

RESEÑAS

ADELA FÁBREGAS (ed.), *The Nasrid Kingdom of Granada between East and West (Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries)*, Leiden, Brill, 2021, 668 pp.

This collective volume, published by Brill in 2021, represents a major contribution to the historiographical renewal surrounding the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada. Under the coordination of Adela Fábregas, it brings together some of the most prominent scholars in the fields of al-Andalus and Medieval Iberia studies and proposes a structured, transversal, and interdisciplinary approach. In this respect, and alongside the publication, in the same year and by the same publisher, of *A Companion to Islamic Granada*, edited by Bárbara Boloix and focused on the city of Granada, all those interested in the Nasrid world are in luck. The book, structured in six sections, addresses politics, society, culture, economy, and sources from a comparative and critical perspective.

The volume's introduction, one of the last texts written by the great French medievalist Pierre Guichard, offers a historiographical and methodological reflection on the place of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada within the history of al-Andalus. He does so from a self-aware position, clarifying that his research focused on earlier periods of Andalusī Islam and on regions such as Sharq al-Andalus, rather than on the Nasrid emirate itself. Nevertheless, he lucidly addresses several fundamental themes that affect both the interpretation of Nasrid society and its historiography, such as the question of kinship and family structure among the Nasrid elites, the territorial cohesion of the Nasrid emirate, the urban and cultural uniqueness of Granada, and the crucial role of the Kingdom of Granada as a space of synthesis that should not be reduced to a mere epilogue of Andalusī history.

The first section, "Political and Institutional Aspects," explores the core of Nasrid power. It opens with the chapter "The Banū Naṣr: The Founders of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada" by Bárbara Boloix, which presents a meticulous investigation of the Banū Naṣr, the family that founded and ruled the Nasrid Emirate of Granada between 1232 and 1492. Through a genealogical and political approach, the author reconstructs the lineage of the dynasty, examines its ideological legitimization, and analyzes the strategies employed to maintain the regime's internal cohesion. One of the chapter's main strengths lies in its portrayal of the dynasty not as a monolithic entity, but as a complex network of kinship ties, marital alliances, and internal conflicts. The chapter draws on Arabic chronicle sources such as those by Ibn al-Khaṭīb and al-Maqqarī, alongside Castilian sources. This combination allows for a multifaceted reading of the discourses on legitimacy. Against older interpretations that saw the Nasrids as weakened heirs of a declining Islam, Boloix portrays a dynasty that was active, adaptive, and politically astute in a frontier context.

In the second chapter, "Political Structures," Antonio Peláez Rovira provides a systematic overview of the political structures of the Nasrid Emirate, focusing on the organization of power, the role of the sultan — and the terminology associated with it, central administration and ruling elites. Peláez Rovira dissects the architecture of Nasrid power, showing how it combined elements of the classical caliphal model, practices inherited from the Taifa and Almoravid periods, and adaptations shaped by its frontier status and tributary relationship with Castile. One of the most notable aspects is the attention paid to the pragmatic dimension of sultanic power, where leadership relied both on religious legitimization and on military and administrative efficiency.

In the third chapter, "Islamic Law and Religion in Nasrid Granada," Amalia Zomeño examines the role of Islamic law and religious institutions in shaping the power and society of the Nasrid emirate.

Her analysis focuses particularly on the Mālikī legal school, predominant in al-Andalus, and on the figure of the *qāḍī* (judge) as an intermediary between the state authority and the believing community. Zomeño demonstrates that *sharīʿa* functioned both as a tool of governance and as a symbolic framework of legitimacy. This dimension was expressed through the promotion of mosques, educational institutions (*madāris*), and the patronage of jurists, which strengthened the image of the sultan.

The fourth chapter, titled “Granada and Its International Contacts” by Roser Salicrú i Lluçh, offers an overview of the diplomatic, commercial, and military relations of the Nasrid Kingdom with other actors across the Mediterranean and the Islamic world. In particular, it explores the Emirate’s connections with the Crown of Aragon, Castile, the Marinids of the Maghreb, and the Mamluks of Egypt. Her approach relies on both Arabic and Latin sources, including peace treaties, diplomatic correspondence, and records of embassies, which allow for the reconstruction of a network of interactions that transcends the conventional boundaries of Christian-Muslim conflict.

The second section, “Socioeconomic Structures,” reinforces the image of Granada as a complex society internally held together by social networks and routine practices. It begins with the chapter “The Nasrid Economy,” in which Adela Fábregas, the volume’s editor, provides a comprehensive analysis of the Nasrid economy. Fábregas reconstructs a centralized fiscal system based on agricultural taxation, luxury trade, mining, and the protection of key activities such as the silk market. The author also addresses external economic relations, particularly with Italy and the Maghreb. Fábregas demonstrates that the emirate developed a complex and highly fiscalized economy in which the central government directly intervened in the regulation of markets, prices, and revenues. Fábregas argues that the emirate functioned as a dynamic economic center, well-connected to international circuits.

