The last chapter (10), "Letters between Popes and Shahs," delves more deeply and systematically into the epistolary record, listing the actual letters exchanged between Roman popes and Iranian shahs in chronological order, beginning with the famous message the Mongol ruler Güyük Qa'an wrote to Innocent IV in 1246, all the way to the exchange of letters between Pope Pius XI and Reza Shah Pahlavi in the 1930s. This enumeration reveals that eighteen letters went back and forth between Rome and the Mongol capital between 1246 and 1329, and that the papacy and the Safavids exchanged at least 100. Piemontese helpfully provides the full text of many of the unpublished ones.

This work is a treasure trove, the crowning achievement of a scholar driven by sheer love of learning and remarkable scholarly commitment. We should be grateful to Dr. Piemontese for the many thousands of hours of assiduous work that must have gone into this monumental study. *Persica Vaticana* offers a taste of what he calls the *mare magnum* of Rome's historical archives, leaving us to guess how much this ocean yet conceals.

Notes

1. Angelo M. Piemontese, *Catalogo dei manoscritti persiani conservati nelle biblioteche d'Italia* (Rome, 1989).
2. E. Rossi, *Elenco dei manoscritti persiani della Biblioteca Vaticana, Barberiani, Borgiani, Rossiani* (Rome, 1948).
3. See Nile Green, *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam* (Oxford, 2015).

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Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran, Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters, Ilker Evrim Binbaş, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, ISBN 9781107689336, hardback, 364 pp.

Ilker Evrim Binbaş' *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran* is a model of textual scholarship—and a dauntingly difficult book to read. Binbaş utilizes a formidable array of Persian, Turkish and Arabic texts as he reconstructs the informal intellectual networks and analyzes the historical writings of the Iranian occult scholar and historian Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī (1370-1454). In the course of explaining the range of Yazdī's scholarly interests and describing those of individuals who formed part of his intellectual milieu, he has, first of all, illumined little known aspects of a small group of early Timurid individuals, who were particularly distinguished by their belief in the mystical revelations of

occult knowledge, including and especially the truths they claim to have discovered through *ʿilm-i hurūf* or letter science. Then in the second half of his book Binbaş turns to a careful study of early Timurid historiography and Yazdī's varied historical writings, including his famous and influential history of Timur, the *Zafarnāma*, or *Book of Victory*. The impact of this impressive contribution to Timurid history and historiography is, however, somewhat muted by the encyclopedic nature of Professor Binbaş' account of Yazdī's network, the seeming disconnection between his discussion of networks and Timurid historiography and also by decision to present his conclusions about Timurid historians only after evaluating the debates of modern scholars.

In both his Introduction and Epilogue Professor Binbaş repeatedly stresses that his book is devoted to an explanation of the nature and significance of Yazdī's informal intellectual network. He argues that this network developed in the early fifteenth-century interstice between the dissolution of Mongol rule and the rise of the early modern Islamic empires. In doing so he emphasizes that this period and these networks, or more particularly the era of Yazdī's life, ought to be regarded as a unique period that cannot be simply classified as post-Mongol or pre-Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal. It should be classified as a fluid or politically unstructured sui generis epoch, which allowed for or encouraged the development of unstructured intellectual networks, whose participants became "powerful actors in the public sphere" (p. 21).

He defines these networks as informal associations of individuals who shared "philosophical, political, ideological, religious and esthetic sensibilities," which in the case of Yazdī's particular milieu, was distinguished by its members' engagement with the science of letters (p. 15). Binbaş further emphasizes that Yazdī's circle believed that they were a coterie of exceptional individuals, who sought to use this science to understand the secrets of the universe and believed that, as an intellectual community, they were unique in the fifteenth century (pp. 13, 292). Binbaş also insists that the very informality and lack of organization that characterized Yazdī's network distinguished it from Sufi orders, such as the prominent Central Asian Naqshbandi order developed by Khwāja ʿUbaidullah Ahrār (d. 1490) in the second half of the fifteenth century. He is particularly careful to contrast Yazdī's interests and network—and opaque Persian style—with that of the great Timurid scholarly figures Navāʾī (d. 1501) and Jāmī (d. 1492), "who found their place in a more hierarchical, organized and disciplined organization" (p. 70). Indeed, both Navāʾī and Jāmī, who met Yazdī at different periods and criticized one of his works, the *Hulal-i mutarraz* (c. 1427), as impenetrable, distinguished their own influential Naqshbandi network from Yazdī's.

As Binbaş shows, the principal figures in Yazdī's informal network have long been known, as Jean Aubin identified its principal members in the 1950s as Shāh Niʿmatullāh Vālī, Sāʾīn al-Dīn Turka and Sayyid Husayn Akhlātī (p. 5). He provides elaborate accounts of Akhlātī and Turkā among others. He not only explores the intellectual contours of Yazdī's network but attempts to ascertain whether or not it overlapped with two other groups: the *Ahl-i Kashf va Tahqīq* and the *Ikhvān-al-safā*. He is not, however, able definitely to answer his own question. He writes that identifiable *Ahl-i tahqīq* members were individuals who were "informed by the mystical philosophy of Ibn ʿArabī and were engaged in various occult or esoteric sciences" but he

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cannot definitively say whether Yazdī participated in this network. As for the *Ikhvān-al-safā*, Binbaş introduces this important if elusive group by summarizing Cornell Fleischer's writings on the occult, prophetic practitioner of letter science and numerology, ʿAbd al-Rahmân al-Hanafī al-Bistāmī (d. 1454), who placed himself within this group of intellectuals. Binbaş writes that it is possible to indirectly associate Yazdī with al-Bistāmī's circle, at least to the extent of his engagement with the occult. Ultimately, though, Binbaş is content to argue about the interpenetration of these networks only that "Yazdī stood at the intersection of various religious and intellectual collectivities, but his position was not exclusive to any single one" (pp. 112-13).

