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Mirdās b. Udayya

Abū Bilāl **Mirdās b. Udayya** (d. 61/680–1) was an early Basran Khārijī (*shurāt*) hero and martyr. He was from the Rabīʿa b. Ḥanzala branch of the Tamīm tribe, and Udayya was said to be his mother’s name. According to the sources, his father’s name was Ḥudayr (al-Balādhurī, 5:188). Nothing of his early life is known, and the stories of his later exploits are so heavily steeped in legend that it is perhaps more appropriate to approach them as hagiography (Gaiser, *Tracing the ascetic life*, 67–8). He and his brother ʿUrwa are reported to have participated in the Battle of Şiffīn (37/657), to have rejected the arbitration agreement (*tahkīm*) between ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) and Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), and thereby to have been some of the first Khārijīs, later known as the Muḥakkima (al-Balādhurī, 5:188–9; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, 1:278). Indeed, his brother ʿUrwa was

said to be the first to utter the distinctive Khārijī slogan *lā ḥukm illā li-llāh* (“No judgment but by God”), from which the term Muḥakkima (that is, “those who say the *lā ḥukm* slogan”) is said to be derived. He is also reported to have drawn the first sword in protest against the arbitration (al-Mubarrad, 3:129; Ibn al-Jawzī, 134; al-Baghdādī, 52; al-Shahrastānī, 117–8). The Udayya brothers survived the battle of Nahrawān (38/658), returning to Basra where they became important figures among the nascent *shurāt* movement there. Abū Bilāl, for example, was said to have shamed the governor ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād (d. 67/686) with a Qurʾānic verse, threatened a notable for maligning the *shurāt*, and censored another notable for wearing expensive clothing (Gaiser, *Shurāt legends*, 63). He earned a reputation for moderation (or, perhaps more accurately, his story was remembered by moderate Khārijīs) for his criticism of his fellow Basran Khārijī rebels Qarīb b. Murra al-Azdī and Zuḥḥāf b. Zaḥr al-Ṭāʿī (both d. 53/672–3) for engaging in random killing (*istiʿrād*) during their uprising in 53/672–3 (Gaiser, *Shurāt legends*, 59; al-Balādhurī, 5:183; al-Ṭabarī, 2:91; Ibn Khayyāt, 135–7).

Abū Bilāl was compelled to rebellion by the persecution of the *shurāt* at the hands of Ibn Ziyād (the governor of Basra), particularly by his interrogation and killing of a female Khārijī followed by the display of her dismembered corpse in the marketplace of Basra (al-Balādhurī, 5:189). In 58/678, Abū Bilāl left the city with a small group of followers (whose numbers grew to forty) and went to Āsik (a district of Ahwāz between Arajān and Rāmhurmuz). Muslim sources emphasise the restraint of their revolt as well as their piety, for example, Abū Bilāl reportedly

vowed only to attack those who attacked his followers. Likewise, they were said to have intercepted a representative of Ibn Ziyād who was carrying the stipends (*atā'*) for the Basran garrison, but took only what was due to them (al-Mubarrad, 3:177; Ibn Khayyāt, 159; al-Balādhurī, 5:191). In 60/680 Ibn Ziyād sent an army of 2,000, led by Aslam b. Zur'ā (d. late first or early second/late seventh or early eighth century) to destroy the rebels, but they suffered an embarrassing defeat at the hands of Abū Bilāl's tiny force. The rout was so humiliating that Ibn Ziyād was forced to dispatch guards (*shurṭa*) to the marketplace to stop the heckling of Ibn Zur'ā (al-Mubarrad, 3:178; al-Balādhurī, 5:191–2; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, 1:218–9; al-Ṭabarī, 2:187). Later that year Ibn Ziyād sent a larger force of between 3,000 and 4,000 under the command of 'Abbād b. 'Alqama (or Akhdar; d. late first or early second/late seventh or early eighth century). Finding Abū Bilāl's group at either Tawwaj or Darābjird (both in the province of Fārs), the armies began fighting on a Friday. When the time for prayers arrived, Abū Bilāl called for a temporary truce to perform the canonical prayer (*ṣalāt*), and Ibn 'Alqama agreed to the ceasefire. However, during the prayer as Abū Bilāl's group prostrated (that is, placed their foreheads on the ground to perform *sujūd*), Ibn 'Alqama's army fell upon them, taking their heads back to Basra and displaying them on posts (Gaiser, *Shurāt legends*, 66; al-Mubarrad, 3:179–82; al-Ṭabarī, 2:391; al-Balādhurī, 5:193; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, 1:279). For his treachery, the Basran Khārijīs later killed Ibn 'Alqama in revenge.

