

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an intellectual biography of the historian and theorist ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406). It argues that Ibn Khaldūn and his South Asian readers were driven to contest prevailing views of history and society as much by their individual concerns (responding to perceived crises and succeeding in their careers) as by their intellectual affiliations (with Rāzian philosophical theology, Islamic reform, sectarian convictions, and Muslim nationalism). The first four chapters show how troubles in Ibn Khaldūn’s personal life, his careerist concerns, and his education in commentarial traditions shaped his innovative writing on historiography and society. The commentarial texts of the philosopher and theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (1149–1210) were especially significant, since Ibn Khaldūn relied on al-Rāzī for specific theological concepts as well as for combining diverse ideas and methodologies in the *Muqaddimah*. On the other hand, the final chapter questions the claim that colonial South Asia lacked any indigenous traditions of reading Ibn Khaldūn. It argues that local intellectuals displayed their agency in using the historian’s work to respond to various crises of colonial modernity. They read, translated, and appropriated Ibn Khaldūn to seek inspiration for modern Muslim nationalism, as validation for sectarian convictions and the rhetoric of Islamic reform, and to resist colonial and Hindu revivalist narratives of despotic Muslim rule of India.