The Muslim WORLD

On Being An Ibāḍī

John C. Wilkinson
University of Oxford (retired)

The issue addressed in this article is "what does it mean to be an Ibāḍī?" Quite clearly there are universal values irrespective of time and place, but there are also specifics related to who you are, where, and when. Being an Ibāḍī was obviously not the same thing in Basra in the Umayyad period as it was in Oman or Tahert a century later, or if living in Ghardaiya (Mzab) under French occupation (post 1882) or Zanzibar under the British Protectorate (post 1890). Since I am completing a study on *The Arabs and the Scramble for Africa* I have chosen as my specific case study Zanzibar and its African hinterland during the period when the European colonial carve-up was developing in the second half of the 19th century and Britain asserting its authority both in Zanzibar and Oman which it separated into two nominally independent Sultanates in 1861.

Omani Identity

So what did it mean to say you were an Ibāḍī in Zanzibar at that time? Briefly it was a declaration of being an Omani. Even if you were living right in the interior of Africa at Nyangwe on the Lualaba (Upper Congo), you considered Oman your homeland and your religion to be Ibāḍī Islam. There was also a further dimension to the geographical and confessional identities, that of the tribe. If we look at the names of the earliest pioneers who discovered the ivory resources of the Lualaba according to al-Mughayri,[1] they were Nāsir b. Sayf al-Ma'mari, 'Isā b. 'Abdullah al-Kharūsi, 'Ubaydallāh b. Sālim al-Khadūri (Abed b. Salim in European writings) and his associate from the Comoro Islands, Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Anjaziji known as Kibonge. Another early important figure at Nyangwe was Mwinyi Mohara, a Swahili originating from the Mrima coast, known better by his African name of Mtagamoyo, and there were two other Omanis who played a significant role there, Sa'id b. Habib al- 'Afifi and Jum'a b. Sâlim al-Bakri (Jum'a Merikani). The well-known Tippo-Tib (Hamad b. Muhammad al-Murjabi ca 1840-1905) did not arrive in the area until nearly 20 years later.

[1] Sa'id b. 'Ali Mughayri, *Juhaynat al-akhbâr fi ta'rîkh Zanzibar* MNHC[A Collection of Information Concerning Zanzibari History], Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, (Oman, 1979.).

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Tribe and Geography

So even if we knew nothing more about the members of the first expedition we would at least be able to say they were Omanis, simply from their *nisba*s (clan), an identification normally omitted in European sources and in the African nicknames by which they were often referred to. All Omanis have this affiliation name which of itself tells us that they were of tribal, *baysari*, or *khadim* origins. Such social classifications subsisted despite the nominal equality arising from being a Muslim: but they were far less pronounced than those operating in neighbouring Greater Yemen and Greater Bahrayn. In Oman there was no division between weak and strong tribes, nor was occupation an overt social barrier: *bayādir* peasants were tribesmen, as were those who worked at sea. Above all there was no *sayyid* or *sharif* class in Oman. The term Sayyid (abbr. Sd.) as applied to the Al Bu Sa'id was not in fact peculiar to them and in any case was purely a courtesy title. All the Omani elite were of traceable tribal origins none of which conferred precedence, and all were theoretically equal, though some more so than others.

In other words, place, clan and *madhhab* (religious school) were all intimately linked in Omani identity. The territorial limit of the tribal dimension was the *'asabiyya* (solidarity) that could be invoked by membership of one or other of the *shaff* (tribal confederation) alliances that consolidated in the civil war that brought to an end the Ya'aruba Imamate (second quarter of 18th century), Hinawi and Ghafiri (in early Islamic times it was Nizar and Yaman), while the religious dimension is expressed by the concept of Oman forming an indivisible *misr*, that is one of the geographical subdivisions of the Muslim world recognized since 'Umar's time.[2]

Muscat and Oman

That of course raises the question of what Oman is, a subject I have addressed in detail elsewhere. Briefly it is perhaps best understood in terms of the old Arab geographers' concept of a Greater Oman, which in turn may be analyzed in terms of two dichotomies, "Muscat and Oman", and core and periphery. The former split develops when the Omanis no longer have political mastery over their coastal commerce, so that the main coastal centres fall under the control of outside powers, either directly or operating through vassals. Overseas trade has always been essential to Oman if for no other reason than exchanging dates (sugar) for grain, while its proximity to the main circulation of the monsoonal Indian Ocean trading system and access to the Gulf has favoured the location of a major entrepot, Sohar, Qalhat and Muscat at various periods of history. So Omani shipping and merchants have played a significant role in linking the ports of Iran, Iraq (and to a lesser extent Bahrein) to the eastern wing of the Indian Ocean trade network, primarily India but also the Far East and on the western side to the entry of the Red Sea and down the East African coast as far as Kilwa. That in turn has meant

[2] Originally coupled with al-Bahrayn.

arranging reciprocal rights through *aman* (security) agreements that allow Omanis on the one hand to operate abroad and foreigners (notably Indians/Banians) to establish themselves at the main port. But such residence rights do not extend to the interior which is thus preserved from outside influences. In fact this sort of balance between the need to sustain external relations and preserving the probity of the community are intrinsic to Ibāḍism since all their communities have depended in varying degrees on maintaining trading networks to survive and flourish, whether in the past at Basra, in southern Iran, Hadramawt, Tahert, or in the modern period in Oman and its East African dependencies, or North Africa, notably the Mzab. That openness to outsiders, even those considered as pagans (*mushrikūn*) gives rise to an apparent tolerance that all have remarked on, but which in fact is deceptive: it does not allow for any laxism within the actual Ibāḍī community which insists on respecting the austere and sober tenets of a purist Islam (see below).

