

## THE IBĀDĪS

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*Valerie J. Hoffman*

The Ibādī form is a distinct sect of Islam which nonetheless shares with the other major groups of Islam, the Sunnī and Shīʿī branches, the same basic doctrines and practices. Ibādī Islam's distinctions lie mainly in its doctrine of the necessity of overthrowing unjust rulers, if feasible, and in its definition of who is considered a Muslim. Ibādī Islam also preserves doctrines popular in the early Muʿtazilī theological school that have been discarded in Sunnī Islam, though preserved in some Shīʿī sects, regarding God's essence and attributes and the createdness of the Qurʾān. Ibādī Islam is a small sect found today only in Oman, in small pockets of Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, and among Omanis living in east Africa.

The Ibādīs are an offshoot of the first sectarian movement in Islam, the Khawārij or Kharijites ("those who went out"), which formed at the battle of Ṣiffīn in June 657 CE when a group of several thousand in the army of the Caliph, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, seceded from his camp over their disagreement with the Caliph's consent to subject to arbitration his dispute with Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān. Muʿāwiya was the son of Abū Sufyān, the former ruler of Mecca who had resisted Islam for so long during the lifetime of the prophet Muḥammad. Muʿāwiya was also a cousin of the former Caliph, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (r. 644–56) and had served as ʿUthmān's governor in Syria. In selecting governors for the provinces, ʿUthmān favored his own relatives from the clan of Umayyā, who had been the most resistant to Islam, though ʿUthmān himself was an early convert. This selection was somewhat understandable, given the Umayyad clan's experience of leadership, but ʿUthmān's nepotism and unequal distribution of the wealth derived from the Muslim conquests aroused widespread discontent that led to a conspiracy in the army and ultimately to his assassination.

ʿUthmān's assassination revealed deep divisions within the Muslim community regarding what was required of a Muslim and what was to be expected from the ruler of the Muslims. The Khawārij believed that faith must be proven by works, and that any Muslim who commits a grave sin, or who persists in a minor sin without repentance, should no longer be considered a Muslim, but rather an apostate deserving of death. From the Khārijī perspective, ʿUthmān's failure to repent when confronted by his soldiers' demands justified his assassination. Some other Muslims, however, felt that those who profess faith in Islam should be recognized as Muslims, regardless of their deeds. A group known as the Murjiʿa ("Postponers") held that faith does not increase or decrease according to one's deeds, and that judgment should be "postponed," i.e. left to God. Although this position is now deemed heretical because the notion that faith is unaffected by works gives the impression that acts of faith and morality are

meaningless, it is actually very close to standard Sunnī teaching, which accepts as Muslims all who profess faith in Islam, regardless of their sins. Such Muslims were shocked by the killing of the ruler of the Muslims, whose offenses were deemed quite minor.

Those who supported ʿUthmān’s assassination were among the supporters of his successor, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who felt Muslims were too divided over the justice of ʿUthmān’s killing to make it prudent or feasible to punish the assassins. His failure to punish ʿUthmān’s killers led Muʿāwīya to claim the right of blood vengeance and declare ʿAlī unfit to be Caliph. When their two armies met at Ṣiffīn, however, Muʿāwīya’s soldiers tied copies of the Qurʾān to the end of their lances and called for the matter to be settled by arbitration. When ʿAlī agreed, the Khawārij seceded from his camp, saying “no judgment but God’s,” meaning that the matter had already been settled by the Qurʾān, from which it was clear that ʿUthmān and Muʿāwīya were both sinners worthy of death, and that by agreeing to submit the matter to human arbitration ʿAlī was making an agreement with unbelievers, in violation of the Qurʾān’s injunctions, and so likewise had become an apostate. The Khawārij declared the necessity of a new *hijra* or withdrawal from the society of such “unbelievers” and the necessity of founding a new Islamic society. Anyone who did not join them in this belonged to the “Abode of War.” By declaring war against the majority of Muslims, the Khawārij sealed their own fate and, after two hundred years of assassinations, rebellions and general harassment of the imperial government, they died out as a sect.

