Introduction

On June 2, 1949 the grand vizier of the French Protectorate of Tunisia, Muṣṭafā al-Kaʿāk, issued this circular to provincial officials all over the country:

> I would like to know if there are any private endowments (*aḥbās*) established by Tunisians in the lands of the Egyptian Kingdom. It is desired that a broad search be conducted, and thorough investigations undertaken in order to obtain this information and to record it as soon as possible. If some of those under your administration possess endowments of this kind, you should let us know their type, their importance, and the names of their founders.[1]

When the official from the island of Jerba responded two months later, he attached to his letter a remarkably detailed table of private endowments in Egypt owned by Tunisians from this island in the south.[2] The list was far longer than those from other parts of the country. It included endowed homes (*diyār*), shops (*ḥawānit*), and trade depots (*wakāʾil*) in Cairo and Alexandria dating to as early as the seventeenth century, managed by prominent Jerban merchant families in Egypt. First on the list were the extensive endowments of the al-Baḥḥār family, an Ibadi Muslim family from the southern Jerban town of Ajīm (Figure 0.1).

Over three centuries earlier, on November 18, 1617, several members of the same Jerban families listed in that document had stood in the Civilian Inheritance Court (al-Qisma al-ʿArabiyya) in Ottoman Cairo. Those present, "all from among the distinguished merchants of the market of the [Ibn] Tulun Mosque," had gathered to serve as witnesses in a case regarding the estate of a merchant from the al-Baḥḥār family named ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad.[3]

[1] ANT A 281 0006 (1949–1950), doc. 13 (French), doc. 14 (Arabic).
[2] ANT A 281 0006 (dated 25 Shaw 1368/Aug 20, 1949), doc. 4.
[3] Maḥkamat al-Qisma al-ʿArabiyya, 23, case 440 (dated 19 D. al-Qaʿda 1026/Nov 18, 1617). Reproduced in ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, ed.,

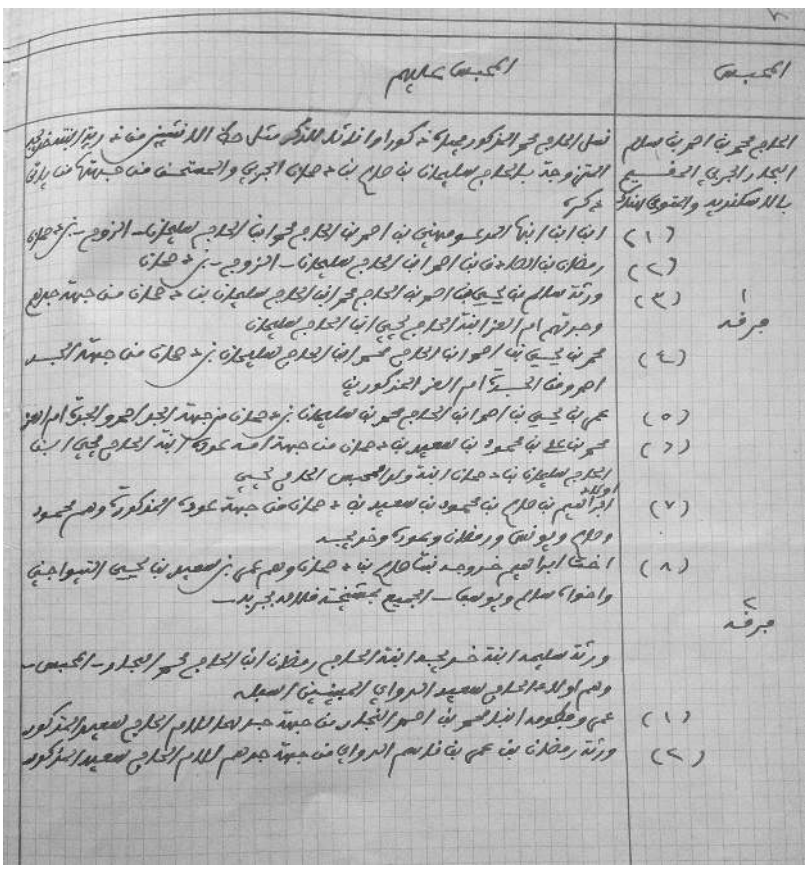

Figure 0.1 The first of several pages in a table, prepared in Jerba in 1949, recording private endowments (*aḥbās*) in Egypt belonging to Jerbans. The entire first folio lists endowments connected to the al-Baḥḥār family. ANT A 281 0006, doc. 5. (Photo by author, 2018)

