what Yongnian Zheng calls "the organizational emperor" and its charismatic leader.

Timothy Cheek University of British Columbia
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Ruby Lal. *Vagabond Princess: The Great Adventures of Gulbadan*. Yale University Press, 2024. Pp. 280. Paper $22.00.

Vagabond Princess explores of the life of Gulbadan Begum (d. 1603), whose father, Babur (d. 1530), founded the Mughal Empire (1526–1857). Gulbadan penned a memoir, *Humayunnama*, in response to a command given by her nephew, the Emperor Akbar (d. 1605), in 1587. Akbar had asked those who knew his father, Humayun (d. 1556), and grandfather Babur to write down their recollections for his royal historian Abu'l Fazl (d. 1602), who was compiling a chronicle of Akbar's reign. The first half of *Vagabond Princess* builds upon Ruby Lal's earlier work on Gulbadan, which was based on a close reading of the *Humayunnama*, and the second half traces Gulbadan's life as a matriarch within the empire and includes an account of her pilgrimage to Mecca in the mid-1570s. The only extant manuscript of the *Humayunnama* is incomplete and ends maddeningly in mid-sentence; it does not cover Gulbadan's years abroad, and Lal's creative reconstruction of these years is welcome, especially as they traverse "the vast terrains, people, animals, and sacred geographies of Mughal India, the Red Sea, and the desert land of Arabia" (13).

Also welcome is Lal's engagement with the materiality of the archive. Lal writes that she was the first scholar to work closely with Gulbadan's text and begins with her visit to the British Library archive in 1997 (10). Lal describes how the book itself, with its "light golden pages dotted with faint coffee-colored blemishes," became a tactile portal to the past. Lal's reflection on the text—"her writing felt direct, as if it were speaking to me" (4)—underscores her personal connection with Gulbadan. This connection infuses the text with moments of poetic beauty that are rare in historical scholarship on Mughal India. This very connection, which possesses tremendous creative potential, also runs the risk of entrapping Gulbadan Begum within the confines of the present, in which a feminist historian, rightly troubled by the erasure of women in history, seeks to find in Gulbadan Begum an adventurous protagonist who resists male power. Lal's documentation of sexism in the field (201–2, 206) is necessary and important. At the same time, a robust body of scholarship on gender in Mughal India, which owes a debt to Lal's pioneering work, has emerged since she began working on Gulbadan Begum. Beyond challenging male scholars' dismissal of Gulbadan, engaging with scholarship on gender (much of which is by women) would have helped contextualize the text. For instance, Lal notes that Abu'l Fazl refers to Gulbadan's entourage as consisting of "chaste, secluded ladies," and Lal sees this as an unfit label for our "vagabond princess" (186). But replacing one label with another is less effective than exploring gendered norms in Akbar's India, in which being seen as chaste and secluded doesn't seem to have hampered Gulbadan's movements; it may well have been what allowed her to move about as she did. Addressing how Gulbadan's text played an active role in crafting ideas about masculinity, emotion, and memory would also have given greater agency to Gulbadan.

Vagabond Princess interestingly contains two modes of narrative inquiry: In the first, Lal's Gulbadan Begum is a historical figure who remains opaque in the way that people from the past do, but whose world we can, to some extent, reconstruct. Lal makes a number of claims that stand up to historical scrutiny. Gulbadan likely heard about her father's exploits from other women, writes Lal, and understood that he was "fond of war and poetry" (27). Lal also asks questions that allow the reader to wonder about Gulbadan. "Did she compose a divan?" asks Lal, who then says that "we do not know" (30). In sharp contrast is the mode in which Lal makes pronouncements about Gulbadan's inner world with certainty. Statements such as "She valued movement as beneficial to freedom and to the flowering of mind and body" (8), or "At her core, Gulbadan longed to return to life as a royal vagabond" (111), or "She longed to be in the House of God, far from the court and harem, simmering with intrigue and ambition" (123) are closer to what a reader would expect in historical fiction. In this mode, Gulbadan becomes the invention of an omniscient narrator. Of these two modes, the first—which draws out the contours of the unknown—seems more honest and to have more humility: We don't know for sure what Gulbadan thought, but we can speculate within some parameters. The second reads as presumptuous; an omniscient narrator is no remedy for the unknown. Read together, however, these two modes can help further dialogue on the limits of historical imagination and the responsibilities of the historian toward silences in the archive.