Ibādīs are often called “moderate Khawārij” and are the only surviving Kharijite sect. However, while Ibādīs recognize their derivation from the Khawārij, they do not like to be called Khawārij, as the Khawārij have been universally denounced by all Muslims as deviant. Rather, the Ibādīs refer to themselves as “the people of straightness” (*ahl al-istiqāma*) and the only true Muslims. Their perspective on the Caliphates of ʿUthmān and ʿAlī is similar to that of the Khawārij, and they share with the Khawārij the perspective that grave sin or persistence in minor sins causes infidelity (*kufr*) and that sinners should not be considered Muslims but are infidels (*kuffār*) subject to dissociation (*barāʾa*) and are not included in the bond of spiritual friendship (*walāya*) that true Muslims share. However, whereas other Muslims equate infidelity (*kufr*) with unbelief, Ibādīs distinguish between two types of infidelity: the infidelity of ingratitude for God’s blessings (*kufr niʿma*) and the infidelity of polytheism (*kufr shirk*). Ibādīs feel the Khawārij were wrong to castigate sinners as polytheists and apostates; they classify both sinning Ibādīs and Muslims of other sects as *kuffār niʿma* who are not really “Muslims” but who are nonetheless monotheists (*muwahhidūn*) who face the same direction in prayer as true Muslims – they are *ahl al-qibla*, and they are members of the community (*umma*) of Muḥammad, and therefore deserve the courtesies extended to all who belong to the *umma*. Ibādīs do not deem it permissible to kill monotheists; the only ones who may legitimately be killed (aside from the perpetrators of capital crimes) are an unjust ruler who refuses to repent or step down, and those who support the unjust ruler and resist calls for justice.

### History

The Ibādīs derived from the “quietist” (*qaʿada*) Khawārij of the town of Basra in southern Iraq. Kharijite rebellions posed a serious threat during the civil wars that plagued

much of the Umayyad period after the death of Mu'āwiya's son and successor, Yazīd I, in 683. The earliest and most violent Khawārij were the Azāriqa or Azraqīs, followers of Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq, who conquered Basra in 684, opening the doors of the prisons there and assassinating the governor. Outraged Basrans of the Azd tribe, of Omani origin, expelled the Azraqīs, and Nāfi' was killed in battle the following year. 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 685–705), one of the most capable of the Umayyad caliphs, was able to regain control of all the provinces of the Islamic empire.

The Ibādī sect is named after 'Abd Allāh ibn Ibād (or Abād), who broke with the Azraqī Khawārij after 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān's accession to the throne. Jābir ibn Zayd, a well-known transmitter of *ḥadīth*, is generally seen as the true organizer of Ibādī Islam, though this has also been questioned (Wilkinson 1982: 133–6). He hailed originally from Oman and belonged to the Azd tribe, which had many important representatives among the moderate Khawārij of Basra. For many years Jābir had friendly relations with the powerful Umayyad governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, who apparently saw the Ibādīs as a bulwark against the growth of Kharijite extremism.

When 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān died in 705 and was succeeded by the pious 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, many Ibādīs hoped for the realization of their dreams of a righteous Islamic Imamate. They were disappointed, and many of the new Ibādī leaders wanted to embrace a more activist stance toward *jihād*. Jābir himself felt compelled to take action, and instigated the assassination of one of al-Ḥajjāj's spies. This led to a complete rupture in the friendly relations the Ibādīs had enjoyed with the Umayyad regime. Al-Ḥajjāj imprisoned many Ibādīs, and others were exiled to Oman.

Among those imprisoned in Iraq was Abū 'Ubayda Muslim ibn Abī Karīma al-Tamīmī, one of Jābir's students. Released after the death of al-Ḥajjāj in 714, he was appointed leader of the Ibādīs of Baṣra. Inclined at first to come to terms with the Umayyads, his fear of schism among the Ibādīs led him to embrace a different strategy. He established missionary teams called *ḥamalāt al-'ilm*, "bearers of knowledge," to propagate Ibādī teachings and promote anti-Umayyad insurrections in provinces that were less susceptible to immediate Umayyad control, like Khurasan (in northeast Persia), Oman, Yemen, the Ḥaḍramawt region (in the southeast of the contemporary republic of Yemen), and the Maghrib (the north coast of Africa west of Egypt). The Ibādīs of Baṣra embraced a strategy of *kitmān*, living in a state of "concealment" – that is, not openly espousing political rebellion, though they were well connected with the rebellions occurring in the provinces. Abū 'Ubayda's successor as leader of the Ibādīs in Baṣra, al-Rabī ibn Ḥabīb, author of the authoritative compilation of Ibādī *ḥadīth*, migrated to Oman. Increasingly, in response to persecution, Ibādīs were pushed to the margins of the Islamic empire.

