

A READING IN THE APPLIED IBĀDĪ *FIQH* OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE DIRECTIVE OF IMĀM AL-ŞALT (D. 275/888) TO HIS ARMY CONCERNING SOCOTRA

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Abstract

The directive of the Omani Ibādī Imām al-Şalt ibn Khamīs al-Kharūşī, read out to his army upon their deployment to the island of Socotra, is a document of 3rd/9th century Islamic international law. The local Christian community, being under covenant (*dhimmab*) with the Muslims, had broken their treaty by rebelling against Muslim rule and killing the Imām's governor. This article analyzes the available historical sources and the directive as contained in *Tuḥfat al-a'yan bi-şirat abl 'Umān*, by the 13th/19th-century Omani scholar Imām al-Sālimī. It covers questions of authorship, details surrounding the campaign, and Islamic rules on international relations according to the Ibādī school. It provides insight into military organization and administration in al-Şalt's imamate and allows an assessment of Muslim-Christian and international relations as well as those between followers of Ibādism and other schools. Al-Şalt's legacy sets high ethical standards for warfare and anticipates a number of deliberations commonly considered as modern.

Ilahiyat Studies

p-ISSN: 1309-1786 / e-ISSN: 1309-1719

Volume 10 Number 1 Winter / Spring 2019

DOI: 10.12730/13091719.2019.101.188

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Received: February 2, 2019 *Accepted:* July 31, 2019 *Published:* November 27, 2019

To cite this article: Bouzenita, Anke Iman. "A Reading in the Applied Ibādī *Fiqh* of International Relations: The Directive of Imām al-Şalt (d. 275/888) to His Army Concerning Socotra." *Ilahiyat Studies* 10, no. 1 (2019): 7-45 <https://doi.org/10.12730/13091719.2019.101.188>

Key Words: International law, Ibāḍism, Imām al-Ṣalt, Oman, Socotra, *dbimmah*.

Introduction

The letter from Imām al-Ṣalt ibn Mālik al-Kharūṣī to his army concerning Socotra, sometimes referred to as the *‘abd* (treaty, covenant, or in this particular context, directive), is an important document on the history of Islamic international law and relations in the 3rd/9th century. At the same time, it provides insight into Omani heritage and Ibāḍī readings in the field. While the events leading to the campaign and the legacy are very present as a point of reference in both scholarly and public discourse in contemporary Oman, they may be little known elsewhere in the Islamic world or beyond.

By examining the Socotra example, its historical background, and the Islamic legal (*fiqhī*) perspective of the Ibāḍī school on international relations, this paper attempts to shed some light on the ethical standards of military campaigns implemented in the 3rd/9th century. The article investigates questions of the authenticity and authorship of the letter, explores its historical background, and presents a summary and analysis, with references to chosen *fiqh* compendia of the Ibāḍī school for support and explanation where necessary.

I. Sources and Authorship of the Legacy

The paper focuses on the directive of Imām al-Ṣalt as rendered in the *Tuḥfat al-a‘yān bi-sīrat ahl ‘Umān*¹ of Imām al-Sālimī.² This book

¹ I used the 1983 edition annotated by Abū Ishāq Aṭfayyish: Nūr al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥumayyid al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfat al-a‘yān bi-sīrat ahl ‘Umān*, ed. Abū Ishāq Aṭfayyish, reprint (Rūwī, Muscat: al-Maṭābi‘ al-Dhahabiyyah, 1983), 168-184. Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Yūsuf, Abū Ishāq Aṭfayyish (1886-1965), from Wādī Mzāb in Algeria, was one of the eminent scholars of the Ibāḍī school. Exiled from Tunisia where he had pursued knowledge and also assumed a political role, he chose to stay in Cairo, where he died. Aṭfayyish mingled with the political figures of his time in Egypt and later on in Oman; he also travelled to Zanzibar and Libya (Nafūṣah). He had a scholarly impact via his work writing, editing, and revising manuscripts, as well as on political reform in the Islamic world. Muḥammad ibn Mūsā Bābā ‘Ammī et al., *Mu‘jam a‘lām al-Ibāḍiyyah min*

needs to be understood in the light of al-Sālīmī's attempts at reforming Omani society during his time and era and his advocacy of the Omani cause internationally, depicting its Islamic heritage and the heritage of the imamate as a societal model. Al-Sālīmī's historical sources for the *Tuḥfab* have been partly researched.³

