

## Developing Tolerance and Conservatism: A Study of Ibadi Oman

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### ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the development of Omani-Ibadi society from pre-Islam to the present day. Oman represents an anomaly in the religious world because its Ibadi theology is conservative in nature while also preaching unwavering tolerance. To properly understand how Oman developed such a unique culture and religion, it is necessary to historically analyze the country by recounting the societal developments that occurred throughout the millennia. By doing so, one begins to understand that Oman did not achieve this peaceful religious theology over the past couple of decades. Oman has an exceptional society that was built out of longtime traditions like a trade-based economy that required foreign interaction, long periods of political sovereignty or autonomy, and a unique theology. The Omani-Ibadi people and their leaders have continuously embraced the ancient roots of their regional and religious traditions to create a contemporary state that espouses a unique society that leads people to live conservative personal lives while exuding outward tolerance.

Keywords: Oman, Ibadi, Tolerance, Theology, History, Sociology

# Developing Tolerance and Conservatism: A Study of Ibadi Oman

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## INTRODUCTION

The Sultanate of Oman is a country which consistently draws acclaim for its tolerance and openness towards peoples of varying faiths. The sect of Islam most Omanis follow, Ibadiyya, is almost entirely unique to Oman with over 2 million of the 2.5 million Ibadis worldwide found in the sultanate.<sup>2</sup> This has led many to see the Omani government as the de facto state-representative of Ibadiyya in contemporary times. When compared with the nation-states that claim to represent other sects of Islam, Iran for Shi'ism and Saudi Arabia for Sunnism, Omani tolerance becomes even more impressive. Whereas Iran and Saudi Arabia actively discriminate against those citizens which do not follow the government's prescribed faith, Oman legally protects religious freedom for all citizens and visitors. Ibadi citizens in Oman adhere to the religious freedom laws, resulting in an extremely low number of religious discrimination cases. It might be tempting to claim that this trend of tolerance resulted from the recent globalization and the smooth transition of Oman into a modern state during the twentieth century, but this assumption would be misguided because there are a number of sources throughout history that praise Oman for its tolerance. For instance, "One [nineteenth century] British observer of Ibadis in Oman and Zanzibar came to the conclusion that the Ibadis are most tolerant of people, living in harmony with all religious and

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<sup>2</sup> Other communities are found in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Tanzania.

ethnic groups.”<sup>3</sup> For a more concrete example, one merely needs to view the two-hundred-year-old Hindu temple that stands in the heart of downtown Muscat to understand that Ibadis have been willing to accept peoples of alien faith in their lands for centuries.<sup>4</sup>

Ibadis have lived side-by-side with non-Ibadis for centuries, but their form of tolerance does not necessarily mean acceptance. Tolerance towards other religions by Omani Ibadis adheres to the literal definition of the word because, while they are willing to tolerate the existence of foreigners in their land, they do not accept the legitimacy of their faiths. This is best exemplified by the limits the Omani government places upon all faiths. Non-Muslim and Muslim religious groups alike are not allowed to practice rites or rituals publicly without approval from the government for fear of the civil unrest they may stir. Additionally, non-Muslim groups may only build places of worship on land that is donated to them by the Sultan of Oman, presently Sultan Qaboos (r. 1390 A.H./1970 C.E.).<sup>5</sup> Although the law limiting public ritual is applied universally, it is clearly aimed towards non-Ibadis because an Ibadi practice, if properly done, would cause no significant unrest amongst the majority Ibadi population. This implies that, although the state is willing to legally promise religious nondiscrimination, it cannot guarantee that Ibadi citizens will not be disturbed by public displays of what Ibadiyya sees as unscrupulous faiths. This fear of backlash also dictates that the government must separate the places of worship by controlling where foreigners practice their religions. Omani tolerance, therefore, does not prescribe to the Western secular notion of religious freedom wherein the privatization of religion allows

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<sup>3</sup> Valerie J. Hoffman, *The Essentials of Ibadi Islam* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas R. Leonard, “The Origins and Contemporary Approaches into Intra-Islamic and Inter-Religious Coexistence and Dialogue in Oman,” *The Muslim World* 105, no. 2, (May 2015), under “Oman,” <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/muwo.12094/full> (accessed September 25, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report: Oman*, U.S. Federal Government, (Washington, DC, 2011), under “Oman,” <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf> (accessed October 3, 2017).

peoples of all faiths to practice and espouse their beliefs openly so long as they are not violent. Rather, Omani tolerance allows these non-Muslims to integrate and prosper in Omani society if their faith remains separate from that society.

Regardless of the lack of religious acceptance, the willingness of Ibadis to protect the livelihoods of non-Muslims is impressive considering their faith's radical roots as a subsect of Kharijite theology. The Khawarij were known as the original violent radical sect of Islam for their ruthlessness and cruelty towards anybody who did not espouse their beliefs. This original radicalism has caused many to wonder how Oman has become so tolerant. Some believe it results from Oman's geography, which, in ancient times, naturally led the population to maritime and trade traditions that exposed them to foreign peoples. Others attribute religious tolerance to Ibadi theological and doctrinal developments. Still others believe Sultan Qaboos is responsible based upon his success in modernizing the country and opening it to globalized trade. Although each of these theories has valid arguments, when taken independently, they do not provide a clear picture for the transition. Instead, to gain a clear and comprehensive understanding of how tolerance and conservatism developed in Ibadi Oman, one must consider each of the above theories as developments that build upon one another to create modern day Ibadi doctrine.

## **THE KHARIJITE ORIGINS OF IBADIYYA**

Many scholars struggle to pinpoint the moment in which the Khawarij began to separate themselves from the rest of the Islamic community. Many are inclined to agree with the Muslim tradition that argues the group separated following Caliph 'Ali ibn Abi Talib's (d. 40 AH/661 CE) arbitration during the Battle of Siffin. However, contemporary scholarship ponders whether the initial split occurred with the killing of the third caliph, 'Uthman b. Affan (d. 35/656). 'Uthman was killed by a group of

peasants from Southern Iraq and Egypt who came to Mecca and surrounded ‘Uthman’s house. The unrest stemmed from allegations that the Caliph unethically used *mal al-muslimun* (Money of the Muslims) to pay his relatives whom he also made governors of large swaths of the Islamic Empire. These spoils were supposed to be given to the ‘*umma* (Muslim Community) following military victories against heathens or pagans.<sup>6</sup> The scholars who believe the third caliph’s murderers were pre-Siffin Khawarij, back their speculation by referring to the Khawarijs’ recognition of the first two caliphs, Abu Bakr (d. 12/634) and ‘Umar (d. 22/644), ‘Uthman in his early years as caliph, and ‘Ali as the righteous and legitimate rulers.<sup>7</sup> What this recognition means is that the Khawarij are not really Shi’ite like the majority of ‘Ali’s army because they recognize the legitimacy of the first three caliphs. The Shi’ites refuse to recognize Abu Bakr’s ascension to the caliphate because they believe ‘Ali should have been the rightful heir to the Prophet due to their blood relationship and a variety of the Prophet’s actions which, according to them, show he chose ‘Ali as successor.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the Khawarij, by recognizing Abu Bakr and the others, were never Shi’ites, and nor were they proto-Sunnis because they condemned ‘Uthman’s later years as Caliph. Therefore, the group of peasants that assassinated ‘Uthman seem to follow the Khawarij’s thinking on the Righteous Caliphs and could be seen as proto-Khawarij.

