

regime to the fore. Saparov coherently articulates his arguments and concurrently manages to interrelate them by offering extensive research mainly through Russian and Armenian archives. Furthermore, translations of the original concepts and idioms are brilliantly made; another feature that allows the reader to follow the text and clearly conveys the author's narrative and the context. However, it should be noted that the numerous grammatical and spelling errors that run throughout the book bear the risk of distracting the readers. All in all, *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus* is a valuable resource not only for political and historical studies researchers but also for those interested in seeking alternative ways of reading and understanding the history of the Caucasus.

Onur Ağkaya,  
*Bilecik Şeyh Edebali University, Bilecik, Turkey*

*Christ Came Forth from India: Georgian Astrological Texts of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.* By Timothy Paul Grove. Leiden: Brill, 2021. 463 pages. doi: 10.22679/avs.2022.7.1.012

The Caucasus is often overlooked by scholars engaged in tracing the dissemination of ancient knowledge from East to West. Yet an abundance of materials attests to the centrality of the Caucasus as a crossroads for the texts and traditions of many different civilizations, from South Asia to Africa. Among the materials that bear witness to this legacy is the anonymous *Balavariani*, a Georgian rendering of an Arabic work entitled *Bilanbar u Buddsaf*, which was itself a translation of a Pahlavi text that gathered together legends relating to the life of the Buddha.<sup>2</sup> Although this work does not correspond to a specific extant Sanskrit text, it is clearly indebted to the Indic hagiography of the life of Gautama Buddha. Georgian specialist David Marshall Lang introduced this neglected work to the Anglophone world with his translation in 1966. In the magisterial study that is the subject of this review, Timothy Paul Grove performs a similar feat by introducing us to the richness of the Georgian astrological tradition during the early modern period, a time when Georgia served as a crossroads for the transmission of scientific learning from the Muslim world into European languages.

Grove's book opens with an overview of astrology across multiple civilizations, all of which were in one form or another transmitted to the Caucasus: Babylonian, Hellenistic, Indian, Persian, Harranian (Sabian), Byzantine, Arabian, Medieval European, and Far Eastern. These sections place the discussion of Georgian astrology within a comparative framework and attest to the author's wide-ranging erudition. We then turn to early modern Georgia, an epoch that Grove refers to as Georgia's "Silver Age" while also calling it Georgia's "Late Mediaeval Period" (p. 24). This terminology seems rather idiosyncratic, given that during

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<sup>2</sup> David Marshall Lang, *The Balavariani (Barlaam and Josaphat): A Tale from the Christian East*, translated from the Old Georgian (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966).

the period under discussion—1600-1810—Georgia was wholly part of the modern world and very much under the influence of European and Russian literary and learned traditions that would not generally be classified as medieval. This idiosyncratic periodization doesn't however harm Grove's analysis overall.

Although the book's primary focus is on Georgian astrology, Grove also gives serious consideration to other astrological traditions of the Caucasus, including Abkhazian, Circassian, Vainakh (Chechen and Ingush), Daghestani, Ossetian, Armenian, Kalmyk, and Islamic. He also considers Georgian astrology in light of multiple disciplines, including pagan and Christian theology, archaeology, the decorative arts, and literature. Mention is made of the role of astrology in major works of Georgian literature, including Shota Rustaveli's 12<sup>th</sup>-century epic, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* (*VepxisT'q'aosani*). One work that is not mentioned, even though it belongs to the period which is the primary temporal focus of the book, is Nodar Cicishvili's *Seven Planets* (*shvidi mt'iebi*), a Georgian romance written in the medieval Persian tradition, which borrowed many of its narrative tropes from a previous version of the story of Sassanian king Bahram Gur (406-438, r. 420-438) by the Central Asian poet Nawa'i in Chaghatay Turkish.<sup>3</sup>

Among the most engaging chapters of the book are those which chronicle the writings and achievements of King Vakht'ang VI of Kartli (1675-1737; r. 1716-1724) and his uncle Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani (1658-1725). The latter is well-known to students of early modern Georgian literature, primarily due to works such as *The Wisdom of Deception* (*sibrdzne sicruisa*), which is the first extant Georgian work written in the mirrors-for-princes genre. Sulkhan-Saba is also well known for his diplomatic efforts to obtain support for Georgia from European monarchs through the mediation of the Catholic church. Grove introduces a new aspect of Sulkhan-Saba's legacy, which until this point has not been well known to scholarship: Sulkhan-Saba as an astronomer. Sulkhan-Saba was also King Vakht'ang's teacher and it is in the context of learning about the former's achievements that we are also introduced to the intellectual contributions King Vakht'ang made to the science of astronomy.

