’s teachings are only temporarily challenged.

The second ‘folk’ which makes Alexander reflect on his preceptor’s teachings is ‘Bragmarmaris’ (12625), or the Brahmins. Two sections added to the *Hitoria de preliis*, the advice of Dindimus, the king of Brahmins, and Alexander’s justification of hierarchy, appear to make the Macedonian king reconsider and even retell his knowledge and belief concerning kingship. In the beginning of their correspondence, Dindimus advises Alexander about the

the ‘Regiment’ section (9269–9354) and becomes a motivation for Alexander to ask Aristotle to write a guidebook, the king would not overlook the possibility of female governance.

³³ John Cartright, ‘Basilisks, Brahmins and Other Aliens: Encountering the Other in Sir Gilbert Hay’s Alexander’, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 26.1 (1991), 334–42 (p. 341).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

³⁵ Pritchard, p. 79.

governance of his realm. His counsel does not oppose Aristotle's thinking; rather, it bears remarkable resemblance to the Greek philosopher's counsel:

Crovn is nocht gevin onlie for dignetie,
To syre in sege of he soueranite,
Bot to kepe law to all men, and iustice,
Quhilk thare may na man do bot he be wise,
And gif him-selff can nocht sic gouernale,
Than sould he cheris him men of wise counsale,
And cheris thame, and hald thame nere his cors,
Ane than behuffis him for to be wise of force.
Bot mony wenyis þat riches visdome ay has,
Bot maist of wisdome leist of riches mais—
Quhare maist of riches is, thare is maist foly,
For it and visdome haldis neuer gud cumpany. (12684–95)

Dindimus says that the crown is not given only because of royal supremacy but in order to provide law and justice for every man. He thinks the authority of a king derives from his ability to administer justice. He tells Alexander to choose wise men as his councillors, pointing out the incompatibility of wisdom and wealth.

However, a later argument made by the Brahmins' king offers a stark contrast to the body politic Aristotle taught. Asked about the Brahmins' virtuous way of life, Dindimus explains their desire for 'pouerte and symplines' (12814), which makes them live equally. Because the Brahmins never indulge in excess and always exercise moderation according to reason, 'na iustice nor correctioun' (12790) is necessary; in actuality, they do not require any law or justice. Moreover, the king insists that men should be equal, although there are some differences in terms of their virtue: 'For God of mankind made na difference | Bot vertew bringis a man till excellance' (12786–87). His argument appears to be somewhat contradictory to his advice at the beginning of the letter, but through its emphasis on equality among men, it denies any hierarchy, which is a primary premise of the body politic.

As Aristotle's faithful pupil, Alexander makes a counterargument against Dindimus. Following Aristotle's 'Regiment', Alexander expresses doubt about equality among people and claims the existence of hierarchy:

Als, quhan, 3e speke of 3oure humilete,
That all 3oure folk standis in equite,
3e suld witt þat in Hevin ar diuers greis,

As in this warld amange kingis men seis;
For king takis nocht here domynatioun
Na governance, bot fra the heist croun,
For in-till Hevin is ordouris he and law,
As be the ordouris of angelis here we knaw. (13024–31)

Alexander draws an analogy between social distinctions among ‘kingis’ and the celestial hierarchy of ‘angelis’. Through retelling Aristotle’s teachings about the resemblance of the body politic between heaven and earth, Alexander might become more convinced of his knowledge.

Both the Amazons and the Brahmins question the idea of the body politic, but eventually, their doubts encourage Alexander to think back on his learning and understand it more deeply. Thus, the two inhabitants of the East can be said to function as *figurae* of the mirror for princes. From them, Alexander can extract the precepts concerning kingship and governance of a realm. During his encounters with them, Alexander retells Aristotle’s teachings in his own words. As *figurae*, the Amazons and the Brahmins offer occasions for the king to reinterpret the ‘Regiment’ of his preceptor.

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The two Eastern peoples who are integrated into the plot of the mirror for princes, the Amazons and the Brahmins, enable Alexander to consider and retell what he learned about kingship in Aristotle’s ‘Regiment’ section, which is mainly based on the *Secretum secretorum*. Since the two races pose possible threats to the order kept by the body politic, Alexander has to reflect on his preceptor’s teachings in the encounters with them. The female governance in ‘þe land of Femynne’ and the equal community of the Brahmins question the male-centred body politic, but Alexander does not accept their deviations from the hierarchical order. Rather, these encounters are utilised to reaffirm the precepts of Aristotle. Even though they demand the reconsideration of the ideal political system and the ethical quality of a king, Alexander makes use of them to deepen his understanding of the education he received. As provocative *figurae* for the mirror for princes, the Amazons and the Brahmins urge the king to reinterpret Aristotle’s teachings and to retell them in his own words. In the *Buik*, Alexander’s encounters with the visible creatures are not only part of the expedition to revelation unknown, invisible truth; they also reflect already-known knowledge about kingship.