



The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization)

By Michal Biran

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The empire of the Qara Khitai, which was one of the least known and most fascinating dynasties in the history of Central Asia, existed for nearly a century before it was conquered by the Mongols in 1218. Arriving in Central Asia from China, the Qara Khitai ruled over a mostly Muslim population. Their history affords a unique window onto the extensive cross-cultural contacts between China, Inner Asian nomads and the Muslim world in the period preceding the rise of Chinggis Khan. Using an extensive corpus of Muslim and Chinese sources, Michal Biran comprehensively examines the political, institutional and cultural histories of the Qara Khitai. Her book explores a range of topics including the organization of the army, the position of women, the image of China in Muslim Central Asia, the religions of the Qara Khitai and the legacy they left for the Mongols. Crucially she asks why they did not, unlike their predecessors and successors in Central Asia, embrace Islam. The book represents a groundbreaking contribution to the field of Eurasian history for students of the Islamic world, China and Central Asia.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Biran's excellently written masterwork, the first full study of the Qara Khitai in their own right, draws on all available resources. It will underlie all future Qara Khitai studies. Other major research contributions are the comprehensive tables of rulers, reign titles, and central administration titles (title translation, holder(s), source(s), data note(s) and the first-ever full chronology of all the dynasties. Essential." - Choice

"This is a long overdue study that overturns much of the conventional wisdom on Qara Khitai. Those interested in cultural contact between the medieval Eurasian civilizations in particular will find The Empire of the Qara Khitai an authoritative introduction to a hitherto little understood subject." - Mongolian Studies

"Biran's work is both original and insightful. Anyone studying Central Asia or inner Asia, or premodern states that deal with borderlands, whether religious or economic, will benefit from this work. It should be an essential addition to any library. Biran's mastery of both the Islamic and Chinese sources, with a large number of Russian and English secondary sources thrown in, makes this a complete and balanced study so that scholars from Islamic, Chinese, or inner Asian studies will not find the work as esoteric as the Qara Khitai often seems." - International Journal of Middle East Studies

About the Author

Michal Biran is Lecturer at the Institute of Asian and African Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her previous publications include *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State in Central Asia* (1997) and *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (2005; co-edited with Reuven Amitai).

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