Revue d'Histoire Méditerranéenne. Vol.8 n° 02, Juin 2026, p. 140 - 150

P-ISSN: 2716-764X, E-ISSN: 2716-7747

Reçu le : 23 – 02 - 2026	Accepté le : 11 – 05 – 2026	Publié le : 30 – 06 - 2026

Ibadi thought between the Mashriq and the Maghrib: Institutional continuity and societal transformation in Oman and Algeria

الفكر الإباضي بين المشرق والمغرب: الاستمرارية المؤسسية والتحول المجتمعي في عُمان والجزائر

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Abstract:

This study explores the trajectories of Ibadi thought in Oman and Algeria by examining the factors that contributed to its institutional continuity in the Omani case and its societal transformation in the Algerian experience. The importance of the topic lies in its attempt to explain the relationship between religious thought and political and social structures, and to show how institutional contexts can shape either the continuity of ideas or the transformation of their historical functions. The study aims to explain why Ibadi thought followed two different historical paths despite sharing the same doctrinal foundations, while highlighting the role of political authority and social institutions in shaping these divergent outcomes.

The study is guided by a central question: to what extent did political and institutional structures contribute to the institutional continuity of Ibadi thought in Oman, while leading to a model of societal continuity in Algeria after the collapse of the Rustamid state? In addressing this issue, the research also examines a number of related questions concerning the role of political authority, social organization, and religious and educational institutions in reproducing or transforming Ibadi thought.

Methodologically, the study adopts an integrative approach that combines comparative analysis, structuralism, and political anthropology, while also drawing on perspectives from the sociology of religion and institutional theory. The research relies on a wide range of historical and doctrinal sources, including classical Ibadi chronicles, modern historical studies, and sociological literature dealing with the Imamate system in Oman and the ʿAzzāba institution in the M'zab Valley of Algeria.

The findings demonstrate that the Omani experience represents a model of institutional continuity in which Ibadi thought became integrated into the structures of governance, education, and the judiciary through the Imamate system, ensuring its long-term presence within the public sphere. By contrast, the Algerian experience reflects a model of functional transformation and societal continuity, as the collapse of the Rustamid state shifted Ibadi thought from centralized political authority to localized social frameworks, particularly through the ʿAzzāba system, which assumed major religious, educational, and social functions, thereby preserving Ibadi identity. The study concludes that the continuity and transformation of religious thought are shaped not only by doctrinal content but also by the political and institutional environments in which it operates, highlighting the close relationship among state, society, and the continuity of intellectual systems in Islamic history.

Keywords: Ibadi Thought, Oman, Algeria, Institutional Continuity, Societal Continuity.

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة مسارات الفكر الإباضي في كلٍّ من عُمان والجزائر، من خلال تحليل العوامل التي أسهمت في استمراريته المؤسسية في الحالة العُمانية وتحوله المجتمعي في الحالة الجزائرية. وتنبع أهمية الموضوع من كونه يسلّط الضوء على العلاقة بين الفكر الديني والبنى السياسية والاجتماعية، ويوضح كيف يمكن للسياقات المؤسسية أن تؤثر في استمرارية الأفكار

أو تحول وظائفها التاريخية. وتهدف الدراسة إلى تفسير اختلاف المسارين التاريخيين للفكر الإباضي رغم اشتراكهما في المرجعية العقدية ذاتها، مع إبراز دور السلطة السياسية والمؤسسات الاجتماعية في تشكيل هذا الاختلاف.

وتنطلق الدراسة من إشكالية رئيسة تتمثل في: إلى أي مدى أسهمت البنى السياسية والمؤسسية في تحقيق الاستمرارية المؤسسية للفكر الإباضي في عُمان، مقابل تحوله إلى نمط من الاستمرارية المجتمعية في الجزائر عقب سقوط الدولة الرستمية؟ كما تطرح الدراسة عددًا من الأسئلة الفرعية المرتبطة بدور السلطة السياسية، والبنية الاجتماعية، والمؤسسات الدينية والتعليمية في إعادة إنتاج الفكر الإباضي أو إعادة تشكيل وظائفه.