So it is that when Oman looses control of its entrepot and navy it still survives, since the interior (until the oil era) has been of little economic interest to outsiders and is virtually impossible to occupy for any length of time without local support. At the same time the actual maritime commerce remains within the Omani trading networks essential for the sustenance of the entrepot and payment of taxes to the occupying power. So in such periods a *modus vivendi* exists until the force of the interior can reassemble in reaction to domination by outside Muslim powers (Abbasids, Qaramita, Buyids, Saljuqs, Hormuz) or Christian, Portuguese and then British. The last great Omani revival of the Imamate was that of the Ya'aruba who drove out the Portuguese and re-established direct control both in the Gulf in Bahrein and much of the adjoining southern Persian coast, and on the East African coast where the Mazru'i dynasty effectively remained in control after the Imamate collapsed in civil war. The Ya'aruba were succeeded by the Al Bu Sa'id who rebuilt Muscat's prosperity and overseas commercial empire so that Sa'id b. Sultan (r. 1806-56) actually established Zanzibar as the Sultan's residence. The dynasty, on the other hand, never established a proper direct control of the interior until modern times. Thus the split between Muscat and Oman, opened and exacerbated as the Sultan increasingly had to look to support from the British imperial power which in turn intervened ever more in Omani affairs.

Core and Frontier

The religious view of the core-frontier division is described by a leading contemporary *'alim* of our period, Nasir b. Abi Nabhan al-Kharûsi (1778-1847) as between the bedouin (*a'rab*), "people of ignorance living in the outback (*qufar*) away from the people of the settlements who are the people of favour (*ahl al-fadl*), and many of whom subscribed to the *madhhab* of 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Najdi". Another aspect of this old core-frontier division arises from the incorporation not only of the bedu fringe into the modern Sultanate but also Dhofar. The people of Dhofar were neither Ibāḍī nor belonged to the Hinawi-Ghafiri moiety tribal divisions and its incorporation has distorted

the modern map of Oman in two ways. First by giving equal area representation to the huge area of desert that separates this small exclave of settlement on the south coast with the main settled area of Oman proper, concentrated in the mountainous core and associated Batina coastal plain. That in turn has led to a further distortion of an apparent division into north and south, whereas the traditional divide in Oman proper was between Gharb (North-West of the Sumayil Gap hinge), and Sharq (South East). In the period that concerns us, the boundary of Oman was Ras Madraka.[3]

Here in this core region the Arab population was and still is solidly Ibāḍī, along with every Omani dynasty, whether Imams or not. That does not mean that the inhabitants were confined to the settlements of the mountainous interior of the country. On the contrary! If we look at the names of the tribes involved with opening up the interior of the African continent as far as the Congo, all were from the Omani heartland: Siyabi, Habsi, Ruwayhi, Riyami, Hinâ'i, Harithi, Khanjari, Maskari, Jâbiri, Barwani, Khaduri, Wardi, Kindi, Sa'di, Ghaythi, Mazru'i, Tûqi, Shukayli, Bakri, Kharusi, Nabhani, Shaqsi, Murjabi, Lamki, Kayûmi, Hajri, 'Amiri/'Umûr.[4]

These geographical and tribal aspects will not be discussed further here except in so far as they impinge on the essentially religious dimension. It will simply suffice to note initially that in our period of interest the "religious" challenge at home was Wahhabism, whereas in East Africa it was the Sunni Shāfi'i school and various Sufi *tarīqa*s (brotherhoods) which prevailed in southern Arabia and became the main Islamic influence for the Swahili. These far outnumbered the Omanis, who were increasingly regarded by them as foreign colonialists in the Al Bu Sa'id period, even though Ibāḍism in an early period had been a major formative influence in the Islamization of the coast. One illustration will suffice. On the day the Germans proclaimed their right of occupation (16 August 1888), the delegation from Pangani which came to Zanzibar to protest stated that the only people there on that day were foreigners; Arabs, Shihris,[5] Indians and Ngazidye (Comorans), because they (the Swahili leaders) were up country (*barr*) for the Nairoz (New Year) festival. And while the German Commander Wissmann hung two Omani leaders implicated in the so-called Bushiri "rebellion", he spared Bwana Heri at the end of the revolt because he was not an Arab, but an "honourable enemy". Indeed, Glassman goes so far as to maintain the uprising was directed as much against the Omanis as the Europeans.[6]

So in sum, to say you were an Ibāḍī was another way of saying you were an Omani. A parallel may perhaps be made with the Church of England. When I was doing basic training during National Service, we were summoned under three divisions for Church

[3] Capt. W.F.W. Owen, *Narrative of Voyages* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833).
[4] The order of the names identified is of no significance.
[5] Note the distinction between Omanis and the collective term for those from South Arabia.
[6] J. Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, & Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (London: Heinemann, 1995).