With regard to al-Ṣalt's directive to his troops, a letter covering some fifteen pages in the printed edition of the *Tuḥfab*, I have not been able to find it in its complete form in earlier (printed) sources, nor have I been able to find any hint about existing manuscripts that present the letter in its entirety. Although the Socotra case has remained a point of historical and *fiqbī* reference, none of the available printed resources render more than select paragraphs of the letter. The *Tuḥfab* is therefore currently the only available source regarding the letter and it remains the main source of information on the Socotra campaign.⁴

Imām al-Sālīmī himself closes his quotation of the letter with the remark, "It was found in the handwriting (*kbatt*) of Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Sulaymān, written in some books that it is on the authority of ('*an*) Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb."⁵ Al-Sālīmī's note on the handwritten manuscript he used leads us to two important scholarly figures pertaining to this topic: Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Sulaymān al-Kindī⁶ (d.

al-qarn al-auwal al-bijrī ilā l-ʿaṣr al-ḥādīr: Qism al-Maghrīb al-Islāmī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2000), II, 24-26.

² Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥumayyid al-Sālīmī (1869-1912), born in al-Ḥawqayn, Rustāq, Oman in 1286/1869, was known as an outstanding Omani scholar and reformer who advocated for a return to the imamate system. Among his many works are the *Tuḥfab*, *Ṭalʿat al-shams ʿalā l-alfīyyah* in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and other works in poetry and *fiqh*; Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Nāṣir and Sulṭān ibn Mubārak al-Shaybānī, *Muʿjam aʿlām al-Ibādīyyah min al-qarn al-auwal al-bijrī ilā l-ʿaṣr al-ḥādīr. Qism al-masbriq* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2006), 271-273.

³ Sulaymān ibn Saʿīd ibn Ḥabīb al-Kiyūmī, "Maṣādir al-Shaykh al-Sālīmī wa-manhajuhū fī l-kitābah al-tārikhiyyah min khilāl kitābat "Tuḥfat al-aʿyān bi-sīrat ahl 'Umān'" (master's thesis, Muscat: Sultan Qaboos University, 2009).

⁴ 'Alī ibn Saʿīd al-Riyāmī, *Qaḍīyyat ʿazl al-Imām al-Ṣalt ibn Mālik al-Kharūṣī* (Muscat: Bayt al-Ghashshām li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tarjamah, 2015), 45.

⁵ Al-Sālīmī, *Tuḥfab*, 183-184.

⁶ Abū 'Abd Allāh spent his life "between compiling, *fatāwā*, and *qaḍā*." The *fiqh* compendium *Bayān al-sbar*, printed in some 71 volumes, is only one of his

508/1111), author of the *fiqh* compendium *Bayān al-sbar*⁶, as a copier; and Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb al-Ruḥaylī, who deserves more detailed attention in this context.⁷

works. The Socotra letter is mentioned among his *āthār*. Nāṣir and al-Shaybānī, *Muʿjam aʿlām al-Ibāḍiyyah*, 371.