Regardless, this group would definitively separate from both Sunni and Shi’ite doctrine following the Battle of Siffin. ‘Ali’s arbitration with Mu’awiya that caused him to forfeit the caliphate led the Khawarij to abandon ‘Ali and to the creation of their creed, “judgement belongs to God alone.”<sup>9</sup> This creed is the basis for many of the Khawarij doctrines, such as their belief that only God has the right to rule human beings because they

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<sup>6</sup> Harry S. Timani, *Modern Intellectual Readings of the Kharijites* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 4-6.

<sup>7</sup> Timani, *Modern Intellectual*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Momen Mojan, *An Introduction to Shi’I Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi’ism* (New Haven, USA: Yale University Press 1985), 12-14.

<sup>9</sup> Timani, *Modern Intellectual*, 5.

are His creation and He is far superior to any man that has been or will ever be. They argue that power must be designated to a person by God and His will must be exercised by man over man on Earth. As a result, God designates the prophets, caliphs, and imams to deliver His will.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, when ‘Ali gave up the Caliphate, he spurned God’s choice to make him the Islamic ruler and was no longer worth following. So, they left ‘Ali’s army and established themselves in the town of Harura near ‘Ali’s capital in Kufa. Once settled in Harura, they implemented radical doctrines that condoned terrorizing and killing Kufans who were still willing to follow and recognize ‘Ali as a righteous leader.

Before continuing the narrative, it is necessary to explain the Kharijite doctrine of *kufr* because it was used to justify the violence the Khawarij showed against the Kufans and other Southern Iraqi Muslims. *Kufr* directly translated from Arabic means “unbeliever” or someone who no longer deserves the protections guaranteed between Muslims according to the Quran.<sup>11</sup> To the early Khawarij, Muslims gained the rank of *kufr* by committing an unrepented sin, such as following and preaching for the legitimacy of an unrighteous caliph or imam. These actions were disgraceful according to the Khawarij because these leaders violated God’s Quranic will making their followers sin by association. Therefore, the Khawarij questioned Muslims on who they believed the righteous leader was and killed those who followed the wrong man as though they were polytheists because they committed the sin of leaving the ‘umma.<sup>12</sup> The development of *kufr* doctrine caused not only significant harm for the Kufans and Basrans who lived in the regions around Harura, but also to the Khawarij. Their violent actions led ‘Ali to massacre nearly all of them during the Battle of al-Nahrawan just two years after they left his army.

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<sup>10</sup> Timani, *Modern Intellectual*, 107.

<sup>11</sup> Friedman Yohanan, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Timani, *Modern Intellectual*, 18.

What followed was an act of revenge as three Kharijite survivors held a meeting where they decided to assassinate those they saw as unjust manipulators of Islam, ‘Ali, Mu’awiya, and ‘Amr ibn Al-As. Although they wanted to assassinate all three of the leaders, there was a special desire to kill ‘Ali as an act of vengeance for what happened at the Battle of al-Nahrawan.<sup>13</sup> After months of planning, the three Kharijite assassins finally made their moves, but only the Egyptian Kharijite attacking ‘Ali would succeed. He struck ‘Ali with a sword outside the Grand Mosque of Kufa just after the morning prayer on January 26, 661.<sup>14</sup> ‘Ali would be given as much care as possible, but he would pass away two days later because of his wounds. Before he passed, however, he was able to designate his and Fatimah’s, the Prophet’s daughter, son Hassan as the next Shi’ite Imam. This secured leadership for the the Kufan and Basran communities’ after his passing.<sup>15</sup> The martyrdom of ‘Ali at the hands of the Khawarij would only solidify the Basrans’ and Kufans’ resolve to follow the Imam and guarantee the survival of ‘Ali’s teachings and his struggle against the Umayyad Caliphate.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the Khawarij actions against the Shi’ite leader would have the undesired effect of consolidating his followers into some of the longest lasting Shi’ite communities in the world.

## OMAN’S IBADI IMAMATES

It was in these Shi’ite communities that Ibadi thought began to develop from Kharijite teachings. It is worth noting that the initial division between the Khawarij and the Ibadis seems to have occurred in 64/686 about twenty-four years after ‘Ali’s assassination. It was during this time that Ibn Ibad (d. 86/708) wrote a series of letters to other Khawarij explaining that there was no need to perpetrate violence against fellow

<sup>13</sup> Timani, *Modern Intellectual*, 213.

<sup>14</sup> Timani, *Modern Intellectual*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> G.R. Hawting, *The History of al-Tabari (Ta’rikh al-rusul wa’l-muluk)* Vol. XVIII (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 217-223.

<sup>16</sup> Timani, *Modern Intellectual*, 21.

Muslims. These letters had a profound effect on the Kharijite scholarship that was being carried in Basra and would draw many away from the violent Khawarij that still wanted to remove the Umayyad caliph and Shi'ite Imams. Many of these violent Khawarij began to persecute the new Kharijite sect as being too weak to enforce *kufr* and, in some cases, began to extend their violence towards the young Ibadī movement.<sup>17</sup> Despite this, many Kharijite scholars continued to work with principles that resembled Ibad's and continued to develop a more peaceful version of Kharijite conservatism.

Amongst these scholars was the jurist Jabir ibn Zayd (d. 89/711), an Omani man whom moved to Basra after 'Ali's assassination. Very little is known about his personal life. For instance, he may or may not have been an Ibadī Imam, which in his times would have merely meant a distinguished Kharijite scholar who heeded the words of Ibad's letters. It is even possible that he was just a scholar working to revise Kharijite doctrines without ever having contact with Ibad's works.<sup>18</sup> Jabir's writings would have a profound impact on the small Ibadī community in Basra, and he has been labelled as the father of Ibadiyya instead of Ibad. Jabir's work was recognized not just amongst the native Basrans, but amongst the Oman-based Azd tribe who had become an influential group in Basra since their arrival following the conquests of 'Umar's reign.

The Azd have a long history within Oman. They are the Arab tribe responsible for removing the Sassanid Persians from Oman in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE and continued to migrate into the region from then. This created a cultural connection between Oman and the rest of the Arabian Peninsula. This connection had not been made before because Oman's was isolated from the rest of the Arabian Peninsula by the Empty Quarter to its

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<sup>17</sup> John C. Wilkinson, *Ibadism: Origins and Early Development in Oman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 136-7.

