Van Renterghem Vanessa,
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The social history of the pre-modern and specifically the pre-Mongol Near and Middle East is a difficult field. "Ulemology", as Roy Mottahedeh stated more than forty years ago, "ulemology is a noble science – at least we have to think so – because it is almost all the Islamic social history we will ever have for this period"(1). Some authors over the last years have tried to show that the prospects for studies of other groups are not as bleak as this famous quote suggested; as an example, David Durand-Guédy's book on Iṣfahān should be mentioned(2). The book under review here is another example of what can be achieved beyond a social history of the Muslim scholars.

The main point is in the source base. Whereas earlier studies were based almost exclusively on the biographical dictionary, both Durand-Guédy and Van Renterghem have taken into account a much wider range of source materials, including chronicles and general history and geography. The results are appreciable.

Van Renterghem has collected 2639 individual files on persons who lived in Baghdad in the Seljuq period or who visited for a certain period of time; the procedure of collecting the data is explained at the beginning of the second volume together with the methodological principles for working with the database. Many of these persons were scholars, a majority of them, again, transmitters of *ḥadīth*; but there are also many others: secretaries and viziers, courtiers and medical specialists, concubines and princesses. Therefore, this is a book on elites, not only on learned elites, but on elites in general. The author explains at the beginning of the first volume what she takes "elites" to be: persons with an elevated status in at least one out of several fields, genealogy, wealth, position, respect and so forth. And she makes it clear that not all of the persons whose biographies she has brought together belong to one of the elite groups.

The study (first volume) proceeds in three major steps. In the first part, Van Renterghem presents the different groups, again in three divisions, starting with persons who have a leading position in their community (chapters 2-5), including religious authorities, sufis shaykhs, learned men (and women), in particular transmitters of *ḥadīth*, and legal specialists, muftis, cadis and so forth. The second division (chapters 6-8) is devoted to political elites, viziers, military men, but also poets, concubines and other persons close to the caliph (and the sultan), and finally, the last division (chapter 9) presents what there is to be found about the big traders. The second part treats elite practices and strategies (chapters 10-12); this part addresses the self-presentation, sentiments of belonging to an elite group, and strategies of elite reproduction, including matrimonial alliances, but also teacher-disciple relationships. The third part, called "The elites and the city" (chapters 13-15) comes across as a rather mixed bag. It dresses the topography of elite dwellings, cemeteries and so forth, but also rebellions and social unrest, and last but not least, urbanism and building activities (with elite patronage).

Not surprisingly, the author shows that elites thought and operated in houses. They tried to establish themselves in certain positions and fields on an hereditary basis. But they met with different degrees of success: whereas cadis and in general high officials in the judiciary could hope to survive over more than two generations (the Dāmghānī family held important positions, including the *qāḍī al-quḍāt*, over five generations), this was not the case with other groups such as viziers. Genealogical tables of all important houses are given in the second volume. The author also insists on the difference between legal scholars and transmitters of *ḥadīth*; in a way, she argues in favor of abandoning the category of ulemas as too broad. With the transmitters of traditions, she again introduces an important difference: she separates them into "simple" and "big" transmitters, the difference being that big transmitters have more than twenty recorded hearers who transmitted from them in turn. With the simple transmitters, she presents a group of people who could hardly claim elite status: these were people who came from the middle and lower middle classes, craftsmen and neighborhood traders who perhaps were also muezzins, imams of quarter mosques or held other lower-ranking positions in the religious sphere. There was only partly overlap with the jurists. Jurists are also classified, first according to school of law, and then according to the positions they held. Ḥanbalīs were underrepresented in the court system; being a Ḥanbalī reduced one's chances of getting a position even as a professional

(1) Roy Mottahedeh, Review of Richard Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 95/3 (1975), p. 495.
(2) David Durand-Guédy, *Iranian Elites and Turkish Rulers. A history of Iṣfahān in the Saljūq period*, London, Routledge, 2010.

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witness (*shāhid*) considerably. This was due to the sultans (and also caliphs) who systematically preferred Ḥanafīs and Shāfiʿīs. In the madrasa system, she divides the schools according to longevity (some schools vanished very quickly because the foundations on which they relied for their finances were insufficient) and to prestige; the madrasa was no single institution. It is these differences, among other things, which make Van Renterghem's work a true innovation.

Another important point which impressed me was the spatial dimension. Van Renterghem succeeds in identifying residential patterns, however roughly (no archeological research has yet been conducted in the urban area of present-day Baghdad). The oriental part, the east side of the Tigris, where also the caliph and the sultan had their palaces, emerges as a preferred living area; the most important madrasas were also located there, and a thick cluster forms in the southern part of the area *intra muros*. Lower-ranking persons lived mostly on the west side of the river. The west side also strikes one as being much less densely built (even if Van Renterghem argues against the picture of 12th century Baghdad as a moribund city). Differences, here again: Karkh, one of the main quarters on the west side which is generally taken to be a Shīʿī neighborhood, also was home to a number of staunchly Sunnī, including Ḥanbalī, scholars, to the point that it could be called a mixed space even if the Shīʿī part of the population was larger than in other quarters.

A last point which I want to make concerns social unrest and uprisings. Since the publication of Claude Cahen's *Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du Moyen Âge*(3), the question of the *ʿayyārūn* has occupied specialists. Recently, Deborah Tor has argued that the *ʿayyārūn* were religiously motivated, with a strong link to volunteer fighters in *jihād*; her work concerns eastern Iran mostly, and an earlier period(4). Van Renterghem does not claim that Tor is wrong, but again, she introduces a difference: it may be the case that in eastern Iran (or in Iran in general) in the 9th and 10th centuries, the *ʿayyārūn* were religiously motivated and that for them, the general judgment that they could hardly be distinguished from ordinary bandits, is very much mistaken. But for Baghdad in the Seljuq period, from the mid-11th to the late 12th centuries, Van Renterghem states that the entire population was afraid of them and called for help whomsoever was able to offer support against their tribulations.

This "study in social history" is in fact much more than that. It is a masterly demonstration of what can be done in quantitative history – Van Renterghem uses quantitative methods to a very high degree, but she integrates them into a general structure so that the "qualitative" context never gets lost. The result is a very vivid picture of the Abbasid capital during the period under study. The caliphs and sultans are there, but the elites take central stage. Moreover, besides the elites, Van Renterghem also has remarkable passages on the non-elite majority of the city population. This massive study will remain a work of reference for many years to come.

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(3) Claude Cahen, "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du moyen âge," *Arabica,* vol. 5 (1958), p. 225-50; 6 (1959), p. 25-56 and p. 233-65.

(4) Deborah Tor, *Violent Order: Religious Warfare, Chivalry, and the* ʿAyyār *Phenomenon in the Medieval Islamic World*, Istanbul: Orient-Institut/Würzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2007.

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