⁷ Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb al-Ruḥaylī, an Omani scholar of Qurashite origins whose grandfather, al-Ruḥayl ibn Sayf, was among the first propagators of the Ibāḍī movement in Baṣra. Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb was among the scholars who gave Imām al-Ṣalt the pledge of allegiance in 237/851. He was the *qāḍī* of Sohar, then the capital of the imamate, during al-Ṣalt's imamate (from 249/863 to his death in 260/874) and is considered an influential figure in the field of Islamic jurisprudence for generations of Ibāḍī scholars to follow. Nāṣir and al-Shaybānī, *Muʿjam aʿlām al-Ibāḍiyyah*, 425-426; Farḥāt ibn ʿAlī al-Jaʿbūrī, *al-Tadwīn al-fiqhī: al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb namūdhajān. Aʿmāl nadwat taṭawwur al-ʿulūm al-fiqhiyyah* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shuʿūn al-Dīniyyah, 2002), 17-71; al-Jaʿbūrī, *Shakhsīyyāt Ibāḍiyyah* (al-Sīb, Oman: Maktabat al-Ḍāmīr li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2010), 83-84. For his scholarly and political role, see Badriyyah bint Muḥammad ibn Shāmis al-Nabhānī, “Āl al-Ruḥayl wa-dawruhum al-siyāsī wa-l-fikrī fī ʿUmān min al-qarn 3h/8m - 4h/10m” (PhD diss., Muscat: Sultan Qaboos University, 2017). On the relation to and importance of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb, see Ismāʿīl ibn Ṣāliḥ ibn Ḥamdān al-Aghbarī, “Ahd al-Imām al-Ṣalt ibn Mālik wa-ʿumuquḥū l-ḥaḍārī,” in *Aʿmāl nadwat taṭawwur al-ʿulūm al-fiqhiyyah fī ʿUmān, al-fiqh al-ḥaḍārī, Fiqh al-ʿumrān* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shuʿūn al-Dīniyyah, 2012), 78. Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb asserted that the Qurʾān is created, a teaching commonly ascribed to the Muʿtazilah, but stepped back from this teaching due to pressure from the scholars of his time. Nāṣir and al-Shaybānī, *Muʿjam aʿlām al-Ibāḍiyyah*, 426; see also al-Jaʿbūrī, *al-Tadwīn al-fiqhī*, 41-42). Among his extant and known works are the *Mukhtaṣar min al-Sunnab* (part of an original work that is said to have comprised 70 volumes), and a number of *siyar*; his *sīrab* to the people of Maghreb, a *sīrab* to Aḥmad ibn Sulaymān, the imām of Ḥaḍramawt, a *sīrab* to Abū Ziyād Khalaf ibn ʿAdhrah, and a directive (ʿ*abd*) in the name of Imām al-Ṣalt to Ghassān ibn Julayd, when he appointed him as governor of the Hujjār. Nāṣir and al-Shaybānī, *Muʿjam aʿlām al-Ibāḍiyyah*, 426). The appointment letter is to be found in *Tuḥfab* (184-193), without mentioning Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb as an author. Al-Shaybānī lists a *sīrab fī l-siyāsah al-sbarʿiyyah* (contained in *al-Siyar wa-l-jawābāt*) under the authorship of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb; Sulṭān ibn Mubārak al-Shaybānī, *Amālī l-turāth: Nazarāt naqdiyyah wa-qirāʿāt fī jadīd al-turāth al-ʿUmānī makbūṭūtibī wa-maṭbūʿibī* (Muscat: Dhākīrat ʿUmān, 2015), I, 46.

The sixth-century Omani scholar Abū Bakr al-Kindī (d. 557/1162)⁸, author of *al-Muṣannaf*, quotes a longer part of al-Ṣalt's letter concerning the people of Socotra, on the authority of the 3rd/9th-century work of Abū l-Ḥawwārī, *al-Jāmi'*; ("and this is from the words of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb in his *sīrah*"). The excerpt corresponds to the text in the *Tuḥfab*, "And what I advise you to do is to fear Allāh, and not to sell any weapons in Socotra," with minor variations.⁹ As a matter of fact, this same excerpt is not to be found in the *Jāmi'* of Abū l-Ḥawwārī,¹⁰ although this work has ample material on the dicta of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb. It is available in the *Jāmi'* of Muḥammad ibn al-Faḍl Ibn al-Ḥawwārī, of the same era.¹¹ The same

⁸ Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Mūsā al-Nizwānī al-Kindī (d. 557/1162). He is author of, among other works, the *fiqh* compendium *al-Muṣannaf fī l-adyān wa-l-aḥkām*, and of *Kitāb al-ibtidā'*, which is specifically about the division of Omani scholars into the Nizwa and Rustāq factions after the forced abdication of al-Ṣalt; he divided the *Bayān al-sbar'* of his teacher, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Sulaymān al-Kindī, into chapters and gave it its title. Nāṣir and al-Shaybānī, *Mu'jam a'lām al-Ibādīyyah*, 56. It may therefore be expected that he used the material on Socotra from his teacher as well.

