Book Review

Jāsim Muḥammad Kaẓim, *Ahl al-dhimmah fī al-mujtamaʿ al-Baghdādī fī al-ʿahdayn al-Buwayhī wa-al-Saljūqī* (Baghdad: Dār al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah, 2013), 327 pages. (Paperback).

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This book belongs to a subfield that has emerged over the past half-century in Arabophone historical scholarship. We might call it "non-Muslim studies." It is first cousin to that historiography which has focused on particular non-Muslim religious communities—usually Jews or Christians—in relation to some period of Islamic history (think of Louis Cheikho's pioneering work on Christian poets, scholars, and state officials, or Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḥamad's *Dawr al-yahūd fī al-ḥaḍārah al-islāmiyyah* [al-Raqqah, 2006]). But "non-Muslim studies" treats non-Muslims trans-communally, usually in their legal personality, as *ahl al-dhimmah*. The subfield is distinctive, too, in that most of its contributors have been Muslims, and have written as such. Its appearance has coincided with that of independent nation-states in the Arab world, in which the political salience of religious identities and religious minorities has been increasingly debated amongst a new Muslim-majority reading public. It has also been invigorated by a growing awareness of European-language historical scholarship, with its longstanding, occasionally antagonistic concern for Christians and Jews "under Islam."

One struggles, in fact, to find Arabic historiography on *ahl al-dhimmah* as such before 1949, when Arthur Stanley Tritton's foundational *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects* first appeared in Arabic translation (*Ahl al-dhimmah fī al-Islām*, tr. Ḥ. Ḥabashī. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī). But since then the studies have followed in quickening succession:

- Qāsim ʿAbduh Qāsim, *Ahl al-dhimmah fī Miṣr al-ʿuṣūr al-wusṭā: dirāsah wathāʾiqiyyah* (Cairo, 1977
- Idem, *Ahl al-dhimma fī Miṣr min al-fatḥ al-islāmī ḥattā nihāyat dawlat al-Mamālīk* (al-Haram, 2003)
- Sallām Shāfiʿī Maḥmūd, *Ahl al-dhimmah fī Miṣr fī al-ʿaṣr al-Fāṭimī*

al-thānī wa-al-ʿaṣr al-Ayyūbī (Cairo, 1982

- Idem, *Ahl al-dhimmah fī Miṣr fī al-ʿaṣr al-Fāṭimī al-awwal* (Cairo, 1995
- Tawfīq Sulṭān Yūzbakī, *Tārīkh ahl al-dhimmah fī al-ʿIrāq, 12–247* (Riyadh, 1983)
- Shafīq Yamūt, *Ahl al-dhimmah fī mukhtalif aṭwārihim wa-ʿuṣūrihim* (Beirut, 1991)
- Sayyidah Ismāʿīl Kāshif, *Miṣr al-islāmiyyah wa-ahl al-dhimmah* (Cairo, 1993)
- Ḥasan al-Mimmī, *Ahl al-dhimmah fī al-ḥaḍārahal-islāmiyyah*(Beirut,1998)

The subfield continues to flourish in the new millennium:

- Fāṭimah Muṣṭafā ʿAmir, *Tārīkh ahl al-dhimmah fī Miṣr al-Islāmiyyah min al-fatḥ al-ʿArabī ḥattā nihāyat al-ʿaṣr al-Fāṭimī, 2v.* (Cairo, 2000)
- Yaḥyā Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Hādī Ḥusayn, *Ahl al-dhimmah fī al-ʿIrāq fī al-ʿaṣr al-ʿAbbāsī: al-fatrah al-Saljūqiyyah namūdhajan (447–590/1055–1194)* (Irbid, 2004)
- Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Hādī Sharīf, *Aḥwāl ghayr al-muslimīn fī bilād al-Shām ḥattā nihāyat al-ʿaṣr al-Umawī* (Amman, 2007)
- Wasan Ḥusayn Muḥaymīd Ghurayrī, *Ahl al-dhimmah fī al-ʿaṣr al-ʿAbbāsī: dirāsah fī awḍāʿihim al-ijtimāʿiyyah wa-al-iqtiṣadiyyah* (Baghdad, 2009)
- Banāz Ismāʿīl ʿAdū, *Ahl al-dhimma fī bilād al-Kurd fī al-ʿaṣr al-ʿAbbāsī, 132–447/749–1055: dirāsah tārīkhiyyah taḥlīliyyah* (Irbil, 2011)
- Muḥammad al-Amīn Wuld Ān, *Ahl al-dhimmah bi-al-Andalus fī ẓill al-dawlah al-Umawiyyah, 138–422/755–1031* (Damascus, 2011)
- ʿAlī Fulayḥ ʿAbdallāh al-Ṣumaydiʿī, *Ahl al-dhimmah fī al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā min al-fatḥ al-Islāmī ḥattā nihāyat dawlat al-Muwaḥḥidīn* (Amman, 2014)

