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IRAQI CHRISTIAN LINKS WITH AN EARLY ISLAMIC SECT

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The "early Islamic sect" of the title refers to the Ibāḍiya, which first surfaced in late 7th century al-Baṣra.[1] Regarded generally as part of the Kharijite movement, Ibāḍīs considered themselves as moderates. Emerging from the intellectual ferment of late 7th century al-Baṣra, moderate Kharijite thought was concerned nevertheless with the same issues over which extremists such as the Azāriqa and Najadāt took such fanatic measures. The Khawārij adhered to the *taḥkīm*[2] and held that all believers were thus enjoined to take up the *jihād* against apostate Muslims. On this subject, however, the moderates diverged on points of definition.[3] For extremist Khawārij such as the Azāriqa, doctrine was uncompromising and straightforward. They had "gone out" and made the *hijra* to their camps and thus considered those Muslims who failed to take up the standard of revolt against unjust rule as polytheists, *mushrik*. Their tactics were as uncompromising as their doctrine.

Moderates like the Ibāḍīs, on the other hand, permitted association with other sects to the extent of living under a ruler who did not share their principles. This pragmatism served the early Ibāḍīs well, for they survived the vicissitudes of the late Umayyad period when we find them dispersed to the east in Khurāsān, to the south in 'Umān, and to the west in Ifrīqiya. In these latter two refuges the sect thrived even until the present day.

The North African community has been the object of this author's particular study. Shortly, we shall turn to it with regard to the North African Christian precedents to the movement there. The first question raised is the possible link between Iraqi Christians and the early Ibāḍiya.

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[1] For a lengthier version of this article, see Savage, E., *A Gateway to Hell, A Gateway to Paradise: The North African Response to the Arab Conquest,* (Princeton, 1996).

[2] That is the Muslim body politic must be founded on God's commands as signified in the exhortation: *lā ḥakm illa lillah*. This became a basic tenet of the Ibāḍīs and came to mean no government except what God has ordained. Wilkinson, J. C., *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, (1987), 149.

[3] This was in adherence to the Qur'ānic injunction:

> "Nor should the believers all go forth together. If a contingent from every expedition remained behind they could devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them that thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil). *Qur'ān*, IX: 122.

Christians had lived in Muslim cities like al-Kūfa, Wāsiṭ and al-Ḥīra from the earliest days of the Umayyad caliphate. Christianity was practised openly with Christian houses contiguous to mosques.[4] Their presence remained a century later in the 'Abbāsid period when at various times, Wāsiṭ, al-Kūfa and al-Ḥīra was the residence of the Nestorian bishop, Abha II.[5] Al-Ḥīra, formerly the seat of the Lakhmid kings, had been the capital of Arab Christians of north central Arabia and was the seat of a Nestorian bishopric. The tribes of Azd[6] and Tanūkh[7] are most immediately associated with al-Ḥīra's Nestorian Christians, called 'Ibād.[8] But other tribes were associated with al-Ḥīra as well, such as the Bakr Ibn Wa'īl,[9] Rabī'a[10] and even Tamīm,[11] which were either partly Christian or had Christian branches. Like their Sasanid predecessors, early Muslim caliphs recognized the influence of Christian chiefs among the tribes[12] and knew the benefit of political alliances in the early days of expansion.[13] As allies, the 'Ibād took an active military part on behalf of the caliphs.[14] In addition to its political influence, al-Ḥīra's

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[4] al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al - Aghānī IV*, (Būlāq, 1888-1889), 182-183.

[5] Fiey, J. M., *Assyrie Chrétienne*, (Beirut, 1968), 11.

[6] Strenziok, G., "Azd", Encyclopedia of Islam, (new edition), 811; Ibn Khallikān, Shams al-Dīn, *Kitāb wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān*, de Slane, (trans.), Vol. III, (Paris, 1842), 515; Charles, H., *Le christianisme des arabes nomades sur le limes et dans le désert syro-mésopotamien aux alentours de l'hégire*, (Paris, 1936), 55.

[7] Lammens, H., *Études sur le règne du calife omayyade Mo'awia Ier*, (Paris, 1908), 435; Kinderman, H., "Tanūkh", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Leiden, 1993), 228-229.

[8] Ibn Khallikān, *Kitāb wafayāt al-a'yān*, 188-189

[9] Although the Bakr bin Wa'īl had hostile relations with the kings of al-Ḥīra, several branches such as the 'Idjl accepted Christianity. Caskel, W., "Bakr bin Wa'īl", (Leiden 1960), 963-964.

