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STEFAN HEIDEMANN: *Die Renaissance der Städte in Nordsyrien und Nordmesopotamien: Städtische Entwicklung und wirtschaftliche Bedingungen in ar-Raqqa und Ḥarrān von der Zeit der beduinischen Vorherrschaft bis zu den Seldschuken*. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2002. X, 530 pp. (Islamic History and Civilization 40.) ISBN 90-04-12274-5. € 191,-.

This book constitutes a major new contribution to the study of the medieval history of the Near East. More than just filling important gaps in our chronological knowledge of northern Syria and Mesopotamia in the late Fatimid and early Crusader era, it places the region's commercial and fiscal interrelatedness in the foreground and suggests a new paradigm in the examination of marginal, seemingly obscure inland towns and fortresses and their role in Syria's wider history. It accomplishes this with an exhaustive use of the available Syrian, Iraqi and Christian narrative literature coupled with recent advances in archeology and especially numismatics. The result, while obviously not the last word on the shift from classical to Turkish-dominated Islamic civilisation in the Near East, sets a new standard of authority on the political and economic structures underlying this shift that will not quickly be surpassed.

The study is essentially arranged in two parts, the first comprising two long chapters (pp. 29–295) that detail the political history of northern Mesopotamia and adjoining areas from the late Hamdanids to the early Saljuqs, the second with two shorter analytical chapters (pp. 297–435) on the fiscal regimes and monetary circulation in the region. They are preceded by a well-written introduction that spells out the basic, if far-reaching problematic of this study: what accounts for the “Siedlungslücke” (settlement gap) which archeologists have determined for the middle Euphrates and Balīḥ valley (the classical Diyār Muḍar) from the mid-tenth to mid-twelfth centuries? Remarking that this crucial period in Islamic history is too often considered only from the perspective of major urban centres and dynasties, HEIDEMANN proposes to concentrate on smaller towns on the far borders of rural settlement which, by their nature, are more attuned to changes in the regional political and economic nexus. The rise and fall of nomadic tribal rule in Ḥarrān and ar-Raqqa, the author argues, parallel and help explain the decline and then the renaissance of urban civilization throughout the Near East in this time.

The second chapter begins by treating the regression of Hamdanid authority over the desert periphery and its replacement by the rule of Arab nomad tribes. Already in the late

tenth century, the Hamdanids' exploitative tax policies had led to the economic ruin of northern Mesopotamia. The power vacuum was filled by a dizzying succession of Fatimid and Buyid pretenders as well as by bedouin tribes that had recently immigrated from Arabia and that dominated and taxed the region's towns from their nomad encampment or *hilla*. Thus the Banū Numayr were able to establish control over the once thriving Abbasid cities of ar-Raqqā and Ḥarrān in the early eleventh century, subsequently underpinning their claim to rule as an independent Muslim dynasty in Mesopotamia by striking coins in their own name. Here the author is able to supplement the meagre narrative sources with his own research in the numismatics of the region; of particular note is his argument that the brief resumption of Fatimid coinage at ar-Raqqā and ar-Rahba in 401/1010–1011 marked a serious attempt to extend their hegemony over Iraq, a full 50 years before the Basāsīrī revolt. The expansion of Numayrid authority around Ḥarrān is equally interesting, their role in the suppression of various chiliastic uprisings there serving to highlight the still active sectarian tensions between the urban Sunni and Sabeian populations and the rural Shiite population. Archeological evidence of Numayrid constructions in both Ḥarrān and ar-Raqqā marks the mid-eleventh century as the zenith of the dynasty's power; the pro-Fatimid general Basāsīrī's bid to seize control of Iraq in 451/1059 and the Numayrids' hosting of the refugee Abbasid caliph in ar-Raqqā underline the strategic importance the Diyār Muḍar had now acquired – and therewith the reason for the subsequent Saljuq invasions into the region.

The integration of northern Syria and Mesopotamia into the Saljuq matrix of rule is the subject of chapter three. If anything, this period appears even more politically confused than the previous, as the last remnants of tribal statelets compete with Saljuq emirs, independent Turkmen bands, Armenian warlords and finally of course Frankish crusaders for control of the rural periphery. The distinguishing features of the process, according to HEIDEMANN, are the gradual displacement of local tribal governors by Saljuq military commanders; the return to fortified cities and castles as the centres of political power; and the state of nearly constant war at the fringes of the crusaders' and Saljuqs' effective reach. In the first phase, resistance to the crusades was in the hands of local or only loosely Saljuq-affiliated emirs, giving cause to frequent switches of alliance and permitting a Frankish advance all the way to ar-Raqqā in 497/1104. The apparent chaos of the Muslim response, well attested in the standard historiography on the crusades, is rendered more comprehensible in HEIDEMANN's discussion as he centres his perspective on the Saljuq state rather than on the Syrian theatre of war. Thus the Great Saljuqs' priorities in the region are not so much to confront the Franks as to subject the remaining Muslim principalities to their rule and to ensure their position in eventual succession struggles in the capital Isfahan. The effective Muslim counter-crusade begins in the early twelfth century with the consolidation of Saljuq rule in the province of Mosul, of which the Jazīra and indeed all Syria were considered dependencies.