Parade: CofE Catholics, Others. Not Lutherans, not Anglicans, nor even Protestants, but Church of England: we were in England. Had one been asked what that meant a few might have muttered something about Henry VIII and the Pope, but most would not have had a clue. One was born and some baptized that way: Queen (just, October 1952!) and Country! Religious appurtenance was, and always has been essentially a matter of birth except in moments of major political or social upheaval. One did not choose to be an Ibāḍī, you were born one and remained so unless you made a very major decision to change.

The Swahili and Intermarriage

All writers of the period with which we are concerned emphasize that among the changes in Swahili society is the change of concept of the term *ungwana*, originally associated with the civilized values of the upper echelons of Swahili society to the aspirations of being considered Arab, *ustaarabu*. One can see this debasement in the autobiography of Tippo-Tib where, like the *bayāsira*, the *wangwana* formed a quite distinct class, and in contrast to the Omani tribesmen hardly ever mentioned by personal name. The ordinary Swahili *wangwana*, albeit Muslims, were not considered as on a par with the Arabs (that in our period were the Omanis, the renewal of Hadrami migration is largely associated with the colonial period). So in Zanzibar, as in Oman, those of Arab tribal origins generally married within the family clan or allied tribes. One result is that while they absorbed local population they did not assimilate in terms of identity. They might take Swahili wives or slave girls, but the distinguishing marriage was overwhelmingly, as at home, monogamous and enduring. All Sd Sa'id's numerous offspring were by concubines, but what mattered was his marriage to his close Busa'idi relative; likewise Barghash despite his 50-70 concubines, while the only spouse that mattered for Tippo-Tib's status was his Barwani wife, even though she too bore him no children. These "official" Omani wives were of equal status. A Swahili on the other hand could not take an Omani tribal wife because he was of lower status, though marriages of Omani men with Swahili women were common.

That did not mean the Arabs did not speak Swahili and indeed many were more familiar with it than Arabic: likewise, the customs of the people were respected and absorbed, to a degree at least, by those living on the mainland. How far the Omanis intermarried with the upper echelons of Swahili society is less clear. Despite often being designated as "Shirazi" these were generally of old Hadrami or Yemeni origins and careful to preserve their *sayyid* and *sharif* status by marrying among themselves, an elitism reinforced by the Shaf'i interpretation of *kafa'a* which was particularly strict.[7] Long established, they may have intermarried with the African rulers on the coast, but this was

[7] U. Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in the Hadhramaut: Reforming the Homeland* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

made possible partly because they had accepted Shafi'i Islam, and again it would have been with the womenfolk. The old Omani dynasts like the Nabahina and Mazari'a also married to reinforce their ties with the Swahili leaders and in the interior we find Omanis marrying both Christians and pagans with little concern, but the tribesmen in general had little opportunity to promote their status by marrying outside their own clans, and were also inhibited because they were Ibāḍīs. Indeed, in the one example of an Omani (Salih b. Muhammad b. Bashir al-Mundhiri) trying to promote himself through his marriage to a daughter of the Shirazi ruler of Mayotte, he had to renounce Ibāḍism for Shafi'ism before being proclaimed Sultan following his father-in-law's death (c.1790). Subsequently he fell to the knife of one of his former slaves whom he had made vizier and now usurped his place: Divine retribution?

So, if an Omani wanted to become a leader among the Shirazi Sultanates, he had to renounce his religion, and thereby effectively his Omaniness. Conversely, however much a Swahili might aspire to Arabness he could never become an Omani because he was not a tribesman and intermarriage only took place on the distaff side. "National" appurtenance followed the male line, and with it the religious identity.

Ibāḍī Conversions to Sunnism

This also helps explains why the Omanis never proselytized in East Africa, whereas Ibāḍī conversions to the Shafi'i school did occur. This may be illustrated by the example of Sh. 'Ali b. Khamis b. Salim al-Barwâni (1852-85). Born in Zanzibar he studied with the likes of Barghash's chief Qadi, Muhammad b. Sulayman al-Mundhiri, and the great Qadi Sh. Yahya b. Khalfan al-Kharusi, himself a grandson of Abu Nabhan Ja'id b. Khamis who edited that massive compilation of the renaissance, the *Qamus al-Sharī'a* of Jumayil b. Khamis Yal Sa'di, which the Barghash press started printing. So trained by the best of the ulema in Zanzibar and associated with the inner circle of Barghash's advisers, Sh 'Ali was certainly steeped in the traditions of Ibāḍism and by the time he was 30 had become famous for his literary prowess, writing *qasīda*s for each work published by the Sultan's press. However, he abandoned his Zanzibari teachers for (Abu Wasîm) Khamis b. Sulayyim al-Khusibi a distinguished scholar and poet when he visited Zanzibar and the two became inseparable friends. Al- Khusibi's father was a *dallāl* (fruit broker) from a *baysari* clan in Sumayil[8] but himself had become a Qadi, with the honorary address of Shaykh, as well as being a distinguished literary figure, and as such refused to adopt the subservient "*habib*" address to the Sultan, which riled Barghash who threatened him with prison so that he fled back to Oman, where he composed verses attacking him. But this was a class issue and shows that the ideology of Ibāḍism has still never completely