[10] Lammens, *Études*, 436. Christianity was widespread among the Rabī'a in the Prophet's time.

[11] The Tamīm of al-Ḥīra was the only Tamīmī group which was completely converted to Christianity. This clan had completely altered their manner of life and their relations with the rest of the tribe. Levi della Vida, G., "Tamīm", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 4 (Leiden, 1934), 643-646., 644; Charles, *Études*, 4, 55, 60.

[12] During the troubles of Yazīd bin Mu'āwiya's reign, the Christian, Haggar bin Abgar, as chief of all the Rābi'a was courted by all sides. Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr, *Ta'rīkh al-rusūl wa'l-mulūk*, de Goeje et al., (eds.), (Leiden, 1879-1901), 256, 619.

[13] To secure their loyalty and co-operation, tribal chiefs were accorded the rank of *ardāf*, chamberlain, which entailed privileges as well as a quarter share of spoils. Kister, M. J., "Al-Ḥīra. Some Notes on its Relations with Arabia", *Arabica*, 15 (1968), 143-149, 152.

[14] The Tanūkh, for example, fought for Mu'āwiya at Ṣiffīn and at Marj Rāhiṭ for Marwān. Lammens, *Études*, 435. Kinderman, "Tanūkh", 229.

past was admired, its poetry and language imitated, its architecture copied,[15] and its women desired as wives.[16] As former companions of the Lakhmid kings, the 'Ibād of al-Ḥīra were equally well-regarded by the Umayyads of the 7th century. According to a tradition of Abū 'Ubayda, when al-Baṣra was founded, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb transferred the Tanūkh to the new city.[17] The caliph Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya (680-83 AD) had a preference for distinguished Christians. One notable Christian, Akhṭal, is known to have settled disputes actually holding office in the central mosque of al-Kūfa, and al-Ṭabarī describes the funeral of the Christian chief of the Rabī'a:

> With a cross at their head, amidst chanting and clouds of incense, the funeral cortege of the old chief traversed the city preceded by Christian clergy and followed by the Muslim aristocracy.[18]

However, al-Ḥīra was soon overshadowed by its near neighbour, al-Kūfa, and al-Baṣra, garrison cities of opportunity. Naturally, al-Ḥīra's Christians, the 'Ibād, were attracted along with everyone else to those lynch pins of the empire. The Azd Sarāt, that Azd group found in al-Ḥīra, came to al-Baṣra along with the Tanūkh prior to Mu'āwiya bin Abū Sufyān's reign.[19] Al-Ṭabarī cites the 'Ibād as among the early residents of al-Kūfa during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.[20] These were cities awash with new Arabs, Arabs new to Islam. The milieu was factious, particularly al-Kūfa which was divided by Khariji and other anti-dynastic groups. Although the 'Ibād had been initial favorites of the Umayyad caliphs, their support, as Christians, lost its value once the initial stages of conquest and consolidation were over.

The 'Ibād, however, did not drop out of sight. Tribes associated with them remained active, and individuals from those tribes and associated with the early Muslim Ibāḍīya appear fleetingly in the literature. Our sources are the

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[15] Al-Mas'ūdi described Khalid bin Walīd's admiration of al-Ḥīra's palaces and fortifications, see Al-Mas'ūdi, 'Alī bin al-Ḥusayn, *Kitāb murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-jawāhir*, Sprenger, A., (trans.), (London, 1841), 252.

[16] Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb Al-Aghānī*, (Bulaq, 1888-1889), XIII 192, XIX 18.

[17] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, II, 447.

[18] Lammens, *Études*, 436; see also his *Le chantre des Omiades: notes biographiques et littéraires sur le poète arabe chrétien Aḥṭal*, (Paris, 1895).1-208

[19] Ibn Khallikān, *Kitāb wafayāt*, III, 515; Pellat, C., *Le milieu basrien et la formation Gahiz*, (Paris, 1953), 24; Strenziok, "Azd", 812.

[20] Donner, F., *The Early Islamic Conquests*, (Princeton, 1981), 233, n. 63

tabaqāt in which Ibāḍī writers of subsequent centuries arranged in chronological levels the biographies of notable Ibāḍis. Here we find early Ibāḍī "founders" like 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Ibāḍ al-Tamīmī[21] and Jābir bin Zayd al-Azdī in addition to other less likely candidates.[22] Also included is the Tamīmī chief, al-Aḥnaf bin Qays al-Tamīmī al-Sa'dī (d 686/7 AD). His inclusion as an early Ibāḍī may be partly explained by his sympathy for the early Ibāḍis and partly by his success as peacemaker between the former Christian tribe of Bakr bin Wā'il of the Rabī'a[23] and the Tamīm tribe which formed the religious and political elite of al-Baṣra.[24]

