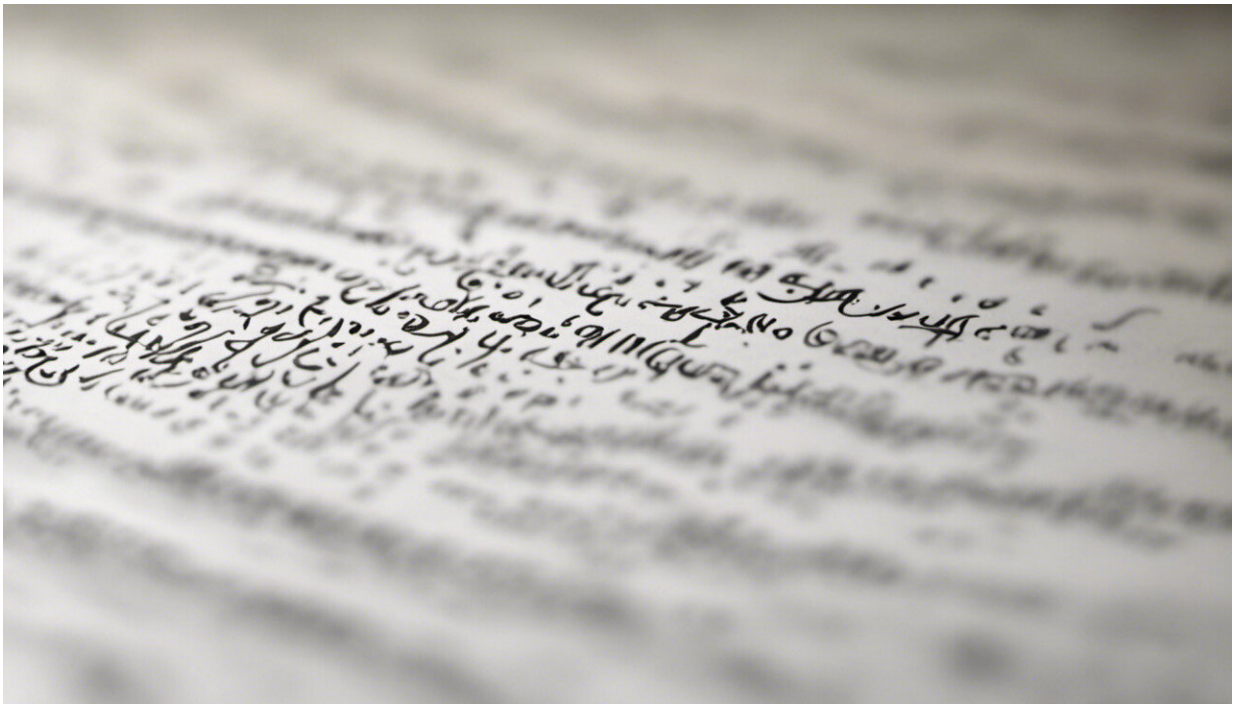


Understanding an overlooked period of Islamic history

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

According to most history books, the Islamic empire came to an official end with the Mongol conquests of the Middle East during the mid-13th century. Although by this time the empire had well-surpassed its Golden Age and had entered into a general state of decline, this conquest served as the final nail in the coffin. End of story. Or is it?

According to research conducted by the EU-funded IMPACT project, the influence of the Middle East's Mongol moment far exceeds the textbook definition of merely marking the end of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad. Instead, it marks the beginning of a protracted era of enlightenment where, in the face of fundamentally changing socio-political realities, Muslim philosophers set off to redefine the very core of Islam.

Despite the intense change happening, the period between the dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate and the establishment of the early modern regional states of the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals remains one of the most understudied periods in the history of the Nile-to-Oxus region. It is this historic middle section that was the focus of the IMPACT project.

A collaborative effort

As a result of the rise of Persian and Turkish as literary languages, in addition to Arabic, one must have a wide linguistic knowledge to be able to scrutinise the texts produced during this period – which makes studying the 13th to 16th centuries a challenge. 'As a consequence, the majority of the texts from this period remain unpublished – and this was the core focus of our research,' says Project Lead Judith Pfeiffer. 'Our objective was to overcome the current fragmentation of the existing expertise across Europe, the Middle East and North America.'

To accomplish this, the project collaborated closely with other projects happening in related fields, often bringing a wide range of experts together for international workshops and conferences. The project also focused on encouraging and engaging with young researchers by providing graduate students travel grants and establishing post-doctoral research positions. The project was further supported by the editing and translating of key texts and the publication of important monographs. 'As

a result of these combined efforts, IMPACT enabled associated researchers to devote themselves to the in-depth study of a specific topic for an extended period of time without the distractions of academic administration,' says Pfeiffer.

A database of insight

The cumulation of this expansive research is the launch of an open-source, open-access and fully searchable database. Here, for the first time, future researchers can find a plethora of published and unpublished Arabic, Persian and Turkish works on the rational sciences dating from 13 – 16th centuries.

'By studying the texts, authors and intellectual networks of the 13th-16th century period of the Nile-to-Oxus region, we have made this crucially important, but much neglected, part of history accessible,' says Pfeiffer. 'We successfully bridged the gap between the much more heavily studied classical and modern periods of Islamic intellectual history, thus enabling scholars to study the intellectual and political history of the period, both in its own right and in a holistic manner.'

More information: Project website: impact.orient.ox.ac.uk/

Provided by CORDIS

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