واعتمدت الدراسة منهجًا تكامليًا يجمع بين التحليل المقارن، والبنيوية، والأنثروبولوجيا السياسية، إلى جانب الاستفادة من مقاربات علم اجتماع الدين والنظرية المؤسسية. كما استندت إلى مجموعة من المصادر التاريخية والإباضية الكلاسيكية، والدراسات التاريخية الحديثة، والأدبيات السوسيولوجية المتعلقة بنظام الإمامة في عُمان ونظام العزّابة في وادي مزاب بالجزائر.

وتُظهر نتائج الدراسة أن التجربة العُمانية تمثل نموذجًا للاستمرارية المؤسسية، حيث اندمج الفكر الإباضي في بنى الدولة والحكم والتعليم والقضاء من خلال نظام الإمامة، بما ضمن استمراره داخل المجال العام. وفي المقابل، تعكس التجربة الجزائرية نموذجًا للتحول الوظيفي والاستمرارية المجتمعية، إذ أدى سقوط الدولة الرستمية إلى انتقال الفكر الإباضي من المجال السياسي المركزي إلى الأطر الاجتماعية المحلية، خاصة عبر نظام العزّابة الذي اضطلع بوظائف دينية وتعليمية واجتماعية حافظت على الهوية الإباضية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن استمرارية الفكر الديني وتحوله لا يرتبطان بالمضمون العقدي وحده، بل بطبيعة البيئة السياسية والمؤسسية التي يحتضنهما، وهو ما يبرز العلاقة العضوية بين الدولة والمجتمع واستمرارية النظم الفكرية في التاريخ الإسلامي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفكر الإباضي، عُمان، الجزائر، الاستمرارية المؤسسية، الاستمرارية المجتمعية.

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Introduction:

Ibadi thought is considered one of the oldest Islamic doctrinal traditions and represents a distinctive intellectual and social experience within the broader history of Islamic civilization. The importance of studying Ibadism lies not only in its doctrinal particularity but also in its historical ability to adapt to diverse political and social contexts. In this regard, the Ibadi experiences in Oman and Algeria provide an important comparative model for understanding how religious thought interacts with political authority, institutional structures, and social organization. Although both cases share the same doctrinal foundations, they produced significantly different historical trajectories. In Oman, Ibadi thought evolved into a stable institutional framework integrated into the structures of governance and state authority, whereas in Algeria, it underwent societal and functional transformation following the collapse of the Rustamid state, becoming increasingly rooted in localized social structures, particularly in the M'zab Valley. This divergence highlights the importance of examining the relationship between religion, institutions, and political authority in shaping the continuity or transformation of intellectual traditions.

Existing scholarship on Ibadi thought has generally developed along several major directions. A substantial body of literature has focused on the historical and doctrinal origins of Ibadism, particularly its early emergence and geographical expansion, as reflected in the works of **Wilkinson** (2010) and Muʿammar (2003). However, these studies largely remain descriptive and provide limited analysis of the structural transformations that affected Ibadi thought across different political environments. Other studies concentrated on the relationship between religion and political authority, especially in the Omani context. In this regard, al-Farsi (2010) analyzed the role of Ibadism as the official doctrine of the Omani state and demonstrated how religious institutions contributed to sustaining political continuity by integrating into state structures.

In parallel, sociological and structural approaches examined the persistence of religious and social systems under conditions of political fragmentation. Skocpol's (1979) work on states and social

revolutions offers an important analytical perspective for understanding how social systems adapt to political disruption, which is particularly relevant to the Algerian Ibadi experience after the collapse of the Rustamid state. Despite the richness of this literature, most existing studies remain confined to isolated national or doctrinal contexts and rarely provide integrative comparative analyses linking the Mashriq and the Maghrib within a unified analytical framework.

Accordingly, this study seeks to explain the divergent trajectories of Ibadi thought in Oman and Algeria by examining the role of political authority and institutional structures in shaping either continuity or transformation. The study is guided by the following central question: to what extent did political and institutional structures contribute to the institutional continuity of Ibadi thought in Oman while leading to its societal and functional transformation in Algeria?

The study also addresses several subsidiary questions related to the role of political authority, social organization, and religious institutions in shaping the continuity or transformation of Ibadi thought across different historical contexts.

For example, what role did political authority play in consolidating Ibadi thought in Oman compared to the Algerian context? How did local social structures influence either the continuity or transformation of Ibadi thought? What role did religious and educational institutions play in preserving the continuity of Ibadi thought or managing its transformation? To what extent did historical contexts—such as the collapse of the Rustamid state and the emergence of the modern state—shape the divergent trajectories of Ibadi thought? Finally, did the Algerian experience represent a model of functional transformation rather than institutional continuity?