The situations of Ḥarrān and ar-Raqqā in this period are dissimilar. Ḥarrān epitomizes the region's devastation as it declines to little more than a "dismal garrison city" under the Saljuqs. The more isolated ar-Raqqā, meanwhile, begins to flourish under the 'Uqaylids, a local tribal dynasty that probably served the Saljuqs to control the area's bedouins. Based in Ġa'bar castle, the 'Uqaylids played the role of both robber barons and mediators between various warring factions. Their ejection from ar-Raqqā in 529/1135 by the Saljuq governor Zangī b. Aqsunqur signifies the Diyār Muḍar's reincorporation into a single centralized state and marks the terminus of this study, but the prosperity enjoyed by ar-Raqqā under their rule, as evidenced by restoration work on the citadel and as well as newly created *waqfs*, prefigures the city's renaissance in the Ayyubid period.

Against this detailed political background, the author then attempts to distinguish the economic indicators of the urban renaissance. Chapter four starts from the almost counter-intuitive assumption that the pre-modern state had a major role to play in the redistributive process through its fiscal policy. In the Saljuq period the *iqṭā'* land fief was famously the basis of the state's fiscal structure, while cash taxes levied for the central treasury played only a subordinate role. The *iqṭā'* is frequently blamed for the decline of agriculture in medieval Iraq, but HEIDEMANN posits that in Syria it actually favoured development as the Saljuq emirs were tied to their land for longer periods and actively promoted tribal settlement and repopulation. In regard to urban taxes, the problem was that Islamic law only sanctions very few or reserves them for specific expenditures. The Saljuq state was thus dependent on commercial excise taxes (principally the *maks*) that were seen as illegitimate by the merchant and '*ulamā'* class. The author again finds a net benefit from these taxes, however, in that they created an interest on the part of the state to protect the caravan trade and forced the Saljuq authorities to devise an actual finance policy.

In the final chapter, the most specialized in its research, HEIDEMANN traces the medieval renaissance through a single phenomenon: the availability of small coin money. More than gold or silver, copper coin is indicative of the complex division of labour in an urban economy. Its value was not determined by its metal content but rather by the demand for a quotidian medium of exchange at the local level. The minting of copper stopped in most Syrian and Mesopotamian towns in the first half of the ninth century. The use of fragments of larger coins, though widespread, was reproved by the religious scholars because the market value sum of the fragments is generally higher than the whole, creating the potential for illegitimate profit. The period under investigation was above all characterized by the circulation of the "black dirham", a heavily alloyed silver coin that took over as the local small currency. With no standard weight, the black dirham could not well be hoarded or used for transregional trade, and it disappeared after the Zangids' financial reforms in the twelfth century. Its career, according to the author, reflects not so much a silver metal famine as claimed by previous scholars as a failure of the state to provide for a base medium of exchange. The Saljuqs were not quick either to introduce monetary reform, but did provide for the greater circulation of trade and money in the region. In addition to Fatimid dinars, large amounts of Byzantine copper coin were actively imported into Syria where the demand for small specie was especially high. By the late twelfth century, these Byzantine copper coins were being struck over by local Saljuq governors or were replaced by new Saljuq coins issued from Mosul, mirroring the return of state monetary control and the beginning of an urban renaissance in the Near East in this time.

The text is not without some minor print errors and flaws; the oft-quoted concepts of the "dimorphic state" (a nomadic-based dynasty also supplying urban government) and "zuwiegen" (the weighing, as opposed to the counting out, of coin) are not defined early enough; the repetition of numerous factual details at times confuses the chronology. Much of this, however, must be ascribed to the layeredness of the analysis, and the reader is helped by the clear and rigorous framework as well as the precise index and extensive notes. Plates of many of the coins mentioned as well as maps and historical photographs of ar-Raqqa complete the study. This meticulously argued and stimulating book confirms HEIDEMANN as one of the preeminent historians of medieval Syria. Its creative use of material evidence, its theoretical acuity and its original focus on the Near East's geographic and political periphery should constitute a model for research in later periods as well.