Readers of this book will not, therefore, be able to identify with certainty all the strains of Yazdī's thought as no one can determine the exact nature of Yazdī's association with some of the prominent strains of occult thought in the early fifteenth century. That uncertainty falls away, though, when Binbaş turns to a discussion of Yazdī's historical writings. Yazdī is principally known for his history of Timur, the *Zafarnāma*, based upon Turkī and Persian verse chronicles. Written in 1428-29, the florid Persian text narrates the history of the formation of the Timurid Empire. What is particularly noticeable in Binbaş' account of the *Zafarnāma* and Yazdī's other historical works is that he answers the question that most readers of his text will want to know: did Yazdī's knowledge of the occult generally or the science of letters in particular shape his historical writing. Binbaş has found but one short reference to the science of letters in Yazdī's historical texts and this is restricted to letter symbolism rather than metaphysics (pp. 265-66). Otherwise he devotes much of his discussion of Yazdī's historical thought to his analysis of the significance of his use of the legitimizing concepts of the *sāhib-qirān*, so beloved of later Timurids and Ottomans alike, and the notion of the dual-caliphate—the uniting in one ruler of both sacred and profane authority.

It is impossible not to be impressed by the linguistic sophistication that enables Professor Binbaş to offer persuasive textual analyses of a staggering array of sources that contain information on Yazdī's elusive intellectual networks and the details of early fifteenth-century Timurid historical writing. He effectively depicts the known membership and informality of Yazdī's occult intellectual network and convincingly insists how misleading it would be definitely to identify him as an associate—and certainly not a card-carrying member—of other groups. This book ought to be respected as a major source for the study of the early Timurid era in Iran and acknowledged more generally for furthering the understanding of informal intellectual associations. It also serves to illuminate the biases of early Timurid historical sources. It seems likely, though, that it will be used primarily as a reference work rather than commonly read comprehensively as a monograph.

This is partly due just to the depth of the textual research, in which he has discussed a vast array of individuals, both in the text and in the notes. It is also partly due to the nature of the informal networks he describes, so that while his data on individuals is fascinating, the importance or long-term influence of many individuals often remains obscure. It is also partly due to his emphasis on the science of letters, as the signature trait of Yazdī's network, for this science needs to be explained more comprehensively

than it is, perhaps by paraphrasing the entirety of Ibn Khaldun's discussion of the phenomenon, to which he briefly alludes. It would also have been helpful if he included a fuller account of the terms "hermetic" and "occult philosophy." Finally, the idea that this book may be used primarily as a reference work is also partly due to Binbaş' discussion of Timurid historiography. This subject is not discussed in either the Introduction or the Epilogue and seems almost disconnected from the theme of informal networks, for Yazdī's occult interests do not seem to have noticeably influenced his historical writings. Binbaş' discussion of historiography is nonetheless valuable as it deals with the lesser-known texts of the early Timurid era and is characterized by the same precise textual analysis he brings to his descriptions of Yazdī's informal networks. The historiographical section is, however, often presented as a summary of various modern scholars' research on histories of the era, and, as such, much of it seems more appropriate for a scholarly article than for this monograph.

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Iran Without Borders: Towards a Critique of the Postcolonial Nation, Hamid Dabashi, London and New York: Verso, 2016, ISBN-13 978-1-7847-8068-5 (hbk), 978-1-7847-8069-2 (US ebk), 978-1-7847-8070-8 (UK ebk), 256 pp.

In the present age of seemingly rising tribalism and nineteenth-century style nationalism Hamid Dabashi's *Iran without Borders* is an excellent and timely contribution in two distinct and relevant ways. On the one hand, it challenges the Eurocentric notion of cosmopolitanism and implicitly questions the widely believed assumption of the decline of cosmopolitan culture and multiculturalism. On the other hand, it provides a powerful response to reductionist and orientalist readings of Iranian culture and politics. Since Khomeini loyalist militant Islamists came to power in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the country has been the subject of relentless negative coverage in the press and public debates in Western Europe and even more so in the US. In these venues Iran is predominantly reduced to Islamism, Ayatollahs, and terrorism. *Iran without Borders* is an exceptional intellectual contribution that succeeds at presenting a radically different and nuanced examination of Iranian intellectual history that dismantles the racist and Islamophobic reading of the Iranian people.

Surveying a wide range of past and contemporary intellectual works and artistic achievements, *Iran without Borders* illustrates how generations of Iranian thinkers and public intellectuals (inside and outside of its fictive colonial and postcolonial frontiers) from the eighteenth century onward constructed what the author calls a