Book Reviews

Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War: Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Military System* (Yardley: Westholme, 2007). Pp. 214. Includes maps, illustrations, photographs, and glossary.

Reviewed by Patrick Wing, University of Redlands

Warfare and military conquest have long been associated with the Mongol Empire of Chinggis Khan in historical literature. We need only to consider the titles of works such as Juvaynī's "History of the World Conqueror," or Grigor of Akanc''s "History of the Nation of Archers" to realize that the earliest encounters between the Mongols and their Eurasian neighbors were essentially encounters with the Mongol army. In our own time, books such as J. J. Saunders' *The History of the Mongol Conquests* and, more recently, Stephen Turnbull's *Genghis Khan and the Mongol Conquests, 1190-1400* have addressed the military aspects of the foundation and expansion of the Mongol Empire. However, for all the attention given to the Mongols as conquerors, there have been fewer attempts to provide a systematic and comprehensive overview of Mongol military organization, training, tactics, and leadership.[1] This is the goal of Timothy May's *The Mongol Art of War,* a valuable contribution to our understanding of the structure of the Mongol military and the reasons for the Mongols' success against almost all of their adversaries in the thirteenth century. For the readers of this journal, perhaps an even more pertinent question is why the Mongols were unable to conquer the Mamluk Sultanate, one for which May provides some insightful suggestions.

After an introductory chapter providing a general overview of Chinggis Khan's early life and career, as well as a narrative of the dynastic and political history of the Mongol Empire until the 1260s, May addresses several themes relating to the structure of the Mongol army. These include recruitment and organization, training and equipment, logistics and supply, espionage, tactics and strategy, and leadership. Two chapters discuss the Mongols' major military opponents, including the Jürchen Chin, the empire of the Khwarazmshah, and the Mamluks, as well as detailed accounts of specific campaigns and battles. A final chapter on the military legacy of the Mongols offers an assessment of the major strengths and weaknesses of the Mongol army, as well as an interesting summary of the ways in which Mongol tactics and strategy have impacted the history of warfare down to

[1] A general overview of Mongol military organization is provided by H. Desmond Martin, "The Mongol Army," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1943): 46–85.

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DOI: 10.6082/M1C53J0Q. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1C53J0Q)

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the twentieth century.

For the specialist, there are few new revelations about the details of the Mongols' campaigns. May relies on standard contemporary sources, including the *Secret History of the Mongols,* Juvaynī's *Tārīkh-i Jahān-gushāy,* Nasawī's *Sīrat al-Sulṭān Jalāl al-Dīn Mankuburnī,* Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmiʿ al-Tavārīkh,* accounts of travelers from the Latin West, including Marco Polo, and many others. The value of this work is in the synthesis of the enormous amount of material relating to military matters in these sources, which enables the reader to comprehend the high degree of planning, organization, and strategy that accompanied the Mongols' campaigns of conquest. Of particular value is the way in which the author illustrates the correlation between military organization, leadership, and mobility, a combination which accounts for the Mongols' often overwhelming success on the battlefield. May illustrates how the *keshik,* the royal bodyguard of the khan, provided both a kind of military academy for Mongol commanders, as well as a proving ground where they could demonstrate their skill in the field while still under the control of the khan. Here May acknowledges the work of Thomas Allsen on the *keshik* as an institution of social control within the Mongol military and political system.[2] The experience gained in the *keshik* meant that when generals were given command of a mission, they came having had experience coordinating their actions with other units on the battlefield. Unlike many of their European enemies, Mongol commanders did not lead personal contingents, based on their own noble status. Instead, Mongol leadership was based on merit proven within the context of the royal bodyguard.

The quality of leadership that the *keshik* provided became most valuable when it was translated into coordinated movement. Superior mobility combined with discipline were the major strengths of the Mongol army, according to May. Coordinated maneuvers of the Mongol horse archers made them deadly against armies in the field. Mongol weapons technology was also developed to enhance the advantages of the mounted archer. May provides a fascinating discussion of the superiority of the Mongol composite bow, which had a range far greater than the Frankish Crusader crossbow. The Mongols preferred to shoot their enemies at a distance, and to avoid close combat if possible. However, Mongolian practices like the *nerge,* or group hunt, could be employed to take advantage of coordinated cavalry movement. The enemy would be surrounded and forced to the center of a gradually contracting circle of warriors, in the same way that wild game on the steppe would be corralled during a hunt.