Troubles between the two, Bakr bin Wā'il and the Tamīm, broke out upon the death of Yazīd bin Mu'āwiya (683 AD), who had been well disposed towards Christians. This was a time of growing tribal polarity between the Tamīm and the Bakr bin Wā'il, who had formed a powerful coalition with the Azd. Al-Aḥnaf bin Qays' arbitration was significant. Not only did he placate his own tribe, the Tamīm, but he was also able to persuade them to support the Azdi general, al-Muhallab bin Abī Ṣufra, whose immediate family had close links with the Ibāḍiya.

We know that at least four ladies of the al-Muhallabid family were Ibāḍis themselves, including al-Muhallab's daughter, 'Atika.[25] The sixteenth century Ibāḍī historian Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Shammākhī contributes the charming detail of this lady's friendly interest in a leading Ibāḍī, Jābir ibn Zayd al-Azdī, to whom she sent food parcels when he was imprisoned by the governor al-Ḥajjāj bin Yūsuf al-Thaqafī.

It is true that the settlement between the two tribes lasted only briefly. But a connecting thread seems to run between the former Christian tribe of Bakr

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[21] Ibāḍī tradition, while having very little to say about 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Ibāḍ, nevertheless attributes the name of the sect to him. Al-Shammākhī, Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad bin Abū 'Uthmān, *Kitāb al-siyar*, (Cairo, 1884), 77; Al-Shammākhī, Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad bin Abū 'Uthmān, "Extraits de L'abrégé d'ech Chemakhi", appendix of *Kitāb al-siyar wa akhbār al-a'imma*, Masqueray, E., (trans.), in *Chronique d'Abou Zakaria*, (Algiers, 1879), 342-90; al-Barrādī, Abū al-Faḍl Abū al-Qāsim bin Ibrāhīm, *Kitāb al-jawāhir al-muntaqāt fimā akhalla bihi Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt li-Abī al-'Abbās al-Darjīni*, (Cairo, 1302 AH).156.

[22] The Ibāḍī ṭabaqāt even includes the caliph 'Abd al-Malik. Rubinacci, R., "Il callifo 'Abd al-Malik bin Marwān e gli 'ibaditi", *Annali dell Instituto Orientale di Napoli*, 5 (1954), 99.

[23] Cuperly, P, "Muḥammad Atfayyaš et sa risāla", *Revue de l'Institut des belles lettres arabes, Tunis*, 130 (1972), 261-303. 292-293.

[24] Pellat, *Le milieu basrien*, 303-304

[25] Wilkinson, J. C., "The Early Development of the 'Ibāḍī Movement in Baṣra", in *Studies in the First Centuries of Islamic Society*, Juynboll, G. H. A., (ed.), (Carbondale, 1982), 248 n. 48

bin Wā'il, their support of al-Muhallab (whose family had ties with the Ibāḍiya), the temporary cessation of hostilities with the Tamīm (from whom several important early Ibāḍis came, notably Ibn Ibāḍ and Abū 'Ubayda). The intervention of al-Aḥnaf bin Qays al-Tamīmī as mediator was the reason why later Ibāḍi chroniclers included him as an early member of their sect.

Ibāḍi sources written long after these events offer few clues to Christian precedents. They are, after all, less a history than a buttress to the sect with a view to strengthening its genealogy. The origins of the Ibāḍiya are vague,[26] its earliest objectives markedly conciliatory, and its structure a sort of secret theocratic council.

Could the 'Ibādī Christians of al-Ḥīra, having lived through the conquests, not have survived the turmoil of al-Baṣra? Let us consider the name itself. The Ibāḍi tradition simply states that the name of the sect was derived from 'Abd Allāh Ibn Ibāḍ al-Tamīmī, a shadowy figure about whom very little is known. Wilkinson notes in his study of the early community in al-Baṣra that many Ibāḍi sources omit Ibn Ibāḍ's name altogether[27] and when he is cited it is in the period prior to the sect's recognizable establishment.[28] Jābir bin Zayd al-Azdī and Abū 'Ubayda Muslim bin Abī al-Tamīmī must be considered as the real founders. This then begs the question as to the origins of the name, al-Ibāḍiya. Does one simply concur with the tradition that it derived from a relatively obscure individual, Ibn Ibāḍ, who pre-dates the sect's actual formation, or perhaps we should look farther for other possibilities?

