the extent that Vasıf appears modern, his reaction begins to look very much like a matter of circumstance, not the principle of free-thinking reason that Enlightenment *philosophes* would espouse. Perhaps Menchinger would have been better off setting his study within a more global framework, instead of forcing parallels with intellectual currents in the Atlantic world. Why not measure Vasıf against Russian statesmen and intellectuals? Or those, say, in India, whose experiences with European power were not so different?

More fruitful is Menchinger's investigation of Ottoman thought on its own terms. He demonstrates the enduring creativity of received intellectual paradigms. Vasıf and his contemporaries did not mindlessly adhere to inherited doctrine. They refashioned it to the needs of the day. The reader watches statesmen and intellectuals entering a new and unwelcome era of forced choices and compromises. There were no ready-made programmes or policies. Underscoring the makeshift nature of eighteenth-century thought is the intellectual journey of Vasıf, which Menchinger is able to show in fascinating detail. We follow Vasıf through the thick of political intrigue and manoeuvre. More than he (or any other Ottoman author) might have liked to admit, his ideas evolved with circumstances. In retrospect, we can pick out glaring inconsistencies or watch as his ideas suddenly shift with the twists and turns of court politics.

We never quite meet Vasıf as an individual. But if we cannot have biography as we would like it, then perhaps we can, like Menchinger, make the most of intellectual biography. Given the nature of the sources at our disposal, Menchinger has surely set an instructive example to future researchers.

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NİKOLAY ANTOV:
The Ottoman 'Wild West': The Balkan Frontier in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries.
324 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X19000089

Antov's study is an attempt to contextualize the overlapping processes of Turcoman colonization, ethno-religious change and urbanization in the north-eastern Balkans, more precisely the Dobrudja and Deliorman region, from the initial period of Ottoman conquest in the mid-fourteenth to the late sixteenth century. Given the complexity of the relevant source material (administrative, fiscal, legal, and narrative), and the debates around their interpretation, Antov has chosen a composite model of presentation so as to arrange the disparate materials into an articulate text organized in seven interwoven chapters. Comparative case studies enable the author to offer a detailed and circumstantiated analysis on both rural and urban spaces by highlighting the particularity of each case and avoiding any generalization, still a common reflex in Ottoman studies, not only about the formation and historical development of Muslim communities in the Balkans but, quite often, in the analysis of overall processes.

The author argues that the Ottoman settlements had some significant continuity with pre-existing patterns, but each differed considerably in its development, reflecting the heterogeneous nature of Ottoman society. Most of the new settlers from

Anatolia seem to have migrated of their own free will, responding to socioeconomic and political pressures in Anatolia. However, while the central administration was far from in control of these population movements, it was not slow, at least from the second half of the fifteenth century onward, to adapt to and even to alter, in some instances, the new demographic configuration. As for relations between the so-called colonizing dervishes and the Ottoman state, the latter did not seem to have initiated, and even less controlled, dervish groups, but rather these mystical enterprises tried actively to negotiate tax exemptions and other privileges once they had settled in a new area. While initially the presence of Islam was much associated with newcomers from Anatolia, by the mid-sixteenth century, according to Antov, Islam had become a culturally internalized part of the Balkan religio-cultural landscape; local-born Muslims participated in and patronized urban Islamic culture, and the Sufi cult of saints was able to produce its own leading figures – the sixteenth-century saint Demir Baba, born in Deliorman, being the most prominent example. While treating the *res vitae* of these saints imbued with supernatural elements, Antov convincingly narrates in chapter 6 the arrival of Istanbul-based and orthopraxy-minded new Sufi brotherhoods at the expense of the local ones.

Students of conversion and the growth of Islamic communities in the early modern period will benefit from this book, which ties together evidence from various sources and offers a detailed analysis of differentiation at the meso-level. Antov's command of the primary and secondary sources is notable and this enables him to resituate societal processes of diverse nature and explain them convincingly. Since the treatment of supernatural elements together with the official documents and chronicles interest both Ottomanists and scholars from other disciplines, Antov's contribution is of considerable interest not just for its treatment of several forms of Islamic presence in early modern Bulgaria, but also a good example of what rigorous and circumstantial analysis of sources can achieve in the field of Ottoman history.

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ATA ANZALI:
"*Mysticism*" *in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept*.
(Studies in Comparative Religion.) xiii, 276 pp. Columbia, SC:
University of South Carolina Press, 2017. $49.99. ISBN 978 1 61117 807 4.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X19000120

For scholars interested in the exchange of philosophy, mysticism, and religious polemic, the intellectual debates found in Shiism in the early modern and modern periods might be considered the veritable motherlode. Indeed, the Iranian religio-philosophical sphere from 1500 onwards operates with such a wide range of notions and conceptual language that it has been difficult for scholars to engage in this topic without falling into traps of reductionism and naive fundamentalism. Part of the challenge is the fact that the terms, vocabulary, and general operating language used by religious scholars, jurists, Sufis, and philosophers to discuss "mysticism" shift constantly in meaning and application across time and place. Into this field ventures Ata Anzali in his thoughtful and deliberative study, "*Mysticism*" *in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept*. Across six chapters, Anzali introduces the