Chapter six, “The Nasrid Population and Its Ethnocultural Components” by Bilal Sarr, analyzes the ethnocultural composition of the Nasrid emirate, revealing a diverse and hierarchical society in which Arab-Andalusis, Berbers, Jews, and Christians coexisted. The chapter outlines the contours of social and cultural segmentation that defined Nasrid order, with special attention to the mechanisms of integration, assimilation, and differentiation.

In chapter seven, “Families and Family Ties in Nasrid Granada,” Amalia Zomeño analyzes the family as a social and political institution within the Nasrid emirate. She examines the role of familial bonds in the reproduction of elites, the transmission of property, and the formation of power networks at both local and regional levels. The author demonstrates that the family was not merely a private sphere, but a fundamental structure mediating between the individual, the community, and political authority. Drawing on notarial documents, legal sources and *awqāf* records, she reconstructs how marital alliances were used to consolidate political loyalties, how kinship shaped access to resources, and how inheritance was organized.

The third section, “Spatial Organization and Material Culture,” combines archaeological and urbanistic approaches. In its opening chapter, “Organization of Settlement and Territorial Structures in the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada,” Antonio Malpica presents a detailed map of the territorial organization of the Nasrid realm, focusing on the distribution of rural settlements, defense systems, and hydraulic networks. His analysis is grounded in archaeological and geographical studies and is centered on the idea that the emirate was a society structured around the control of space and water.

In the ninth chapter, “The Madīna and Its Territory: Urban Order and City Fabric in the Nasrid Kingdom,” authored by Christine Mazzoli-Guintard, the focus shifts from the rural world to the urban sphere. Mazzoli-Guintard centers her analysis on the *madīna* as a political, symbolic, and social space, where the main mechanisms of Nasrid control were concentrated: administration, commerce, religion, and court ceremonial. The author reconstructs the morphology of the classical Islamic city as adapted to the Nasrid context, a context of high urban density. She also examines the role of the *arrabales* (suburbs), the defensive belt, and the relationship with peri-urban gardens and irrigation systems. A particularly significant contribution is her interpretation of the city as a performative space, as a space of experience.

In the tenth chapter, “Domestic Spaces during the Nasrid Period: Houses,” María Elena Díez Jorge examines Nasrid domestic architecture as a reflection of everyday life, social hierarchies, and the cultural values of medieval Granada. Drawing on extensive archaeological documentation and comparisons with other Islamic and Iberian traditions (mainly Mudejar and Morisco), the author reconstructs the typological evolution of houses and their ritual, familial, and aesthetic functions.

The chapter emphasizes how homes were not merely functional spaces but were also symbolically codified environments, where courtyards, fountains, and epigraphic decoration expressed an Islamic worldview centered on privacy, harmony, and hierarchy. The role of women in managing domestic space is also addressed, as well as the forms of distinction among social classes.

The eleventh chapter, “Productive Activities and Material Culture,” by Alberto García Porras, presents the material culture of the emirate through the study of its productive activities: pottery, textiles, metallurgy, construction, among others. He draws on both archaeological and documentary sources to demonstrate that the emirate was neither a closed nor a marginal economy, but rather an active and specialized productive space. The author highlights the existence of workshops organized by guilds and quarters, the high quality of goods produced for both local consumption and export, and the court’s role as a promoter of luxury and refinement. The circulation of objects allows one to trace contacts with the Maghreb, Italy, the Mamluk Levant, and the Christian Iberian world.

Chapter twelve, “The Palatine City of the Alhambra, Seat and Center of Power,” by Antonio Malpica, concludes the section on material space with a study of the Alhambra as a palatine city and as the political, ceremonial, and residential center of Nasrid power. Malpica analyzes its architectural evolution, internal urban structure, and the administrative and symbolic functions it fulfilled. Moving beyond the usual aesthetic approach, the author interprets it as a true city within the city, with bureaucratic structures, residences, oratories, gardens, hydraulic systems, and spaces for representation. The Alhambra functioned as a political microcosm that reproduced and performed the Nasrid order.

