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Reviews

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BETWEEN RIOTS AND NEGOTIATIONS



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EB-Verlag Nov 2012, 2012. Taschenbuch. Condition: Neu. Neuware - Most political histories of the Mamluk regime which ruled Egypt and Syria focus on the roles of the Sultans and Mamluk officers. When the non-elite are mentioned in the discussion of Mamluk politics, they remain a footnote to the larger drama, implying that the options available to them were restricted to violence or impotence. This article takes issue with this generalization and argues there was a role for the non-elite. One aspect of popular political participation, especially in urban centres, that is more evident in the sources is protest. The reports that survive suggest a more nuanced balance of power that involves a spectrum of urban protest from riots to negotiations. Despite the absence of formal institutions managing this participation, the non-elite of Cairo, Damiette, Damascus and Aleppo 'interfered' in the political process to safeguard what they believed to be their interest or customary rights and to right what they perceived as wrongs committed against them, acting as checks of sorts on the political process. The surviving reports of protest in Egyptian and Syrian cities indicate that negotiation was an integral part of daily politics. They also allow us to put a human dimension to the transition processes that Egypt and Syria were undergoing in the late middle ages, and to link the micro-history with the macro-history to better appreciate the challenges that the Mamluk order was facing. As a new world-system centered in Europe was developing in the 14th century, trade routes and the economic balance of power were shifting against the Mamluk regime's interests. This, in addition to competition in the region and the devastating effects of the recurrent waves of plague, left the Mamluk state in financial difficulties. Many of the policies the regime resorted to in order...

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