

Teaching Ethics in Early Ibadism: A Preliminary Study

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It was not simply Ibādī doctrine or practice, but also the unbroken transmission of these doctrines and practices by unimpeachable authorities that set the Ibādī *madhhab* above the other 72 erring groups as the true and correctly guided *fırqa*.¹



Ibadism, which today exists mainly in Oman and North Africa, can without a doubt be considered one of the oldest factions of Islam. The first Ibadis split from the Kharijites as early as the first half of the second/eighth century. Hence, studying this early Islamic minority will not only shed some light on their history and beliefs, but will also, more generally, work to fill some of the gaps in research on the formative period of Islam from a non-Sunni or Shi'i perspective.

Throughout the centuries Ibadis have managed, to a large extent, to maintain the key elements of their beliefs, which developed from the early years of the group's formation in the first half of the second/eighth century in Basra, the Ibadi center to the end of the third/ninth century. An offshoot of the quietist Kharijites, who split from the activist Khariji branch during the second *fitna*, from their early days, the Ibadis were eager to develop distinctive doctrines and practices, which were to a great extent characterized by egalitarian and moderate ideas.² Consequently, doctrines established by early Ibadis not only shaped their own identity but also contributed to the development of Islamic *kalām* (theology), *fiqh* (Islamic law), and *akhlāq* (ethics) in general.

At first glance, these doctrines might not appear to differ much from those of other groups in early Islam. However, a review of Ibadi sources reveals their

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1 Gaiser, *Teacher* lines 157.

2 Gaiser, *Scholars* 61–62; Ennāmi, *Studies* 241–243.