These documents, one from the colonial-era archives of the French Protectorate in Tunisia and the other from the court registers of Ottoman-era Egypt, together capture the main themes of this book. First, they demonstrate a centuries-long presence for Jerbans and other

Wathāʾiq al-maghāriba min sijillāt al-maḥākam al-sharʿiyya al-miṣriyya abān al-ʿaṣr al-ʿuthmānī 1604/1650 (al-juzʾ al-thālith), vol. 3 (Zaghwān: Muʾassasat al-Tamīmī, 1998), 55.

Maghribi Ibadis in Ottoman-era Egypt that lasted from the seventeenth century well into the twentieth. Second, the family at the center of these two documents, al-Baḥḥār, endowed the building that is the geographic anchor of my story here. In the early seventeenth century a member of the al-Baḥḥār family established a trade agency, school, and library beside the Ibn Tulun Mosque that would become known as the "Buffalo Agency" (Wikālat al-Jāmūs).

That institution would be operated and supported by the Ibadi Muslim communities of the Maghrib from the island of Jerba, the Mzab Valley (today in Algeria), and the Jebel Nafusa (today in Libya). As in these two documents, however, the Ibadi affiliation of the Buffalo Agency and its residents over the course of its three-and-a-half centuries of operation remained hidden in plain sight. In this book I argue that this is because the Maghribi Ibadis of Cairo participated in the legal, commercial, religious, and political spheres of Ottoman Egypt to such an extent that they are only with great difficulty distinguished from their non-Ibadi contemporaries. Their unusual status as members of both the Muslim majority and a coherent minority religious community facilitated this participation and enabled them to be at once Ottoman and Ibadi. In short, this is the story of the Ottoman Ibadis of Cairo.

The two documents referred to above likewise bookend the timeframe of the story I tell here. In the following chapters I anchor the history of Ibadis in Cairo to that of the Buffalo Agency and the individuals whose commercial, scholarly, and personal lives intersected there from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries. Finally, the documents convey something of the range of materials I use to tell this story, including Ottoman shariah court records, personal documents and letters, official correspondence, colonial-era archives, and notes and marginalia from private manuscript libraries.

Ibadis as a Community

The Ibadi community constitutes a religious minority, whose history predates the Ottoman period by several centuries. Ibadi Muslims trace their own origins to the first century of Islam in the city of Basra, in what is today Iraq. By the eighth century CE they had begun to emerge as a distinct community, which would develop separately from what would become known as Sunni and Shiʿi Islam. The two spheres of

premodern Ibadi communities – one in the east, centered in the southern Arabian Peninsula, and another in the west, in the Maghrib – developed their own legal, theological, and prosopographical textual corpora that distinguished them intellectually from both one another and their Sunni or Shiʿi counterparts.[4]

The two spheres also followed separate political trajectories throughout the early Islamic centuries. In the Arabian Peninsula, especially in Oman, their communities would hold political power, and in the early modern era even commanding a vast maritime empire that led to the incorporation of the island of Zanzibar into the realm of Ibadism.[5] In the west, by contrast, there was only a brief period of Ibadi political control in the form of the Rustamid dynasty of Tāhart (778–909 CE). From the fourth/tenth century onward, Ibadis in the region lived under the control of other empires or regional polities.[6] Over the subsequent centuries Ibadi scholars would fashion a historical narrative that drew the boundaries of an Ibadi community and distinguished it from other Muslim groups.[7]

Since the extension of Ottoman influence into the Maghrib beginning in the sixteenth century, Ibadi communities there have concentrated in three main regions: the Mzab Valley in what is today central Algeria, the island of Jerba in southern Tunisia, and the Jebel Nafusa in northwestern Libya. The Ottoman centuries would witness the continuation of a trend toward a growing familiarity among Ibadi scholars with Sunni texts, a trend that accelerated with the attraction of Sunni

