

Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th-15th Century Tabriz, edited by Judith Pfeiffer, (Iran Studies, 8) (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2014), xiv + 397 pp., ISBN: 978-90-04-25539-5, €131.00 / \$182.00 (hb)

The field of Middle Eastern history in the later Middle Period has considerably expanded over the last decades freeing itself from the last remnants of the idea of decline. In particular Mamlūk history and, closely linked, what might be called Eastern Mediterranean history have now dedicated journals, conferences, and book series with a continuous stream of articles and monographs. This expansion has been in particular focused on the Arabic-speaking lands, but has to some extent side-lined the study of contemporaneous neighbouring regions to the east. This is in particular true for the period after the Mongol invasions and the consolidation of new political structures in the Persianate world first under the Ilkhanids and subsequently under the Timurids and the Aqquyunlus. The book under review sets out to tackle this imbalance in studying Middle Eastern history by honing in on one particular case study, the history of Tabrīz in north-western Iran.

Based on papers given at a workshop and expanded by additional articles Judith Pfeiffer has edited an extraordinarily successful volume. The themes covered in the volume are broad, as is evident from its title, yet the clear regional and chronological foci make it much more than just the sum of its papers. Most importantly, it shows the vivacity of religious, economic, artistic, intellectual, and political life in what became one of the largest centres in the Persianate world. Most contributions can be broadly grouped into three large clusters, namely history of ideas (Devin DeWeese on the religious encounters of the Sufi Simnānī at the Ilkhanid court; Domenico Ingenito on contemporaneous literary encounters between the poets Sa‘dī and Humām Tabrīzī; Judith Pfeiffer on religious boundaries in the Ilkhānate; Robert Morrison on the role of astronomy in al-Ījī’s theological thinking; F. Jamil Ragep on the Greek Chioniades studying astronomy in Tabrīz), economic history (Johannes Preiser-Kapeller on the role of Tabrīz for Christian merchants and ecclesiastics; Patrick Wing on commercial life in Tabrīz; Sheila S. Blair on Tabrīz as an entrepôt in long-distance trade) and institutional history (Birgit Hoff-

mann on Rashīd al-Dīn's endowment complex in Tabrīz; Nourane Ben Azzouna on manuscript production in this endowment; Ertuğrul Ökten on Aqquyunlu religious institutions in the city). Two further contributions are those by Reuven Amitai on the 'wise men' in the entourage of the Ilkhānate's founder Hülegü and Joachim Gierlichs on Tabrīzī woodcarvings in the Timurid period.

The broad thematic coverage makes it difficult to identify a distinct common thread in the contributions and patronage for instance is not a relevant issue for each and every article. However, in a field that is in relative terms *terra incognita*, it is simply too early to strive at all costs for thematic coherence in such a volume. The main task at this point is to open up the field for further research and the best way to do so is to do away with great narratives that have restrained scholarship for so long. The volume splendidly does so as the reader goes away with a clear sense of excitement of what can be done and with a clear sense of the diversity of historical phenomena inaptly labelled with broad categories such as 'Persianate world' or 'Ilkhānate period.' What it meant even to reside in Ilkhānate Tabrīz was clearly a very different story for the various individuals and groups who are dealt with in the respective contributions. Yet the volume goes beyond just showing that it was all very different: The combination of micro-historical case studies (e.g. Rashīd al-Dīn's endowment and Simnānī's religious encounters) with rather long-durée papers (especially those on economic history) offer a fascinating kaleidoscope, where the individual phenomenon can be linked to broader developments of continuity and change.

On account of the broad thematic coverage most readers will have some articles that speak more to their personal interests than others. In my case I particularly found two contributions fascinating, but this is not meant as a judgment on the quality of others. Patrick Wing's discussion of the economic role of Tabrīz between 1250 and 1400 is a splendid example of how to write such a case study without losing sight of the wider regional developments. He builds a convincing argument that Tabrīz was able to gain such a prominent position in this period on account of intersecting interests of political elites and merchants. The opening of new long-distance trading opportunities in the aftermath of the Mongol conquests not only attracted more traders from abroad, but local traders were able to channel increased revenues to their own control. Judith Pfeiffer takes up another theme traditionally associated with the post-1250 period in the eastern Is-

lamic world, namely that of confessional ambiguity where the borders between Sunni and Shī'ite identities mellowed. While accepting the broad outlines of this trend she convincingly challenges its applicability across all regions and throughout the later Middle Period. The case study aptly chosen is that of Shī'ite communities who successfully linked religious Shī'ite identity to genealogical claims (*sayyidism*) to carve out new political, social, and economic opportunities.

As with any field that is newly developing a core feature is the question of what primary sources can be used. Here, the contributions as a whole show the breadth of what is available and what is possible: Documentary sources that are well known are far from being exhausted (e.g. Rashīd al-Dīn's endowment deed); autobiographical narrations offer detailed insights into religious life (e.g. Simnānī's account); Persian narrative sources, if carefully read, allow moving beyond the rich but heavily biased picture presented in Arabic chronicles to present more indigenous voices and the use of material artefacts enables us to supplement the myopic view of the textual sources.

Except for those with encyclopaedic interests most readers will not read through the entire volume, but whatever one's choices are there is enough for a very pleasant reading experience. The contributions are mostly well written, they are carefully edited and most importantly the volume gives a great insight into an invigorated field. It should be read by anybody with an interest in the late Middle Period.

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