Unsatisfied with a derivation from Ibn Ibāḍ, I have wondered if his name was not later adapted as an edifying substitute for an earlier name. Five possibilities come to mind if one is willing to alter the three radicals from (ابض) to (بيض) and (عبد):

> - From the root *al-abyaḍ* (بيض) could have been the origin of the sect's name with reference to colour nicknames, along with the Ṣufrīya and Azāriqa, whose colours have lost their significance.[29]

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[26] Lewicki, T., "al-Ibāḍiya", *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 3 (Leiden, 1968), 648.

[27] Wilkinson, J. C., "Arab Settlement in Oman: the Origins and Development of the Tribal Pattern and its Relationship to the Imamate", (D.Phil thesis), (Oxford, 1969), 76. Wilkinson, J. C., *The Imamate Tradition of Oman,* (1987).

[28] Wilkinson, "The Early Development", 131-132.

[29] I am indebted to Fred Donner for the following extract refering to the possible sallowness of the pious: وما كان الا قليلا ريث وقفتهم من كل ابيض صافي اللون ذي شطب ('Abbās, (ed.), *Shi'r al-khawārij*, (Beirut, 1963), poem 108, verse 8, by al-Asamm al-Dabbī Qays bin 'Abdullāh).

- A second possibility could have been derived from al-Walīd al-'Abdī (العبدي), a moderate Kharijī reckoned among the earliest Ibāḍis. A close friend of Abū Bilāl, he was regarded as an organizer of the later movement.[30]
- Ṣuhār al-'Abdī (العبدي) was also part of the early movement and noted particularly as a student of Jābir bin Zayd and the teacher of Abū 'Ubayda. He thus provided an important link in the subsequent transmission of *'ilm*.[31]
- Alternatively, in the late 8th century, Kharijī ideology maintained that all men, slaves (عبيد, 'abīd) and *mawāli* were equals, and only knowledge, *'ilm*, distinguished a man. As this became a basic tenet of later Ibāḍī doctrine, *'abīd* could have been the origin of the sect's name with an ambiguous, if not derogatory, implication when applied by non-Ibāḍis. For another reason Ibn Khallikān attributes the name, 'Ibād, to the word *'abīd* because the people of al-Ḥīra had been subject to the kings of Persia.[32]
- Finally, as I am suggesting, the name may have had some association with the 'Ibād (عباد) or the pre-Islamic Christians of al-Ḥīra whose name, in turn, was derived from their battle cry: *wa yā āhl 'ibād Allāh*, as worshippers of God.

Some historians may categorically reject this idea. However, linguistic analysis, particularly that developed by Roman Jakobson, shows how this is plausible. From his original distinction of the phoneme as "the minimal unit of language capable of discriminating word meanings",[33] Jakobson went on to develop a linguistic classification of phonemes in which there were three key factors: the articulation of sound, its acoustic reception (ie what the listener hears), and its phychological reception or meaning. In other words, the

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30 Al-Shammākhī, *Kitāb al-siyar*, 79.

31 Cuperly, "Muhammad Atfayyaš", 293. Al-Shammākhī, *Kitāb al-siyar*, 81.

32 Ibn Khallikān, *Kitāb wafayāt*, 189. Stetkevych, J., "Toward an Arabic Elegiac Lexicon: The Seven Words of the Nasib" in *Reorientations/Arabic and Persian Poetry*, Stetkevych, S. P., (ed.), (Bloomington, 1993). Bosworth, C. E., "Iran and the Arabs before Islam", *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Iran*, 3 (1983), 597-605.

33 Jakobson, R. and Pomorska, K., *Dialogues*, (Cambridge, 1983), 25. See also 27-34.

mechanical production of a phoneme or sound was not the only consideration in the analysis of its semantic meaning.[34]

"Any phonemic change is a recoding... it is first and foremost a semiotic question".[35] This brings us back to the proposed merging of the two words 'Ibāḍi and Ibāḍi. There is no question that the ḍ and ḍ represent what Jakobson called a binary opposition. I do not propose that the merging of the two terms was due to carelessness either linguistically or textually. Nor is there any question that the distinction between the two terms 'Ibāḍi and Ibāḍi was preserved textually. I do suggest, however, that there may have been a deliberate recoding of the phoneme ḍ to ḍ and that it may have been a play on a linguistic distinction – a pun with political overtones. A familiar term is thus made more visible by the deformation of its medial radical by substituting its phonemic opposite. The alliterative result suggests a semantic relationship.[36] In the modern context, Steven Caton's study of Yemeni poetry shows that phonological parallelism, alliteration, and puns are all at the poet's disposal[37] to express political views.[38]

While theorizing along these lines, one even questions the preservation of the distinction of 'Ibāḍi and Ibāḍi in the sources. Might not "Ibāḍi" have gained later acceptance as a more satisfying and correct term for a Muslim faction which sought to uphold the core teachings of the Prophet? After all, literacy in seventh century Iraq can hardly have been universal. The visual signs of writing follow upon the spoken language.

