

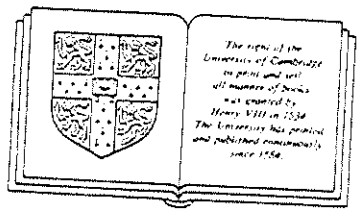
COL. 3369(3)

CAR 2A 861.104 REL

RELIGION, LEARNING
AND SCIENCE
IN THE
‘ABBASID PERIOD

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EDITED BY
M. J. L. YOUNG, J. D. LATHAM AND
R. B. SERJEANT



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE
NEW YORK PORT CHESTER
MELBOURNE SYDNEY

A.211813

CHAPTER 3

IBĀḌĪ THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

ZUHŪR: THE EXPANSION OF IBAḌISM

The same general conditions which allowed the 'Abbasids to establish their power in the core of the Islamic world were also exploited by the Ibāḍīs (the chief sect of the Kharijites¹) to establish states in parts of its periphery. During the last decade of Umayyad rule their movement in Basra had been transformed into a full-scale *da'wah* under the guidance of Abū 'Ubaydah Muslim b. abī Karīmah, propagating its ideology among two major disaffected groups, the Berbers of North Africa and the Yamanī tribes in southern Arabia (notably the Azd). Basran political and social networks were also exploited, particularly those of the merchants of the old Sasanid *Ard al-Hind*, so that cells of Ibaḍism came into being in parts of Khurāsān, Kirmān, Sijistān and al-Baḥrayn. Lesser colonies also existed in other parts of Iraq and even in Egypt: but Syria seems to have been barren ground.

Political activation of the movement in the Maghrib appears to have been precipitated by the rival propaganda of the Ṣufrīs (another Kharijite sect) in about 126/743-4, but the first full realization (*zuhūr*) of an Ibāḍī state resulted from a joint 'Umānī-Ḥaḍramī-Yamanī expedition which established 'Abdullāh b. Yaḥyā al-Kindī (*Ṭālib al-Ḥaqq*) in Yemen and took the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina in the *hajj* of 129/747. 'Abdullāh was killed shortly afterwards. Following the suppression of this uprising, a rump imamate survived for a while in the Ḥaḍramawt and a weak (*da'if*) imam, al-Julandā b. Mas'ūd, was brought to power in 'Umān: both areas however, were early on brought under 'Abbasid control. In the Maghrib the fortunes of the numerous centres of Ibaḍism had a complicated history but, reputedly in 144/761-2, a new colony, remote from the main Arab centres, was founded at Tāhart, and in about 160/776-7 was sufficiently strong openly to proclaim 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rustam (d. 168/784) as the imam. A decade or so later the Mashriqī Ibāḍīs began to exploit the internal political divisions of 'Umān and finally overthrew Julandā rule in 177/793 to establish a century of strong (*shārī*) imamate rule. Some time in the fourth

¹ See *CHALUP*, 220-1, 413-4.

decade of the third/ninth century the old directing centre in Basra closed and its last "imam", Abū Sufyān Maḥbūb b. al-Raḥīl, returned to join his son in the new state: Abū ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad b. abī Sufyān in turn acted as a general adviser to the other Ibāḍī communities until his death in 260/873. In Ḥaḍramawt a small (*difāʿī*) imamate existed based on the Wādī Daʿwān.

The Ibāḍī community, however, was by no means unified. Following the death of Abū ʿUbaydah (shortly after the ʿAbbasids came to power), a doctrinal dispute began to emerge amongst his followers, notably between his successor al-Rabīʿ b. Ḥabīb al-Farāhīdī (d. 170/786) and a group which propounded views that threatened the integrity (*ijmāʿ*) of the community. Surviving written material shows that amongst the issues involved was the attitude that communal prayer was not indispensable, and that the views of previous generations over such issues as *fitnah* were not binding: associated with this was an attempt to classify degrees of sin. Other matters at stake reflected current debate elsewhere in the Islamic community, *tashbīb*, *qadar*, *shakk*, *ʿaql*, the "creation" of the Qurʾān, and so on. So internal divisions began to emerge and an Ibāḍī heresiography came into existence: politically the most important breakaway group were the Nukkarites, the deniers of the legitimacy of the second Rustamid imam, ʿAbd al-Waḥhāb b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (168–208/784–823). In the Mashriq the community was doctrinally threatened by Hārūn b. al-Yamān, but Abū Sufyān managed to hold the "orthodox" line of what became known as Wahbiyyah Ibaḍism in ʿUmān and Ḥaḍramawt; however, the Yamānīs (who had never re-established an imamate) broke away.

