

# The Breaking of a Thousand Swords

A History of the Turkish Military of Samarra (A.H. 200-275/815-889 C.E.)

Matthew S. Gordon

*The Breaking of a Thousand Swords* provides a portrait of the Samaritan Turks as members of a community with a specific and complex history in the early medieval Islamic world. It considers: the encounter of the Turks as rough, non-Muslim outsiders, with the sedentary, urbane world of Baghdad; the closely related encounter of the Turks with the Islamic tradition in its urban, scholarly guise; the settlement of the Turks, in Baghdad then in Samarra, through the use of land grants and appointments to office; the impact upon the affairs of the Turkish community of not only a military ranking but of a socio-political hierarchy as well; the construction by the Turkish elite of an elaborate network of patronage and support, both within urban Iraq and throughout the provinces (Egypt in particular); and the emergence, and impact, of factionalism within the community.

“This book fills a crucial gap in the study of the early Islamic caliphate. Gordon weaves together the first complete political history of the Samarra caliphate, and as such places the subject within the mainstream of academic study and within reach of the general reader. Although focused on Samarra, the book has broader implications, especially in the way it addresses questions that relate to military-slave systems and their effect on state institutions. Gordon’s treatment will occupy a special place in the debate over the origins of this institution, and will engage scholars ranging from Islamic historians working on the later medieval period to specialists on Turkish history in general.”

— Tayeb El-Hibri, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

“Gordon for the first time tries to understand the internal society of the Turks and how they fitted into the society around them. The book is full of information and insights.”

— Michael L. Bates, Curator of Islamic Coins, American Numismatic Society

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