[8] From this *baysari* clan also came Rashid b. 'Azayiz, who became a trusted servant for Faysal b. Turki (r.1888-1913) and then his son Taymur, serving first as governor of Sumayil. (information from Dr. Salimi).

penetrated the age-old barriers of Arab status sustained in Islam by the notion of *kafa'a*. Indeed, the first break-away movement in the Ibāḍī movement, that of the Turayfiyya, was precisely over this issue, when the very first proper Ibāḍī Imam, 'Abdullah b. Yahya (Tālib al-Haqq) of noble Hadrami Kinda origins, refused to marry a daughter of 'Abdullah b. Turayf, because he was a *mawlā*.

Whether this affected Sh 'Ali's attitudes or not, the real reason for his conversion was almost certainly rejection of the particularism of the closed Ibāḍī school for the quasi-universal forms of Sunnism that predominated in East Africa and southern Arabia. He was strongly influenced by Sheikh Muhammad b. Salih al-Farsy, who originated from Lamu but had studied under Sayyid Ahmad Zayn Dahlân (1817/8- 1886), the highly influential Shafi'i mufti of Mecca since 1871, himself a scholar of early Muslim history and initiated into various *tarīqa*s (Sufi brotherhoods).[9] To Barghash's fury, Sh 'Ali in turn became a teacher of several great scholars from the sayyid and sharīf families, notably Sayyid Ahmad b. 'Ali (1863-1927), generally referred to as Sayyid Mansab b. 'Ali, who originated from Moroni (Comoros) and in due course become a convert to Pan-Islamic ideas. So Barghash had Sh. 'Ali imprisoned, telling him he would die incarcerated if he did not revert to Ibāḍism. Despite the remonstration of Muhammad b. Sulayman al-Mundhiri who visited him daily, he refused to recant, so Barghash sent him to Oman where it was hoped he would see the light. On the contrary, he caused as much trouble there as in Zanzibar and so he was sent back to prison in Zanzibar. After consulting with al-Farsi, who counseled what in fact was *taqiyya*, he did publicly renounce his Sunni beliefs, but died shortly after, largely from the mistreatment he had suffered.

Another distinguished scholar whom Barghash imprisoned was Sh 'Ali b. 'Abdullah b. Nâfi' al- Mazru'i who, with his father had taken refuge in Mecca after Mazru'i power had finally been broken by Sd Sa'id b. Sultan in 1837. There he studied first under the Egyptian master 'Uthman b. Hasan al- Damyati (d.1848-9), and then his famous pupil the Grand Mufti Dahlân who had so influenced Sh. Muhammad b. Salih al-Farsy, Sh 'Ali b. Khamis al-Barwani's mentor. Ten years later the Mazru'i returned to Mombasa where he built a considerable reputation, in due course being appointed Shafi'i Qadi by Sd Majid (r1856-70) before inviting him to teach in Zanzibar. Interestingly, one of his compositions[10] was on the subject of *ru'ya* (the vision of God), the main theological issues on which the Ibāḍīs differ from the Sunnis (see below) and which seems to have been his reply to Sh. Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Mundhiri's critique of Shāfi'i views on the subject. Not surprisingly he took Mubarak b. Rashid al-Mazrui's side when rebelling against Barghash and returned to Mombasa after the Sultan had conceded Kenya to the British East Africa Company in 1887. But the last straw came when Barghash learned he had been making

[9] For details of his career see U. Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 201-8.; A.S. Farsy, *The Shafi'i Ulama of East Africa c. 1830-1970*. Translated by R.L. Pouwels 1989 (Madison: University of Wisconsin).

[10] S.A. al-Mazru'i, *The History of the Mazru'i Dynasty of Mombasa*. Translated by J.McL. Ritchie (Oxford: OUP, 1995).

Shafi'i converts both there and in Pemba where members of his clan lived. Sh. 'Ali al-Mazru'i was re-established by Sd Hamad b. Thuwayni (r.1893-6) as Qadi in Mombasa, shortly before his death.

