

background and histories later informed their travels to the Middle East, and how this then charted their path to Arabness and to their “rearrival” to California coalition politics. The chapter makes a compelling case for how intergenerational readings can produce richer understandings of Arab-American history.

The final chapter, “Palimpsests in Iconic California,” draws the reader in with a captivating photograph. Set in Muscle Beach, it features acrobats in action against a backdrop of Coca-Cola and Dr. Pepper clad storefronts; in the corner, we see a sign for Khoury and Auad Café. Rather than considering the presence of this café as “incidental to the photo, a marginal notation in a much grander story of the constitution of California beach culture,” the chapter “reinserts them as central to the conditions that helped produce that culture” (p. 112). The rest of the chapter weaves together a reading of these photographs, Rabee Jaber’s novel *Amerika*, and oral histories that Arab-American historian Alixa Naff collected in Los Angeles in 1962 to push against the sterilized “peddler to proprietor” narrative of the Syrian migrant (which Naff herself helped shape in the earliest historiographies of the *mahjar*). By excavating the Syrian Pacific, Gualtieri revises the “truncated” oral histories in the Naff archives, and like Jaber’s novel, brings Syrian migrants into conversation with other racialized groups in California.

By shedding light on characters who exuded “Arab Latinidad,” who understood their Arabness alongside their connections to Latin America whether through their own journeys or those of their grandparents, *Arab Routes* makes a significant and new contribution to our understanding of the diaspora and its transnationalism. This understanding moves beyond the liminality of Syrianess in relationship to whiteness as contended in her first book, to one in which Arab migrants also understood themselves to be in some cases Mexican. By employing a layered reading of subtle notations and clues, Gualtieri offers scholars and students of the diaspora new possibilities to explore. While Gualtieri gives the reader an explanation of her use of the term “Syrian” in the footnotes of her first chapter, the book nevertheless identifies many as “Syrian” even after World War II made the states of Syria and Lebanon a reality that in turn informed Syrian-Lebanese identity politics. One possibility for further inquiry is then to what extent identification with either Syria or Lebanon affected the specifics of Arab-American politics. Additionally, hinted at in the author’s use of the term “Syrian Pacific,” is what relationship to Asianness and Asian migrants these same Arab Californians may have had. In conclusion, *Arab Routes* is not only a must-read for those interested in *mahjar* history and transnationalism but is a shining example of how the marriage of critical ethnic studies and migration history (by prioritizing movement over settlement) can produce more nuanced studies that take into account multiple registers of identity.

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## The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty. Christopher Markiewicz, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Pp. 358. \$120.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781108492140

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Christopher Markiewicz’s *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam* is an admirable biography of a major scholar and scribe as well as a rich study of intellectual activity in the 15th- and 16th-century Near East, especially in the field of political thought. Told through the life of Idris Bidlisi (1457–1520), Markiewicz’s readable account will not only interest historians of the Ottoman Empire but also of the wider Persianate world.

The book advances a straightforward point. Markiewicz argues that new vocabularies of sovereignty and alternative claims to political rule arose and took hold across west Asia from the mid-14th century

on. The “crisis” in his title refers to the vacuum left after the collapse of earlier dispensations, most notably the Abbasid and Mongol (pp. 6–7, 176), which had tied universal rule to divine sanction through juridical and genealogical claims. In the first instance, the Abbasids cited their position as caliphs and descent from the Prophet’s tribe of Quraysh; in the second, the Mongols claimed a sacral charisma and prestige inherent in the line of the great conqueror Genghis Khan. An innovative new mode of kingship began to emerge when these claims ceased to be viable, says Markiewicz, after the dissolution of the Abbasid line in 1258 and the Chinggisid Ilkhanate the next century. It coalesced first in Timurid lands, spreading over the 15th and 16th centuries to the major polities of west and central Asia, including the Aqquyunlu, Mamluk, and Ottoman realms. The book explores the development of this discourse largely through the person of Idris Bidlisi and is structured into two parts—the first on his life and career, and the second an extended inquiry into his ideas.

