Part I

The *Sīrat Sālim* and the early epistles
1
Sālim b. Dhakwān and his epistle

The career of Sālim b. Dhakwān in Orientalist scholarship began in 1970. In that year Dr A. K. Ennami, himself an Ibaḍī from Libya, published a brief account of some unknown Ibaḍī manuscripts which he had inspected in North Africa.¹ The most interesting of these was a collection of letters from the early Bašran Ibaḍī leader Jābir b. Zayd (d. c. 100 A.H.).² One of the letters was addressed to a certain Sālim b. Dhakwān.

A few years later Professor van Ess went on a similar journey, and published the results in an article in 1976.³ He too gave a description of Jābir’s letters, and à propos of Sālim b. Dhakwān he adduced the relevant data from Shammākhi’s Siyar.⁴ Sālim, according to Shammākhi, belonged in the same generation as Abū ‘Ubayda (sc. Muslim b. Abī Karīma), the Bašran Ibaḍī leader who died in the reign of the Caliph al-Manṣūr; and he corresponded with Jābir. The first statement is, as we shall see, improbable; the second, as indicated by van Ess, is likely to derive directly or indirectly from Jābir’s letter.

Shortly afterwards van Ess published a postscript to his article of 1976, incorporating new information that he had obtained in the course of a visit to England.⁵ In this postscript he added that a sīra (i.e. epistle) of Sālim’s was contained in an unidentified Omani manuscript of which a copy was to be found in Cambridge; he described the epistle as containing important information regarding the political stance of the Ibaḍī community, above all in relation to the Azāriqa and Najdiyya.⁶

This information presumably derives from Ennami’s Ph.D. thesis Studies in Ibaḍism, which he submitted in 1971.⁷ Van Ess did not use this work for his original article, but generously acknowledges his debt to it in the introduction to his postscript. This thesis, which remains for practical purposes unpublished,⁸ is a careful and richly informative study in largely inaccessible manuscript sources; and one of the sources of which it makes extensive use is precisely Sālim’s epistle.⁹ Ennami gives extensive coverage to the parts of the epistle directed against the Khārijite schismatics, in particular the Azāriqa and the Najdiyya. He describes the text he used as belonging to an Omani manuscript ‘of mixed contents’ of which an Omani friend had
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given him a Xerox copy. Ennami was told that it was part of a work of the fifth-century Omani scholar Bisdâni, but clearly doubted it. He adds that the copy is now in the possession of the Library of the Faculty of Oriental Studies in Cambridge. This information accounts adequately for the description given by van Ess.

Unfortunately this copy is not currently to be found in the Faculty Library. What does exist in Cambridge is a Xerox of a similar but distinct Omani manuscript, which is in the possession of Dr Martin Hinds. This too has a text of Sâlim’s epistle. That this text is different from that used by Ennami is clear from the page references he gives: they do not tally with those of the Hinds Xerox (as I propose to designate it until a better description is available). Hinds, however, obtained his Xerox from Ennami, who had previously shown him the manuscript itself; and Ennami in turn makes mention of a second Omani manuscript of mixed contents, also given to him by an Omani friend, the contents of which in so far as he specifies them fit fairly well with those of the Hinds Xerox.

Whether or not this is a correct account of the complex history of the Xerox tradition, we are for the present left with a single text of Sâlim’s epistle, that of the Hinds Xerox. This Xerox represents a substantial fragment of a large collection of epistles of varying dates. The manuscript itself is no earlier than the last century. It is paginated (not always correctly); the table of contents is at pp. If, and the Xerox (and, apparently, the manuscript) breaks off at p. 393 – which to judge from the table of contents means a loss of over a third of the original manuscript.

The text of Sâlim’s epistle extends over fifty-two pages, normally of nineteen lines per page; it begins at p. 154 and ends at p. 194. The rubric is simply sîrat Sâlim b. Dhakwân. The contents may be presented schematically as follows:

(i) A long paraenetic passage with strong Koranic emphasis (pp. 154.15–152.11).