LITERATURE OF THE PERIOD

The nature of such Ibāḍī literature as exists from this period of *ḡubūr* may only be understood in the light of the fact that the tradition remained oral. Strengthening the community was what mattered, and this came through attracting members to a leading ʿālim's *majlis*; notions concerning the resulting states of association (*wilāyah*), or dissociation (*barāʿah*) with other Muslims in due course came to cover "soundness" of legal opinions (*fatāwā*), and eventually elaborated to determine the conditions for breaking away and deposing an imam. Originally, all missionaries (*ḥamalāt al-ʿilm*) were trained in Basra, but as the imamates became established the leading ulema developed their own centres locally. In this way the true learning was expanded spatially from node to node and temporarily by a line of teachers who had inherited a communally developed *ijmāʿ* (not *taqlīd*). Mutual debate was always preferred when resolving problems

confronting the community, so that written exchanges were exceptional.

Ibādī theological literature therefore really only came into existence when personal communication was difficult. At one level we thus have what is little more than fragmentary correspondence, inter- and intra-community opinions and advice offered individually or collectively to imams and other ulema. Such "letters" are generally termed *sīrabs*, and a considerable quantity have survived in various recensions: perhaps the earliest is the only written work we know by Abū 'Ubaydah, a treatise on *ḡakāb* written to a Maghribī. Written communication with the Maghribī community, encouraged perhaps by the bibliophile tendencies of the increasingly urbane Tāhart imams, in fact resulted in the only large-scale recording of material from the early Ibādī period, for the Mashriq remained for some time the main advisory centre and there was no reliable contact outside the *ḡajj*: most of these works remained more or less unknown in 'Umān for a long time. Perhaps the most important is a complex of *fatāwā* from the earliest teachers: the *Kitāb Jābir* (Abū Sha'thā' Jābir b. Zayd, the supposed teaching founder of the movement who died in 93/711-12), the *Kitāb Ḍumām b. Sā'ib* (the main teacher of Abū 'Ubaydah Muslim b. abī Karīmah and the leading figure of "proto-Ibādism") and the *Athār* of al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb al-Farāhīdī. Much of this collection, in reality, seems to have been set down by Abū Ṣufrah 'Abd al-Malik b. Ṣufrah (the *Kitāb Abī Ṣufrah*), probably in the first third of the third/ninth century; one of his main sources was al-Haytham b. 'Adī (d. c. 206/821-2). Another important source was the last Basran "imam", Abū Sufyān, who himself really began to rationalize Ibādī history in a biography of the early Ibādīs written specifically for the Maghribīs: unfortunately this *Kitāb Abī Sufyān* only appears to survive in the recensions of al-Darjīnī, al-Barrādī and al-Shammākhī (seventh to ninth/thirteenth to fifteenth centuries). The third major early work is the *Mudawwanah*,² reputedly written for the imam 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. 'Abd al-Raḡmān by Abū Ghānim Bashīr b. Ghānim al-Khurāsānī, but almost certainly, like the *Kitāb Abī Sufyān*, for his son the imam Aflaḡ: it contains the legal opinions (*fatāwā*) of seven of Abū 'Ubaydah's pupils (including the "heretical" 'Abdullāh b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and Abū 'l-Mu'arrij). The existing form of all these early works has evidently resulted from subsequent editing, but without question forms a major corpus of genuine early material, mostly set down in the first third of the third century of the *Hijrah*. It shows us much about the early forms of Ibādism: amongst the important features to note is that *fatāwā* display virtually no critical apparatus justifying each opinion.

² Beirut, 1974.

Amongst the other more important intercommunity works to come down to us are *sīrabs* by Abū ʿAbdullāh b. abī Sufyān advising the Ḥaḍramīs and Yamanīs (virtually all his *fatāwā* have also been recorded) and a *sīrab* written by Abū ʿl-Ḥawārī Muḥammad b. al-Ḥawārī (late third/ninth century) to the Ḥaḍramī community. This contains some important information concerning early ʿUmānī history in the context of an exposé concerning the proper conduct of an expedition. This is an important theme in Ibāḍī *fiqh*, for it emerges from the attitude adopted towards other Muslims. The essential idea here is that they are *ahl al-qiblah* and that therefore their property and persons are inviolate; the only blood-letting permitted is in fighting an official war. Basically the blame for their condition is seen as coming from the political leadership which had fallen into the hands of the *ahl al-ahdāth*, that is, innovating, unconstitutional rulers (*jabābirah*), and deviants (*min al-qiblah kuffār*), but not polytheists (*mushrikūn*).

