Keywords: al-Andalus, Umayyad centralization, Islamization, urban development, Muslim elite, luxury goods
fitna (civil war), during the late Emirate period, and the build-up of fortifications are analysed in the Ilbīra hinterland.

Chapter 3 moves the setting to the eastern district of Urš al-Yamān (then within the “cora” of Ilbīra) and the city of Pechina, which was founded there in the mid-9th century. The role of the bahriyyun (indigenous sailors) in the splendour and Islamisation of the city as well as the articulation of the Mediterranean trade axis are well explained, since they connected al-Andalus to North Africa and the East through the trade of luxury goods (i.e. slaves, silk fabrics, perfumes) and passenger transport. Their growing power, which culminated in the temporary independence of Pechina from both Ilbīra and the Umayyad emirate, is traced by the author from the preserved information. Chapter 4 considers the occupations related these new production activities and the mercantile craftsmanship of both Ilbīra and Pechina, and the relationship between them. This chapter also covers the natural resources of the region, especially from the Sierra Nevada mountains.

Chapter 5 explains how the city of Almeria—very close to Pechina—was founded by the Umayyads, converted into the seat of the Caliphal navy, and finally into the new capital of the district. This accelerated Almeria’s urban development, with a new citadel, walls, suburbs, artisan areas, and commercial buildings being built. The second fitna allowed the fityan (Caliphs’ domestic servants) family’s rise to power in the city and the definitive decline of Pechina. Chapter 6 is devoted to a similar story, but for the inland region, since it emphasizes the prevalence and the urban evolution of Ilbīra during the Caliphate and the loss of the capital in favour of Garnāṭa (Granada) with the arrival of the Zīrid dynasty during the Taifa period in the 11th century.

The last chapter provides the reasons for the productive and commercial emergence of the four cities during the 10th century, especially through the development of luxury craft activities, such as glazed pottery, silk and linen fabrics, perfumes, copper work, marble masonry, among others, and the routes and dynamism of exchanges in manufactured goods, slaves and food commodities.

Overall, López Martínez de Marigorta analyses three main processes: the shift of the taxation surplus, the Umayyad centralisation (materialised mainly in a new urban model), and the increased relations between the southeast of al-Andalus and the Dār al-Islam (particularly North Africa and the Middle East). However, the interaction of the area under study with the more closely related territories, such as other surrounding “coras,” is somewhat left aside. The contribution of this book (the outcome of the author’s thesis) advances the well-known idea that there was no immediate religious conversion to Islam after the conquest of Iberia. Rather, it was a centuries-long process, a solid trend based on the development of a common cultural framework that accounts for a social Islamisation. The tracing that López Martínez de Marigorta does of the people who lived in the territory during those centuries is commendable: he explains who they were, what their occupations were, their religion, tribal group and identity, where they lived and where they travelled. Much of the existing information was extracted particularly from the biographies of ulāmas. The clarification of the historical sequence, especially for the case of Pechina, is worth noting as well. The author’s effort to consider archaeological sources should also be highlighted, as it is of noble quality, despite the author not having archaeological training. López Martínez de Marigorta accounted for not only the published archaeological data, but also unpublished information from archaeological reports and
personal conversations with archaeologists. The lack of a more in-depth analysis of the territory from an archaeological point of view is manifest, but it must be noted that this was not the aim of the study.

In sum, the rich information and analyses provided in this work are essential to understanding the urban development and processes of Islamization and Arabisation in the Iberian Peninsula during the early Islamic period.