Another leading figure Barghash imprisoned was Sh 'Abd al-'Aziz b. 'Abd al-Ghani al-Amawi (1832- 96). Al-Amawi had been brought up and trained as a Shāfi'i in his native Brava (Somali coast), before moving to Zanzibar, and had been appointed at the incredibly young age of 18 as Qadi of Kilwa by Sd Sa'id, thanks to the influence of his teacher, Muhyi al-Dīn b. Shaykh b. Abdullah al-Qahtâni (c. 1790- 1869): he then became Shafi'i qadi in Zanzibar. Amongst those whom Al-Amawi strongly influenced was Barghash's rival brother Sd Khalifa who appointed him his personal Qadi when he succeeded to the Sultanate in 1888, though as Sultan he himself never abandoned Ibāḍism; but more significant is that al-Amawi had come under the influence of Sh. Uways b. Muhammad al-Barawi (1847-1909), the leading proponent of Qadirism and was appointed one of his 520 *khalifa*s. Travelling extensively from the 1880s onwards, partly to keep out of the way of his opponents, and performing the "miracles" and "wonders" recorded by his hagiographers, 'Uways first arrived in Zanzibar in 1883-4, apparently at Barghash's invitation: perhaps because he was a distinguished scholar but probably more to keep in touch with this spreading movement as Martin[11] argues. Nevertheless al-Amawi also ended up in prison.

What is interesting in all this is that Barghash clearly considered himself "defender of the faith". To some extent he was sustaining his own legitimacy, but that also depended on maintaining the status quo in the wider Islamic order. Just as the Ibāḍī ulema made absolutely no attempt to convert other Muslims, so he expected reciprocity. So while by no means averse to the great Shafi'i ulema, or even the Sufi orders, he could not tolerate attempts to subvert his Ibāḍī subjects: it was only after his death that the Zanzibari Sultans changed their attitudes. His greatest ire was for Sh. 'Ali al-Barwani, because he was betraying his very roots as an Omani by denying his religious heritage. Sh. 'Ali b. 'Abdullah al- Mazru'i was different: long since converted to Shafi'i Sunnism, Majid had accepted that fact in the interests of keeping in well with the Mazari'a and the old established Omanis still loyal to them. But Barghash was certainly not prepared for him further to undermine his authority by alienating his Ibāḍī subjects, particularly in the troublesome isle of Pemba. Sh. 'Abd al-'Aziz b. 'Abd al-Ghani al-Amawi was also betraying his own training and background as well as meddling in politics, so whilst Sh. 'Uways was tolerated and indeed, under succeeding Sultans, encouraged in propagating ideas that fostered anti-colonial sentiment and led to widespread conversion to Islam among the Africans, Barghash was not going to have Qadirism, or for that matter any other Sufi orders, undermining the authority of the ulema class in his domains. Maintaining the existing religious order was essential as a stable base for his rule.

[11] B.G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth century Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976).

Sh. 'Ali al-Barwani's change of *madhhab*, was nevertheless part of a wider trend developing among the Ibāḍīs, particularly in the Mzab, that of finding common ground with the rest of the Islamic world through a *retour aux sources* to fight corrupt practices and the advance of European influence and colonization, as too to preserve the Ottoman Caliphate. Barghash himself was naturally not isolated from such wider concerns and, like the Sultan of Anjouan, put his name at the head of a subscription which raised quite a sum of money to support the Sultan of Constantinople in his struggle against the infidels (notably over the issue of the passage of Russian warships from the Black Sea).[12] This rapprochement was characterized by two approaches among the Ibāḍīs, that of imposing a high degree of morality within their own community while at the same time demonstrating their orthodoxy by emphasizing their claim to be the first *madhhab*, with its own collection of *hadith*, considerably antedating those of the Sunni schools. Barghash himself played a role in this with his Sultaniyya Press which printed important Mzabi works as well as Omani from 1879. Even so, in East Africa the trend was generally quite different. Rather than developing along conventional orthodox *salafiyya* lines, it was the rise of the Sufi brotherhoods that became widespread: initially the Shadhiliyya from the Comoros (notably in the Kilwa area), but subsequently and far more widely the rise of the Qadiriyya, whose brotherhood under the leadership of 'Abd al-Qadir had already demonstrated its ability to resist French occupation in Algeria. This was the order to which the Barawina living in what became German territory finally converted, foremost amongst them "Rumaliza", Muhammad b. Khalfan b. Khamis al-Barwani who, along with his sons, seems to have been behind the circulation of the so-called "Mecca Letter" (1908) that warned that those who failed to pass on its message to reform would soon be facing their Lord as opponents of his Prophet, a millennial message that seemed to the Germans a call for yet another uprising against their rule.[13]

But at the period with which we are concerned, most of this lay in the future. What was more important for the Ibāḍīs was their own *nahda* (reawakening) taking root in Oman and influencing the politics of Zanzibar.

The *Nahḍa*

There were four features that lay behind this renaissance: Sa'id b. Sultan's deficient government and his frequent absence in Africa; his growing dependence on the British and their resulting interference in Omani affairs; the confrontation with the Wahhabi *da'wa*: and the general malaise in Islamic society which was generating *salafiyya* movements throughout the Muslim world.

[12] (CCZ) Correspondance Consulaire Zanzibar (Quai D'Orsay) letter of 13 October 1877.

[13] What was behind this affair is discussed at length by B.G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth century Africa*.

