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Elite Circulation in Intra-Religious Shiʿi Relations in Qom (94–220 AH)

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Abstract

With the arrival of Muslim migrants in Qom, the city's social equilibrium was disrupted, and the superior status of the Zoroastrian elites declined. This transformation created the conditions for the emergence of new elites from lower and non-governmental strata, enabling them to consolidate their positions. Nevertheless, familial and intra-sectarian rivalries led to continual shifts in elite status. This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach and evaluates two key indicators, social assets and the elites' role in fostering social cohesion or division, to reconstruct their position. The findings indicate that the status of Qom's elites underwent significant changes in three principal spheres: first, the transition from military activity to landholding and urban administration; second, the acquisition of bureaucratic authority and political power to secure a degree of municipal self-governance; and third, the transfer of power to more concealed layers within the organization of agency (*wikāla*) and commercial networks. Until 189 AH, leading families concentrated on expanding their financial, social, and military assets. Between 189 and 210 AH, social and political power became the dominant indicator of status. By 220 AH, a relative alignment between financial resources and scholarly capital gained value in relation to ruling authority. Despite this dynamism, the concentration of assets in the hands of the Ashʿarī elite prevented lower-status groups, such as *mawālī* and Iranians, from entering power structures, ultimately leading the community toward stagnation.

Keywords: Elite circulation; status; assets; intra-sectarian relations; Shiʿites of Qom.

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