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**EUGÉNIE RÉBILLARD, *Imposer l'ordre. La police dans les villes et les campagnes de l'Iraq abbasside (132–334/750–945)*, Presses de l'Ifpo, Beyrouth 2024 [= *Études arabes, médiévales et modernes*, 306], pp. 724, <https://doi.org/10.4000/13m0h>**

The presented monograph is a discussion of the issue of legitimizing the power of the state in the form of police units (*shurta*) organized by the Abbasid dynasty in Iraq in the years 750–945. The monograph is the result of work on a doctoral thesis entitled *Imposing Order and Law. The Shurta in Abbasid Iraq*, written at the University of Paris Panthéon-Sorbonne under the supervision of Sylvie Denoix and Mathieu Tillier. The author is also associated with the Institut Français du Proche-Orient. She has been researching the subject of this monograph since at least 2017<sup>1</sup>.

In the introduction (p. 5–24) the author presents theoretical issues related to the issue of appropriately defining what the police actually is. The police combine both military and political functions. It is an instrument for applying legal norms imposed by a given authority, but at the same time it is used by adapting legal norms to various social, economic, or legal changes. The police is a repressive institution, but it operates within the framework of conditions in which the authorities must sometimes adapt to both the demands of society and the

common understanding of what justice is. The author concludes: *es pratiques policières (maintien de l'ordre, sanction des contrevenants à la norme juridique et au pouvoir politique...) pouvaient être discutées et négociées entre les différents acteurs étatiques et les membres de la société. On envisagera donc l'action de la police comme un processus en recomposition permanente, "toujours en train de se faire et s'inventer"*. The presented work should therefore be treated not so much as a purely historical treatise relating to police activities, but at the same time a certain monograph discussing theoretical issues, an attempt to answer the question of what the police actually is and its social role, based on considerations concerning the Abbasid period. The introduction also discusses the achievements of historiography to date relating to the functioning of police units in the early Muslim state by authors such as Fred Donner<sup>2</sup>, Hugh Kennedy<sup>3</sup>, and Claude Cahen<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> E. RÉBILLARD, « *Des gens suspects* ». *La construction des figures criminelles dans l'Iraq abbasside (IX<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, *Hyp* 1(20), 2017, p. 189–198; EADEM, *Solidariétés familiales et réseaux à l'épreuve dans la police califale abbasside*, [in:] *Sociétés en réseaux dans le monde musulman médiéval*, ed. S. DENOIX, Reims 2017, p. 44–52.

<sup>2</sup> F. DONNER, *The Shurta in Early Umayyad Syria*, [in:] *Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symposium of the History of Bilād al-Shām in the Umayyad Period*, ed. M.A. BAKHIT, R. SCHICK, Amman 1989, p. 247–262.

<sup>3</sup> H. KENNEDY, *Central Government and Provincial Elites in the Early 'Abbāsīd Caliphate*, *BSOAS* 44.1, 1981, p. 26–38.

<sup>4</sup> C. CAHEN, *Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du Moyen âge*, I, *Ara* 5.3, 1958, p. 225–250; IDEM, *Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du Moyen*



The content of the book is divided into three parts, which are preceded by a study of source materials, such as the chronicles of Ḥalifa b. Ḥayyāt, al-Ṭabarī, al-Ya'qūbī, *Murūǧ al-Dahab* al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-Awrāq* Abū Bakr al-Šūlī, *Ta'riḥ Baǧdād* Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, books of Ibn al-Ġawzī, Ibn al-Aṭīr, al-Dahabī, and Ibn Kaṭīr, a list of police chiefs *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, a biographical dictionary, legal works, administrative treatises, office manuals, manuals of good governance for rulers, etc. The monograph includes, among others, previously unpublished sources, such as an anonymous manuscript *Risālat siyāsāt al-mulūk* preserved in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul, containing an entire section dedicated to the police chief (šāhib al-šurṭa), their subordinate agents, the heads of the rural police (ma'āwin), muḥtasiba, and even secretaries working in numerous dīwān, or the act of appointing the chief of police in Wāsiṭ, dated to the mid-4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century (p. 25–77). An important part of the chapter is an attempt to establish all the information concerning the mentioned manuscript *Risālat siyāsāt al-mulūk*, with particular emphasis on the issue of its dating.

