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Introduction

The present volume contains a first edition of three Arabic treatises by the 'Umānī Ibādī religious scholar Abu l-Mundhir Bashīr b. Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb (d. ca. 290/908). Two of the texts, *K. al-Raṣf fi l-Tawḥīd*¹ (Book of Paving about Divine Unity) and *K. al-Muḥāraba* (Book of Warfare), were until recently considered lost by western scholars.² With their discovery, a significant new source for the study of the development of early Ibādī thought in Oman has become available. The third text, Abu l-Mundhir's so-called *Sīra*, sets forth his legal opinion condemning the deposition of the 'Umānī Ibādī Imam al-Ṣalt b. Mālik in 272/886.

The author of the texts, Abu l-Mundhir Bashīr, was a grandson of Abū Sufyān Maḥbūb b. Ruḥayl, the last leader of the Baṣran Ibādī community in succession to Wā'il b. Ayyūb (d. ca. 190/806) and is thought to have died around 210/825. Maḥbūb visited Oman repeatedly and, according to some sources, moved to Ṣuḥār in Oman before his death, but this seems unlikely, and according to another report he rather died in Mekka. His most famous son, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb, is known to have studied first in Baṣra and later in Oman. He became *qāḍī* of Ṣuḥār from 249/863 until his death in 260/873 and was involved in the controversy over the theological doctrine of the created nature of the Qur'ān. As he backed this doctrine, he was almost expelled from Oman, since the contemporary Ibādī scholars there were strictly traditionalist in outlook and opposed to the speculative theology of *kalām*. Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb, however, enjoyed the trust of the contemporary Ibādī Imams of Oman. Both his sons, Abu l-Mundhir Bashīr and 'Abd Allāh, were born and died in Ṣuḥār.

Abu l-Mundhir became a prominent Ibādī scholar and author of authoritative theological and legal books. His writings reflect expert knowledge of Ibādī religious law and a consistent inclination to rationalist *kalām* in contrast to the traditionalist tendency of earlier Ibādī scholarship in Oman. An affinity with the thought of the contemporary Mu'tazilī theologian Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915–16) is distinctly apparent, although there is no evidence that Abu l-Mundhir ever met al-Jubbā'ī.

1 The full title as given in the manuscripts is: *Kitāb al-Raṣf fi l-tawḥīd wa-aḥkām al-Qur'ān wa l-asmā' wa l-aḥkām wa l-sunna wa l-imāma wa-asmā' al-dār wa-aḥkāmihā wa-ḥudūth al-'ālam*.

2 See J. C. Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, Cambridge 1987, p. 190; P. Crone and F. Zimmermann, *The Epistle of Ṣālim b. Dhakwān*, Oxford 2001, p. 314.

The *K. al-Raṣf* is a compendium of *kalām* theology from an Ibādī point of view. Occasional redactional notes seem to indicate that the text originally consisted of lectures presented over a period of time and then collected and abridged by a student of the author. Internal and external evidence suggests that it may have been composed between 260/874 and 270/884. By his emphasis on the essential rationality of the basic religious truths, including the existence of God, His attributes, knowledge of good and evil, and desert of reward and punishment, the author aligns himself with contemporary Muʿtazilī teaching. In the preamble, God is praised for His omnipotence and wisdom in His creation and in the imposition of obligations (*taklīf*) on mankind. The chapter on the origination of the world is based on the *kalām* concepts of substance and accidents. The chapter on divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) draws the distinction between eternal and originated being, between attributes of essence and of act. Knowledge is based on sense perception and rational analogy. Every human being of sound mind is obliged to acquire knowledge of God even if revelation has not reached him or her. The chapter on the Qurʾān deals with its rhetorical perfection, the stable veracity of its information, the obligation to promulgate the Promise and the Threat (*al-waʿd wa l-waʿīd*), general and particular commandment, and abrogation. The chapter on legal Names and Rules (*al-asmāʾ wa l-aḥkām*) discusses the implications of names denoting legal status in the religious law. In the chapter on the Sunna, the degrees and the extent of obligation arising from the practice of the Prophet and the community are examined. The section on the Imamate presents arguments for its necessity on the basis of the Qurʾān, the Sunna, and Consensus. The final chapter, on the names and rules of the Abode (*dār*), deals with the legal status of lands where unbelief or grave immorality (*fisq*) prevails and the conditions under which the believer may visit or stay in such lands. Ibādī concerns are evident in this chapter.

The *K. al-Muḥāraba* essentially deals with the law of warfare. Like the *K. al-Raṣf*, however, it begins with the praise of God's omnipotence, omniscience, and wisdom apparent in His creation and presents a rational proof for the origination of the world. The author goes on to prove the unconditional veracity of God's Messengers in conveying their messages to mankind and in particular the truthfulness of the Prophet Muḥammad, which is necessarily known. He then turns to the Qurʾān, quoting and analyzing the verses authorizing and regulating war against refractory opponents and wrongdoers in their historical progression. He distinguishes between the rules applying to the fight against the idolators, the unbelievers of the People of the Book, and the apostates from Islam. The next

section deals with the rules of warfare derived from the Sunna. There follows a lengthy chapter on the Qur'ānic duty of Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong. The last section deals in considerable detail with warfare against Muslim rebels (*ahl al-baḡhy*). This also involves the legitimacy and obligation to fight an unjust and oppressive Muslim Imam in self-defence. Here again specific Ibādī concerns evidently were at stake, and the author quotes relevant opinions of Ibādī scholars and refers to incidents in the Ibādī Imamate in Oman. The *K. al-Muḥāraba* is most likely to be dated slightly later than the *K. al-Raṣf*, during the last years of Imam al-Ṣalt b. Mālik (deposed 272/886).

