

exploration of the methods and models applied to studies of oral traditions in Iranian languages and cultures.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X23000319

R.D. McChesney: *Four Central Asian Shrines: A Socio-Political History*

Leiden: Brill, 2021. ISBN 978 90 04 45958 8.

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New York University Professor Emeritus Robert D. McChesney is a luminary in the field of Afghanistan, Central Asian, and Persianate studies, whose body of work echoes and takes new directions in this book composed of case studies of four shrine complexes. The shrines, whose histories are masterfully illuminated by McChesney, are the Gur-i Mir in Samarqand, the Khawaja Abu Nasr Parsa in Balkh, the Noble Rawzah in Mazar-i Sharif, and the Shrine of the Prophet's Cloak in Qandahar. The shrine complexes are interconnected in various political and stylistic ways, but they are treated as distinct ensembles of similar component parts including the *gunbad/gunbaz* domed structure that frequently serves as a mausoleum, the *khanqah/khanaqah* or Sufi lodge, *masjid* or mosque, *madrastas* or Islamic schools, the *langar khana* or "soup kitchen", as well a number of other structures including dormitories, gates, arches, walls, pools, canals, latrines, etc. The four case studies include three complexes in Afghanistan and one in Uzbekistan, and the narratives cover approximately 500 years from the Timurids, through the Mughal, Durrani, colonial, and Soviet periods, to the contemporary post-2001 era when the most recent transformations to shrines in Afghanistan were contextualized by an international military occupation. The narratives are built on McChesney's meticulous use of scores of Persian-language sources, a rich array of English and Russian texts, a smaller sampling of French materials, as well as epigraphy and 107 photographs that adorn the volume and enhance the treatment of each shrine.

The Gur-i (A)Mir shrine complex in Samarqand is the first and longest (c. 120 pages) of the four case studies, and many of the themes addressed here are revisited in subsequent chapters. The most historiographically significant of these recurring motifs are source interrogation and source comparison. In the case of this shrine ensemble, McChesney juxtaposes the writings of Sultan Muhammad Samarqandi (pen name Mutribi) and Muhammad Badi' (pen name Maliha) to contextualize and describe transformations during the seventeenth century. These and other sources highlight the regularity and importance of Mughal imperial patronage of the Gur-i Mir complex due to their dynastic lineage being traced through Timur's second son Miranshah who is also interred there. Mughal patronage of the Gur-i Mir is exemplified by a memorable poetically licensed account of an elephant, bequeathed by Akbar, going mad, killing its handlers, crashing through a gate to escape Samarqand, and fleeing all the way back to India! The chapter provides fascinating details about the context and intentions surrounding the burials and reburials



of Timur, Miranshah, Timur's grandson Ulugh Beg, the saintly figure Mir Sayyid Barakah, and others at the Gur-i Mir. As with the other shrines addressed in this book, the Gur-i Mir has been impacted by political pressures, including nationalism, that continually inscribe new historical meanings upon the shrine complex. In this regard, McChesney describes how the imperatives of Soviet ethnogenetic theorizing about Uzbek history and identity that hinged on the literary production of Mir Ali Shayr Nawa'i led to the exhumations of Timur, Ulugh Beg, and other Timurids in Samarqand, and how in the post-Soviet era the Uzbek state has framed Timur as the founding father of Uzbekistan.

The intimate connection between Naqshbandi Sufism generally and particular Naqshbandi Shaykhs and lineages, and various Timurid and later Muslim rulers that McChesney describes for Samarqand is a recurrent theme in the second and third chapters of the book (and indeed throughout Mawarannahar, Khorasan, and Hindustan). The Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa shrine at Balkh and the Noble Rawzah shrine at Mazar-i Sharif dedicated to the Prophet Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law, the Caliph or Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, are separated by a mere twelve miles in the plains between the Hindu Kush and Amu Darya. The two shrine complexes are sustained by an impressive ancient system of 18 irrigation canals (*Hazdah Nahr*) emanating from the Balkh river that constitute the hydro-historic foundation of the region's political economy, with the most southeasterly King's Canal or *Nahr-i Shahi* designed to support the Noble Rawzah. Both chapters emphasize family monopoly over shrine administration, with the Parsa'i family occupying the *Shaykh al-Islam* position in Balkh, and the Ansari family as similar trustees (*Mutawalli*, and other titles) in Mazar-i Sharif. The two shrines have experienced episodic but substantial Afghan state-based intervention, beginning with the mid-eighteenth-century founder of the polity Ahmad Shah Abdali/Durrani when Naqshbandi Mujaddidi Sufis become associated with the Noble Rawzah; to the 1870s when Mazar-i Sharif became the provincial capital, after which the shrine was much elaborated by Abd al-Rahman in the 1890s, apparently as a form of atonement for the atrocities he perpetrated to bring northern Afghanistan into his emerging imperially bounded orbit. Balkh absorbed Kabul-centred refashioning most markedly during the 1930s when the shrine's cemetery was laid waste to make space for modern "New Balkh" that was intended to become a celebrated site of ancient Aryan origins as Aryanism was first deployed by state functionaries as a historical framework for managing and manipulating increasingly ethnicized politics in Afghanistan.

