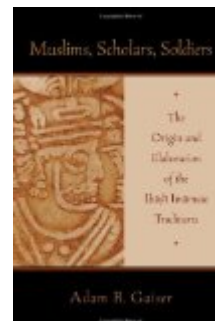


**Adam R. Gaiser.** *Muslims, Scholars, Soldiers: The Origin and Elaboration of the Ibādī Imāmate Traditions.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. viii + 203 pp. \$80.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-973893-9.



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After an extended lull, English scholarship on the history of the Ibādīyya has begun to revive in recent years. Published in 2010, Adam Gaiser's study of the origins of the Ibādī imamate traditions turned out to be the first of several new studies that would take up the Ibādīs and their intellectual history. In many ways, his study represents a significant departure from previous studies of Ibādīs and Kharijites in that it aims to place Ibādī intellectual traditions within the broader history of early and medieval Islam. In this way, the book appeals to an audience much larger than specialists in Ibādism. Rather than treating the Ibādīs as a *sui generis* community or a mere branch of an early, unified Kharijite movement, Gaiser seeks to "elucidate, for each piece of the imamate under consideration, a progression of development that begins with conceptual and institutional precedents in the pre-Islamic era and ends with specific configurations in the medieval Ibādī theory of the *imāma*" (p. 9). While this framing of intellectual history could risk constructing a teleological argument of linear development,

Gaiser avoids this by presenting Ibādīs as merely one among many of different expressions of Islam in the formative period. That is, Ibādīs neither appear *ex nihilo* nor follow a simple development direct out of Kharijism. Instead, Ibādism belongs squarely within the historical pre-Islamic and early Islamic contexts from which it emerged.

The introduction to the work lays out the goals of the study and includes a useful summary of previous work on the Ibādī imamate tradition. These studies have more often than not taken for granted the veracity of the emic Ibādī claim that the theory of the *imāma* was linked to the historical conditions of the community itself, divided into four "stages of religion" (*masālik al-dīn*): *Zuhūr*, (manifestation); *kitmān* (secrecy), *shirā'* (activism), and *difā'* (defense). This formulation is well known in English scholarship on Ibādīs, particularly since the publication of A. Ennami's *Studies in Ibādism* (1972). Previous studies, Gaiser points out, have followed Ennami in treating this version of the theory of the *imāma* as universal, with no attention to either regional specificities or

temporal contexts. This book attempts to rectify this problem, by treating each of these four elements of the Ibādī *imāma* in individual chapters and placing it in its historical context. The goal is in part to demonstrate, as the title of the work suggests, how Ibādīs elaborated these *traditions* in different times and places. In general, Gaiser frames the study of these elements using two different binaries. First, there is the distinction between the “formative Ibādī imamate,” which predates an Ibādī polity, and the “medieval Ibādī imamate,” which represents periods in which there was or had been a polity. Second, there is a crucial distinction between the two geographies in which these traditions developed: North Africa and Oman. Finally, Gaiser suggests that the Ibādī communities of these two regions also produced very different kinds of sources for talking about the *imāma*. In North Africa, where the imamate became a largely theoretical institution following the fall of the Rustamid imamate of Tahert at the beginning of the tenth century, the main sources tend to be histories and biographical dictionaries. By contrast, the imamate was a more or less continuous tradition in Oman and as a result the primary source materials are largely legal in nature.

The first chapter takes up the notion of the *imām al-Zuhūr*, an ideal type for both North African and Omani communities based on the key characteristics of piety and moral rectitude. Gaiser argues that the precedents for this idea are found in personal characteristics of pre-Islamic *sayyids*, the Prophet Muhammad, and the Qur’anic concept of *taqwā*, as well as the exemplary figures of caliphs Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, as well as early Kharijite leaders like ‘Abdallāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī. These figures were then taken up by medieval Ibādī scholars and used to theorize the concept of the *imām al-Zuhūr*. Chapter 2 examines the figure of the *Imām al-kitmān* (secrecy), which Gaiser suggests brings together the two key notions of authority and knowledge (*‘ilm*). Here, too, he identifies both pre-Islamic and early Islamic precedents, pointing to the importance of

knowledge and wisdom among pre-Islamic *sayyids* and the emphasis among early Sunni communities on the knowledge of the Imām. Medieval theorists then used the early example of the Prophet himself, as well as those of early “quietest” Kharijites leaders to develop this “fictive institution” of an *imām al-kitmān* (p. 77). Chapter 3 takes up the concept of the ‘*shārī*’ *imām*’, which Gaiser argues is a unique concept in Islamic political theory. Ibādī communities of North Africa and Oman approached this concept differently, but both ultimately connected this idea to the example of the militant activism of early Kharijites. Medieval theorists then took up this concept of militant activism (*shirā*) and transformed it into a kind of “office.” Chapter 4 addresses *imām al-difā*’ (the Imām of defense) and *imām al-da’if* (the “weak” Imām), both concepts that Gaiser argues represent “the careful balancing of authority between Imam and community” (p. 111). Despite the practical differences between the political situation of Ibādīs in North Africa and Oman, both regions appear to have privileged this role of the community in balancing the power of the leader. As in previous chapters, he identifies pre-Islamic and early Islamic precedents for this notion.

The structure and presentation of these arguments are effective and Gaiser convincingly demonstrates pre-Islamic and early Islamic precedents for each of these concepts, as well as explaining the ways in which medieval Ibādī theorists used these precedents to develop something new. However, it is striking that while the study situates medieval development of imamate theories in their North African or Omani contexts, Gaiser locates the precedents for both regions in an almost exclusively Arabian context. While the work successfully argues that both of these intellectual traditions in some ways sprang from the Basran origins of Ibādism, it also thereby tacitly assumes little or no influence from pre-Islamic or early Islamic influences in the Maghrib. This has the unfortunate effect of reinforcing the dominant depiction of North Africa as peripheral to the

broader developments of the Islamicate world, one in which the Maghrib drew its religious and political influences from the east. Admittedly, this may be the result of the source material for either region and no study can take on everything at once. It would be interesting, however, to know to what extent pre-Islamic and early Islamic precedents in North Africa influenced the development of imamate theory there.

This singular criticism, however, in no way detracts from the tremendous value of this study for historians of early Islam. Overall, this work helps deconstruct the concept of the Ibādī *imāma* and helps contextualize each of its components in time and space. Among the significant contributions of this work, then, is its attempt to demonstrate the elaboration of Ibādī political theory over several centuries and how that elaboration differed according to geographic and temporal contexts—providing an exemplary study for those interested in other minority communities in early Islam. Perhaps more valuable to the broader field of Islamic history is that Gaiser’s study shows how Ibādism itself developed out of the same religious and cultural milieu as what later became identifiably Sunnī and Shī‘ī expressions of Islam. Finally, as Gaiser himself suggests in his conclusion, this work has the potential “to serve as a stepping stone for further investigation” (p. 144) into the historical development and other intellectual precedents for Ibādī and Kharijite thought, including an investigation of their potential links with similar strands in Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity.

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