[4] Pierre Cuperly, *Introduction à l'étude de l'ibāḍisme et de sa théologie* (Algiers: Office des publications universitaires, 1984); Valerie J. Hoffman, *The Essentials of Ibāḍī Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012); John Wilkinson, *Ibāḍism: Origins and Early Development in Oman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Adam Gaiser, *Muslims, Scholars, Soldiers: The Origins and Elaboration of the Ibāḍī Imamate Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Ersilia Francesca, "Ibāḍī Law and Jurisprudence," *The Muslim World* 105, no. 2 (2015): 209–23.

[5] Wilkinson, *Ibāḍism*; Amal N. Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism: Expanding the Crescent from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (1880s–1930s)* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

[6] Virginie Prevost, *L'aventure ibāḍite dans le Sud tunisien, VIIIe–XIIIe siècle. Effervesence d'une région méconnue* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2008); Cyrille Aillet, *L'archipel ibadite. Une histoire des marges du Maghreb médiéval* (Lyon-Avignon: CIHAM-Éditions, 2021).

[7] Paul M. Love, Jr., *Ibadi Muslims of North Africa: Manuscripts, Mobilization, and the Making of a Written Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

institutions of learning such as the Zaytuna Mosque in Tunis and, as this book explores, the al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo. By the end of the Ottoman centuries, Ibadis knew the Sunni postclassical canon well, and were participating in the pan-Islamic and Salafi discourses of their non-Ibadi contemporaries.[8] One of the purposes of this book is to shed light on this long-term participation of Ibadis in the legal, intellectual, political, and religious life of the Ottoman Empire.

Ibadi Studies

Until very recently, the scholarship on Ibadi Islam in European languages has focused on one of two periods. The first and largest has been research on the earliest history of the community, including its development in late antique and early medieval contexts. Interest in this period of Ibadi history dates back to the first half of the twentieth century in particular.[9] Drawing on that earlier generation of scholars, more recent historians focused on these periods, including many from the contemporary Ibadi community, have made remarkable contributions to our understanding of the place of Ibadis in early Islamic intellectual and legal history.[10] Historiography in Arabic has long

[8] Augustin Jomier, *Islam, réforme et colonisation. Une histoire de l'ibadisme en Algérie (1882–1962)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2020).

[9] On North African Ibadis, the work of Tadaeusz Lewicki, Zygmunt Smogorzewski, and Pierre Cuperly merit special mention for the influence they have had on modern scholarship: Tadeusz Lewicki, "Les sources ibāḍites de l'histoire médiévale de l'Afrique du Nord," *Africana Bulletin* 35 (1988): 31–42; Tadeusz Lewicki, *Les ibadites en Tunisie au moyen âge* (Rome: Angelo Signorelli, 1958); Tadeusz Lewicki, *Études maghrebines et soudanaises* (Warsaw: Éditions scientifiques de Pologne, 1983); Marius Canard, "Les travaux de T. Lewicki concernant le Maghrib et en particulier les Ibadites," *RA* 103 (1959): 356–71; Marius Canard, "Quelques articles récents de l'arabisant polonais T. Lewicki," *RA* 105 (1961): 186–92; Krzysztof Kościelniak, "The Contribution of Prof. Tadeusz Lewicki (1906–1992) to Islamic and West African Studies," *Analecta Cracoviensia: Studia Philosophico-Theologica Edita a Professoribus Cracoviae* 44 (2012): 241–55; Zygmunt Smogorzewski, "Essai de bio-bibliographie ibadite-wahbite, avant-propos," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 5 (1927): 45–57; Cuperly, *Introduction à l'étude de l'ibāḍisme*.

