

BOOK REVIEWS

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STEFAN HEIDEMANN, *Die Renaissance der Städte in Nordsyrien und Nordmesopotamien. Städtische Entwicklung und wirtschaftliche Bedingungen in ar-Raqqa und Harran*, Islamic History and Civilization, Studies and Texts, vol. 40. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002). Pp. 555. \$154.00 cloth.

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Tourists coming to today's Aleppo or Damascus are often surprised by the abundance of Umayyad ruins from the early 8th century. In al-Raqqa, a town in northern Syria, they are impressed by magnificent 'Abbasid monuments from the late 8th century. All over Syria, more fortresses, mosques, and madrasas erected by Zangid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman rulers after the 12th century will also be worth a visit. What tourists will not find, however, are remains from the period between the 10th and early 12th centuries, because there are none.

This period is known to archaeologists as a "gap of settlement" in northern Syria. There is evidence of an almost complete abandonment of urban construction and a dramatic decrease in population during that time. Scholars such as D. S. Richards therefore argue that these two centuries marked a crucial turning point in the history of Islamic culture from a "classical" Islamic world toward a Turkish-dominated Islamic society in the Middle Ages (p. 4). Despite the obvious importance of this transition period, it has not yet received the in-depth scholarly treatment it deserves.

Stefan Heidemann's meticulously researched, richly documented, and well-written book fills this gap through a study of the region of Diyar Mudar in northern Syria. At the heart of his inquiry is an exploration of the specific causes of the "gap of settlement," starting in the 10th century, when bedouins with no particular interests in the maintenance of urban space conquered the region, until the "renaissance" of the cities under the Seljuks and Zangids in the 12th century. The author studied urban "non-development" in al-Raqqa and Harran since both were medium-size towns and therefore probably more representative of overall trends than the great capital city of Damascus. In his work he blends the writings of contemporary Muslim scholars with an analysis of material sources such as coins and architecture, which is a fresh methodological approach in the study of medieval Syrian history. Heidemann's skill in the field of numismatics is especially noteworthy, and he clearly demonstrates the broader potential the analysis of coins has in the future for the reconstruction of the histories of Islamic societies.

Heidemann demonstrates how after the final breakdown of 'Abbasid authority in northern Syria, bedouin tribes such as the Banu Numair, which had come from the Arabian peninsula in the 10th century, took power in the prevalent anarchic circumstances. As nomads, they neglected urban settlements and moved administrative centers from town to encampment (*hilla*). Market activities stopped, and the number of settlements declined precipitously because of permanent bedouin raids. Excavations reveal that, out of fifty-five Islamic settlements, only

four towns contained pottery dating from the 11th century (p. 298). Moreover, long-distance trade also collapsed at the time of bedouin rule, as is seen in the emergence of the so-called *black dirham* coined in northern Syria. Its name derived from a decreasing percentage of silver and a higher quantity of copper. The *black dirham*, which often bears the name of the local bedouin ruler, was circulated exclusively in local markets.

Only after the Seljuks drove out bedouin rulers at the end of the 11th century did the cities recover, despite inner Seljuk strife and the establishment of the Crusaders in the fortress of Edessa in 1098. According to Heidemann, the Seljuks encouraged long-distance trade and local agricultural production because they wanted to benefit from both through the trade taxes and revenues from the *iqṭāʿ* system. It was the Seljuk governor of Mosul, ʿImad al-Dīn Zangī (d. 1146), who managed to stabilize the region by repelling the Crusaders and by reforming the taxation and irrigation systems. During the second half of the 12th century, his descendants minted new indigenous coins, which replaced Byzantine copper coins in long-distance trade. This revival of the currency system reinforced the urban recovery during Zangid and later Ayyubid rule.

Overall, Heidemann's thorough research and sound analysis make for compelling reading. His descriptions of local political history may at times be too detailed for a general audience, and a chart listing the rulers of al-Raqqā and Harran would have improved readability. Commendable are the small summaries in all of his chapters and subchapters so the reader can easily select and recapitulate the information and findings. Specialist scholars of medieval Islam and Crusader studies will enjoy this book, which is rich in political, economic, and archaeological evidence. Heidemann successfully rediscovered large parts of the two "missing centuries" of Syrian urban development, thereby contributing significantly to our understanding of this crucial transition period in Islamic history.

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TREVOR H. J. MARCHAND, *Minaret Building and Apprenticeship in Yemen* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press 2001). Pp. 299. \$90.00 cloth.

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"To learn about learning in a context in which formal technical training, engineers, and drawn plans are non-existent" (pp. ix, 73): this is the main quest that lies behind the work of architectural anthropology authored by the architect turned anthropologist Trevor Marchand, currently a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His efforts focus on the builders of the minarets that grace the famously spectacular skyline of the highland Yemeni capital Sanaa. As the title suggests, the professional practice of building, and the system of transferring the knowledge necessary in that practice, occupy the center of this study. Marchand spent a year working as an unpaid laborer in the projects of Bayt al-Maswari, the leading "house" of minaret builders in Yemen. Thanks to his participant-observation method and his practical understanding of architecture, his narrative is appealingly vivid and provides unique insights into the themes of craftsman hierarchy, non-propositional communication, and the learning process within the "hierarchized space of the building site" (p. 46).

Prolific and resilient, traditional Yemeni architecture has been the subject of numerous studies and films. Minarets have also been extensively studied, although they are central to only three other monographs in English: Doris Behrens-Abouseif's work on Cairo minarets,