Similarities between the 'Ibād of al-Ḥīra and the Ibāḍiya of the early 8th century can be cited but they may reflect no more than general characteristics of the period. Both the 'Ibāḍi Christians of al-Ḥīra and the early Ibāḍi community attracted otherwise disenfranchised members. Like the 'Ibād of al-Ḥīra, the early Ibāḍi community was involved extensively in trade, especially long-distance trade. In the days of the Muslim conquest, this was a relatively undistinguished calling but one profitably undertaken by a minority. A passing allusion to al-Ḥīra's traders was made by al-Mas'ūḍi when he

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[34] Jakobson, *Dialogues*, 30.

[35] Jakobson, R., "Retrospect" in *Selected Writings*, (ed. Jakobson) I (The Hague, 1962), 651.

[36] Pomorska, K., Rudy, S., (eds.), *Roman Jakobson. Language in Literature*, (Cambridge (USA), 1987), 434. See also Holenstein, E., (ed.), *Roman Jakobson's Approach to Language. Phenomenological Structuralism*, Schelbert, (trans.), (Bloomington & London, 1976), 84-86.

[37] Caton, S. C., "Peaks of Yemen I Summon", (Berkeley, 1990), 59, 140, 166, 201.

[38] Caton, "Peaks of Yemen", 142.

described 'Atīk, the old river bed through which the Euphrates had once flowed and by which the 'Ibād of al-Ḥīra had traded with China and India.[39] Al-Ḥīra's kings sought tribal co-operation in large part to ensure the security of caravans and trade. The tribe of Tanūkh was one such tribe cited by the early Christian writer, Michael Syrus, as being very rich from trade.[40]

To a minority, even a formerly privileged one, would it not have become clear that there was little future potential for the community in an environment in which adherence to Islam was the basis of society?[41] Would this not have been especially so in al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa, where various factions proliferated to varying extremes? Intolerance of Christians in al-Baṣra was increasing and 'Ibāḍīs, like the Muhallabids and Muslim Ibāḍīs, were actively persecuted by al-Ḥajjāj.[42] Under these circumstances it is possible that the diverse tribal groups which had formerly been Christian 'Ibāḍīs bowed before the sweeping changes of the Muslim conquest and recast their creed along more advantageous lines. Islamic domination was already accepted among these monophysite Christians as part of the inscrutable decree of God.[43]

In the years surrounding Nahrawān the religio-political parties were only just forming. Militant extremists who rejected Umayyad authority were annihilated. Such a group for example was that led by Khirīt bin Rāshid al-Nājī, whose tribe, Banū Nājīya, had only recently converted from Christianity to Islam. His following included bedouin raiders and riff-raff as well as his own fellow-tribesmen, who reverted to Christianity upon their defeat. The 'Ibād may also have sought social and political viability by aligning themselves with a more moderate sect, the Ibāḍīya, whose members came from both the Azd[44] and Tamīm[45] – an odd association in those days of

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39 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb murūj al-dhahab*, 246, 249; Fiey, J. M., *Chrétiens Syriaque sous les Abbasides surtout à Bagdad (749-1258)*, (Louvain, 1980), 51.

40 Nau, F., *Les Arabes chrétiens*, (Paris, 1933), 108-109; Fiey, J. M., *Assyrie chrétienne - Bét Garmaï, Bét Aramāy et Maišān Nestoriens*, (Beirut, 1968), 229.

41 Christian associations could actually be detrimental. A poem by Tukheym ibn Abī 'l-Takhma al-Asadī in honour of the descendants of 'Adī ibn Zayd (a famous Tamīmī poet of al-Ḥīra's 'Ibādīs) brought considerable blame upon the writer for so praising a Christian family. Horovitz, J, "'Adī ibn Zayd, the Poet of Ḥīra", *Islamic Culture*, 4 (1930), 68. Shahīd, I., "al-Ḥīrā", *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 3 (Leiden, 1967), 462-463.

42 Fiey, *Chrétiens Syriaques*, 28.

43 This is a theme that runs throughout the history of the Patriarchs. Stillman, N, "Subordinance and Dominance: Non-Muslim Minorities", in *A Way Prepared*, Kazemi, F., (ed.), (New York, 1988), 137.