The fourth chapter, on the Shrine of the Prophet's Cloak in Qandahar, continues the discussion of themes addressed in earlier chapters, including the presence and influence of Sufis and Sufism as well as South Asians in these Central Asian shrines. At about 70 pages, this final case study is the shortest chapter, but it is important for several reasons. It does the most with sources relating to water usage and taxation, the food provisioning and refuge (*langar khana* and *bast*) functions of the shrine, and the social tensions within this multi-ethnic frontier society, including the unfortunate reality of episodic friction between Shii and Sunni communities. This chapter is arguably the most effective in bringing the lived experiences of the shrine into historical relief.

This book will be of great interest to historians of Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Persianate World, as well those interested in the architectural history of Islam. It is a requisite item for all research libraries. As is the case throughout McChesney's oeuvre, it takes hundreds of pages to stumble upon a minor typo, and the primary technical/editorial/typographical error in this volume is a footnoted reference to an essay by the author that does not appear in the bibliography. Among the possible long-term benefits for Afghanistan studies of this illuminating volume is the spawning of future substantive historical research into matters necessarily mentioned only in passing, such as the pursuit of answers to questions on the materiality of the shrines and the local and peripatetic

labouring groups, artists, and engineers who built, maintained, and transformed these captivating structures.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X23000332

Shivan Mahendrarajah: *A History of Herat: from Chingiz Khan to Tamerlane*

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. ISBN 978 1 47449936 1.

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Shivan Mahendrarajah's meticulous research into Mongol Herat and the fabled though now faded city's most famous dynasty, the Karts, is a welcome if long overdue study of a once glorious and powerful metropolis. Long a commanding and influential city-state, Herat dominated the rich and flourishing province of medieval Khorasan reflecting the power and prestige of Persian culture throughout the eastern Islamic world. Herat was the undisputed centre of political, financial, and cultural power in the wider Persian-speaking world and a city-state whose elites were decisive and instrumental kingmakers in the Islamic world despite that status being challenged and at times undermined during the Mongol centuries.

The Kart dynasty's founder, Shams al-Din, championed Persian culture and protected the rights of native citizens, while allying himself with the Ilkhanid conqueror, Hulegu, and defending the Toluid branch of the imperial Chinggisid Qa'anate. Lawrence Potter's PhD thesis on the Karts ("The Kart Dynasty of Herat: religion and politics in mediaeval Iran", Columbia University, 1992), for too long the major source on the Kart dynasty, failed to emphasize Herat's all-important regional role, allowing Mahendrarajah's *History of Herat* to become the authoritative history of the Kart dynasty and of medieval Herat.

Mahendrarajah has focused attention on Herat in its heyday under the Kart dynasty whose achievements, though recognized, have not received the attention and research they deserve. The first part concentrates on military and political history and the second half is concerned with social and economic developments. The organization and layout of this book prioritize the researcher's concerns: it provides not only maps, charts, tables and diagrams, but also a glossary, genealogical charts and appendices furnished with extra economic and social data. In addition, appropriate prolegomena introduce the three segments of the first half of the book, and summaries and reflections conclude both main parts, which make reviewing and re-assessing the material detailed in this meticulous study all the easier to manage. This is a book written with the researcher in mind.

Mahendrarajah's book has been written from the viewpoint of Herat and the emphasis is on events from the perspective of the city's Kart rulers. This angle results in an unexpected interpretation of events in the wider Mongol world and is immediately evident in the organization of the chapters. Whereas the Ilkhanate is usually split into into three distinct stages, with the reigns of Hulegu and Abaqa generally regarded as a positive period, the years from 1281 until the appearance of Ghazan in 1295 portrayed as essentially chaotic, and finally, the rule of the three Muslim Ilkhans as a golden age, Mahendrarajah's