

the historian in her pursuit of truth. Fenton and Littman's volume has its merits as a sourcebook by offering fare of a certain type, but it must be carefully sampled, because too much toxicity is not good for either the stomach or the brain.

SUSAN GILSON MILLER
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

The Almoravid and Almohad Empires. By AMIRA K. BENNISON. The Edinburgh History of the Islamic Empires. Edinburgh: EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. Pp. xiv + 382. \$150, £90 (cloth); \$49.95, £29.99 (paper).

Amira K. Bennison's book under review provides a great service to the fields of North African, medieval Mediterranean, and Islamic history. As an introduction to western Islamic history between the mid-eleventh and mid-thirteenth centuries, it draws together primary sources and selected scholarship to provide an intelligent narrative history of the Almoravid and Almohad regimes, followed by more focused chapters on social organization, economy, religious practice and knowledge, and material culture. In this way, it develops multiple points of orientation and comparison over time.

Bennison adeptly makes the case for the larger relevance of her work in the first chapter: most broadly, it brings into focus Berber peoples as significant actors in Islamic history and the making of Islamic civilization. The history of the Almoravids and Almohads in the Islamic West, she argues, is as significant as that of the Seljuk Turks in the East. In regional terms, Bennison situates the Almoravids and the Almohads in the context of their origins in the western Sahara and High Atlas and explains their place in the history of state-building in the Maghrib and the Islamization of North Africa. In doing so, she provides an antidote to persistent characterizations of the regimes from the perspective of the Iberian Peninsula, a perspective that has found expression in an Iberia versus Africa opposition and stereotypes of Berber "barbarism" and "fanaticism," and perhaps overemphasizes the importance of jihad ideology.

Chapters two and three, narrating Almoravid and Almohad political history, navigate significant challenges. For example, any chronological history of the Almoravids depends on narrative sources that largely postdate Almoravid rule, with the exception of the Andalusī geographer al-Bakrī's description of the early movement, dated perhaps to 1068 (before the foundation of Marrakesh). While drawing on named and unnamed oral and written sources, they are colored by hindsight, employ tropes, and express partisan interests and cultural biases. Almohad charges against the Almoravids and criticisms of their support for Mālikī jurists have too often been taken at face value, and Bennison tries to manage distortions of perspective in texts that present Almoravid and Almohad history as fatefully linked. As another example, she uses al-Baydhaq's hagiography of the Mahdi Ibn Tūmart and his successor, the caliph 'Abd al-Mu'min, to develop Almohad chronology with caution, and explicates its rhetorical strategies and ideological intentions. In both chapters Bennison thus alerts the reader to some of the limitations of the sources as she develops her narrative, noting myth-making and interest promotion, and acknowledging variations, contradictions, and gaps of evidence. She expresses doses of skepticism with terms such as "supposedly" and "purportedly" and the equivocal nature of the evidence with "probably" and "possibly" in developing her interpretations; in this way, she allows that readers familiar with the sources may not always agree with her assessments. She guides the reader past points of contemporary and modern speculation, as well as debate, for example, about the Almoravid conquest of Soninke Ghana, Ibn Tūmart's legendary meeting with al-Ghazālī, and interpretations of Almohad terminology, sometimes with extended elaboration of the points at issue. Because Ibn Khaldūn is well known among modern readers as a fourteenth-century North African theorist of the rise of states from tribal movements, who developed his ideas in part from the examples of the Almoravids and Almohads, Bennison engages with his arguments at different stages of her historical reconstruction and sustains her engagement in subsequent chapters. She acknowledges the explanatory power of Ibn Khaldūn's

emphasis on tribal *‘aṣabiyya* (group feeling) and religious ideology, and indicates, in her investigation and assessment of political decisions, economic interests, and forms of religious expression, the problems of paradigmatic oversimplification and the importance of comparative political analysis.

The book's thematic chapters are historically descriptive and comparative and present the world of the Almoravids and Almohads through a broad lens. Chapter four, "Society in the Almoravid and Almohad Eras, 1050–1250," is particularly compelling where it addresses binaries and taxonomies that may distort, and have distorted, our understanding of politics, society, religion, and culture. For example, discussion of the term "Berber" differentiates among Berber tribes, languages, and degrees of pastoralism and addresses Berber and Andalūsī Muslim socio-cultural distinctions and their permeability in a number of contexts, Andalūsī and Maghribī. The chapter illuminates aspects of the subject with a discussion of the symbolism of the western Sanhaja "veil" (*liṭhām*) in contemporary sources (literary and legal) and for different constituencies. The survey of social hierarchy includes discussion of gender and observations about the social visibility of Almoravid women—the evidence and the way such observations, paired with those of male "effeminacy," served the Almohad derogation of their rule. The chapter also evaluates Almoravid and Almohad treatment of religious minorities, focusing on specific examples and contexts, and articulates differences between the two regimes' policies and practices and the range of experiences of subject populations.

Chapter five, "Economy and Trade within and beyond Imperial Frontiers, 1050–1250," which includes discussion of taxes and coins, situates the Almoravids and Almohads in the diverse terrain of their domains and the long *durée* of agricultural production, outlines their place in the history of urbanization in the Islamic West, and illustrates the importance of trade routes and networks to their emergence and the maintenance of their power. Bennison writes, "It was trade in and across the Sahara as much as religion that tempted the Sanhaja Almoravids out of the desert and encouraged them to conquer the string of trading cities that stretched from Awdaghust and Sijilmasa in the Sahara all the way north to Seville and Córdoba" (p. 179). She develops a view of a "symbiotic relationship" between western trans-Saharan trade and Almoravid and subsequent Almohad urbanization that contributed to economic and demographic growth in the Maghrib, and a contrast to the circumstances of al-Andalus and Ifrīqiya, whose economies and populations suffered more directly from the tolls of warfare and raiding as well as the migration of the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym tribes.