May does address the Mamluk army, one of the few adversaries the Mongols could not conquer. The main reason for this was that the Mamluks fought like

[2] Thomas T. Allsen, "Guard and Government in the Reign of the Grand Qan Möngke, 1251-1259," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46 (1986): 495–521.

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the Mongols did, and, man for man, they did it better. The Mamluks represented an elite warrior caste, in which every individual was specifically chosen for specialized training and combat. The Mongols, on the other hand, while effective as a group, were individually not as talented as the Mamluks in all areas of warfare. In a compelling analysis, May compares the Mamluks to the Japanese samurai. Both the Mamluks and the samurai were elite warriors who, unlike the knights of Europe, had mastered archery, a major strength of the Mongols. The Mamluks' main weakness was that they did not have as many horses as the Mongols, and thus could not compete with the Mongols' mobility. However, the Mamluks compensated for this by carrying out scorched earth measures on the Syrian frontier, thus denying the invading Mongols adequate pasture for their usual number of horses. With the mobility of the Mongols restricted, the Mamluks' discipline and archery skill left little advantage to the Mongols in Syria.

In the final chapter on the long-term legacy of Mongol warfare, the impact of the Mongols on the development of Muscovite and Russian tactics and organization is analyzed. The princes of Moscow emulated the Mongols, and borrowed institutions like the postal system *(yam)*. May illustrates how enduring this experience was, pointing out that Mikhail Ivanin's 1846 publication *The Art of War of the Mongols and Central Asian Peoples* continued to be part of Russian and Soviet military academy curriculum until World War II. May also discusses the relationship between Mongol tactics and the use of gunpowder weapons. Although the impact of the Mongols on the diffusion of gunpowder technology has been discussed before, May argues that the degree to which gunpowder weapons were developed in Eurasia was related to the degree of conflict particular states and societies had with the Mongols and other steppe nomads. Early cannons and firearms were effective against heavy artillery and infantry, as was widespread in Central and Western Europe, in a way they were not against steppe nomads. For this reason, May suggests, states sharing frontiers with the steppe saw less development in gunpowder weapons before the seventeenth century, when field artillery became mobile enough to counter the movements of nomad armies.

The Mongol Art of War does not offer new interpretations of individual campaigns or battles, nor does it provide new perspectives on the familiar sources on which it relies. However, by providing a thorough, systematic analysis of several issues relating to the organization and projection of Mongol military power, Timothy May has produced a valuable contribution to our understanding of the Mongol Empire, its encounters with its neighbors and adversaries, and military history in general. For scholars of the Mamluk Sultanate, May's treatment of the Mamluks' military success against the Mongols is sure to stimulate positive discussion and debate within the field.

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History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods. Edited by Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn in collaboration with Ernest Tucker (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006). Pp. 604, tables and index.

Reviewed by Thomas T. Allsen

Like all such tributes to distinguished scholars, this volume collects essays from colleagues and former students, but unlike most endeavors of this sort, it has a "shape" which it sustains to a surprising degree. Thus, while many *Festschriften* are best described as "miscellanies," covering diverse and disconnected topics, this celebration of Woods' scholarly career takes on many of the attributes of a symposium volume arising from a research conference organized around a central theme, in this instance, Islamic historiography. The editors, contributors, and, ultimately, the honoree, deserve much credit for this uncommon result.

Grouped under a variety of chronological and geographical headings, the first set of essays, despite the title, is devoted to "The Mongol World Empire." Peter Jackson investigates their concept of a heavenly mandated universal dominion and concludes that it probably arose in the later stages of Chinggis Qan's life as the unprecedented success of their imperial venture became apparent. He also makes the important point that alongside their claims of world dominion, the Mongols frequently tried to trick or cajole foes into submission and often downplayed their ideological pretensions in order to gain allies, divide enemies, or make temporary peace. To this end, they used a host of intermediaries-—subordinate princes, merchants, and translators—recruited from across Eurasia. All this is persuasively argued on the basis of both Muslim and Latin sources, of which the latter are particularly enlightening on the Mongols' little-studied diplomatic techniques.

