

THE MOZABITES OF ALGERIA

One cannot spend much time in Algeria before coming across the Mozabites. They are found as grocers in most Algerian towns, and in some places they are butchers as well. The best and most attractive looking grocery stores in the city of Algiers belong to the Mozabites. The least one may say of their owners is that they have a marked gift for business, which has made them thrive under the French rule. But this commercial ability is not of recent date, as during the Turkish domination they had the monopoly of the public baths, the meat markets and the mills of Algiers, besides their connection with the caravan traffic and the trade in Negro slaves.¹

The Mozabites do not look quite like the representatives of the other ethnic groups of North Africa. They are generally of a rounder type, both facial and corporeal, contrasting in this with the sharp and lean faces and bodies of the Kabyles. Neither is there anything of the Kabyle's sunburnt freshness on the Mozabite grocer's face. These well-fed, serene looking men are in fact "the pale faces" of Algeria.

Their women are never seen in northern Algeria, due to the fact that the Mozabites are only temporary immigrants in the northern towns and are not permitted by laws of their own to bring their wives along. As a rule the men stay abroad for periods of two years, and then other members of the family will come and carry on their businesses.

It is also noticeable that, business exigencies apart, they stand aloof from the other natives of North Africa, whether they be Arabs or Berbers. They are themselves Berbers. The reason for this aloofness is a religious one. They do not consider the Orthodox Sunnis of the Mālīkī (or any other rite, for that matter) as true Muslims. They maintain that they themselves and they alone are the true followers of the religion of Muhammad. They accuse the French of hav-

¹ Cf. Julien, Ch.-André, *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord*, Paris, Payot, 1931, p. 527.

ing insulted them grossly by permitting the few Arabs who live in their land to build a mosque where worship is being performed according to the Mālikī rite.

Their Desert Land: Algeria is divided for administrative purposes into two distinctive parts. The North is administered along the same lines as metropolitan France and organized into three provinces or "départements," which are in fact parts of France. The South, on the other hand, is under military control and consists of four vast territories, collectively called the Southern Territories.² These territories cover nearly 90 per cent. of the surface of Algeria, but have less than 9 per cent. of its population, that is 767,435 square miles of desert, with certain scattered oases and 642,651 inhabitants, of whom 8,955 are Europeans (1936 census).

Here in the desert is the homeland of the Mozabites, who derive their name from the region they live in: the Mzab or the Chebka du Mzab.³ The area is about 3,000 square miles, with clear-cut limits, except in the South, where there is a network of dunes of the impenetrable Erg. The country is also on a higher level than the surrounding regions, with an average altitude of 1600 feet, and certain places as high as 2,500 feet.

The Mzab forms from an administrative point of view what the French call a "native commune" and is part of the Ghardaia Territory, to which also Ouargla, Ngousa, Metlili and El-Goleah belong. The Territory has its name from its capital, which is a Mozabite town, situated 400 miles south of Algiers. There are seven towns in the Mzab commune, each with its own oasis. These oases are among the richest in the whole of the Sahara, not so by the clemency of nature, but through the sheer efforts of a race of tenacious men.⁴ The climate is exacting, with a torrid excess of heat during the summer, making it one of the hottest areas of

² Cf. Liebesny, Herbert J., *The Government of French North Africa*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1943.

³ Cf. M. Mercier, article on MZAB in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (1938) Supplement, p. 164.7.

⁴ Cf. Basset, René, *La Zenatia du Mzab* (Introduction). Cf. also Julien, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

the immense desert. The land was absolutely uninviting and sterile from nature's side. But the uncommon energy of the Mozabites made it possible to maintain agriculture by digging some 3,000 wells, a great number of them as deep as 200-265 feet. They even started to grow date-palms, although at an economic loss in a region where water was so scarce. In spite of this admirable effort the existence of human life is often threatened in the Mzab. In years of great drought they have lived mostly on wheat and other food sent down to them from their grocer compatriots in the northern towns.

At the arrival of the French the seven Mozabite towns formed a Confederation. They had been able to hold their own through centuries. Neither the Arabs nor the Turks had ever managed to conquer these desert strongholds. But in 1853 the Mzab came under French protection without fighting. In 1882 the French simply annexed the country, under the pretext of stopping all the internal strife. But the French recognized their national and religious entity by making a special treaty with them, which still governs their reciprocal relations.

