

intentions, which, in turn, are in a constant dialogue with reality; endowment deeds are not evidence of the reality on the ground.

Ragab positions his book as a revision of past historiographies of early Islamic medicine. It is indeed the first to discuss the interface between structure, social life, and medical knowledge and practice in and around hospitals in the context of the late medieval Middle East. However, similar questions have already been posed and discussed by historians of another period in Islamic history, namely, the Ottoman world.

Scholarship on Ottoman medical institutions has examined the dialogue between physicians, medical texts, and medical institutions, and the society in which they functioned. Ottomanists have already addressed career paths of physicians, the relationship between structure and clinical medical practice, and the charitable context of hospitals. Several scholars have been writing on these issues in recent years (full disclosure: the author of this review is among them). The *Turkish Historical Review* (Brill), for instance, includes several relevant studies. Ragab does not build on this scholarship, acknowledge it, or argue with it.

The lack of reference to the Ottoman period and to relevant literature appears in several other places in the book. For instance, at the end Ragab describes his forthcoming project, which is presented as a chronological continuation of the current work: he intends to follow the historical realities of al-Manṣūrī Hospital into the Ottoman period and to study how the hospital and its medical scene interacted and compared with European medicine. This is indeed an interesting and important topic by all accounts, but missing is the regional context of Ottoman imperial hospitals—some newly established, others older pre-Ottoman hospitals incorporated into the Ottoman system. The existing literature has just started to scrape the surface of the Ottoman Egyptian medical scene, but it has been shown that medicine in Egypt during the Ottoman period was at least somewhat Ottomanized.

Ragab's monograph contributes to our understanding of the renowned al-Manṣūrī Hospital, and through it we grasp the multilayered meaning of hospitals in medieval Islamic society. The definitive history of medieval Islamic hospitals is still wanting, however—it is a task that should probably be undertaken as a group endeavor.

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Twelve Infallible Men: The Imams and the Making of Shi'ism. By MATTHEW PIERCE. Cambridge, Mass.: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. Pp. ix + 254. \$45, £35.95, €40.50.

Matthew Pierce's new book on the biographies of the twelve Imams is a welcome contribution to the sparse scholarship on these powerfully influential narratives. It will provide food for thought for scholars in the field of Islamic Studies and beyond. Its clarity of expression makes it an excellent teaching resource.

Faced with the diverse ways in which the lives of the Imams have been expressed, and the still more diverse instances of their reception through the ages, Pierce chooses to focus on the earliest "collective biographies": those that treat all twelve Imams, or sometimes all fourteen infallibles (adding the Prophet Muḥammad and his daughter Fāṭima to the sequence). He limits himself to the foundational stage of the production of these works, concentrating on five books from the tenth to twelfth centuries CE, though with a regular nod to the reception of these stories in modern Twelver Shi'ism.

Pierce understands these works to serve as windows onto the process of the formation of the social memory of the Shi'i community, producing and reinforcing boundaries between the Twelver Shi'a and other communities. He does not attempt to ascertain the historicity of the events depicted, aiming instead to release the biographies from "the tyranny of bland facticity" (p. 40, quoting John Renard). He treats them as hagiographies comparable to Christian lives of the saints, and thus to be understood

as a way of linking life in the present with the community's memory of its great heroes. Through these stories, their example is made to intersect meaningfully with social life, ritual, and spirituality. Pierce presents a series of case studies focusing on particular themes of the biographies: community, gender, injustice, bodies, mourning, and the tension between the Imams' human vulnerability and divinely bestowed infallibility. He addresses some of the major moments in Shi'ī historical memory, such as the betrayal and martyrdom of Ḥusayn at Karbala, but he also discusses episodes from the lives of lesser-known Imams like Sajjād and Jawād. He shows how a coherent set of paradigms comes to be applied to each of the Imams' biographies. This standardization of the elements in the Imams' lives, Pierce suggests, was a progressive process: "As collective biographies proliferated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the conventions of the genre solidified and narratives at odds with prevailing notions of how the imams lived and died fell by the wayside," driven by "the impulse to view the imams as a type, alike in their lives and deaths" (p. 48). This process of amplification and erasure is crucial for establishing the canonical set of narratives which come to define Twelver Shi'ism.