Grove discusses a range of texts by the prodigious Vakht'ang that have rarely been treated in scholarship, namely the *Book of the Knowledge of Creation* (*Kmnulebis Codnis C'igni*), the king's alchemical and astrological manuscripts, and his adaptations of eastern texts. Like other astrological texts written under the influence of Christian theology, Vakht'ang's *Book of the Knowledge of Creation* attempts to justify the science of astrology by engaging with the Biblical tradition. In the preface to this work, Vakht'ang frames the prophet David as a defender of the science of the stars. Vakht'ang's preface is a literary feat in its own right and is admirably translated for the first time into English by Grove. Vakht'ang states in this text that because "Georgia has been ravaged" many times by enemies, the "study of philosophical learning in the Georgian language" has not had a chance to flourish and Georgians have been "ridiculed" by speakers of other languages (p. 341). Passages like these provide important

<sup>3</sup> Nodar Cicishvili, *Shvidi Mt'iebi - Baram-Guri*, ed. K. Keķelidze (K'art'uli cigni: Tbilisi: 1930). A Russian translation and critical edition is available as *Sem' planet: (baram-guriani)*, ed. B. T. Rudenko (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka, 1975).

insights into the self-perceptions of Georgian intellectuals during the early modern period and their motivations for seeking cultural transformation.

Although it lacks an argument that might change our understanding of the material he investigates, Grove's detailed study is valuable for a number of other reasons. It gives us a wide-ranging introduction not just to Georgian astrology, but more generally to early modern Georgian scientific learning. As such, it is clearly a precursor to future, perhaps more conceptually oriented, work. By assembling together these materials from a range of different archives, Grove reminds us of the role of astrology in premodern cultures as a mediator among different kinds of knowledge. Although he does not explicitly make this claim, the material Grove assembles suggests that astrology's role in the early modern Caucasus was analogous to the role played by critical theory in the humanities today: it brings different disciplines into dialogue with each other and thereby proposes new relations between humanity and creation.

Rebecca Ruth Gould

*University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom*

*China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative, Africa, and the Middle East: Feats, Freezes, and Failures.* Edited by Jean-Marc F. Blanchard. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. 291 pp. (ISBN: 9789813340121) doi: 10.22679/avs.2022.7.1.013

While the recent years have witnessed a surge of literature on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), only little attention has been given to analyzing the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI). Covering vast regions stretching from East Asia to Europe, the MSRI involves dozens of countries and concerns hundreds of billions of dollars in trade. Jean-Marc F. Blanchard's latest edited volume *China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative, Africa, and the Middle East: Feats, Freezes, and Failures* aims to discuss the actual processes and the multi-dimensional consequences of the MSRI in Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa (MENA). With in-depth case studies, the contributors focus on selected countries within Africa and MENA to examine "how politics and economics interact to shape participant country attitudes towards the MSRI, its implementation, and its political and economic effects" (p. 3).

The volume opens with Blanchard's comprehensive introduction that briefly outlines the background of the MSRI and traces the history of Africa-China and MENA-China ties and their drivers from 1949 through the present. The eight core chapters can be geographically divided into two groups that are devoted to the African and MENA countries, respectively. The first group, comprising chapters 2 to 5, focuses on MSRI projects in Africa. As the chapters collectively reveal, the most important feature of the MSRI in Africa consists of seaport projects, ranging from Lamu in Kenya, Bagamoyo and Dar el Salam in Tanzania, and the Doraleh Multipurpose Port in Djibouti as well as various seaports in Madagascar,