

of authority. The third is that the book is positioned as a discussion of al-Suyūṭī's legal thought; however, this is not really the case. The book does not really engage with al-Suyūṭī's discussions of law, but rather on al-Suyūṭī's claims to authority, as witnessed in a few of his *fatāwa*. Consequently, there still remains little scholarship on al-Suyūṭī's legal thought. In her introduction, Hernandez comments that "Al-Suyūṭī's story, as I tell it in this book, is ultimately a story about authority" (p. 23). Although it is an important thread in many of al-Suyūṭī's works, I remain slightly sceptical that al-Suyūṭī's works are solely about *authority*, there is more to al-Suyūṭī than his hubris and claim to be a *mujtahid* and *mujaddid*."

However, all in all, Hernandez's monograph is a very valuable contribution to the field of legal theory and the role of the '*ulamā*' in late classical and modern legal thought. The discussion of his reception in contemporary Egypt is particularly engaging. Considering al-Suyūṭī's stature and the dearth of studies exploring his works, this monograph also provides a vital addition to our knowledge of al-Suyūṭī.

S.R. Burge

The Institute of Ismaili Studies

ROBERT IRWIN:

Ibn Khaldun: an Intellectual Biography.

xxi, 243 pp. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018.

ISBN 978 0 691 17466 2.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X19000077

It was a great pleasure to read Robert Irwin's "intellectual biography" of Ibn Khaldun. For me it was as if I had picked up a stack of letters from an old friend who has recently moved away. Almost eight years ago I published a biography entitled *Ibn Khaldun, Life and Times* (Edinburgh University Press). I am familiar with Irwin's challenge and his accomplishment. Irwin's gripping prose, use of learned anecdote combined with careful scholarship makes *Ibn Khaldun: an Intellectual Biography* an excellent choice for the classroom and for the general reader alike. Beyond this praise of Irwin's book, which he deserves, I cannot help but address some specific questions and challenges to my interpretation of Ibn Khaldun. "Recently Allen Fromherz, assistant professor [now I am ranked at Full Professor] at Georgia State University in Atlanta, in his biography of Ibn Khaldun has emphasized and perhaps overemphasized both the importance of Sufism in his life and its role in shaping his philosophy of history." He claims this is an unlikely theory since, "if this is so obvious, why has no one seen it before?"

I respect Irwin's scholarship and his opinion. In a way, it is flattering to be engaged in this debate. By way of defence, I must admit that Ibn Khaldun seems to do something strange to his would-be biographers. He often throws dust on the window to his mind, obscuring the more complex depths of his own autobiography. In fact, he did it to me, at first. Ibn Khaldun's autobiography, the main source for both Irwin and for me, seems first to reveal a real stick in the mud. Read superficially, it seems to be only about a man who writes boring sermons about Maliki law and tries his hand at bad courtly poetry. If read on the surface level, the *Ta'rif* is just about a typical man of Marshall Hodgson's "Middle Period" of Islamic culture, a man who was a part of a web of Islamic cultural continuity that

existed despite political division. If we only had his autobiography, we might mistakenly put Ibn Khaldun's life in the same old dusty box historians generally used for typical sticks in the mud, the box for some of the hundreds of names the populate works like the *Tabaqat Hanabilah*. But in fact, as anybody who had read the *Muqaddimah* and compared it to contemporary works, from Froissart to Ibn Marzuq, knows, he was no stick in the mud. Far from it. He was a revolutionary thinker. He sought to do something new. He knew it.

It is thus strange to read Irwin, who recognizes the uniqueness of Ibn Khaldun and praises his import, throwing Ibn Khaldun's autobiography into a box of discarded lives, dismissing the work as largely unhelpful or unrevealing. Ibn Khaldun's work, especially *The Muqaddimah*, or Introduction to History, appears so unusual, so confident and so refreshing in its search for what he calls the "hidden meaning" of history that it must break us out of the typical mould of thinking about Islamic historiography. It compels us to read the autobiography of Ibn Khaldun again, to rethink our assumptions and to link the *Muqaddimah* to the autobiography, to show that they are, in many ways, telling a linked story. At times, Irwin seems close to something deeper. He then hesitates. We learn, for instance, that Ibn Khaldun thinks history should be pursued in depth as a branch of philosophy and but then that he also dismisses philosophy. How can this be so? We get no satisfying answer from Irwin. We learn that Ibn Khaldun seems to embrace the vigour of the desert and the Bedouin but then simultaneously seems to condemn them as the ruin of civilization and order. What does that mean? We learn that Ibn Khaldun says one thing but then another, a contradiction sealed within a counterfactual. But we learn nothing as to why this might be so. Why, or for whom, is Ibn Khaldun writing both his *Muqaddimah* and his autobiography? Why is he being deliberately, so blatantly, self-contradictory? We get no satisfying answers to these mysteries at the heart of Ibn Khaldun's writing. Irwin seems to dismiss the question of a layered audience repeatedly, and the possibility that Ibn Khaldun might want to display one side of himself to some readers (such as conservative jurists who dismiss philosophy and rulers and rivals who might want to imprison him) and a hidden side to others, such as those of his own intellectual circle who are sympathetic to a philosophical or even, shall we say, a Sufi interpretation of history. The truth was revealed in layers.