<sup>18</sup> Valerie J. Hoffman, "Ibādism: History, Doctrines, and Recent Scholarship," *Religion Compass* Vol. 9, no. 9 (2015): 299.

north and the Yemeni Mountains in the West. This isolation gave ancient Omanis the opportunity to create a culture that was unique to the rest of the peninsula. A key part of their culture derived from their geographical location at the South-Eastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula that gave Omanis easy access to the Indian Ocean. This led ancient Omanis to become sea-faring people who traded with groups in present-day East Africa, India, Indonesia, South-East Asia, and China.<sup>19</sup> This consistent exposure to other cultures is often used to explain the Ibadis' religious tolerance but does not account for how Omanis developed Kharijite conservatism into Ibadi tolerance.

Regardless, when the Azd tribes began ruling Oman in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE they did not destroy these maritime trade connections as they were vital to the local economy. However, they did end Omani isolation from the rest of the Peninsula which would be vital to Oman's conversion to Islam during the time of the Prophet. Even Oman's conversion is unique because it did not happen as a result of Islamic conquest, but rather through the Prophet's diplomacy. In 8/628 the Prophet sent 'Amr ibn al-As to Oman with a letter asking for the ruling Azd tribe to convert themselves and their people to Islam. This was common practice for the Prophet who sent letters as far as Constantinople, Alexandria, and Ctesiphon. However, unlike those other regions the Azd rulers of Oman accepted the Prophet's offer and quickly set about converting their kingdom. As a caveat of this agreement, the Azd could rule Oman with great autonomy. Having escaped the conquest experienced by the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, the Azd only had to recognize the superiority of the Prophet and maintain Islamic practices within their kingdom to retain sovereignty. This gave Azd tribesmen the independence necessary to continue developing Oman's Islamic identity separate from the rest of the Muslim world.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Isam al-Rawas, *Oman in Early Islamic History* (Lebanon: Ithaca Press, 2000), 23-6.

<sup>20</sup> al-Rawas, *Early Islamic*, 36-7.

This is not to say the Azd did not participate in the burgeoning Islamic Empire. During the rule of Caliph ‘Umar, they fought bravely in the Muslim army responsible for toppling the Persian Sassanid Empire. Many Azd settled in Basra following their successes with the Muslim army during the Islamic-Sassanid War. Their significance grew greater after the Umayyads conquered Southern Iraq and placed their recent conquests with Oman under one emirate. This granted the Omanis control over the Strait of Hormuz and a considerable amount of trade arriving into the Islamic Empire from the Indian Ocean.<sup>21</sup> Basra served as the main port through which these goods would be distributed. So, to control the trade as it arrived in The Gulf, the Azd and other Omani tribes began to build population and influence bases in Basra while still vying for power in Oman. The powerful Basran Omanis began to follow Kharijite doctrines after ‘Ali’s assassination when Basra became the radical sect’s scholarly center. However, the peacefulness of Ibadiyya was more attractive because they had moved to Basra for maritime trade, and other Kharijite sects would compel the Omanis to kill those foreigners they attempted to trade with. Instead, they turned to Ibadiyya because it allowed for a peaceful approach that could permit the trade which secured the prosperity of their tribe and their country.<sup>22</sup>

With Ibadiyya firmly established in the Azd tribes, the Omanis were able to take control over the school’s development. Key to establishing this center of Ibadi thought was the creation of an Omani Ibadi imamate with a ruling imam who religiously and politically guided Ibadis’ and Ibadiyya’s intellectual development. It is important here to discuss the Ibadi concept of an imam. Ibadis chose to call their religious leader an Imam for politico-religious reasons. Primarily, there was a desire to be politically independent from the caliphs, and to create a pure faith that was still open

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<sup>21</sup> al-Rawas, *Early Islamic*, 50-1.

<sup>22</sup> al-Rawas, *Early Islamic*, 52.

and unoppressive towards other Islamic faiths.<sup>23</sup> They also separated themselves from the Shi'ite concept of Imam by declaring the leader did not have to be a descendant of the Prophet and subdividing the office into three categories. First was the concealment imam. This type of imam was particularly useful during times wherein it was impossible to establish an Ibadi state and the imam needed to operate in secrecy to avoid being hindered by authorities. One finds this form of Imam during the Basran period. Second is the activist imam who worked to establish an Ibadi state. This style of imam was used in battle situations where the Ibadi community would have to fight to gain self-governance. Finally, the declaration imam was established after the Ibadis had been victorious over their oppressors. This imam was to run an Ibadi state and enact Ibadi doctrines for its citizens.<sup>24</sup>

Most importantly an Ibadi Imam must be pious, intelligent, and a knowledgeable religious scholar selected by the consensus of the Ibadi community. Not only are they selected by consensus, but they can be removed if they lose this consensus by failing to enforce Ibadi doctrines or creating religious developments that do not fit what the community believes to be Ibadi in nature. As a result, Ibadiyya was able to develop through the scholarly Ibadi community and not at the behest of a single man as is often found in Shi'ism and Sunnism.<sup>25</sup>

Moving the Ibadi center of thought to Oman was possible after the failure of the first Ibadi Imamate in the Hadramawt of North West Yemen.<sup>26</sup> Omanis, and in particular the Azd tribesmen, could not establish a new Imam in Oman with the Hadramawt Imam still in existence because it would dilute the purity of the faith. Therefore, using the consensus

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<sup>23</sup> Leonard, "Contemporary Approaches."

<sup>24</sup> al-Rawas, *Early Islamic*, 95-103.

<sup>25</sup> al-Rawas, *Early Islamic*, 104-6.

<sup>26</sup> The establishment of the primary Ibadi Imamate in Yemen explains why an Ibadi-like community still exists in the Yemen today.

election doctrines, Omanis established their first Ibadi Imamate in 132/749. The primary imam was al-Julanda bin Mas'ud (d. 134/751) of the Julanda tribe. His tenure, and the Imamate would be short lived because of an Abbasid invasion of the region which overwhelmed any military force the imam could muster. He died fighting against the invasion, and Oman was placed under the Abbasid Basran Governate.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, the Abbasids chose a non-Ibadi Julanda tribe member to rule Oman in hopes of calming the populous but having a non-Ibadi Muslim as a ruler did not sit well with the Omanis.

Inevitably, the Ibadi Omanis revolted against the Abbasid-Julanda governors in 177/793 and established a new imamate in Oman. This imamate would last just over a century but fell due to a common challenge that all the imams faced during their reigns, tribalism. Imams were constantly being accused by other tribes for being impious and leading Ibadis astray in hopes they could remove the imam and establish someone from their tribe in his stead. Most of these revolts were led by the Julandas who wished to restore their own power regardless of the current imam's competency as a ruler or Oman's prosperity. For instance, the reign of Imam Sheikh 'Abd al-Malik bin Humayd (d. 226/840) was known as a time of peace, stability, and intellectual progress within the imamate. However, he still suffered an al-Julanda revolt as they attempted to regain the power they had lost since the Second Imamate and their Abbasid-backed governate.<sup>28</sup> As time passed, not only were the Julandas upset with their political situation, but other tribes began to desire having one of their tribesman chosen to be the Imam.

Eventually these tensions grew so intense that for three consecutive Imams' from 237-280/851-891 there were internal conflicts so large that they became civil wars. Each civil war was fought to depose the ruling

<sup>27</sup> al-Rawas, *Early Islamic*, 112-118.

