Ibadi Muslims of North Africa

The Ibadi Muslims, a little-known minority community, have lived in North Africa for over a thousand years. Combining an analysis of Arabic manuscripts with digital tools used in network analysis, Paul M. Love Jr. takes readers on a journey across the Maghrib and beyond as he traces the paths of a group of manuscripts and the Ibadi scholars who used them. Ibadi scholars of the Middle Period (eleventh–sixteenth centuries) wrote a series of collective biographies (prosopographies), which together constructed a cumulative tradition that connected Ibadi Muslims from across time and space, bringing them together into a "written network." From the Mzab valley in Algeria to the island of Jerba in Tunisia, from the Jebel Nafusa in Libya to the bustling metropolis of early modern Cairo, this book shows how people and books worked in tandem to construct and maintain an Ibadi Muslim tradition in the Maghrib.

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Manuscripts, Mobilization, and the Making of a Written Tradition

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For my parents, Paul and Stephanie.

And to my wife, Sarra.

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Acknowledgments

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Ifrane, 2018

Note on Transliteration and Dates

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Transliterations from Arabic throughout the book follow a modified version of the system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*). Throughout the main body of the text, I have not included the diacritical marks while still retaining the ʿ and ʾ symbols to represent the Arabic letters ʿayn and hamza, respectively. For the notes and the bibliography, I have included all diacritical marks. For secondary sources and published editions that follow systems of transliterating Arabic in languages other than English (Italian, French, German), I have modified the titles to conform to the *IJMES* system. I have followed the conventional English spellings for well-known Northern African toponyms, such as Jebel Nafusa, Jerba, Sedrata, and Mzab.

The transliteration of Berber (Amazigh) names and toponyms follows the Arabic system, since all the primary sources discussed here are originally in Arabic script. Although there are several variations in how Berber names are transliterated in late medieval Arabic, I have tried to be consistent. Unless otherwise noted, all dates in the main body of the text are provided in Common Era (CE) equivalents of their Islamic *hijri* (AH) originals.

List of Library and Archive Abbreviations

ANOM	Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer	Aix-en-Provence, France
BnF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France	Paris, France
BnT	Bibliothèque Nationale de Tunisie	Tunis, Tunisia
Ivan Franko	Ivan Franko National University of Lviv	Lviv, Ukraine
Jag.	Library of the Institute of Oriental Studies Jagiellonian University	Kraków, Poland
Naples Or.	L'Università degli Studi di Napoli l'Orientale	Naples, Italy
Makt. al-Bārūnī	al-Maktaba al-Bārūniyya	Jerba, Tunisia
Makt. Bin Yaʿqūb	Maktabat al-Shaykh Sālim b. Yaʿqūb	Jerba, Tunisia
Makt. Āl Khālid	Makatbat Āl Khālid	Benisguen, Algeria
Makt. Āl Faḍl	Āl Faḍl	Benisguen, Algeria
Makt. Āl Yaddar	Āl Yaddar	Benisguen, Algeria
Makt. Irwān	Irwān	Ateuf, Algeria
Makt. al-Istiqāma	al-Istiqāma	Benisguen, Algeria
Makt. al-Ḥājj Saʿīd	al-Ḥājj Saʿīd Muḥammad Lakhbourat	Ghardaia, Algeria
Makt. al-Ḥājj Sāliḥ Lʿalī	Maktabat al-Ḥājj Sāliḥ Laʿalī	Benisguen, Algeria
Makt. Bābakr	Maktabat al-Ḥājj Masʿūd Bābakr	Ghardaia, Algeria

(cont.)

Makt. al-Khalīlī	Maktabat al-Shaykh Aḥmad al-Khalīlī	Muscat, Oman
Makt. al-Quṭb	Maktabat al-Quṭb	Benisguen, Algeria
Makt. al-Shaykh Ḥammū	Maktabat al-Shaykh Ḥammū Bābā wa Mūsā	Ghardaia, Algeria
Makt. ʿAmmī Saʿīd	Makatabat ʿAmmī Saʿīd	Ghardaia, Algeria
UBL	Library of the University of Leiden	Leiden, the Netherlands

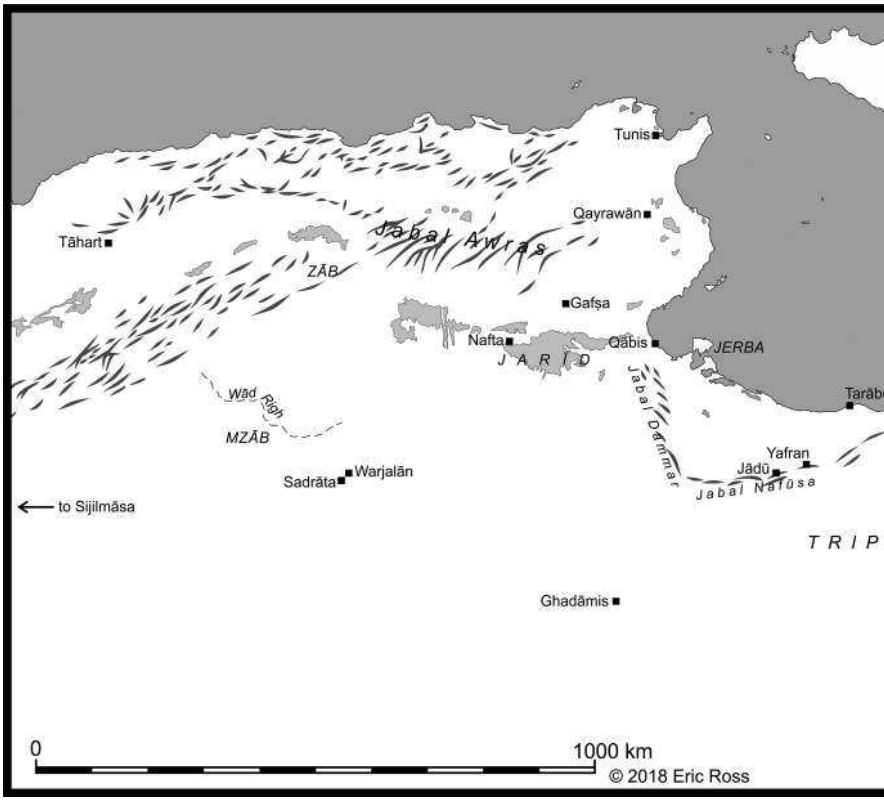

FIGURE 1: Northern Africa in the Middle Period (eleventh–sixteenth centuries). Map created by Eric Ross.