(ii) A historical survey covering the Prophet (pp. 152.11–161.16), Abû Bakr and ‘Umar (pp. 161.16–162.6), ‘Uthmân and ‘Alî (pp. 162.6–170.17), and culminating in the khawârij (pp. 170.17–171.19).

(iii) Polemic against other sects: the extreme Khârijites (pp. 171.19–179.9), especially the Azârîqa (pp. 171.19–174.13) and Najdiyya (pp. 174.13–177.16); the Murji’a (pp. 179.10–185.2); and one which I propose to label the Quietists (pp. 185.2–187.13).

(iv) A statement of what ‘we’ hold and ask of others (pp. 187.13–194.17).
1 Sālim b. Dhakwān

This schema, however, makes too sharp a distinction between the historical (ii) and polemical (iii) sections. The basic polemical concern – the stance that the ‘Muslims’ proper should adopt towards the ‘people of the qibla’ at large – is frequently apparent in the ‘historical’ section; while the ‘polemical’ section presents all but the last of the sects in a historical succession.

It is the polemic against the Murji‘a which will concern us most in this study. But before we take it up in detail, there are two preliminary matters requiring attention.
2

Literary parallels

The *Sirat Sālim* is merely one among a number of early Islamic religious epistles. The interrelations between these epistles are critical for their historical interpretation, and will frequently concern us in this study. In this chapter I shall confine myself to setting out a series of literary parallels the significance of which will be taken up later. The ascriptions and dates of the various epistles are given here without prejudice; some of them will be taken up and examined in detail in subsequent chapters.

We may begin with a simple phrase which occurs in the introductory matter near the beginning of the epistle:1 *wa-nuṣīkum bi-taqwā 'llāhi 'l-ʿazīm*. The first three words of this phrase, with various expansions which I leave aside, are of frequent occurrence in the early religious epistles, where again they are to be found at or near the beginning of the letter:

1. Van Ess quotes the introductory formulae of the sixth of Jābir’s letters, describing it as typical for the collection as a whole.2 Among these formulae we find: *wa-uṣīka bi-taqwā 'llāh*.
2. Two letters of ‘Abdallāh b. Ibāḍ to the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik are preserved in Ḫaḍath sources. Of these letters the first is extant in both an eastern3 and a western text,4 and is usually dated c. 76. Here also we find: *wa-uṣīka bi-taqwā 'llāh*.
3. Van Ess has published the *K. al-īrjā* of Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanāfiyya (d. c. 100),5 dating it c. 75. Here we have: *fa-innā nuṣī-kum bi-taqwā 'llāh*.
4. The *Risāla ilā 'Uṯmān al-Battī* of Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150) offers: *fa-inni uṣīka bi-taqwā 'llāh*.
5. The *K. al-ṣafwa* of Zayd b. ‘Alī7 is in fact an epistle. Here we have: *fa-inni uṣīka bi-taqwā 'llāh*.

Three early religious epistles lack the phrase:

6. The second letter of Ibn Ibāḍ to ‘Abd al-Malik is unfortunately known only in a very corrupt eastern text.8 It is acephalous, the text as we have it proceeding directly from the *basmala* to the *ammā bāʾd*.
2 Literary parallels

(7) ‘Umar II’s anti-Qadrite epistle is preserved in the Ḥilya of Abū Nu‘aym\(^9\) and has recently been re-edited by van Ess.\(^{10}\) It is effectively acausal, in the sense that the material preceding the ammā ba’d is not in the form of an epistolary proem, and appears to be a secondary rubric.\(^{11}\)

(8) The Risāla fl ‘l-qiṣṣa of Ḥasan of Baṣra (d. 110) was published by Ritter;\(^{12}\) van Ess dates it between 75 and 80. The proem here is fully preserved.