In general, Pierce tends to emphasize the similarities between biographies rather than their discontinuities. This homogenizing approach is appropriate if we consider the biographies purely as a reservoir of Twelver orthodoxy. However, it comes at the expense of a historical understanding of the biographies as a resource for understanding the dynamic orientations taken on in the Shi'ī community at particular moments in time. I sympathize with Pierce's explicit intention to set aside questions of historicity in order to get at the meaning of the narratives, but this particular approach creates problems insofar as these meanings are constructed by the diverse interpretive communities that coexisted within Twelver Shi'ism.

We may take as an example Pierce's discussion of the problematic question of the relationship of the Imams to the *ghulāt* (extremists) (pp. 85–89). He indicates several ways in which writers positioned themselves: in opposition to them as errant actors who violated the pact of loyalty to the Imams during their own lifetimes; but also as the recipients of *ghulāt*-produced legendary material about the Imams. Pierce rightly emphasizes the fact that the boundaries between Twelvers and *ghulāt* continued to remain "obscure and porous" (p. 87). However, by treating the biographies as a more or less homogenous unit, we are left wondering about the way in which the different writers were embedded in different hermeneutic traditions within the Shi'ī community. Pierce does mention in his introduction the argument that Ibn Jarīr's and pseudo-Mas'ūdi's works may have been more closely aligned with *ghulāt* traditions than the works of Mufīd or Ibn Shahrāshūb, but he dismisses as irrelevant this line of thinking because "these works have been preserved by multiple generations of Shi'a scholars and were considered part of the broad Shi'a tradition up to the modern period" (p. 27). This dismissal ignores the way in which *ghulāt* elements might have been integral to the Twelver community, in spite of the polemic against them. Pierce's homogenizing stance means that he does not engage with the way in which the biographies dealt with internal disputes. However, biographical reports that depicted the Imams in particular ways (for example, as having miraculous abilities, divine knowledge, or the power to create) were themselves vehicles for the politicized definition of the Imams and their followers at different historical moments. (See the recent work of Mushegh Asatryan, for example.) Pierce notes that some *ghulāt* ideas were incorporated in the biographies, but he argues that their inclusion was, in general, nontheological, alluding to the tolerance of contradiction that leads Ibn Shahrāshūb both to condemn the *ghulāt* and, almost in the same breath, to quote *ghulāt* stories "in which 'Alī is said to have flown through the air . . . riding atop a shield. [Ibn Shahrāshūb] explicitly stated that these accounts came from the *ghulāt*." In order to tackle these difficulties, it would have been fruitful to provide analysis of the distinctive doctrinal idiosyncrasies, polemics, and apologetics that shaped these biographies: for example, the chain of *waṣīyya* from primordial times that serves to structure pseudo-Mas'ūdi's *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*, or the importance of identifying each Imam's "gateway" (*bāb*) that we see in Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's *Dalā'il al-imāma*. A useful control would have been to include a work such as *al-Hidāya al-kubrā* of the so-called *ghulāt* Nuṣayrī author al-Khaṣībī, as a way to compare the formation of an orthodox Twelver Shi'ī identity against *ghulāt* twelvers like the Nuṣayrīs. Pierce often notes the ways in which the biographies are constitutive of community through excluding a Sunni other, but it was equally crucial for Shi'ī groups to define themselves against other Shi'ī groups that also claimed to be the true inheritors of the religion of 'Alī.

