

RESEÑAS

IBN MARZUQ, *El Musnad: hechos memorables de Abū l-Ḥasan, sultán de los benimerines*, estudio y traducción de María Jesús Viguera Molins, Granada, Universidad de Granada, 2025, 559 pp.

Like stars in unanswered darkness, primary historical sources seem, through some sort of mysterious intellectual gravity, to gather themselves in clusters. There are instances where we have only one account of a particular period or place. However, it is more often the case that one primary source of particular importance, such as the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* of Ibn Khaldūn and the *Iḥāṭa* of Ibn al-Khaṭīb, will be accompanied by several others, creating a school around a particular temporal context. Although his light seemed dimmed when compared to the extraordinarily vast and original output of his contemporaries Ibn Khaldūn and Ibn al-Khaṭīb, the writing of Ibn Marzūq, including *El Musnad* (1371 CE) held a prominent place, as one of the brighter stars in the constellation of writers and intellectuals who shine through the remarkable intellectual, literary, architectural and artistic output of the Islamic, western Mediterranean from around 1340-1380. This richness is notable, especially considering the enormous and devastating impact of the Plague, the Black Death, which was rampaging through the region at the same time.

A previous review in English of the remarkable Spanish translation and edition of *El Musnad* by María Jesús Viguera, a member of the Royal Academy of History in Madrid and Professor at Madrid Complutense University, appeared in 1980 in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. The largely positive review was penned by Michael Brett, who had already established a reputation as a dragoman between the English-speaking academy, which had seen relatively few works on North Africa, and the largely-Spanish/French/Arabic dominated study of the Maḡrib. Since then, the original 1977 edition of the work, which includes a substantial introduction to the life and times of Ibn Marzūq, the author of the *Musnad*, a panegyric account of the “memorable works of the Sultan Abū l-Ḥasan”, the Marinid ruler of much of the Maḡrib from 1331-51 CE, has become a classic primary source, not only for scholars working in Spanish, but also for those of us who have been trained in the British or American tradition of academic writing. Hugh Kennedy, Maya Shatzmiller, Amira Bennison, Aomar Boum, Vincent Cornell, Jennifer Vanz, Linda Jones, have all benefited from the work. Miguel Ángel Manzano, who was advised by María Jesús Viguera, was able to reap important information, not only from the *Musnad*, but from the heavily notated edition prepared by his supervisor. It deserves even more attention, however and it is hoped that this recent edition, published in 2024, will jumpstart scholarship among emerging scholars of the medieval Maḡrib who are increasingly interested not only in questions of political change, but also social, gender and cultural history. As stated by Prof. Viguera in her 2024 introduction, “After a history of little scholarly attention, an awakening of interest in historiography, especially during the 1970s, caused many to use the *Musnad*...” I would argue, however, that it was the other way around. The careful publication and translation of works, such as this, was a necessary prerequisite to their use.

This edition contains an extended thirty-page essay, new introduction by María Jesús Viguera, meant to help relaunch this source and reiterate its continued importance. She provides a fascinating review of the state of the field, the scholars and writers who have benefited from the work in one way or another. Especially interesting is the impact of the work in certain corners of subfield, such as the artistic and architectural history of particular parts of the Maḡrib. At the same time, there seem

to be multiple instances where *The Musnad* could be further exploited. For instance, Ibn Marzūq's account of the ancestry of the Sultan claims that he descended from the first four Arab Caliphs and he consistently speaks of his Caliphal qualities. Interestingly, the Berber ancestry of the Banū Marīn is then almost completely obscured in favor of a complex, convoluted, and unlikely story of "true" Arab descent. This seems, to me, to contrast with earlier attempts in Almohad panegyric genealogies, such as the *Kitāb al ansāb*, to construct a prestigious Arab and Berber lineage. Is this early evidence for the rise of an ideology of Arabized Sharīfianism even before the Sharīfs themselves? Second, there is the interesting way Ibn Marzūq described Sufism and Sufis and the Sultan's sponsorship of the Sufis. He also seems to focus especially the notion that outward appearances were not enough to make a true Sufi. One of the outstanding debates among scholars of the 14th century is whether or not Sufism was embraced by structures of power or outside of them. The *Musnad* provides some balance to the debate by showing that Sufism, and the sponsorship of Sufi shrines and infrastructure, could very much be a part of a ruler's legitimization, even if there was also a reputation for challenges to theological orthodoxy among some Sufis. Questions of daily life, including the ideals of comportment, eating, and politesse, are partially answered by this text, which is, in some ways, a guidebook for proper "courtly" behavior.

If Shakespeare had known more of the life of Abū l-Ḥasan, he would have written a play about his life. Abū l-Ḥasan, of course, was human, far from perfect, he benefited as much from fate and chance rocketing to the top of authority over much of the Maḡrib only to just as suddenly lose his power, position and prestige, ending up exiled under the rule of his son. The *Musnad* is not necessarily the best source to explain the weaknesses behind Abū l-Ḥasan's ambitious attempt to reunify the Maḡrib. That said, although it might at first seem that a panegyric such as this is, by necessity, "ahistorical", it also produced an ideal image, the creation of the idea of the "perfect prince" or "ideal Caliph" even though the first readers of the text would have known the ultimate fate of the text's fallen hero. This subtext, I think, runs through the entire work and it makes it ultimately a piece that was meant to restore hope.

Allen Fromherz

Georgia State University, Middle East Studies Center, Atlanta, EE.UU.

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0458-0749>