The fourth section, “Modes of Thought and Artistic Creation,” showcases the intellectual and cultural richness of the emirate. In chapter thirteen, “Art and Architecture,” the late Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza offers a critical and comparative reinterpretation of Nasrid artistic and architectural production. Ruiz Souza argues that Nasrid art is not merely a continuation of earlier Andalusí traditions nor a degeneration of them, as traditionally suggested, but rather an original, hybrid, and intentionally political artistic form, forged at the intersection of Eastern, Maghrebi, and Christian influences. Through the analysis of emblematic buildings such as the Palace of Comares or the Palace of the Lions, Ruiz Souza contends that the architecture of the Alhambra cannot be understood without considering the circulation of models between Granada, Mamluk Cairo, the Maghreb, and Castile.

In Chapter fourteen, “The Cultural Environment,” María Dolores Rodríguez Gómez explores the intellectual milieu of the Nasrid emirate. Her approach highlights how knowledge in Nasrid Granada functioned as a form of symbolic capital that articulated status, power, and social prestige. The author analyzes *madāris*, libraries, scholarly circles and circulation of scholars, and the production of works in disciplines such as sufism, history, grammar, and geography.

In Chapter fifteen, “Nasrid Literature: Ascesis, Belles-Lettres, and Court Poetry,” José Miguel Puerta Vilchez offers a sophisticated and multifaceted reading of Nasrid literature, ranging from ascetic poetry to courtly verse, including palatial epigraphy. The author argues that literature served as an instrument of cultural self-definition and political legitimation – a kind of “language of power” in which religion, aesthetics, and propaganda were interwoven. A substantial portion of the chapter is devoted to the poems inscribed on the walls of the Alhambra, which are interpreted as performative texts meant to be recited, contemplated, and deciphered within the architectural scenography.

Chapter sixteen, “Science and Knowledge,” by Expiración García Sánchez, examines the cultivation of both rational, empirical and applied sciences in the Nasrid emirate, including astronomy, medicine, mathematics, agronomy, and other technical disciplines. She pays particular attention to educational and medical institutions, networks of knowledge transmission, and forms of cultural patronage. García Sánchez demonstrates that, far from being a period of stagnation, Nasrid Granada was a vibrant center of scientific production, integrated into the intellectual networks of the Islamic West. The author highlights the figure of Ibn al-Khaṭīb as an exemplary encyclopedic intellectual, capable of synthesizing medical, historical, and philosophical knowledge, and links his work to a tradition of learning inherited from Córdoba and reinterpreted through a Nasrid lens. The chapter also analyzes botanical, pharmacological and agronomic texts, treatises on hygiene, and technical manuals as expressions of science in the service of administration and public health.

The fifth section, “Posterity: The Conquest and Incorporation of Granada into the Crown of Castile,” offers a critical perspective on the conquest and the reconfiguration of Andalusí identities. Chapter 17, “Granada and Castile: A Long Conflict,” by Daniel Baloup, presents a diplomatic and

military history — the phases and practices of the war — of the relations between the Nasrid emirate and the Crown of Castile from the thirteenth century until the final conquest in 1492. The chapter dismantles the teleological vision that portrays the conflict as inevitable, and instead proposes a model of fluctuating relations, marked by periods of vassalage, truces, wars, and strategic cooperation. The author shows how the emirate skillfully exploited internal divisions within Castile to survive and how the discourse of “reconquista” was ideologically adapted to legitimize the final annexation. Baloup offers a nuanced analysis that avoids both religious binarism and expansionist determinism.

In Chapter eighteen, “A New Society: The Castilians,” Rafael G. Peinado Santaella analyzes the establishment of Castilian society in the Kingdom of Granada during and after its conquest (1482-1492), focusing on its feudal logic, which diverged sharply from Nasrid institutional structures. The author describes an emerging society simultaneously founded on warfare, agrarian colonization, and the contradiction between discourse and practice. He emphasizes the coexistence of mechanisms of defensive militarization, commercial relations with still-active Muslim communities along the coast, and the pragmatic orientation of some Christian settlers. One of the chapter’s most valuable contributions is the analysis of land redistribution, supported by demographic and economic data.

In Chapter nineteen, “An Old Society. Mudejar Neighbors: New Perspectives,” Ángel Galán Sánchez offers a critical reappraisal of the status, internal organization, and mechanisms of integration of the Mudejar community in the Kingdom of Granada after the conquest. The chapter stands as an example of detailed social history, based on notarial, fiscal, and judicial documentation, and argues that the Mudejars of Granada were not merely surviving remnants of earlier Islamic structures, but active historical agents who reconfigured their position under Christian sovereignty. He also highlights the internal complexity of Mudejar communities, including differences among farmers, artisans, and merchants, as well as the formation of collaborationist elites who acted as intermediaries with Christian power.