The most original aspect of the book is its emphasis upon gender as a framework for assessing the lives of the Imams, so I will discuss this aspect in more detail. As Pierce sees it, "the imams' bodies were

platforms for displaying the biographers' visions of virtue, manliness, and group loyalty" (p. 94). Pierce amply demonstrates how pertinent representations of gender are to the lives of the Imams, but again, one is left wishing for a richer contextualization of the *Sitz im Leben* of the biographers themselves, whose visions of masculinity are said to speak through these works. The biographies are complex layered texts which can be read as providing evidence for three major layers of experience: the lives of the Imams and their contemporaries; the society of the biographers who compiled the stories; and the reception of these texts within some specific context after their initial production. It is not always clear at which level Pierce is treating them, and in this sense, the framework of "historical memory," while convenient, leads to the conflation of potentially very disparate universes. The problem of historical context is a difficulty that Pierce is alive to. He notes that Mufīd and Ibn Shahrāshūb appear to have rather different visions of masculine beauty, the former describing Imam Bāqir as "big bodied," and the latter describing him as having "a slender waist, a beautiful voice, and a bowed head" (p. 97). But he laments that insufficient studies have been done in order to flesh out such historical developments.

In his discussion of the theme of weeping and lamenting in the case of the fourth Imam, al-Sajjād, Pierce builds upon the work of Leor Halevi to indicate the gendered nature of mourning and the opposition to Shi'ī-inflected mourning practices in Sunni discourses in eighth-century Kufa in particular. Putting gender and sectarianism together, he concludes that, "by denouncing the female mourners, proto-Sunni pietists effectively reinforced the gendered nature of mourning and asserted male control over female expression" (p. 60). In his conclusion to the chapter, Pierce again asserts, "By embracing this feminized form of protest against the social order dominated by Sunnis, Shi'a Muslims challenged the notion that any just social order could exist prior to the return of the Mahdi" (p. 67). Pierce thus identifies a discourse that asserts a set of binary identities: Sunni, masculine, anti-mourning, and normative on one hand, versus Shi'ī, feminized, demonstrative mourners, and subversive on the other hand. This is a fascinating speculation, but the reader needs more evidence. This association between Shi'ī and feminine is hardly explored in relation to Pierce's own object: the biographies, which certainly show the Imams mourning, and their followers mourning, but seem, according to Pierce's own reading throughout the book, to be positing the Imams as the masculine ideal. As Pierce notes, "All of the infallibles wept. . . . At nearly every turn the imams reacted in tears, and their emotional performances reinforced the logic of the biographies" (p. 56). This being the case, surely we would be justified in understanding weeping as having the potential to be read as typically masculine rather than feminine, at least for the Shi'a? Is there any evidence from the biographies themselves that provides a cue for reading the Imams' weeping as feminized?

Chapter four, "Vulnerable Bodies and Masculine Ideals," is the chapter most particularly dedicated to the analysis of masculinity in the lives of the Imams. Various aspects are indicated as pertaining to their idealized masculinity: virility and the fathering of children, skill in archery, particular physical attributes, association with lion imagery, and bodily self-control. All of these are, indeed, plausible markers of masculinity, but there is a paucity of discussion as to how the texts might signpost the fact that they are about masculinity, as opposed to an ungendered order of perfection, and what terminology might be used to indicate how this masculinity was conceived and constructed by the compilers of the biographies or their audiences. As such, we are left unsure to what extent this is a conceptual world that is indigenous to the biographies, or whether it is an analytical category imported from present-day concerns (either of which would be justifiable, though requiring different treatment). A discussion of the specific language used to refer to men and women and their identity as men and women would have made an important contribution to Pierce's arguments, precisely in order to navigate what he shows to be the potentially ambivalent and contradictory nature of masculinity and femininity in the biographies. Thus, in addition to the weeping Imams, he describes how the mothers and daughters are to be understood as ideal women, but also as occupying a station above womanhood: almost masculine in their perfection, in a social context in which the virtues of men were extolled above the imperfections of women (p. 125):

Idealized women within this literature, particularly Fatima, reinforce the masculinized construction of the ideal human form by functioning like imams but remaining outside of that category. At the same time, the idealized women were often more "manly" than the men around them and were utilized as potent shaming tools in the authors' critiques of other men.