44 The Ibāḍī tradition claims as early members Jābir bin Zayd, a mawlā of the Shanū'a Azd and another Azdī, Qurayb al-Azdī. Cuperly, P., "L'Ibadisme au XIIème siècle: la Aqida de

solidifying tribal polarities. Perhaps it was a survival of pre-Islamic interests divested of their former Christianity.

Studies contributed to the ARAM series focus on Umayyad Syria and, in this volume at least, extend to Umayyad Jordan, Palestine and Iraq. Straying somewhat beyond these confines, let us turn briefly to Umayyad North Africa of the early 8th century, because here we find a parallel development. That is, members of the pre-Islamic Christian community can be identified and seen to join forces with the Muslim Ibāḍīya.

From the beginning, Ifrīqiya is described in medieval texts as prosperous.[46] Its inhabitants lived in cities or villages. The population, while not entirely Christian, was nevertheless predominantly so in the principal towns of Roman origin whose populations spoke latin.[47] While many of these communities remained Christian, even to the 14th century, the former Christian majority was eroded by the gradual spread of Islam. How or why the indigenous peoples came to adopt Islam was not of interest to the Arab chroniclers.[48] Many Berbers became Muslim, possibly not Muslims in a strictly religious sense, but rather in terms of throwing in their lot with Muslim leaders who seemed most likely to protect their interests. It is at any rate clear that Khariǰī Islam spread like wildfire from the early 8th century, when the motivation was less spiritual than a pragmatic, vigorous response to the Arabs' military invasion, political usurpation, and regular enslavement of the indigenous population.

Undoubtedly, there were instances of North African Christians converting to the faith of the new masters from the very beginning. However, I suggest that many chose to join the Berber opposition instead. Of these some became

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Abu Sahl Yahya", *Revue de l'Institut des belles lettres arabes,* 42:1 (Tunis, 1979), 67-89; 42:2 (1979), 277-305.

[45] Abū Bilāl Mirdas bin Udayya al-Tamīmī is counted by Ibāḍis among the precursors of the sect. Cuperly, "Muḥammad Atfayyaš", 292.

[46] Ibn 'Idhārī, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Marrākushī, *Al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Maghrib,* Fagnan, E., (trans.), I (Algiers, 1901-14), 7, 27. Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb ṣurāt al-arḍ,* Kramers, J. H. and Wiet, G., (trans.), (Paris, 1964), 252. Ibn al-Nuwayrī, Aḥmad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, de Slane, (trans.), in appendix, I (313-447), 314, 322, 331; al-Bakrī, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale*, de Slane, (ed. and tr.), (Algiers, 1913), 301.

[47] Ibn Khaldūn, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Histoire des berbers*, de Slane, (trans.), I (Paris, 1968), 207-208.

[48] Arab historians promoted the idea of total Berber conversion to Islam. Ibn 'Idhārī (*Al-Bayān al-mughrib*, 36) gives 'Uqba ibn Nāfi' the credit for this and Ibn Khaldūn (*Histoire des berbers*, 215), credits Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr.

Ibāḍī Muslims yet retained a hint of their origin. Others remained Christian but continued to live within the safety of Ibāḍī communities.

Ifrīqiya with its Berbers in revolt against the central Umayyad authority offered fertile ground in which Ibāḍism quickly and strongly took root. In North Africa, too, there was a Christian population. Theoretically, the latin-speaking Christians of the towns were regarded as *ahl al-kitāb* and were subject to the *jizya*. But in practice the tribal Berbers were not recognized as Christian and so were obliged to make their submission to the Arabs.

In the preceding sixth century the eastern Maghrib had witnessed an important Donatist revival. Donatism, like later Ibāḍism, had a simple appeal. Freedom to be good belonged to every soul, and authority in the community was to be exercised only by someone worthy. Hence, it was positively necessary to remove an unworthy bishop. Repression by Rome fuelled the Donatist argument that persecution itself made theirs the chosen Church of the Lord.[49]

Two inscriptions written in inaccurate latin from the 7th and 8th centuries bear testimony of North African Donatism. Cited by the early church scholar W. Frend, the first is dated 637 AD and records the ceremonial deposition of relics of numerous Donatist martyrs. The second, from 722 AD, almost a century later, is a direct reference to the Donatist practise of rebaptism, which was such an anathema to the Catholic church.[50]

The Donatist doctrine of authority founded on individual worth is echoed in Kharijism and may partially explain its widespread adoption in the 740s by disaffected Berbers who threw their support behind the early Khawārij and, later, Ibāḍī opposition.[51]

The Arab conquests consisted of a concerted and successful series of campaigns undertaken to squeeze as much wealth as possible out of North Africa. Early raids were directed against urban strong-holds whose populations were Christian. Those cities drew upon a common Christian legacy and commonly resisted Arab invasion. A legendary leader, the Berber

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[49] Frend, W. H. C., *The Donatist Church*, (Oxford, 1952), 130-131.