According to the 1936 census the *ksur* of Mzab has a population of 40,277 souls. Compared to earlier censuses or to the quickly growing populations of other regions of Algeria, their number seems fairly stationary.

Who are really these Mozabites? Why did they ever choose to settle in this inhospitable desert? These questions, and many others, get their answer through a certain knowledge of their historical background.

1) They are Kharijis. Even before stating anything of their Berber origin, one must keep clearly in mind that they are Kharijis. That is, they are members of the earliest religious sect in Islam. Macdonald tells about their origin: "At one time in Mu'awiya's contest with Ali, he trapped Ali into the fatal step of arbitrating his claims to the Caliphate. . . . Part of Ali's army seceded in protest and rebellion, because he—the duly elected Khalifah—submitted his claims to any shadow of doubt."⁵

⁵ *Muslim Theology* etc., p. 23.

This happened at Siffin, A.H. 37 (A.D. 659), where these Muslims abandoned Ali's cause and were given their sect-name, which means "goers out" or "seceders."⁶ They refused to regard the other Muslims as co-religionists. As they were proclaiming full democracy in Islam they set forth the following rules: a) The *khalifah* should be elected and should be deposed if he behaved unworthily; b) no special family (e.g. Muhammad's), nor a special tribe (e.g. Quraish) had any claims to the Caliphate; c) a slave might be elected, if a good Muslim; and d) a woman might become *khalifah*. e) There was also a section who did not want a *khalifah* at all, as the Muslim congregation might rule itself.

Macdonald says: "It cannot be doubted that these men were the true representatives of the old Islam. They claimed for themselves the heirship of Abu Bakr and Umar, and their claim was just. Islam had been secularized. . . . So they drew themselves apart and went their own way. . . . To them the Orthodox Muslims—meaning the general body of Muslims—were antipathetic more than even Christians and Jews."⁷

Branding all other Muslims as infidels and renegades, they committed some awful murders and started a series of rebellions. 'Ali had to attack them (A.H. 38) and defeated them completely, killing both their leader and most of his followers and seemed to have crushed the movement. But they came again, and this victory cost 'Ali his life at the hand of a Khārijī (A.H. 40). The Kharijis became well organized as guerilla soldiers, with a good cavalry. Real wars of extermination were conducted against them, but they came again and again and again. They are the only Muslim sect that curses and abhors 'Ali and his family,⁸ although they recognize his initial caliphate.

⁶ There cannot be any doubt of the fact that the kharijism originated at the arbitration, although some great scholars (Wellhausen, Lammens, etc.) held the opinion that the origin and the arbitration were two separate events. Cf. G. Levi Della Vida on KHARIJITES in *The Ency. of Islam*, cf. same art. on meaning of word: *kharaja* "went out", *khawārij* "those who went out." Some say that they went out from "Orthodoxy" (Mercier), although the Kharijis themselves maintain that they alone are true Muslims. There is no reference to having gone out from the general community. They went out from 'Ali's camp, some openly at Siffin, some secretly at Kufa, amongst them even some *qurrā'* (quranic readers). This is the origin of their name.

⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 27.

The Mozabites are very conscious of being the heirs of those great fighters for the faith, and they want to remain pure. They are neither Sunnis nor Shi'is, but a separate community in Islam alongside them, having their own rules of faith and religious laws. This community has never permitted any brotherhoods or *ṣūfī*-orders. They hold to the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, but instead of *ijmā'* and *qiyās* they have *ra'y*.⁹

2) They are 'Ibadis. Several schisms occurred among the Kharijis. The absolutists behaved like a band of "holy murderers," killing to the glory of God even children of non-Kharijis. They disapproved of mixing with other than members of their own sect, but they rejected even those of them who did not actually fight in God's path.

The 'Ibādī schism occurred in the year 60 A.H., when the moderate Kharijis gathered around 'Abdallah b. 'Abād (or 'Ibād), having their centre at Basra, whence they carried their doctrine with missionary zeal to other countries. Whereas the absolutists (Azraḳīs) were exterminated in A.H. 77, and the other branches of Kharijis have all disappeared from the arena of history, the 'Ibadis have survived, the only ones that could have a future.¹⁰

The old centres of kharijism no longer belong to the sect. The 'Ibadis have been able to hold their own in regions that were not easily accessible (deserts, mountains, islands), and they have maintained contact with each other, even though they are very far afield. Differing schools have found each other, and there seems to be a panibādī movement, from which they receive new fervor, ambition and unity, under the impulsion of intellectuals attached to "al Barunīa," an 'ibādī publishing house at Cairo.¹¹ May be they give them unrealizable dreams: the hope of a universal imamate, as during the time of Muhammad and the two first khalifahs. But they give at any rate to the isolated

⁹ Cf. article on IBADIS in E. I.

