
Reviewed by Maribel Fierro: CSIC, Madrid, maribel.fierro@cchs.csic.es

DOI 10.1515/islam-2016-0010

This volume of the Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée includes a study by F. Pouillon on the polemical portrayals of the emir Abd al-Kader during his stay in the East (did he abandon the Algerian way of dressing?), a review section, as well as a list of bibliographical references and of electronic resources. The main body of the issue is occupied by a monographic section devoted to the study of Ibadism coordinated by Cyrille Aillet, professor at the University of Lyon II and director of the research project Maghríbadite financed by the French Agence Nationale de la Recherche (www.maghribadite.hypotheses.org).

Ibadis are today less than three millions, living mostly in Oman where they rule, and in certain regions of the Maghreb: Libya (Djebel Nafusa and Zuwarah), Tunisia (island of Djerba) and Algeria (Ouargla and Mzab). Their original conception of power – linked to historical Kharijism, although subject to developments caused by changing contexts – is based on the ideas of merit, election, collegiality and equality: the most pious and learned should rule, regardless of their ancestry and ethnicity, consulting others if need be, and if they fail from a religious point of view they are not to stay in office. Ibadis have always been a minority in Islamic lands and the contributions here collected deal with the ways in which this minority has taken shape, and how they have constructed the memory of their trajectory. Kharijism has mostly a negative image among Muslims because of their uncompromising violence and their egalitarianism linked to pre-Islamic tribal ideals, and this powerful image may obscure past realities and erect boundaries between Ibadis and other groups when in fact there were many points of agreement.

---

contact, as happened with the Mu’tazilis with whom they shared a number of religious and political conceptions.

Interaction with other groups reveals itself clearly in the case studied by Ersilia Francesca, having to do with the amount to be paid for zakat regarding cattle. In this domain, the Ibadi doctrine appears as having been shared by proto-Sunni scholars to be eventually discarded, thus being an example of J. Schacht’s ‘unsuccessful traditions’. In this important article, Francesca reminds us how early Ibadi legal texts depart from classical standards and are thus an important source to recover the earliest strata of Islamic law, and how their legal tradition was later transformed to conform to the evolution of the Sunni madhāhib. Regarding the origins of Ibadism, W. Madelung revisits the famous letter sent by its alleged founder, ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Ibâd, to ‘Abd al-Malik to propose a new interpretation, agreeing with J. Wilkinson that ‘Abd al-Malik is to be identified with the son of the caliph ‘Umar II and suggesting a new identification for ‘Abd Allâh b. Ibâd who would not have been the founder of the sect. Madelung states that ‘Abd al-Malik may have initiated their correspondence when he knew of Ibn ‘Ibâd’s condemnation of those who were in favour of the harsh treatment of civilian Muslims in the Khariji uprisings. This was the issue that separated Ibadis from more radical Kharijis and serves as a reminder of how central discussions about the limits of violence have been throughout the history of Islamic societies reaching our own day.

W. Madelung’s contribution contains rich historiographical implications both for past and present scholarship on Ibadism. On his part, Adam Gaiser analyses the debate (munâzara) that opposed ‘Ali’s supporters and the muḥak-kima (the forerunners of Kharijism) according to the Ibadi sources, showing that there were two different historiographical trends – one Omani, another Maghribi – and that the latter has been influential in the Sunni rendition of that event. Virginie Prévost – a scholar who in the last decade has produced many studies on the North African Ibadis – analyses both Ibadi and non Ibadi narratives about the battle of Manu (283/896) in which Aghlabid troops put an end to the control of the coastal region of Tripolitania by the Ibadis of Jebel Nafusa, showing the strong hagiographical and martyrological character of the Ibadi texts while also mapping the consequences of the defeat. Here as in other cases, Ibadi narratives contain striking anecdotes related to women’s participation in the affairs of the community and their initiatives (see for example p. 86). Aghlabid hostility and repression against the Ibadis were continued by the Fatimids, who deposed the last Rustumid imam of Tahert in 269/909. He took refuge in Warjlan, and in their contribution Cyrille Aillet and Sophie Gilotte study how his memory is recreated during the yearly ziyâra to his grave situated in Sedrata, to the south of today Ouargla. Of special interest are the pages devoted to Marguerite van Berchem’s
Reviews

intervention in Sedrata, as well as to the book by Jean Lethielleux on Ouargla and the problems regarding his sources. Individual and collective interests, colonial needs and post-colonial reconfigurations, scholarship and memory: Aillet and Gilotte’s paper manages to weave together a nuanced account of the many and diverse appropriations of this site.

Allaoua Amara and Mohamed Has sen add geography to doctrine, history writing and memory, studying two different regions with Ibadi communities in the Maghreb. They both highlight the internal diversity of such communities and the autonomy they enjoyed sustained by tribal institutions that did not disappear even during the period of the imamate of Tahert. The Ibadi domain appears as a confederation in which unity was guaranteed by the charismatic authority of its leaders with the institution of the ḥalqa, the assembly of scholars (‘azzāba) presiding over the religious and legal life of the Ibadi communities, gradually emerging. This institution – formalized in the fifth/eleventh century by Muḥammad b. Bakr (d. 440/1048–9) and strengthened by the assemblies of notables – maintained the ideal of a collective process of consultation and decision making and contributed to the resistance against the penetration of Malikism during the stage of kitmān (secrecy). The area studied by Amara, the Zāb, saw the eventual disappearance of Ibadism under the pressure of the Fatimids, the Malikis and the Hilali invasions. This disappearance combined with the lack of local Ibadi sources explains why scholarship on this area is scarce and has lagged behind research conducted in other Ibadi regions, despite the fact that from this area the rebellion of the ‘Man of the Donkey’ originated, this being one of those crucial events that marked the history of the Maghreb. Hilalís and Malikís figure also prominently in Has sen’s study on the Ibadi communities of the Jebel Demmer in the south-east of modern Tunisia. The study focuses on settlement and territorial organization, with the qsūr built in the area serving different functions from political and military to cultural meeting places and fortified granaries, of special relevance when Jebel Demmer became the refuge-mountain for Ibadi communities threatened by the Hilali invasion. The texts quoted by Has sen reflect how visitors reacted to the specific way of being Muslim of the population in this area and how by the ninth/fifteenth century Maliki proselytism was supported by the Hafsids in their periodical visits for maintaining or imposing fiscal and military control.

Having started with two papers dealing with the Eastern original context followed by Gaiser’s contribution on both North African and Omani Ibadi historical narratives, the remaining six papers concentrate on the Maghrebi context. While the four just discussed focus mostly on the pre-modern period, with Valerie Hoffman and Sulaiman bin Ali bin Amir Al-Shueili’s contribution and that of Augustin Jomier we move to the twentieth century, when powerful figures such
as Muḥammad b. Yusuf Aṭfayyesh (1820–1914), Shaykh Ibrāhīm b. ʿUmar Bayyūḍ and others reacted in front of the colonial situation and the appeal of modern values and customs moving between Islamic universalism and attachment to their own traditions, while at the same contributing to transform the Ibadi community in a political community within modern Algeria.

The introduction by Cyrille Aillet reads very well, guiding the reader through the different contributions and providing information about developments taking place in Oman at the same time as those dealt with for the Maghreb. Aillet alerts to which events need to be better understood and to questions necessitating better answers. For those of us who are not specialists on the topic, this volume serves as an excellent introduction to the present state of research while raising a number of issues worth exploring from a wider perspective such as the varied shapes taken by the world of scholarship in Islamic societies and the role of violence for both coercion and memory. The specificities in both content and form of the Ibadi sources would deserve by themselves a monographic dossier.