wishing for a fuller picture of Bidlisi himself. Sections on the subject's early life, while rich in context, can be spare in real detail. Information is fuller for his later years, as he gained prominence and wrote prolifically, and for Bidlisi's political and historical thought. But we come away with much less sense of the subject's character and personality, or inner life. To be sure, this is no fault of Markiewicz's. It is a challenge faced by all would-be biographers in the field, who run up against sources that are scant and rarely speak to subjective experience. That said, however, the study is an invaluable addition to the small but now growing study of Ottoman lives.

Overall, Markiewicz has produced an intellectually sophisticated, empirically rich, and well-written book. *The Crisis of Kingship* makes important contributions to Islamic political thought, as well as to the nexus between patronage, literary culture, and intellectual output, especially in historical writing. It is also an excellent biography.

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The Rebel and the Imām in Early Islam: Explorations in Muslim Historiography. Najam Haider, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Pp. 304. $99.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781139199223

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Najam Haider's book responds to the question of how to deal with the sources of early Islamic history. His central claim is that our sources did not merely recount past events, but reflected what he calls "rhetoricized historiography." In doing so, he aims to enrich the field of early Islamic history with insights already prevalent among historians of Late Antiquity. He proposes a three-step methodology showcased in three case studies: the famous rebel of the Umayyad period, Mukhtar al-Thaqafi (d. 67/687); the seventh Imami Imam, Musa al-Kazim (d. 183/799); and the Zaydi Imam, Yahya b. ʿAbd Allah (d. 187/803). In the first step, he identifies the "core structure" common to most versions of these cases. Secondly, each version is analyzed for its "rhetorical elaboration": the additions and manipulations of these core elements. Thirdly, Haider provides a summary of each author's "interpretive framework": the major ways in which that author's worldview shapes his account. Thereafter, Haider provides an overview comparing the divergent interpretive frameworks of the different authors. For example, in the case of Mukhtar, the Sunni al-Baladhuri (d. 279/892) and the Shiʿi al-Dinawari (d. 290/903) both emphasize the tensions between Arab tribal elites and non-Arab clients. On the other hand, Ibn Aʿtham al-Kufi (third/ninth century) and Yaʿqubi (d. 284/897), both Shiʿi, tend to stress religious differences, for example using heresiographical terminology for the sectarian movements of the *khashabiyya* and the *sabaʾiyya*, and posing religio-ethical questions such as whether Mukhtar's calls to avenge the family of the Prophet were sincere (p. 110).

A key element of Haider's approach is to bring together Twelver, Zaydi and Sunni sources. He convincingly shows how, regardless of religious affiliation, authors use the rhetorical elaboration of events to push certain agendas or respond to certain audience dynamics. Thus, the sources on Mukhtar "reveal no substantive differences in the approaches employed by Sunni and Shiʿi historians," because for historians of all orientations, Mukhtar's "portrayal lacks real theological stakes" (p. 113). Shiʿi sources, then, are not to be treated as intrinsically more ideological than Sunni sources, but rather all historiography demonstrably betrays the influences of the worldview of its creators. For all authors, particular figures and events matter more than others, and therefore are more carefully manipulated. The cases of Musa al-Kazim and Yahya b. ʿAbd Allah are characterized by the fact that each holds a very particular interest to the communities that venerate them as Imams. Thus, though Musa al-Kazim is praised as a pious exemplar by Sunni and Zaydi authors, more interesting differences are to be found between authors within the Twelver community for whom the stakes are higher. Kulayni's *Kafi* (d. 329/941) emphasizes Kazim's

strategic caution (*taqiyya*) amidst an atmosphere of fear and persecution that resonated with the pre-Buyid explanations of the Occultation as being motivated by Abbasid persecution that were dominant in Kulayni's milieu. By contrast, Ibn Babawayh (d. 381/991), writing in the newly confident mode of the Buyid-era Shiʿa, instead emphasizes Kazim as "a figure of overt and clear resistance to ʿAbbāsid power" (pp. 185–87). Likewise Zaydi authors are deeply invested in rehabilitating the activist credentials of their Imam Yahya in spite of his capitulation to Abbasid power.

Haider's approach to this material rests on the idea that "the key dynamic… centers on the relationship between the author's text and the audience's expectations" (p. 4). His assumption is that authors intentionally manipulated narratives for an audience of sophisticated elite readers. As such, it would have been useful if he had provided us with a more explicit discussion of how he understands both authorial intent and audience reception, topics which he treats largely through the citation of previous research (for example p 4). Although contextual information about medieval Islamic authors is often extremely sparse, Haider studiously avoids utilizing one (admittedly complex) set of data that allows us to reconstruct an author's social and intellectual context: an author's teacher-student relationships and his sources and *isnād*s. An understanding of the intellectual milieu of a given scholar, who he associated with, and what he had on his bookshelf, could transform and enrich our understanding of the way sources are deployed within the rhetorical framework Haider proposes. But the sociological and epistemological background to the scholars he surveys remains underdeveloped. Instead of analyzing the sources that a scholar might have had at his disposal, Haider falls back on the sociologically and epistemologically weaker concept of a common pool of sources that could be drawn upon at will by different authors. But we cannot assume that all the narrative resources of the Islamic historical tradition were available to Haider's writers. Yes, they had agency to compile and redact, but they were also constrained by the source material they had at their disposal. A consideration of source material does occasionally peep through. Haider notes, for example, that al-Khatib al-Baghdadi is the only Sunni historian who treats Yahya b. ʿAbd Allah as a figure of central importance, providing the relevant detail that al-Khatib ascribes one of his narratives to a Shiʿi source, but no further discussion is provided (p. 217).