¹⁰ Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹¹ Cf. Dr. Enrico Insabato, *L'Islam et la Politique des Alliés. L'Islam mystique et schismatique. Le problème du khalifat*. Paris, 1920, p. 116-17. In the note, p. 117, he states that "al Barunia" is a real publishing house, almost clandestine, publishing the most important books for exclusive 'ibādī use, and that Orientalists have had great difficulties in obtaining information about it.

group of Mozabites (and certainly also to other 'ibādī groups) a feeling of greater cohesion, which certainly must bring them some satisfaction, some feeling of hopes that would be too daring if they were alone.

One might wonder how many 'Ibadis there are in the world. According to the estimates by Louis Massignon, published 1930, there are about 435,000 of them.¹²

3) They are Berbers. This fact is not of the least importance in trying to understand the present-day Mozabites. The Berbers had stood out valiantly against the Arab invaders. Lack of unity finally caused them to lose. But their independent Berber spirit found numerous occasions to express itself against the Arabs. That is also why they seemed to prefer the schismatic and heretical forms of Islam.

Kharijism came to North Africa through missionaries from the East as early as A.H. 112.¹³ They made some progress among the Berbers, who seemed to accept it as a national doctrine, providing pretexts for warfare with the Orthodox Arabs. One of the missionaries, the Yamani Abū'l Khaṭṭāb, led the Berbers to the reconquest of Tripoli (140/757) and was elected the first 'ibādī imām of Ifriqiya (Tunisia)-Tripoli-Nafusa. Four years later he and most of his lieutenants were killed in the disastrous defeat at Tawarga, inflicted on them by the Abbasid governor of Ifri-

¹² Cf. *Annuaire du monde musulman*, third edition (1929), Paris, 1930. The 'Ibadis are found in the following countries:

Uman 325,000, where they have maintained themselves since A.H. 130 and form now 3/5 of the population.

Zanzibar 6,000, only 3 per cent. of the population, but the reigning house, the ruling and land-owning class are Ibādīs, originally from Uman.

Libya 33,256, according to the 1917 census, then 6 per cent. of the population; live mostly in Djebel Nafusa and a few other mountain regions.

Tunisia 20,000, mostly on the island of Djerba, and as businessmen in Tunisian towns.

Algeria 60,000, of whom 2/3 live in the Mzab, others in Ouargla, Oued Rir' and a few thousands in the northern towns.

There are possibly some 'Ibadis in Morocco (bdadoua for ibādiya?). Some 'Umanian Ibadis are established also in Tanganyika.

¹³ For this chapter I have consulted Strothmann: *Berber und Ibāditen*, in *Der Islam* 1928, p. 258-79; in E. I. articles by George Marçais on the RUSTAMIDS and TAHERT; the article by de Motylinski on the ABADITES, and the article on IBADIS already quoted.

qiya. But even such a calamity could not break the spirit of the survivors.

The 'Ibadis had now leaders that they called "imams of resistance (or defense)," some leading them into great battles, but of small avail for the *ibādī* establishment, till they got their second imām 160/776, an Iranian by name 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rustam. He had been governor of Kairawan under the first imām, but escaped at the fall of that city to the khalifah's army (A.H. 144). In the West he built the city of Tahert, which became so important that it became the capital for all 'Ibadis, with himself as ruler. The kingdom stretched from Nafusa to Tahert, including the South of Tunisia and Algeria.¹⁴ In spite of the fact that Tahert remained the capital of this kingdom for 150 years and under Rustamid rulers, the Arab historians of Maghrib do not know much about it.

Six Rustamid imams reigned at Tahert. The principle of election was maintained in spite of appearances. Some of the imams were famous for their piety and learning, but most of them must also have been good statesmen, as for example Aflah, the fourth imām of the Rustamids, who adroitly maneuvered with three kingdoms (warfare with the Aghlabids, who had made themselves independent of the Abbasids; warfare with the Idrisids in the West; obtaining an alliance with the Umayyads of Cordova).