Chapter six, "Malikism, Mahdism and Mysticism: Religion and Learning, 1050–1250," provides a preliminary survey of the variety of religious orientations and practices in the towns and hinterlands of al-Andalus and North Africa before the rise of the Almoravids, including forms of Khārijism, ‘Alidism, and Shi‘ism. The chapter demonstrates how the Almoravid establishment of Marrakesh and conquest of predominantly Mālikī al-Andalus, and the rulers' alliance with Mālikī scholarly elites, promoted the territorial extension of Mālikī learning and legal practice. The discussion of Ibn Tūmart's emergence as a teacher and preacher of reform and then as the Almohad Mahdī develops from an account of precursory reformist tendencies among jurists within the Mālikī establishment who criticized unexamined adherence to Mālikī legal opinions (a trend that preceded and extended through Almoravid rule), and among those who challenged the Mālikī establishment more overtly with charismatic claims to leadership associated with Sufism and Mahdism. The history of Ibn Tūmart's successors delineates change over time in the expression of the ruler's religious leadership and his position toward Mālikī jurists and legal practice, a subject that invites further research. After the caliph al-Ma'mūn publicly denied, in 1229, that Ibn Tūmart had been the Mahdī, "the tide . . . turned towards a reassertion of Malikism as the dominant religio-legal school of the Maghrib and al-Andalus" (p. 258). Both the Almoravids and Almohads made their claims to legitimacy in religious terms, and chronicles written during and after the period supported and undermined these claims in various ways; the chapter dispels stereotypes and provides a concise, faceted depiction of the regimes' place in the landscape of legal and religious thought, practice, and spirituality. The period of Almoravid and Almohad rule is described as the "golden age of western Islamic philosophy" and also saw the spread and institutionalization of Sufism across the Maghrib and in al-Andalus, and the chapter concludes with a summary of both developments. The spread of popular Sufism in its western form furthered the reach of Mālikī Sunnism, combined with the cult of holy men.

The final chapter, before the brief conclusion, is dedicated to urban planning, art, and architecture, as well as textiles and fine ceramics, and it traces the development of a distinctive Andalusī-Maghribī style. Bennison is interested in patronage as an expression of power and the symbolism of decisions about design, materials, and labor. For example, she demonstrates (drawing on the work of art historians such as Jonathan Bloom and Miriam Rosser-Owen) how architectural features and specific objects, such as the minbar that ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf commissioned for the great mosque of Marrakesh, established Almoravid links to an Andalusī-Umayyad heritage and claims to its extension in the Maghrib—and then, when incorporated into the new Kutubiyya mosque in Marrakesh, Almohad links to Umayyad Cordoba. The Umayyad great mosque of Cordoba served as an important model and symbol for both dynasties. The greater abundance of material and literary evidence of Almohad patronage yields more extensive discussion of its products, and here the interest includes investigation of how the Almohads materially expressed their relationship to the Almoravids—what they chose to either destroy or appropriate of the monuments they found (including the capital Marrakesh), and how they otherwise manifested their ideological claims to legitimacy. The overall argument of the chapter for the development of a distinctive Andalusī-Maghribī style out of the patronage and production of both Berber dynasties integrates as much as differentiates observable patterns in their succeeding styles. The Almoravids and Almohads used the same architectural and artistic idiom, with some variation (for example, the Almohads used epigraphy more extensively), and their laborers drew on the same craft traditions and resources. As Bennison observes, the still extant monumental tower of the Almohad great mosque in Seville represents the maturation of a western imperial style that blended Andalusī and Maghribī elements, material, and labor. The Almohad century, she writes, “set the tone for the art and architecture of both al-Andalus and the Maghrib for centuries afterward” (p. 328).

Lastly, the book’s conclusion addresses the causes and characterizations of Almoravid and Almohad “decline,” revisiting Ibn Khaldūn, and brings together the themes of the preceding chapters in a summary of the legacies of the two dynasties.

Readers interested in a comprehensive understanding of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries of Mediterranean and Islamic history will find *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires* useful and perhaps illuminating. Bennison shows how “the era of the Berber empires stands out as a formative two centuries in the Islamic west, which transformed its politics, society, and religious culture, and enabled the Berbers to stand tall as one of the great peoples of medieval Islam” (p. 329). The book provides helpful maps, charts, and photographs throughout the body of the text and similarly helpful appendices: a chronological outline, a list of place names with their English and Arabic designations, and a glossary of Arabic terms. The thematic chapters include shaded boxes of text providing definitions of terms and concepts, such as “dhimma,” which may be skipped over by more informed readers. Specialists too will profit from such a clear and thoughtful summation and revision of a historiography in which the Almoravids and Almohads “have been fitted into narratives not of their own making” (p. 329).

JANINA M. SAFRAN
PENN STATE UNIVERSITY

The Anthologist’s Art: Abū Maṣṣūr al-Thaʿālibī and His Yaṭimat al-dahr. By BILAL ORFALI. Brill Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures, vol. 37. Leiden: BRILL, 2016. Pp. xx + 271. \$135, €104.

Bilal Orfali’s study is an important work of literary scholarship. It is important both for its detailed account of al-Thaʿālibī’s career (his works, his methods, and his legacy) as well as for the attention it pays to an exemplar of a genre that has played a critical role in the development and preservation of classical Arabic poetic and literary traditions. It is no exaggeration to say that without premodern anthologies, historians of Arabic poetry and literature would be lost or—worse than lost—untethered. In addition to their paramount service as repositories of the better part of what we now call the classical Arabic poetic tradition, these anthologies have also served to ground our field in a native, premodern