

rather than movements in the post-Mongol period, and the successful ones evolved into a new form of law, or *siyāsa*, in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Nevertheless, the heuristic allure of these cases is unavoidable, and I believe they need to be studied in their own right in this context. Finally, the chronological and geographical coverage is very imbalanced. The late medieval period is unfairly privileged, and large chunks of geography are simply ignored, including post-Timurid Central Asia, South Asia, North Africa, and al-Andalus. Nevertheless, this is a valuable contribution to the history of ideas in the late medieval and early modern period, and the editors and the contributing authors are to be commended for this achievement.

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JEAN-CHARLES DUCÈNE:

L'Europe et les géographes arabes du Moyen Âge.

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Islamic knowledge of, and interest in, Europe is a politically charged aspect of scholarship on medieval Islam. In his *Muslim Discovery of Europe*, Bernard Lewis described the attitude of the Muslim world towards Europe as that of disdain, a myopic lack of interest that had eventually led to the decline of Islamic civilization. André Miquel explained Muslim authors' lack of detailed knowledge of Europe, which he compared with al-Bīrūnī's comprehensive epitome on India, by the absence of Muslim merchants or ambassadors in Europe who could serve as informants.

But as Jean-Charles Ducène's hefty *L'Europe et les géographes arabes du Moyen Âge* shows, there was in fact no absence of interest nor lack of knowledge. Muslim geographers did not view Europe as a unified entity, and used the term "Europe" very rarely. But they did write extensively about the territories north of the Mediterranean, mixing late antique traditions with first-hand accounts by native Europeans, travellers and captives. This volume under review very much confirms the conclusions of Daniel König's recent *Arabic-Islamic Views of the Latin West* (2015), but also goes beyond it by offering a comprehensive tour-de-force of Islamic knowledge of central and eastern Europe. It also draws attention to the way knowledge of European territories developed over time, especially the knowledge of the geopolitical map of Europe shown by authors working in the Mamluk chancery in late medieval Cairo.

The focus of the first part of this volume is the early Arabic geographical literature of the ninth and tenth centuries, when the classical term "Europe" was replaced by references to the ethnic groups of the Franks, the Byzantines (*Rūm*) and, to an increasing degree, the Slavs. The geographical area north of the Mediterranean was often called *al-arḍ al-kabira*, the "Great Landmass", and was often thought to be an island, separated from Asia by the Don or the Dneiper. This "Great Landmass" was also defined by its otherness, and therefore did not normally include Muslim Spain.

From the start, two European cities attracted the attention of Muslim geographers: Rome and Constantinople. For Rome, the earliest first-hand report comes from a ninth-century Muslim merchant, yet geographers' accounts of Rome combine

legendary elements, probably coming from Syriac traditions, and often confuse the city topography with that of Constantinople. The latter was in fact far better known, as a continuous stream of Muslim prisoners of war were able to report back to Iraqi authors about the grand Byzantine ceremonies, the hippodrome and the Hagia Sophia.

The geographers had at their disposal numerous accounts written by travellers coming from the Islamic world. In a fascinating chapter, Ducène follows the itinerary of the Jewish diplomat Ibrāhīm ibn Ya‘qūb al-Ṭurṭūshī, who was twice given an audience by Emperor Otto I. Between 960 and 965, al-Ṭurṭūshī passed through modern France, Germany, Poland, Prague and the Italian Peninsula. His account, preserved in later sources, describes vestiges of Germanic or Scandinavian paganism, testifies to the assimilation of the Bulgars with the Slavs, and reports the circulation of Samanid dirhams in Mainz. His perceptive reports provide an exceptional testimony to the cultural diversity of central Europe in that period, and contribute to the detailed knowledge in the Muslim world of ethnic groups in central, eastern and northern Europe.

In the geographical texts of the twelfth century, the focus of the second part of the book, knowledge of the northern coasts of the Mediterranean becomes more detailed and concrete. Al-Idrīsī has much new information about Europe, perhaps derived from archival documents in the chancery in Palermo, or, more commonly, from oral reports. Al-Gharnāṭī’s account of eastern Europe has attracted less scholarly attention, but is a mine of information, and demonstrates that by this time Europe in its entirety was solidly Christian.