The first part, on the administration of police departments, contains four chapters, relating first to the functioning of the police in the times of the rightly-guided caliphs and the Umayyads (p. 83–119). The parts of the text in which the author presents the issues of a certain kind of projection on the past described in the chronicles of the Abbasid times, whose authors try to present the “antiquity” of the beginnings of police institutions, using for this purpose, for example, the figure of Umar ibn al-Khattab, should be considered important. This is, of course, similar to other tendencies of Muslim historiography, such as in the case of *ma-salahy*, the common good, the concept of which, although fully defined only in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, has traditionally been attributed to Umar ibn al-Khattab<sup>5</sup>, or referring to the authority of Umar

ibn al-Khattab when restrictions on Christians studying Muslim scriptures were introduced later, most likely in the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>. While acknowledging that the šurṭa was created in the form that later existed in the Abbasid times in the Umayyad period, at the turn of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, the author of the monograph also points out that both in terms of the functioning of the police and judicial activities, it should be recognized that this was a phase of early development, and legal reflection itself was at a very early stage – *en était à ses balbutiements*. The author discusses in this chapter, among others, the emergence of provincial police units, especially in Iraq, their recruitment process, the issue of distinguishing ḥaras and šurṭa, the competences and image of police units, as well as their tasks towards Christians and Jews. In the next part, the author of the study discusses the methods of delegating responsibility and the criteria for selecting the heads of police departments in Baghdad and Samarra in the years 750–945 (p. 121–186). Insightful statistical data is presented regarding the origin of individual šāhib al-šurṭa – both those directly representing individual tribes inhabiting Iraq in the early period of Abbasid rule, and those later deriving from the *mawla*. Based on these data, it is possible to formulate conclusions that undermine the old theses about the Iranization of any Abbasid elites – for the first hundred years of this dynasty's rule, we are rather dealing with the maintenance of the earlier Arabization. The issue of preparation, primarily military, for the functions performed was also discussed. In her research, the results of which were also presented in the form of graphics and tables, the author analyzed the prosopographic data of over sixty people who held the position of šāhib al-šurṭa. The third chapter discusses the relationship between the authorities operating in the capital of the Abbasid Empire and the Iraqi province and the police units located there (p. 187–233). In this part we can also read some

âge, II, Ara 6.1, 1959, p. 25–56; IDEM, *Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du Moyen âge*, III, Ara 6.3, 1959, p. 233–265.

<sup>5</sup> K. GÓRAK-SOSNOWSKA, *W imię dobra wspólnego. Masłaha w muzułmańskim prawie i polityce*, HiP 19(26), 2017, p. 9–23.

<sup>6</sup> C. WILDE, 'We shall neither learn the Qur'ān nor teach it to our children'. *The Covenant of 'Umar on Learning*, [in:] *The Place to Go. Contexts of Learning in Baghdad, 750–1000 C.E.*, ed. J. SCHEINER, D. JANOS, Princeton 2014 [= SLAEI], p. 237–266.

rather surprising conclusions – although Iraq was the centre of power for the new dynasty, the data on the heads of police units in cities in the south of the province such as Kufa, Basra and Wasit are much less precise and extensive than those that have been preserved for the same centres for the Umayyad times. Based on the available data, the author convincingly argues that the policy of the early Abbasids regarding the recruitment of local police chiefs was in fact a continuation of the Umayyad policy of favouring members of the local tribal elites inhabiting southern Iraq. However, due to the change of the center of power, which was much closer to these regions than Damascus, there was a centralization in the context of the center deciding on filling police positions in Iraq – the caliph, and not the governor, issued such decisions directly. The fourth chapter (p. 235–296) discusses the career strategies of individual police chiefs, focusing primarily on the issue of maintaining a balance between the power of the ruler and the independence aspirations of individual police officials, both in the capital and in the provinces. Based on the careers of *ṣāhib al-šurṭa* who held their positions in the capital cities of Baghdad and Samarra, the author was able to outline a typical career path for a police official.

In the second part of the study, the author addresses the issue of the place of the police in the structure of society and its interactions with the population. Chapter 5 is an analysis of the development of the police both in the capital and in the Iraqi provinces, with particular emphasis on the specialization of individual lower-ranking officers and *šurṭa* agents and their tasks, or the local, neighborhood police headed by *ṣāhib al-rab'*, as well as the development of the network of institutions subordinate to the police chief both in the capital cities and in the Iraqi provinces: police stations, prisons, and places of execution (p. 301–355). The text has been enriched with detailed maps showing places related to the justice system in Baghdad and the Iraqi province. The process of networking the police organization in Iraq resembles in a way the regular internal conquest of the lands formally subject to the caliphs – by covering them with an increasingly dense network