Methodologically, the study adopts an integrative approach that combines comparative analysis, structuralism, and political anthropology. The comparative method serves as the principal analytical framework through which the Omani and Algerian experiences are examined in relation to political authority and institutional continuity. Structural analysis is employed to interpret Ibadi thought as a dynamic socio-intellectual system reproduced through interconnected institutional and social practices (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 22–32). In parallel, political anthropology provides a useful framework for understanding the interaction between religion and political authority, especially in contexts characterized by the absence or fragmentation of centralized state structures (Geertz, 1973: 5–10).

The study also adopts a qualitative functional comparison rather than a strictly quantitative approach, given the disparity in the volume of historical and institutional material available for the two cases. While the Omani experience generated extensive political and judicial documentation due to state continuity, the Algerian experience produced largely communal and localized institutional records following the collapse of centralized authority.

The study relies primarily on a combination of historical, doctrinal, and sociological sources related to the Ibadi experiences in Oman and Algeria. These include classical Ibadi chronicles, modern historical studies, institutional analyses, and sociological literature dealing with the Imamate system in Oman and the ʿAzzāba institution[1] in the M'zab Valley.

The study also draws on perspectives from the sociology of religion and institutional theory, particularly the works of Berger (1967) and North (1990), to explain how religious ideas are reproduced, transformed, and sustained through institutional and social structures over time. Through this analytical framework, the study seeks to contribute to broader discussions concerning religion, institutional continuity, identity preservation, and the relationship between state and society in Islamic history.

[1]- **The ʿAzzāba system:** A religious–social institution that emerged in the M'zab Valley (Algeria) in the 4th century AH/10th century CE as an alternative to the **Imamate of Kitmān** (the "concealed" or "non-manifest" imamate). It functions as a collective body of scholars that oversees the community's religious, judicial, and educational affairs, and it has succeeded in preserving the distinct character of the Ibadi community for more than ten centuries (Bssis & Rmita, 2022).

1. The Study's Theoretical Framework

The study of Islamic schools of thought, including Ibadism, has received growing attention in both Arab and international scholarship, as it offers valuable insights into the diversity of Islamic intellectual traditions and their ability to adapt to different social contexts. In this regard, Ibadism represents a particularly important case, as it provides an alternative interpretive framework within Islam that differs from dominant Sunni and Shiʿi traditions, contributing to wider discussions on religious diversity and social organization (Abdelfattah, 2024: 289).

Building on this perspective, the present study adopts a multi-layered theoretical framework that brings together insights from the sociology of religion, institutional theory, and interpretive historical analysis. Rather than treating Ibadi thought as a purely doctrinal system, this approach views it as a dynamic socio-intellectual structure shaped by its interaction with political authority, social organization, and institutional settings. As Berger (1967: 40–44) argues, religious ideas do not persist on their own; they are sustained through the social institutions that embed them within the public sphere.

Within this framework, continuity is understood as the ability of a religious system to reproduce itself over time through both institutional and social mechanisms while remaining active in public life. It does not imply rigidity, but rather reflects a capacity for adaptation that allows core principles to endure despite changing historical conditions. As noted by Hodgson (1974: 60–63) and Wilkinson (2010: 40–44), religious traditions that establish strong connections with both society and political authority are more likely to achieve long-term stability.

By contrast, transformation refers to the way religious thought is reshaped in response to structural changes in its surrounding environment, especially in situations marked by political instability or the absence of centralized authority. Rather than signaling decline, such transformation can be seen as a form of functional adaptation that enables survival by shifting from a comprehensive political role to more localized social or cultural functions. This is evident in the Algerian case, where the fall of the Rustamid state led to the emergence of alternative institutional arrangements, particularly the ʿAzzāba system, which helped preserve Ibadi identity within a community-based framework (Lewicki, 1955: 210–214).

To further explain these processes, the study draws on institutional theory, particularly North's (1990: 3–5) emphasis on the role of institutions in shaping patterns of continuity and change. From this perspective, the endurance of ideas depends on their integration within stable institutional structures that regulate behavior and sustain meaning over time. This helps explain why the Omani experience reflects a model of institutional continuity, with Ibadi thought embedded within state structures, while the Algerian experience represents a form of functional transformation, in which society assumes the role of sustaining and reproducing the tradition.