In many ways Ibn Khaldun's autobiography does read like a "CV", in the words of Irwin. But there are also moments of profound emotional gravitas and hidden drama. Ibn Khaldun is completely stripped naked in the desert by the very sort of marauding robbers and tribes he so praises for their strength and force. He describes multiple personal crises when he realizes that he will never be able to reach the spiritual enlightenment of his father. The most dramatic of all is Ibn Khaldun's experience of the plague; his admission that the plague and the killing of his parents and other members of his family and community hit like a rock falling from the sky. Ibn Khaldun says: "It was as if the whole world had changed". It was because of this profound experience, and the continued memory of his deceased father, himself a mystic Sufi, and not because of Ibn Khaldun's official duties as a qadi or his typical work-a-day life, that the *Muqaddimah* emerged from the mind of Ibn Khaldun. For a writer, it is odd to see him delete or discard dramatic, important and revealing scenes in the life story of Ibn Khaldun.

Ibn Khaldun is like a hypnotist. He seems capable of transforming his biographers into dreamers. Irwin says: "... Writing this book has been the culmination of a necromantic pursuit. I have spent most of my life communing with a man who has been dead for over six hundred years ... It has been a kind of séance and, as is so often the case with séances, it has sometimes been difficult to interpret

the messages coming across the centuries” (p. 205). Irwin’s book is a welcome addition to Ibn Khaldun scholarship. It has answered many questions that I and other scholars had failed to address. I only wonder, however, that if Irwin had awakened somewhat from Ibn Khaldun’s hypnotic pull, Might he have realized that while Ibn Khaldun was capable of holding secrets, he left abundant clues that pointed to something beneath the surface telling of his life? As Irwin should know, sometimes the unseen is obvious and the obvious unseen.

Allen J. Fromherz
Georgia State University

NEFELI PAPOUTSAKIS and SYRINX VON HEES (eds):

The Sultan’s Anthologist – Ibn Abī Ḥaḡalah and His Work.

436 pp. Baden-Baden: Ergon Verlag, 2017. ISBN 978 3 95650 282 8.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X19000090

In 2013, Thomas Bauer received the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize, which is awarded annually by the German Research Society (DFG) to a researcher working in Germany in one of many fields. It is the most prestigious award for the advancement of research in Germany and is endowed with up to €2.5 million per prize winner. This sum can be applied by the winner to any research work in the subsequent seven years, according to one’s own needs and concepts and without any bureaucratic burden. Thomas Bauer chose to use his prize money to establish the Leibniz Prize Research Center entitled “Arabic literature and rhetoric, 1100–1800” (ALEA) at the University of Münster. The texts emerging from this period have previously been largely neglected by researchers, the reason being the dominant idea, originally from Western and colonial thought (which was then quickly adopted by Arabic elites), that there had once been a “Golden Age” that was subsequently replaced by a long period of stagnation and decline. The latter was said to have lasted until the nineteenth century, when the Western colonial powers “breathed new life” into the Arabian countries. Apparently, the ideas of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) concerning the philosophy of history were powerful and efficacious. According to Hegel, history represents the progress that occurs in the consciousness of freedom, thus in the end the self-realization of freedom. The particular “spirit” of a nation blossoms for a time, yet it should be seen only as one link in a long chain. Once it has fulfilled its historical purpose, it is no longer of any use in the world. That nation then leaves the stage to make way for another nation. For Hegel, Christianity was the source of all free thought and precipitated modern European culture. In this narrative, the only task Islam has is to transfer knowledge from ancient Greece to modern Europe. This served as a bridge over the “dark ages” of Medieval times.

In this sense, the entire post-Seljuk era may be seen as mere imitation, epigonal, devoid of any true value. In Islamic studies, this led to – among other things – literary texts from the time of the Mamluks and the Ottoman Empire being neglected entirely. This changed only after Thomas Bauer, in a series of articles, pointed out that, for example, the literary writing of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Syria and Egypt blossomed without parallel, and that this period gave birth to some of the most complex and sophisticated literary writing, embedded within a broad literary culture (Thomas Bauer, “Mamluk literature: misunderstandings and new approaches”, *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9/2, 2005, 105–32; Bauer,