Abū Bilāl's reputation as an ascetic, martyr, and hero insured that his memory was widely preserved among the *shurāt* and even beyond them. Several poems,

notably those of the Khārijī poet 'Imrān b. Ḥiṭṭān (d. 84/703), eulogise Abū Bilāl and his followers (Gaiser, *Shurāt legends*, 67–8; 'Abbās, 53ff, 140–4). A number of Khārijī groups claimed him as a founder, as did some Mu'tazilīs and Shī'īs (al-Baghdādī, 71–2; al-Mubarrad, 3:153, 200). Among the Ibādiyya, Abū Bilāl became the model for the kind of principled resistance to tyranny that the Ibādiyya favoured. His story appears in works across the spectrum of Ibāḍī literature (see, for example, al-Darjīnī, 2:214–26; al-Shammākhī, 1:177–9; al-Izkawī, 2:743–9; Kāshif, 1:110–2, 234–6; 2:314; al-Kindī, 3:297). Abū Bilāl later emerged as the prototype for a certain type of provisional leader, known as the *imām al-shārī* (lit., imam of exchange, i.e., of one's life for paradise), whose purpose it was (in theory) to lead the Ibāḍī *shurāt* in their struggle against oppression with hopes of establishing an Ibāḍī imāmate (Gaiser, *The Ibāḍī "stages of religion,"* 214, 219).

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Miṣḥafā Rash

The *Miṣḥafā Rash* (Kurd., “The black book/codex”) is one of what were once thought to be the two sacred texts of the Yazīdīs, the other one being the *Kitāb al-Jilwa* (Ar., “The book of illumination”). On the history of the finding, publication, and investigation of the two Yazīdī “sacred books,” including the *Miṣḥafā Rash*, see Omarkhali, *Kitāb al-Jilwa*.

Scholars have differed concerning the dating, language, and authorship of these two Yazīdī “sacred books.” Forbes, who visited the Yazīdīs in Shingāl (Ar. Sinjār) in 1838, ascribed the authorship of the *Miṣḥafā Rash* to Shaykh ‘Adī b. Musāfir al-Hakkārī (d. c.557/1162; Empson, 153, n. 1), the founder of the ‘Adawīyya Şūfī order who became the central, highly venerated figure of the Yazīdīs.

The *Miṣḥafā Rash* discusses cosmogony, the creation of humankind, and the history of the Yazīdī community, as well as listing prohibitions related to food, deeds, and the pronouncing of some words. It begins with the myth of cosmogony,

which, contrary to other parts of the text, partly coincides with the “orthodox” variant of cosmogony, and with how it is given in the Yazīdī religious hymns (*qawls*), as well as with some popular creation myth variants. It narrates that in the beginning, God created the white Pearl out of his most precious essence. He also created the bird Angar. God placed the white Pearl on the back of this bird, and he dwelt on it for forty thousand years.

According to the *Miṣḥafā Rash*, the first day of the creation was Sunday. This contradicts Yazīdī oral tradition, which claims that the creation of the world began on a Saturday and ended on a Friday (e.g., in Kurdish *Qewlê Şêx û Aqûb* and *Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr*). According to the *Miṣḥafā Rash*, on the first day, Sunday, God created the angel Anzāzīl, also called Ṭāwūs-i Malak (Kurd., Tawûsî Melek). On Monday, He created the angel Dardā‘īl, also called Shaykh Ḥasan; on Tuesday, Isrāfīl, also called Shaykh Shams al-Dīn; on Wednesday, Mīkhā‘īl, or Shaykh Abū Bakr; on Thursday, ‘Azrā‘īl, called Sajād al-Dīn; on Friday, Shamnā‘īl, and he is Nāşir al-Dīn; on Saturday, Nūrā‘īl, and he is Yādīn (Fakhr al-Dīn). After that, God made Ṭāwūs-i Malak the ruler of all (Joseph, 18ff). After that, God made the forms of the seven heavens, the earth, the sun, and the moon. Fakhr al-Dīn created man, the animals, the birds, and the beasts. It is said that God put them all in pockets of cloth and came out of the Pearl accompanied by the angels. Then he shouted at the Pearl with a loud voice. The white Pearl broke up into four pieces, and from its midst came the water that would become an ocean. It is written that the world was round and was not divided.

The *Miṣḥafā Rash* also informs us about the creation of Gabriel, Adam and Eve, the Yazīdī community from Adam, other