[50] Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 306. Berthier, A.; Martin, M.; and Logeart, F., *Les vestiges du christianisme antique dans la Numidie centrale*, (Algiers, 1942), 121-122. Traces of active Christianity are alluded to in al-Mālikī's description of the Berber leader, Kāhina, fleeing before the Arab general Ḥasan ibn Nu'mān, in the 690s, with a large wooden idol. Talbi has suggested that this idol was probably a statue of her patron saint, see Talbi, "Un nouveau fragment de l'histoire de l'occident musulman (62-196/682-812), l'épopée d'al-Kahina", *Cahiers de Tunisie*, (1971), 42.

[51] Al-Qairawāni, *Histoire de l'Afrique*, Pellissier, E., (trans.), (Paris, 1845), 36.

queen, the Kāhina, rallied a Christian coalition which momentarily checked the flood of conquest.[52] In 696 AD, Ḥasan ibn Nu'mān, the illustrious successor of 'Uqba ibn Nāfi' (who had been ambushed and killed by Berber Christians),[53] was defeated by forces led by the Kāhina. M. Talbi has analysed her identity and persuasively concludes that she was Christian.[54] Although her authority was centred around Bāghāya in the Aures Mountains, the battlefield extended south and east around Qafṣa, Qasṭīlīya, Qābis[55] and, finally, near Tubna. Her defeat came with the dissolution of her Berber, Christian support, some of which aligned itself with the Arab general Ḥasan ibn Num'ān.[56]

Resistance continued during the next twenty years, culminating in six years of barely contained revolts. Begun in 739 AD under the leadership of Maysara, a Ṣufrite, in Tangiers,[57] they continued under 'Abd al-Ala Ibn Hudayj al-Ifrīqī, a former Christian.[58] Ibn 'Idhārī explains that it was only because of their profound ignorance that the Berbers rallied to these leaders who promised that Jesus himself would join them in their fight.[59] Occurring almost simultaneously to the east in Ifrīqiya were uprisings around Qābis under the Berber Isma'īl bin Ziyād al-Nafūsī,[60] whose enormous prestige

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52 Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Futūḥ Ifrīqiya wa'l-Andalus*, Gateau, A., (trans.), (Algiers, 1947), 75.

53 Al-Bakrī, *Description*, 150.

54 Kāhina was not her name but a title, of semitic origins, given by Arab chroniclers to describe her role as prophetess and guardian. Fahd, T., *La divination arabe*, (Leiden, 1978), 98.

Miraculous prophecies and the recitation of divine poetry is often described by the later Ibāḍī biographers such as al-Darjīnī and al-Shammākhī. Lewicki, "Quelques textes inédites", as above, 287-293; "Notice sur la chronique ibāḍite d'ad-Darjīnī", *Rocznik orientalistyezny* 11 (1936), 149; "Mélanges berbères ibāḍites", *Revue d'études Islamique*, 3 (1936), 275.

55 Talbi, "Un nouveau fragment", 423.

56 Talbi, "Kāhina", 423.

57 Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, 50; Ibn al-Athīr, 'Izz al-Dīn 'Alī, *Annales du Maghreb et de l'Espagne*, Fagnan, E., (trans.), (Algiers, 1901), 63; Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Ifrīqiya*, 123, 125

58 Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire*, I, 217; Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, 59/45.

59 This particular leader, another Ṣufrite named Tarīf, had once been a companion to Maysara. Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, 59/45.

60 Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakīm, *Futūḥ Ifrīqiya*, 127, 135; Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, 53, 59; Ibn al-Athīr, *Annales*, 67-69.

ensured a large following. His Nafūsa tribe had been Christian[61] and would become the backbone of Berber Ibāḍism.

This does not mean necessarily that these Berber tribes actually became Muslim Ibāḍis. It is more likely that they simply became aligned with the anti-Umayyad forces. It would be difficult, of course, to explain how non-Arabic speaking Berbers, spread over a considerable area, became Ibāḍis in the fifteen years between the arrival of the five Ibāḍī missionaries in 757 AD and the cessation of hostilities in the 770s. In other words, only the most basic teachings could have been disseminated and that, under the circumstances, would have had as much political as religious weight. As an imported doctrine, Ibaḍism's promulgation was initially limited to those Baṣrans or Baṣran-trained Ibāḍis who made their way to North African towns. Its impact on a population already softened by years of Kharijite rebellion was felt immediately.