⁹ *Tuḥfab*, from middle of 181 to end of first paragraph, 182; Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Mūsā al-Nizwānī al-Kindī, *al-Muṣannaf fī l-adyān wa-l-aḥkām* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfah, 1984), XII, 99-100.

¹⁰ Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥawwārī al-A'mā Abū l-Ḥawwārī, sometimes referred to as al-Ḥawwārī Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥawwārī; alive in 272/885, probably died early in the 4th/10th century. Based in Nizwā, he is considered the most important among the famous Omani scholars of the 3rd/9th century. He was a student of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb, but mainly of Abū l-Mu'thir al-Ṣalt ibn Khamīs al-Kharūṣī. Among his extant works are the *Jāmi' ibn al-Ḥawwārī*, the *Tafsīr kbamsmī'at āyah fī l-aḥkām* (both in print); he also authored *Ziyādāt 'alā Jāmi' ibn Ja'far*. Nāṣir and al-Shaybānī, *Mu'jam a'lām al-Ibādīyyah*, 379-380.

¹¹ Al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥawwārī, *Jāmi' al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥawwārī* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfah, 1985), III, 207-208. Abū Muḥammad al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥawwārī al-Sāmī (d. 278/891). He was a student of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb, one of the outstanding Omani scholars of his time, and contemporary to Imām al-Muhannā ibn Jayfar (226-237/841-852) and Imām al-Ṣalt (237-272/852-885). He was involved in the political events that followed the forced abdication of al-Ṣalt; he opposed the newly sworn-in Imām 'Azzān ibn Tamīm, and was subsequently killed by the Imām's troops near Sohar in 278/891. He is the author of *Kitāb al-jāmi'*. Nāṣir and al-Shaybānī, *Mu'jam a'lām al-Ibādīyyah*, 345-346. It could be

longer excerpt of the letter is found in the printed version of *Bayān al-sbar*^{d2}, of the 6th/12th century.

This seems to be the only longer excerpt outside of the *Tuḥfab*. Historical works after al-Sālimī usually rely on the information he provides.¹³ References to the letter and the case of Socotra exist throughout the Ibāḍī *fiqh* literature.¹⁴

The contemporary Tunisian Ibāḍī scholar Farḥāt al-Jaʿbīrī discusses the authorship of the letter and alludes to the possibility that it could also have been authored by Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb himself, not by Imām al-Ṣalt. While related *fiqbī* teachings are often rendered on the authority of (ʿan) Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb in the primary sources, and some of the contemporary sources refer to the scholar as the author of the letter,¹⁵ access to additional original texts would be necessary in order to definitively assess the question of authorship, as al-Jaʿbīrī states.¹⁶

As for al-Sālimī's source on the letter for his *Tuḥfab*, it is most likely that he used an independent manuscript that is not accessible to date; whether it was transmitted under the title of a *sīrah* ascribed to Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb (as mentioned in the *Jāmiʿ* of Abū l-

an unintentional misappropriation in the printed version of the *Muṣannaḥ*, or perhaps al-Faḍl used to be referred to as Abū l-Ḥawwārī as well.

¹² Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kindī, *Bayān al-sbarʿ* (Salṭanat ʿUmān: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfah, 1993), XXIX, 21-22.

¹³ Al-Baṭṭāshī in his *Salāsīl al-dbabab* mentions the Socotran campaign as one of the important events of al-Ṣalt's imamate; he reiterates the hypothesis of an Abyssinian invasion and generally invokes the information available in al-Sālimī's *Tuḥfab*; Muḥammad ibn Shāmis al-Baṭṭāshī, *Salāsīl al-dbabab fī l-furūʿ wa-l-fuṣūl* (Oman: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfah, 2002), X, 280. Al-Rawwāḥī's *al-Imāmab wa-l-aʿimmab fī ʿUmān* presents a summary of the events as described in the *Tuḥfab*, written for a general audience rather than for scholars. Sālim ibn Muḥammad ibn Sālim al-Rawwāḥī, *al-Imāmab wa-l-aʿimmab fī ʿUmān* (Muscat: Maktabat al-Ḍāmīrī li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2016), 147-151.

