



*The people's democratic republic of Algeria*

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## **The Rustamid Dynasty and the Rise of Local Authority (8th–10th Centuries)**

### **1. Background**

The weakening of Abbasid control opened space for independent political movements. One such movement came from the Ibadi branch of Islam, a moderate offshoot of the Kharijites. The Ibadis, who rejected both Umayyad and Abbasid rule, sought to establish a just and consultative Islamic state. Persecuted in the East, many Ibadis migrated to North Africa, particularly Algeria.

### **2. Founding of the Rustamid State**

In 776 CE (160 AH), Abd al-Rahman ibn Rustam, a Persian-born scholar and Ibadi leader, was proclaimed imam by his followers in Tahert, near present-day Tiaret. This marked the beginning of the Rustamid Dynasty, which lasted until 909 CE. Unlike dynasties driven by royal power, the Rustamid imamate was based on religious merit and consultation (shura). Leaders were selected by consensus among scholars and elders.

### **3. Political and Religious Organization**

The Rustamid state was unique:

- It emphasized egalitarian governance and modesty.
  - It promoted religious tolerance, allowing Christians, Jews, and Sunni Muslims to live peacefully within its borders.
  - It was not expansionist but focused on internal stability and intellectual development.
- The Rustamids encouraged education and learning. Tahert became a vibrant intellectual hub, known for its libraries, schools, and scholarly debates. The state also became a base for spreading Ibadi doctrine throughout the Sahara and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **4. Economic Strength**

Located at a strategic junction of the trans-Saharan trade routes, Tahert prospered economically. The state traded in gold, salt, slaves, and other goods, establishing strong ties with the Sahel and southern markets. Its wealth allowed for the development of urban centers and cultural life, even as it maintained a modest, conservative social structure.

### **5. Decline and Fall**

The Rustamid state eventually faced challenges from both within and without. Internal disagreements weakened central authority, while the Fatimids, an Ismaili Shi'a movement rising in nearby Ifriqiya (Tunisia), launched military campaigns against it. In 909 CE, the Fatimids captured Tahert and overthrew the Rustamids. Many Ibadis fled south to Mzab, where Ibadi communities still exist today.