The phrase is also lacking from the proems of less narrowly religious letters, as for example the so-called ‘fiscal rescript’ of ‘Umar II,\(^{13}\) or the exchange between Ḥarūn al-Rashīd and Ḥamza al-Khārījī preserved in the Ġātīkhi Sūtān.\(^{14}\) More generally, it does not occur in profane correspondence as attested in the papyri,\(^{15}\) in the secretarial compositions of ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Yaḥyā or Ibn al-Muqaffa’, or, with few exceptions, in the numerous profane letters to be found in the historical and other sources.\(^{16}\) On the other hand, it is of common occurrence in Ibāḍī epistles of the second and third centuries.\(^{17}\)

The waṣiyya bīl-iṭqān is thus a fairly characteristic feature of the early religious epistle. It may be added that the list of such epistles given above contains all significant examples of the genre known to me. In this study, I shall give detailed discussions of items (2), (3), (6), (7) and (8).

As indicated above, section (ii) of the Sīrat Sālim consists of an extended survey of sacred history. After a cursory treatment of the earlier prophets, Sālim tells his addressees that God sent Muḥammad as a prophet confirming the previous prophets, and a little later he mentions that God revealed the Book to Muḥammad in confirmation of already revealed scripture, etc.\(^{18}\) I propose to label such banalities (the epistle is clearly written to Muslims, and Ibāḍīs at that) the ‘mission topos’. This topos, embedded in surveys of sacred history of very varied length, is of common occurrence in the early religious epistles. Van Ess points out the existence of such material in the opening paragraphs of the K. al-irjā, and adduces the parallel of Ibn Ibāḍ’s first letter.\(^{19}\) Abū Ḥanīfah finds it appropriate to inform ‘Uṯmān al-Battī that people were polytheists before God sent Muḥammad, etc.,\(^{20}\) although he comes to the point a good deal faster than some. Outside our list the topos also occurs, for example, in the letters exchanged between Ḥarūn al-Rashīd and Ḥamza al-Khārījī,\(^{21}\) and elsewhere.\(^{22}\) On the other hand, there is no mission topos in the second letter of Ibn Ibāḍ; and, perhaps more significantly, it is absent from those epistles characterised by sustained Koranic exegesis – those of Zayd b. ‘Ali, Ḥasan of Baṣra and ‘Umar II.
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These points indicate that our epistles belong within a certain epistolographic tradition. If we wish to narrow our focus and look for specific verbal parallels of a less trivial kind, the field is more restricted. In particular, the only other epistle which presents such parallels to the Sirat Sālim is the K. al-īrjā. There are four such parallels, all affecting passages near the beginning of the Sirat Sālim:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sirat Sālim²³</th>
<th>K. al-īrjā²⁴</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) wa-narḍā lakum ṭa’ata</td>
<td>wa-narḍā lakum ṭa’atahu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘īlāhi wa-naskhaṭu lakum</td>
<td>wa-naskhaṭu lakum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma’ṣiyatahu</td>
<td>ma’ṣiyatahu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) fa-mani ‘tiaba’a hādhā</td>
<td>man ḥafizahu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘l-qr‘āna kafāhu</td>
<td>ballāghahu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘lāhu mā siwāhu wa-man</td>
<td>mā siwāhu wa-man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḍayya’ahu lām yaqbal</td>
<td>ḍayya’ahu ḍayya’ahu lā yaqbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minhu ghayrah</td>
<td>minhu ghayrah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) wa’dakhirū sāliḥa</td>
<td>fa’dakhirū min sāliḥi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘l-ḥujajj ‘inda ‘llāh</td>
<td>‘l-ḥujajj ‘inda ‘llāh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) wa-nasārihu wa-wāṣuḥu</td>
<td>... wa-nasāri fa-anisi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bi-anfushihim wa-anisū</td>
<td>bi-anfushihim wa-anisū bihi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bihi wa-lam yarghab</td>
<td>wa-lam yarghab bi-anfushihim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bi-anfushihim ‘an nafsihi</td>
<td>‘an nafsihi²⁶</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let us now shift the focus of our interest from the Sirat Sālim to the K. al-īrjā, and consider the further literary affiliations of the latter. The K. al-īrjā contains a passage of strongly worded if somewhat obscure polemic against the Saba’īyya.²⁷ Van Ess noted two literary parallels to this. In his original publication of the K. al-īrjā, he adduced the parallel passage that occurs in some versions of the khitba of Abū Ḥamza al-Mukhtār b. ‘Awf.²⁸ Abū Ḥamza was an ʿAbdī rebel who seized the Ḥijāz at the end of the Umayyad period, and gave a sermon or sermons in Mecca or Medina in 129 which are reported in variant texts in a variety of sources, both Sunni and heterodox.²⁹ Some – but not all – of these versions contain variants of a passage manifestly parallel to that of the K. al-īrjā;³⁰ the resemblances are clearly indicated by van Ess with reference to a version from the Aghāni. All that need be added here is that the Kashiṣ al-ghumma contains a version of the sermon transmitted on the authority of Haytham b. ‘Adi (d. c. 206);³¹ for the passage in question, the text comes closest to that given by Jāḥiz.³²

