Book Review

Jo Van Steenbergen, ed., *Trajectories of State Formation across Fifteenth-Century Islamic West Asia: Eurasian Parallels, Connections and Divergences* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020). Pp. 361, 4 maps (Rulers and Elites: Comparative Studies in Governance Series). (Published Open Access.)

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This book is the product of two grants from the European Research Council, which funded a collaborative project on fifteenth-century state formation in the Mamluk Sultanate of Cairo. It concluded in a stimulating conference, "Whither the Early Modern State? Fifteenth-Century State Formation across Eurasia: Connections, Divergences and Comparisons," at Ghent University, 10–12 September 2014. As noted by the editor, Jo Van Steenbergen, publication of the proceedings took longer than anticipated, appearing only in 2019.

The volume opens with an introduction and two chapters on theoretical approaches to state formation in "West-Asia" (i.e., the Middle or Near East), followed by seven case studies of regional dynasties. These are further subdivided into two sections: one on centers of power in the Mamluk Sultanate and Ottoman Empire, and a second on peripheries of power, meaning bureaucratic, scholarly, or mercantile elites in smaller locales. The theoretical chapters employ technical terminology from historical sociology like "structuration," "trajectories," "potentialities," "resource flows," "leadership configurations," "centripetal and centrifugal forces," and "globalizing diachronic approaches." The case studies refer to this language, but otherwise employ traditional historical terminology.

The conference proceedings present an investigation of the entire region rather than focusing on a single dynasty or state. The goals of the organizers appear in the Introduction and Chapter 1, both written by Jo Van Steenbergen, and Chapter 2, co-authored by Van Steenbergen and Jan Dumolyn. These goals were two-fold: first, to use historical sociology and theories of state formation, which have been largely dominated by Europeanists, to investigate state formation in "West-Asia." This discussion takes place in Chapter 2, and involves all the usual suspects—Max Weber, Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, and Charles Tilly, among others—as well as regional specialists who grappled with Europeanists' ideas, among them Marshall Hodgson, Ira Lapidus, Michael Chamberlain, Timothy Mitchell, Cemal Kafedar, Karen Barkey, John E. Woods, Beatrice Manz, and Maria Subtelney, with a surprise cameo by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1405). The scholars in this project sought to ap-

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ply these theories to West-Asian society, and also convince Europeanists to look outside their own geographically-bounded work. Overall inspiration came from a 2009 French project under historian Patrick Boucheron, who saw the fifteenth century as a period of "opening" and global connection and moved away from the prevalent teleological model wherein certain events (like Constantinople, 1453) are seen merely as precursors to a modern world dominated by Europe. When applied to the Middle East, this approach recasts the fifteenth century from the century of Ottoman rise or a prelude to the Gunpowder Empires and the modern world into a century that was important on its own terms.

The organizers' second goal was to invite specialists to think comparatively in light of other parts of the region, especially since so many states and polities were dominated by Turko-Mongol ruling elites that shared practices, interests, and habits. Thus, Chapter 1 presents a general history of the region, written in broad-brush style with an emphasis on charismatic male figures from regional dynasties (i.e., Shah Rukh's influential wife Gawharshad does not appear). This chapter casts Temür's career as a watershed for fifteenth-century historical and political trends: the rise of the Temürid family, the empowerment of new mercantile, scholarly, and military local elites, and the emergence of the Mongol Jalayirids and the Türkmen confederations alongside the Mamluks and (resurgent) Ottomans. A key concept is centripetal-centrifugal tension, which here can be understood as the centralizing tendencies of the most powerful elites, governing from cities or camp cities, in opposition to local elites and agents, who gained authority from the central court but operated outside it in peripheral realms. Despite the interest this approach should spark, however, the organizers note that it has not yet been widely used by Middle East specialists.

The volume then moves into the case studies. In the first, Kristof D'hulster combines historical sociology with history to propose investigating the *atābak* as a necessary precursor to the position of sultan in the fifteenth century. Rather than seeing succession as an ad hoc process fueled by the personal charisma and loyalties enjoyed by individual candidates, the *atābakīyah* provided essential experience for the job of sultan, thus rendering the *atābakīyah* an "institutional constraint" on the path to the sultanate—those who did not serve as *atābak*s were unlikely to attain the sultan's job.