What, in fact, does early Islamic historical writing tell us? What is it useful for? Haider's approach offers a powerful alternative to the old habit of mining historical works for "facts," in which the very purposes that led to the works' composition is often ignored. But if this writing is not primarily interesting for what it tells about the "facts," then what does it tell us? Surely about the society at the moment of production: the authors who wrote it and the readers who read it. If we are interested in the society in which Kulayni or Baladhuri operated, then a more explicit discussion of the political and intellectual *sitz-im-leben* of the authors would have been useful. It is true that Haider often gestures at the historical context of his authors, but these mentions are sparing, and rarely engage with the secondary scholarship that exists. For example, he tantalizingly mentions that the Twelver author, Irbili (d. 717/1317) "appears to have downplayed his Shīʿī inclinations, perhaps because of his employment in the bureaucracy" (p. 188), but we are given no more information about his career or about the kinds of struggles his employment might have engendered. In his treatment of the life of Musa al-Kazim, Haider notes that both Kulayni and Ibn Babawayh had to respond to Zaydi attacks on Twelver quietist doctrines (p. 187), but provides no discussion of the biographies or bibliographies of these authors, and very little explicit information about the political context of their scholarship which might have influenced their positions. Of course this kind of rich context would have required further research on top of the heavy burden of meticulous cross-reading that he has already done. But he does not provide discussion of research that already exists. In relation to Zaydi attacks on Twelver doctrine, he footnotes Modarressi's *Crisis and Consolidation*, but does not give us any sense of our current state of understanding of historical Twelver-Zaydi polemics that could illuminate Kulayni and Ibn Babawayh's divergent reactions, and he fails to cite some basic research such as Amir-Moezzi and Ansari's long article on Kulayni. As a result, the fascinating conclusions of this book feel somewhat disembodied, as we learn in great detail about the differences between stories, but far less about the differences between the actual people who read, rewrote and gave them meaning.

In spite of certain shortcomings this is an important book. Haider poses a provocative challenge for historians to systematically account for the ways medieval authors intentionally manipulated their vision

of the past. It is to be hoped that, if this challenge is met, it will be accompanied by increasingly sophisticated ways of modelling not only the divergences between narratives, but the ways these narratives were circulated and employed in society. The results of Haider's meticulous research are often striking. The dramatic shifts that he has demonstrated regarding the presentation of the character and biography of Musa al-Kazim, for example, provide a severe warning to anyone tempted to simply extract the "facts" of such a *vita* without deeply engaging with the narratological context. This is, perhaps, not a totally new insight, but sometimes it has to be seen to be believed. Haider has made his case so systematically that it will be hard for historians who seriously engage with this book to simply return to their business as usual.

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That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500. Hannah Barker (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019). Pp. 328. $79.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780812251548

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Hannah Barker's *That Most Precious Merchandise* is one of the most important contributions to the historiography on the medieval slave trade. In particular, it provides a much-needed focus on the trade system that carried slaves from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean during the later Middle Ages. The strength of the book lies in the author's analysis of the three main importers of these slaves—Genoa, Venice, and the Mamluk sultanate—making it one of the few studies to successfully examine source material in Latin, Italian, and Arabic from these three perspectives. This includes not just printed sources, but a wealth of unpublished archival material from Genoa and Venice. By synthesizing these sources, Barker paints a picture of a complex and entangled trade system that was fully integrated into the commercial and political worlds of the three main players. In doing so she puts forward a fascinating argument that the Christians and Muslims of the Mediterranean shared a set of assumptions and practices that amounted to a "common culture" of slavery. To them, slavery was both legal and socially acceptable, and it was based on religious difference, partially articulated through linguistic and racial categories. Slavery was also considered to be a universal threat to all free people in the Mediterranean and Black Sea. This stimulating argument should provide scholars with food for thought for some time.

The book is split into two parts. The first examines how slavery was instituted in the late medieval Mediterranean and makes several assertions about the common culture of slavery, especially in relation to trade and the market. Here some fundamental assumptions about slavery in the period are explained, especially the thorny problem of the relationship between slavery and religion, which are tackled in Chapters 1 and 2. As Barker explains, although slavery was legally and socially acceptable to peoples of all religions in the Mediterranean, it was unacceptable to enslave those who shared your religion. In reality, this posed problems, such as the selling of Orthodox Christian slaves by Italian merchants, so language and race were used to categorize individuals who were enslaveable or not enslaveable in a particular society. This partly explains why, for example, Italians considered the enslavement of Russian and Bulgarian Christians to be more acceptable than Greeks (p. 48). Chapters 3 and 4 zoom in on the experiences of slaves, providing detailed examinations of the kinds of labor and service they performed, as well as the operation of the major slave markets in Genoa, Venice, Cairo, and Alexandria. Here Barker makes especially good use of statistical information by providing useful assessments of the demographic of slave populations and the changing prices of slaves. This is fleshed out with detailed consideration of factors such as gender, race, and the master's identity, and how they impacted the fate of slaves, especially for