¹⁴ Apart from the references mentioned above, see Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Bisyawī, *Jāmiʿ Abī l-Ḥasan al-Bisyawī* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfah, 1984), IV, 147-148.

¹⁵ Saʿīd ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥāshimī, “Qirāʾah fī sīrat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb ilā ahl al-Maghrib,” in *Aʿmāl nadwat taṭawwur al-ʿulūm al-fiqbiyyah*, Muscat: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shuʿūn al-Dīniyyah, 2002, 98.

¹⁶ Al-Jaʿbīrī, *al-Tadwīn al-fiqbī*, 63.

Ḥawwārī) and copied by Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kindī may only be answered with the discovery of more manuscripts.

II. The Period: Imām al-Ṣalt and His Imamate

The exceptionally long imamate of al-Ṣalt ibn Mālik al-Kharūṣī (247-272/861-885) is retrospectively considered to be a golden era of just rule and flourishing scholarship in the 3rd/9th century in Oman¹⁷ and is still used as a point of reference – perhaps also under the influence of and in comparison with the events that followed it. Historians mention a devastating storm that hit the country during his imamate, leading to such loss of lives and property that many residents were forced to migrate.¹⁸ Problems emerged at the end of his imamate, either due to his increasing inability to rule the country effectively, as his opponents claimed, or due to the eventual deaths of the eminent scholars of the period and their substitution by people who pursued their own agendas rather than the common welfare, as his supporters maintained.

Whatever the case, increasing criticism forced al-Ṣalt to abdicate in 272/885; he remained at home in self-imposed confinement until his death in 275/888. The event deeply divided both scholars and populace, leading to a tribal war that allowed the Abbasid governor (*wālī*) of Bahrain to intervene, thereby ending the long period of independent Omani rule in 280/893.¹⁹ Scholarly discussions on the forced abdication and events fill entire books, such as *al-Siyar wa-l-jawābāt*.²⁰

III. Socotra: The Island, Its Inhabitants, and Historiography

Socotra is an island approximately 480 km long, situated 240 km from the East African coast and some 380 km from the Arabian Peninsula. The island is known in particular for its unique flora and fauna, with a high number of endemic plants and animals. The

¹⁷ Nāṣir and al-Shaybānī, *Muʿjam aʿlām al-Ibādīyyah*, 248.

¹⁸ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 163-164.

¹⁹ Isam Ali Ahmad al-Rawas, “Early Islamic Oman (ca. - 622/280-893): A political history” (PhD diss., Durham: Durham University, 1990), 299.

²⁰ Sayyidah Ismāʿīl Kāshif, ed. & commentary, *al-Siyar wa-l-jawābāt li-ʿulamāʾ wa-aʿimmat ʿUmān* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfah, 1986); cf. al-Shaybānī, *Amāli l-turāth*, 122ff.

dragon's blood tree (*Dracaena cinnabari*) has its home here, and the island was known in antiquity as a place to find ambergris.²¹

Being situated at a location of geostrategic importance on the trade routes between Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and India, and at the portal to the Red Sea, control of the island was naturally fought over by various maritime forces, leading to changes in power affiliation and population makeup over the centuries.²² It may, from this perspective, be comparable to islands like Cyprus or Malta in the Mediterranean, which also changed hands often and played roles in the history of (Islamic) international relations.

There is no indigenous historiography of the island or its inhabitants; its early historiography therefore largely depends on the sources produced by Greek and Arab historians quoting them (see below). It may be remarked that Omani historiography seems not to have occupied itself with the island much.²³

It is established that the island was in Arab and Muslim hands, with alternating affiliation between Oman and Mahra, prior to the occupation by the Portuguese in 1509, and that this was followed by a period of Islamic rule (the Sultanate of Qishn and Socotra) up to the establishment of the British protectorate in 1866.²⁴ There is room for ambiguity pertaining to the era of interest to us, the end of the 3rd/9th century, particularly with regard to the population makeup at the advent of al-Ṣalt's campaign and its result.