To take the later two factors briefly first, the general degeneration of Islamic society and its rulers, coupled to the growing influence of the European powers in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire in particular, had led to the general return to Islamic roots already mentioned, but which in Arabia took an extreme form in the guise of Wahhabism. In Oman the Ibāḍī revival was also encouraged by their colleagues in North Africa (Jabal Nafusa, and the Mzab) who originally placed hope in the first al-Busaidi ruler, the Imam Ahmad and his sons Hilal and Sa'id to establish the *dīn*.[14] So in its early period the *nahda* was essentially looking to the past for guidance, but towards the end of Barghash's time another strand was emerging, what may be termed Neo- Ibāḍism: this need not concern us in this paper. The Wahhabi summons (*da'wa*) calling the Omanis to obedience also revived notions inherent in the original divisions that had split the Khariji movement, whose extremes were represented as between the Azāriqa and the Ibāḍīyya. The former considered all who would not join them were *mushrikūn*, polytheists and thus subject to the laws of plunder and enslavement, whereas the Ibāḍīs totally forbade this: in a war with other Muslims of whatever kind the enemy were *kuffār*, disbelievers who refused or who had deviated from the true religion (*dīn*), but not *mushrikīn*, even though their actual sin might be *shirk*. Which is why the Ibāḍīs described the Wahhabi doctrine as "a new religion taken by 'Abd al-Wahhab from the Hanbalites and the Azariqa… we know of no other *da'wa* calling the Muslims to kill each other except 'Abd al-Wahhab and Nafi' b. al- Azraq… or who declare Arabs polytheists to the point of plundering their goods, taking *ghanīma* (official booty) and enslaving their women and children (*sibā'*)". Unfortunately, the Wahhabis and Ibāḍīs were frequently confused in Anglo-Indian ideas, since the activists on both sides were sometimes labeled *mutawwi'a* (cf *ṭā'a* "obedience" to God's ordinances: the word is used in Swahili for a fervent Muslim), with the result that they never fully appreciated the differences, nor the anathema in which the Wahhabis were held by the settled peoples of Oman: for the British the Ibāḍī ulema were simply another set of "meddling priests".

Discontent with Busa'idi rule was first expressed by the father of this modern *nahda*, Abu Nabhan Ja'id b. Khamis al-Kharusi (1734/5-1822), himself a descendant of the most important line of early Kharusi Imams, who had refused to recognize the "Imam" Ahmad's election in 1745 and continued to refuse the legitimacy of the Al Bu Sa'id line. His actual "revolt" stemmed from the failure of Ahmad's successor, the "Imam" Sa'id b. Ahmad at Rustaq, to respond to the tribal disorders in Nizwa which led Abu Nabhan to take the necessary action there and occupy the great fort of 'Aqr. The terms al-Salimi uses to describe this *khurūj, li iqāmat al-'adl wa izhār al-ḥaqq wa dhalika farḍ Allāh 'alā 'l-nās*, represent the quintessence of Ibāḍism.[15] The term *khurūj* in this context is a throw back to the very origins of the movement in the so-called Khawarij revolts, those

[14] For their letter see J.C. Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987,), 230.
[15] Al Salimi, *Tuḥfat al-A'yān bi sīrat ahl 'Umān*, [The Contribution of its Leaders to the Story of Oman], (Cairo, 1961) vol ii, 181.

who justly separated and went out against the Caliph 'Ali and the Umayyads, while the rest of the phrase reflects why the Ibāḍīs prefer to be known as Muḥakkima, from the Khariji slogan, *la ḥukm illā lillāh* there is no law except God's (i.e. the Qur'an): "that is to establish justice and make apparent what is right, which is an absolute religious obligation of the (Muslim) people". It was not so much to re-establish the Imamate itself or even objection to the Busa'idi as dynasts. Historical experience shows that all Omani Imamates ended up with dynastic or semi-dynastic rule, including that of the Kharus. What the ulema wanted was just government and there was a long-established constitutional compromise, that of the weak (*ḍa'īf*) Imam, a leader who was not fully versed in *'ilm* (religious knowledge) but who was well-intentioned and powerful enough to establish and administer just rule with their advice. In other words what they desired was a leader who would do what they wanted, or at least listen seriously to what they advised and consult them.

It was this *nahda* movement that threatened the personal rule of the Busa'idi Sultans both in Oman and the Zanzibar domain. But that is a subject that goes beyond the remit of this article. Rather we will conclude with a short survey of the religious aspects associated with being an Ibāḍī.