Finally, the study adopts a comparative analytical perspective inspired by Skocpol (1979: 33–36), which highlights how different structural contexts can produce divergent historical outcomes even when they share the same intellectual foundations. Rather than assessing which model is superior, the study seeks to explain how varying configurations of state, society, and institutions shape the continuity or transformation of religious thought across different geopolitical settings.

2. The Conceptual and Historical Framework of Ibadi Thought

a. The emergence of Ibadi thought and its general features

The emergence of Ibadi thought should be understood within the broader context of early Islamic political and intellectual transformations, where questions of authority, legitimacy, and social organization were closely intertwined with doctrinal debates during the formative stages of the Islamic state. Although its development was influenced by the political tensions that followed the First Fitna, Ibadi thought gradually moved beyond being a simple political reaction and evolved into a structured socio-intellectual system with its own internal logic and organizational principles (Hodgson, 1974: 264–265).

One of the key features of Ibadi thought is its relative doctrinal moderation and its strong emphasis on social cohesion and collective organization. While it shares many jurisprudential similarities with other Islamic traditions, particularly Sunni thought, it developed a balanced position that rejected extremism and prioritized communal stability. This orientation is reflected in its emphasis on consultation (shūrā), justice, and the ethical qualifications of leadership, as well as its rejection of rigid exclusionary positions such as the excommunication of Muslims for major sins[2]
(Hoffman, 2012: 3; al-Nami, 2012: 22).

At the same time, the Ibadi thought developed a distinctly pragmatic and organizational character that enabled it to adapt to different political contexts. Rather than maintaining a fixed or confrontational stance toward political authority, it showed a high degree of flexibility, at times integrating into state structures and at other times creating alternative institutional arrangements when such structures were absent. This adaptability was closely linked to its emphasis on the centrality of the community as a framework for religious and social life, as well as its capacity to sustain itself through both institutional and social mechanisms
(Wilkinson, 2010; Muʿammar, 2003: 111–114).

From a sociological perspective, Ibadi thought can therefore be understood not simply as a doctrinal system, but as a dynamic social structure that is continuously reproduced through institutions, practices, and collective organization. As Berger (1967: 32–35) suggests, religious ideas endure by being embedded within social frameworks that sustain them over time. This perspective helps explain the divergence between the Omani and Algerian trajectories, where Ibadi thought achieved institutional continuity in Oman through its integration into state structures, while in Algeria it underwent a process of functional transformation, reconstituting itself within localized social frameworks.

b. The spread of Ibadism in the East (the Sultanate of Oman)

The emergence of Ibadi thought in Oman can be traced to the early Islamic period, where it developed within a particular political and social context that enabled it to evolve from a doctrinal current into a structured framework capable of organizing both society and governance[3]. This transformation reached a decisive stage with the establishment of the Ibadi Imamate, which provided a legitimate political structure through which religious thought became directly embedded in the mechanisms of authority. As a result, Ibadi affiliation moved beyond the sphere of jurisprudence to become a central source of political legitimacy and social organization
(al-Farsi, 2010: 84–88).

In this setting, the Imamate functioned as an integrated politico-religious institution that combined doctrinal authority with administrative organization. It was not merely a political authority in the conventional sense, but rather a normative system that regulated the relationship between ruler and society based on consultation (shūrā), justice, and moral accountability. This institutional arrangement enabled Ibadi thought to become organically linked to structures of governance, ensuring its continued reproduction within a stable political environment. As **Wilkinson** (2010: 40–

[2]- On the conditions of the Imamate (leadership), **Ibadis** largely agree with Ahl al-Jamāʿa (Sunni tradition) regarding key requirements for the imamate, such as the imam's justice and integrity, piety, ruling by the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Prophet, and the imam's possession of both religious and worldly authority—along with selection through bayʿa (consultation/shūrā). However, they differ on points that are not viewed as departing from Islamic law. For example, they do not require the imam to be of Arab Quraysh lineage: Abū ʿUbayda Muslim ibn Abī Karīma held a leading role despite being described as a one-eyed Black man, which is presented as evidence, within Ibadi literature, of the school's commitment to merit over lineage. They also maintain the obligation to depose an imam who deviates from the Sharīʿa, and they reject the validity of establishing the imamate through a designated bequest (waṣiyya). (al-Shakkaʿa, 1996: 137; Mahdi, 2011: 237-241; Muʿammar, 2003: 85-91; al-Jaʿbiri, 2004: 33-66)

[3]- For further details on the historical beginnings of the Khārijites and the emergence of the Ibadi community in the Islamic East, see, for example: (Muʿammar, episode (1), 2008: 108; Bajia, 1976: 35; Qashshar, 1990: 8).