[10] For example: Prevost, *L'aventure ibāḍite*; Gaiser, *Muslims, Scholars, Soldiers*; Cyrille Aillet, ed., "L'ibāḍisme, une minorité au cœur de l'islam," *REMMM* 132 (2012); Adam Gaiser, *Shurat Legends, Ibadi Identities: Martyrdom, Asceticism, and the Making of an Early Islamic Community* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016); Cyrille Aillet, ed., *L'Ibadisme dans les sociétés de l'Islam médiéval. Modèles et interactions*, Studies in the History and Culture of the

recognized and emphasized the place of Egypt as a site of transit connecting the eastern and western spheres of Ibadism. Like European-language scholarship, however, the emphasis has usually remained on the earliest centuries of Ibadi history with little attention to the Ottoman period.[11]

Scholars have also begun to turn their attention to Ibadi history in the modern era, situating the history of Ibadis in North Africa, East Africa, and Oman in the contexts of the global events that shaped the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Demonstrating how Ibadis in different places participated in or opposed modern Islamic reform movements, for example, has done tremendous work in making Ibadis visible as distinct intellectual and political communities in the contexts of European colonialism and the early years of independence in North Africa, East Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula.[12] That scholarship has also emphasized the ways in which Ibadis, like their contemporaries, utilized the technologies of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as the printing press, steam power, and the telegraph to participate in both intra-communal and global conversations on and

Middle East 33 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2018); ʻAbd Allāh ibn Yazīd al-Fazārī, *Early Ibāḍī Theology: Six Kalām Texts by ʻAbd Allāh ibn Yazīd al-Fazārī*, ed. Abdulrahman al-Sālimi and Wilferd Madelung, Islamic History and Civilization 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Abdulrahman al-Sālimi and Wilferd Madelung, eds., *Ibāḍī Texts from the 2nd/8th Century* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018). A series of international conferences funded by the Omani government since 2011 has resulted in several publications in the series entitled Studies on Ibadism and Oman, published by the Olms Verlag.

11 The two most directly relevant monographs highlighting Egypt as a point of connection are Rajab Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm, *al-Ibāḍiyya fī Miṣr wa-al-Maghrib wa-ʿalāqātuhum bi-Ibāḍiyyat ʿUmān wa-al-Baṣra* (al-Sīb: Maktabat al-Ḍāmirī, 1990); and Farhat Djaabiri, *ʿAlāqāt ʿUmān bi-shimāl Ifrīqiyā* (Muscat: al-Maṭābiʿ al-ʿĀlamiyya, 1991). More recently, a synthetic study in Arabic by ʿAlī al-Shillī offers a good overview of the secondary source material on Ibadis in Egypt: ʿAlī b. Sālim al-Shillī, *al-Wujūd al-Ibāḍī fī Miṣr* (Oman: Baseera Editions, 2018).

12 Valerie J. Hoffman, "The Articulation of Ibādī Identity in Modern Oman and Zanzibar," *The Muslim World* 94, no. 2 (2004): 201–16; Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism*; Valerie J. Hoffman, "Ibadi Reformism in Twentieth-Century Algeria: The Tafsir of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Bayyud," *REMMM* 132 (2012): 155–73; Hoffman, *The Essentials of Ibāḍī Islam*; Augustin Jomier, "Iṣlāḥ ibāḍite et intégration nationale. Vers une communauté mozabite? (1925–1964)," *REMMM* 132 (2012): 175–95; Jomier, *Islam, réforme et colonisation*.

engagements with modernity.[13] A continued engagement with globalization has also been the subject of recent scholarship on Ibadi communities in Oman and East Africa.[14]

Although Egypt appears frequently in this scholarship as a hub connecting different Ibadi communities in the late nineteenth and especially the first half of the twentieth century, its role as a site of Ibadi activity in the centuries of Ottoman rule that preceded those periods has gone largely unremarked. I use the history of Ibadis in Cairo throughout much of the Ottoman period to emphasize the long-term importance of Egypt as a site of Ibadi interaction stretching back to the beginning of the seventeenth century. The lack of attention to Egypt in much of the historiography of Ibadi communities is remarkable, since as I demonstrate throughout this book Ibadis were ubiquitous in all aspects of everyday life in Ottoman Egypt. I argue here for recognizing the central place of Ottoman Egypt – and Cairo, in particular – in the history of generations of Maghribi Ibadi students, scholars, pilgrims, merchants, journalists, and activists from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

