

## 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 Ibāḍī from Libya, published a brief account of some unknown Ibāḍī manuscripts which he had inspected in North Africa.<sup>1</sup> The most interesting of these was a collection of letters from the early Baṣran Ibāḍī leader Jābir b. Zayd (d. c. 100 A.H.).<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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*.<sup>4</sup> Sālim, according to Shammākhi, belonged in the same generation as Abū 'Ubayda (*sc.* Muslim b. Abi Karīma), the Baṣran Ibāḍī 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 Ibāḍī community, above all in relation to the Azāriqa and Najdiyya.<sup>6</sup>

This information presumably derives from Ennami's Ph.D. thesis *Studies in Ibādism*, which he submitted in 1971.<sup>7</sup> 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 This thesis, which remains for practical purposes unpublished,<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 Bisyānī,<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 Sālim'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;<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

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 Sālim'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.<sup>14</sup> It is paginated (not always correctly); the table of contents is at pp. 1f, 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 Sālim's epistle extends over fifty-two pages, normally of nineteen lines per page; it begins at p. 154\* and ends at p. 194.<sup>15</sup> The rubric is simply *sīrat Sālim b. Dhakwān*. 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), Abū Bakr and 'Umar (pp. 161\*.16–162.6), 'Uthmān and 'Alī (pp. 162.6–170.17), and culminating in the *khawārij* (pp. 170.17–171.19).
- (iii) Polemic against other sects: the extreme Khārijites (pp. 171.19–179.9), especially the Azāriqa (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).

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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:<sup>1</sup> *wa-nūṣīkum bi-taqwā 'llāhi 'l-‘aẓīm*. 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.<sup>2</sup> Among these formulae we find: *wa-ūṣīka bi-taqwā 'llāh*.
- (2) Two letters of 'Abdallāh b. Ibād to the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik are preserved in Ibādī sources. Of these letters the first is extant in both an eastern<sup>3</sup> and a western text,<sup>4</sup> and is usually dated *c.* 76. Here also we find: *wa-ūṣīka bi-taqwā 'llāh*.
- (3) Van Ess has published the *K. al-irjā* of Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya (d. *c.* 100),<sup>5</sup> dating it *c.* 75. Here we have: *fa-innā nūṣīkum bi-taqwā 'llāh*.
- (4) The *Risāla ilā 'Uthmān al-Battī* of Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150) offers: *fa-innī ūṣīka bi-taqwā 'llāh*.<sup>6</sup>
- (5) The *K. al-ṣafwa* of Zayd b. 'Alī<sup>7</sup> is in fact an epistle. Here we have: *fa-innī ūṣīka bi-taqwā 'llāh*.

Three early religious epistles lack the phrase:

- (6) The second letter of Ibn Ibād to 'Abd al-Malik is unfortunately known only in a very corrupt eastern text.<sup>8</sup> It is acephalous, the text as we have it proceeding directly from the *basmala* to the *ammā ba'd*.

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- (7) ‘Umar II’s anti-Qadarite epistle is preserved in the *Ḥilya* of Abū Nu‘aym<sup>9</sup> and has recently been re-edited by van Ess.<sup>10</sup> It is effectively acephalous, 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.<sup>11</sup>
- (8) The *Risāla fi ’l-qadar* of Ḥasan of Baṣra (d. 110) was published by Ritter;<sup>12</sup> 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,<sup>13</sup> or the exchange between Hārūn al-Rashīd and Ḥamza al-Khārijī preserved in the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*.<sup>14</sup> More generally, it does not occur in profane correspondence as attested in the papyri,<sup>15</sup> in the secretarial compositions of ‘Abd al-Ḥamid b. Yaḥyā or Ibn al-Muqaffa’, or, with few exceptions, in the numerous profane letters to be found in the historical and other sources.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, it is of common occurrence in Ibāḍī epistles of the second and third centuries.<sup>17</sup>

The *waṣīyya bi’l-taqwā* 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.<sup>18</sup> 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 Ibād’s first letter.<sup>19</sup> Abū Ḥanīfa finds it appropriate to inform ‘Uthmān al-Battī that people were polytheists before God sent Muḥammad, etc.,<sup>20</sup> 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 Hārūn al-Rashīd and Ḥamza al-Khārijī,<sup>21</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, there is no mission topos in the second letter of Ibn Ibād; and, perhaps more significantly, it is absent from those epistles characterised by sustained Koranic exegesis – those of Zayd b. ‘Alī, 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 *Sīrat Sālim* is the *K. al-irjā'*. There are four such parallels, all affecting passages near the beginning of the *Sīrat Sālim*:

<i>Sīrat Sālim</i> <sup>23</sup>	<i>K. al-irjā'</i> <sup>24</sup>
(1) <i>wa-nardā lakum ṭā'ata</i> <i>'llāhi wa-naskhaṭu lakum</i> <i>ma'ṣiyatahu</i>	<i>wa-nardā lakum ṭā'atahu</i> <i>wa-naskhaṭu lakum</i> <i>ma'ṣiyatahu</i>
(2) <i>fa-mani 'ttaba'a hādihā</i> <i>'l-qur'āna kafāhu</i> <i>'llāhu mā siwāhu wa-man</i> <i>ḍayya'ahu lam yaqbal</i> <i>minhu ghayrahu</i>	<i>man ḥafizahu</i> <i>ballaghahu</i> <i>mā siwāhu wa-man</i> <i>ḍayya'ahu lā yaqbalu</i> <i>minhu ghayrahu</i> <sup>25</sup>
(3) <i>wa'ddakhirū ṣāliḥa</i> <i>'l-ḥujaji 'inda 'llāh</i>	<i>fū'ddakhirū min ṣāliḥi</i> <i>'l-ḥujaji 'inda 'llāh</i>
(4) <i>wa-naṣarūhu wa-wāsūhu</i> <i>bi-anfusihim wa-anisū</i> <i>bihi wa-lam yarḡhabū</i> <i>bi-anfusihim 'an nafsihī</i>	<i>... wa-naṣara fa-anisū</i> <i>bi-anfusihim wa-anisū bihi</i> <i>wa-lam yarḡhabū bi-anfusihim</i> <i>'an nafsihī</i> <sup>26</sup>

Let us now shift the focus of our interest from the *Sīrat Sālim* to the *K. al-irjā'*, and consider the further literary affiliations of the latter. The *K. al-irjā'* contains a passage of strongly worded if somewhat obscure polemic against the Saba'iyya.<sup>27</sup> Van Ess noted two literary parallels to this. In his original publication of the *K. al-irjā'*, he adduced the parallel passage that occurs in some versions of the *khuṭba* of Abū Ḥamza al-Mukhtār b. 'Awf.<sup>28</sup> Abū Ḥamza was an Ibādī 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 Sunnī and heterodox.<sup>29</sup> Some – but not all – of these versions contain variants of a passage manifestly parallel to that of the *K. al-irjā'*;<sup>30</sup> the resemblances are clearly indicated by van Ess with reference to a version from the *Aghānī*. All that need be added here is that the *Kashf al-ghumma* contains a version of the sermon transmitted on the authority of Haytham b. 'Adī (d. c. 206),<sup>31</sup> for the passage in question, the text comes closest to that given by Jāḥiẓ.<sup>32</sup>

In his postscript to his publication of the *K. al-irjā'*, van Ess

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adduced a second parallel to the same passage, this time from the second letter of Ibn Ibāq;<sup>33</sup> 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 Kūfans for their conduct after the abdication of Ḥasan b. ‘Alī in 41, elaborating on the religious delinquency which set in among them following their collaboration with Mu‘āwiya 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 Shi‘a 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 <sup>r</sup> marks the beginning of each such passage.

*thumma inna ‘llāha farrāqa amrahum wa-ta‘ādat qādatuhum wa-‘azuma qurrā‘uhum*<sup>34</sup> *wa-kharajū min ḥukmi rabbihim wa’ttakhadhū ‘l-aḥādītha dīnan* <sup>r</sup>*wa-za‘amū anna ‘indahum ‘ilman aṣābūhu min ghayri ‘l-qur‘āni* [1] <sup>r</sup>*fīhi ba’tlu ‘l-mawtā qabla yawmi ‘l-qiyāmati* [2] *wa-āmanū bi-kitābin laysa mina ‘llāhi katabat.hu ‘l-rijālu bi-aydihim* (f. 211b) *thumma asnadūhu ilā rasūli ‘llāhi* (ṣ) <sup>r</sup>*fa-lam tabqa firyatun*<sup>35</sup> *a‘zamu ‘alā ‘llāhi firyatan ‘alā rasūli ‘llāhi* [3] *minhum*<sup>36</sup> <sup>r</sup>*thumma ‘ttakhadhū aḥla hādihā ‘l-bayti dīnan ya’dūna ma’a fujjārihim wa-abrārihim*<sup>37</sup> *‘alā ḥubbihim wa-bughḍihim* [4] *wa-khālafū ‘l-qur‘āna lā yaṣifūnahū wa-yatrūkūna ‘l-taqwā lā ya’dūna ilayhā* <sup>r</sup>*fa’ttaba’ū ‘l-kuhāna* [5] <sup>r</sup>*wa-yarjūna ‘l-duwala wa‘l-zuhūra fi ba’tli ‘l-mawtā qabla yawmi ‘l-qiyāmati* [6] *yu‘minūna* <sup>r</sup>*bi‘l-amāniyyi* [7] *wa-yuzakhrifūnahā li-anfusihim wa-nabadhū ‘l-kitāba warā’a zuhūrihim ka-annahum lā ya‘lamūna*<sup>38</sup> *wa-barī’ū min Abi Bakrin wa-‘Umara wajamī‘i man fāta fi ṭā’atihimā mina ‘l-muhājirīna wa‘l-anṣāri raḥimahumu ‘llāhu jamī’an wa’dā’aw anna rasūla ‘llāhi* (ṣ) *amarahumā bi-ṭā’ati ‘Aliyyin wa-za‘amū anna ‘l-qitāla ‘alā aḥli ‘l-ḥaqqi lā yahillu illā li-aḥli ‘l-bayti wa-kadhhabū dhālika li-man ‘amila bihi ḥujjatan ‘inda ‘llāh*

