

Book Review

Konrad Hirschler. *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture: The Library of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī*. Edinburgh Series in Classical Islamic History and Culture (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), x + 612 pp. ISBN 978-14-7445-156-7. Price: £85.00 (cloth).

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In his new book, Konrad Hirschler continues his research on the history of libraries and catalogs. After studying the catalog of the Damascene Ashrafiyya Library,¹ Hirschler remains in Damascus but this time turns his gaze to the books of the Ḥanbalī scholar Yūsuf Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī (840–909/1437–1503). Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, also known as Ibn Mibrad, was a minor scholarly personality. He belonged to the Maqdisī branch of local Ḥanbalism, and like many members of that branch, he lived in the Damascene neighborhood of Ṣālihiyya, on the slopes of Mt. Qāsiyūn, west of the

old city’s walls.² Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī traveled little and wrote a lot—an estimated 800 works according to Hirschler—but not many of his works enjoyed wide dissemination. He was a precise and dedicated bibliophile equipped with a strong sense of himself and of the prestigious scholarly tradition to which he belonged. Accordingly, he compiled several autobiographies, one of which has just been published by Said Aljoumani and Hirschler.³ Most importantly, for the purposes of the book under review, Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī also accumulated a collection of some 3,000 works

* Cecilia Palombo read and discussed with me the last version of this text. I would like to thank her here for her sensible suggestions.

1. Konrad Hirschler, *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library; The Ashrafiya Library Catalogue* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

2. Ṣālihiyya has been at the center of recent scholarly attention: see Toru Miura, *Dynamism in the Urban Society of Damascus: The Ṣālihiyya Quarter from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

3. Said Aljoumani and Konrad Hirschler, *Mu‘allafāt Yūsuf b. Ḥasan b. ‘Abd al-Hādī wa-musāhamatuhu fī ḥifẓ al-turāth al-fikrī* (Leiden: Brill, 2021). The book is more than a translation of the English one presented here, especially chapters 4 to 6. It will not be discussed here. I thank Mohamed Merheb for drawing my attention to it.

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contained in almost 600 manuscripts that, toward the end of his life, he endowed to the ‘Umariyya Madrasa along with their *fihrist* (catalog). The *fihrist* survived, and so did a substantial portion of his book endowment. Both lie at the heart of this study.

The research carried out by Hirschler combines two main dimensions that are already explicit in the title of the book. One focuses on Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s project of constructing a large corpus of books that he itemized in his *fihrist* and donated to a madrasa that was particularly prominent in the history of Syrian Ḥanbalism. With a special emphasis on materiality (here “material philology”), Hirschler explores how and why Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī assembled his collection.⁴ Hirschler argues that Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī conceived of this corpus of books as a monument to the heyday of the local culture of hadith transmission, an activity whose literary outcomes, social mechanics, and cultural implications have recently been at the center of a growing scholarly trend.⁵ The second and more ambitious dimension that Hirschler intends to illuminate through the case study of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s *fihrist* and his extant books is the social and cultural significance of

owning and endowing books in the late medieval period (p. 2). In this regard, Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s *fihrist* and endowment are presumably treated as representative of a larger book culture, although—as will be pointed out below—his collection bore the marks of a highly distinctive personal and individual project. Hirschler explains that Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s collection deserves to be studied because “it is surrounded by an outstandingly dense documentation” (ibid.). The book unfolds as a close examination of this documentation.

Without being explicitly divided into two parts, *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture* is in fact organized in two sets of chapters. The first one consists of four narrative chapters that cover Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s life and his book endowment: its material aspects, aims, and history.⁶ The second one consists of two chapters and is bulkier.⁷ It comprises an edition of Yūsuf Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s *fihrist*, preceded by identification of the items mentioned in it. The single works are also matched—when possible—with Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s extant manuscripts and modern editions. Two sections of plates, at the end of chapters 4 and 6, allow the reader to follow the argument and to visualize the sources and

4. For nonspecialists, a clarification of the differences between “material philology” and “codicology” may have been appropriate. The reference is to Stephen Nichols, “Philology in a Manuscript Culture,” *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 65, no. 1 (1990): 1–10, but see also, slightly later, idem, “Why Material Philology? Some Thoughts,” in *Philologie als Textwissenschaft: Alte und neue Horizonte*, ed. Helmut Tervooren and Horst Wenzel, special issue, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 116 (1997): 10–30. A useful overview can be found in Lena Rohrbach, “Material Philology,” in *Handbook of Pre-modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann, and Stephen A. Mitchell, part 1: *Disciplines, Traditions and Perspectives*, 210–16 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018).