The first Ibādī state was established in the Hadramawt in 745 under the leadership of 'Abd Allāh ibn Yahyā al-Kindī, known by the nickname Ṭalīb al-Ḥaqq (seeker of truth). He was able to conquer the northern Yemeni city of Sanaa in late 746, and from there moved on to capture Mecca and Medina. This Imamate ended when Ṭalīb al-Ḥaqq was killed in battle at the end of the Umayyad period in 749. One of his followers, an Omani named al-Julandā ibn Mas'ūd, fled to Oman, where he was elected Imām of a new Ibādī state – a short-lived effort that lasted only two years (750–2), ending in an Abbasid military expedition in which the Imām was killed. However, the next Omani Imamate, established in 793, lasted a century.

Abū 'l-Khaṭṭāb al-Ma'ārifi, one of the *ḥamalāt al-'ilm* sent out by Abū 'Ubayda to the

Maghrib, was elected as Imām in North Africa in 757. He seized Tripoli, in present-day northwestern Libya, and in 758 he captured Qayrawan (Kairouan), in present-day Tunisia, the chief Muslim city of the Maghrib at the time. He entrusted its government to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Rustam. Although the Abbasids recaptured Qayrawan in 761, Ibn Rustam was able to found an Ibāḍī state at Tahart, in present-day Algeria. The Rustamid Imamate, as it is known, lasted – though not without schisms and political crises – until it was overthrown by the Shi‘ite Fatimids in 909. Although Ibāḍī communities remain in small pockets in the Jabal Nafūsa mountain range of northwestern Libya, the island of Jirba (Djerba) off the east coast of Tunisia, and the Mīzāb (Mzab) valley of Algeria, an Ibāḍī Imamate ceased to exist in North Africa.

In Oman, however, aspirations to establish a righteous Imamate became a recurring theme in its tumultuous political history, riven by conflicting religious and tribal aspirations. The Imamate of al-Ṣalt ibn Mālik (845–79) ended with his deposition, the correctness of which was contested by rival theological schools associated with the towns of Nizwa and Rustaq. The Imamate of al-Khalīl ibn Shādhān ibn Ṣalt ibn Mālik (1016–34) inaugurated a period of important scholarly reflection and exchanges between the Ibāḍīs of Oman and the Hadramawt, although the dispute between the theological schools of Nizwa and Rustaq continued. In the middle of the twelfth century the Imamate collapsed when the Nabhānī family came to power in Oman, a period seen by Ibāḍī historians as tainted by tyranny and bloodshed, though Wilkinson sees little difference between it and the more idealized periods of the Imamates (Wilkinson 1987: 12). New Imamates arose in the early fifteenth century, but Oman was united only with the establishment of the Ya‘rubī dynasty in 1624, which lasted until the founding of the Bū Sa‘īdī dynasty in 1753.

The founder of the Bū Sa‘īdī dynasty, Aḥmad ibn Sa‘īd (r. 1753–83), was the last ruler in the dynastic succession recognized as Imām, though his son, Sa‘īd, claimed the title. Subsequent rulers were called by the honorific title *Sayyid* (“master”), or *sultān*, a title that carries no religious signification. Sayyid Sa‘īd ibn Sultān (ruled 1806–56), a grandson of Aḥmad ibn Sa‘īd, commanded an empire that extended over Oman and the East African coast, and in 1832 he transferred his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar. After his death, his son Thuwaynī ibn Sa‘īd ruled over Oman, while East Africa, with its capital at Zanzibar, was ruled by another son, Mājid ibn Sa‘īd. The Bū Sa‘īdī family continued to rule in Zanzibar until the anti-Arab revolution of 1964; they continue to rule in Oman, where the sultan since 1970 has been Qābūs ibn Sa‘īd ibn Taymūr.

