

## REVIEW

NOELLE-KARIMI, CHRISTINE: *The Pearl in its Midst. Herat and the Mapping of Khurasan (15th–19th Centuries)*. Vienna, Verlag der ÖAW, 2014 (Veröffentlichungen zur Iranistik 74). xix + 374 pages, genealogical tables, 5 maps. ISBN: 978-3-7001-7202-4.

The importance of the city of Herat\* as the centremost town of Khurāsān hardly needs elaboration here. Starting at the height of its golden age and concluding with its separation from Iran, the period between the 15th and the 19th centuries is one of the most intriguing passages in the history of Herat. As the title implies, Noelle-Karimi has devoted her study to the unique relationship having developed between Herat and Khurāsān by the 14th century. By reconstructing how the city was embedded in the larger territorial framework of its various political entities, the author investigates her subject from a wider regional perspective and by doing so she delves into the aspects of space and notions of territoriality regarding Khurāsān.

\* In the review I have followed the system of transliteration adopted by Noelle-Karimi.

The book consists of six chapters and a number of subsections. In the first chapter, we can take a glance at Timurid Herat and its hinterland through the eyes of Ḥāfiz-i Abrū and Isfīzārī. Having got acquainted with the natural setting and administrative divisions of Herat, we are shown the central character of the city, as the residence of royal authority. The author, by enhancing the contrast between the approach of Timurid and Safavid chroniclers towards Herat, points to the fact that the latter ones take a more distant perspective. Therefore, the second chapter largely focuses on Khurāsān and the position of Herat within it, and in the wider political grid adjoining Central Asia and India, respectively. Noelle-Karimi unfolds how the rise of the Safavids led to the depreciation of Herat, despite still having been the capital of Khurāsān and the residence of the crown prince. Having lost its leading role to the city of Mashhad due to the administrative reforms of ‘Abbās I (1588–1629), Herat was progressively marginalised. Following the Mongol period an internal division had existed in Khurāsān – between Nīshāpūr and Herat at the time – and during the 17th century this dualistic nature was outlined anew. The author examines the local population of Herat and its surrounding areas, thus several chapters

contain valuable data which explain the demographic layout of the region in the given period. Before evaluating the fall of the Safavids, the author discusses the history of the Abdālī Afghāns in the 16th and 17th centuries to set the stage for upcoming events of crucial importance. Nādir Shāh's reign (1736–1747) did not make any peculiar difference in the stance of Herat as a consequence of turning Mashhad into the new capital. Nonetheless, Herat's fortune was again on the rise as the increasing power of the Abdālīs gave way to the foundation of the Sadūzai Empire after 1747. We reach the core of the book in the third chapter which is dealing with the period between the death of Nādir Shāh and the expansion of Russia into Central Asia, i.e. the age in which definite boundaries began to take shape. During the time of Aḥmad Shāh's rule (1747–1772), the city of Herat was once again in a key position being the heart of one of the four main dominions of the Durrānī realm. However, the orientation of the Abdālīs towards India induced a shift from Herat to Qandahār as the centre and the author calls our attention to the fact that the decline of Herat started after Aḥmad Shāh had passed away and especially when Āqā Muḥammad Qājār grasped power in Iran. The fourth and fifth chapters investigate the history of Herat in the 19th century when the emergence of notions of delimitation and territoriality and the growing interests of Britain and Russia in the region resulted in the disintegration of Khurāsān and its attachment to new political entities: Afghānistān, Transcaspia and Iran. Despite the constant attempts for consolidation by the Qājārs in Khurāsān throughout the century, the idealistic perceptions about a Khurāsānī political space did not meet with the realities on the ground, since the authority of the provincial governors was de facto severely limited. Noelle-Karimi uncovers the phenomenon that among chroniclers of the 19th century a sort of nostalgia prevailed by which Khurāsān was depicted as an indivisible part of Iran. The mid-1850s is the heyday of this sentiment considering that both a short occupation of Herat (1856) and the Treaty of Paris (1857) which marked the permanent loss of the city took place in this dec-

ade. The repercussions of this defeat were more considerable for the Qājār government than the loss of the Caucasian provinces a few decades before. It is pointed out that despite the costly upkeep of provincial administration in Iranian Khurāsān, with Mashhad as the centre, the Qājārs had never taken their eyes off the detached eastern lands which makes its symbolic value evident. The last chapter draws a comparison between Khurāsān and its neighbouring areas by covering the events that occurred in the north and northwest – Astarābād, Akhal, Sarakhs and Marv – and in Sīstān.

The case of Herat and Khurāsān demonstrates the transitional process according to which early modern states were functioning on the basis of loosely formed alliances between the monarch and the military aristocracy, implying decentralisation. However, the appearance of established frontiers precipitated the alteration of the concepts of authority and brought about a more centralised administration which gave rise to the government's more substantial control of a particular domain. As a consequence of these new territorial designations, the realignment of the provincial administrative sector was bound to take place along with the unfavourable change of position respecting the nobility.

Until now, our knowledge of the early modern history of Herat was based on works by Terry Allen, Dietrich Brandenburg, Shannon C. Stack, Maria Szuppe, Nataliya N. Tumanovich and several other distinguished scholars. Noelle-Karimi has created an account on Herat which supersedes much of these earlier works, especially with respect to the rather neglected period of the second half of the 18th century and the 19th century. Having been provided a massively documented reference for all phases of the era in discussion, the reader is given a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The expert handling and use of the approximately two hundred primary sources related not only to Herat, but the entire region of Khurāsān, and the presentation of a summary of the most fundamental sources at the beginning of every chapter render this book authoritative and unparalleled.

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