When crises occurred in a theocratic state like that of the 'Ibadis, they took the form of schisms. There were a few of them, and some *'ibādī* schools or communities led an independent existence, some surviving in Djerba till today, but now reunited with the main fold of 'Ibadis.¹⁵

The history of the *'ibādī* kingdom is certainly a strange one. The administration was simple and the taxation was not heavy. The capital became an important market centre, and the people grew rich. The 'Ibadis proved themselves

¹⁴ There was also another Berber *khārijī* kingdom in North Africa, with its capital at Sidjilmasa in the East of Morocco. They belonged to the Sufri Kharijis, but sided with the 'Ibadis in the general Berber risings and later were assimilated with them. Cf. articles on SIDJILMASA and AL-SUFRIYA in E. I.

¹⁵ Here I refer to the Nakkārīs; cf. art. AL-NUKKAR by T. Lewicki in E. I., Supplement, p. 172-73.

good merchants, and even some of the imāms made good in business, e.g. the third Rustamid. For the Berber farmers and nomads as well, Tahert was the common and natural centre. By their tolerance the 'Ibadis attracted Christians from all over North Africa. But even from further afield people were attracted to Tahert, a number of capable Iranians and other Orientals, mostly of the *khārijī* sects and fleeing the persecutions in the East. The State seemed firmly established.

The tragedy is that the whole thing was blown to pieces in a few days. The Fatimid Shi'is utterly destroyed Tahert and massacred the inhabitants. This happened A.H. 296/908 A.D. But this was not the end of the saga of the 'Ibadis. To end that the enemies would have to kill every one of them.

The 'Ibadis still controlled the Nafusa, Djerba and other regions. They led the Berbers in a supreme wave of nationalism against the Arabs, and were at times very near the complete liberation of Berber North Africa. It seems to be a tragic element with the Kharijīs: they were so near success and yet failed.

The imamate was now abolished, as it did not suit the present situation. In spite of constant warfare they built themselves new towns in the Saharan regions: in Wadi Righ and Wadi Mya. Sedrata was their most important town. As the 'Ibadis did not feel quite secure in these regions, they looked for a new place, where they could live in peace and worship according to their religious ideas. It so happened that they chose the inhospitable and difficult region of the Mzab, where they in comparatively short time built a Pentapolis in the beginning of the 11th century. Their enemies at last found them in the Wadi Mya region, and burned and destroyed their towns A.D. 1075. The Mzab Pentapolis was ready to receive the survivors and fugitives after the disaster of Sedrata. Holding their ground in the Nafusa and other regions, they conquered a region of desolation for culture and civilization. Six hundred years later they built the sixth and seventh towns of the Mzab Confederation.

The Mozabites look back to their Lost City of Tahert as the Zionist Jews look back to Jerusalem. What they have done in the Mزاب region of the Sahara is comparable to what the Mormons have accomplished in Utah. Also like the Mormons they received co-religionists from many different races, but these elements were assimilated by the Berbers, although their Berber dialect is less pure than those of Ouargla and of Nafusa.¹⁶

'Ibādī Towns. In striking contrast to all Saharan towns the *'ibādī* towns are built in a regular order, the result of a pre-arranged plan. In the centre, on the highest place, there is a mosque, a store-house, an armory and a fortress. The houses are built to form concentric circles. The architecture of the houses is specifically Berber: there are galleries with arcades over the court-yard, diagonally forming a roof to catch the rainwater. The gallery faces south and is opposite the roofless part of the house, thus giving a particular appearance to the Mزاب towns, completed by the pyramidal silhouette of the minaret. There are also defensive towers, outlook towers and altars for the local saints.¹⁷ The houses of the oases are of the same style as those of the towns, but less serried.

*The Doctrines of the 'Ibadis.*¹⁸ They very naturally reject the name of heretics and claim to belong to the only sect that can be saved.

Their teaching regarding the caliphate has been referred to. Here we shall add that they accept all four of Muhammad's first successors, although making it clear that Abū Bākr and 'Umar alone were "impeccable" khalifahs. 'Uthmān is accepted for his first six years, while his later "innovations" are always singled out in *'ibādī* literature as specially blameworthy. 'Ali is accepted till the arbitration.

¹⁶ Basset, *op. cit.*, (Introduction).