In his contribution, Devin DeWeese notes that while the Mongols visited great destruction on the Islamic world, Sufi orders adapted well to the new order and extended their influence. While many Sufi narratives explain these gains through conversion tales involving shaykhs and qans, others put forward the rather unexpected claim that it was Sufi leaders' guidance of Chinggis Qan that account for the success of the Mongols conquests, that is, God provided these alien forces with spiritual guides as a manifestation of his divine wrath, his disappointment with the failings of Muslim society. DeWeese points out, too, that such a narrative accords nicely with the Mongols' strong attraction to "holy men" of all stripes.

The early history of the Qongrat is carefully reconstructed by İsenbike Togan through a close analysis of Chinese and Persian sources and later tribal oral traditions. She finds that the Qongrat were divided into two major lineages, one in northeast Mongolia and another in the southeast abutting the agricultural lands

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of the North China plain. The former, and most famous grouping, became allies and the consort clan of the Chinggisids, while the latter were later subdued by force. Her findings demonstrate the great potential of this kind of ethno-historical research for illuminating the past of the steppe zone.

The next three offerings focus on Anatolia. The late Zeki Validi Togan explores the correspondence of Rashīd al-Dīn as a source of data on the region, noting that it contains statistics on all kinds of products and commodities, agricultural lands, and a variety of building projects. In his introduction, Gary Leiser, who translated the article from Turkish, succinctly summarizes the ongoing controversy concerning the authenticity of these letters and argues that some of their purely economic information might still be of value if handled critically. Hopefully, Togan's article will stimulate further attempts to authenticate and retrieve specific categories of data embedded in the letters.

Halil İnalcik takes a long view of "Autonomous Enclaves in Islamic States," arguing that grants of royal land and immunity were characteristic of Muslim polities from the Abbasids to the Ottomans. Such enclaves originated in a number of bestowals—*mulk, vaqf, soyurgal,* etc.—that not only transferred land to favored retainers, officials, and commanders, but also granted freedom from administrative interference and from taxes, the highly desirable *tarkhan* status. Over time, he concludes, these grants constituted a persistent force for political decentralization.

Charles Melville investigates the principal Persian chronicles prepared in Anatolia during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, those of Ibn Bībī, Karīm al Dīn and the anonymous *Tārīkh Āl-i Saljūq*. He characterizes each, its sources, literary style, principles of organization, didactic purposes, and political allegiances. Lastly, he deftly situates these three sources into the larger framework of Ilkhanid historiography.

The second letter of the Ilkhan Amad Tegüder to the Mamluk sultan Qalāwūn in 1283 is examined in Judith Pfeiffer's article. She offers a detailed analysis of the context of their diplomatic exchanges and the first full translation and commentary on the letter in question. In so doing, she makes a substantial contribution to the interstate relations of the Mongolian era, which involved a multitude of players, and at the same time furthers our understanding of the internal history of Tegüder's reign.

The next section, "The Age of Timur," the field most closely associated with Woods' own interests and work, is well represented. Robert McChesney gives us an informative biographical study of Ibn ʿArabshāh, a major historian of the period, that reveals the sources of the author's extreme dislike of the famed conqueror. At the same time his treatment of Ibn ʿArabshāh's career richly illustrates the cosmopolitan and peripatetic nature of Muslim intellectual and cultural life in the

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fifteenth century.

Surprisingly, there are still parts of Babur's manifold literary activities largely unexplored. Eiji Mano studies and compares Babur's Chaghatay Turkish translation of the *Vālidīyah,* a Persian mystical text composed by Khwājah Aḥrār, the famed Naqshbandīyah shaykh. This affords an opportunity for an informative discussion of other extant works of the Sufi leader long thought lost.

In another historiographical study, Beatrice Manz surveys fifteenth-century local chronicles of southern Iran, all by authors based in Yazd. She places the individual texts in their appropriate local and regional contexts, and identifies their sources of information, intended audiences, and ideological perspectives. Most impressively, she compares the chronicles written at Timurid courts with those from the south and shows that their discrepancies, no less than their areas of agreement, tell us much about the political dynamics between the center and the provinces.

Paul Losensky presents a convincing case that although overshadowed by the literary fame of Timurid Herat, the Aqquyunlu court at Tabriz also collected its own luminaries in the fifteenth century. He focuses on the highly esteemed poetry of Shahīdī of Qum, who, so characteristic of his age, began his career in Herat, moved on to Tabriz, and ended his days in India.