THE FOURTH/TENTH TO SIXTH/TWELFTH CENTURIES

The collapse of the imamates in both Tāhart and ʿUmān in civil wars at the end of the third/ninth century profoundly revolutionized the Ibāḍī movement and brought to the fore the problem of how to deal with occupying powers and the application of *taqiyyah* (religious dissimulation): the main ʿUmānī treatise was the *Kitāb al-Muḥāribah* of Bashīr b. abī ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad b. abī Sufyān Maḥbūb al-Raḥīlī (late third/ninth century). In north Africa the imamate was never to revive and eventually Ibaḍism only survived in the Mzāb, Jarbah Island and the Jabal Nafūṣah. Following defeat by the Faṭimids at the battle of Baghay in 358/868–9, the surviving communities passed into a state of secrecy (*kitmān*) and the imamate was replaced with the organization of the *ʿazḏābah* councils whose arrangements began to be formalized in a *sīrat al-ḥalqab* by Abū ʿl-ʿAbbās Aḥmad (d. 504/1111), who based himself on the rulings of his father (Abū ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad b. Bakr al-Nafūṣī, d. 440/1048–9). Abū ʿl-ʿAbbās also wrote an important treatise on land, the *Kitāb Uṣūl al-arāḍī* (“Land Principles/Rights”)³, clearly designed for the new colonies founded by the refugee Ibāḍīs.

Associated with such fundamental political changes came a rationalization of the “states” of the religion (*masālik al-dīn*) and an evolution of the ideas concerning the stages of defensiveness (*difāʿ*) and expansionism (*shirāʿ*). In ʿUmān, where the imamate was to re-emerge in the fifth/eleventh

³ Incorporated in *Kitāb al-Nīl* by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Ibrāhīm al-Thamīnī, Bārūn, AH 1305.

century, these categories were used to classify imams and their powers and past history was rationalized accordingly: in fact a *shārī* imam basically meant a permanent, plenipotentiary imam, whereas a *difā'ī* imam was one who was appointed provisionally, for a certain purpose (usually to conduct a war). Otherwise their powers were common. No conditions (*shurūṭ*) could be imposed on them, other than those emanating from the law of God by which they governed (*lā ḥukm illā li-llāh*). Since it was the duty of every Muslim to obey this law, the imam had no need of a standing army. However, he had no particular status in interpreting the law and was bound by the *ijmā'* of the community. Generally speaking, an imam could only be deposed for a major sin (*makfīrah*), and then only after consultation and an opportunity to make atonement (*tawbah*). A further type of imam whose position was theoretically defined in this period was the *ḍa'īf* imam, an appointment made for political expediency; in this case the condition (*shart*) of compulsory consultation was imposed for an initial period. The idea of the *kitmān* imam however, was an *ex post facto* normalization developed in the Maghrib, and the nearest that can be traced in 'Umān is the idea of the *imām muḥtasib* (probably a much later development).

The fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries also saw a major emergence of Ibaḍism as a *madhhab*. In the second half of the third/ninth century, one can trace some attempt to record and structure the judgements of the early ulema, reportedly in the legal work of the Maghribī 'Amrūs b. al-Faḥḥ (d. 283/896), and certainly in the major compendium of Abū Jābir Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Izkawī, the *Jāmi' Ibn Ja'far*. Works of *tafsīr* also began to appear towards the end of that century with that of the Maghribī, Hūd b. Maḥkam al-Hawwārī, preceding that of the 'Umānī, Abū 'l-Hawwārī Muḥammad b. al-Hawwārī (who also wrote a *Jāmi'*) by about two decades. The subsequent rapid development of the *fiqh* apparatus can be judged by examining Abū Sa'īd al-Kudamī's (late fourth/tenth century) critique (*al-Mu'tabar*) of the *Jāmi' Ibn Ja'far*, written probably about a century and a quarter later, and the final great exposé of *fiqh* principles of his quasi-contemporary and rival, Abū Muḥammad 'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad b. Barakah al-Bahlawī (first half of fifth/eleventh century). Although the doors of *ijtibād* have never been closed, Ibn Barakah's *Jāmi'* was to become the standard work of reference for the great encyclopaedists of the next three-quarters of a century, notably Salamah b. Muslim al-'Awtabī's *al-Ḍiyyā'*, and the three works by members of a Kindah clan of Nizwā, the *Bayān al-Shar'* of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm (d. 508/1115), the *Kifāyah* (which seems largely to have disappeared) of Muḥammad b. Mūsā and the *Muṣannaf* of the prolific author, Aḥmad b. 'Abdullāh (d. probably 557/1162). Another influential work from this time was the *Mukhtaṣar al-khiṣāl*

of Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Qays al-Hamdānī (first half of fifth/eleventh century), the last and only *shārī* imam in the Ḥaḍramawt (his surviving *Dīwān* records, *inter alia*, his campaigns in Yemen). The *Dīwān* of Ibn al-Nazar al-Samʿūlī (sixth/twelfth century) was also considered an exemplary work and inspired commentaries through the centuries, rather in the same way as did Abū Naṣr Faṭḥ b. Nūḥ al-Malashāwī's *Qaṣīdah nūniyyah* in the Maghrib.

Unfortunately, Ibaḍism in ʿUmān became increasingly split by a doctrinal dispute over the issues that had led to civil war and which still underlay current political alliances. The extremism of the so-called Rustāq party, which rejected in numerous treatises the moderate Nizwā party's notions about suspended judgement (*wuqūf*: cf. in particular Abū Saʿīd al-Kudamī's *Kitāb al-Istiḳāmah*) finally alienated northern ʿUmān and the Ḥaḍramawt and led to the total collapse of the imamate at the end of the sixth/twelfth century in the core of the country: it was not to revive until the ninth/fifteenth century. For the movement to survive, therefore, it became essential that it acquire an impeccable "orthodoxy" which could challenge that of Sunnī groups and foster its belief that it formed the only true Islamic community. So we find an increasing tendency to calque the *madhhab* on the norms of Sunnism, but derive its teaching from only its own doctors. This meant normalizing the history of the movement and in the case of the Rustāq party, developing a true missionary teacher line (*ḥamalāt al-ʿilm*) down to its final great exponents in the mid-fifth/eleventh century, Ibn Barakah al-Bahlawī and his pupil Abū ʿI-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Bisyānī (or Bisyāwī). In the Maghrib it went even further and a *Ḥadīth* collection, reputedly originating from al-Rabīʿ b. Ḥabīb al-Farāhīdī, was realized in a *Tartīb* by Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm al-Warjalānī (d. 570/1174). Trained in part at Cordova, Abū Yaʿqūb was an expert in *Ḥadīth* scholarship (cf. also his *Kitāb al-ʿAdl wa-ʿl-inṣāf*) and Quranic exegesis (his *Tafsīr* only survives fragmentarily): however, it is in his *Dalīl wa-ʿl-burbān* that he presents his ideas on the general development of Ibaḍism. In ʿUmān his equivalent was Abū ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad b. Saʿīd al-Qalhātī, writing probably about half a century later. His *al-Kashf wa-ʿl-bayān* similarly provides an exposé of the complete Ibāḍī theology through rebuttal of other doctrines and, in emulation of the *milal wa-ʿl-niḥal* literature, finishes by expounding it as the only true *fiqh*: some of this is also expressed in his *Maqāmah* celebrating the reconversion of Kilwa in East Africa to Ibaḍism.

Thus Ibaḍism went into political decline in an explosion of scholarship that transformed its *fiqh* into a school comparable to the four schools of Sunnī Islam and put its theology into the strait-jacket of Islamic orthodoxy. This calquing process largely removed its originality and put in its place a

corpus of material that eventually led to claims by leaders of the *nabḍab* that Ibadism was the first of the orthodox schools, and that their theology derived from the very fount of Sunnī Quranic learning. Some minor variations over interpretation of the law, some small differences over ritual and a few vestiges of theological debate reflecting early issues which for long had ceased to stir Muslim thought, were all that came to distinguish the Ibādīs from the Sunnīs, except for one vital matter: the theory and practice of political community. To have removed that would have been to extinguish Ibadism itself. So the Ibādīs entered their political twilight at the end of ʿAbbasid times with their theology refurbished but their political ideology intact.

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