The impulse to establish a righteous Ibāḍī Imamate did not die out, however. In 1868 a very successful revolt, led by the scholar and mystic, Sa‘īd ibn Khalfān al-Khalīlī, overthrew Sayyid Sālim and installed another member of the Bū Sa‘īdī family, ‘Azzān ibn Qays, as Imām. This Imamate was overthrown in late 1870 through a combination of British and Omani forces. In 1913 another revolt, led by the influential scholar, Nūr al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥumayd al-Sālimī (1864–1914), established the Imamate of Sālim ibn Rāshid al-Kharūṣī in the Jabal Akhḍar (“Green Mountain”) region of the interior that has always been the heart of the Ibāḍī impulse in Oman. But this Imamate was not able to command the coast, and Oman was effectively divided between the Sultanate in Muscat and the Imamate in the Jabal Akhḍar region. This division was formalized by the British-officiated Treaty of Sib in 1920, and remained in effect until 1953, when Sultan Sa‘īd ibn Taymūr reunited Oman under his rule.

### Ibādī doctrine

What follows is a summary of the ways in which Ibādī teachings are distinct from those of other Muslim sects.

#### *The status of sinning Muslims*

As explained above, Ibādīs reject the Sunnī position that faith is unaffected by works, and do not believe, as the Muʿtazila did, that there is an intermediary status between faith (*īmān*) and infidelity (*kufr*), but neither do they castigate grave sinners as unbelievers or “polytheists” (*mushrikūn*) deserving death, as the Khawārij did. Rather, they distinguish between two types of infidelity: (1) *kufr shirk*, the “infidelity of polytheism,” and (2) *kufr nifāq*, “the infidelity of hypocrisy,” or *kufr nīma*, “ingratitude for one of God’s blessings.” Only righteous Ibādīs are worthy of being called “Muslims” or “the people of straightness” (*ahl al-istiqāma*); non-Ibādī Muslims are *ahl al-khilāf*, “the people of opposition,” who are nonetheless included among the “monotheists” (*ahl al-tawhīd* or *muwahhidūn*), the “people of the *qibla*” who face the Kaʿba in prayer, and the *umma*, the religious community of Muḥammad.

#### *Religious friendship (walāya) and dissociation (barāʿa)*

Although the concepts of *walāya* and *barāʿa* are derived from the Qurʾān, Ibādīs are unique in their insistence on their priority. Religious friendship (*walāya*) is reserved for Ibādīs living in obedience to God; sinning Ibādīs and non-Ibādī Muslims are subject to “dissociation” (*barāʿa*). However, this does not necessarily mean severance of all contact or cordiality. Rather, as one early twentieth-century Ibādī author explained it (Hoffman: forthcoming), *barāʿa* is a matter of internal dissociation from spiritual fellowship, but this does not imply social avoidance or discourtesy, nor does it disallow genuine affection; it is simply an inner awareness that the person is not a true co-religionist. These days “dissociation” is more cognitive than actual. In fact, some British observers of the Ibādīs in Oman and Zanzibar came to the conclusion that Ibādīs are the most tolerant of all Muslims, living in harmony with all religious and ethnic groups. Furthermore, all “monotheists” are to be treated as “Muslims” under the law, with whom one can enjoy intermarriage, mutual inheritance one from the other, the Muslim greeting of peace, and other courtesies.

#### *Reward and punishment in the afterlife*

Although one must treat non-Ibādī Muslims with the courtesy all monotheists deserve, Ibādīs believe nonetheless that neither they nor sinning Ibādīs will be allowed into paradise. Unlike most Sunnī Muslims, Ibādīs deny that the Prophet will intercede for sinning Muslims to rescue them from hellfire. Ibādīs believe, in keeping with the strict teaching of the Qurʾān, that punishment in hellfire is eternal and that it is impossible for one to pass from hellfire into the garden of paradise.

