

Mappamundi of one Hajji Ahmed from Tunis is, in Giancarlo Casale's study, not the forgery it was once assumed to be but the product of an intellectual circle of European-born translators at the Ottoman court working at a time when "new men" could argue for a European Alexander the Great whose contemporary heir was Suleyman I.

F. Sinem Eryılmaz's comparison of text and image in the court eulogist 'Arif's *Stories of the Prophets* and his dynastic history (*Shahname*) of the Ottomans argues that the two texts work together to construct an image of Suleyman as a prophet-king and the last individual who could "combine prophetic authority with the political in human history" (p. 125). A neat coda to the volume, Hakan Karateke's contribution delineates the (uneven) shift in eight nineteenth-century histories away from a classical periodization situating the Ottomans as "a chapter of Islamic history" to a world-historically orientated model of a tripartite past: Ancient–Medieval–New; factors in this development included new sources and a new "universalist" consciousness.

Word limitation does not permit this review to do justice to the complexity of the two books and the ways they work individually and together. Both are unabashedly imperio-centric, that is, interested primarily in texts and images that articulate pro-dynastic ideologies; only occasionally do conflicts or tensions among the intellectual or personal motivations of patrons, writers and artists feed into the outcomes emphasized in both books – the variety of voices and hands that publicized the history and present aspirations of the Ottoman court. On the other hand, it is the rich and nuanced exposition of the wide range of texts and images explored in these two books that constitutes their valuable contributions to scholarship.

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ROMAN SIEBERTZ:

Preise, Löhne und Lebensstandard im safavidischen Iran. Eine Untersuchung zu den Rechnungsbüchern Wollbrand Geleynssen de Jonghs (1641–1643).

143 pp. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2013. €35. ISBN 978 3 7001 7263 5.

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Compared to what is available for most pre-modern and early modern European countries, economic information about Middle Eastern societies before the twentieth century tends to be scarce and scanty. And within the Middle East, Iran occupies a particularly disadvantageous place. It had nothing like Istanbul, for over half a millennium the immutable centre and administrative storage house of the Ottoman state. Instead, Iran was, until Tehran became its capital at the turn of the nineteenth century, a land of multiple and moving administrative centres. Isfahan served as the Safavid capital for some 125 years after Shah 'Abbas I selected it as such, but the accumulated administrative records from this period perished during the Afghan sack of 1722. Much of what we know about Safavid social and economic history perforce comes from travel narratives and, above all, the voluminous records of the Dutch East India Company (VOC).

The author of this compact book has made excellent use of the available material in his attempt to reconstruct living standards by way of analysing prices of food, wages and transportation in seventeenth-century Iran. The meticulous, detailed price lists found in the Dutch commercial records are of limited use for this purpose, since they represent wholesale prices of mostly spices and endless varieties of cloth the Dutch imported into Iran. Siebertz's principal source material instead is found in the account books of Wollebrand Geleynssen de Jongh, a VOC servant who, after serving the Company in India for more than fifteen years, was appointed head of its Iranian factory in Bandar 'Abbas in the early 1640s. He occupied the post from 1641 to 1643 and again from 1645 to 1647. In that period he wrote copiously and knowledgeably. Due to his collector's instinct, much of the result has been preserved.

Even with this exceptional source material, the information remains woefully incomplete and inadequate to the task at hand. Geleynssen de Jongh's account books cover only a limited part of the country – mainly the urban centres on the trade route between Bandar 'Abbas and Isfahan – and for the capital itself few data on prices are available. His writings also only inform us about the wages of workers who had dealings with the Dutch; besides, salaries paid by the VOC may not have been representative of wages in general, since the Company's multi-faceted operations were somewhat insulated from the wider Iranian context. For lack of sequential data, prices and wages in most cases also do not allow the modern scholar to establish timelines. Add to that the difficulty of establishing the exact equivalent of some Safavid weight measures, and one gets an idea of the hazards of arriving at any generalizations.

All one can do in these circumstances is offer data with the understanding that these are only valid for a specific place at a specific time, that the price of bread in any given place and month may have been mostly a function of the nature of the preceding harvest and the occurrence or absence of natural disaster or war. Siebertz, aware of these limitations, is cautious not to draw hasty conclusions.