The *Sīra* presents Abu l-Mundhir's formal legal opinion concerning the abdication of Imam al-Ṣalt b. Mālik al-Kharūsī forced by the armed revolt of the powerful Qādī Mūsā b. Mūsā b. 'Alī, who installed Rāshid b. al-Nazar al-Fajhī as the Imam in 272/886. The revolt, as Abu l-Mundhir explains, caused a split in the Ibādī community in Oman leading to mutual recrimination. For some time, however, the two sides in the dispute refrained from express dissociation (*barā'a*) from opponents, until one of the supporters of the revolt published a letter in which he declared it a religious obligation. The leading opponents of the revolt now assembled to discuss the letter and decided on obligatory dissociation from Mūsā b. Mūsā, Rāshid b. al-Nazar and all their unrepentant supporters. Abu l-Mundhir explains and backs their position. He quotes Mūsā b. Mūsā's defense of his actions and refutes his arguments one by one. He affirms that a legitimately installed Imam cannot be deposed except on three grounds: physical disability to perform one of the religious duties of the Imam, incurrence of a divinely ordained *ḥadd* punishment, or refusal to repent of a religious offence known by the public. None of these grounds were valid in the case of al-Ṣalt b. Mālik.

At the end of the *Sīra* Abu l-Mundhir briefly alludes to further developments of the conflict.³ In 277/890 Rāshid b. al-Nazar was overthrown by the opponents of the earlier revolt against the legitimate Imam, and in his place 'Azzān b. Tamīm al-Kharūsī was installed as the Imam. 'Azzān demanded public repentance of Mūsā b. Mūsā and his followers for their rebellion. This led to armed conflict, and Mūsā b. Mūsā was killed in the battle of Izkī together with many of his supporters in Sha'bān 278/ Dec. 891. Despite this defeat, the party of Mūsā was able to establish his close companion al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥawārī as counter-Imam. The conflict expanded into bloody warfare between the Yemenite (Qaḥṭān) and Northern (Nizār) Arab tribes in Oman.

³ See Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, p. 166.

The 'Abbāsīd governor of al-Baḥrayn was able to invade Oman and in 280/893 put an end to the disputed Ibādī imamate. Abu l-Mundhir does not mention this disaster for the Ibādīs. The *Sīra* evidently was composed still during the imamate of 'Azzān b. Tamīm between 278/891 and 280/893.

The edition of each of the texts is based on four out of five manuscripts kept in three private libraries in Oman, the Sālimī library in Bidiyya, the Sayyid Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Āl Bū Sa'īdī library in al-Sīb and the collection of Shaykh Aḥmad b. Ḥamad al-Khalīlī, the recent Grand Muftī of Oman.

1: ١, Maktabat al-Sālimī no. 7, containing a collection of 'Umānī Ibādī epistles. The front of the manuscript is torn and some pages are missing. It was completed on 9 Šafar 1122/8 April 1710 in the castle of Ibrā in the time of Imam Sayf b. Sulṭān al-Ya'rubī. The copyist is Sālim b. Khamīs b. Najjād al-Mahīlawi. The page size is 14×23.5 cm containing 26 lines. The volume now contains 653 pages and 75 epistles, with an index of the epistles at the beginning. The script is *naskhī*. The *K. al-Raṣf* is on pp. 180–193, the *K. al-Muḥāraba* on pp. 193–205 and the *Sīra* on pp. 143–152. The title of the epistles is written in red ink.

2: ب, Maktabat Āl Bū Sa'īdī no. 1358. Beginning and end of the manuscript are missing. The manuscript now contains 410 pages, each page measuring 20×18 cm and containing 28–29 lines. It is written in *naskhī* script with titles in red ink. The *K. al-Raṣf* is on pp. 209–222, the *K. al-Muḥāraba* on pp. 222–238 and the *Sīra* on pp. 7–16. The manuscript may be dated to the last half of the 12th/18th century.

3: ج, Maktabat Āl Bū Sa'īdī no. 2023. This manuscript contains 676 pages, each page measuring 34×22 cm and containing 23–24 lines. It was completed on 6 Jumādā I 1183/7 Nov. 1770 by the copyist 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'īd al-Maskarī. The *K. al-Raṣf* is pp. 48–62, the *K. al-Muḥāraba* on pp. 62–79 and the *Sīra* on pp. 53–64.

4: د, Maktabat al-Sālimī, a photocopy of a manuscript containing a collection of Ibādī epistles. The present whereabouts of the manuscript is unknown. Each page measures 31×20 cm and contains around 23 lines. The script is *naskhī*. Beginning and end of the manuscript are missing. This manuscript does not contain the text of the *Sīra*.

5: هـ, Maktabat al-Khalīlī. The manuscript contains 283 folios and is written in *naskhī* script. It was completed on 29 Šafar 1131/21 Jan. 1719 by the copyist Sa'īd b. 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad Āl Bū Sa'īdī. Each page measures 34×20 cm and contains 22–23 lines. An index at the beginning of the manuscript lists its contents of forty *sīras* (epistles). The *Sīra* of Abu l-Mundhir is

on pp. 44–53. The text provides numerous variant readings not contained in the other manuscripts.

All five manuscripts are late and corrupt in many places. The frequent appearance of the same mistakes in all of them indicates that they derive from a single original that was already quite corrupt. While some emendations proposed in the edition were straightforward, others must remain speculative without much hope that the original text could be fully restored. The Arabic script has been adjusted to modern convention throughout the edition, and missing diacritical dots have regularly been supplied.