### *Freewill versus predestination*

On this controversial theological question, which in early Islam pitted the upholders of freewill (the Qadariyya and Mu'tazila) against the "People of *ḥadīth*," who upheld predestination, Ibādīs embrace the solution proposed by Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 935), which has been accepted by many Sunnī Muslims (though many Ḥanafī Sunnīs subscribe to the Māturīdī theological school, with an analogous doctrine of the "acquisition" of human acts, and Ḥanbalīs reject theology altogether). This position holds that God creates human acts and humans acquire them. People are given a choice between two opposite acts (e.g., to do or not to do something, to believe or not to believe), but that choice does not in itself cause the act; it is simply God's custom to create an act according to human choice, though He is under no obligation to do so. This solution was intended to preserve God's power over all things and place Him above human categories of right or wrong, while at the same time accounting for God's justice in punishing and rewarding people for the acts they choose to do.

### *Anthropomorphic descriptions of God and the vision of God*

Like the Mu'tazila, who were the first Muslims to apply Greek-style philosophical logic to Islamic theology, Ibādīs reject a literal interpretation of the anthropomorphic descriptions of God found in the Qur'ān: God does not have a body, so descriptions of Him that seem to imply that He does have one must be interpreted as metaphors – for example, His sitting on a throne means that He has dominion over all creation, and His hand means His power. Sunnī Muslims, on the other hand, accept the anthropomorphic descriptions of God as literally true, although they do not say that God has a body; they simply affirm that these descriptions must be accepted "without asking how" (*bi-lā kayf*).

As a consequence of their rejection of anthropomorphic descriptions of God, the Ibādīs also agree with the Mu'tazila that God cannot be seen, either in this world or the next. The word "gazing" (*nāzira*) in the Qur'anic verse "On that day faces will be radiant, gazing at their Lord" (Qur'ān 75:23) must be interpreted to mean "expecting" God's reward; this is permissible because *nāzira* can mean "expecting," though "expecting" is more typically rendered as *muntazira*, a word from the same root as *nāzira*. Ibādīs say that *ḥadīths* that say that the best reward God will give to believers in the afterlife is the vision of His self cannot be accepted as authentic. Ibādīs also agree with the Mu'tazila in seeing such eschatological symbols as the scale in which deeds will be weighed on the Day of Judgment as mere metaphors, because deeds are accidents, not bodies, and cannot literally be weighed.

### *Reason and revelation*

Ibādīs agree with the Mu'tazila that the truths of Islam can be discerned by the intellect without the need for prophetic revelation. Prophets are a grace from God, sent to remind people of what they already know, or to force upon them the evidence of the truth that they can perceive with their senses and their intellect. Prophets are needed only to reveal specific laws. It is therefore entirely impermissible to adopt religious

belief through *taqlīd*, blindly following the opinions of others. The revelation of the prophets is entirely compatible with reason; if a verse's literal interpretation is incompatible with reason, it must be subjected to an alternative interpretation. Ibādīs believe that humans have an innate knowledge of God from childhood, whereas Sunnī Muslims believe knowledge of God comes through education and occurs at the age of legal accountability.

### *The unity of God, His essence and attributes*

Early Muslim theological discussions revolved around the question of whether or not God's attributes are real things distinct from His essence. For every one of the 99 beautiful names of God given in the Qur'ān, such as "the all-Merciful," "the Living," "the all-Powerful," "the all-Knowing," and "the Creator," there was said to exist a corresponding attribute, which for the above-mentioned names would be mercy, life, power, knowledge, and creation; many Muslims held these attributes to be real, though incorporeal, things that exist in God. Like the Mu'tazila, Ibādīs believe that the unity of God is compromised if one posits the existence of the attributes as real things distinct from His essence; God's unity implies that He cannot be composed of parts (essence and attributes), but must, in Aristotelian terms, be "simple," not composite. Sunnī Muslims, on the other hand, accept the reality of God's attributes as inhering in His essence from all eternity, and do not believe that this compromises His transcendent unity. On the contrary, they accuse the Mu'tazila of "stripping" (*ta'tīl*) God of all meaning.