Then God brought division upon them; their leaders fell into mutual enmity, and their readers multiplied [?]. They abandoned the judgment of their Lord and took *ḥadīths* for their religion; they claimed to have obtained knowledge other than from the Koran, including a raising of the dead before 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 [?] 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 or hatred. They opposed the Koran, not describing it [?], and they abandon the fear of God, not calling [people] to it; they followed the soothsayers, and hope for revolutions and manifestation [overt political action?] 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 Abū Bakr and ‘Umar and all who died in obedience to them from among the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār, 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 'Alī, and accuse him of politically motivated lies. The first relates to his fabrication of a Prophetic tradition:<sup>39</sup>

ʿ*wa-aḏhara ʿl-firāʿa* [sic] ʿ*ala ʿllāhi wa-ʿalā rasūlihi* [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 Dhū ʿl-Thudayya, who fell in the battle of Nahrawān:<sup>40</sup>

ʿ*fa-fataḥa li-aṣḥābihi abwāba ʿl-kidhbi faʿttakhadhūhā khuluqan wa-kʿbd* biʿl-firā ʿ*faʿttakhadhūhā dīnan wa-fataḥa lahum mā lā yasuddu fatqahu aḥadun abadan* [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-irjāʿ* are as follows:

- (1) This presents a thematic, but not verbal, parallel to the claim of the Sabaʿiyya 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 Abū Ḥamza quoted by van Ess, in which the Shīʿites claim occult knowledge (*ʿilm al-ghayb*) etc.<sup>41</sup>
- (2) See (6) below.
- (3) This, and (8), present an interesting parallel to one of the misdeeds of the Sabaʿiyya (p. 23.16): *wa-aʿlanū ʿl-firyata ʿalā banī Umayyata wa-ʿalā ʿllāh*.
- (4) Compare: *ittakhadhū ahla baytin mina ʿl-ʿarabi imāman wa-qalladūhum dīnahum yattalūna ʿalā ḥubbihim wa-yufāriqūna ʿalā bughdihim* (p. 24.3).
- (5) Compare: *jufātun ʿalā ʿl-qurʿāni atbāʿun lil-kuhḥān* (p. 24.5).
- (6) With this (and (2) above) compare: *yarjūna dawlatan takūnu fī baʿthin yakūnu qabla (qiyāmi) ʿl-sāʿa* (p. 24.5).
- (7) The meaning of the term *amānī* is coloured, if not constituted, by its Koranic occurrences. It is always pejorative, and Ibn Ibād's statement that the followers of 'Alī believe in *amānī* may be compared with Ḥasan of Baṣra's declaration that God's religion is not a matter of *amānī* (*laysa dīnu ʿllāhi biʿl-amānī*).<sup>42</sup> 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 'Alī believed in a book written by the hands of men, etc. The other association, through the singular *umniyya*, is with the Satanic inspiration of false revelation to which a prophet is subject when he 'fancies' (*tam-annā*) (22:51). The reference of the *K. al-irjā'* to *saba'iyya* (or *shī'a*) *mutamanniya* (p. 23.16) must be interpreted against this background, and rendered 'fanciful' or the like.<sup>43</sup>

(8) See (3) above.

(9) Compare: *wa-fataḥū abwāban kāna 'llāhu saddahā wa-saddū abwāban kāna 'llāhu fataḥahā* (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-irjā'* (pp. 23.16–24.12), based on the English translation given elsewhere by van Ess:<sup>44</sup>

Among those whom we oppose in their cause [*sc.* the cause of our righteous imams] are fanciful Saba'ites who have held in contempt (*ḡaharū 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 [?], reproaching for their sin those who had committed it while committing it themselves when they had held it in contempt (*ḡaharū biḡā*), 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 (*juḡātun 'alā*) the Koran,<sup>45</sup> 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,<sup>46</sup> and have hastened 'about the earth doing evil, and God does not like the evil-doers' [Koran 5:69]. 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 *ḡaharū bi-kitābi 'llāh*. Van Ess translates: 'came forward with the Qur'an (*i.e.*,