

## BOOK REVIEW

*Mirrors and Mirroring from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*. Edited by MARIA GEROLEMOU and LILIA DIAMANTOPOULOU. London, UK and New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Pp. x + 282. Hardback, \$ 80.50. ISBN: 9781350101302.

In classical antiquity, various discussions on mirrors (didactic, prognostic, decorative, liminal and mimetic types of mirroring) describe their effects by focusing on the medium of the mirror itself or the real or metaphysical character of its products. This new and inspiring volume *Mirrors and Mirroring*, edited by M. Gerolemou and L. Diamantopoulou, offers its readers a new perspective on the contextualization of the status of reflections from antiquity to the early modern period on an “interdisciplinary basis” (3). This interesting and genuine volume in context consists of four parts concerning mirrors in antiquity (part 1), the relationship between women and mirroring (part 2), mirrors as thresholds of liminal spaces (part 3), and last but not least, the association of mirrors with mimesis (part 4).

### Part 1 “Philosophy, Reflections and Mirrors”

The first chapter of part 1 (“the Liver and the Mirror: Images Beyond the Eye in Plato’s *Timaeus*”, 9-17) by Ava Shirazi examines the function of liver as a mirror, which is a crucial mechanism in *Timaeus*’ account of the embodied soul. In the following pages (11-17), Shirazi cleverly explicates how the mirror informs sensory experiences (not only the visual), and answers to the question why Plato turns to the mirror for a device of sensory communication between reason and appetite (meaning hepatoscopy). Thus, in *Timaeus* the mirror emerges as an object of visualization and functions as a tool with which we can give abstract ideas a visual form (17). In the next contribution of part 1 (“Alexander of Aphrodisias on the Reality of Mirror Images”, 19-28), Katerina Ierodiakonou examines the case of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who suggested that what we see in mirrors are the objects themselves but dimly. Alexander, in his own treatise *On the Soul* and in its *Supplement*, the so-called *Mantissa*, compares mirror images to colors.

Ierodiaconou rightly concludes that Alexander tried to flesh out what he thinks is already implicit in Aristotle's treatises, by introducing sophisticated distinctions in light, colours, and mirror images that bring out and explicate their relational character (28).

The following chapter ("Catoptrology in Lucretius' *DRN* 4.269-323", 29-42) by Myrto Garani focuses upon the Epicurean approach to catoptrics, in the way this can be tracked down within Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (4.26-44). Garani observes that Lucretius turns mirrors into an integral mechanism of his demonstrative and analogical method, by means of which he "demystifies" further the secrets of nature (42). The final contribution of part 1 ("Tideus' Theory of Reflection in *On the Mirrors*", 43-55) by Mikhail Silian presents Tideus' short treatise and includes an original answer to the question why some surfaces reflect bodies better than others; Tideus (based on Galen) provides a more general theory of reflection than that which had been hitherto offered by visual theorists. Silian generally offers his readers a consistent and more literal translation that can be used for the purposes of further scholarly work on Tideus' treatise (50-55).

#### Part 2 "Women in the Mirror"

The opening chapter of part 2 ("Mirrors of Women, Mirrors of Words: The Mirror in the Greek Papyri", 59-71) by Isabella Bonati and Nicola Reggiani aims first to give a brief overview of the terms used in ancient Greek to label the "mirror" (κάτοπτρον, εἴσοπτρον, ἔνοπτρον, δίοπτρον) through documentary papyri; the emphasis by the authors is given on mirror as a "gender object" in the papyri, its connection with the sphere of women, and its material aspects (59). The following article ("a Flame on Etruscan Mirrors? Meaning and Function in Daily Life and Religion of the Pattern on the Mirrors' Reflection Side", 73-80) by Vittorio Mascelli examines a peculiar representation appearing on the extension of the *recto* of some Etruscan bronze mirrors dating from the Hellenistic Period. The writer concludes that mirror-motifs could be related to real functions as well; specifically, the position of this decoration, reflecting disk, could be related to sources of artificial light, which allowed a woman to see her reflection in the dark (79).

The next contribution of this part ("Portable Love: Ivory Mirror Cases under the Lens of *Fin' Amor*", 81-91) by Loreto Casanueva Reyes seeks to explain how mirrors and their representations shed light into the Middle Ages' ideals of beauty and love under the lens of *fin' amor*. Reyes begins providing a brief

historical overview of how mirrors were perceived from Antiquity to the Middle Ages; then, this chapter explores how portable mirrors became a love token; finally, it provides its readers an analysis of the presence and connotations of mirrors in *De Amore* and *Le Roman de la Rose* (81). The final chapter of part two (“So Skilfully Mirrored in His Art’: (Re)Visiting Mirrors in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*”, 93-103) by Nikolas P. Kakkoufa aims to revisit the *Picture of Dorian Gray* in an effort to enrich existing scholarship on the topic by focusing on the use of the mirror within the text, not only as a signifier of Narcissism or a trope for talking about sexuality, but also as a physical object, and, most importantly, its use as a learning mechanism. Kakkoufa comes to a conclusion that the mirror image becomes an affirmation of identity; self-doubling and self-representation are in the *Picture of Dorian Gray* a method by which we can “multiply our personalities” and experience more fully the “myriad lives and myriad sensations” that constitute our identity (103).

