

IBN KHALDUN. AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY. By ROBERT IRWIN. pp. 243. Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2018.

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Ibn Khaldun is one of the most fascinating figures of the premodern Muslim world and perhaps the one whose thoughts more than any other continue to intrigue readers and scholars. As Robert Irwin notes in the preface, much has already been said and debated on the subject of Ibn Khaldun in the last two centuries so that he was hesitant to add yet another book to the canon. Irwin's motive however, was to explore the philosopher from the perspective of "another planet" rather than looking for the "modernity" of his thoughts as many others have already done.

In eleven chapters Robert Irwin's book redraws the intellectual profile of Ibn Khaldun. Of course it is mainly through *Muqaddima* or Introduction that he scrutinises Ibn Khaldun's intellectuality, reiterating the established view that although the chronicle, the *Ibar* that follows the 'Introduction', provides new information (Chapter Three), it remains conventional historiography.

Quite appropriately, the first chapter is 'About Ruins' and deals with nostalgia, a decisive feature not only in the historiography of Ibn Khaldun but in the Arabic cultural tradition and its view of the world altogether. It deals with the vestiges of the past in the literature of mirabilia, notably the *Muruj al-Dhahab* of Mas'udi which had a significant impact on Ibn Khaldun in spite of the scepticism and critiques he expressed about it. Beginning with the Koran, the ruins of the past have inspired pessimism about history and led to admonition about its interpretation. Here and again in several other passages in the book, Irwin notes that Ibn Khaldun's analysis and attitude towards causality is not consistently rationalistic. Although he rejected many supernatural phenomena he never questioned those related to Muslim faith.

Having defined Ibn Khaldun's conceptual background, Irwin dedicates a chapter to his Biography, his life in the Maghreb, his interaction with the political situation there and his experiences with his teacher al-Abili, a master of rational sciences and with his much admired and beloved friend Ibn al-Khatib, a pessimistic critical historian and a Sufi. The third chapter revisits Ibn Khaldun's views in the *Muqaddima* and the *Ibar* on the virtues of the Nomads, specifically the Berbers, and his famous concept of the *'asabiyya*, emphasising again his nostalgic-pessimistic attitude.

In a chapter on the methodology of the *Muqaddima*, Irwin tries to situate Ibn Khaldun between philosophy, theology, *Sharia* and Sufism. Although Ibn Khaldun rejected Greek philosophical thinking, Irwin describes him as a philosopher in the sense of possessing the capacity to reason abstractly and to generalize about social and historical phenomena (p. 78). His philosophy of historical cycles does not divert Ibn Khaldun from the Ash'ari concept of God as the omnipotent creator of history.

Following Chapter Five, which documents Ibn Khaldun's career in Egypt and his experience with Timur — showing that in spite of acknowledged admiration, he remained an outsider in Egypt described by his fellow Mamluk historians in not very flattering terms, Irwin returns to Ibn Khaldun's *Weltanschauung*. He identifies him as an orthodox Sufi with reservation against esoteric extremes and heterodoxy. This was in fact the form of Sufism predominant in Egypt and the Maghreb. The following long chapter is dedicated to Ibn Khaldun's obsession with occultism and his urge to foresee future history. In this part of the book Irwin describes Ibn Khaldun as an intellectual puzzle, whose rational thinking did not prevent him from believing in numerology, lettrism, astrology, miracles and some forms of religious divination. Following a short Chapter Ten on Ibn Khaldun's views on language, Irwin, who had already referred to parallels between Ibn Khaldun and European thinkers, discusses the afterlife of the *Muqaddima* in western scholarship.

Ibn Khaldun's inconsistent scepticism and rationality, rejecting some but not all forms of magic and sorcery, (p. 140) coupled with consistent religious faith is the leitmotif of Irwin's intellectual portrait drawn from "another planet". But is not this portrait consistent with the world of a medieval thinker? Would not any further rationalism be utter heresy? Ibn Khaldun's conditional rationality prompts Irwin to join those who reject the view of Ibn Khaldun as 'precursor' of modern ideas. In the epilogue, coming back to the perspective from "another planet" announced in his introduction, Irwin candidly and refreshingly admits that he could not always understand Ibn Khaldun. Although he was one of the most outstanding figures of his age, Ibn Khaldun's thoughts remained beyond the grasp of his contemporaries. Robert Irwin sees him as a strikingly bleak and lonely figure (p. 208), standing between the exceptional and the conventional, beyond categorisation. Irwin's portrait of the philosopher is beautifully written, intriguing, stimulating and movingly intimate. <da30@soas.ac.uk>

DORIS BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

TREASURE, TRADE AND TRADITION: POST-KIDARITE COINS OF THE GANGETIC PLAINS AND THE PUNJAB FOOTHILLS, 590–820 CE. By JOHN S. DEYELL. pp. 228. New Delhi, Manohar Publishers, 2017. doi:[10.1017/S1356186318000366](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186318000366)

This is an important new book that answers a long-standing question in Indian numismatic history: where is the coinage of the great Pūṣpabhūti king Harṣavardhana? The only known coinage of this illustrious king is a small silver issue modelled on Gupta/Maukhari prototypes.

Deyell did not set out to answer this question, but rather to study a series of base gold coins of a post-Kidarite style, showing a stylized king sacrificing at an altar on one side and a seated female deity on the other.¹ Sir Alexander Cunningham attributed these coins in 1894 to a "Naga" or "Karkotaka" dynasty of Kashmir. This dynasty is mentioned in the great history of Kashmir, the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, and some of the base gold coins in question name some of the kings, such as Durlabha and Pratāpa, who are mentioned in that text. Cunningham drew the seemingly natural conclusion that the coins belonged to the dynasty, and his attribution became the conventional wisdom about these coins. Some scholars, however, maintained uneasiness about this wisdom, as it appears that these coins are almost never found in the Kashmir valley. Further, they do not seem to belong to the same sequence as other known coins from Kashmir. Deyell decided that it was time to solve this puzzle.

The most significant part of Deyell's work was to identify the find spots of the coins. There are very few recorded hoards of these coins; most of the known examples have come to the coin market through chance discoveries or other unofficial channels, where the find spots are not made public. Deyell painstakingly recovered this information through extensive interviews with dealers in Pakistan and India and was able to construct maps showing where the coins are found. He discovered that only one hoard has ever been found in the Kashmir valley, and that hoard was discovered at a pilgrimage site where coins could easily have been carried from elsewhere. As for the rest, he discovered two

¹Michael Mitchiner: *Oriental Coins and their Values: The Ancient and Classical World*, (London, 1978), types 3636–3660.