INTRODUCTION
FROM BAGHDAD TO MARĀGHHA, TABRIZ, AND BEYOND:
TABRIZ AND THE MULTI-CEPHALOUS CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS,
AND INTELLECTUAL LANDSCAPE OF THE 13TH TO
15TH CENTURY NILE-TO-OXUS REGION

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For a long time the study of the Later Middle Period of Islamic History (1258–ca. 1500) was marred by a decline paradigm that posited a ‘golden age’ of Islam during its first three to four centuries, and about a millennium of decline afterwards, which reached its bottom with the Mongol invasions and their conquest and destruction of Baghdad in the mid-13th century (1258). As a result, the cultural and intellectual achievements of the Later Middle Period have been less well studied than those of other periods of Islamicate history and culture.

While the decline paradigm has long been challenged as a widely accepted framework of inquiry, especially by the historians of science¹ and material culture² and scholars of the literary³ and intellectual history

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¹ For the field of astronomy, see the literature cited by Ragep and Morrison in this volume. The RASI project at McGill (Rational Sciences in Islam: An Initiative for the Study of Philosophy and the Mathematical Sciences in Islam), which is based on the sustained and meticulous research by Sally and Jamil Ragep and has significantly expanded over the past years, is at the forefront of research in this area. RASI subsumes three major research projects: the Islamic Scientific Manuscripts Initiative (ISMI), the Post-classical Islamic Philosophy Database Initiative (PIPDI under the leadership of Robert Wisnovsky) and Scientific Traditions in Islamic Societies (STIS) (for all three, see http://islamsci.mcgill.ca/RASI/).

² Arthur Upham Pope stated more than seventy years ago that “the close of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth were characterized by an outburst of creative energy in architecture such as Persia had rarely seen.” Arthur Upham Pope, “Islamic Architecture. H. Fourteenth Century,” in *idem, ed., A Survey of Persian Art From Prehistoric Times to the Present* (Tehran: Sorough Press, 1977/2535; originally published in 1938–39), 1052–1102, at 1052. Similar statements could be easily multiplied. See, most recently, Linda Komaroff’s essay, in which she declared that what we are witnessing is nothing less than the creation of “a New Visual Language” in Western Asia under Mongol rule. Linda Komaroff, “The transmission and dissemination of a New Visual Language,” in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256–1353*, eds. Linda Komaroff and Stefano Carboni (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2002), 169.

³ E.G. Browne, Jean Aubin and others have observed the high quality of the literary production under Ilkhanid, Muzaffarid, and Timurid rule, noting with surprise that Persian
of Islam,4 and while especially Mamluk Studies have flourished over the past decades,5 their insights and efforts have only highlighted the amount of work that has yet to be done: Due to the long neglect of this period, some of the most basic groundwork has yet to be undertaken, including the stock-taking of the literary production during this time. The last


5 The study of the Mamluk Sultanate, and Mamluk Studies in general, have flourished over the past two to three decades, notably through the activities of the Middle East Documentation Centre at the University of Chicago (http://mamuk.uchicago.edu/), which were more recently reinforced by programmes and publications at the universities of Liège (http://www.islamol.ulg.ac.be/f3.htm), Bonn (http://www.mamul.uni-bonn.de/the-kolleg), and Ghent (http://www.mamul.ugent.be/). See in particular Stephan Conermann’s article on the state of the art, “Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg History and Society during the Mamluk Era (1250–1517). Program, Concept, Tasks,” ASK Working Paper 1, Bonn: 2012, and the contributions in idem, ed., Ubi sumus? quo vademus? Mamluk studies, state of the art (Goettingen: V & R Unipress/Bonn University Press, 2013).