A century later, after the successful establishment of an Ibāḍī imāmate, the Rustamids, the Ibāḍī imām Aflaḥ bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb relied on a guard of Tāhart's Christians to keep a balance between the constantly shifting tribes.[62] In describing the extreme popularity of Aflaḥ's son, Abū Yaqẓān, the historian Ibn Ṣaghīr (neither Ibāḍī nor Christian) curiously describes his supporters as regarding Abū Yaqẓān in the same light as Christians regarded Jesus.[63] If nothing more, this anecdote would suggest a strong contemporary Christian influence. A century later, when the Ibāḍis left Tāhart for Wārjlā, their Christian allies accompanied them.

The end of the 8th and early 9th centuries saw a proliferation of new Ibāḍī Berber towns in the Jabal Nafūsa and the establish ment of Ibāḍī communities in the cities. By no means did this mark an eclipse of the earlier Christian elements. Christian names continued to be used by Ibāḍis; Christian churches were gradually converted to mosques or places of pilgrimage; and Christians continued to play an active part in the politics of the capital, Tāhart. Rather than a total and apparently sudden eclipse of Christianity, a more appropriate metaphor may be an overlay whose transparency only gradually decreased to complete opacity.

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61 Beguinot, F., "Nafūsa", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1936), 831.

62 Ibn Ṣaghīr, "Chronique d'Ibn Saghir sur les imams rustumides de Tahert", de C. Motylinski, A., (ed. and trans.), in *Actes du XIVe Congrès International des Orientalistes*, (Algiers, 1905), 86, 99, 117-118.

63 Ibn Ṣaghīr, "Chronique", 111.

Christian communities persisted during the early Muslim period on the fringes, where they lived alongside Berber Ibāḍis, who tended to be more tolerant. In the period under discussion, the latter half of the 8th and early 9th centuries, Christian towns and villages coincide with areas of Ibāḍī concentration in Ifrīqiya, in the Jarīd, and the Jabal Nafūsa. In addition to Christians living in Ibāḍī communities, there are other less obvious hints of latinized, Christian precedents in the preservation of Latin names among Ibāḍis.

One of the more evocative of these names, for example, is Īdūnāt, a village in the Jabal Nafūsa (in modern western Libya). It existed in the second half of the 8th century but had been inhabited in the Roman and Byzantine periods. The Polish orientalist, Tadeus Lewicki suggests it is the Berber plural for the latin *donatus* which exposes a remnant of dissident Donatists who had taken refuge in the Jabal.[64]

Sharwas, an important Ibāḍī centre of the Jabal Nafūsa, bears a revealing indication of its Christian association in the inscription on its mosque.[65] Dating to the early 10th century, it quotes the Quranic verse which asserts the equality of the divine truths revealed on the one hand to Muḥammad and on the other to the Judaic patriarchs and prophets, including Jesus.[66]

North Africa exemplifies an instance in which the pre-Islamic Christian majority was absorbed into what became a predominantly Muslim culture. Within the Ibāḍī community this process can be discerned by piecing together stray references and names. On the western margin of the empire the Ibāḍīya established themselves and offered a tolerant alternative to the Islam of the Umayyad armies. In this provincial environment we can just trace Christian assimilation. This may partly be due to the nature of Maghribi Ibāḍī sources, which while venerating their early Muslim origins in Iraq, retain the distinctly North African characteristics of the community which, in turn, reflect Christian antecedents.

A century earlier, the situation of Iraqi Christians was very different. In the heartland of the new empire, to remain Christian in al-Kūfa or al-Baṣra may have proved difficult. But just as the moderate Ibāḍī teachings of the 760s

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[64] Lewicki, T., "Les noms propres berbères employés chez les Nafūsa médiévaux (VIII^e-XVI^e siècle). Observations d'un arabisant", *Folia Orientalia*, 14 (1972-73), 5-35. "Encore sur les voyages Arabes aux Canaries au moyen âge", in *Études maghrebines et soudanaises*, II, (Warsaw, 1983), 37-39.

[65] Lowick, N., "The Arabic Inscriptions on the Mosque of Abu Ma'rūf at Sharwas", *The Society for Libyan Studies*, 5 (1973-74), 14-19.

[66] Qur'ān, 2:136.

may have provided an Islamic alternative to North African Christians so perhaps the moderate Ibāḍis of al-Baṣra attracted 'Ibāḍis adrift in the tribal and political fluctuations of late 7th century Iraq.