¹⁷ Mercier mentions the altars in his art. MZAB, but nowhere is saint-worship mentioned. Insabato, *op. cit.*, p. 122, says that there is no saint-worship. God's judgment is irrevocable, and intercessions would be blasphemous. The 'Ibadis confess their sins before dying, but no absolution is given by the one who hears it, as God alone knows if the repentance is genuine. The altars mentioned may be commemorative monuments of martyrs.

¹⁸ For this section I have used Margoliouth, art. *Ibādīs*, in E. R. E.; de Motylinski, *art. cit.*; Insabato, *op. cit.*, p. 120-21.

This attitude is consistent with their teaching of deposing unworthy khalifahs.

They believe that the Qur'ān is God's word, created by him and they allow only literal interpretation.

They teach that God will not be seen in the next world.

They absolutely reject the teaching of the Sunnis (especially those of the orders) of justification by faith alone. Faith must be proved by deeds, and salvation is not obtainable by certain devotional, pious practices. Repentance is only acceptable to God for unintentional offenses.

It is the duty of all Muslims to enjoin the good and reprove the evil. An individual who acts contrary to the religious laws, loses the friendship of the faithful and should be treated as an enemy. The excommunication (*tabriya*) is followed by grave religious and civilian consequences. The excommunicated either has to go in exile or go through a very humiliating process of repentance.

This consistency of faith and deeds has produced a puritanical austerity in behavior and morals, at least in the Mzab, where nobody can avoid the supervision of the "talba" (here a secret religious council). Tobacco, games, dancing, luxury, music, frequenting of cafés, celibacy (a source of vices) and anger are formally forbidden. They do not sing; they seldom laugh. Honesty and cleanliness are universal. There is a high sexual morality, and concubinage is forbidden.¹⁹ Contact with a woman's hand, an obscene or a derogatory word suffice to abolish the moral purity and necessitate special ablution before prayer. Their religious zeal is great, and they stick to "the old paths." Marriage with non-Ibāḍīs is disapproved by the entire society. This puritanism, be it sincere or pharisaical, has formed them into a homogeneous and compact group, clearly distinguishable in character, behavior and tendencies among the Arabs and the Berbers.

Wellhausen points out that kharijism played a very important part in the development of Muslim theology, either

¹⁹ If the legitimate wife consents, the Mozabite might take his female Negro slave or servant as a concubine; cf. A.-M. Goichon, "La vie féminine au Mzab," in the *Revue du monde musulman*, Vol. 62, 1925, p. 80.

directly or by stimulating reflection on the problems of the faith.

One teaching of the Kharijis needs special mention. During the caliphates of Abū Bakr and 'Umar, Islam was in "the state of glory." This "state" was experienced again in Tahert, when an *'ibādī* imam governed an *'ibādī* country. Their looking back to this Tahert-Jerusalem might possibly encourage the hope for a new day, when they once more should experience this "state of glory."²⁰ After the fall of Tahert (A.D. 908) they entered the "state of resistance." They had known also this "state" before in their history, after the death of their first imām and until the election of Ibn Rustam. "The state of resistance" came to an end 1882, when the French annexed their country. They then entered into the "state of secrecy." Outside their own country the *Ibādīs* had always practiced "secrecy" concerning their own sect, its tenets, its literature etc. This "state" had been known to the early history of the kharijism, when "al-shurat,"²¹ operated as partisan-soldiers on the Arab home-front. But there does not seem to be any partisan fighting in the *'ibādī* regions now. On the contrary, the French have every reason to praise the Mozabites for their peaceful attitude and behavior. But some say that they are always waiting for the time when they can pass into the "state of resistance" again, so that they may be able to pass into the "state of glory" once more.²²

A "state of devotion" is also mentioned in the *khārijī* history. That was their missionary enterprise in the early times, carrying their doctrines to the countries where the 'Ibadis now are established.²³

What about their Literature? Macdonald says: "Of the jurisprudence of the *Ibādītes* we know comparatively little. A full examination of *'Ibadite fiqh* would be of the greatest

²⁰ Insabato, *op. cit.*, p. 101-8, tells of this hope, and how they even helped their inveterate enemies, the Sanusis, against the Italians, only in order to prepare their own day. But F. Béguinot in art. AL-NAFUSA, E. I., says the Libyan 'Ibadis even later helped the Italians to pacify the country, going of course especially against the Sanusis.

²¹ Mercier, *art. cit.*, translates this: "acquirers (of future life)." Della Vida, *art. cit.*, translates as "vendors" "those who have sold their soul for the cause of God."

