The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Sabaʾ and the Origins of Shiʿism. By SEAN W. ANTHONY. Islamic History and Civilization, vol. 91. Leiden: BRILL, 2012. Pp. xiii + 352. $189, €152.

In this book Sean Anthony pulls apart the myth, historiography, and history of one of the legendary founders of Shiʿi "exaggeration" (*ghuluww*), ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ, also known by his alias Ibn al-Sawdāʾ.

The book is split into broad sections based upon the period, theme, and source material. In the first three chapters, Anthony details the influential role played by the Kufan historian Sayf b. ʿUmar (d. ca. 180/796) in formulating key tropes of the legend of Ibn Sabaʾ, with many comparisons with how Ibn Sabaʾ was treated by other historians before and after. In chapters four to six Anthony looks at the rather different way in which Ibn Sabaʾ was treated by heresiographers. In the final chapter Anthony describes the fortunes, not of Ibn Sabaʾ himself, but of the "Sabaʾiyya" group or tendency whose "heretical" roots were traced back (often tendentiously) to Ibn Sabaʾ's example. Anthony demonstrates that the treatment of Ibn Sabaʾ in the historiographical and heresiographical traditions was substantively different.

Perhaps the most useful parts of the book are Anthony's careful anatomy of the way the Ibn Sabaʾ narrative was employed by Sayf b. ʿUmar, who was ultimately responsible for crystallizing a certain image of Ibn Sabaʾ for future generations of historians. Sayf was not just a passive transmitter of earlier reports. Anthony argues that he manipulated a reservoir of reports about Ibn Sabaʾ circulating during the second/eighth century to achieve definite rhetorical ends. Anthony concludes that the major function of Ibn Sabaʾ for Sayf was to exculpate the beleaguered caliph ʿUthmān from moralizing criticisms of his caliphate as the moment when the *umma* broke down into civil war. In this sense Anthony depicts Sayf as the ʿUthmānī historian par excellence (p. 101). Sayf used Ibn Sabaʾ as a scapegoat, portraying him as the major corrupting influence that introduced discord (*fitna*) into the *umma*. Crucially, Ibn Sabaʾ is portrayed by Sayf as having corrupted a relatively small number of men. How many men is left vague, for Sayf generally insinuates rather than accuses, with only a few names being explicitly branded as out-and-out Sabaʾiyya loyalists. Thus, Sayf was able to drive a wedge between the Companions on one hand, and the heresiarchs and the riffraff influenced by Ibn Sabaʾ on the other. This allowed Sayf to advance a solution to the intractable problem of how it was that the rightly guided Islamic community could have fallen to infighting. Anthony argues that Sayf's success in rehabilitating ʿUthmān and the Companions, without overly criticizing ʿAlī (albeit not recognizing him as caliph), is what made him so useful to later Sunni historians (pp. 101–3).

Anthony shows that although the heresiographers initially drew upon the same second/eighth-century pool of material as Sayf to articulate the sectarian archetype that Ibn Sabaʾ represented, their interests were different, and the heresiographical tradition steadily diverged from the historiographical tradition. Sayf had documented certain "heretical" beliefs of Ibn Sabaʾ that were incorporated into later heresiography. For heresiographers, both Sunni and Shiʿi, the figure of Ibn Sabaʾ was used to provide an etiology for an assortment of early Muslim "heresies," and thereby to damn certain ideas and groups by association. Anthony argues that the earliest of the beliefs ascribed to Ibn Sabaʾ that appear in both the historiographical and heresiographical traditions were probably very early, and therefore might plausibly be attributed to the historical Ibn Sabaʾ himself, providing us a window onto "the origins of Shiʿism" of the title. In particular, Anthony sees the early elements of this Shiʿi religiosity to be the *waṣiyya* archetype, the testament that ʿAlī was given by Muḥammad proving his legitimate leadership, and the interest in messianic tropes of return (*rajʿa*), a belief that ultimately became mainstream among the Shiʿa, but was denied by Sunni heresiographers. Anthony notes the irony that although Ibn Sabaʾ came to be viewed with suspicion as a heretic by later Imami Shiʿi heresiographers, these early beliefs associated with Ibn Sabaʾ and his circle came to be unproblematic mainstream elements of Imami Shiʿism. Of course, Ibn Sabaʾ was also associated with material that was not canonized by any surviving group, including the flat denial of ʿAlī's death in statements such as the following: "If you would have come to us with his brains in a hundred bags, we would (still) know that he shall not die until he leads you all with his staff" (p. 145). A further addition (Anthony suggests a later one) to the archetypes ascribed to Ibn Sabaʾ is the claim of Imam ʿAlī's divinity (*ilāhiyya*, *rubūbiyya*), associated with the "execution archetype": a story in which ʿAlī himself denies the claim and orders Ibn Sabaʾ's execution by burning.

Methodologically, Anthony attempts to date the emergence of certain tropes by tracing narrative innovations to particular authorities mentioned in hadith transmission chains. He combines this work with a general sense of the likely development of traditions toward positions that harmonized with developing orthodoxies in different communities, in particular Sunni or Imami Shiʿi. This is most successful in the comparison of Sayf's accounts with those of other historians and transmitters, by which method Anthony convincingly suggests dates for the emergence of certain narrative tropes in the historical literature. His dating of the emergence of doctrinal archetypes in the heresiographical literature owes more to the identification of similarities between early Muslim ones and those stemming from other late antique religious traditions. In doing so, Anthony evinces an erudite awareness of late antique Judaism

and Christianity, but the results remain more speculative. The book is a rich and fascinating account, relevant to early Islamic political and religious history, historiography, and the emergence of Muslim sects.

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