

Malcolm H. Kerr Dissertation Award of the Middle East Studies Association

Humanities, Hon. Mention

Shafique Virani's dissertation, "Seekers of Union: The Ismailis from the Mongol Debacle to the Eve of the Safavid Revolution," is a path-breaking work of Islamic history. Virani sheds a stark new light on the darkest period in the history of the Ismaili community, from the Mongol conquest of Iran in the mid-thirteenth century to the rise of the Safavid dynasty at the end of the fifteenth. How did the Ismaili community survive through these centuries? Virani attributes and documents three crucial factors in the survival of the medieval Ismaili community: pious dissimulation, a re-organized da'wa (or "mission"), and, above all, a particular conception of the imamate, which increasingly acquired a soteriological dimension for the community. By exploiting a wide array of sources in Arabic, Persian, Sindhi, Siraiki, Punjabi, and Gujarati, some of them newly-discovered and presented here for the first time, Virani has produced a study that is at once deeply rooted in texts and yet also possessed of a broad historical vision.