5. In English, see, above all, Garret Davidson, *A Social and Intellectual History of Hadith Transmission across a Thousand Years* (Boston: Brill, 2020) and before him the seminal article by Eerik Dickinson, “Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, no. 3 (2002): 481–505.

6. Chapters 1 to 4 with introduction and conclusion, pp. 1–170.

7. Chapters 5 and 6, pp. 171–554.

much of the information provided by the author. In addition to the general index and bibliography, the provided indexes of titles, authors, thematic categories, and identified manuscripts of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s books (pp. 582–612) are necessary ancillary tools to make the best of the catalog.

The book is rich and informed by a variety of approaches with a strong penchant for material history. It starts by providing context for Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s scholarly background, his ancestors and descendants, and more generally his family branch—the Maqdisīs—that was renowned for its commitment to hadith transmission.⁸ Hadith transmission is also the field of which Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī was most fond, as is clear from his own book collection. Despite his impressive written production, biographies of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī are not very informative. Yet close inspection of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s books (i.e., manuscripts) allows Hirschler to uncover details about this scholar’s real-estate and professional activities, details that are omitted by biographical sources. This is one of the main points the book seeks to make: that documentary and manuscript sources are essential for bringing to light information that remains below the radar of normative and narrative texts. At the end of the first chapter, two topics are tangentially touched upon (pp. 59–63). They are peripheral to

Hirschler’s agenda but deserve to be mentioned here since they are important for a complete understanding of late medieval Syrian Ḥanbalism. The first is Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s Sufism, which raises the broader issue of the relationship of hadith scholars and transmitters with local forms of *taṣawwuf*. As Hirschler observes (p. 59), the mutual permeability of the boundary between these trends has been repeatedly pointed out in recent research.⁹ Nonetheless, its full configuration has yet to be understood. One significant step in this direction has been taken by Arjan Post in his book on the tradition-oriented *taṣawwuf* of the Taymiyyan Sufi ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī (d. 711/1311).¹⁰ At some point at the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century, ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī became a student of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) in Damascus and the Sufi teacher of Ibn Taymiyya’s circle of followers, many of whom were devoted to hadith transmission and scholarship. Al-Wāsiṭī devised a sober, scripturalist, prophet-centered *taṣawwuf*.

Like many of his peers, Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī was the author of a booklet on the *khirqā* (the initiatory Sufi cloak) in which he professes to have received the cloak of the Qādirī brotherhood via a lineage featuring the names of the authoritative Ḥanbalīs Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1392), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), and Ibn Taymiyya.¹¹

8. See Stefan Leder, “Charismatic Scripturalism: The Ḥanbalī Maqdisīs of Damascus,” *Der Islam* 74, no. 2 (1997): 279–304.

9. Too often overlooked is Denis Gril, “De la khirqā à la ṭarīqa: Continuité et évolution dans l’identification et la classification des voies,” in *Le soufisme en Égypte et dans le monde musulman à l’époque ottomane*, ed. Rachida Chih and Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, 58–81 (Cairo: IFAO, 2009), esp. 63–72, 80 with n. 75. Gril makes important points about the meaning of *khirqā* treatises written in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.

10. Arjan Post, *The Journeys of a Taymiyyan Sufi: Sufism through the Eyes of ‘Imād al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī (d. 711/1311)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

11. Hirschler, *Monument*, 60–61; Yūsuf Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *Bad’ al-‘ulqa bi-lubs al-khirqā*, in *Lubs al-khirqā*

He also reports, from the Shāfiʿī hadith specialist Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī (d. 842/1438), a famous statement in which Ibn Taymiyya describes the Qādirī path as “the greatest path among the well-known ones.”¹² All these elements are duly noted by Hirschler, but it remains unclear what boasting of having worn the Qādirī *khirqā* meant to Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī and, overall, what the implications of claiming such spiritual affiliations were. In what senses and ways a scholar like Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī was a Sufi is a big question that remains to be answered.¹³

The mention of Ibn Taymiyya’s name leads to the second issue—namely, Ibn Taymiyya’s marginal position in Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī’s library. The broader issue at stake is, of course, the (not so obvious) relationship of late medieval Syrian Ḥanbalism to the legacy of the towering and controversial Ibn Taymiyya. Although quite a few of Ibn Taymiyya’s occasional writings are recorded in Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī’s *fihris*t, none of his big treatises is.

