

Book Review

Eneko López Martínez de Marigorta. *Mercaderes, Artesanos y ulemas: Las ciudades de las coras de Ilbira y Pechina en época omeya.* Arqueologías, Serie Medieval, 2 (Jaén: UJA Editorial, 2020), 432 pp.

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Because the history of al-Andalus has mostly been written from a capital-centered perspective, the historical trajectory of the provinces has elicited only slight historiographical interest. Eneko López Martínez de Marigorta's book, which is based on his PhD dissertation written under the supervision of Professors Eduardo Manzano Moreno and Manuel Acién Almansa and defended at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) in 2017, fills this gap in an excellent way.

The book is dedicated to the study of the cities of southeastern al-Andalus, nominally the *kūras* ("provinces") of Elvira and Pechina. These correspond roughly to the modern provinces of Granada and Almería, which are very different in their topographical and cultural characteristics. The book's temporal scope is the Umayyad

era (second/eighth to fifth/eleventh centuries), set within a *longue durée* perspective that sees the author make frequent reference to the Visigothic and Taifa periods. This is an ambitious approach, since the objective of the book is to identify the historical trajectory of the region by looking at both cities and people, especially the progress of urbanization (p. 13).

The author has collected information from a wide range of sources, employing all the classical chronicles and geographical treatises while also making good use of the biographical literature (*tabaqāt*) and of some Latin Christian texts. With respect to the documentation, one of the strengths of the study is the systematic use of archaeological reports from recent investigations in the region, mostly in Pechina and *madīnat* Elvira, though some

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rural settlements are documented, too. Methodologically, that study does a fine job connecting textual sources and material evidence, both of which are meticulously examined and cross-checked. The study's methodological rigor contributes to both the ambition and the innovativeness of the conclusions.

The book is divided into seven chapters. It also contains twenty-three maps, which greatly assist the reader in understanding the discussion; nineteen color figures; and twenty black-and-white figures of various kinds (here we must also commend the editor for the high-quality product). The list of sources occupies a six-page section (pp. 371–77), which shows their breadth, and an extensive bibliography of forty-eight pages likewise gives the reader insight into the wide range of materials used (pp. 377–415). Although the chapters are arranged to follow a chronological progression, in fact they also reflect three geographical scales: local, Iberian, and Mediterranean.

Focused on the *kūra* of Elvira-Granada, chapters 1 (“The articulation of the province of Ilbīra before the creation of its *madīna*,” pp. 19–65) and 2 (“The *madīna* of Ilbīra and territorial hierarchical organization,” pp. 67–108) investigate how the transition from the Visigothic era to Umayyad rule affected the southeastern portion of the Iberian Peninsula—in other words, how it inflected the course of Late Antiquity in the region. After reviewing the narratives of the Islamic conquest at the beginning of the second/eighth century, the author proposes an interesting synthesis regarding the settlement of the Arab *ajnād* (military divisions), whose territorial distribution, which partly differs from that of the Visigothic

aristocracy, he precisely delineated (p. 32). Another interesting facet of this first chapter is the data the author has gathered regarding the administration of the region; such information is rare for al-Andalus because of the scarcity of sources for the first centuries of the Islamic era. It is notable that in this peripheral region, the Arab *ajnād* continued to hold the most prominent administrative positions; Umayyad power seems to have been very limited here, although the *kūra* of Elvira was one of the provinces that contributed the most to the treasury due to the dynamism of its economic life.

It seems that Islamic Elvira—a place distinct from late antique Illiberis—became the capital city of the *kūra* in the middle of the third/ninth century, when it was inhabited by Syrian Arabs, whose importance can be seen in the *tabaqāt*, especially in the tribal *nispas*. Elvira gradually managed to polarize its hinterland, especially from a fiscal point of view. It was also a major vector for transmitting Islamic scholarship, since many of the local scholars traveled east for a *riḥla fi ṭalab al-‘ilm* (journey in search of knowledge). The author notes that Elvira produced more such traveling scholars than most other cities. This indicates that in peripheral spaces, Islamization must be seen as a local initiative, with only slight interference from the capital. Because of the influence of the Syrian *ajnād*, Umayyad emirs had only a limited role in the city; their one attempt to appoint a judge, for example, ended in failure. Although Elvira was deeply affected by the *fitna* in the late third/ninth century, these effects had highly specific local features. It seems that the proportion of rebels belonging to the social group of the *muwalladūn* (Muslims

of local descent) was smaller in Elvira than it was anywhere else in al-Andalus; the most important local rebels were in fact Syrians.

