

KİTÂBİYAT / BOOK REVIEWS

Ali Anooshahr,

Turkestan and the Rise of Eurasian Empires: A Study of Politics and Invented Traditions,

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Ali Anooshahr's *Turkestan and the Rise of Eurasian Empires: A Study of Politics and Invented Traditions* explores how the late medieval and early modern Persianate historians dealt with the Turco-Mongol lineages of the founders of the Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal, Mongol, and Shibanid empires. As Anooshahr claims, the legacy of Turco-Mongol heritage was mostly linked with negative associations of "barbarity," "plundering," "violence," and "paganism," in the Persianate discursive traditions. Therefore, what the Persianate historians attempted to do is either to distance their patrons from such negative legacies, or to redefine their legacies in subtle ways in accordance with imperial needs. These attempts were part of the imperial response to the internal or inter-imperial legitimacy challenges throughout sixteenth-century Eurasia. By studying five Eurasian empires together in comparative approaches, Anooshahr shows how these attempts shared similarities, even though "the particularities and context of each 'state' and their 'ideologues' were unique" (5).

In Chapter One, Anooshahr questions the "Turco-Mongol" or "Turkestani" origins of five early modern dynasties: the Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals, Mongols, and Shibanids. To do so, the book devotes five chapters to each of the above-mentioned dynasties and the discussion in each is built on one or more examples from

Persian historiography. That is to say that while Chapter Three, Five, and Six are mainly based on single historical works, Idris Bidlisi's *Hasht Bihisht*, Fazl Allah Khunji's *Mihmannamah-i Bukhara*, and Mirza Muhammad Haydar Dughlat's *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, respectively; Chapter Four, and Seven are based on a variety of texts within the Persian historiography of the time. By taking a comparative approach, Anooshahr explores how and why historians dealt with the origins of dynasties and reconstructed their origin myths in accordance with their political agendas.

Anooshahr discusses how the question of origins of "Asian Empires" was dealt with by European scholars from the late seventeenth century to the nineteenth century in Chapter Two. The discussion among European scholars, whose views were developed under colonial contexts, mostly revolves around two main concepts: oriental despotism and race. There was, of course, no consensus among the scholars, but thanks to the colonial conditions, those "that emphasized difference, primitiveness, lack of development, and other features that justified these dynasties' otherness" (24) received a great deal of attention. Therefore, instead of focusing on "the ethnolinguistic genesis of the Turkic tribes" that formed the above-mentioned five empires, Anooshahr chooses to "see how individuals working during the very process of formation in the states grappled with that legacy" (25).

In Chapter Three, Anooshahr focuses on the sections regarding the origins of the House of Osman in Idris-i Bidlisi's *Hasht Bihisht* (compiled in 1506). According to Anooshahr, the aim of Bidlisi's discussion regarding the origin of the Ottoman dynasty in *Hasht Bihisht* is two-fold. First Bidlisi reconstructed the existing origin myth of the House of Osman, which attributes its origin to "the countries of Turan and Turkestan." And then he further mythologized this existing myth by making great use of Biblical and Qur'anic narratives to strengthen the Ottoman dynasty's legitimacy within Islamic discourses of sovereignty in accordance with the new imperial vision of the dynasty at the turn of the sixteenth century. Anooshahr points out that Bidlisi identifies the Central Asian/Turkestani political vision with "warring and plundering" and notes how Osman Beg (d. 1324 or 1326), the eponymous founder of the Ottoman dynasty, deliberately abandoned it for something new, "marked by building and agriculture (*'imārat va zirā'at*)" (43).

Chapter Four discusses the history of Shaykh Junayd (d. 1460) and Shaykh Haydar (d. 1488), the grandfather and father of the founder of the Safavid dynasty, Shah Ismail (d. 1524). Through questioning how these two Sufi leaders had

gathered warriors around themselves, Anooshahr claims that “the group identity of Haydar’s forces was meant to supersede kinship, tariqa, and regional affiliations” (73). According to Anooshahr, the early Safavids chose “a nonethnic self-identification” under the umbrella identities of “ghazi” and “Qizilbash” (red headgear) by rejecting the Ottomans’ categorization of them as “Turkic,” which is associated with “barbarism” within the Ottoman configuration.

Chapter Five investigates how an Iranian emigre who previously worked at the Akkoyunlu palace, Fazl Allah b. Ruzbihan Khunji Isfahani (d. 1521), dealt with the legitimacy problems of Muhammad Shibani Khan’s (d. 1510) Chingisid heritage and his military campaigns against fellow Muslims – Kazakhs, in particular. According to Anooshahr, the emergence of the “Shi’i” Safavids in the beginning of the sixteenth century forced the Shibanids to adopt more Islamic (Sunni) ideals, and to distance themselves from “the pagan legacy of the Mongols” (84), which would already be deemed outdated in the eyes of the Muslim inhabitants of Transoxiana (*Mā Warā’ al-Nahr*). By mainly focusing on Khunji’s narrative of the Kazakh campaign in his *Mihmannamah-i Bukhara* (The Bukharan Guestbook) and comparing it with his earlier chronicle, *‘Alam’ara-i Amini*, Anooshahr claims that Khunji participated in the construction of the Shibanids’ new ideology through forgetting the “pagan” or “barbaric” Turkestani past of his patrons and introducing Muhammad Shibani Khan as a protector of Sunni Muslims.