Prologue: Tunis, 2014

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On 31 October 2014 I walked into the entry hall of the Madinat al-ʿUlum ("City of Sciences") complex in the northern suburb of Ariana just outside downtown Tunis. A large crowd had gathered, drinking juice, eating sweets, and discussing the books and manuscript facsimiles on the display tables in the center of the room. This event marked the beginning of the first annual conference on the "Ibadi Books of *Siyar*" (*Kutub siyar al-Ibadiyya*). The *siyar* were works of literature compiled from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries in Northern Africa by Ibadi Muslims, a minority religious community whose adherents have lived in the region since the eighth century CE.

It was a large conference of perhaps two hundred people. In addition to regional participants from Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya, the event had attracted a large group of scholars from Oman, where most of the world's Ibadi Muslims live today. These latter stood out in their stark white *dishdasha* robes, elegant headgear, and long beards. Their Maghribi counterparts mostly wore suits, although some also dressed in white robes (often with button-down dress shirts underneath), had short beards, and a few donned small white hats. Many of the Omani students and scholars who had come were women, identifiable in their all-black attire that contrasted in its uniformity with that of other female attendees from Northern Africa and elsewhere dressed in a variety of styles. While the language of the conference was Modern Standard Arabic, the discussions took place in a variety of regional dialects of Arabic, as well as Tumzabt and French.

These two regional Ibadi communities had come together to discuss what they regard as some of the most important sources for understanding their shared past: the books of *siyar*. The meeting was especially symbolic for the Ibadi community because it was held openly in Tunis, which as more than one presenter noted would have been scarcely conceivable prior to the Tunisian revolution in January 2011. In the past, Ibadi communities in Tunisia had kept a relatively low profile, preferring not to attract the attention of the government. Nearly four years later, this conference was advertised throughout the city and on the internet. The Omanis had even brought a full production crew to film the conference. The event marked an open effort by the Tunisian Ibadi community to link their past and that of their coreligionists to the present. This was a public claim by both Northern African and Omani Ibadis that they belonged to the same religious community.

Panels discussed the genre, specific books and themes, as well as differences between the "eastern" (i.e. Omani) Ibadi meaning of *siyar* and its "western" (i.e. Maghribi) equivalent. In the east, the term *siyar* has historically referred to compilations of letters and opinions exchanged among Ibadi scholars. By contrast, in the Maghrib the *siyar* were books containing anecdotal and biographical information about individuals. Ibadis in late medieval Northern Africa never developed a genre of chronicle-style history (*ta'rikh*) as did their contemporaries in western Asia. Instead, the *siyar* played that role, telling the story of the community's past by bringing together anecdotes and biographies of its members from across time and space. In this way, the Ibadi *siyar* functioned as prosopographies, collective biographies in which stories about individual members come together to form a biography of the community. Through the inclusion or exclusion of individuals, these prosopographies drew the boundaries of the community and constructed an Ibadi tradition in Northern Africa.

Having come to Tunisia to search for manuscript copies of the Ibadi prosopographies and trace their history, I was struck by the immediate relevance and central importance of this corpus of late medieval books to this contemporary Ibadi audience. Through the conference, the participants were claiming a shared history not only between Northern Africa and Oman but also between Ibadis of the past and those of the present. For its participants, this conference was a continuation of the centuries-long maintenance of the prosopographical tradition in the region.

The event brought together widely dispersed members of the community to generate scholarly discussion and, crucially, to establish connections among them—to create a network of otherwise discontiguous

actors. Despite differences in dress and language, through their participation and attendance the individuals at the conference asserted their ties with the broader Ibadi community. In drawing a straight line between past and present, these participants were also claiming membership in a much older network that had been constructed by the prosopographies themselves.

But this seamless move from past to present, this vision of a shared history that links the medieval Ibadi communities in both Northern Africa and Oman with those of today, belies a long history of tradition building characterized by as much discontinuity as continuity. The Ibadi communities of today are not identical to those of the eighth century any more than were those of the sixteenth. Building this tradition and creating the illusion of a seamless connection through time required centuries of inclusion and exclusion of individuals and groups, the restructuring and reconceptualization of power and leadership, the compilation and transmission of texts, and the constant movement of peoples and books.

How had these the Ibadi *siyar* constructed and maintained the late medieval Ibadi tradition in Northern Africa? Why did their importance extend beyond the sixteenth century, when the tradition ended? What was the conference eliding, overlooking, or silencing by presenting the history of community in this way? How did these medieval books, which for the conference participants lay at the center of their shared history, come to occupy such a place of prominence in the twenty-first century? After attending the conference, these were the issues I decided to address and the questions for which I sought answers. The journey led me to follow circuits of people and paper across the Sahara and the Mediterranean. The result is this book, which accompanies the Ibadi books of *siyar* on their travels and traces their role in the construction and maintenance of the Ibadi tradition through the constantly changing landscapes of Northern Africa over nearly a millennium.