44) notes, the early alignment between Ibadism and the Imamate played a decisive role in shaping Omani political identity and laid the foundation for long-term continuity.

This continuity was further strengthened by the close interaction between state structures and social organization. The tribal system, a central component of Omani society, complemented the political framework by providing a stable social base that supported governance, reduced internal conflict, and facilitated the transmission of religious authority. Through this interaction between social cohesion and institutional governance, Ibadi thought was able to sustain itself across generations (Hodgson, 1974: 270).

At the same time, educational and religious institutions played a key role in maintaining the intellectual and social continuity of Ibadism. Through mosques, scholarly circles, traditional schools, and judicial structures, Ibadi knowledge was continuously reproduced and transmitted, securing its lasting presence in the public sphere. As **Berger** (1967: 32–35) suggests, religious ideas endure through the "social canopy" provided by institutions and practices that sustain them, a condition that was clearly fulfilled in the Omani case through the integration of political authority, social organization, and institutionalized education.

Taken together, these interrelated factors produced a distinctive model of institutional continuity in which Ibadi thought became an integral part of national identity rather than a marginal doctrinal affiliation. This model allowed Ibadism to adapt to historical change without losing its core principles, reflecting a form of dynamic continuity rather than rigid preservation. Even during periods of modernization, particularly after 1970, Ibadi scholars demonstrated a capacity to engage with new social and economic realities by drawing not only on traditional sources but also on broader intellectual currents within the Islamic world. This adaptive flexibility further strengthened the resilience of Ibadi thought within the evolving structure of the modern Omani state
(Goshey, 2019: 285–286).

The Omani experience thus illustrates how the integration of religious thought within stable political and institutional frameworks can produce a durable model of continuity, in which the state functions as a central incubator for the reproduction and development of intellectual systems. This case provides a crucial point of comparison for understanding alternative trajectories of Ibadi thought in contexts where such institutional support is absent, as will be explored in the Algerian case.

3. The spread of Ibadism in the West (Algeria)

The trajectory of Ibadi thought in Algeria reflects a structural context that is fundamentally different from its counterpart in Oman, particularly following the collapse of the Rustamid state, which had served as the central political framework supporting Ibadi presence in the Maghrib[4]. During the Rustamid period (160–296 AH / 777–909 CE), Ibadism functioned as a comprehensive socio-political system that combined religious authority with political governance and social organization. This institutional structure enabled Ibadi thought to operate in the public sphere, supported by stable administrative, judicial, and educational institutions that reinforced its legitimacy and continuity (Abu Nahel, 2025: 32).

However, the fall of the Rustamid state marked a critical turning point that fundamentally transformed the role and function of Ibadi thought in Algeria. With the disappearance of centralized political authority, Ibadism lost the institutional framework that had previously allowed it to exercise broad socio-political influence. As a result, it underwent a process of restructuring, shifting from a comprehensive system of governance to a more localized form of social organization. This transformation did not indicate a decline of Ibadi thought, but rather its adaptation to a new political reality characterized by fragmentation and the absence of state support
(al-Jilali, 1965: 233–235; Aillet, 2016).

[4]- For further details on the historical beginnings of the emergence of the Ibadi community in the Islamic Maghrib, see, for example: (Muʿammar, episodes 2, 4, 2008: 146; Abū Zakariyya, 1982: 15; al-Darjini, 1974, vol. 1: 7, 11-12; al-Shammākhī, vol. 1, 1992: 113-114; al-Busaidi, 2002: 22-23).