We may conclude this brief, inexhaustive survey with a 2005 Zagazig University dissertation — fittingly, by one of Qāsim's students— Zaynab ʿAbdallāh Aḥmad Karīr's *Ahl al-dhimma fī al-ʿahd al-Ḥafṣī (626-982/1228–1574)*. This is to say nothing of the steady flow of studies concerned with specific religious communities or sects, or more narrowly with Islamic law as it related historically to non-Muslims (construed as *ahl al-dhimmah*). European-language scholarship has engaged much less with the Arabophone subfield of non-Muslim studies than the works that comprise the subfield have done with it, which is to say, very little indeed.

Jāsim Muḥammad Kaẓim's study sets out to fill a geographical and chronological gap in this literature: Baghdad in the Būyid and Saljūq periods, including the interlude between the demise of Saljūq rule and the Mongol sack of the city (so, ca. 334–656/945–1258). The book is divided into four thematic chapters (*fuṣūl*). The first surveys the history of non-Muslims (*al-dhimmiyyūn*) in Baghdad prior to the Būyid period, while the remaining three cover aspects of non-Muslims' history in the period under study. There is a thorough introduction and a brief conclusion. Lastly, the author provides seven appendices: four diplomas of investiture from an Abbasid caliph to a Christian or Jewish communal leader (three Nestorian *katholikoi* and

a Jewish head of the yeshiva), from published sources, and three family trees: of the Bukhtīshūᶜ dynasty of doctors and the Sabian Qurrah and Zahrūn secretarial clans. The latter are helpful enough, the former less so, as they offer no critical apparatus whatsoever. I shall briefly review each major division of the book in its turn, then conclude with some general observations.

The introductory section is in two parts: prologue (*muqaddimah*) and introduction (*tamhīd*). The prologue outlines the book's rationale, approach, structure, and major sources. The author does not conceal his preference for the Abbasid caliphs' rule over that of the "foreign" Būyids and Saljūqs. He is also eager to highlight the salutary diversity that characterized Islamic society in the period under study. To do this, he engages in what he calls "social history," which earns its name by being attuned to all aspects of non-Muslims' participation (in effect, that of Christians, Jews, and Sabians, since Zoroastrians are evidently all but invisible in the sources) in the society of Baghdad. The book's sources, both primary and secondary, are almost all in Arabic. All will be known to the specialist. It is worth noting that the author has exhaustively combed Ibn al-Jawzī's *Muntaẓam*, a valuable service; that he uses the works of non-Muslim writers such as Bar Hebraeus, Mārī b. Sulaymān, and Benjamin of Tudela; and that he is cognizant of some European-language scholarship, principally the work of Tritton and (crucially) J.-M. Fiey. The introduction that next follows presents a standard political history of the period under study, concentrating on the Abbasid caliphs. It is evident in these introductory portions of the book that the author will take a critical approach to some of his sources—such as the works of al-Dhahabī ("extreme" in his views on non-Muslims) and Ibn al-Athīr (too fulsome in praising the late Abbasids)—but not to those for Islam's formative period, and that he has consulted a very wide range of sources beyond the main ones identified in the prologue.