In this context, the first appearance of the toponym Granada, at the end of the third/ninth century, is quite remarkable. That toponym had, of course, a storied career after the end of the fourth/tenth century, as shown in chapter 6 (“The *madīna* of Granada and the substitution of the *Shāmiyyūn* by stipendiary troops,” pp. 277–95). Under the Umayyad caliphate, Elvira experienced a major disturbance after *hājib* al-Manṣūr recruited a great number of mercenaries from the Maghrib. During the *fitna* that ended the caliphate of Cordoba, *madīnat Ilbīra* was destroyed and its inhabitants moved into the highlands, where they settled at the site of late medieval Granada. There, a lineage belonging to the Banū Zīrī family took over and ruled over an independent taifa until the end of the fifth/eleventh century. Thus the *fitna* appears to have been a real watershed, in some regards much more important than the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, for it completely changed the territorial configuration of the region.

The Mediterranean orientation of the southeastern Iberian Peninsula is investigated in chapters 3 (“The *madīna* of Pechina and the connection to the Mashriq,” pp. 109–61) and 5 (“The *madīna* of Almeria and the Umayyad maritime influence,” pp. 231–75), with an emphasis on Pechina and Almeria. The main focus of chapter 3 is the foundation of Pechina, which has been discussed in many earlier publications and is regarded as convincing proof of the increased openness of al-Andalus to the Mediterranean in

the middle of the third/ninth century. An important partner in that opening was the Maghrib, where, the author underscores, many Andalusians from the peninsula’s southeast settled and formed a diasporic network. Their communities included one in al-Qayrawān (in modern-day Tunisia), which was at that time the “mother city” of the Islamic West, and another in Tenes (today’s Algeria), which is presented in medieval sources as an Andalusian foundation. This chapter clearly shows how Pechina was shaped by its very specific opening to the sea. It became a major hub of western Mediterranean trade but also one of the most dynamic peripheral cities of al-Andalus in terms of Islamic scholarship because of its links with the Maghrib and the East. The author’s use of the Andalusian *ṭabaqāt* literature here is very convincing. He extracts from this corpus extensive information regarding local ‘ulamā’ who traveled to the Maghrib and/or to the East, studied there, and brought back Islamic knowledge. These data thus illustrate clearly the social and cultural construction of a city founded by Muslims. The author makes good use of archaeological reports from a material and economic perspective.

Chapter 5 presents the consequences of the foundation of Almeria, which was chosen as the harbor of the Umayyad navy in the middle of the fourth/tenth century and quickly overshadowed Pechina. Here, the reader may regret that the conflict between the Umayyad and Fatimid caliphates is passed over so quickly, since medieval authors argued that ‘Abd al-Rahmān III founded Almeria specifically in response to a Fatimid attack in 344/955; that moment was as traumatic as it was foundational. Apart from this aspect,

the chapter continues the reflections of the previous one, looking into the Mediterranean functions of Almeria from an Iberian perspective. Founded as a caliphal initiative, the city followed a very specific trajectory, increasingly guided by central political power. The author observes that notables from Pechina continued to play a political role within the administration of the caliphate, especially in its navy, until al-Manṣūr managed to curb their influence. From an economic point of view, Almeria became the most important city on the Mediterranean shore of al-Andalus, receiving considerable investment from the caliphs, who acted as traders in their own right. The city's two functions—military and economic—had a direct influence on its urban arrangement, which featured the unique association of a *qayṣariyya* (public market) and a *dār al-ṣinā'a* (arsenal) in the center. Because of the macro-development of Almeria, Pechina experienced a long decline. The pages dedicated to the Taifa period (fifth/eleventh century) are especially interesting, since the author shows that the *fitna*, traditionally considered to have represented a breakdown, did not hamper urban development in this area. In addition to functioning as the main Mediterranean harbor of al-Andalus—its “door to the East” (*bāb al-sharq*)—Almeria also became one of the peninsula’s most powerful cities, and its population was still growing during the Taifa period, when several new suburbs were established.

Indeed, economic life at the local level is the subject of chapters 4 (“The artisanal and mercantile environment of the *madīnat Ilbīra* and Pechina,” pp. 163–229) and 7 (“The flourishing of production and trade in the cities of the provinces of Ilbīra and

Pechina,” pp. 297–359). Here, the author adopts a double perspective, analyzing first manufacturing activities and then trade.

