Persian poet Abū Manṣūr (or Abū Naṣr) ʿAlī b. Aḥmad Asadī Ṭūsī (3:820-29). The 65-page entry on Baghdad (4:91-155) and 58-page entry on Baṣra (4:507-64), both conceived on a grand scale *à la Tārīkh Baghdād* and *Tārīkh Dimashq*, provide a breathtaking panoramic view of these two historic cities. They are both rich in history and intellectual thought and extensive bibliographies cover almost all facets of public life. Yet while subthemes like "Literature, Religious Sciences, and History of Science" of these cities do provide glimpses of their intellectual life, they are neither complete developments nor comprehensive enough to grant the reader insight into the cities' intellectual milieu and historical contributions. The mere mention of al-Ṭabarī's monumental *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* in half a sentence does not yield much regarding what went on in the city with reference to Qurʾān commentary. Perhaps the editors wanted to replicate what happened in Kūfa with reference to law (the section begins, "Although Baghdad never produced its own school of Qurʾān commentary…") (4:115a).

Printed on coated paper, the five volumes so far published are an impressive achievement both in production as well as in scholarship related to Persian themes. Each of the volumes published so far comprises approximately 900 pages. The publications' font size and style as well as line spacing are superior to *EI2*, while its bibliographies follow the same user-unfriendly format, and do not adhere to alphabetical order. Typography could have been improved by making the entry-headers more distinct; currently, the new entry titles (in bold) are barely distinguishable from running text. The entries could have been more carefully divided between volumes. Volume three, for instance, has only three short entries under letter "B", which could have been moved to the next volume. Another overall feature is the placement of illustrations at the end of the volume. The rationale seems to be cost of color printing when it is spread throughout the text, but the alternate with no additional cost (black and white illustrations within the entries) could better illustrate the text, as is finally done in an entry of volume 5.

Yashab Tur
Center for Islamic Sciences

ʿUthmān ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nābulusī • *Sword of Ambition: Bureaucratic Rivalry in Medieval Egypt* • Edited and translated by Luke Yarbrough • New York: NYU Press, 2016 • ISBN: 9781479889457 • HB • pp. xliv + 266

This admirable translation of T*ajrīd sayf al-himmah li-stikhrāj mā fī dhimmat al-dhimmmah* (*Unshething Ambition's Sword to Extract What the Dhimmis Hoard*) by "an unemployed Egyptian scholar and former bureaucrat", ʿUthmān ibn Ibrāhīm

al-Nābulusī (d. 660/1262), is an amazing narrative that combines erudition, poetry, belles lettres, history, law, and anecdotal accounts into a compelling work that champions the cause of hiring only Muslims, and not the Jews or Christians, as state bureaucrats. In marshalling his arguments, al-Nābulusī uses all the resources at his disposal—from sacred law to social history, from witty poetry to tribal stories, and from sincere advice to invoking the highest Afterlife scenarios. This bi-lingual edition in the now fully established Library of Arabic Literature Series by New York University Press is one of the best translations published in the series. The book includes a 2-page "Foreword" by Sherman ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Jackson, who describes it as "a social polemic packaged in the language of Islamic law," and a perceptive "Introduction" by the editor/translator, Luke Yarbrough, who is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Saint Louis University.

ʿUthmān ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nābulusī apparently wrote the work under compelling personal circumstances, which he mentions in the section with which he ends the book: "I swear to God, be He glorified, that three things alone led me to write this. The first is my zeal for "God's wealth," which is the Muslims' provision and the treasure of the adherents of their religion. The second is my love for the reign of our lord the sultan, may God make his rule everlasting, for I believe it to be incumbent upon me and upon every Muslim to offer sincere advice to his highness. The third is the excessive wealth of these Copts, which I have beheld with my own eyes…I, by contrast, have been appointed overseer in major offices…In the course of all these appointments I sold the possessions in Syria that I inherited form my father…I spent all of it on clothing, riding animals, and servants. I became burdened by a family that grew to include fifty-two persons: children, grandchildren, and wives. Neither they nor I have any stipend in the world, nor any source from which so much as a single silver coin might come to us (or less, let alone more). We scrape by on the income from an endowment that my father made for us, God show him mercy. Most of it is in ruins, since we lack the means to maintain it" (p. 189).

This quote, showing both the reason for the composition of the work, as well as the fluidity of translation, also indicate how al-Nābulusī marshals several reasons for his cause. This is typical of the work which also sheds light on the vast trove of knowledge from which al-Nābulusī was able to draw. His dire circumstances notwithstanding, he remains witty to the end: "I have fallen into that state that a poet describes: *I live by such provision that, were it tears// the corners of the eye would never be damp*" (p. 191).

The translation follows all the academic norms without sacrificing readability. It is based on four manuscripts and variants are noted in endnotes. As indicated by the translator, the original Arabic "alternates among registers of formality and sophistication, from poetry of considerable complexity, to

humorous and ribald tales, to occasional phrases that betray colloquial influence and apparently represent direct speech" (p. xxxvi). Yarbrough attempts to follow the fluctuating tenor of the original and admirably succeeds. In the dramatic scene of al-Mutawakkil's pilgrimage where his guards spot a bareheaded man circumambulating the House, cursing al-Mutawakkil, the dialogue is translated in terse, running prose. When the man is seized and brought to the caliph, he says: "By God, Commander of the Believers, I said what I did in full certainty that I would be killed for it. So listen to what I have to say, then command my execution." "Speak," al-Mutawakkil said, and the man said, "Commander of the Believers, the dhimmi secretaries have beset your state on every side. They have chosen the best for themselves, purchasing this world for themselves at the cost of your lot in the next. It is you who will be called to account for the wrongs they commit, and not the reverse. I pray you, do not improve their lot in this world by ruining your lot in the next. For there is no one who will be a greater loser on the Day of Resurrection than the person who improves someone else's lot in this world at the expense of his own lot in the next one." At this al-Mutawakkil wept audibly and called for the man who had told him these things, but he was not to be found" (p. 43).

The Sword of Ambition is not an ambitious translation project, but the value of the work is precisely in its rather limited scope: it brings to the English readership an inside account of a bygone era through the pen of a participating member who has a case to make and benefits to harvest during a time when all kinds of social and political currents were reforming state structure in Egypt. The bureaucrat-cum-writer has an existential need to improve his own circumstances and a self-assumed religious duty to perform. He combines vivid personal testimonies with his considerable Islamic learning, anecdotal history with solid arguments and witty couplets with fictional and factual narratives to present his case.

Arabic typeface is clear, like all other publications in the Series and the English text on the facing page can be easily compared to the original Arabic. This is one of the best features of this bi-lingual series. It provides scholars a ready reference and for general readers, a flowing English text, unencumbered by footnotes, which are at the end of the text. A glossary of names and terms and bibliography further enhance the scholarly value of the translation.

Yashab Tur
Center for Islamic Sciences