Though the title of the first chapter promises a study of non-Muslims in Baghdad before the Būyids, this is the subject only of its second and final section (*mabḥath*). The first section is a survey of the juristic notion of *ahl al-dhimmah* and the financial obligations of *dhimmis*. It is in this first section that the author's sanguine and ahistorical approach to the early Islamic period is most apparent, and with it the implicit deference to Islamic law that characterizes much of the subfield of "non-Muslim studies" outlined above. Non-Muslim communities and the individuals that comprised them apparently sprang into existence at the precise moment that they concluded the all-important pact with the Muslims, whence flowed the static, divinely ordained *dhimmah* institution that regulated their subsequent lives ("the Qurʾān makes numerous references to *dhimmīs*" [46]; "the wisdom behind this divine legislation… was to create a wide arena for mixing with Muslims, thereby to facilitate their conversion to Islam. The goal was certainly not to amass money" [47]). The presentation of the *dhimmah* arrangement here is highly schematic and idealized. Fortunately, the author soon recovers his critical faculties, but it must be borne in mind that the entire historical investigation is framed by reference to persistent personal-status categories

devised by premodern Muslim jurists.

The picture of pre-Būyid Baghdad presented in the second section would fit well in a modern *faḍāʾil* work in its glowing descriptions of economic flourishing coupled with the caliphs' boundless tolerance and leniency, but this rhetoric, too, gives way soon enough to a well-informed treatment of the major phases in the life of non-Muslims in Baghdad before 334/945. The highlights are all here, including basic introductions to the major religious communities; the discriminatory decrees under al-Rashīd, al-Mutawakkil, and al-Muqtadir; the hotly contested employment of non-Muslims in administration; and their participation in many cultural arenas. The larger picture that emerges is of a thoroughly integrated, multi-religious society in which Muslims formed the ruling class but, apart from enforcing persistent minor disabilities such as the *jizyah*, only tighten the screws on non-Muslims under anomalous circumstances.

The second chapter studies state policy toward the non-Muslims of Baghdad in the period under examination, under the headings of their "rights and obligations"; the state's treatment of them; and their communal leaders' dealings with the state. The bulk of the section on "rights and obligations" uses diplomas of investiture issued by the Abbasid state to communal leaders to flesh out the boundaries of peaceful cooperation. We then get the author's catalog of non-Muslims' "rights" (e.g., legal autonomy, limited freedom of worship, and state employment, the last of which is misleading) and "obligations" (e.g., respect for Islamic symbols, concealment of Islamic taboos like pork and alcoholic drinks). We find out about the riots that could ensue if those obligations were not met, which the author blames on the urban rabble, not the *dhimmah* arrangement itself. In the author's view (85) the significance of the distinctive dress sometimes imposed on non-Muslims (*ghiyār*) evolved gradually until the Būyid period, when it settled in as a means of punitive and extortionate state discrimination.

The state's treatment of non-Muslims, meanwhile, turns out to be far from a top-down affair. Rather, for the author it is a ceaselessly evolving story of shifting alliances and conflicts among caliphs, Būyid and Saljūq military men, Muslim and non-Muslim high administrative officials, the urban populace, and influential Muslim scholars. The *dhimmah* discourse is deployed alongside other discursive registers as a weapon in this unending struggle. This is a richly documented discussion with many colorful and little-known anecdotal examples. Most of the harsher repression is blamed by the author on the urban masses and the scholars, whom he refers to as "jurists" (*fuqahaʾ*) and who allegedly envied the high social and economic standing of certain non-Muslims. This argument is convincing, and reassuringly distant from the wooden conception of Islamic law that clogged the book's earlier sections. The chapter concludes with a survey of how the state interfaced with the leaders of non-Muslim communities. Specialists will find relatively little new in this final survey. The treatment is competent but thinly documented, as it makes little use of non-Arabic sources, European-language scholarship, or new Arabic sources beyond the well-known information of Ibn al-Sāʿī and al-Qalqashandī on the subject.