<sup>28</sup> al-Rawas, *Early Islamic*, 156-159.

Imam by an alliance of tribes.<sup>29</sup> The final escalation occurred in 278/891 when the tribes around Sohar elected their own Ibadi Imam to directly challenge Imam ‘Azzan bin Tamim (d.280/893). The existence of two Ibadi Imams was unprecedented and strictly prohibited by Ibadi political thought. ‘Azzan bin Tamim would be left with no choice but to create an army and march against his Sohar rival. The two sides met at al-Qa’ and ultimately ‘Azzn would be the victor.<sup>30</sup> However, following the battle, ‘Azzan’s and Oman’s power was greatly diminished leading the Abbasids to seek a new campaign in the region. This was not the first time that the Abbasids invaded the Second Imamate, having been beaten back on two occasions by ‘Azzan’s predecessors. In this instance, Oman was unprepared. Having suffered great losses of manpower due to the past decades’ civil wars, the administrative and economical poverty of the state, and an overwhelmingly large Abbasid force, the Imamate had little chance to survive. The Abbasids once again conquered Oman in 280/893, ending the Second Imamate and placing the region firmly under Abbasid control for centuries.<sup>31</sup>

## MEDIEVAL IBADI THEOLOGY

The Omani Imamates stretching from the time of al-Julanda bin Mas’ud to the fall of the last imam in 1385/1965 were essential to the theological development of Ibadiyya. Despite the desire for purity of faith, which would seem to contradict development and change, Ibadiyya has consistently been reformed throughout its long history. For instance, early Ibadi communities refused to recognize the *Sunnah of the Prophet* espoused by Sunnis because they wished to keep their independence of culture and state from the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates.<sup>32</sup> However, after the fall of the second Ibadi Imamate of Oman in 177/799 and the

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<sup>29</sup> al-Rawas, *Early Islamic*, 171-188.

<sup>30</sup> al-Rawas, *Early Islamic*, 190.

<sup>31</sup> al-Rawas, *Early Islamic*, 191-195.

<sup>32</sup> Wilkinson, *Origins*, 128.

expansion of Abbasid power over the region, it was impossible for the Ibadis to ignore outside scripture. They began to accept the *Sunnah* as a source from which theology could be derived and began to incorporate more Sunni elements into their theological work.<sup>33</sup> This development in Ibadiyya was a giant leap away from the Khawarij who refused the *Sunnah*. This change gave the Ibadis the ability to create dialogues with Sunnis from common ground. In fact, the *Sunnah* may have been accepted into Ibadiyya because it was needed to cooperate better with the new Abbasid authorities and create a mutually beneficial relationship rather than a combative one which the far weaker Omanis would have certainly lost. This openness towards outside sources of knowledge did not compromise the Kharijite tradition of consensus which formed the backbone of unified Ibadi thought. Scholarship on the *Sunnah* had to have the consensus of the community before it could be implemented because Ibadis believe that the knowledge of a person and their analogical thinking is more important than the words of any book. Simply, a consensus approval of a single person's idea shows more sound reasoning than the book from which it may derive and can lead to an acceptable doctrine.<sup>34</sup>

This belief that a consensus backed idea is more legitimate than any written authority even extends to the Quran because, to them, all literary works are created in space and time. Their belief in the createdness of the Quran is vital to their open and tolerant attitude towards all groups. Although they believe that God's speech is eternal, the Quran is not because it was created for the people at the time of the Prophet. God's message was meant to make sense to the Prophet and his immediate followers, not to hold the same weight as time goes on.<sup>35</sup> Within the Quran, one can find the meaning of God's will, but for those living in different times and locations, it is far more difficult to understand and

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<sup>33</sup> Wilkinson, *Origins*, 377.

<sup>34</sup> Hoffman, *Essentials*, 75.

<sup>35</sup> Hoffman, *Essentials*, 40-1.

cannot be literally applied to their lives. This means that the text must be interpreted by people to implement God's will, because if it is not interpreted, one is using God's message as it was meant to be used by the Prophet and the Arab people until 10/632. This use of the *Ashab al-Nuzul* method of Quranic interpretation along with consensus-based reasoning gave the Ibadis almost unlimited liberty in deciding the path their faith takes.<sup>36</sup> Even so, it did and does not give the individual freedom of choice in faith. It provided the Ibadi scholarly community the power to shape thoughts and teachings to respond to changing times and circumstances. This gave the school great adaptability and allowed Ibadis to accept other cultures and religions, which the Omani economy and people required to prosper.

The way in which Oman interacts with these foreign groups is also dictated by their doctrinal systems. The first doctrine which must be examined that is relevant to foreign interaction is the previously discussed Khawarij *kufr* doctrine. The Ibadis have split *kufr* so it can be applied to two different groups. The first group is the *kufr nifaq*, or hypocritical unbelievers. These are all non-Ibadi Muslims, and unrepenting sinners from the Ibadi community.<sup>37</sup> The peoples of this group are not treated as alien to Islam. Instead, Ibadis believed they have received the message of God and His Prophet but have turned their backs on the truth. Despite these fundamental differences, they are still provided the same legal benefits as other Muslims (i.e. inheritance rights, freedom from *jizya* tax, legal protection from murder, etc...). The second group of *kufr shirk*, or unbelievers, are all those who refuse the *Shahadah*.<sup>38</sup> This includes all polytheists, atheists, ancestral worshipers, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians.<sup>39</sup> It must be stated that the Ibadis believe that people are given limited self-determination. Their self-determination doctrines

<sup>36</sup> Leonard, "Contemporary Approaches."

<sup>37</sup> Hoffman, *Essentials*, 28.

<sup>38</sup> The *Shahadah* is, "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet."

<sup>39</sup> Hoffman, *Essentials*, 27.

closely follow the ‘Asharite school’s theory that God supplies people with choices. Those who are faithful to Him will choose the path of piety and be received in heaven.<sup>40</sup>

The *kufr shirk* peoples have chosen not to follow the path towards the good which God laid for them and will be condemned to eternal hell as a result. However, this does not mean that these people are to be sent there by the sword of an Ibadi. For instance, the People of the Book, or the Jews, Christians, and, sometimes, Zoroastrians, are supposed to be given the opportunity to convert to Islam by the Imam. If they refuse this offer, then they are to pay the *jizya* tax to the Ibadi authorities. The Ibadis are then supposed to use these funds for pious means, therefore, indirectly allowing the People of the Book to provide for righteous practice according to Ibadiyya.<sup>41</sup> What the tax does, therefore, is give the People of the Book a place within Ibadi society by allowing them to provide for Ibadis’ piety. They were accepted in this role as financier and help to achieve the success of the imamate and larger Ibadi nation.