In response to this structural disruption, Ibadi communities in regions such as the M'zab Valley developed alternative institutional arrangements aimed at preserving religious identity and social cohesion. The most prominent of these was the ʿAzzāba system, which emerged as a collective body responsible for organizing religious, educational, and social affairs within the community. Rather than functioning merely as a religious institution, the ʿAzzāba system operated as a comprehensive organizational framework that assumed many roles typically associated with the state, including social regulation, dispute resolution, and the management of communal life. In this sense, it can be understood as a form of "societal institutionalization" that compensated for the absence of centralized political authority (Lewicki, 1955: 210–218).

This shift from state-based institutionalization to community-based organization reflects a broader process of functional transformation, through which Ibadi thought redefined its role in response to changing structural conditions. Instead of seeking to re-establish a centralized political system, Ibadi communities prioritized the preservation of identity through localized mechanisms of governance and social control. Consequently, the locus of continuity moved from the state to society, with local institutions—such as the ʿAzzāba, mosques, and educational networks—becoming the primary means of transmitting religious thought across generations (Bssis & Rmita, 2022).

The Algerian experience thus demonstrates that the absence of political authority does not necessarily lead to the disappearance of religious systems, but may instead give rise to alternative forms of continuity rooted in social structures. This model of societal continuity differs fundamentally from the institutional continuity observed in Oman, as it relies on localized networks rather than centralized authority. Nevertheless, it reflects a similar capacity for adaptation, highlighting the resilience of Ibadi thought as a socio-intellectual system capable of reconfiguring itself in response to structural constraints.

Accordingly, the Algerian case provides a critical counterpoint to the Omani model, illustrating how religious thought can persist and endure outside the framework of the state through processes of functional transformation. This reinforces the study's central argument that the trajectory of religious ideas is shaped not only by their doctrinal content but also by the political and institutional environments in which they are embedded.

4. A preliminary comparison between the Islamic East and West

Table 1 summarizes the key structural differences between the Omani and Algerian trajectories. Rather than reflecting doctrinal divergence, these differences highlight the decisive role of political and institutional contexts in shaping the continuity or transformation of Ibadi thought.

Table 1:

Structural comparison of Ibadi trajectories in Oman and Algeria

Factor	Oman	Algeria
Political legitimacy	Strong through the Imamate system	Absence of a unifying political framework after the fall of the Rustamid state
Social organization	Integrated with tribes and towns	Local and limited to the M'zab Valley
Religious institutions	A continuous system of education and judiciary	Limited alternative institutions (the ʿAzzāba system)
Continuity of thought	Clear institutional continuity	Local functional transformation, without comprehensive institutional continuity

Source: Compiled by the authors

The table indicates that Ibadi's trajectory was not determined by doctrinal reference alone, but was also shaped by surrounding political, social, and institutional structures. In Oman, the integration of political legitimacy, social organization, and religious institutions produced clear institutional continuity. In Algeria, by contrast, the absence of a unifying political framework after the fall of the Rustamid state pushed Ibadi thought toward a limited local social presence—preserving identity without comprehensive institutional continuity—thereby reinforcing the study's central hypothesis.

5. Institutional Continuity and Societal Transformation: A Comparative Analysis of Ibadi Trajectories

The main contribution of this study lies in showing how a single intellectual tradition—Ibadi thought—can take different paths depending on the political and institutional context in which it develops. Although Oman and Algeria share the same doctrinal foundation, their historical experiences diverged in important ways due to differences in political authority and institutional structures. In Oman, the existence of a stable political framework, represented by the Imamate, allowed Ibadi thought to become closely integrated into both governance and society (al-Farsi, 2010: 84–88; Wilkinson, 2010: 40–44). In contrast, the collapse of the Rustamid state in Algeria created a political vacuum that pushed Ibadi thought to reorganize itself within the local social sphere (al-Jilali, 1965: 233–235; Aillet, 2016).

This contrast highlights the central role of political structures in shaping the development of religious thought. In Oman, continuity was achieved through the integration of religion into state institutions such as governance, education, and the judiciary (North, 1990: 3–5; al-Farsi, 2010: 91–95). In Algeria, however, the absence of centralized authority led to a different pattern, where society itself became the main carrier of Ibadi identity through local networks such as the ʿAzzāba system (Lewicki, 1955: 210–218). In this sense, the shift can be understood as a move from institutional continuity to what may be called societal continuity.