The twelfth-century geographers fix their gaze on cities, and structure the landscape around urban centres and a road network, unlike earlier geographical literature focused on European ethnic groups. The number of European towns mentioned in these texts increased manifold – 350 in al-Idrīsī’s text – while the surrounding rural areas are hardly visible. Nonetheless, most of these towns are known only by name and not in any detail, as stops on itineraries rather than as political or cultural centres. Even Rome remains a somewhat mythical place, despite the increasing political importance of the pope.

Then, from the thirteenth century until the end of the Middle Ages, authors writing in the Mamluk capital turn their interest to the political entities of the European continent, and give detailed account of the states (*mamālik*) and communes (sing. *kumūn*) with which the Mamluk court had intense diplomatic and commercial relations. The Mamluk chancery had multiple sources of information about Europe, including European diplomats, merchants, renegades and captives; occasionally, Mamluk ambassadors travelled to Europe. The fourteenth-century bureaucrat al-‘Umarī left us an original account of the European powers of his time, based on a Genoese interpreter and missionary called Dominico Doria. For his account of Byzantium, al-‘Umarī relied on Aqṣunqur al-Rūmī, a Mamluk amir who had been born to an ancient family of Constantinople. Al-‘Umarī’s text is translated in full by Ducène (pp. 312–20).

The Mamluk-era focus on those powers that had a direct relationship with the court of Cairo meant, however, that central and northern Europe beyond the Mediterranean, well-travelled in previous centuries, disappears from view. England or Scandinavia simply do not exist for al-‘Umarī, and little is known on central Europe. The only exception is the Black Sea region, which had great strategic importance for the supply of military slaves, and was therefore discussed in greater detail.

As this volume comprehensively shows, Muslim authors were interested in Europe, and with regard to central and eastern Europe in the High Middle Ages, are sometimes the best sources at our disposal. But, as Ducène points out, they

did not recognize these territories north of the Mediterranean as one religious and political unit; for them, “Europe” was not a meaningful term. Ducène’s quasi-encyclopaedic volume reflects both the disjointed nature of Europe at the time, and the multiplicity of Islamic perspectives. This balanced, erudite study should become the reference point for future research on Muslim knowledge of European territories.

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ALIREZA DOOSTDAR:

The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny.

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Alireza Doostdar’s *The Iranian Metaphysicals* intervenes in questions of Islamic reason (*‘aql*), rationalization, metaphysics and the uncanny, and the everyday lives of modern religious subjects. The book draws on ethnography and interviews (largely from 2006 and after), archives to explore earlier twentieth-century state and popular practices, and secondary material in earlier and contemporary Islamic studies. Significantly, Doostdar insists that readers should not take his interlocutors to be primarily representative of an Iranian “underground” that attempts to escape and circumvent the authority of the Islamic Republic. Indeed, aside from the divergent personalities and politics of his interlocutors themselves, *The Iranian Metaphysicals* both relies on and sidelines questions about Iranian politics and government. This book is not, in other words, strictly about the Islamic Republic as a political system, but it is about a much broader phenomenon: the rationalizing forces of the modern state. Here, Iranians engage metaphysics *as* state subjects (pp. 231–2), regardless of whether or not their practices are sanctioned or censured by the Islamic Republic.

Doostdar argues that metaphysics – as rationalized attempts to understand the unseen (*al-ghayb*) – “have constituted a fundamental element of Iranian thought since the nineteenth century” (p. 4). Theoretically, this work contributes to conversations about the utility of “belief” and “reason” as anthropological – and more broadly analytical – categories. As he suggests in the Introduction, many scholars (those invested in the “ontological turn”) “call for moving away from epistemological questions so that we can open ourselves up to our interlocutors’ radically different ‘ontologies’”; however, Doostdar argues, this bracketing of “rationality . . . relies on an assumption that rationality matters more to the analyst than to her interlocutors” (p. 15). In contrast, Doostdar argues that reason and rationality are not only “outsider” categories of the anthropologist, but also constitutive of contemporary Iranian practices and debates.

This is so, Doostdar convincingly suggests, in at least two ways. The first is via theological reason; that is, the long-standing Shii Islamic commitment to *‘aql* (reason). This commitment matters not only to many Iranians, but also organizes the boundaries of acceptable discourse and practice after the formation of the Islamic Republic. The second is via modern reason, or a kind of rationality indebted to scientific discourses. Modern reason too, Doostdar argues, is not external to Iran