The third chapter is perhaps the book's richest. Covering the social, economic, and political conditions of non-Muslims in Baghdad, it is divided into three sections—on "the relationship between *ahl al-dhimmah* and the society of Baghdad," non-Muslims' occupations, and their political and economic roles—but these tend to bleed together. We get a reasonably thorough tour of the urban topography of Baghdad and the religious makeup of its inhabitants (without a good map, unfortunately), a survey of the city's churches and monasteries, and anecdotal evidence of how non-elite Muslims and non-Muslims got along. The author claims (147) that Christians mixed far more freely with Muslims than did Jews, who were (as he repeatedly states, without compelling justification) a community turned in upon itself. The sources for all this are uneven; some anecdotes are richly documented from primary sources like the *Muntaẓam* or the Nestorian Christian Mārī b. Sulaymān's *Kitāb al-majdal*, but too often the author falls back on Arabic translations of European-language secondary sources, like Adam Metz's *The Renaissance of Islam* (dated) and Richard Coke's 1927 *Baghdad: The City of Peace* (dubious). One particularly spotty passage (157) blames "Christian armies" that, under Mongol command, sacked Baghdad in 1258—an exaggeration, to say the least. Nevertheless, the author successfully shows that economic and political motives underlay much of the recorded animosity toward non-Muslims in the period (160). This applied especially to non-Muslim officials, who are treated next, in a lengthy and well-researched section that collects a wealth of material that will be new to many specialists. Time and again we see Muslim jurists, competing with non-Muslim officials for prestige and influence, rouse urban Baghdādīs against their adversaries. Yet the chapter's final section, on non-Muslims' economic and political roles, disappoints. Too reliant on secondary sources, it briskly surveys non-Muslims' involvement in certain famous intrigues and occupations, notably trade. The highlight is a fascinating (though abortive) "strike" against the imposition of the *ghiyār* that Ibn al-Jawzī reports for the year 450/1057; all the Jews and Christians of Baghdad were to stay home in protest. This incident deserves careful study, but does not receive it here.

The fourth and final chapter attempts to present a picture of non-Muslims' intellectual life in Baghdad. Since the author is so heavily dependent on Arabic sources and secondary literature of uneven quality, it natural that this chapter is the book's weakest. The account of Arabization after the conquests, for instance, is so truncated as to be useless, reliant as it is on antiquated European scholarship in translation (Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes' 1921 *Les institutions musulmanes*) and questionable assertions in more recent Arabic-language works (Suhayl Qāshā's authority is invoked for the claim that "it was the tolerance of the Arab Muslims that led to the spread of Arabic" [197]). Lacking access to Aramaic, Hebrew, and Judeo-Arabic sources, or recent scholarship on them, the author has not moved beyond the accounts—primarily of non-Muslim educational institutions—that are available in those Arabic secondary sources on which he depended most heavily. When he arrives at non-Muslim doctors and translators, however, the Arabic primary sources come

online once again, and the treatment is accordingly rich, though it amounts to little more than a prosopography derived from the biographical dictionaries of Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿah, al-Qifṭī, and other such authors. As such the chapter could be a useful resource for modern historians—who will enjoy such anecdotes as that of the Christian doctor Ibn al-Tilmīdh (d. 560/1164), whose house adjoined the Niẓāmiyyah *madrasah* and who did brisk business treating Muslim jurists (239)—but adds little value to the material it assembles. The non-Muslim learned men treated in the chapter's final section—on non-Muslim philosophers, natural scientists, and littérateurs—are mostly doctors, too, and much of the material about their lives is drawn from the same biographical dictionaries. That which comes from elsewhere, particularly Arabic poetry composed by such men, is chiefly from secondary sources, such as the works of Louis Cheikho. The specifically religious intellectual activities of Baghdad's non-Muslims are glaringly absent.

Nevertheless, several of the conclusions presented in the book's succinct conclusion are astute, particularly the observation that instances of conflict that ostensibly took place between members of different religious communities were usually rooted in factors beyond the ideological. Given the general neglect of Arabophone "non-Muslim studies" by scholars working in European languages, one would like to report that the subfield, to which this book belongs, has a great deal to offer. That claim would not be wholly untrue; the present volume unites much material that was previously quarantined in confessional silos and scours the Arabic literary sources with unprecedented care, bringing new or long-forgotten anecdotes to light and curating it with real skill. Readers of this journal stand to gain by building on its advances in these respects, and they should read those sections that pertain to their interests. Moreover, one is grateful for such a measured contribution to Arabophone scholarship in these dark days of intercommunal strife in Iraq and Syria; it cannot have been easy to research and write the book under such conditions. Yet it must be said that in many respects the book falls short of the reader's hopes: in the stiffly juristic framing of its subject; in its too-frequent reliance on modern studies of irregular quality; in its blithe disregard for sources in languages other than Arabic; in its preference for surveying a set topic, however general and scantily documented, rather than following where the surviving sources lead. Yet instead of continuing to ignore "non-Muslim studies" because of such reservations, we should engage with it, for its strengths, and to bridge the gulf that still separates its practitioners from our own traditions of scholarship, to our mutual disadvantage.