Although the People of the Book are given a role within Ibadi society, there is a question as to how Omanis are supposed to interact with all *kufr*. As previously shown, the Khawarij believed that all *kufr* should be killed for not heeding God’s word. Ibadis don’t apply violence when they are forced to deal with those who have less faith than themselves. Instead, they practice *Bara’ā*, or disassociation. In Ibadiyya, *Bara’ā* has a duel meaning. When applied to the *kufr* it implies that he or she has disassociated themselves from God. While for the Ibadi it implies that they must disassociate themselves from the *kufr*.<sup>42</sup> This disassociation for the Ibadis could have one of two meanings. It could mean that the Ibadis would have to disassociate themselves from the *kufr* at a physical level, or it could imply that they must disassociate their relationship with the *kufr* from

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<sup>40</sup> Hoffman, *Essentials*, 34.

<sup>41</sup> Hoffman, *Essentials*, 220.

<sup>42</sup> Hoffman, *Essentials*, 29.

their relationship with the *kufr*'s beliefs. Importantly, the Ibadis choose to follow the second interpretation. They believe that affiliation leads to association between people, and Ibadis believe "the root meaning of affiliation is agreement on the truth."<sup>43</sup> Therefore, associating with someone means that the Ibadi would have to agree with the truth which that person believes. Disassociating, on the other hand, can simply be carried out by recognizing that someone has different beliefs than themselves and separations are created based upon that difference.

Not only are Ibadis allowed to physically interact with non-believers, but they can be accepting as to who the non-believer is when faith is removed. This is epitomized when late nineteenth-century Ibadi theologian Nasir al-Rawahi (b. 1277/1860) wrote,

Natural love does not harm you unless it becomes religious affiliation. There is nothing wrong with being polite to someone while inwardly retaining religious dissociation from him. The Prophet only asked his Lord not to give any infidel who lived near him something that would make him love him because of the Prophet's perfect devotion and desire to be affected by God alone, in worship and love.<sup>44</sup>

Al-Rawahi is making the profound statement that Ibadis should not be dissuaded from loving the *kufrs*. They have interpreted the meaning of the Quranic verse wherein the Prophet asks for disassociation as originating from his perfection, not because it is a necessitated practice for all Muslims. In the Ibadi sense, therefore, it would be ridiculous to ask Muslims to refrain from kind and loving interactions with all peoples because no man could ever reach the level of religious perfection the Prophet espoused. So long as the Ibadis understand the difference between loving the *kufrs* with whom they associate and loving the *kufrs'* faith, and choose to only love the former, then they will not corrupt their own faith.

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<sup>43</sup> Hoffman, *Essentials*, 174.

<sup>44</sup> Hoffman, *Essentials*, 204.

Though this doctrine allows for Ibadis to be physically kind and emotionally loving of their *kufr* relations, it must be kept in mind that the Ibadis are still required to separate themselves at the religious level. Ibadis still claim religious superiority to all other religious groups, meaning that the *kufrs'* practices, rituals, and beliefs are all sinful. Ibadis place themselves in the right while all others are in the wrong when it comes to religious matters.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, what is expressed by the Ibadis, at least doctrinally, is tolerance in its strictest form. They preclude from accepting the legitimacy within of *kufrs'* beliefs and are theologically forced to condemn those they love to hell. This creates an interesting dichotomy in Ibadi faith between tolerance and self-superiority wherein the self-superiority is only to be felt and shown privately between Ibadis or even within a single Ibadi, but they display tolerance to all others in public life.

## **COLONIAL OMAN**

Though these doctrines have become vital to Ibadis espousing tolerance and peace with its neighbors, following the First and Second Omani Imamates there was still great internal Omani and Ibadi divisions which created violence and threatened the sovereignty and security of Oman as an Ibadi state. For instance, during the seventeenth century, Oman was once again divided. On the Gulf coast of Oman, the Sultanate had taken control over the territory which was previously occupied by the Portuguese, while the interior of the region was still under the control of the Ibadi Imam.<sup>46</sup> This division would remain until the middle of the nineteenth century when the Sultanate ultimately unified the two states following a bloody ten-year war. Throughout the period of division and following the Portuguese occupation, there were interactions with foreigners that placed the Omanis as the colonizers and the colonized that would change how Omanis viewed themselves and their faith.

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<sup>45</sup> Hoffman, *Essentials*, 157.

<sup>46</sup> Linda P. Funsch, *Oman Reborn* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 37-8.

This reimagining of what it meant to be an Ibadi-Omani began when the Sultanate started to colonize East Africa and Southern Persia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The most scholarly and culturally important location in this new Omani empire was the small island of Zanzibar, where the sultans even established their capital during the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup> During this time the Said dynasty had come into power for expelling a Persian invasion during the early eighteenth century and had been quick to ensure that all Omani tribes were viewed equally. For instance, there was no distinction of *Sayyid* given to one tribe to place them above all the others. Combined with the lack of an election to decide the next ruler, tribal politics became significantly less important.<sup>48</sup> It may seem reasonable that the Saids, being the ruling family, would claim to have superiority, but there was recognition that they were not the true power, God was. They would only be allowed to rule if they did so justly according to God's Will including Ibadi Theology, which dictates that the Saids' had to give equal treatment to all Ibadis and *kufr nifaq*.<sup>49</sup> It was during this period of equal-footing for all tribes that the Omani Empire began to take shape.

Since the Omani expansion occurred under the social norm of equal treatment between elites, there was less focus on shaping these newly accessible regions to fit the needs of the tribe. The result was that the Omanis occupied foreign lands under the flag of Oman, not under the flags of the Julanda, Ya'rubi, or Said tribes. Ibadi tolerance was applied to these foreign lands, and the Omanis governed fairly and justly. They also

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<sup>47</sup> John C. Wilkinson, "On Being an Ibadi," *The Muslim World* 105, no. 2, (March 17, 2015), under "Ibadi"  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274140696\\_On\\_being\\_an\\_Ibadi](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274140696_On_being_an_Ibadi) (accessed October 15, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> Wilkinson, "Being an Ibadi."

<sup>49</sup> Gertjan Hoetjes, "Iran-GCC Relations: The Case of Oman," In *Iran's Relations with the Arab States of the Gulf: Common Interests Over Historic Rivalry* (Berlin, Germany: Gerlach Press, 2016), 151-152.

maintained significant internal distinctions between themselves and those they governed over.<sup>50</sup> The focus of these distinction, both on an individual and societal level, was that they were Ibadis and their homeland was Oman. As time continued and the Omani colonists viewed themselves with each of these defining characteristics, the two began to be combined into one. Eventually, being Ibadi meant one was also Omani, causing the faith and the nationality to become mixed.<sup>51</sup> This was a huge change for the religiosity of Omanis which up to that point was seen separate of the land which the Imamate had occupied. However, these new peoples and the consistent spread of Oman's government abroad made it clear to Omanis that their defining feature and what gave them the right to rule was that they were Ibadis and they carried the proper faith to the *kufrs*.<sup>52</sup>

This method of distinction, and new identity was solidified by the fact that the Omanis, due once again to their theological doctrines, could not send missionaries to convert those whom they ruled. In Ibadiyya, Ibadi missionaries can only be sent to seek converts if there is an undisputed Ibadi Imam. However, the existence of the Sultanate on the Omani coast, the North African Ibadis' Imam, and the increasing threat of Wahhabism on the Imamate-ruled interior of Oman meant the Imams of this period were disputed.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the Imams did not feel in the right to dispatch missionaries. Likewise, the Said Sultans could not sponsor missionaries, because their right to rule over Ibadis was based on upholding Ibadi doctrines. Therefore, if their non-imam leaders sent missionaries, their legitimacy would be compromised leading the Omani Empire to collapse into a civil war. As a result, Omanis in foreign territories would continue to see themselves as distinguished from the populations they governed

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<sup>50</sup> Wilkinson, "Being an Ibadi."