According to Hirschler, this is due to Ibn Taymiyya’s scant engagement in hadith transmission, which is corroborated by his minor role in the *Index of Damascene Audition Certificates* when compared to the Maqdisīs.¹⁴ Although there is certainly some truth in this claim, it is equally true that the *samāʿāt* excerpts reported by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī in his defense of those who acknowledged Ibn Taymiyya as *shaykh al-islām* do attest to some involvement on Ibn Taymiyya’s part in local hadith transmission.¹⁵ This element alerts us to remain vigilant about the limits of the *Index of Damascene Audition Certificates* and not to give up exploring literary sources as repositories of documentary ones.¹⁶

Hirschler suggests that there were two local trends of Ḥanbalism: a Ṣāliḥiyya-centered, hadith-focused Ḥanbalism, and a Taymiyyan Ḥanbalism concentrated within the city walls (p. 63). It is an interesting suggestion that deserves to be taken up in the future. The boundary

fi al-sulūk al-ṣūfī, ed. ʿAṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayālī, 45–75 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2008), 72–73.

12. Yūsuf Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī, *Badʾ al-ʿulqa*, 28. Famously, these materials were noticed by George Makdisi in “Ibn Taimiyya: A Ṣūfī of the Qādiriyya Order,” *American Journal of Arabic Studies* 1 (1974): 118–29, at 124; idem, “The Ḥanbalī School and Sufism,” *Boletín de la Asociación Española de Orientalistas* 15 (1979): 115–26, at 123, 125. See also idem, “L’isnād initiatique de Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma,” *Cahiers de l’Herne* 13 (1970): 88–96.

13. While writing this review, I became aware of Daphna Ephrat, *Sufi Masters and the Creation of Saintly Spheres in Medieval Syria* (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2021) which may provide answers to some of these questions.

14. Stefan Leder, Yāsīn M. al-Sawwās, and Maʾmūn al-Ṣāgharjī, *Muʿjam al-samāʿāt al-dimashqiyya: Les certificats d’audition à Damas, 550–750/1155–1349*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Institut français d’études arabes de Damas, 1996–2000).

15. I make this point in “Ḥadīth Culture and Ibn Taymiyya’s Controversial Legacy in Fifteenth Century Damascus: Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī and His *al-Radd al-Wāfir* (d. 842/1438),” in *The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam: The Prophet between Doctrine, Literature and Arts; Historical Legacies and Their Unfolding*, ed. Denis Gril, Stefan Reichmuth, and Dilek Sarmis, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2021). The work of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn in question is *al-Radd al-wāfir ʿalā man zaʿama anna man sammā Ibn Taymiyya shaykh al-islām kāfir*, ed. Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1393 [1973 or 1974]; 2nd rev. ed. 1400/1980).

16. Well argued by Fozia Bora with regard to historiography in *Writing History in the Medieval Islamic World: The Value of Chronicles as Archives* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019), 1–7, 12–27.

between these groups was probably more fluid than one might think. A good illustration of this point is Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343), one of Yūsuf’s ancestors. Muḥammad, too, was a Ṣāliḥiyya-based Ḥanbalī who was committed to hadith. He studied with the great hadith scholars of the day, al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) and al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341), taught in the Ṣāliḥiyya (at al-Ṣadriyya madrasa), and was close to Ibn Taymiyya, whose life he recounted and documented in the most voluminous and important biography of Ibn Taymiyya we possess.¹⁷ Not only is Muḥammad’s work well represented in Yūsuf Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s library,¹⁸ but Yūsuf also compiled two bibliographies of his ancestor’s writings. Yet Muḥammad’s *al-‘Uqūd al-durriyya*, so important for us, is not included in the *fihrist*.¹⁹ Hirschler’s book is thus a good reminder of the difficulty we face in figuring out the relationship between these close but diverse groups within the same school of law, a relationship we generally tend to depict as neater than it effectively was. This first chapter also performs a service by reminding us that little has yet been done on post- and extra-Taymiyyan Ḥanbalism.

The book continues by approaching Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s collection and *fihrist* from different angles. Chapter 2 addresses the purpose of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s project, which was—according to the author—the creation of a monument, or “museum of texts,” commemorating Ṣāliḥiyya’s

great legacy of hadith scholarship and transmission (p. 113). Chapter 3 adds to the monumentalization argument by examining the materiality of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s books: the shape of his manuscripts, the layout of their notes, and Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s archival practices. Chapter 4 retraces the afterlife of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s collection. It is here that the exquisite local flavor of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s books enters into conversation with the broader history of the nineteenth-century European book trade in the Arab Middle East, through which many of the Oriental manuscript collections of Western libraries took shape. Hirschler convincingly shows that Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s collection was saved from dispersal by its unattractive character together with the foundation, in 1878, of the Public Library in Damascus, where Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s corpus was transferred. In the last chapter (chap. 5), the author unpacks the logic of the *fihrist* and presents the difficulties involved in identifying the works it mentions. The identification of the works, authors, subjects, extant editions, and/or manuscripts for each of the titles listed in the catalog covers the rest of the book and forms its most voluminous part (pp. 198–511).