This is an important insight, amply justifying the comparison to female Sufis (p. 122). A closer analysis of explicit textual cues from the biographies might have further enriched our understanding of the way in which the models provided by the Imams and their women were embodied and reflected on.

Ultimately, Pierce has chosen to give us a broad overview of multiple interlocking themes rather than a minute case study or a work that concentrates purely on a single theme. His interrogation of questions of gender in the biographies of the Imams is to be welcomed as a pioneering step into what proves to be an extremely fruitful field for further inquiry.

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Christian Exegesis of the Qurʾān: A Critical Analysis of the Apologetic Use of the Qurʾān in Select Medieval and Contemporary Arabic Texts. By J. SCOTT BRIDGER. American Society of Missiology Monograph Series, vol. 23. Eugene, OR: WIPF AND STOCK, 2015. Pp. xii + 188. \$25 (paper).

Christian Exegesis of the Qurʾān invites the reader to an interesting controversy among some evangelical Christians over the perceived appropriate method of using the Quran as a “point of contact” when evangelizing among Muslims. J. Scott Bridger’s argument as to why the Quran can be an appropriate apologetic contact is based on biblical examples and—most importantly for Bridger—on the fact that such a model has been used by Arabic-speaking Christians from the very beginning of Arab Christian theological discourse up to the present. In fact, he remarks somewhat scoldingly that it would behoove evangelicals to “become aware of the rich history of theology written by Christians residing in the world of Islam” (p. 40). (To be fair, this is a common complaint put forward by scholars in mainline Protestant and Catholic circles who are aware of this history.) This Bridger does in chapter one, where he briefly reviews the witness of Arab Christianity in the midst of a culture that has been steeped in the language of the Quran and its theological positions. While he does not note this, one might posit that this lack of awareness of the Arab Christian theological tradition is due to the overwhelming assumption among many Christians in the United States, and especially many within evangelical Christian communities, that equates Arabs with Islam. Such a view has a long historical legacy (even though it defies literal readings of Acts 2:11).

Bridger takes issue with the argument of Sam Schlorff, in *Missiological Models in Ministry to Muslims* (Upper Darby, PA, 2006), who argues that Christian evangelists should not use the Quran or any form of Islamic culture as a “point of contact” to lure Muslims or to help them understand biblical truths. Schlorff posits that one cannot separate the message of the Quran from “the believing community” that has perpetuated its historic interpretation through Islamic culture, which has carried such beliefs (p. 29). Thus, to use the Quran, argues Schlorff, is to somehow validate the Islamic perspective. Bridger, however, lays out his view that all human cultures can be vehicles for Christians to use as “points of contact” to express God’s revelation by “subverting” previous cultures and traditions. Thus, Bridger states, even the Quran can be used “in evangelistic contexts and apologetic discourse” (p. 61) to demonstrate the truth of Christianity as revealed in the Bible.

Bridger lays out his argument in three steps. In chapter two he provides the commonly used missionary biblical text of Paul on Mars Hill in Acts 17. He argues that this biblical example demonstrates Paul’s use of the religious beliefs of the Athenians and quotes from their historical works, in order to “resignify” what they might mean for belief in the God of Jesus Christ. Again, Bridger critiques Schlorff’s fear that using any reference to the Quran or to Islamic culture will validate them as a “source of authority” (p. 62).

In chapter three, Bridger reviews this history of Arabic Christian theological arguments about the nature of God and revelation. He examines what most scholars now consider to be the first Arabic Christian theological discourse, *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* (On the Triune Nature), from the eighth century, and the works of the Melkite Bishop of Harran Theodore Abū Qurra. Bridger concludes that