<sup>51</sup> Wilkinson, "Being an Ibadi."

<sup>52</sup> The Omanis did, and continue to, recognize the North African Ibadis as proper Ibadis, but because the Omanis have harbored almost all the major Imams, they uphold that Ibadiyya and Oman are more interlinked than Ibadiyya and North Africa.

<sup>53</sup> Wilkinson, "Being an Ibadi."

because the colonized would largely keep their faith due to the lack of missionary actives.<sup>54</sup>

The strengthening of the Ibadi-Omani identity through non-conversion meant that, even when the Omani Empire became dominated by the British and many colonists chose to return home, the new identity had become well established throughout the country. Oman's physical geography and lack of development guaranteed the identity's survival because the British were only able to control the Imamate.<sup>55</sup> The Imamate in the interior remained untouched by British governance allowing for a continuous Omani sovereignty. The Imamate was perfect for building the importance of this religious-nationalist identity because its government focused on maintaining Ibadi doctrines while resisting British rule. Though it is the Imamate that should be credited for strengthening the Omani-Ibadi identity, its existence would be far more important on the British-backed Sultanate coast.

## **OMAN POST-WORLD WAR II**

The primary British objective in establishing a protectorate over the Sultanate was to control Gulf and Indian Ocean trade. They did not care to govern over the people because it would interfere with their commerce-minded objectives, especially since the Omanis new identity would almost certainly lead to revolts against their rule. Therefore, the sultans were given autonomy in domestic policies and could choose to govern their people as they saw fit so long as it did not interfere with British trade.<sup>56</sup> Through this autonomy the Saids continued to retain their legitimacy to rule in the eyes of their Ibadi subjects, despite being under the protection of *kufr shirks* who did not espouse Ibadiyya. Having maintained their

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<sup>54</sup> Wilkinson, "Being an Ibadi."

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

legitimacy, the Saids gained even greater power over Oman during the British protectorate. This occurred because the consistent challenges the Imamate faced to their legitimacy and the technological advances the British gave the sultans access to.<sup>57</sup> After almost sixty years of British protectorate, the Omanis once again achieved independence in 1370/1951. Using this newfound sovereignty, Sultan Said ibn Taimur (d. 1392/1972) began to consolidate his power over the entirety of Oman by attacking the Imamate shortly after the election of a new Imam in 1373/1954.<sup>58</sup>

The Sultanate's invasion began in 1373/1954 and would end in triumph five years later. Sultan Said ibn Taimur wished to quickly establish himself over his newly conquered territory so he began by exiling over a dozen religious scholars who continued to preach the necessity of an Imam.<sup>59</sup> Though this policy was effective in maintaining the Sultan's legitimacy, it defined the Sultan's closed-mindedness. This was especially harmful because, during the previous decades, Omanis had begun to travel throughout the world and had been exposed to new ideologies. Primary amongst these new ways of thinking was Communism. However, the isolationist attitude of the Sultan, and his desire to maintain a traditional Oman without socialist policies led to a Communist uprising in the Dhofar region in 1384/1965.<sup>60</sup> This war would rage on for over five years under Sultan ibn Taimur's leadership despite the Omanis having received considerable aid from the United Kingdom, Jordan, and Iran.

The ineffectiveness of Oman's alliance was largely due to the Sultan's refusal to modernize the country. During the five years of peace between

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Abdulrahman al-Salimi, "The Transformation of Religious Learning in Oman: Tradition and Modernity," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21, no. 2. (March 2011), under "Oman," <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/867410558?accountid=11243> (accessed September 14, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> al-Salimi, "The Transformation."

the wars he made no efforts to improve Oman's infrastructure, making it very difficult to move any equipment or supplies to the distant province.<sup>61</sup> Recognizing these deficiencies in the Omani state, Sultan Said ibn Taimur's British educated, and militarily-trained son, Qaboos ibn Said al-Said, began to protest his father's inefficiencies as a ruler. Anticipating the danger his son represented to his rule, Sultan Taimur had the young prince placed under house arrest shortly after returning from his journeys abroad. However, seeing that the war would drag on and the country was not being prepared for the future, Qaboos could sit idle no longer. Therefore, he bloodlessly ousted his father and proclaimed himself the sultan.<sup>62</sup> Within five years of the coup, the war was over, and Oman had government-led development plans that would bring Oman out of the Middle Ages and make it a modernized state.

The most important field of these reforms has been the de-construction and reconstruction of the Omani education system to implement modern education methods. Traditionally, the Omani education system was similar to those used by the majority of the Arab World before Western powers' domination over the region. Children at a young age were educated in the mosque by the sheikh or imam and were taught about the Quran as interpreted by the religious leader. This education was religious based and learned based upon the varying versions of Islam the imams taught. These imams consistently disregarded the teachings of other schools of Islamic thought, only providing their students a narrowminded outlook of the wider faith. In Oman, if a student was deemed bright enough, they would be sent to schools, most of which were abroad, for further education, usually in secular fields. The students who did not show

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<sup>61</sup> Funsch, *Reborn*, 105.

<sup>62</sup> Roby C. Barret, *Oman: The Present in the Context of a Fractured Past* (Florida: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2011), 6.

excellence in the classroom would stay in Oman and typically work for their families, most commonly in agriculture.<sup>63</sup>

Recognizing the limitations this style of education, namely sectarianism and inefficient economy, from other states that continued to use it, Sultan Qaboos worked to restructure Oman's education system. Immediately after taking power, in order to improve Oman's secular education, he began to rewrite education policy to hire non-Omani scholars who could teach from a non-religious perspective at the primary and higher levels.<sup>64</sup> This process initially took shape by unifying the curriculum at mosque schools to teach the basic principles of Islam which all the Islamic schools of thought agreed on.<sup>65</sup> There was also a push to begin modelling Omanis education on the liberal-Western model. These changes had to be done carefully, so Sultan Qaboos balanced them with traditional religious education. However, overtime he began to eliminate schooling in mosques and began ordering the construction of government-run primary schools around the state as infrastructure was expanded and updated. The movement away from mosque-based education was long and arduous, but the Ministry of Education closed the final mosque school in 1996, cementing Oman's successful commitment to a reformed education system.<sup>66</sup> While the new government schools did not ignore religious instruction, there was a reduced focus on Ibadiyya. Professors are now required to teach a plurality of faiths, both Islamic and otherwise.<sup>67</sup> This shift opened Omani students to outside religious groups that their now globalized state requires them to interact with. As shown above, Ibadi doctrines do not require separation from foreigners and their faiths, but without the proper education having effective and strong relations in a globalized world would be very difficult.