The argument running throughout the book revolves around the idea that Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s collection and endowment constituted an attempt to “monumentalise a bygone era of scholarly practices, namely post-canonical *ḥadīth* transmission” (p. 4). This argument is validated through several

17. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *al-‘Uqūd al-durriyya min manāqib shaykh al-islām Aḥmad b. Taymiyya*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥāmid Fiḳī (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Hijāz, 1938). On his life, see Ibn Rajab, *al-Dhayl ‘alā ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Sulaymān al-‘Uthaymīn, 5 vols. (Mecca: Maktabat al-‘Ubaykān, 2005), 5:117–23.

18. See Hirschler, *Monument*, 603 for references to the *fihrist*’s entries.

19. Hirschler, *Monument*, 94, and entries 511–12, 514–15.

indicators originating from Hirschler's insightful reading of his materials: Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's careful construction of a corpus of books that consisted mainly of small-scale hadith booklets with a strong Ḥanbalī-Ṣāliḥī bent in terms of their transmission history; his transmission notes, which drew renewed attention to booklets that had gone unread for a hundred years; the *fihrist* itself, which was meant to accompany the books and framed itself as a guide to the (monument's?) visitor; and the repeated readings to which Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī subjected his household in order to bid farewell to his books right before their endowment in 897/1492. Finally, the choice of the endowment's destination—the 'Umariyya Madrasa—was not accidental. As the madrasa that embodied the origins of Ṣāliḥī Ḥanbalism, it would have been particularly meaningful for somebody like Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī.

Materially speaking, Hirschler argues that Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's project was reinforced by his creation of a significant set of new books by binding small booklets together into new, large-scale composite manuscripts. On these newly bound books, Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī left evidence of his presence by means of distinctive “legalized” transmission notes that functioned, according to Hirschler, as stamps. Contrary to the norm, Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī wrote his notes on the title page. His presence on his books was thus highly visible and distinctive. Finally, Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī used his newly bound books as archives by sewing into them a significant amount of his paperwork.

For Hirschler, these are all strong markers of Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's “conscious project of monumentalising what was for him the the glorious past of his hometown” (p. 67).

This book is part of a trend of growing interest in the history of libraries, catalogs, and book collections.²⁰ It participates in a wider documentary and material wave that studies archival practices rather than archives and manuscripts as objects rather than as texts, with their own life cycles, specific agencies, and performative functions. It is from this perspective, and not so much from that of intellectual history, that the book approaches the *fihrist* as well as Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's extant corpus. In this regard, Hirschler's achievements are manifold. His book illustrates the fascinating historical trajectory of Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's books, which passed from book markets to Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's home and then through the 'Umariyya Madrasa, the modern al-Maktaba al-'Umūmiyya, and the Zāhiriyya Library before ending up in the present-day al-Asad National Library, where they sit today. The book makes the long afterlife of this book collection extraordinarily alive. In so doing, it succeeds in showing the debt that a modern-day manuscript library owes to the personal project of a single seventh/fifteenth-century scholar of middling rank. Equally impressive is the amount of information Hirschler can extract from his material inspection of the manuscripts. It will also be important for scholars who work with Damascene *samā'āt* to know that 94% of the manuscript notes that Leder, al-Sawwās, and al-Ṣaghārjī indexed in

20. One significant title among others is Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar, and Cornell H. Fleischer, eds., *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4)*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

their *Muʿjam* come from Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī's collection (p. 67). Finally, Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī's very personal self-inscription on his books and Hirschler's skillful grasp of it allow the latter to track the provenance of Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī's books even though some of them are now scattered around the world. It is thus a relief to observe that the loss of historical information that normally accompanies unprovenanced objects or manuscripts is significantly reduced here.²¹

