

the poor quality of many illustrations. The latter is especially regrettable due to the visual sources referred to in some articles.

However, despite these deficiencies and the genre-specific characteristics mentioned, this volume is a valuable contribution to the field of Crusade studies.

Konrad Hirschler

MICHAEL AXWORTHY:

Empire of the Mind: A History of Iran.

xvi, 333 pp. London: Hurst & Co., 2007. £25. ISBN 978 1 85065 8711 9.

Empire of the Mind is a detailed and informative account of two-and-a-half millennia of Iranian history. Throughout the author explores the position of Iran as a non-Arab country in the Middle East, which has succeeded in maintaining its identity and language despite numerous invasions. “The remarkable resilience of the idea of Iran”, as explained in the preface, is a truly remarkable phenomenon which remains the *Leitmotiv* of this book.

Empire of the Mind is suitable for both specialists and non-specialists and its comprehensible and flowing style makes it both informative and enjoyable.

The pre-Islamic period is the focus of a small section of the book, as Axworthy is obviously more comfortable with Islamic Iran. In dealing with the early periods a few details are slightly misleading. Although Cyrus’s religion is not entirely certain, his tomb at Pasargadae is not an “anathema to later Zoroastrians” (p. 15). Classic sources inform us that the body was placed in a gold coffin and stored inside the tomb, which is made of stone. The body, therefore, did not pollute the earth, one of the sacred elements of the Zoroastrian religion. Neither is it correct to describe Zoroastrians as fire worshippers (p. 18), as only Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord, is worshipped. Fire is a *yazata*- (Modern Persian *izad*-) or divine being, one of the helpers of God, and the symbol of the religion. A fire altar, and not a fire temple as described on p. 45, appears on coins of the Sasanian kings.

A comparison between Cyrus the Great and Alexander – one a liberator the other a destroyer – suggests a Hellenocentric approach to the history of the ancient Near East. This also becomes evident in Axworthy’s description of King Xerxes’ burning of Athens. It would be worth mentioning how the Athenians’ sacking and burning of Sardis and its sanctuaries in Asia Minor, which were under the protection of the Persians, prompted Xerxes to attack and burn Athens (see S. Razmjou, “Religion and burial customs”, in J. Curtis and N. Tallis (eds), *Forgotten Empire. The World of Ancient Persia*, London, 2005, p. 153). Furthermore, interpretations such as “Alexander’s aim, to bring Greek influence into Persia, Persian influence into Greece, and to create a blend of eastern and western civilisations” (p. 31) seems more a romantic fiction than political reality. Axworthy then rightly concludes that “Alexander’s pacification policies” (p. 32) – if indeed there were any – may not have influenced the Persians.

The Islamic section begins with a fascinating and detailed discussion of language and literature. Here the role of Persian literature in the revival of the Persian language after the Arab invasion is explained using correct translations by experts on the Persian language, including the author himself. The poetry of Rudaki and Ferdowsi and its significance for the revival of the Persian language and identity is discussed in great detail. This then leads to a section about the three great Persian masters: Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi, Saadi and Hafez, where the reader is carried to spheres beyond reason and into the world

of mysticism. Fascinating to the Western reader is the link between Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (p. 115), whose *West-Oestlicher Diwan*, first published in 1819, was inspired by and named after the ghazals of fourteenth-century Hafez of Shiraz. But Goethe, who did not know Persian, worked from the German translations of the Austrian scholar Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall.

The political upheavals of the early Islamic period and Iranian involvement in the formation of early Islamic dynasties, particularly the 'Abbāsid caliphs of Baghdad, is discussed in chapter 3 and fittingly subtitled "The Iranian reconquest of Islam ...". It is here that, among other topics, the Iranian contributions to medicine, astrology, philosophy and science are discussed. Axworthy also deals with national uprisings and Iranian dynasties, which often claimed descent from pre-Islamic Sasanian kings (p. 87). Throughout, informative maps, covering an area far beyond the present borders of Iran, are used to help the reader with geographical names.

Chapter 4 combines two inseparable aspects of Islamic Iran: Shiism and the Safavids. Of great interest here are Axworthy's references to pre-Islamic, Mazdean practices, particularly the worship of saints (p. 129), which are prominent in Shiism. Surprisingly, this detailed chapter does not explain the role of the eighth imam, Imam Reza, and the significance of his burial place, which from the time of Shah Abbas I onwards gave Mashhad its significance as the most important Shiite centre after Najaf and Kerbela.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the "Fall of the Safavids", Nader Shah, the Qajars and the arrival of the Pahlavis on the political scene. Nader Shah, of course, has been extensively dealt with by Axworthy in *The Sword of Persia* (London, 2006), but he once again captures the reader in his analysis of the achievements of Nader, and his psychological analyses are brilliant. Equally fascinating and informative are the early decades of the twentieth century, Iran's confrontation with the ever-interfering British, the tragic ending of Dr Mossadegh's quest for democracy, and a misjudged shift towards the new superpower, the United States of America. Axworthy's description of Iran, and especially Tehran, of the 1970s, is realistic and objective, making it possible for the reader to understand the reaction towards foreign presence and interference since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

The reader may end up asking the same question again and again: how has Iran maintained its identity and language despite so many invasions and foreign interventions? Perhaps this is precisely why Iran is so resilient and has survived for millennia. Certainly to Iranians, it is neither a "Forgotten Empire" nor an "Empire of the Mind", but a living national and cultural entity.

Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis

DOMINIC PARVIZ BROOKSHAW and SEENA B. FAZEL (eds):

The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies.

(Routledge Advances in Middle East and Islamic Studies.) xv, 283 pp. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. £70. ISBN 978 0 415 35673 2.

The situation of the Baha'is in Iran has received some media attention since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Despite being the largest non-Muslim religious minority, the Baha'i community is not recognized as one of the "protected" religious groups in the Iranian constitution and Baha'is in Iran have been