### *The creation of the Qur'ān*

The question of whether the Qur'ān is created or eternal was the topic of heated discussions in the ninth century. It is connected with the controversy over God's attributes as well as the belief in the existence of the Qur'ān before its revelation, even before the creation of the world: the Qur'ān speaks of itself as being on a tablet preserved in heaven (Qur'ān 85:22). Sunnī Muslims believe the Qur'ān is uncreated or eternal, because it is associated with God's attributes of word, speech, and knowledge, which are eternal. The Mu'tazila, on the other hand, denied the reality of God's eternal attributes, and said that belief in the eternity of the Qur'ān was tantamount to polytheism. They were supported in this view by the three Abbasid caliphs between 833 and 847, who, in the *miḥna* ("Inquisition"), persecuted religious scholars like Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal who insisted that the Qur'ān was uncreated. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal held that the Qur'ān is knowledge from God, and since God's knowledge is uncreated, the Qur'ān must be uncreated. Despite – or perhaps because of – the *miḥna*, the doctrine of the eternity of the Qur'ān came to be embraced by the majority of Muslims. Nonetheless, some distinguished between the Qur'ān that has an eternal existence in God and its temporal revelation, utterance and writing.

Ibādīs distinguish between God's essential speech (*kalām nafsī*), which is an attribute of His eternal essence, and the Qur'ān and other revealed scriptures, which are created indicators (*madlūlāt*) of His knowledge and consist of letters and words. The Ash'arites also hold that *al-kalām al-nafsī* does not mean that letters, sounds, sentences or words subsist in His essence; God's knowledge of the revealed scriptures as letters, sounds

and words is eternal, as all His knowledge is eternal and unchanging, including His knowledge of all His creatures, but that does not mean that the objects of His knowledge are eternal or unchanging. However, Ibādīs point out that there is no evidence in the Qur'ān or *ḥadīth* to indicate that the Qur'ān is identical with God's essential speech; hence, their affirmation that the Qur'ān is created does not mean that God's essential speech is created. Most Ibādīs affirm that God has an eternal attribute of speech (although none of God's attributes are real things subsisting in God's essence, as the Sunnīs would say) in order to deny that He is mute. Nonetheless, it is unnecessary to affirm specifically the attribute of speech as an eternal characteristic of His essence, as this is subsumed under the affirmation of omnipotence as an eternal characteristic of God's essence. The affirmation of an attribute is only necessary to deny its opposite, but the opposite of speech is silence, not muteness. The affirmation of God's eternal omnipotence is enough to guarantee that He is eternally capable of speech; it is not necessary to affirm that He is eternally speaking.

### *Political theory*

Like the Khawārij, Ibādīs say that the Imām, or legitimate ruler of the Muslims, should be a man selected on the basis of his piety alone, without regard to race or lineage. Nonetheless, historically the Ibādīs have tended to select Imāms from particular families who have ruled in dynastic succession. It is not necessary for the Imām to be a scholar — though some Ibādī Imāms have been — as long as he submits to the religious authority of the *'ulamā'*.

Ibādīs categorize the Imamate into a number of different types: (1) the hidden Imamate (*imāmat al-kitmān*), which exists in a situation of political oppression and weakness; (2) the activist Imamate (*imāmat al-shirā'*), which becomes possible when at least 40 men pledge to die in order to establish a righteous Imamate; (3) the Imamate of defense (*imāmat al-difā'*), an emergency appointment of someone as Imām in order to repel an invading enemy; and (4) the declared Imamate (*imāmat al-ẓuhūr*), which is established after enemies have been defeated and there is stability.

### *Ritual observances*

There are minor differences between the prayer observances of Ibādīs and Sunnīs. Ibādīs, like the Shī'a and the Mālikīs, pray with their arms down at their sides. They do not say *Āmin* after the *Fātiḥa*, and they do not say the *qunūt* invocation in the *fajr* prayer. Until recently, most Ibādī scholars taught that Friday prayer should be held only in major cities in which justice prevails — meaning that for centuries Ibādīs did not observe congregational prayer because of the lack of a just Imām — and they reject the blessing of tyrannical rulers in the *khuṭba*.

### *Place of theology and mysticism*

Unlike modern Sunnī and Shī'ī Muslims, who focus in their writings almost entirely on issues of legal, social and political importance, Ibādīs continue to write about purely theological issues, especially those that separate them from Sunnī Islam. Their continued interest in these matters probably derives from the fact that they are a very



small minority who need to defend their very existence against attacks from scholars in places like Saudi Arabia.