### Part 3 “Liminal Mirror”

The first chapter of this part (“Mirrors and the Manufacture of Religious Aura in the Graeco-Roman World”, 107-117) by Tatiana Bur examines an ancient catoptric manual – Pseudo-Hero’s *Catoptrica* – with anecdotal evidence which testifies to the deployment of mirrors in ancient religious contexts (107-8). In general, this elucidating chapter helps readers to understand how the same laws of geometrical optics, and same objects through which these laws are materialized, could do different things according to different religious systems within which they existed (117). The next contribution (“the Mirror of Nature”, 119-125) by Daniel Markovic examines four instances of the idea of ‘the mirror of nature’ (*speculum naturae*, κάτοπτρον φύσεως) in Latin and Greek literature: Lucretius, Cicero (two instances), and Plutarch. We generally observe that the literary examples of Epicurean origin, provided in the chapter, activate two images: that of a personified nature holding a mirror, and that of nature seen in a mirror as an optical instrument (124).

Mirror metaphors were quite common in Byzantine literature, while mentions of actual mirrors were infrequent and usually had connotations of vanity and deception, mostly associated with women. Thus, the following chapter of part 3 (“the Unspotted *Dioptra* of Prophecy’: A Mirror Metaphor in Byzantine Literature”, 127-138) by Eirini Afentoulidou concentrates on two different but related

concepts: reflection and vision are further analyzed in the chapter (137-38). Afentoulidou rightly concludes that the mirror metaphor represents two major traits of Byzantine thought: the “unfathomable is reflected in the fathomable, and the visible and invisible, past, present and future form an entity, concealed for the many but waiting to be revealed” (138). The last article (“Mirrors and Mirroring in Dreams: Self-Reflection and Liminality in the *Roman De La Rose* and in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*”, 139-154) by Efthymia Priki taking under consideration the correlation of mirrors, dreams, and liminality, as well as Foucault’s notion of heterotopia, examines two cases, where these themes converge in two narratives about a dreamer’s initiation in love (140). This examination has shown that reflective surfaces in these dream narratives of the medieval literary works presented in the chapter, are used to mark the disruptive effects of self-reflection and the illusory and transformative effects of such reflective surfaces on the dreamer’s visual, or rather mental, perception of the dream space (154).

#### Part 4 “Mimetic Mirror”

The first contribution of part 4 (“Plane and Curved Mirrors in Classical Antiquity”, 157-164) by Maria Gerolemou restricts itself to two observations relating to plane mirrors that can produce virtual images and to curved mirrors with the ability to deform reality. Readers are led to conclusions that discussion of mirrors and reflections in the ancient world from the fourth century BC onward seems to focus on three major questions also related to other imaging technologies. (164). The second chapter of this part (“Reflections on Lucian’s Lunar Mirror: *Speculum Lunae* and an Ancient Telescopic Fantasy”, 165-175) by Karen ni Mheallaigh examines Lucian’s fantastical view from above (an allusion to Menippean satire and the motif of *kataskopia*) as a serious scientific heft in terms of ancient theories about both the Moon and of mirrors, and perceives Lucian’s lunar mirror as an emblem of what we might call the ancient scientific imagination for the way in which it amalgamates diverse strands of thought that associated the Moon with mirrors in magic, philosophy and scientific practice (175).

The following chapter (“Mirroring the Face of God: The Challenge of the ‘Invisible Face’ and the Metropolitan Crucifixion Ivory”, 177-187) by Kalliroe Linnardou examines mirrors and mirroring in conjunction with the acheiropoietic icon, a medieval manipulation of ancient beliefs and practices that eventually would be superseded by the luminous acheiropoietic impressions of photography (178). Readers observe that this hidden portrait was meant as a mental

indirect reflection and alternative visual interpretation of the renowned *acheiropoietos* icon/touch-relic of Christ's face – the Image of Edessa (the *Mandylicon* arrived in Constantinople in 944) (181). The last contribution of this part ("Technologies 'Made in Greece': Konstantinos Simonides' Steampunk Inventions Through the Looking-Glass", 189-197) by Lilia Diamantopoulou explores the well-known forger Konstantinos Simonides who published the *Symais* claimed by the editor to be a work of the Byzantine monk Meletios of Chios (thirteenth century). Diamantopoulou generally assumes that Simonides did not want to be remembered as the mere publisher of the discovered texts, but as their true author and notes that if it were not for his conspicuous intention to deceive, Simonides would have earned poetic laurels (196).

Overall, this interesting and valuable volume offers its readers plenty food for thought examining an underestimated subject, such as mirrors and mirroring. All contributors cleverly, subtly, and clearly present many aspects and types of mirror-image from Antiquity to Modern Period offering us new perspectives in the fields of literature, science, and arts as well. I totally recommend this volume to anyone who is interested in scientific and literary scholarship on mirrors. Summarizing the presentation of this volume, I would absolutely agree that "the international scholars brought together here explore critical questions around the mirror as artefact and the phenomenon of mirroring within the intersection between technological and cultural dynamics of mirrors".

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