*The Crisis of Kingship* joins a recent body of work on “post-classical” Islamic political thought and sovereignty during this era, by scholars like İlker Evrim Binbaş, Jonathan Brack, A. Azfar Moin, and Hüseyin Yılmaz. Like them, Markiewicz presents the features of this new discourse as broadly mystical and often messianic. He ties its vocabulary in part to sufi and other religious movements, some with radical millenarian casts, which drew heavily on “theosophical” cosmologies and ideas of world or cosmic order. Titles like *şāhib-qirān* (lord of the auspicious astral conjunction), *khalīfa-yi ilāhī* (vicegerent of God) and *mujaddid* (centennial renewer) proliferated especially with rulers who lacked robust pedigree; they signaled divine sanction, universal rule, and cyclically recurring messianic figures. Some readers may note parallels between the book’s ideas and notably those of Yılmaz, whose recent *Caliphate Redefined* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) explores the concept of the caliphate and its mysticization in Ottoman thought of a similar time period. Markiewicz’s treatment, however, is ultimately more focused and satisfying.

What *The Crisis of Kingship* adds, for one, is a human element. Markiewicz has chosen Idris Bidlisi as a vessel to tell his larger story, and he has chosen him well. Bidlisi’s life paralleled the political, intellectual, and religious trends then reshaping the Islamic world. Born in 1457 in a messianic community in northern Iran, he spent his early years immersed in mystical study under his father Husam al-Din ‘Ali. As an adult Bidlisi crisscrossed the Islamic world. Starting his career in the Aqquyunlu chancery in Tabriz, where he honed a divinely ordained image of his patron in letters and official documents, he fled to Ottoman lands in 1502 after the disintegration of Aqquyunlu power and the rise of the Safavids. Bidlisi, among other émigrés, found a congenial environment at the court of Bayezid II and began to compose the work *Hasht Bihist* (*The Eight Paradises*), a lavish history in Persian of the Ottoman line. This work remains neglected by Ottomanists, perhaps partly due to its consciously rhetorical, “hyperliterate” style and because it fits awkwardly across modern disciplinary lines (see p. 192 f.). Markiewicz tells us how, stymied at court and disappointed at his work’s tepid reception, Bidlisi made the pilgrimage to Mecca and considered a return to Iran. He instead accepted an invitation back to Istanbul from a new sultan, Selim I. Bidlisi spent his final years as Selim’s envoy, advisor, and ideologue before again falling out, revising his opus and writing a laudatory *Salimshahnama* (*History of Sultan Selim*). These works formed the staging point for Bidlisi’s political ideas, especially his notion of *khalīfat-i rahmānī* (vicegerency of God), or what Markiewicz calls “a coherent vision of kingship embodied in the Ottoman sultans” that merged Bidlisi’s commitments to astrological, mystical, and philosophical discourses (p. 22). Bidlisi died shortly after in 1520.

More than adding human color, this biographical approach also allows Markiewicz to ground his study in individual agency and attempt, as he puts it, a “connected history” (pp. 15, 291). His study is less about texts and abstract ideas, nor is it an exclusively Ottoman story. He instead focuses on the people— itinerant scribes, chancery officers, émigrés, scholars, travelers, and other go-betweens—who formulated, deployed, moved, and spread the new political vocabulary across a geography spanning the Balkans and Egypt to South Asia. The book thus places Ottoman developments in much wider context. As Markiewicz notes, a biographical approach permits him “to explore kingship in the intellectual and cultural constellations in which it is formulated while still preserving the messiness of individual lived experience and the broader intellectual entanglements they produce” (p. 18). He is indeed successful in this aim.

*The Crisis of Kingship* contains some minor typos, e.g., “Chinggisied” (p. 6), “innovate” (p. 22), “Selime” (p. 142 n. 153), and “twentieth criticisms” (p. 169). Mostly, though, the reader is simply left

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 "rhetorized 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. 'Abd 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 Shi'i al-Dinawari (d. 290/903) both emphasize the tensions between Arab tribal elites and non-Arab clients. On the other hand, Ibn A'tham al-Kufi (third/ninth century) and Ya'qubi (d. 284/897), both Shi'i, tend to stress religious differences, for example using heresiographical terminology for the sectarian movements of the *khashabiyya* and the *saba'iyya*, 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 Shi'i historians," because for historians of all orientations, Mukhtar's "portrayal lacks real theological stakes" (p. 113). Shi'i 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. 'Abd 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