There are no Ṣūfī orders (*ṭuruq*) in Ibādī Islam, but the teachings and practices of Sufism, including the writings of al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Fārīd, were part of standard life for many serious Ibādīs until the mid-twentieth century. Some of the most prominent Ibādī scholars of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Oman were true mystics to whom miracles are attributed, and who taught Sufism to their close students in a manner not dissimilar to the Ṣūfī *shaykhs* of Sunnī Islām. A number of them also practiced the occult arts known as “the divine sciences” (*al-ʿulūm al-rabbāniyya*), including the writing of talismans and manipulation of Qurʾanic verses to powerful effect, if we are to believe the stories told in Nūr al-Dīn al-Sālimī’s important history of Oman, *Tuḥfat al-ʿayn bi-sīrat ahl ʿUmān*.

One might also note that whereas theology, *fiqh* (jurisprudence), and mysticism are usually entirely separate domains in Sunnī Islam (though one may well be competent in all three), the separation between them is not so neat in Ibādī literature. A nineteenth-century encyclopedia of Ibādī teachings is entitled *Qāmūs al-Sharīʿa*, which would lead one to think that it deals entirely with law, when in fact it is a compendium of all types of religious knowledge – theological, legal, ethical, and mystical.

### Ibādī Islam in the modern world

In the late eighteenth century Ibādī scholarship experienced a revival in both Oman and the Maghrib. The nineteenth century saw a number of outstanding scholars who wrote commentaries on early Ibādī works as well as explanations of Ibādī Islam aimed at non-Ibādī Muslims. The most celebrated scholar of the Ibādī renaissance was an Algerian, Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Aṭṭafayyish (or Aṭṭafayyish, or Iṭṭafayyish, or Aṭṭfiyyāsh – there does not seem to be any agreement on how to render his name), whose long life, from 1820–1914, overlapped the careers of three of the most important scholars of Oman, with whom he was in contact. Aṭṭafayyish visited Zanzibar, and his works were first published there, where the ruler, Sayyid Barghash ibn Saʿīd (1870–88), was an avid promoter of Ibādī scholarship and had established a printing press. In the early twentieth century the works of Aṭṭafayyish and other Ibādī scholars were published in Cairo, at al-Maṭbaʿat al-Salafiyya, a printing press established by the Libyan Ibādī, Sulaymān Pasha ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Bārūnī (1870–1940), who was a strong supporter of the ideas of Muḥammad ʿAbduh. Both Aṭṭafayyish and al-Bārūnī emphasized Ibādī Islam’s commonalities with Sunnism, and concurred with the Salafī notion that sectarianism was one of the causes of Muslim weakness that allowed for European dominance of the Muslim world. Aṭṭafayyish was so highly respected in the world of Ibādī scholarship that he is universally referred to as *quṭb al-ʿimma* (Pole of the Imams), or *al-Quṭb* (the Pole) for short. Nonetheless, in many respects he was untraditional, ready to reconsider issues that had long been decided in Ibādī tradition. In Oman, outstanding Ibādī scholars include Abū Nabḥān Jāʿid ibn Khamīs (1734–1822), his son Nāṣir ibn Abī Nabḥān (1778–1847), Saʿīd ibn Khalfān al-Khalīlī (1811–70), and the most influential and prolific of them all, “Nūr al-Dīn” ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥumayd al-Sālimī (1869–1914). Like the Salafī scholars of the Sunnī Muslim world, some Ibādī scholars exhibited reformist tendencies, insisting on examining the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* as the basis for all Islamic teachings and promoting the