Chapter Six moves the discussion to the Mughal Empire, “*Moghulistan*,” and explores the change in meaning of the “Turco-Mongol” heritage in Kabul and India. This chapter is mainly based on the Mongol aristocrat Mirza Muhammad Haydar Dughlat’s (d. 1551) popular magnum opus *Tarikh-i Rashidi*. For Anooshahr’s discussion on the “Turco-Mongol” heritage in different early modern empires, unlike the protagonists of the previous chapters, Mirza Haydar and his work offer an interesting case study, because he was a Turco-Mongol ruler himself in the lands of the Mongols, *Moghulistan*. According to Anooshahr, on the one hand, Mirza Haydar expressed pride in his Mongol heritage, but on the other hand, he felt embarrassment regarding the “pagan” and “barbaric” past of the Mongols. More importantly, Mirza Haydar is very well aware of the emergence of “trained” individuals in politics through “meritocracy” at the expense of the importance of aristocratic lineage. In short, writes Anooshahr, “the Turco-Mongol identity and origins were a fraught issue even in ‘Moghulistan’ itself” (135).

Chapter Seven is dedicated to tracing Timur and his legacy in Indo-Persian historiography from the early fifteenth century to the mid-sixteenth century. Anooshahr points out that the legacy of Timur consists of two rather contradictory parts in Indo-Persian historiography: (i.) The right of rule in north India was exclusive to the Timurid dynasty, but (ii.) the memory of massacre that took place in 1398 during Timur's sacking of Delhi was still strong. Therefore, the legitimacy that was based on the Timurid dynasty is useful, but at the same time, brings up violent memories. Thus, according to Anooshahr, the first challenging task for the early fifteenth-century historians Yahya Sirhindi (*Tarikh-i Mubarakshahi*, compiled in 1434) and Muhammad Bihamad-Khani (*Tarikh-i Muhammadi*, c. 1438) was to reconcile these two contradicting parts of the legacy of Timur. Ali b. Mahmud Kirmani's *Maasir-i Mahmudshahi* (c. 1467) represents a transition between the earlier attitude and the attitude of the later historians who noticed that power directly derived from Timur in South Asia faded away, namely 'Abd al-Husayn b. Haji Tuni (*Tarikh-i Mahmudi*, c. 1484), and Fayz Allah Binbani (*Tarikh-i Sadr-i Jahan*, c. 1502). Eventually, during the reign of Humayun, the legacy of Timur started to be appreciated again, as evidenced in the works of Shaykh Zayn al-Din Khvafi (*Tabaqat-i Baburi*, c. circa 1533), Ghiyas al-Din Khvandamir (*Qanun-i Humayuni*, c. 1535), and in the anonymous *Tarikh-i Ibrahimi* or *Tuhfat al-Tavarikh* (c. probably 1545), and it is during Akbar's reign that the "Mughals began to evoke it [the legacy of "Turkestan"] more confidently" (167) as illustrated in Khurshah b. Qubad Husayni's *Tarikh-i Qutbi* (c. 1564).

Chapter Eight, which serves as the book's epilogue, makes some remarks on the concepts of invented tradition and the Persianate historical tradition. By pointing to the "existence of a common discursive historiographical repository," Anooshahr sums up the limits and processes of historical inventions in the texts. He does this to show how the historians dealt with the memory of the Turco-Mongol origins. Lastly, Anooshahr discusses how the Mongol-era Persianate historiography and its "standardized set of tropes, frames of reference, and historical teleology for imperial rule" (173) seem to defy time itself. According to him, even the colonial-era European orientalist in the nineteenth century produced their works within the boundaries established by the late-medieval Mongol-era authors.

By way of criticism, Anooshahr left a few of his choices unclear. For example, even though he uses the adjectives "newfound" and "nascent" several times to describe the five empires studied in the book, the Ottomans had already been on the scene for two hundred years by the early sixteenth century. There is thus a

chronological disparity between the case studies that should have been discussed. Second, the chapters in which Anooshahr focuses on one specific text seem to call for an explanation: Why are those specific texts chosen? For instance, why is Chapter Three based on Idris-i Bidlisi's *Hasht Bihsht* and not on another historical work written in Persian in the Ottoman Empire, such as Şükrullâh's *Bahjat-al-Tavârikh* or Halil Konevî's *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osmân*, etc.? In a similar vein, it would be illuminating to address the question of how and why the chosen specific texts held representative power for the Persianate historiographies of those specific empires. Lastly, in Chapter Four, Anooshahr revisits the history of Shaykh Junayd and Shaykh Haydar and perfectly reconstructs the literature by utilizing available sources, but the argument of the chapter, the "downplaying Turkic kinship bonds" (58), seems not to be fully backed up, due to the lack of contemporary historical work.

Anooshahr's work points out to the necessity of studying these empires together while stressing the similarities of the legitimacy-seeking processes. He does this by showing how the historians participated in identity-building and empire formation throughout the eastern part of early modern Eurasia. Even though the author did not discuss the concept of "Persianate", what he does throughout the book is to trace the Persianate world from "Bosnia to Bihar (with Bukhara and Badakhshan along the way)" (1). By doing so, the book not only presents the historical productions of the Persianate cultural space, but also highlights the connected cultural practices of history writing and state-building. Thus, Anooshahr brings the Persianate zone of the eastern part of Eurasia to the table of global history.

Overall, Anooshahr's work makes an important contribution to the field by showing the shared characteristics of the state-building, legitimation, and historiography in the five Eurasian empires, and also sheds light on the "creative energy [that was] unleashed by courtiers and leaders" (1) of the Persianate world in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Anooshahr shows the importance of rereading the primary sources and of questioning established views that have been taken at face value. Additionally, his usage of secondary sources in Persian and Turkish is also quite impressive. All in all, as a rare example of comparative history in the early modern "Islamic" Eurasia, *Turkestan and the Rise of Eurasian Empires: A Study of Politics and Invented Traditions* is a must-read for those interested in historiography, the Persianate world, and global history.

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