Where speculative claims work in the text, often beautifully, is in Lal's depictions of space. In the absence of writing from Gulbadan, Lal draws on a vast body of literature to invite the reader into the landscapes Gulbadan visited. Surat is "an irregular half moon of dwellings built upon the north-south curve of the river Tapti" (114), and it is filled with merchants, weavers, and artisans, who "structured their lives according to the seasons" (117). Lal imagines, in vivid detail, the complexities of the Ottoman Hijaz, in

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which Gulbadan and her party of women found themselves (159–60), and focuses on how the presence of royal Mughal women irked the Ottoman authorities. The women symbolized Mughal power in Ottoman lands—and that too, lands far removed from the Ottoman heartland of Anatolia and therefore spaces where Ottoman power was tenuous. Lal reads the Ottoman demand that the women be sent back to India as evidence that the women's giving of alms was threatening to Ottoman power, and she reads their ability to have stayed for four years as an assertion of matriarchal authority (174–75). Lal's exploration of the interplay of Mughal and Ottoman power is deft and original and speaks to her strengths. Lal's evocative prose, vivid accounts of space, and courageous exploration of the affective dimensions of historical research are groundbreaking and likely to inspire future scholars. This is in keeping with her earlier work, which did the same.

Taymiya Zaman University of San Francisco
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Elizabeth D. Leonard. *Benjamin Franklin Butler: A Noisy, Fearless Life*. University of North Carolina Press, 2022. Pp. 392. Cloth $36.00.

He wore nicknames including "Devil," "Damnedest Yankee," "Beast," and "Spoons" for his treatment of Southern gentility and his alleged theft of silverware. Loathing for him by white Southerners rivaled that for Abraham Lincoln and William T. Sherman. Meanwhile, when removed from command during the Civil War, adoring and saddened Black soldiers sent him off with cheers and tears. Decades later, Black veterans feted their former general at his funeral. The effusive emotional responses to Benjamin Butler speak to his contentious life and personality. Such people can make for difficult subjects of biography. The strong responses test the biographer. Evocative sources demand the writer account for many political biases and wade into divergent accounts. But if successfully understood, a character like Butler presents the biographer the rewarding opportunity to offer a thrilling account of a person and the past. In *Benjamin Franklin Butler: A Noisy, Fearless Life*, Elizabeth D. Leonard accomplishes this, providing a complex view of the complicated politician, general, and family man.

Leonard begins stating that Butler has been and remains largely characterized by those who maligned him. The Civil War historian who preceded her at Colby College, Harold B. Raymond, delivered a short correction to this image in 1964. Leonard's biography is a longer, more detailed explication of Raymond's reappraisal. In full, she argues that Butler was "a brilliant, complicated, funny, loving, beloved, frequently brash individual who was unquestionably ambitious and could be opportunistic," yet for all his foibles, he was a patriot who supported "practical positive changes" to rectify economic, racial, and gender inequalities (xviii). In presenting the complexities of Butler, Leonard helps explain especially well his long political career, his military service, and the time he spent with his family.

First, Leonard describes Butler's political trajectory, demonstrating that although he ran for office and served as a member of multiple parties, this mainly reflected that the parties—not the politician—changed. Touching on Butler's first foray into public life in the early 1840s, Leonard sums up his guiding principle. She contends that a salient characteristic of Butler's political life was a concern for the average citizen's well-being. Leonard argues that this explains why he shifted from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party to the Independent Greenback Party to the fusion Greenback-Democratic Party. First, as a Democrat, Butler was committed to labor reform, attaching himself to the ten-hour workday and other safeguards for workers, such as a secret ballot to neutralize the possibility of employers punishing those in their employ with differing political views. Later, he shifted party allegiances. As the Republican Party supported Black Americans' future, he joined their ranks. Finally, as Republicans distanced themselves from their post–Civil War prerogatives, Butler again shifted, hoping to help Bay State constituents with labor reform endeavors.

Second, Leonard clarifies the most controversial period in Butler's life, the Civil War. She first addresses Butler's wartime career, noting that he was undoubtedly an ambitious man. However, for all his aspirations, he made sacrifices and contributed to the preservation of the Union. She importantly observes that from when he donned the uniform until he was finally relieved at the request of Ulysses S. Grant he ruffled feathers. But she details his consistent efforts to aid the Union as he thought appropriate, therefore depicting a general who spent his time in the US Army creatively trying to undermine Confederates. He did not always succeed; his exploits proved useful but also unhelpful and sometimes harmful to the Union's war objectives. Yet he was a patriot. As such, Leonard's assessment yields a flawed yet nevertheless devoted Union officer, not a blundering, self-interested "beast."

Leonard's measured interpretation is particularly important and true of Butler's seven-month stint as military commander of New Orleans. During this time, Butler earned much repute, especially after his infamous order deeming a woman who insulted Yankees as a "woman of the town plying her avocation." Leonard breaks from such readings, readings informed by the Lost Cause interpretation of the war, and shows Butler from the perspective of marginalized

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