²² Insabato, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

²³ Mercier, *art. cit.*

interest, as the separation of its line of descent goes far back behind the formation of any of the orthodox systems, and it must have been codified to a greater or less extent by Abd Allah ibn Ibād himself."²⁴

It is not easy at all to get hold of their literature on account of their secrecy. But scholars have been able to put forth certain facts about it.

The *'aqīda*, which forms the basis of the religious teaching in the Mزاب, as for their co-religionists in Djerba and in Nafusa, was originally framed in the Berber language, which was a literary language long after the Arab invasion.²⁵ It was also to become, so to speak, the official language of the Ibādīs in the brilliant period of the Rustamids. We see here one of the few examples offered in the Muslim world of religious works composed in a language other than Arabic. These are also the historical reasons for the survival of their Berber language until this present day. It is wrongly called mozabite, whereas they themselves call it *tamazight*, a name also given to most Berber dialects in Morocco. If it is not as pure as that of Ouargla or Nafusa, that is easily explained by the assimilation of so many foreign elements during historic times. But it is not very unlike the dialect of the Kabyles, which is called *zuwawa*.

The books of the Ibādīs, though, are generally written in Koranic Arabic and more seldom in Berber (in Arabic script).²⁶ The constituent part of their literature is naturally *'ibādī* exegesis, dogmatics and history. They do not accept the writings of non-'Ibadis.²⁷ Their classics are divided in three groups: a) works by "our comrades in the East," b) works by "our comrades of the Mountain" (Nafusa) and c) works by the Westerners (Mزاب etc.). Some of these classics are known, either in the text or in some translation.²⁸

Administration in the Mزاب. Each town had self-govern-

²⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 115.

²⁵ Mercier, *art. cit.*

²⁶ Some samples of Mزابi Berber are printed and translated by T. Lewicki and Henri Basset in the *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1934 and 1936.

²⁷ It is interesting to notice that the version of the Qur'an chosen from among the ten orthodox readings, is that of the Malikis called *Nāfi'* or *War'*, see Goichon, *op. cit.*, p. 37, note 2.

²⁸ Bibliography by Mercier, *art. cit.*

ment in the limits of the Mزاب Confederation. The government was composed of two bodies: 1) the *halqa* of the i'azza-ben or *talba*, presided over by a shaikh, and which laid down the degrees of corporal punishment, of imprisonment and other police regulations, which were in turn administered by 2) the *jama'a* of the 'awāmm, presided over by a *hākim*. A special police (*jama'a* of *umkaru*) had charge of the maintenance of order, keeping a strict surveillance over the individuals.

Since the French annexation these things have changed. The French military commander is in charge of the government. The French tried to change as little as possible of their administrative set-up. But they installed, as in the rest of the Southern Territories *cadis* and *caids*. The *jama'a* of the 'awāmm has taken more and more the form of a democratic and representative municipal council.

But what about the *talba*? There seems to be some disagreement or lack of knowledge as to their real present status. The French let them remain as the recipients of the *hubus*, benefactions, which are highly developed in the Mزاب. Mercier states that they exercise only a moral influence at present.²⁹ But what is a "moral influence" in a country where the religious zeal is as great as in the Mزاب, and where morals and faith are one? And then, the sect is in the "state of secrecy," which should indicate that this "moral influence" certainly cannot be of minor importance. Others speak about the "tyrannical supervision of the *talba*," even today,³⁰ claiming that the real authority rests with the *talba*, acting as a secret council.

An example of its way of acting, giving some inference of its power over the people as well, will be cited. The military commander of the Mزاب rebuked a *caid* for negligence in the service during an epidemic. He got an "answer" in an anonymous letter from the *talba*:

"To Monsieur le Commandant Superieur,

"Know this: the doctor shall not visit a Mozabite dead or sick; there you have acted badly.

²⁹ *art. cit.*

³⁰ de Motylinski, *art. cit.*; and André Chevrillon, *Les puritains du désert*, Paris, 1927, from which the letter also is quoted.

"You shall not take any Mozabites and make them soldiers. You shall not change the laws of our ancestors. You shall not oblige our children to go to your school. You shall not say: I want one hundred, one thousand, twenty or ten.

"You have established an office: let him go, who wants to make a complaint; a hospital: let him go who will; 'a house of pleasure': let him go, who wants to go to the fire of hell. Nothing of all that is obligatory.