In Chapter twenty, “The Christianization of the Mudejars of Granada and the Persistence of Islam after the Expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain (1492-*ca.* 1730),” Gerard Wieggers addresses the processes of forced religious transformation in Granada, from the conversion of the Mudejars to the crypto-Islamic resistance that followed the expulsion of the Moriscos. The chapter is structured around three themes: the evangelization campaigns, the mechanisms of religious dissimulation, and the underground persistence of Islam, traceable through *aljamiado* manuscripts and inquisitorial records. Particularly noteworthy is his analysis of the *Parchment of the Torre Turpiana* and the *Sacromonte Lead Books*, which are treated not merely as forgeries but as testimonies of a cultural resistance strategy that blended Islamic and Christian elements. Wieggers contends that these documents reflect a frontier religiosity shaped by the need for survival and by esoteric — and eschatological — forms of spiritual expression.

The sixth and final section, “Sources for the Study of the Nasrid Kingdom,” offers a methodological assessment of the sources available for the study of the Nasrid world. In Chapter twenty-one, “Arabic Sources for the History of Nasrid al-Andalus,” Francisco Vidal Castro provides a detailed analysis of the principal Arabic sources documenting the history of the Nasrid emirate, along with a critical reflection on their transmission, editing, and historiographical use. The chapter is organized around genres such as chronicles, travel narratives, biobibliographic works, *adab*, or juridical and religious works, and explores the production of key authors such as Ibn al-Khaṭīb, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Zamrak, al-Maqqarī, and other chroniclers and men of letters who narrated — or reconstructed — the Nasrid period through various genres and ideological frameworks. Vidal Castro distinguishes between sources contemporary with the emirate (such as the writings of Ibn al-Khaṭīb) and later or compilatory works, such as al-Maqqarī’s *Nafh al-ṭīb*, and between Andalusī, Maghrebi and Mashreqī authors. He underscores the fragmentary, often rhetorical or apologetic nature of many of these texts, as well as the importance of their contexts of production.

Chapter twenty-two, “Christian Sources for the Last Muslim Kingdom in Western Europe,” by Raúl González Arévalo, analyzes Christian sources — both Latin and vernacular — that document the Nasrid Kingdom, with an emphasis on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. González Arévalo shows that, although many of these sources are shaped by stereotypes, war propaganda, and perceptions of alterity, they also contain valuable information on politics, diplomacy, and Christian views of the emirate. The author distinguishes among several types of documents: Castilian royal chronicles

(such as the *Crónica de Pedro I* or the *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*), diplomatic documents, trade correspondence, books of *Repartimiento* and of *Apeo*, commercial treaties and municipal records. He examines how these texts constructed the image of the “Nasrid Other” through perspectives oscillating between admiration and demonization. A notable contribution of the chapter is its focus on frontier diplomacy practices, in which Christian sources reveal not only hostility but also pragmatism, daily interaction, trade, and even mutual recognition of legitimacy.

Finally, Chapter twenty-three, “Archaeological Sources,” by Alberto García Porras, evaluates the role of archaeology in the study of the Nasrid emirate, from the early excavations of the nineteenth century to the most recent developments in urban and landscape archaeology. The author underscores the epistemological transformation of the discipline, which has shifted from a monumental and aesthetic focus (centered on the Alhambra) to a social and spatial archaeology. García Porras reviews the main archaeological lines of research and demonstrates how archaeology has strongly revised interpretations of urbanism, religious, funerary, economic, and domestic practices. He also highlights the analysis of material culture as a means to reconstruct networks of production, consumption, and distribution.

Far from the traditional view of the Kingdom of Granada as a decadent epilogue to al-Andalus or a mere prelude to 1492, the chapters in this volume underscore its historical singularity, capacity for adaptation, internal complexity, and Mediterranean integration. The work presents the emirate as a sophisticated diplomatic actor, a multicentric society, and a cultural environment that combined tradition, innovation, and cosmopolitanism. It also highlights the methodological coherence of the volume: most chapters adopt a critical stance toward essentialist discourses while incorporating recent developments in historical anthropology, literary criticism, landscape archaeology, and the history of emotions. In this sense, the Nasrid emirate emerges as a richly textured political, aesthetic, and social laboratory, in dialogue with the Mamluk world, the Maghreb, the Iberian Christian kingdoms, and broader Mediterranean networks. Although chapters dedicated exclusively to topics such as gender, popular religiosity, or contemporary memory of the Nasrid Kingdom would have been welcome, the volume stands out for its editorial coherence, scholarly rigor, and capacity to renew the field. *The Nasrid Kingdom of Granada between East and West* is, to date, the most comprehensive collective synthesis available on the Nasrid Kingdom and an exemplary work for its integrative approach, critical perspective, and value for advanced research. Its publication marks a milestone in the consolidation of Nasrid studies as a distinct field within the historiography of al-Andalus, in ongoing dialogue with the global history of the medieval Mediterranean¹.

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