Specific Features of Ibāḍism

The first point to elucidate is what it meant for the ordinary person. Simply stated, nothing more than being a good Muslim. There is nothing whatever in the Islamic duties imposed by Ibāḍism that is not common to Sunnism; the odd detail of how exactly one prays is superficial. The one issue the Sunnis latched onto in Zanzibar (and later in Saudi Arabia) is that of *ru'ya* and passages concerning the Vision of God in the Qur'an which the Ibāḍīs held as figurative. It was a vestige of Mu'tazili influence that had survived its general elimination from Ibāḍism as it formalized as a *madhhab* (Islamic school) in its own right, increasingly based on Shafi'i-Ash'ari norms.[16] While such eschatological debate provided a pretext for scholastic pyrotechnics by the ulema, preferably in verse form,[17] It hardly affected the comportment of Muslims in this world who, in any case would find out who was right on the Day of Resurrection. So too the traces of Mu'tazili theology that the Ibāḍīs were sometimes accused of sustaining, concerning the old debate which had divided the Ibāḍīs in the 3/9th century about whether the Qur'an was created or not. This was not perhaps as resolved as they subsequently like to claim despite the fact that the leading modern authorities from Oman, 'Abdullah b. Humayd al-Salimi (c1869-1914) and the Mzab, Muhammad b. Yusuf Atfayyish (1820-1914) support the Created school.

[16] Wilkinson 2010. J.C. Wilkinson, *Ibāḍism: Origins and Early Development in Oman* (Oxford: University Press, 2010).
[17] V.T. Hoffman, *The Essentials, of Ibāḍī Islam* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 110-134.

That brings us to the second feature that requires emphasizing: there was very much a *khāṣṣ wa ʿāmm* division in Ibāḍism, that is between the religious elite, the ulema, and the ordinary Muslim. That was not a class division but a matter of religious learning (*ʾilm*): as already stated there was no special status acquired through relationship to the Prophet or Quraysh. As good Muslims, all were equals and linked by that obligatory duty of community solidarity termed by the Ibāḍīs *walāya*, the fundamental relationship that binds God and his community, and hence members of that community to each other. That basic concept comports the reciprocal duties of mutual defense, help, peace, protection, and equality. Theoretically, that true Muslim community should exist in *ẓuhūr*, an openly declared and fully independent Imamate. Under such circumstance it may issue a summons to other Muslims to join after it has consolidated itself in the traditional homelands (Oman, Hadramawt, and North Africa), but that situation only manifested itself during the early Islamic period, and then once again in Oman under the Ya'ruba, who at best paid the principle lip service to justify their overseas expansion. On the other hand the duty of the Imam to defend the *miṣr* subsists. So its integrity must be preserved by fighting the *ahl al-baghi*, essentially lapsed Omanis who have abandoned the true *da'wa* and its mission, and *jabābira*, "unconstitutional" rulers, whether local *mulūk*, sultans or outside powers. In all these cases, however, where the enemies are Muslims, they are guilty of *nifāq/kufr* (hypocrisy, unbelief) but not *shirk* (polytheism) and the laws of warfare are strictly laid down and absolutely prohibit plunder and enslavement. Basically, the minimum violence and destruction of property is prescribed.

So, unless Ibāḍīs have a properly established Imamate they do not go around trying to convert other Muslims, and provided these observe the essential precepts of Islam, they are respected. They are not in *walāya* (association) but nor are they in *barā'a*, that is a state of positive dissociation. On the contrary, in what might be termed the neo-Ibāḍī movement that was developing during the later part of our period there were positive moves to find common grounds with other Muslims and preserve the Caliphate. On the other hand, they are certainly not in the third condition recognized by Ibāḍīs, that is *wuqūf*, for such abstention/suspended judgement only applies where there is legal doubt (*shakk suʿāl*) that cannot be resolved. By definition, Ibāḍism was the true *firqa* and the other 72 false, as Qalhāti demonstrated in his writings to the Kilwans of East Africa in the 7/13th century. Nevertheless, mutual respect was the order of the day in a mixed community such as existed in East Africa (as also in the settlements of the Mzab where it was written into the constitutional documents of Guerara's foundation,[18]) the key word being mutual. Other Muslim schools in turn should not try and convert Ibāḍīs, a problem that increasingly came to the fore in East Africa where the dominant form of Islam was Shafi'i Sunnism and where the *tariqa*s, Sufi brotherhoods, were just beginning to take popular hold, ending up as the main form of religious resistance to the Europeans.

[18] Motylinski, A de C. *Guerara Depuis sa Fondation* (Alger, 1885.).

Converting Non-Muslims

Even in the *dār al-ḥarb*, where warfare against polytheists and others that had not come to terms with the Muslim community was permitted, Ibāḍīs should only mount expeditions with the authority of the Imam. That is a fairly theoretical stance, but it does mean the Omanis operating in the interior of Africa in our period were essentially doing so on their own responsibility. In so far as conversion occurred, it would seem to be rather as a process of osmosis, of emulation rather than positive declaration of a new religion. The general observation made by Europeans was that while the Africans might conform to outward practices it was with no conviction. When Gongo Luteta, the Batetela chief went over to the Belgians, he exclaimed: "Now I can eat pork again, since I am no longer Sayf's vassal!"[19] Furthermore, there was no incentive to convert pagans to Islam for that dried up the source of slaves and inhibited exactions on the local population, notably in ivory tribute and corvée. In areas where the African population of the interior had for long been in contact with Muslim traders, as with the Yao, genuine conversion may have occurred and been used as an instrument of anti-colonialism; in the time of Barghash some leaders considered him as a sort of Islamic head of state.[20] But the one great exception was Uganda where State forms existed that warranted attempts by the Ibāḍīs to convert their rulers to Islam, a matter discussed in my forthcoming book. The major conversion of Africans came in the colonial period and was essentially the work of the *tariqas* and Sunnis.