The question of the makeup of the Socotran population in the time of Imām al-Ṣalt may be analyzed in the light of the available geographic and historiographic works. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, the 6th/12th-century Muslim geographer, states (of his time) that the majority of the population were Christian Arabs. He mentions the presence of Indians, then of Greeks since Alexander the Great, and a Greek population that had embraced Christianity since the time of Jesus while preserving their Greek descent. The Yemeni geographer of the

²¹ See al-Sālimī's description, *Tuḥfab*, 166.

²² See Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd ibn Khamīs al-Anbālī, "Tārīkh jazīrat Suqatrá," <http://www.socotra.org/books/ahmedalanbali/historysocotrailand.pdf>, accessed September 25, 2017.

²³ Sālim ibn Ḥammūd ibn Shāmis al-Siyābī, *Umān 'abra-l-tārīkh*, 5th ed., (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfah, 2014), I-II, 317.

²⁴ Al-Anbālī, "Tārīkh jazīrat Suqatrá."

4th/10th century and author of the book *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿArab*, al-Hamdānī,²⁵ is quoted as mentioning that the population was of Mahri origin, and that there were ten thousand Christian soldiers. He mentions different versions as to the history of the island:

They say that Roman people [i.e., Greeks/Byzantines] were cast there by Kisrá, and then tribes from Mahrah joined them, and some of them became Christians with them; while the people of Aden say that there was no Roman [Greek] influx, but the people followed a bishop, and then perished, upon which the Mahrī tribes and some *shurāt* settled there; Islamic *daʿwab* became more intense, the number of *shurāt* increased, and they [the Christian Mahrīs] transgressed against the Muslims and killed them all except ten people; and there is a mosque in a place called al-Sūq.²⁶

This could be an exact description of the Socotra events prior to the campaign we describe herein, as the term *shurāt* denotes a division of the Omani imamate's army (see below). Ibāḍī sources describe an Omani presence on the island since the imamate of al-Julandá (132-134/750-752). An often quoted statement in Abū Bakr al-Kindī's *al-Muṣannaḡ* specifies that if the Muslims have an agreement to take slaves as payment, it is permissible to do so for the first year, and then they should take the equivalent amount in the second year, "as they have all become *abl al-ṣulḡ wa-l-dhimma*" "... and we have been informed that al-Julandá ibn Masʿūd concluded a treaty with the people of Socotra (*ṣālahā abl Suqatrā ʿalā ruʿūs*), and took them in the first year, and Allāh knows best."²⁷ Wilkinson takes the stipulation for the second year as proof that attachment of the island to the imamate was achieved peacefully.²⁸ If the treaty had been concluded at this early stage, it seems that it had

²⁵ Cf. Lisān al-Yaman al-Ḥasan ibn Aḡmad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿArab*, ed. Muḡammad ibn ʿAlī al-Akwaʿ al-Ḥawālī (Cairo: Dār al-Āfāq al-ʿArabīyyah, 2001), 93-94.

²⁶ Shihāb al-Dīn Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī al-Rūmī al-Baghdādī, "Suqatrā," *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977.) III, 227.

²⁷ Al-Kindī, *al-Muṣannaḡ*, XI, 145, cf. al-Kindī, *Bayān al-sbarʿ*, LXX, 355; Aḡmad al-ʿUbaydlī, "Ḥamlat al-Imām al-Ṣalt ibn Mālik ʿalā jazīrat Suqatrā wa-l-ʿalāqāt al-ʿUmāniyyah al-Mihriyyah," *Nizwā: Majallab faṣṡiyyah thaḡāfiyyah* 13 (January 1998), accessed August 15, 2017, <http://www.nizwa.com/pdf/Nizwa-13.pdf>; al-Nabhānī, "Āl al-Ruḡayl," 65.

²⁸ Wilkinson, *Imamate*, 332.

only been broken during the time of Imām al-Šalt, some 130 years later, in the events that are the subject of this research.