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<sup>63</sup> Leonard, "Contemporary Approaches."

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> al-Salimi, "The Transformation."

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Leonard, "Contemporary Approaches."

These educational reforms have led to an environment in Oman that espouses intra-faith and inter-faith dialogues.<sup>68</sup> These dialogues, which exist at all levels of society, have made Oman an important platform for various faith leaders to solve their grievances with other faith leaders. For instance, Oman holds an Islamic faith dialogue conference every year wherein scholars of Sunnism, Shi'ism, and Ibadiyya meet to discuss the similarities and differences of their faiths.<sup>69</sup> These conferences help to increase the understanding between peoples who share faiths, giving them the ability to cooperate rather than battle each other. Not only does the Omani government provide physical conferences for dialogues, they have published scholarly journals that pride themselves on publishing writings from scholars of all faiths since 2004. The journals are called *al-Tasamoh* (tolerance) and *al-Tafahom* (understanding) and feature articles on all fields of scholarship as written by people according to their faiths.<sup>70</sup> The ease of access to these articles, including access for all Omani citizens, means the entire population can gain an understanding of other religious groups' thought processes outside of theology. Learning about different ways of thinking beyond theology is the most important aspect of these journals. They give the Ibadis the ability to cooperate with foreigners who work in the same field as them increasing their own, and Oman's, productivity and prosperity. This increased and shared success leads to even greater ties between Ibadis and foreigners, amplifying Ibadi openness and diminishing the likelihood of radicalism by defeating sectarianism.

This pro- dialogue environment inside Oman has had a great effect on its ability to carry out a neutral and mediation-based foreign policy. For much of his history, Sultan Qaboos has been able to maintain strong relations with Iran, both during pre- and post-Islamic Revolution, without being pressured to participate in the various crises around the Middle East. This

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<sup>68</sup> In this case intra-faith is between the schools of Islam, and inter-faith is between Muslims and other religious groups.

<sup>69</sup> Leonard, "Contemporary Approaches."

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

relationship between Oman and Iran began when the Iranians played an active role in subduing the Dhofar Revolt. They deployed 6,000 soldiers, squadrons of planes, and other military equipment to Oman while also helping to convince the United Kingdom and Jordan to give similar support. Despite the widespread fear in other Arab-Gulf states following Khomeini's revolution in 1979, Oman maintained strong relations with the Iranians by concluding a series of bilateral economic and military cooperation treaties that made the two states more interdependent.<sup>71</sup> These strong ties have allowed the Ibadis to act as mediator between various states and Iran. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Iran have often been at odds over territory within the Persian/Arabian Gulf. Oman has played a major role in creating dialogues and deflating conflicts before they became violent. Beyond the GCC, the Iranians relied on the Omanis to mediate the peace treaty that ended the Iran-Iraq War in 1988. This aid helped establish the legitimacy of the young theocratic republic and gave the Omanis the opportunity to return the favor of assistance from the Dhofar Revolt.<sup>72</sup> More recently, Iran used Oman to create a secret dialogue with the United States in 2012 that eventually led to the creation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or the Iran Deal.<sup>73</sup> This deal has eliminated numerous economic sanctions that have hindered Iranian development for decades and has helped to secure the Iranian economy's prosperity. The Ibadis can maintain the integrity of their faith by expanding their tolerance to other states and promoting peace between combating groups. The Omani role as a mediator has led other states to respect Omani sovereignty and allowed Sultan Qaboos to enact reforms to the sultanate's political and religious landscapes without interference from external powers.

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<sup>71</sup> Hoetjes, "Iran-GCC," 145-146.

<sup>72</sup> Hoetjes, "Iran-GCC," 147.

<sup>73</sup> Ahmet Uysal, "What is Unique About the Omani-Iranian Relations?" Center for Iranian Studies in Ankara, (August 2016), under "Oman," <https://iramcenter.org/en/what-is-unique-about-the-omani-iranian-relations> (accessed November 5, 2017).

These political reforms have largely been focused on mending the gap between the secular sultanate and Ibadiyya since the removal of the Imamate. Sultan Qaboos began this reconciliation in 1392/1973 when he established the Ibadi Mufti as a part of the Sultan's government. As it stands, the Mufti is the leading figure in Ibadiyya within Oman and has great influence over religious decisions made in Ibadi communities around the world.<sup>74</sup> Qaboos looked to create a replacement for the Imam that could give the Ibadis religious guidance in a way similar to the imam. As a sign of respect towards Ibadiyya and the general learnedness of its new lead figure, Qaboos gives the Mufti leadership over many of the government's ministries, including the Ministry of Education, Higher Education, and Endowments and Religious Affairs. Although this wide array of ministries would seem to give the Mufti great power to push a strict Ibadi agenda, he is unable to act without the Sultan's approval. Therefore, unlike the Imam, the Muftis have consistently promoted a more consensual and open version of Islam that better reflects the even-handed government that has defined Sultan Qaboos's reign.<sup>75</sup>

The transition towards a more secularized government would seem to be a difficult task considering Ibadiyya's long history with the imamate and religious rulership. However, Ibadiyya, due to its constant interpretation of the Quran to adjust its meaning from contemporary issues, is different than other forms of Islam as it has "an ideological approach that provides ways for Islam to adapt to changing circumstances, which includes modernization"<sup>76</sup> The reformation of Ibadiyya to permit a secular leadership without a distinguished imam can be seen with the Muftis' reforms to the judicial system. Currently, it is required that Omani judges not only have specialization in *Sharia*, but they must also learn about the

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<sup>74</sup> al-Salimi, "The Transformation."

<sup>75</sup> Hoejtes, "Iran-GCC," 151.

<sup>76</sup> Hoetjes, "Iran-GCC," 154.

secular laws of the state.<sup>77</sup> Previously, as in many Islamic states, judges were required to have received only religious learning in order to maintain law and governance of *Sharia*. If the monopoly of religion over justice and judicial practices would have been allowed to continue, undoubtedly, the Sultan's rule would have continuously been challenged by pro-Imamate elements within Ibadiyya. But Ibadi doctrines and theology have been changed since Qaboos through religious leadership to allow for secular rule-of-law to coexist with religious law inside Oman.

Ultimately, Sultan Qaboos's educational, political, and foreign policy reforms have caused Ibadis to become surefooted in their tolerant traditions. During a time when the other Islamic sects created radical movements like al-Qaeda, Hamas, and many others that violently opposed foreigners and inter-Islamic groups, Ibadis have remained peaceful and have shown no interest in joining or creating similar groups. Sultan Qaboos is largely responsible for this peaceful attitude. He exposed his fellow Omanis to the benefits of outside-sources of information and gave them the ability to understand others' ways of thinking. From this solid basis of learning and dialogue he was able to reshape Oman's foreign policy to be an active and peaceful player in world politics by choosing to mediate crises and not involve itself in violence. The increased prosperity Oman gained from these educational and foreign policy reforms enabled Sultan Qaboos to change the dynamics of religion and state within Ibadiyya. The increased exposure of his country was not used to harbor fear of outsiders, but rather to begin implementing more secular ideas into the conservative faith. Through the Muftis' reforms, Ibadiyya has transitioned from a conservative faith which espouses the unification of religion and state, to a faith that allows for contemporary human-rights for all citizens regardless of, "gender, origin, color, language, religion, sect, domicile, or social status."<sup>78</sup> Things could have developed much differently in Oman since 1970 if Sultan Qaboos had failed to subdue the Dhofari

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<sup>77</sup> al-Salimi, "The Transformation."