Ibadis as Ottomans

A history of the Ottoman Ibadis of Cairo and the Buffalo Agency offers three contributions to the historiographies of northern Africa and the broader Ottoman world. First is the transnational nature of the story told here. The Buffalo Agency's history is primarily one of Maghribis

[13] For example, see Philip Sadgrove, "From Wādī Mīzāb to Unguja: Zanzibar's Scholarly Links," in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott Reese (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 184–211; Amal N. Ghazal, "An Ottoman Pāshā and the End of Empire: Sulaymān al-Bārūnī and the Networks of Islamic Reform," in *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, ed. James L. Gelvin and Nile Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 40–58; Augustin Jomier, "Les réseaux étendus d'un archipel saharien. Les circulations de lettrés ibadites (XVIIe siècle-années 1950)," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 63, no. 2 (2016): 14–39. On the broader context of global Muslim engagement with modernity into which Ibadis fit see Nile Green, *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[14] Mandana E. Limbert, *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory, and Social Life in an Omani Town* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Kimberly T. Wortmann, "Omani Religious Networks in Contemporary Tanzania and Beyond" (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2018).

living, studying, and working in Egypt but operating in networks linking them to the rest of the Ottoman Mediterranean and beyond. The legal, commercial, and communal ties linking Ibadis in Cairo with their coreligionists in Tunis, Jerba, Alexandria, Mecca, or Istanbul demonstrate the remarkable interconnectedness of the Maghrib to the rest of the Ottoman Empire. Ibadis share this transregional history with other Maghribis in Egypt, whose lives have captured the attention of prominent historians. The collective works of André Raymond and ʿAbd al-Raḥīm A. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, as well as the more recent work of Ḥussām ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī, have demonstrated the ubiquity of Maghribis in Ottoman Egyptian society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[15] In this book I draw heavily on the work of these three scholars, but I also extend their arguments in two ways. First, I move beyond the general community of Maghribis in Egypt to follow the history of a particular community: Maghribi Ibadis. Second, I follow the history of Maghribis in Egypt beyond the eighteenth century and demonstrate the continuity of the Ibadi Maghribi experience into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This means that the book traces the history of Ibadis in Cairo over almost the entirety of Ottoman rule in Egypt, which I approach here as having lasted in one form or another from 1517 CE until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following World War I.

My emphasis on the Ottoman character of this period and the Maghribi Ibadis who lived through it connects to the second contribution of the book: making Ibadis visible as a religious minority in the historiography of the Ottoman Empire, and Ottoman-era Egypt in particular. Rich and innovative scholarship on the Ottoman Mediterranean from the past several years has highlighted the histories of religious minorities such as Sephardic Jews, Armenian Christians, and Coptic Christians in Ottoman and European colonial contexts.[16]

[15] André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle*, vol. 1 (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1973); André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle*, vol. 2 (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1974); ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, *al-Maghāriba fī Miṣr fī-al-ʿaṣr al-ʿuthmānī* (Tunis: al-Majalla al-Tārīkhiyya al-Maghribiyya, 1982); Ḥussām ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī, *al-ʿĀʾila wa-al-thawra: al-buyūt al-tijāriyya al-maghribiyya fī Miṣr al-ʿuthmāniyya* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma lil-Kitāb, 2008).

[16] Recent examples include Magdi Guirguis, "The Organization of the Coptic Community in the Ottoman Period," in *Society and Economy in Egypt and the*

Those studies likewise draw attention to how the roles of those minorities within the Ottoman Empire varied according to time and place. Treatments of some of these minorities, as Magdi Guirguis has written, often "do not fully describe these groups of people nor … take into consideration the changes that take place in the internal dynamics of such groups in the course of the historical process."[17] In this book I follow Guirguis's example by tracing the history of Ibadis in Cairo to highlight elements of continuity and change both in the internal dynamics of the community and its place vis-à-vis Ottoman state and society in Egypt and beyond.

While they shared much with non-Muslim religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire, Ibadis nevertheless belonged to the Muslim majority. This unusual combination afforded them opportunities in that it gave them space to participate fully in Ottoman society in Egypt while also allowing them to draw on a vast support network of coreligionists throughout northern Africa and beyond. This dual status of minority within a majority raises two interrelated questions for my purposes here: (1) How visible as a distinct community were the Ibadis to the Ottoman authorities in northern Africa? and (2) What, if anything, distinguished the Ibadi experience in Cairo from elsewhere in Ottoman lands?