Regarding the production of goods, archaeological investigations have clearly shown that products such as luxury ceramics and glass are well represented in the archaeological record as early as the third/ninth century. Within the city, the textual sources document also other luxury products, including items made of iron, copper, and brass; leather goods; marble carvings; and perfumes. Textiles seem to have been very important within local economic networks, and specific, renowned items such as silk (*ḥarīr*) became key products for the local economy, sold in Mediterranean markets. Later, silk ensured the wealth of the Nasrid emirate of Granada. Local linen (*kattān*) was also prized. The consumption of such goods, which clearly increased in the fourth/tenth century, can be related to the expansion and refinement of the urban way of life. The author develops a very interesting approach to the study of production, combining archaeological findings and textual data, such as professional *nisbas* extracted from the *ṭabaqāt* literature. By doing so, he manages to circumvent the silence of the medieval authors on economic matters and to reconnect the products to their makers, who are usually invisible.

These cities were also major hubs of trade, at different scales. The author demonstrates, through archaeological studies, that the cities’ inhabitants lived on the agro-pastoral products of their own hinterland. More important, however, were their regional trading functions. Open to the Mediterranean, they were also tightly connected with the capital

city of Cordoba, the node of all economic networks in Umayyad al-Andalus. For the first time, Pechina seems to have been connected to Cordoba by a route that remains partly unknown; following the foundation of Almeria, it seems that the road between Cordoba and the new harbor was one of the most important. At this point, Granada became the node that connected the two segments of the route.

Through the vast sweep of his scholarship, Eneko López Martínez de Marigorta delivers with this book an insightful reflection on the construction and resilience of a territory. The book's merging of spatial and cultural approaches, using a wide range of very different sources of information, proves both generative and innovative. By demonstrating the true importance of territories that are normally considered peripheral from a political perspective, this book makes an important contribution to the history of the Islamic West. It shows that the *kūras* of Elvira and Pechina were crucial in the creation and development of relations with the opposite shore of the Mediterranean and with the East, an important source of both trade goods and scholarship. Another important conclusion is that academic periodization is open to discussion and debate. In this region the most important period seems to have been not the Islamic conquest of the early second/eighth century but rather the middle of the fifth/

eleventh century, which saw such important changes as the emergence of Granada and the ascendancy of Almeria at a Mediterranean level. These developments produced a very different pattern from that seen in Visigothic Iberia.

One may note several weaknesses in the section on the book's sources. First, most of the sources are referenced only in an Arabic edition, and not always the edition preferred by scholars. This can be disconcerting for readers in search of translated texts. Moreover, some references are mistaken; for instance, the *Mafākhir al-Barbar* is said to have been edited and translated by Muḥammad Ya‘lā, but in fact it was only edited by him. In terms of historiography, it is unfortunate that the bibliographical references consulted do not include more works from the French scholars who have dedicated important studies to Andalusian cities and especially Pechina-Almeria (such as Christine Mazzoli-Guintard, Mohamed Meouak, and Christophe Picard).¹

Yet these observations concerning the bibliography do not detract from the high quality of the analysis or of the book overall, and its abundant pictorial documentation will be of great help to readers. Original in its methodology, this very erudite book should certainly be welcomed, read, and discussed.

1. See, for instance, Christine Mazzoli-Guintard, “Almería, ¿ciudad-mundo en los siglos XI y XII?,” in *Carolus: Homenaje a Friedrich Edelmayr*, ed. Francisco Toro Ceballos, 241–49 (Alcalá la Real: Ayuntamiento de Alcalá la Real, 2017); Christophe Picard, “Pechina-Almeria aux ix^e–x^e siècles: La naissance d’un port omeyyade en Méditerranée,” in *Villes méditerranéennes au Moyen Âge*, ed. Élisabeth Malamut and Mohamed Ouerfelli, 163–76 (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2014); Mohamed Meouak, “Les Banū-l-Rumāḥis et les Banū Ṭumlus, fonctionnaires au service de l’état hispano-umayyade,” in *Familias Andalusíes: Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos de al-Andalus V*, ed. Manuela Marín and Jesús Zanón, 273–88 (Madrid: CSIC-Instituto de Cooperación con el Mundo Árabe, 1992).