The next section, "The Safavids and their Legacy," has a pronounced historiographical emphasis. One of the more important sources on the origins of this dynasty is *Ṣafvat al-Ṣafā,* a history of the eponymous founder of the Safavid Sufi order written by a lieutenant, Ibn-i Bazzāz. Michel Mazzaoui discusses the available manuscripts and the complicated history surrounding attempts to produce a critical edition, and gives an evaluation, largely positive, to a newly published (1995) edition from Ardabil. Sholeh Quinn traces the evolution of Safavid coronation ceremonies from their austere beginnings to their more elaborate manifestations in the seventeenth century. By comparing the differing emphases of the chronicles, she charts the changing notions of kingship and legitimacy, and identifies the mix of Islamic and Iranian elements in the ceremony. Camron Michael Amin looks at the coverage of Safavid history in official textbooks and public discussion in twentieth-century Iran. He finds that although the rhetorical and ideological contexts differed, both the Pahlavi regime and the Islamic Republic extolled the Safavids for their creation of a "modern" Iranian national identity and for fending off the encroachments of foreign invaders.

In a somewhat different vein, Ernest Tucker studies the efforts of Nādir Shāh, the all-powerful Safavid general and founder of the Afshārid dynasty, to associate himself with Timur, who, faced with a similar situation, initially ruled through a series of Chinggisid figureheads. Nādir Shāh followed suit, found Safavid puppets and tried, unsuccessfully, to emulate Timur's vast conquests. This is an intriguing

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example of historical memory and of the role of "models" in empire building, for Timur himself took Chinggis Qan as his model and, like Nādir Shāh, was unable in the end to duplicate his predecessor's record of expansion.

The section on "Mamlūk Studies" begins with Anne Broadbridge's revealing examination of the numerous apostasy trials held in Cairo in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, proceedings that shed considerable light on the relationship between the military and scholarly elites and on the Mamluk sultans' quest for legitimacy.

Li Guo pursues the interesting theme of the use of verse in chronicle writing, particularly that of Ibn Dāniyāl, whose poems were widely cited and presented as accurate descriptions of contemporary events. This he did with some regularity, but his satirical verses on Mamluk anti-vice campaigns, as Guo demonstrates, were recycled and placed in differing chronological frameworks and in different literary forms. This recycling, he argues cogently, is in itself a useful source for cultural history.

The annual *maḥmal* festival, held in Cairo during the month of Rajab, formally opened the Mamluks' pilgrimage to Mecca. But as John Meloy shows in his study of its origins and development, there was a sharp contrast between the institution's "solemn intent" and its public reception, which transformed the event into a carnival-like celebration. The resultant tension provides a useful window on the dynamic relationship between governmental policy and popular culture.

The famous pilgrimage of Mansa Mūsá, the ruler of Mali who passed through Cairo in 1324, is the subject of Warren Schultz's contribution, which compares the depiction of this event in the Arabic sources with its conventional treatment in world history texts. He convincingly shows that the textbook perception that the Malian ruler's gifts of gold were so vast that they depressed gold prices for decades is simply not true. What the sources do show is that his largesse produced one of the many short-term variations in the money market of medieval Cairo.

In the shortest section, "Historical Geography," the noted Persian scholar Īraj Afshār employs a close textual-philological approach to questions connected with the name and location of Damadan, a mountain mentioned in various sources from pre-Islamic times down to the Mongols. By way of methodological contrast, two Mongolian scholars, D. Bazargur and D. Enkhbayar, investigate, on the basis of toponymics and modern environmental studies, the geographical and natural worlds of the *Secret History*. Among their more interesting findings is that many migratory routes have been in continuous use since the days of Chinggis Qan.

In the final section, "Interregional Contacts and Cross-cultural Transmission," Abolala Soudavar examines the historiographical and publication activities of the Yuan Hanlin Academy, which he connects to similar efforts in the Ilkhan capital of Tabriz and to the rise of illustrated manuscript production in Iran. The Chinese

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antecedents of this activity, expressed in official portraiture and book illustration, are well worth pursuing; such an investigation will need to take into account the vital importance of visual representation and its reproduction in the political culture of the Mongols and other steppe peoples.

Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam analyze the variable views of two seventeenth-century Safavid travelers on India and the Indians. While some of their differences, they argue, are attributable to personal characteristics, a full explanation of their divergent images must also take into consideration internal developments within Mughal India.