In his postscript to his publication of the K. al-īrjā, van Ess
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adduced a second parallel to the same passage, this time from the second letter of Ibn Ibad.⁶³ he does not however reproduce the passage in question, and I accordingly give it here. The passage seems to begin as a condemnation of the Kufans for their conduct after the abdication of Ḥasan b. ʿAlī in 41, elaborating on the religious delinquency which set in among them following their collaboration with Muʿawiyah against the Khārijites at Nukhayla; but it slips into the present tense, and must then be understood, with van Ess, as a denunciation of the Shiʿa at large. The text is in places corrupt beyond repair. The numbers in square brackets mark passages to which parallels will be adduced below; the sign ' marks the beginning of each such passage.


Then God brought division upon them; their leaders fell into mutual enmity, and their readers multiplied [7]. They abandoned the judgment of their Lord and took kādhiḥth for their religion; they claimed to have obtained knowledge other than from the Koran, including a raising dead the Day of Resurrection. They believed in a book which was not from God, written by the hands of men; they then attributed it to the Apostle of God, and there is [7] no greater lie against God than [?] the attribution of fabrications to His Apostle. Then they adopted this house [sc. the Alids] as their religion, going into the attack with the reprobate and the righteous of them [indiscriminately] according to their love of hatred. They opposed the Koran, not describing it [7], and they abandon the fear of God, not calling [people] to it; they followed the soothsayers, and hope for revolutions and manifestation [over political action?7] at a raising of the dead before the Day of Resurrection. They believe in fancies, embellishing them for themselves; they cast the Book behind their backs as though they did not know. They dissociated from Abu Bakr and 'Umar and all who died in obedience to them from among the Muhajirun and the Ansar, may God have mercy on them all. They claimed that the Apostle of God had ordered both of them to obey 'Alī,
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and asserted that to fight is the duty of the righteous party, permissible only to the people of the house; they denied [?] this to those who acted in accordance with it [?] as a proof before God.

To this passage we can usefully add two further excerpts. Both refer to ‘Ali, and accuse him of politically motivated lies. The first relates to his fabrication of a Prophetic tradition:49

wa-azhara 'l-firda [sic] 'ala 'llâhi wa-'alâ rasûlîhi [8]

He overtly lied against [or: imputed falsehoods to] God and His Prophet.

The second relates to his misrepresentation of the identity of the body of Dhû 'l-Thuwayya, who fell in the battle of Nahrawân:50

'fa-fataqa li-ashâbihi abwâba 'l-kidhibi fa'ttakhadûhâ khuluqân wa-k'bî bîl-firâ fa'ttakhadûhâ dinân wa-fataûa lahûm mà là yasuddu fattâhu ahadu abâdan [9]

He opened the gates of mendacity to his followers, and they adopted them as second nature and ... lies, taking them for their religion; he opened to them that of which no one will ever close the breach.

The parallels in the K. al-irjâ’ are as follows:

(1) This presents a thematic, but not verbal, parallel to the claim of the Saba’iyya to have been guided to a revelation from which people have gone astray and secret knowledge’ (p. 24.9); cf. also the version of the sermon of Abu Ḥamza quoted by van Ess, in which the Shi’ites claim occult knowledge (‘ilm al-ghayb) etc.51

(2) See (6) below.

