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ABSTRACT

Medieval Baghdad: Some Aspects of the Social and Political History of the City during the mid-Tenth Century—mid-Thirteenth Century

Средневековый Багдад: Некоторые Аспекты Социальной И Политической Истории Города В Середине X-Середине XIII В.

The book is about aspects of the social and political life of Baghdad during the period between the mid-tenth to the mid-thirteenth centuries. The first chapter tries to set the stage for the descriptions of events, processes, and personalities which have been discussed in the remaining three, by offering a review of the city's topography, demographics, and a sketch of what the author calls its "social structure." It includes information about the "commoners" and the "elite", the learned and the slaves, and is followed by a brief description of Baghdad's administration, the role of city quarters in the life of Baghdad, and two notes about the so-called 'ayyarun (class of warriors) and Sufis.

The remaining three chapters follow a dynastic pattern, each focusing on a period of one political elite's rule in Baghdad — the Buyids (945-1056), the Seljuks (1056-1160), and the last Abbasids, till the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258. They mostly focus on social disturbances, military events, and economic facts, and each chapter is also organised around the chronological succession of events.

The conclusion attempts to offer some broad generalisations about the “typology of social relations in Baghdad” in the three centuries covered in the book, including the Shia-Sunni relations, clashes between different quarters, and the caliph's relations with the Baghdad society. However, the breadth of the topics tackled, and the length of the time-span scrutinised, do not allow for a meaningful discussion of the possible economic and social roots of the said phenomena in the mere ten pages of the conclusion.

The author bases her research on a broad range of primary sources, but at times makes naïve generalisations such as, people from Baghdad are spontaneous in their ability to riot at any time (p. 100); or the lower classes of Baghdad regarded the Seljuks as foreign and supported the caliph's return to power. She thus conveys a romantic picture of the relationship between the people and king.

Despite its shortcomings, however, the book offers an interesting window into aspects of the political and social life of Baghdad in the period under study.

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