

The Interpretation of Islam under Sultan Qaboos (7000 words)
Valerie J. Hoffman, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Oman is the only country in the world in which the majority of Muslims belong to the Ibadi School. Ibadism provides an ethos of egalitarianism and a strong impulse toward justice, while at the same time sometimes being a source of instability, most recently in the Jabal Akhdar war of the 1950s. Sultan Qaboos was able to heal the wounds of that war and to chart a path that balanced pride in the Ibadi heritage with a deliberately nonsectarian approach to the teaching of Islam, in addition to providing freedom to non-Muslims to practice their religions. This chapter will discuss the interpretation of Islam promoted by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs during the reign of Sultan Qaboos, looking at the role of the Mufti of the Sultanate, Shaykh Aḥmad b. Ḥamad al-Khalīlī, and that of the Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Shaykh Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Salmi. These two religious scholars, in some ways very different from each other, have each played important roles in promoting religious tolerance and articulating the meaning of Islam in Oman today.