<sup>78</sup> Funsch, *Reborn*, 108.

Communists, implement new educational policies, and modernize Ibadis' faith and culture. Serious religious opposition could have arisen against the sultan. Religious groups would likely have become violent and began to espouse xenophobic messages to oppose Sultan Qaboos's openness leading to intolerant and aggressive forms of Ibadiyya, which one does not find in Oman today.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sultan Qaboos has cultivated Oman's tolerant past to create a peaceful, tolerant, and non-sectarian Muslim state that still espouses conservative doctrines and maintains a conservative society. Although he does deserve a great amount of credit for creating contemporary Oman, there have been a number of societal developments throughout the country's history that have led to the coexistence of conservatism and tolerance. Initially, Oman's geographical position and maritime tradition vitally established contact with foreigners that necessitated a tolerant society before Islam entered the region. These outward looking social developments made Oman politically independent and socially unique from its Arab Arabian Peninsula neighbors. With the maritime economy and long history of independence established, the introduction of Islam threatened to end Oman's sovereignty as the major sects required Muslims to follow a foreign Imam, as with the Shi'as, or a foreign Caliph, as with the Sunnis. Therefore, the Omani nobility began to look for a way to maintain their Islamic faith while guaranteeing the independence of their state. They found this by turning to the violent and radical Khawarij sect which had separated itself from the other sects by strictly adhering to the Quran early on. Although the Omanis had found their independence in faith, the violence and intolerance of Kharijite practices threatened the Omani maritime tradition. This is when Ibadiyya began to play a role. Still Khawarij, Ibadiyya allowed for Kharijite thought to be non-violent towards outsiders. This meant that Omani nobility had found a faith which gave

them continued independence and did not destroy their economic traditions.

The conversion of Oman and the establishment of an Ibadi Imam solidified Oman's religious and political independence. The Imamates were essential in the further development of a tolerant faith. The Imams were also unafraid of allowing for the faith's development based upon the consensus of the community giving the whole of Oman's traditionally tolerant society the power to legitimize interaction with and protection of foreigners. It was during these times that Ibadiyya not only continued to use the *kufr nifaq* and *kufr shirk* doctrines, but expanded the initial tolerance guaranteed by those doctrines. It is quite possible that the Omani population realized it would not be enough to guarantee their prosperity by tolerating only "sinning" Muslims, but they must also tolerate the heathens: including Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, and others. Therefore, at some point, the disassociation that the *kufr* doctrines required was no longer applied to the physical level as it had under the Khawarij and early Ibadis. Instead an Ibadi merely had to disassociate with the *kufrs* on a faith level and were even allowed to love *kufrs* so long as they did not fall in love with the *kufrs'* faiths.

None of these theological and doctrinal developments would have been possible if Ibadiyya did not become adaptable. This adaptability is best shown by their eventual acceptance of the *Sunnah of the Prophet* which they initially denied in hopes of maintaining their independence. Ibadiyya's adaptability and development was only made possible by theologically viewing the Quran as a created document that could be interpreted. Ibadis would not have broken the violence and xenophobia of the Khawarij if it had not shifted on both the *Sunnah* and the Quran. Therefore, the developments made under the Imamates and Caliphate occupations completed the reshaping of Ibadiyya's Kharijite basis to resemble a faith that is tolerant of all non-Ibadis.

Although the Imamates created an outwardly tolerant faith, Omani politics made it difficult for Ibadis to find peace. The Second Imamate was torn down by tribal disputes and the Ibadis continued to struggle in Oman. They were unable to establish internal stability until the Sultanate of Muscat removed the Portuguese along the Omani coast and began Omani colonization. Resulting from this new form of exposure to foreigners, as a ruler and not just a trade partner, was the use of the faith as a source of Omani identity. Ibadiyya was transformed during this time and the Ibadis and those they colonized recognized that Ibadi and Omani were one in the same. This combination of a religious identity with a regional identity and the non-tribal based rulership of the Said sultans led to the decrease of tribalism in Oman. This meant the divides that destroyed the Second Imamate had largely been mitigated by the time the British began dominating the region.

With the Omanis unified through their faith, the British domination over the coast did not cause a radical backlash as they were unable to dominate the Imamate in the interior, giving Omanis a sense of security not found in other parts of the Islamic World. Regardless of the Omani security of identity, the country needed to be politically unified if it wanted to retain its sovereignty and power. The Sultan, having been given British technological advances, was able to unify the country after a five-year war, but he was unable to curb the ideological differences between the continuously more globalized country and faith. It is here that Sultan Qaboos built his legacy. He has managed to modernize Oman politically and economically without westernizing its society and compromising Ibadi doctrines and theology. Much of this was done by using Ibadiyya's long history of adaptability to his advantage by reshaping religious leadership. Using a mufti, he can control has given him the ability to carry out the necessary political and economic reforms that guarantee prosperity while also satisfying Oman's conservative population's desire for religious

conservatism. Deriving from Kharijite philosophy makes Ibadiyya naturally conservative and, therefore, prone to radicalism. This has not taken place due to Qaboos's guidance and smart policies since beginning his reign over half a century ago.

Ultimately, when one looks as to why Ibadi was able to develop from the Khawarij into being one of the most tolerant countries in the Middle East, it does not merely stem from one factor.<sup>79</sup> Instead, it is a narrative that stretches back to ancient times. Omani tolerance stems from its ancient traditions of maritime trading, social and political independence, and foreign interactions. Combined, this history has caused the Islamic Omanis to look for a faith that could reconcile these traditions. Once they settled on Ibadiyya, the Ibadi Omanis continued to open the faith up by giving it greater adaptability. This led to the vital doctrinal shifts which no longer demonized people, like the Khawarij did, only their faiths. Importantly, the uniqueness of Omanis' faith caused them to place this unifying feature above their tribal differences and ignore the crisis of identity which afflicted the Muslim World following western domination of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally, the country's unification under the Sultan has perpetuated this long history of tolerance. Sultan Qaboos brilliantly reconciled the secularized world of the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century by ensuring Ibadiyya remained tolerant and did not fall into radicalism like other Muslim sects. This has built an Ibadi Oman which still espouses religious conservatism on a personal and private level that it retains from its peoples' Kharijite faith while also maintaining the tolerance that has existed in Omani society for millennia.

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<sup>79</sup> Due to the combination of Ibadi and Omani identity it is acceptable that Ibadiyya can currently be considered a nationality, and, as a result, a social and political driving force for the modern-day Sultanate.

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