(3) This, and (8), present an interesting parallel to one of the misdeeds of the Saba’iyya (p. 23.16): wa-‘alânî ’l-firîyâta ’alâ bani Umayyata wa-‘ala’llâh.

(4) Compare: ittakhadîh ahlâ baytîn mina ’l-arabi imânân wa-qalladîhumin dinahum yattalîhun ’alâ ’ubbihim wa-yuffirîqîhun ’alâ bughthîhin (p. 24.3).

(5) Compare: jufâtun ’alâ ’l-qur’ânî atba’un lil-kühân (p. 24.5).

(6) With this (and (2) above) compare: yarjûna dawlatan takhûn fi ba’tthin yakûnîn qabla (qiyyâmî) ’l-sâ‘a (p. 24.5).

(7) The meaning of the term amâni is coloured, if not constituted, by its Koranic occurrences. It is always pejorative, and Ibn Ibad’s statement that the followers of ‘Ali believe in amâni may be compared with Hasan of Baṣra’s declaration that God’s religion is not a matter of amâni (laysa dinû ‘llâhi bi’l-amâni).52 Two more specific associations are relevant here. One is with Jews and Christians (Koran 2:73, 105; 4:122), and in particular with ‘those
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who write the Book with their hands, then say: "This is from God" (2:73); a clear resonance of the latter text is found in Ibn Ibād's accusation that the followers of 'Ali believed in a book written by the hands of men, etc. The other association, through the singular ummiyya, is with the Satanic inspiration of false revelation to which a prophet is subject when he 'fancies' (taminā) (22:51). The reference of the K. al-irji'a to saba'iyya (or shi'a) mutamanniya (p. 23.16) must be interpreted against this background, and rendered 'fanciful' or the like.\(^4\)

(8) See (3) above.
(9) Compare: wa-fatahū abwāban kāna 'llāhu saddahā wa-saddū ab-wāban kāna 'llāhu fatahahā (p. 24.8).

To facilitate general comparison of the two passages, I give here a translation of the polemic against the Saba'iyya from the K. al-irji'a (pp. 23.16–24.12), based on the English translation given elsewhere by van Ess.\(^4\)

Among those whom we oppose in their cause [sc. the cause of our righteous imams] are fanciful Saba'ites who have held in contempt (zahrū bi-) the Book of God and openly lied against the Umayyads and against God; they do not dissociate from people with penetrating perception or adequate reason in Islam [\(^2\)], reproaching for their sin those who had committed it while committing it themselves when they had held it in contempt (zahrū bihā), perceiving its temptation without knowing the way out of it. They took a house from among the Arabs as their imam and ascribed their religion to them, affiliating [to people] according to their love of them [i.e. of the house] and dissociating [from people] according to their hatred of them, insolent towards (jufātun 'alā) the Koran,\(^4\) followers of the soothsayers. They hope for a revolution which will take place in a raising [of the dead] before the coming of the hour. They distort the Book of God and act corruptly in judgment,\(^4\) and have hastened 'about the earth doing evil, and God does not like the evildoers' [Koran 56:69]. They have opened gates which God had closed, and closed gates which God had opened. One of the [arguments brought up in] dispute by these Saba'ites whom we have encountered is their claim to have been guided to a revelation from which others went astray, and to secret knowledge. They allege that the Prophet of God concealed nine-tenths of the Koran. But if the Prophet of God were to have concealed anything of what God revealed to him, he would have concealed the matter of the wife of Zayd. [This is followed by relevant Koranic citations which we may leave aside.]

It is unnecessary to set out in detail the respects in which this translation is conjectural, or to go over the various points at which I have departed from that of van Ess. One point does however need comment, namely my (hesitant) rendering of the phrase zahrū bi-kitābi 'llāh. Van Ess translates: 'came forward with the Qur'an (i.e.,