Next, Albrecht Fuess uses a traditional historical approach to examine the ill-starred sultanate of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qāytbāy (r. 1496–98). As the son of a sultan, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad invoked an earlier, successful son-turned-ruler, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (d. 1341). Unfortunately for the later al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, the fifteenth-century process of Mamlukization, in which the political elite was reordered to simultaneously limit the highest positions to Royal Mamluks and open other opportunities for non-Mamluk elites, had so thorough-

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ly transformed the institutions and politics of the sultanate that he stood little chance of succeeding and died violently at the age of 16.

By employing a comparative and intertextual approach to Ottoman narratives of the state and state actors, Dmitri Kastritsis uses the Çandarlı bureaucratic family and the consumption of wine to analyze what we can know about the family and how they were treated by different historical sources—including anecdotes and rumors—for each author's political, social, or ideological purposes. This careful approach to tricky material challenges dominant paradigms in Ottoman history by charting the development of a narrative of hostility to centralization.

Like Kastritsis, Beatrice Manz highlights the importance of a comparative approach to sources, although in her case not to untangle myths so much as to step outside the limitations of each genre. Doing so allows her to demonstrate that the great divide between Turko-Mongol rulers and their Iranian servitors was actually not so great as we have assumed, particularly in military matters, and that local elites in fact regularly trained for and participated in fighting, including the defense of cities. Although Manz does not explicitly mention the Hodgsonian *aʿyān-amīr* model of societal division here, this article serves as a useful counter to it.

John Meloy applies the abovementioned concept of Mamlukization to the relationship between the rulers in Cairo and the sharifs and judges of Mecca in the fifteenth century. He sets the scene in the fourteenth century, when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (d. 1341) in Cairo began to appoint judges in Mecca, usurping that prerogative from the Rasulids of Yemen. He also implemented an anti-Zaydī (Shiite) policy in his relationship to the Meccan sharifs, even though many in that family were Zaydīs. By the fifteenth century, rulers in Cairo were increasing the number of judicial appointments in Mecca, incorporating judicial families into the structure of the distant sultanate, and consolidating their hegemony over the sharifs, all of which demonstrate how central state control can extend over elites at the periphery.

Patrick Wing studies the al-Muzalliq family of Syrian merchants, who aligned their commercial interests with sultanic desires to expand trade and reassert control over Damascus after its ruin by Temür in 1400–1. As merchants to India, the al-Muzalliq family was well-positioned to join the *khwājakīyah,* a new class of fifteenth-century traders who worked closely with the ruling elite. By virtue of the first al-Muzalliq's savvy positioning, the family was able to amass wealth, engage in strategic marriages with other trader families, endow public buildings, and branch into corollary positions as judges or military officials. This demonstrates Syria's unique position in the sultanate in this century and highlights a new path to joining the political elite, which no longer had to begin in the citadel or a madrasah.

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George Christ presents the final case study, which reveals a dispute between Venetian merchants in Alexandria and the Mamluk sultan al-Muʾayyad Shaykh (d. 1421). By analyzing key pages copied from a now-lost Venetian consul's ledger, Christ makes a compelling case that the Venetian consul was less a foreign agent acting in Alexandria than a quasi-sultanic official, with salary, rights, and privileges appropriate to a particular rank in the sultanate's bureaucracy. Like the previous studies by Manz, Meloy, and Wing, this demonstrates the incorporation of local elites—even foreign nationals—into a state apparatus.

Overall, the book presents an interesting theoretical exercise fleshed out by individual case studies. The strongest idea to emerge from it is that of the complex, negotiated, and re-negotiated interactions between center and periphery, which is very well illustrated by the studies. Another valuable point is the usefulness of working comparatively in light of the history of other regional dynasties, rather than keeping within a single dynastic format.

A few critiques. Although the project focuses on post-Chinggisid elites in the fifteenth-century world, this reviewer would have liked to see some discussion of the powerful Chinggisid legacy, especially among the Temürids. In particular, legitimacy and ideology were explicitly omitted on the grounds that not enough scholarship has been done on them, but this reviewer suggests that state formation cannot be divorced from ideas. Where are the Temürids without Chinggis Khan's example? Where are the Ottomans without Osman's dream? Temür's ideology in particular has been well studied and could have appeared. Furthermore, at times some authors link the Türkmen and Temürids, but they are not entirely comparable. Rather, the Temürids, as noted, are better understood in light of the Chinggisids, while the Türkmen confederations differed significantly both ideologically and in historical origin. Finally, as this reviewer knows from personal experience, proceedings of a conference can be seriously delayed in publication. Although the scholars and editors are not to blame for this, it does mean that new topics may arise during the delay that then cannot appear in the volume. In this case, such later lines of inquiry include new conversations about slavery in the Islamic world and strategic marriages in Turco-Mongolian politics.

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