of posts and institutions related to the administration of justice in the provinces. One of the elements of such a message – emphasizing the importance of power – was the characteristic monumentality of police buildings, whether posts or prisons, large buildings surrounded by high walls. In Chapter 6, the author discusses detailed examples of police activities in the field of disciplining society, understood as the apparatus of repression and prevention (p. 357–425). The tasks of the police include participation in the process of collecting taxes, controlling population flows, and organizing municipal night guards. Chapter six also discusses issues related to the origin, number, recruitment principles, and internal control of junior police officers, who had the most frequent contact with residents and whose activities were the basis for the everyday functionality of the police. In the scope of the topic of tasks related to prevention, the issues of police intelligence, informant networks, and information preserved in sources about particularly criminogenic places on the maps of larger cities of Abbasid Iraq were also discussed. The author notes certain pathologies related to the ambitions of some police chiefs, whether related to having as much power as possible or the desire to enrich themselves, which led to the use of the tax system for abuses, on the one hand exploiting the population, and on the other leading to the impoverishment of the state treasury. The particular interest of the central authorities in implementing preventive and intelligence activities reflects the authorities' concerns about maintaining order in the context of constant unrest, rebellions and the emergence of organizations that called for the non-recognition of authority – whether that of the caliph or his officials. The author devoted the seventh chapter to discussing the methods of society's response to police actions (p. 427–468). The issue of lynching and the reaction to it in terms of competition for a monopoly on the use of law and violence has been analyzed in detail. The author also presents situations of cooperation between society and the police, both individually – such as informing about dangerous situations and denouncing criminals and organizing volunteer patrols in particularly difficult situations.

Strategies of resistance to the police have also been discussed, both hidden forms of protest, complaints, and open rebellions against the police forces. Moreover, in this chapter, the author emphasizes that at some point, after the fourth fitna and the fall of al-Amin, there were problems with restoring the authority of the police in Iraq. This process was not helped by the mafia-like practices of the chiefs and high-ranking police officers, e.g. regarding tax collection, the brutality of punishments, various kinds of injustices committed by lower officers, or their relations with various social groups officially marginalized by the central authorities – all this led to opposition to the authorities, with rebellions as the final form.

The third part of the book deals with the relations between the police and the justice system, courts, and other legal institutions. Chapter eight deals with the role of the police in conducting criminal investigations, but also its relations with the judicial apparatus of the Abbasid state (p. 473–511). Analyzing narrative sources, as well as administrative manuals, or *Risālat siyāsat al-mulūk*, the author discusses criminal procedures implemented by the police. Due to the brevity of many of these references, it was necessary to discuss the methods of analysis used in this chapter. First, she notes that police procedures were not as formalized in comparison to judicial institutions: the author discusses the issue of the procedure for receiving information about a crime by police officers, elements of the investigation, interrogations, and confrontations of witness testimonies. Second, however, tracing information on police activities in the field of justice and the functioning of the general administration allows for drawing conclusions about the progressive bureaucratization of the Abbasid state. Part of the chapter is therefore devoted to the issue of procedures for archiving documents, whether concerning the investigation itself, the sentences passed, or those relating to the functioning of the prison apparatus. In the context of the relationship between the police and the justice system, one can see the reaction of the latter to the arbitrariness of the police officers, which was quite often criticized by lawyers.

This attitude of representatives of the justice system towards the police authorities may also be an expression of the process of a certain independence of judicial institutions, or of the qadi from the direct authority of the caliph, striving towards autonomy. Chapter nine, on the other hand, concerns the issue of the implementation of penalties by police officers, including the presentation of a catalogue of example penalties in the sources (p. 513–583). The author clearly emphasizes that this topic could be the subject of a separate, extensive treatise, which is why she had to limit herself to discussing the basic problems, without an extensive description of this topic in this book. The implementation of punishment, preparation for its implementation, and strategies for using institutional violence against the population were also the subject of considerations by numerous legal authors of the Abbasid times – the study of this source material allows us to determine to what extent the actions of the police were approved and to what extent they were criticized.

In summary, the presented monograph is a fairly comprehensive discussion of the place of the police in the system of power of the Abbasid state. An important element of the book is the presentation of conclusions resulting from the analysis of the unpublished document *Risālat siyāsat al-mulūk*, which allowed for the presentation of the actions of anonymous people – police officers who took part in everyday police actions. Thanks to this, the previous perspective has changed, dominated by narrative sources in which the figures of the heads of entire, state-wide or Baghdad police structures, led by, for example, the Tahirids, dominate. At the same time, the analysis presented in the book allows for a better understanding of the causes of the crisis of the Abbasid statehood in the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries and the impact of the collapse of central structures on the everyday life of the caliph's subjects, increasingly harassed not only by various groups of influence not necessarily recognizing the authority of the Abbasids, but also by representatives of formally state institutions, which the rulers used for their own interests.

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