"You say, O Frenchmen, that your forefathers are dead, and that you have no contact with them. But we, Muslims, say that even if their flesh and bones are decayed in the bosom of the earth, our forefathers live and guard us. Our ancestors watch like the lion, who guards himself and his region. He eats those who want him to perish! God is seeing and just! Our ancestors tell you: the Government that makes one single Mozabite a soldier, will perish. And such a Mozabite obeys only because he is forced to; or else he is a renegade. The one who sells his religion and his brethren shall not profit by it.

"This letter does not emanate from the learned, nor from the chiefs, nor from the rich, nor from the civil servants. It is the work of the weak the sick and the dead, who are now dust in the earth. You think they are dead: they live near God!³¹

"No investigation is to be made on account of this letter. The writer does not fear investigation, nor prison, nor death. He only fears God who created him and who commanded him to write."

It may be noted that the Mozabites have an agreement with the French government, by which, even abroad (that is in the three northern provinces of Algeria), they are under *'ibādī* jurisdiction and not submitted to *Mālikī* or *Ḥanafī* *cadis*.³²

Social Life in the Mzab. Their social life has been touched upon. Here I shall mention two points in the above letter: the French school and the military service.

³¹ The Mozabites claim that they took the bones of their dead with them from Tahert first and from Ouargla and Sedrata next.

³² Liebesny, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

These things raised an unanimous outcry. But as the school was made obligatory, there was not much to do about it. The parents submitted with more or less grace, but without enthusiasm.³³ But the Mozabites stick to their quranic schools as well, and so the children go to two schools on the same day, the quranic school requiring nearly two full hours before the French school starts, and more than two hours after the French school is over. Whatever holidays the French school grants are used entirely by the quranic school, except Thursdays and Fridays. The quranic school recognizes only the Muslim holidays and keeps the pupils over the age fixed for primary education.

Also the girls are given instruction. The Mozabites show here a greater understanding of woman's rights than do other North Africans. There are of course objections to too much instruction for the girls, but in the purest 'ibādī towns the women have more instruction than in others.

The protests against the military service stopped when it was learned that they could send a substitute for the one drafted. They had the substitutes: the Arabs, whom they despise, and who form a kind of proletariat around their towns. They do need them, though. The Arab women are used as maids in the Mozabite homes. The only beggars in the Mzab region are Arabs, and now they could serve as substitutes for the Mozabites in the French army, receiving good money for it, naturally.

Beni Isguen is the holiest of the towns. None but 'Ibadis can spend the night there. The streets are always well swept. No animals are permitted there.

A married woman cannot go out freely. Her life is spent in the small and inconspicuous home, where sanitary problems were not raised when they were built; there is, for instance, little ventilation.³⁴ The children's room is apart from that of their parents, contrary to the general practice of North Africa. If the husband is in the North (where it is not, strange to say, reprehensible for him to live with other

³³ Goichon, *op. cit.*, p. 37 and p. 41ff.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 29f, 58.

women,³⁵ although this is absolutely forbidden in the Mزاب), the other members of her family keep strict surveillance over her and her honor.³⁶

There is not much of beauty in a Mozabite home. Why should there be, when not even God's house is ornamented? Not a piece of sculpture, not even a decorative tile is permitted for their mosques.³⁷ Life is simple, food is plain, no luxury is permitted; even the rich man lives as if he were poor.

The holidays, except for the Muslim feasts, are few. Of course, there are the family feasts also. A special cause for feasting is the return of the men from the North. There is an even greater joy, if a thunderstorm passes over their desert homeland, which is a rare thing, indeed, as it sometimes happens that there might be an interval of five or six years between such events.³⁸ Then the children can roll themselves in the dirt and mud. The women are permitted to come out; the men are delighted when they find that water bars their way; in the evening they have an extra dinner. Famine has been pushed away again for some time.

Should these 'Ibadis be difficult to win for the Gospel? Both Roman Catholics (the White Fathers) and Protestants (Algiers Mission Band) have stations in Ghardaia. But they do not seem to make any headway. The 'Ibadis do not come to their stations. The Arabs are the only people who seem to make use of their services, so far.

But we must recognize that a very strong religious sentiment fills the Mozabite's heart, although he is hostile to all *ṣūfī* practices and does not permit brotherhoods. He tries to live "well" in this world, hoping to obtain the best in the next.

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³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 134.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 108.