The spread of Persianate art to Istanbul is investigated by Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, who documents the importance of Tabriz as a cultural center and its influence on the Ottomans. This was exercised, in her view, through the forced removal of Tabrizi artists and artisans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries following successful Ottoman military operations. This fine study points up again the significance of this kind of "technician transfer" in the circulation of culture.

The concluding essay by Douglas Streusand forcefully challenges H. A. R. Gibb's view that Islam alone engendered Islamic civilization, thereby ignoring and minimizing its composite character, which drew upon both ancient Near Eastern, mainly Old Iranian, and Greek-Byzantine elements.

Viewing the volume as a whole, and from the perspective of my own research interests, several other recurrent themes, besides that of historiography, emerge from this collective endeavor. First, is the peripatetic lives of so many artists and intellectuals; Muslim culture was highly mobile during the Chinggisid and Timurid eras. A second, and related, connecting thread is the importance of Tabriz, whose ample cultural resources were eagerly appropriated throughout this period by neighbors near and far.

This brings us back to the honoree, whose first major contribution to the field dealt with the Aqquyunlu and their capital, Tabriz. Indeed this collection nicely mirrors Woods' own research interests chronologically, geographically, and thematically, and many articles build upon and elaborate his work.

Lastly, the overall quality of the papers is uniformly high; there are no learned notes here, only carefully argued papers based on primary research of a kind one would normally expect to find in a serious professional journal. And, as an added bonus, there is an extensive analytical index! In all respects, this is an uncommon *Festschrift,* one well earned.

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ADAM SILVERSTEIN, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Pp. 190.

REVIEWED BY ELIZABETH URBAN, University of Chicago

This impressive book is easily the most comprehensive work on the Islamic *barīd* to date. Temporally, it ends with the arrival of modern postal techniques, namely the telegraph and the privatization of postal systems in the sixteenth century. Spatially, it is confined to "those regions that were 'Islamic' throughout the formative and classical periods of Islamic history" (p. 3), which excludes most of Africa, southeast Asia, and Europe. Within these expansive parameters, the book is divided into three parts. Part One, "The pre-Islamic background," deals mainly with the Roman *cursus publicus,* Persian postal systems as far back as the Achaemenid period, and the postal practices of pre-Islamic Arabia. Part Two, "Conquest and centralisation—the Arabs," covers the Umayyads, the Abbasids along with several of their autonomous successor states, and the Fatimids. Finally, Part Three, "Conquest and centralisation—the Mongols," includes the Il-Khan *yām* and Mamluk *barīd.* Throughout the book, Silverstein utilizes a staggering amount of primary and secondary source material, from Herodotus and the Babylonian Talmud to Islamic-era Greek papyri and studies on Chinese administrative history (though he of course did not consult every conceivable source, and this reviewer particularly noted the absence of such Syrian Islamic historians as Ibn ʿAsākir and Ibn al-Adīm).

More crucial than the impressive amount of material that Silverstein has collected in this book, however, are the insightful questions he asks and useful analysis he provides. That is, the purpose of the book is not merely to amass data and dryly describe the minutiae of the *barīd* institution, but rather to provide answers to such questions as, "What (if anything) makes an Islamic postal system 'Islamic'?" (p. 4). Indeed, the greatest strength of this book lies in its examination of the way various dynasties adapted the *barīd* to their particular circumstances; instead of focusing on one dynasty, geographical area, or time period, Silverstein traces the developments of the *barīd* institution across various times and places. As he eloquently puts it, the relatively simple idea of the *barīd* "was expressed and elaborated upon in manifestly different ways throughout Islamic history. The idiosyncratic ways in which different states chose to interpret the basic postal formula offer us rare insights into the political traditions of particular dynasties and rulers" (p. 188). For example, Silverstein describes the changes that occurred within the Abbasid *barīd* network in the turbulent periods of Zanj and Qarāmiṭah revolts (pp. 111–21), and how both the Samanids and Ghaznavids simultaneously preserved and altered parts of the Abbasid *barīd* model (pp. 125–31). He does not

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frame these changes in terms of Abbasid "decline," but in terms of adapting to new circumstances.

