The second part, on the royal household, deals principally with women, specifically the Seljuk harem and the case of ʿIṣmat al-Dunyā wa-l-Dīn, a wife of Sultan ʿAlāʾ-al-Dīn Kaykubād. Rustam Shukurov explores the close relationship of thirteenth-century sultans with Greek women, something that points to a strong Greek background and a sort of "dual identity" of the Seljuk court. Certainly, the co-existence of Greek and Muslim–Turkish elements can be observed on various levels in Seljuk public life and thus forms an important subject for further research. ʿIṣmat al-Dunyā wa-l-Dīn is an intriguing case of a sultan's wife involved in intra-dynastic conflicts, the patronage of building projects, and the ideological strengthening of dynastic claims. As narrative sources are silent about her, Scott Redford reconstructs her activities on the basis of architectural and epigraphic evidence surviving in the environs of Erzurum and in Uluborlu. The contributions on Sufism focus on the intersection between political and religious life and the relations of Sufi sheikhs with the Seljuk elite in particular. Ibn ʿArabī, Majd al-Dīn Isḥāq, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, and his son Sultan Walad represent different aspects of elite patronage and the close co-operation between Sufi orders and political leaders. In the concluding chapter Rachel Goshgarian examines an Armenian language futuwwa constitution compiled by Yovhannēs Erznkacʿi (1230–93) in Erzincan and its similarities to Muslim treatises, thus presenting a case-study of cross-cultural interaction between Muslims and Christian Armenians in north-eastern Anatolia. All in all, this is a thought-provoking collection of articles posing many new questions and offering innovative approaches to the complex field of Seljuk court life in Anatolia.

Alexander Beihammer
University of Cyprus

RUDI MATTHEE:
Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan.
xxxiv, 371 pp. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012. £35. ISBN 978 1 84511 745 0.
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At the time of writing there is much debate and discussion about the Islamic Republic of Iran and its immediate future; perhaps a book about the decline, crisis, and fall of an Iranian polity in terms of a sui generis is of some importance. On this front, Matthee makes no explicit connection in *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan*, but one wonders to what degree eighteenth-century Safavid Iran and the current Iranian government do indeed share some characteristics (economic isolationism, inflation, corruption, regional interventionism, aggressive theo-juridical class, and so on). Of course, the world is a far more complex place than it was in 1722, and this comparison, although intriguing, probably remains unworkable.

Nonetheless, this is a book which tackles head on the solidly entrenched historiography of decline in the early modern Middle East and South Asia. Matthee is right to insist that more nuance be brought to this term so as to avoid its totalizing effects in shaping a complex historiographical landscape such as that of Iran. He explores this and other issues in his first chapter ("Patterns: Iran in the late Safavid period"), and here he divides the text into a number of arguments appearing under the headings of "centrifugal" and "centripetal" tendencies. Of course, the topography/geography of Iran earns a "centrifugal" classification, while less

physical features (court politics, patrimonial rule, culture, religion) are discussed in such a way as to highlight their cohesive and unifying effects. This centrifugal/centripetal dynamic introduces a slightly mechanistic quality to this important contextual chapter, but above all Matthee is correct to underline the degree to which Safavid Iran cannot easily be reduced to an empire that operates in a single line of direction (either ascent or decline). It is a hopelessly complex narrative which witnesses contemporaneous expansion, retrenchment, fluorescence, and degeneration.