I have one further point to raise and one complaint to make. Let me start with the former. As anticipated above, part of Hirschler's agenda is demonstrating that manuscript and documentary sources and their material inspection can yield much information that literary sources do not divulge. In this vein, the contribution of Hirschler's work in general has been influential. Yet at the same time, the book under review also shows how much scholars can gain not by turning away from the dominance of narrative and normative sources²² but by activating a fruitful interplay between different types of sources. It is only thanks to Ibn Ṭūlūn that chunks of Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī's history of Ṣāliḥiyya have come down to us (pp. 48, 58). And it is Ibn Ṭūlūn, too, who tells us that at some point Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī endowed his books to the al-ʿUmariyya Madrasa (p. 97). "In fact," writes Hirschler, "we do not have a single note stating that

any of his books were endowed to the "Umariyya madrasa" (p. 96). The work on material and documentary sources carried out by Hirschler and others is innovative, refreshing, and inspiring. Now that these materials have begun to receive the attention they deserve, and their value has accordingly begun to be appreciated, serious critical reflection is needed not only on their potential but also on their limitations, if we are to make the most of them.

As for the complaint, it regards the heuristic term devised by Hirschler to explain the aim of Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī's project—namely, the idea, repeated many times throughout the book, that Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī's purpose was to erect a monument to commemorate a golden past of thriving hadith transmission that was focused on the Ṣāliḥiyya neighborhood and was on the brink of disappearance by Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī's time. Given the prominence of this argument in the book,²³ it is surprising that the concept of "monument" as a heuristic tool is never discussed. The absence of such a discussion in an otherwise theoretically rich study has the consequence of making the monument argument not fully convincing. In related literature, monuments are defined as "built forms erected to confer meanings on space."²⁴ Recent approaches emphasize that a monument bears multiple meanings

21. Charming discussions by Cecilia Palombo on working with (unprovenanced) collections can be read on the website of the Embedding Conquest project: <https://emco.hcommons.org/2021/03/19/it-belongs-in-a-museum-or-does-it/> and <https://emco.hcommons.org/2020/12/21/working-with-collections/>.

22. Hirschler, "From Archive to Archival Practices," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131, no. 1 (2016): 1–28, at 3.

23. See, for example, pp. 4, 67, 72, 80, 83, 87, 89, 92, 94, 95, 111, 112, 117, 138, 140, 141, 145, 149, 152, 155, 156, 157, 158, and 167.

24. Federico Bellentanti and Mario Panico, in "The Meanings of Monuments and Memorials: Toward a Semiotic Approach," *Punctum* 2, no. 1 (2016): 28–46, advocate a semiotic approach to monuments but also

that stem from the interplay among its designers, its users, the monument itself, and the surrounding environment.²⁵ The spatial dimension of a monument is a central aspect of it.²⁶ The issues of space and users are too important to be overlooked. Where and how in the al-‘Umariyya Madrasa were Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s books placed? Were they displayed and thus visually accessible? Hirschler discusses the significance of the ‘Umariyya location for Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī in a paragraph titled “Placing the monument” (pp. 103–12), yet the monument is not the ‘Umariyya building but the collection of books itself. It is thus the spatial positioning of the collection within the ‘Umariyya with its ensuing consumption “as a monument” that one expects to find discussed here. One might assume that Hirschler uses the word “monument” metaphorically to mean “a tribute to.” This does not seem to be the case, however, because the word occurs in the title of the book and too often thereafter to be just a suggestive metaphor. Furthermore, the paragraph on “placing the monument” just mentioned shows that the word is not intended figuratively. Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s endowment is also referred to as a “museum of texts” (p. 113). Preservation, conservation, and safeguarding are perhaps implicit

dimensions here. Yet a museum—like a monument—is also, and above all, a place of visual accessibility and display.

On the contrary, what emerges with great force throughout the book is the highly individual character of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s enterprise. In putting together his book collection, in binding insignificant booklets into larger ones, in signing his notes and styling them in a strikingly distinctive fashion, in placing them on the first rather than the last page of his books, in sewing his own paperwork into his manuscripts, and finally in endowing all of this to a famous Ḥanbalī madrasa, this little-known Ḥanbalī scholar exhibited a robust sense of self. This is a self that appears inextricably tied to his books, which in turn bespoke the scholarly profile of the community Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī belonged to and its chosen place (Ṣāliḥiyya). In other words, a conscious and deliberate personal project surfaces from Hirschler’s material study of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s library and catalog. Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s self-inscription into these materials is so pervasive that both the *fihrist* and the books could almost be read as material ego documents. This is precisely what strikes the present reader, and it is here that material philology as advocated and practiced by Konrad Hirschler performs at its best.

illustrate the main approaches to the subject.

25. Ibid.

26. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 220–26 (originally published in French in 1974 as *La production de l’espace*).