The Ulema and the Ibāḍī Tradition

However, all the above general observations applied to the true Muslim (i.e. Ibāḍī) community operating as a unified body, the *khāss* and the *'amm* conjoined. The great difference with the other forms of Islam was the way the interpretations had emerged, that is the origins of the *'ilm* (true scholarship) by which the ulema advised and passed judgements. Unlike the Sunnis, they only gradually accepted the use of *hadith* (reputed sayings of the Prophet) and then only to reinforce the fundamental interpretations that had already been made. The essential characteristics of Ibāḍism was that the Qur'an was the *hukm*, the law, government, justice, the source of the *'amr bi'l ma'rūf*, (moral code) and of its *fiqh*, (legal rulings) and all other sources of *'ilm* merely served to illuminate it. *'Ilm* was transmitted through the *āthār*, that is through interpretation agreed over the generations of the most learned. So while *hadith* might be quoted with respect to *furūd* (absolute obligations) they were auxiliary to the *sam'* (revealed word) and at best invoked as incitation to recommendable and *faḍīla*, (exemplary behavior). So while *hadith* came to be part of the criteria used to understand the Qur'an, the Sunni

[19] *Le Congo illustré* iii February 1894 *et seq* "Les Chefs Arabes du Haut Congo", pt 3.

[20] Cf A. Thorold, "Metamorphosis of the Yao Muslims" in *Muslim Identity and Social Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. L. Brenner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

scholarship based on reliability of *isnad*s (lines of transmission) was not a part of that process. In due course the term *āthār*, that is the imprint of the forebears who gradually built up the Ibāḍī *madhhab* largely disappeared, and became more or less synonymous with *ijma'*, that is the consensual view of the most learned ulema of their generation, who, of course, knew the views and judgements of their forebears. In this Ibāḍism retained an element of pragmatism for the gates of *ijtihād* have never been formally closed.

So it can be seen that while Ibāḍism and the orthodox Sunni schools approached each other, they had moved to that position from quite different angles and that trajectory was integral with explaining the end position. So even had they wanted to, the Sunnis could never have converted, for Ibāḍī roots lay in opposition to the very form of centralized Caliphate government that had been usurped by Quraysh and their Hijazi cronies since 'Uthman's time. For the Ibāḍīs the font of all authority, was the Qur'an. They were not fundamentalists in the sense that they pursued any extreme literary interpretation of the texts; on the contrary, there was always a mixture of puritanism and pragmatism. To survive they adopted the conventions of *taqiyya*, religious dissimulation and developed these into a code concerning what was permitted to survive when under the control of unjust rulers. *Baṣar*, (perspicacity) and self knowledge-control were expected in the ulema and Imam, so that the harshest of interpretations, judgments and penalties were tempered by practical considerations. Whence the tolerance to others; but for the Ibāḍīs themselves the highest standard of Islamic morality was expected. So the small man was protected not just by a religious ideology that came into existence to promote social justice, but also by a tribal system that looked after its own. As a French botanist who was one of the first Europeans to travel into the interior of Oman wrote:

> 'I did not expect such simplicity so close to Muscat which Europeans frequent... while the mixed race of the Muscat population is thoroughly nasty, it is not the same in the interior where I have generally found much hospitality, honesty and sometimes cordiality... I think that the goodness of the people stems from the very mild, indeed republican government of the Shaikhs: the people there are not rich, but one sees no poor. The needs of these Arabs are so few'.[21]

Of course there were abuses of the system and one has to ask how far that social inclusion might go in Africa, despite the fact that the earliest proclamation of the Ibāḍī credo in existence emphasizes that God has sent his Messenger alike to white and black, Arab and non-Arab, freeman and slave, male and female.[22] But the main reason why it was unsuited to the African environment was that it was austere. There were no saints to

[21] Aucher-Eloy (sic), ed. Jaubert *Relations de Voyage en Orient de 1830-1838* (Paris, 1843) ii, 566, 575-6.
[22] P. Crone and F. Zimmermann, *The Epistle of Sâlim b. Dhakwân* (Oxford University Press, 2001,), §18.

intercede, no redemption, no medicine men, no drums and dancing, no *baraka*, no *karāma* nor *tarīqa*s of the Sayyids, just a simple message, the law of the Qur'an. The conclusion of the informant who explained to Harold Ingrams what the other forms of Islam in East Africa were, says all:

> "If we look hard we see that the Ibadhis follow the truth because most of them are Arab and know the word of El Qur'an, they like truth and do not treat religion frivolously, and they do not change the words of their religion from the days of the Prophet till now. The Sunnis are people who have mixed much with savages. They mix religion with noisy play and make great show of it. It is not necessary; God can hear prayer even if whispered."[23]

[23] Harold W.H. Ingrams. *Zanzibar: Its History and its People* (Oxford: Frank Cass, 1931). Ingrams (1931)