Matthee's structure is broadly chronological, and he begins his narrative in chapter 2 by looking at court politics during the reigns of Safi and ʿAbbas II through the lens of those individuals who had positioned themselves at the helm of key institutions like the *dargah* (court) and the *divan* (administration). Personal security in the court of Shah Safi was on decidedly shaky ground in the early years (1629–34) as the ruler ordered the execution of any rival claimants to the throne, as well as those prominent *ghulam*s (like Imam Quli Khan, son of Allah Verdi Khan) and Qizilbash who had prospered during the reign of his grandfather. These purges have been interpreted as indicative of an ascent by the Caucasian *ghulam*s over the traditional Qizilbash elite, but instead this was an attempt by Safi "to balance old forces with new ones, all with the aim of enhancing central control" (p. 40). The rest of the chapter adopts a fairly strict biographical organization (which includes the reign of Abbas II) with sections on key administrators such as Mirza Muhammad Taqi Khan, Khalifa Sultan, Muhammad Beg, and Mirza Muhammad Mahdi. The third chapter is structurally identical to the second: an exploration of court politics during the reign of Suleyman. Likewise, we find the author focusing here on the administrative exploits of notable individuals, such as Shaikh Ali Khan Zanganah, but at the same time we encounter the new and unparalleled influence of *haram* officers and eunuchs. Chapter 4 breaks off from the established court narrative, and shifts its focus to "Monetary policy and the disappearing mints, 1600–1700". As Matthee points out, late Safavid Iran was forced to contend with the issue of specie drain as inordinate levels of silver (from the New World via western European markets) entered Iran, only to continue their fiscal journey into the entrepôts of South Asia. Unable to compete with the spice and textile leviathan of South Asia, Abbas and his successors worked hard to ban the export of bullion south-eastwards. However, corruption and weaker mechanisms of court control soon took their toll over the seventeenth century. One of the key manifestations of this development, and here Matthee provides a key contribution to Safavid economic scholarship, was a decline in the number of active mints: this, combined with the inevitable tendency towards debasement, only spelled further fiscal peril for Iran. Chapter 5 focuses on military politics during the seventeenth century and, not surprisingly, the author interconnects the aforementioned economic crisis with creeping stasis and rising desertion within the Safavid army; soldiers were forced to provision themselves (with great trauma to civilian populations) while military discipline was deteriorating at a rapid pace.

Lest readers think that Matthee privileges exclusively the central administration, the author uses chapter 6 ("Weakening links: the center and the provinces, 1600–1700") to focus on regional implications for all the changes and developments encountered thus far. We learn of the various categories of land (*mamalik*, *khassa*, *vilayat*) which made up the Safavid empire, and how such designations were more often than not a reflection of the tribal and geopolitical situation in specific regions. As reliance on the Qizilbash waned, and thus the popularity of the *iqta'* land-tenuring system, more and more property was recategorized as royal domain (*khassa*): those tribes on the margins of the Plateau who boasted a neo-dynasticism were accommodated with semi-autonomous control of their lands (termed *vilayat*).

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With such features in mind, the reader is introduced to a number of key regions and cities: Shirvan, Fars, Kirman and the Persian Gulf (specifically Bandar Abbas). The historiographical debate regarding early modern empires, metropoles, and centre–periphery relations is quite rich (especially in Ottoman studies), and I would say that these questions and their implications are not as fully explored here as they could have been. Chapter 7 focuses on arguably the most frequently discussed historiographical feature of late Safavid Iran: religion. In the spirit of the book's overall approach, we find that the seventeenth century was hardly one of uniform orthopraxy and religious bigotry. At the same time, however, it would be inaccurate to characterize rulers like Safi and Abbas II as broad-minded, ecumenical "philosopher-kings" as we may encounter in other Muslim states of the day (e.g. Akbar or Jahangir in Mughal India). An official policy of toleration was encouraged – at times – for indigenous and foreign Christian communities, although forced conversion was proclaimed intermittently for Armenians and Jewish enclaves living in Isfahan and elsewhere. Undoubtedly it was during the reign of Suleyman when juridical elements were able to manoeuvre themselves into positions of unprecedented power. Muhammad Baqir Majlisi oversaw a sanctioned religious policy which made little or no accommodation for Sufi groups, Jews, Armenian Christians, and Hindu moneychangers/merchants (*bayans*).