The readership of this journal will be most interested in the book's fifth and shortest (at 22 pages) chapter, entitled "The Mamluk *barīd.*" Silverstein points out that the Mamluk *barīd* has received more scholarly attention than other Islamic postal systems, tipping his hat in particular to Jean Sauvaget's masterpiece *Poste aux cheveaux dans l'empire des Mamelouks*. Silverstein's work improves upon *Poste aux cheveaux* in two ways. First, he draws upon sources that were unavailable to Sauvaget, such as Baybars al-Manṣūrī al-Dawādār's *Zubdat al-Fikrah fī Tārīkh al-Hijrah* and 'Umar ibn Ibrāhīm al-Anṣarī's *Tafrīj al-Kurūb fī Tadbīr al-Ḥurūb*. Secondly and more importantly, rather than attempting to supersede Sauvaget's work in detail, Silverstein aims to "contextualise the Mamluk *Barīd* in relation to previous and contemporary postal systems, a subject in which Sauvaget was uninterested" (p. 167, n. 12). He achieves this goal through a discerning comparison of the postal systems in Mamluk, Abbasid, Fatimid, and Il-Khan domains. First, he analyzes the very origins of the Mamluk *barīd,* asking why Baybars would have wanted to create a *barīd* given that the Fatimids and Ayyubids before him had thrived without one. Then, while acknowledging the significant impact of the Il-Khan *yām* on the Mamluk postal system (an idea first noted by Sauvaget and taken up by other scholars such as Gazagnadou), Silverstein also examines the ways the Mamluk *barīd* drew on models other than the *yām*. He notes that the Mamluk system differed from the Il-Khan system in several important ways, that the Mamluks inherited political traditions from many sources aside from the Mongols, and that the Mamluks themselves consciously (or self-consciously) attributed their *barīd* to the Abbasid caliphal model. Examining this claim of Abbasid legitimacy, Silverstein also details how the Mamluk *barīd* was distinct from the Abbasid model. Finally, Silverstein sees the decline of the Mamluk *barīd* in light of the peace achieved between the Mamluks and Mongols in the fourteenth century, as well as the reforms instituted by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. As a whole, Silverstein's assessment of the Mamluk *barīd* is enlightening and carefully argued. However, he does very occasionally verge on oversimplification or even cultural bias; a superficial reading of the book might lead some readers to think the Mamluks were military machines who could not maintain a purely bureaucratic institution, or that ethnic Turks were better suited to horsemanship than anything else (see especially p. 169). In the end, his analysis of the Mamluk *barīd* is actually much more nuanced than any pre-conditioned understanding of the Mamluks would permit, and these seemingly biased statements are often the result of blithe phrasing rather than misconception.

Unfortunately, there is one noticeable gap in the book's attempt to contextualize the Mamluk postal system. Silverstein mentions that the Mamluk *barīd* may have

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been influenced by the Golden Horde (p. 185), a statement which he cannot elaborate upon because he does not include the Golden Horde's postal system in this book. This is partially justifiable, as the Golden Horde falls outside the parameters set in the Introduction; however, in this case the chosen parameters seem more cumbersome than helpful. It is understandable that Silverstein had to draw his limits somewhere, but to cover the Il-Khans and the Mamluks but not the Golden Horde seems unwise given the close (if not always friendly) contact between those three states.

As a final note, readers will be pleased with the book's flowing style and engaging mixture of primary source quotation and ensuing analysis. However, it does occasionally suffer from lack of clarity. For instance, when Silverstein claims that the Il-Khan *barīd* "became an 'Islamic' postal system" within a few decades of Hülegü's conquering Iran and Iraq (p. 153), he gives no immediate indication of what he means by this. This omission is especially frustrating as one of the stated goals in the Introduction is to discover what makes an Islamic postal system "Islamic." Eventually, Silverstein does explain the meaning of this statement, but it is not until the Conclusion of the book more than thirty pages later. Other examples of unclear writing could be cited, but in general his narrative is quite lively and readable. In the end, no amount of nitpicking about the occasional missed source or unclear sentence can decrease the importance of this book. Students of Islamic administrative history, whether or not they focus on the Mamluk period, will benefit greatly from Silverstein's perceptive analysis and fruitful comparisons of Islamic *barīd* systems throughout the pre-Modern period.

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DOI: **10.6082/M1C53J0Q**. (**https://doi.org/10.6082/M1C53J0Q**)

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