idea of pan-Islamism – though insisting all the while that Ibādī Islam is the earliest form of Islam and the true Salafī faith. Despite Wilkinson's characterization (1987: 244–5) of at least some of these scholars as “fundamentalists,” the Omani scholars also exhibited very strong mystical tendencies: Saʿīd ibn Khalfān al-Khalīlī, leader of the successful revolt that installed ʿAzzān ibn Qays as Imām from 1868–71, was profoundly Ṣūfī in his orientation, and wrote mystical poetry and guides to the Ṣūfī path for his students. The greatest poet of Oman and Zanzibar, “Abū Muslim” Nāṣir ibn ʿUdayyim al-Bahlānī al-Rawāhī (1860–1920), whom Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf nicknamed “the poet of the Arabs,” was earnestly interested in promoting both pan-Islamism and the Ibādī Imamate movement of 1913, but many of his poems are intensely Ṣūfī. In spite of common notions in the West of the alleged incompatibility of mysticism with political activism, these mystical scholars were profoundly involved in political affairs. The scholar whom Wilkinson (1987: 231) calls the “father” of the modern Ibādī renaissance, Abū Nabḥān, strongly opposed Sayyid Saʿīd's policies, but Sayyid Saʿīd feared his popularity as well as his power in the esoteric arts, and waited until Abū Nabḥān's death before attacking his family. Sayyid Saʿīd soon discovered, however, that Abū Nabḥān's son Nāṣir was similarly powerful in the making of talismans, and decided that it was prudent to make Nāṣir a close ally and take him with him to Zanzibar; when Nāṣir died in 1847, his head was on Sayyid Saʿīd's lap. We have already mentioned the key role of the mystical scholar, Saʿīd ibn Khalfān al-Khalīlī, in the overthrow of Sultan Sālim ibn Thuwaynī in 1868 and the installation of ʿAzzān ibn Qays as Imām, and Nūr al-Dīn al-Sālimī's leadership of a second successful rebellion in 1913, leading to the Imamate of Sālim ibn Rāshid al-Kharūṣī (1913–20).

Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Aṭfayyish (1886–1965), a nephew of Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Aṭfayyish, went even further than his uncle in minimizing the differences between Ibādī Islam and Sunnism, even to the point of denying any historical link between Ibādī Islam and Kharijism (Ghazal 2005: 131–5). In 1917 he joined the faculty at al-Zaytūna University in Tunis, where he and other Ibādīs became involved in the Tunisian Constitutional Party founded by the Sunnī reformer, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Thaʿālibī (1876–1944). He and al-Thaʿālibī were both exiled from Tunisia in 1923, and both moved to Cairo, where Aṭfayyish established *al-Minhāj*, a journal published from 1925 to 1930 that received much support from Sunnī reformers. He was a founding member of the Islamic Guidance Society and the Society of Muslim Brothers and was a close friend of Rashīd Riḍā, Ḥasan al-Bannā and Sayyid Quṭb. Nonetheless, Ibrāhīm Aṭfayyish clearly preserved his distinctive Ibādī identity, and had a significant impact on his generation of Ibādī activists and intellectuals; he edited a number of important Ibādī works and represented the Omani Imām at the Arab League and the United Nations.

The main spokesman for Ibādī Islam today is the Grand Muftī of Oman, Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Ḥamad al-Khalīlī. Like Ibrāhīm Aṭfayyish, al-Khalīlī feels that the differences between Sunnī Islam and Ibādī Islam are insignificant, and strongly promotes the unity of all Muslims, though he feels that there are significant differences between Ibādīs and the Shiʿa. In contrast, the nineteenth-century scholar, Nāṣir ibn Abī Nabḥān, felt that the differences between Ibādī Islam and Shiʿism were less significant than the differences between Ibādī and Sunnī Islam, because the latter are theological, whereas the former concern secondary matters mainly of a political nature. Although al-Khalīlī is well aware of the classical Ibādī doctrine of dissociation from non-Ibādīs, he denies the relevance of that doctrine today. Nonetheless, when a prominent Saudi

scholar attacked Ibādī Islam in 1986, al-Khalīlī did not hesitate to defend Ibādī doctrines, and his book, *al-Haqq al-Dāmigh* ("The Irrefutable Truth"), is devoted to the articulation and defense of the theological doctrines in which Ibādīs differ from Sunnīs. Ibādī students who wish to pursue higher theological education beyond a bachelor's degree must study at Sunnī institutions, like al-Azhar University in Cairo or King 'Abd al-'Azīz University in Medina, but al-Khalīlī is not afraid that this will lead to a decline in allegiance to Ibādī Islam, and hopes that eventually higher theological institutes specializing in Ibādī Islam will be founded in Oman.

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