

John Renard. *Rumi. A Life in Pictures*

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John Renard. *Rumi. A Life in Pictures*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021, 276 p., 69 figs. ISBN 978-1 4744 7500 6 (hardback), ISBN 978-1 4744 7503 7 (webready PDF), ISBN 978-1 4744 7502 0 (epub)

- 1 Inviting as its title is, this book is far from being an album or an essay in art history. Rather, it deals with texts and their accompanying illustrations in equal measure. Moreover, it is not confined to the life of Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī alone, but it follows the fortunes of his lineage, his order, and his community from the eclipse of the Saljuqs until the rise of the Ottomans. That said, one can justly peruse the book for the sake of its rich images and their interpretation. The manuscripts on which the book is based are the three extant illustrated versions – an abridged 16th-century Persian edition and its two Turkish translations – of a work by Šams al-Dīn Aflākī (originally composed from 1318 CE under the patronage of ‘Arif Čalabī, Rūmī’s grandson), known as *Manāqib al-‘arifīn wa marātib al-kāšifīn*. Besides Aflākī’s work, the author engages in a lively dialogue with recent works on Islamic textual and visual hagiography by Rachel Milstein, Christiane Gruber, Franklin Lewis, Andrew Peacock, Julie Scott Meisami, and others.
- 2 Part One (*History and context*) explores the background of the establishment of Rūmī’s mystical confraternity and the inner workings of Aflākī’s (1296-1360 CE) hagiography. Chapter 1 (*Rumi, Sufism and Sultans in the Medieval ‘Lands of Rum’*, p. 5-25) traces the arrival of itinerant Sufis in Anatolia, among them Rūmī’s father, Bahā’ Walad (d. 1231 CE), from the Mongol-occupied East, and situates these movements in the larger picture of the Islamisation and Turkicisation of Rūm. Following Aflākī’s narrative, the author then relates the establishment of the mausoleum of Bahā’ Walad in Konyā (Qūniya) and the subsequent introduction of the order’s “signature paraliturgical ritual known as *sama*” inside the shrine, which set the stage for many events across the first four

generations of Mawlawī leaders: first in the age of Rūmī, then during his elder son Sulṭān Walad, his grandson ‘Ārif Čalabī and, finally, his great-grandsons, Amīr ‘Ābid and Amīr Wajid. Further in this chapter Renard points out the centrality of miracles in Aflākī’s work, be them prophetic wonders (*mu‘jizat*) or Sufi tools of persuasion (*karāmat*), while noticing social diversity, corporate loyalties, and gender roles prevalent in Konyā, in particular the role of women among Rūmī’s disciples, notably his first and second wives, the latter having been an erudite Christian woman. The second and later generations witnessed the solidification of the threefold social idea about “a Virtuous Community in a Muslim Society under Divine Providence”, in parallel with the strengthening of links between religious communities (both Naqšbandī and Mawlawī) and the Sultan’s court.

- 3 Chapter 2 (*Islamic Hagiography: Literary and Visual*, p. 26-44) presents an overview of Mediaeval Islamic hagiographical traditions, among them the early development of *faẓā’il* literature, dealing with the excellence of great figures, a genre which evolved from *hadīth* collections and biographical lexicons (*‘ilm al-rijāl*) and also shaped by universal histories and prognosticatory texts. Attention is drawn on the influence of Shi’i hagiography on this literature over the course of the 15th century, resulting in a peculiar Anatolian blend of pro-‘Alid Sufism (*tašayyu’ ḥasan*). Chapter 3 (*Visualised Hagiography: Manuscript and Method*, pp. 45-71) brings the reader to the hagiographic tradition of Aflākī and its surviving manuscripts. Here the earliest and arguably most important example is the abridged and illustrated Persian version by ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Muḥammad Hamadānī (Uppsala University Library, O Nova 94). Concluding this text and its nine paintings, this manuscript also includes the *Nay-nāma* of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492 CE), a versified commentary on the opening section of Rūmī’s *Maṭnawī*. This appendix is revisited in Chapter 7 for more discussion.
- 4 In Part Two (*Text and Image*) the author shifts from the textual to the visual and it is in this part that the “life in Pictures” transpires. Chapter 4 (*The Virtuous Community*, p. 75-130) introduces Rūmī’s forebears as the protagonists of pedagogical stories: prophets, saints, and Sufis, like Ḥallāj, as well as the founder’s own teachers, including his meeting with and apprenticeship to Šams-i Tabrīzī; finally, Rūmī’s death and last counsel are discussed. In keeping with Aflākī’s axiom according to which “the sultan of scholars outranks the sultan of soldiers”, Chapter 5 (*In a Muslim Society*, p. 131-176) discusses and illustrates “encounters between members of the Family Rūmī and representatives of Islamic religious institutions, political authorities and well-connected fellow citizens – society’s movers and shakers.” Furthermore, this chapter explores painterly attempts at depicting a higher, parallel, plane of existence within the material realm, based on Gruber’s analysis of pictorial dreamscapes. Chapter 6 (*Under Divine Providence*, p. 177-226) explains the success of Mawlawī spirituality in the age of Aflākī by drawing attention to the changing worldview in early 14th-century Anatolia when the breakdown of the Saljuq Empire and the ensuing chaos led to a yearning for a ‘Perfect Person’ (*al-insān al-kāmil*) and a dream-world of clairvoyance, precognition, and bilocation. Finally, Chapter 7 (*Conclusion: Little Images in the Big Picture*, p. 227-243) summarises the significance of what the author regards as “the most complete and integral visualised hagiographic record of a major Sufi, his spiritual descendants and his links to the larger (Sunnī) Muslim ambience”, before a brief excursus (*Meanwhile, over in Agra ...*, p. 244-245) would take us to the court of Jahāngīr where a parallel phenomenon was unfolding in the form of illustrated Persian

manuscripts about the life of Jesus, written by the Jesuit missionary Jerome Xavier (d. 1617 CE).

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