In the lands west of Egypt, Ottomans encountered Ibadis beginning with the establishment of their control there in the sixteenth century. The Mzabi community of the Sahara signed a special agreement with the Ottomans that distinguished them from other parts of the *eyālet al-Jazāʾir*, granting them autonomy in exchange for tribute and at least indirectly recognizing their identity as Ibadis.[18] Internally, the Mzabis

Eastern Mediterranean 1600–1900: Essays in Honor of André Raymond, ed. Nelly Hanna and Raouf Abbas (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 201–16; Febe Armanios, *Coptic Christianity in Ottoman Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Richard E. Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith, Brokers of Empire: Armenians and the Politics of Reform in the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Dina Danon, *The Jews of Ottoman Izmir: A Modern History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

[17] Guirguis, "The Organization of the Coptic Community," 201.

[18] Yūsuf Ibn Bakīr al-Ḥājj Saʿīd, *Tārīkh Banī Mzāb: dirāsa ijtimāʿiyya wa-iqtiṣādiyya wa-siyāsiyya*, 3rd. ed. (Ghardaïa: n.p., 2014), 68–70. Al-Ḥājj Saʿīd is referencing an agreement with the Wargala, rather than the Mzab, which is cited

were allowed to maintain their form of governance centered on local councils of scholars (*ʿazzāba*). Within the territory under more direct Ottoman control in the northern tell region, especially in the city of Algiers, Mzabis held a special status and remained organized under and responsible to the leader of their community (*amīn*).[19] As I demonstrate in this book, the physical separation of Ibadis in the Mzab or their "social separation" in the north contrasted with Ibadi participation in Ottoman society in Egypt.[20]

The identity of the Mzabis as a trading community throughout the *eyālet al-Jazāʾir* resembled that of their coreligionists from the island of Jerba, whose merchant communities could be found throughout the empire. Ottoman control of Jerba began first through the island's incorporation under the Ottoman government in Tripoli in the sixteenth century. Largely autonomous families ruled the island on behalf of the Ottomans until Jerba came under control of the Husaynid Ottoman government in Tunis in the eighteenth century.[21] Over the period of Ottoman rule, Ibadis in Jerba watched the traditional council of religious scholars, the *ʿazzāba*, progressively lose its influence as the Ottomans exercised control of the island through the appointment of officials and the establishment of courts.[22] A growing rate of conversion of the island's population to Maliki Sunnism, especially in the last two centuries of Ottoman rule, distinguished the Ibadi experience in Jerba from that of the Mzab. In Jerba people would have been very aware of the Ibadi community as a distinct one, but there is little to suggest that the Ottomans were particularly interested in the Ibadis'

in Diego de Haëdo, *Histoire des rois d'Alger*, trans. H. D. de Grammont (Algiers: Adolphe Jourdan, 1881), 86–87. Robert Brunschvig suggested that the Ibadis from both Jerba and the Mzab enjoyed "la liberté … pour pratiquer leur rite" beginning with the Ottoman occupation at the end of the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, he did not cite the source of that information: see Robert Brunschvig, *La Berbérie orientale sous les Ḥafṣides des origines à la fin du XVième siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1940), 1:333.

[19] Donald C. Holsinger, "Migration, Commerce and Community: The Mīzābīs in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Algeria," *Journal of African History* 21, no. 1 (1980): 61–69.

[20] Ibid., 70.

[21] Muḥammad al-Marīmī, *Ibāḍiyyat Jarba khilāl al-ʿaṣr al-ḥadīth* (Tunis: Kullīyat al-Ādāb wa-al-Funūn wa-'l-Insānīyāt bi-Manūba, 2005).

[22] Farhat Djaabiri, *Niẓām al-ʿazzāba ʿind al-ibāḍiyya bi-Jarba (L'organisation des azzaba chez les ibadhites de Jerba)* (Tunis: Institut national d'archéologie et d'art, 1975), esp. 309–10.