What are his conclusions? The main ones point to great regional variation and enormous fluctuation, in keeping with patterns in an early modern world where transportation was problematic and supply and demand poorly co-ordinated. Bread was either cheap or expensive depending on circumstances of time and place. Butter was generally costly, but buttermilk less so. Fruits, raisins and beans were abundantly available at reasonable prices. Meat, unsurprisingly, tended to be high in price. Rice, *polow*, is likely to have been reserved for special occasions – a fact for which the author could have found additional evidence had he checked sources for the post-Safavid period. Bandar 'Abbas was much cheaper than Isfahan, which was by far the most expensive city of the country – although less so when the shah and the thousands forming his retinue were out of town – and wages in the port town were only about one-third of those in the capital. Anywhere, a labourer made enough money to afford a wholesome diet for himself and his family consisting of bread, fruit, some rice and chicken. Travelling, though, was expensive, and only feasible for professionals using the country's vast commercial network. All in all, one gains a good idea about Iranian food habits and the income levels of certain professions. Much attention is also paid to transportation and its costs, even if no coherent picture emerges from the mass of detail.

In the last part of the book the author broadens the perspective by lifting Iran out of its isolation, seeking to make more sense of his data by comparing these to conditions in India and The Netherlands, respectively, in the same period. This comparison, which naturally suffers from the above limitations as well, shows that both prices and wages in the Mughal state tended to be lower than in Safavid Iran, a

function of the immense fertility of the Gangetic plain, the abundant availability of labour, and the relative ease of transportation, so that living standards in India more or less matched those in Iran. Comparing flat, densely populated, urbanized Holland during its Golden Age to Safavid Iran is inherently precarious, but it can be said that the average Isfahani household enjoyed a lifestyle comparable to that of the inhabitants of the relatively poor eastern provinces of Holland, with the understanding that we know almost nothing about the cost of clothing, household appliances, rents and repairs.

The book ends with an effort to chart developments over time. We learn from this that some prices went up but that, overall, there was little inflation so that life did not become markedly more expensive between *c.* 1640 and 1700.

This is a useful study, showing what can be done with limited sources but also how difficult it is to arrive at meaningful conclusions on the basis of those same sources. The author could have teased out more information from travel accounts, missionary sources and VOC records from the period after 1700; and extending his chronological purview beyond the Safavids while integrating the available scholarship on the period's monetary system might have given him a better sense of both long-term eating habits and price trends. Still, he has done an admirable job mapping living conditions in seventeenth-century Iran.

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FABIO CAIANI and CATHERINE COBHAM:

The Iraqi Novel: Key Writers, Key Texts.

xiv, 264 pp. (Edinburgh Studies in Modern Arabic Literature.)

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This book is part of a series whose major ambition is to position modern Arabic literature not only within a more global context of what we have increasingly labelled comparative or world literature, but within a wider public readership. To focus on the evolution of the modern Iraqi novel in particular, young as it may be, helps map out major political anxieties and aesthetic orientations formed and continuously in formation by a fluid history of transformation, and by a contingent shattering and dislocating of the Iraqi identity. On this account, fiction becomes the prism through which we can trace, account for, and pin down the development of a curious auto/biographical relationship between modern Iraqi writing and history.

From the very outset, Caiani and Cobham have underscored their methodological choice: to look at “formative” short stories of the 1940s and 1950s by deploying a close and comparative examination of the texts. The authors’ approach stays away from a “macro” descriptive and exhaustive treatment of Iraqi fiction; it invests its scrutiny more judiciously in understanding the dynamic interface between the text, culture and society. This seems to be an important pedagogical departure from the few studies which already exist, especially on Iraqi literature.

The clear rationale in selecting the texts of ‘Abd al-Malik Nūrī, Ghā’ib Ṭu‘ma Farmān, Mahdī ‘Īsā al-Ṣaqr and Fu’ād al-Takarlī depends on the assessment of these works as serious departures in aesthetic innovation and maturity. This study is divided into eight chapters that have a more or less coherent and consistent