The book's final chapter ("From stability to turmoil: final days, 1700–1722") is an in-depth analysis of the complicated entanglement of factors which spelled the sudden collapse of one of the great "gunpowder" empires of the early modern period. After Shah Sulayman died ("exhausted from excessive drinking and sexual debauchery") in 1694, we learn how the aforementioned centrifugal forces of the periphery were in a position to overwhelm the increasingly static and defunct centre. Here, Matthee explains how the once peripatetic court, in a constant state of performance and power, was now staid and disconnected from those all-important peripheral elements. Indeed, as others have argued (long ago by Norbert Elias, but more recently by Farhat Hasan, Dina Khoury and Lisa Balabanlilar), the ability of a polity to enjoy ideological privilege and mechanisms of power is defined necessarily by its ability to negotiate such status and wealth with other centres, locales, and regions. In this way, power is inherently a discursive and negotiated process: once discourse is replaced by an exclusive structural notion of power it is only a matter of time, as the Safavids discovered in 1722 when they found themselves surrounded by a small army of Ghiza'i Afghans with little or no assistance from former vassals like the Georgian dynasty. Matthee provides a rich and nuanced narrative for these events, and how Isfahan and other parts of the Iranian Plateau suffered during invasions and predatory raids by a host of neighbouring regions. The conclusion does an admirable job of summing up some of the bigger questions – the most important being why the Safavids collapsed in the manner they did – and Matthee looks to the decline in personal and peripatetic power of the Safavid shahs, short-sighted economic policies, and the inability to maintain a strong, centralized army based on responsible land-tenuring systems.

In sum, this is a vast improvement on the existing historiography for late Safavid history. While Laurence Lockhart set the tone for the last half-century with *The Fall of the Ṣafavī Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia*, Rudi Matthee has compelled us to re-examine how we understand the "decline" of the Safavid empire and its collapse in the early eighteenth century. This study shows a deft handling of a very rich and wide base of primary sources in a panoply of languages which are rarely brought together in one book. Also noteworthy is the solid editing and the decision to provide an insert of colour/b&w images (indeed, readers might enjoy the miniature of a seemingly irascible Shah Quli Khan by Hajji Muhammad).

With other recent work on this period (books by Ernie Tucker and Michael Axworthy on Nadir Shah), perhaps the eighteenth century will enjoy a surge of interest as it has in Ottoman and South Asian historiographies in recent years.

Colin P. Mitchell
Dalhousie University

MAFALDA ADE:
Picknick mit den Paschas. Aleppo und die levantinische Handelsfirma Fratelli Poche (1853–1880).
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Non-governmental sources have for a long time been understudied in the historiography of the modern Middle East. The, in part, turbulent political history of the region, demographic movements, and changing use of languages are among the reasons that the study of documents from personal archives has not received the attention it might have. Mafalda Ade's study on the Aleppine trading company Fratelli Poche reveals the potential of such personal documents for enriching our view of the modern history of the region. It is based on the private archive of the families Marcopoli and Poche which was created by Tübingen University following the discovery of the documents in the 1990s and which now, according to the author, constitutes the largest personal archive in the Middle East. It contains principally commercial correspondence and accounting books from the two families' businesses, but also documents from a large variety of vice-consulates that had been represented in Aleppo by members of the Marcopoli and Poche families, as well as personal letters.

Ade concentrates on the company founded by the Poche Brothers. Her study is subdivided into three parts that have rather different foci, but all in all it indicates the various questions that can be successfully addressed using the archive. The first section concentrates on the Poche family's life and place in Aleppine society; the second traces their commercial network in the region; and the third investigates their attempts at collecting debts as a micro-study on the efficiency of *Tanzimat* (Ottoman reform) institutions.

Following an introduction to the general history of residents with West or Central European roots in Aleppo, Ade recreates the Poche family history based on their private letters. Josephe Poche, born in Northern Bohemia, came to Aleppo as a trade representative in 1819. His sons Frédéric and Adolphe founded a long-lasting company in the mid-nineteenth century. The second generation was no longer fluent in German, but better versed in Italian and French, and later on Arabic. Most family members intermarried with other local families of foreign origin, but some also wed Arab Christians from among the local business families. In continuation of a century-old tradition, they lived in a *han*, but had adapted its interior to European design. Ade summarizes that the Poches became classic representatives of "Levantine" society: although only vaguely connected to their region of origin, they understood themselves to be Europeans and simultaneously strongly identified with their place of residence and were locally well connected.

The second section moves on to the wider region and the company's commercial network. Their letters reflect relatively intense contacts and in some cases