

Yousef Casewit, *The Mystics of Al-Andalus: Ibn Barraġān and Islamic Thought in the Twelfth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
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Before being a work on the life and thought of Barraġān, the book of Y. Casewit is a modern introduction to the mystical movements that sprung up in al-Andalus, starting from the tenth century. In this review I will avoid giving a summary of the work, which is already provided in a thoughtful preface to the book. What seems to be more important to note is the methodology the author uses to describe the thought of Ibn Barraġān.

Contemporary scholarly works on medieval Islamic thought seem to be focused on the reconstruction of networks. The circulation of diverse ideas in al-Andalus has been the object the attention of a number of studies, all reviewed by the author in the introduction of his book. This preliminary overview is carried out not only as a state of the art. Casewit here dealt with the scholarship devoted to the reconstruction of a framework of historical and philosophical inquiry in tenth- to thirteenth-century al-Andalus. The issues of *bātinism*, *ismā'īlī* influences, and the role of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* are synthetically discussed and establish a large framework for the following inquiry. The most important part of the preliminary phase of the research is the definition of the role (if any) played by al-Ghazālī in the formation of Ibn Barraġān's thought. This passage narrows down the boundaries of Casewit's focus. From thence he focuses on the works of Ibn Barraġān with very few parallels with contemporary authors or attempts to reconstruct the written sources of his ideas.

Far from being a limitation of this book, this centering of the reader's attention on a single tile within a larger mosaic makes it an indispensable tool for future inquiries into the development of Sufism in al-Andalus. The underlying idea seems to be that, before trying to understand the whole picture, it is necessary to understand the specific character of each tile. In the rest of the book, Casewit allows very little space for the comparison with Ibn Barraġān's contemporaries, from al-Andalus or elsewhere. He does it mainly in the last chapters dealing with the central topics of Ibn Barraġān's books, like *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi al-khalq*, Qur'anic hermeneutics, and cyclical time. To mention but one example, in the case of the interpretation and the use of biblical quotations, Casewit draws a parallel with Ibn Ḥazm and with Zāhirism in general. Here the comparison is drawn on the basis of the attitude of the authors and the topics they dealt with, but the author is also keen to give some philological explanation about the possible sources for pre-Islamic Scriptures.

The author clarifies his attitude in the conclusions, where he gathers the different threads of the study and, defining the doctrine of Ibn Barraġān, says: "He was not merely a Muslim Neoplatonist, nor a proto-Isma'īlī clothed in the garb of Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. He did not see himself as repackaging Neoplatonism, the teachings of the Brethren, or Ismā'īlism for a Sunnī Andalusī audience. His writings are certainly enriched by the writings of Muslim philosophers, the Brethren, and perhaps indirect Isma'īlī contact, but he makes no reference to these works" (309). For Casewit, Ibn Barraġān is primarily an Andalusī scholar, whose sources rely primarily on Qur'anic text, prophetic sayings, and the Bible. It is, nonetheless, the first of these that plays the role of a touchstone: every other scripture is, according to Casewit's reconstruction, valid only if it does not contradict the Qur'ān. In this way Ibn Barraġān also dismisses all the intricacies of *isnād* criticism, to focus on the very content of traditions. "Quranic hegemony" is realized, according to Casewit, by a "hyperliteral reading of scriptures" (191) that will find application in later authors like Ibn 'Arabī. Also, in this case the author does not emphasize the concept of influence of earlier works on Ibn Barraġān. Casewit gives the reader information about the political context and the doctrinal debates of twelfth-century al-Andalus. The profiles of diverse authors that constitute the context of the development of Ibn Barraġān's thought are also thoroughly designed. Footnotes give hints about possible relations among those elements that do not make it to the main body of the text. The reader is, in this way, guided to look at Ibn Barraġān as a man of his time, where the debate around theological issues also had political and practical consequences. As for his sources, Casewit considers more important those that we are able to retrace directly in the text, leaving to footnotes and to a general background those that cannot be proven directly. This reductionist approach could leave unsatisfied a reader who is looking for the reconstruction of a broad intellectual esoteric network. On the other hand, this approach makes the book a safe reference for future inquiries in that direction.

Being centered on Ibn Barraġān's thought, the work is rich in quotations, which often close the discussion of a chapter or a sub-section, giving Ibn Barraġān the last word in explaining his ideas. The reviewer would have appreciated the presence of the original Arabic, which is only partially compensated by transcriptions of some key terms. This could be due to editorial limitations and does not diminish the value of the work.

A last note can be made on how Casewit positions the titanic figure of Ibn Barraġān in the context of Sufism, approached as spiritual dimension of Islam. The introduction of *'itibarism* as a key term for the Andalusī movement seems to be coherent with the previous sources and contemporary to Ibn Barraġān. On the other hand, it seems to have been abandoned in post-Ibn 'Arabī Sufism,

which apparently does not preserve the memory of this movement as a separate current of Islamic spirituality. Its introduction in scholarly terminology is quite welcome, as it can be used parallel to *bāṭinism* in order to distinguish two tendencies that animate not only al-Andalus, but *taṣawwuf* in its broadest sense.

Michele Petrone

Post-doctoral Researcher, Institut des civilisations, arts et lettres (INCAL),

Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium

michele.petrone@uclouvain.be