Despite these differences, both cases show that society plays a key role in sustaining religious thought, though in different ways. In Oman, society worked alongside the state, reinforcing Ibadi thought within the public sphere through institutional participation (Hodgson, 1974: 270; al-Nami, 2012: 74–80; Ziyan, 2025). In Algeria, by contrast, society took on a substitute role, compensating for the absence of the state and preserving religious identity through local forms of organization, particularly in the M'zab Valley (Bssis & Rmita, 2022; Shaʿshūʿ, 2023). This difference highlights the flexibility of Ibadi thought as a system capable of adapting to both centralized and decentralized settings.

From this perspective, the transformation seen in Algeria should not be understood as a decline, but as a form of adaptation to changing structural conditions. While Ibadi thought in Oman maintained a broad role within a unified political system, in Algeria, it reorganized itself into a more localized framework focused on preserving identity (Gauthier, 2010: 171; Lewicki, 1955: 210–214; Ṭaʿa, 2023: 273-292). Overall, these findings suggest that the development of religious ideas depends not only on their doctrinal content, but also on the political and institutional environments in which they exist, reinforcing the study's main argument about the relationship between state, society, and the continuity of intellectual traditions (Skocpol, 1979: 33–36).

To further consolidate the structural comparison between the Omani and Algerian experiences, the following table summarizes the core differences that define the trajectory of Ibadi thought in each context. It highlights key analytical dimensions related to the nature of the political framework, the pattern of continuity, the function of thought, the scope of influence, and its relationship with the structure of the state. This synthetic presentation offers a point of entry for understanding the structural divergence between the model of institutional continuity in Oman and the model of societal continuity in Algeria.

Table 2:
Summary of the structural comparison of Ibadi trajectories in Oman and Algeria

Analytical dimension	Oman	Algeria
Political framework	Stable (the Imamate)	Absent after 296 AH/909 CE
Pattern of continuity	Institutional	Societal
Function of thought	Comprehensive organization	Preservation of identity
Scope of influence	National/public	Local/limited
Relationship to the state	Organic integration	Near-complete separation

Source: Compiled by the authors

The table indicates that the key difference between the two cases lies not in Ibadi thought itself, but in its position within the structure of state and society. Political stability in Oman allowed Ibadi thought to be organically integrated into institutions of governance and the organization of the public sphere. In Algeria, the absence of the state redirected Ibadi thought toward preserving identity within a limited local social framework—reinforcing the distinction between institutional continuity and societal continuity reached by the study.

Conclusion:

The findings of this study show that the development of Ibadi thought is shaped less by its doctrinal content alone and more by the political and institutional environments in which it operates. The comparison between Oman and Algeria makes it clear that political context is the key factor explaining their different trajectories. In Oman, the early integration of Ibadi thought within the institutional framework of the Imamate helped create a stable politico-religious system that ensured its long-term continuity. In contrast, the collapse of the Rustamid state in Algeria removed the political structure that had supported Ibadi thought, forcing it to reorganize within a more localized social setting.

The study also highlights that religious ideas endure not simply because of their doctrines, but because they are embedded within institutions capable of sustaining and reproducing them over time. This aligns with institutional approaches in the social sciences, which emphasize the role of both formal and informal structures in shaping continuity and change. In Oman, Ibadi thought became deeply integrated into state institutions such as governance, education, and the judiciary, securing its presence in the public sphere. In Algeria, however, the absence of centralized authority led to a different pattern, in which social institutions—especially the ʿAzzāba system—took responsibility for preserving religious identity.

In both cases, society plays a central role in maintaining religious thought, though in different ways. In Oman, society worked alongside the state, reinforcing Ibadi continuity through institutional participation and social organization. In Algeria, by contrast, society acted as a substitute for the absent state, becoming the main carrier of Ibadi identity. This shift shows how social structures can sustain religious systems even in fragmented political environments.

From this perspective, the Algerian experience should not be seen as a decline of Ibadi thought, but rather as a form of adaptation to changing conditions. While the Omani model reflects institutional continuity through the close relationship between religion and the state, the Algerian model reflects societal continuity through local forms of organization. This contrast highlights the flexibility of Ibadi thought as a dynamic system capable of adapting to different structural conditions.

Overall, these findings point to a broader conclusion: the continuity and transformation of religious ideas depend on the interaction between doctrine and the political and institutional contexts in which they exist. This reinforces the study's central argument that the relationship between state, society, and institutions plays a decisive role in shaping the historical trajectories of intellectual traditions.

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