

been strengthened with documentation of how he identified and analyzed the regular sound changes, which he uses to distinguish borrowings in the cultural vocabulary words and the source languages of loanwords, as well as more details about how he is using loanwords as historical sources.

In conclusion, *Fusion Foodways* takes on large literatures, such as the histories of the Columbian Exchange, the Atlantic world, and the African diaspora. It brings to light the role of African farmers and cooks as historical agents who experimented with growing and processing new crops, cooking new foods, and who ultimately ordered their lives and their societies around the production of new foods. La Fleur's study provides an important, yet all too often, missing link in the Atlantic world literature of the history of Africans in Africa and the ways that transformations in African societies were largely impacted by transformations in the Atlantic world. La Fleur characterizes Africans in Africa who greatly outnumbered Africans who disembarked in the Atlantic world as a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a 'hidden diaspora'. In addition, La Fleur's study reinforces the notion that the African diaspora was not only unidirectional. Africans in different stages of freedom left the continent for the New World where they experimented with new crops and cooking practices. Some of the charter generation and many more of their descendants returned to the African continent bringing their cultigens, cultivation techniques, and culinary arts with them. How much richer the world is for their efforts!

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## ALMOHAD PAPERWORK

*Governing the Empire: Provincial Administration in the Almohad Caliphate (1224–69). Critical Edition, Translation, and Study of Manuscript 4,752 of the Hasaniyya Library in Rabat.*

Edited By Pascal Buresi and Hicham el Aallaoui. Translated By Travis Bruce.

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The Almohad Empire was founded on an apocalyptic promise. The mahdi of the Almohads, Ibn Tumart, proclaimed a new era and ideology of unity or *tawhid* that would begin in the Maghreb, the land of the setting sun. Remarkably, despite the death of the mahdi and the breaking of the apocalyptic spell, a reconstituted vision was maintained by his successor 'Abd al Mu'min. 'Abd al Mu'min's conquests in the name of Ibn Tumart transformed Northern Africa and the entire Western Mediterranean. As the empire reached its farthest extent it became necessary to consolidate the driving ideology of *tawhid*, founded on the backbone of Mountain Berber loyalty and unity. While successors of 'Abd Al Mu'min maintained a remarkable degree of control, dynastic decay eventually set in.

The question of how the Almohad Empire persisted over an area of geographic diversity as long as it did is certainly worth asking. With the publication of *Governing the Empire*,

Pascal Buresi and Hicham El Allauoi seek to provide specialists and linguists with a new analysis of a set of *taqadim*, imperial administrative correspondence and appointment letters from the waning years of the Almohad Caliphate. The authors set two primary goals for their work. The book first seeks to provide technical analysis of these administrative texts in order to establish the ideological foundations for the Almohad Caliphate. It is difficult to see, however, how such an analysis of these highly administrative and formulaic texts could fully achieve that goal of illuminating ideology. Instead, the author's stated goal of showing 'institutional' frameworks and the persistence of those institutions seems more promising. The authors argue that 'the originality of the structure that they [the Almohads] put into place could not stray from the framework they contributed to formalizing. Therein lies the dialectic of distinction through conformity; that is, the conformity of distinction, that is at the heart of this study' (p. 3). It is difficult to discern, however, what 'conformity of distinction' really means.

In their effort to remain tied to the text, the authors, at times, eschew issues of greater significance and for a large portion of the book remain locked in technical arguments about orthography. There are times when the broader analysis needed to support their overall thesis is lacking. A greater understanding of the distinctive role of the various Berber Mountain tribes whom they wrongly identify as 'sedentary', a more open attitude towards historical anthropology, and less fear of the rich literature and comparative analysis of empire would, I believe, help fill in many of the gaps and clear up some confusion. The authors seem heavily dependent on continental scholarship coming almost exclusively from the national research institutions of Spain and France, which they describe as 'complete' (p. 5, fn. 4). Engaging with the work of Amira Bennison, Philip Naylor, Hugh Kennedy, David Powers, Russell Hopley, and other authors writing in English, as well as M. Talbi, H. Ferhat, and even Malik Bennabi who have written excellent work in North Africa, might have led the authors to insights of wider significance.

Nevertheless, the authors are perhaps too modest about what they have contributed. At one point they say of their assistance from the librarian at the Hasaniyya Library in Rabat: 'My [our?] lack of knowledge in Maghribi manuscripts leads me to accept and follow his [Ahmad Benezine's] evaluation.' (p. 95) But little 'lack of knowledge in Maghrebi manuscripts' is shown here. Instead, the work appears technically very good and provides illuminating techniques for reading the often-difficult Almohad sources. Any future edition would benefit from a fuller index for this valuable volume.

The authors seem to have limited themselves to studying the formulaic verses omitted by previous editors, who they praise. This raises the question of why they decided to devote their attention solely to these texts when a more far-reaching documentary analysis of texts both within and without the Almohad context alongside a selection of these *taqadim* could illuminate the big questions of Almohad decline. Overall, however, despite self-imposed limits, this book is at least as good as earlier edited contributions. It offers an illuminating portrait of an Islamic empire in its dying days and deserves careful study. It is a welcome addition for specialists in the area and for the patient generalist interested in the life cycle of religiously-inspired empires.

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