Daʿwah activity emerging from the Ibāḍī imamate was remarkably vigorous in the 2nd/8th century, as Hāšim points out.²⁹ Al-Rawas infers that Ibāḍism had first arrived on the island after establishing the first imamate in Ḥaḍramawt and Yemen under the leadership of Imām Yaḥyá Ṭālib al-Ḥaqq al-Kindī (128-129/746-747); this was at the end of the Umayyad caliphate, when many Ibāḍīs were forced to escape to northern Oman and Socotra as this imamate succumbed to Umayyad forces.³⁰ Al-ʿUbaydlī suggests that the Christians of Socotra were Nestorians (of Greek origin), while the non-Ibāḍī Muslims on Socotra may have belonged to Mahrī tribes. He suggests an Omani-Yemeni competition over Socotra.³¹ This rivalry may be asserted regarding a later period, after Socotra split from Oman due to the fall of the imamate and the establishment of Abbasid control toward the end of the 3rd/9th century, but was probably not prominent at the time in question.³²

The 4th/10th century author al-Masʿūdī states that the island was home to Indian pirates and a danger to existing trade routes. He does not mention any previous Islamic or Arab presence on the island, but seems to focus on the purported Greek origins of the population.³³ However, if al-Masʿūdī's information on the insecurity of trade routes is accurate, Muslim hegemony may have been abolished by the first half of the 4th/10th century, possibly as a result of Christian insurgence on the island and a failure to reestablish Muslim control, either through al-Šalt or at a later point.

Based on these (and other) pieces of information, contemporary historians and analysts arrive at different conclusions with regard to the ethnic and religious makeup of the Socotran population at the advent of the Imām's campaign. This may be of importance

²⁹ Mahdī Ṭālib Hāšim, *al-Ḥarakah al-Ibāḍiyyah fī l-Mashriq al-ʿArabī*, 2nd ed. (London: Dār al-Ḥikmah, 2003), 224-225.

³⁰ Al-Rawas, "Early Islamic Oman," 272-273.

³¹ Al-ʿUbaydlī, "Ḥamlat al-Imām al-Šalt ibn Mālik ʿalā jazīrat Suqatrá."

³² Al-Anbālī, "Tārīkh jazīrat Suqatrá," 81-82.

³³ Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhabab wa-maʿādin al-jawbar*, ed. Mufid Muḥammad Qumayḥah (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1986), II, 20-21; see Hāšim, *al-Ḥarakah al-Ibāḍiyyah*, 228.

concerning their respective assessment of another question: namely, whether outside support of the insurgence of the island's Christians (who were under covenant) was involved, and whether or not the campaign was successful.

Our primary source, the author of the *Tuḥfab*, does not mention any details about the islands' inhabitants at the advent of the campaign. He states:

In his [Imām al-Ṣalt's] days, may Allāh be pleased with him, the Christians committed treason (*kbānat al-naṣārā*) and broke the treaty that existed between them and the Muslims; they attacked Socotra and killed the governor of the Imām and some young men with him; and they plundered and looted, took over the country, and seized it by force.³⁴

The author does not specify who those Christians were who took over: were they among the *abl al-dhimmah* on the island (as a breach of covenant is mentioned); or is he referring to external forces, possibly Abyssinians, who used to rule the island prior to the Muslims? The *Tuḥfab*'s editor, Aṭfayyish, remarks that the author may not have known the details.³⁵ The letter contains hints to support both interpretations. Secondary sources therefore differ in their discussion of the events, while it may be noted that the sheer proximity of Socotra to the African mainland seems to suggest outside Abyssinian military intervention to some, even in the absence of historical evidence.

On one hand, expressions like “for the insurgents among the Christians (*li-abl al-nakth min al-naṣārā*),” “for all of Socotra, the people of peace as well as of war (‘*alā jamī‘ Suqaṭrā, abl al-silm minbā wa-abl al-ḥarb*),” “the people of the covenant who did not break their treaty (*abl al-‘abd alladhīna lam yanquḍū ‘abdabum*),” “the insurgent village (*al-qaryah al-nākithah*),” “those who broke their treaty (*al-nāqidīna li-‘abdibim*),” and “those who transgressed against the Muslims through their rebellion (*al-nākithīna ‘alā l-muslimīna bi-baghyibim*)” are indicative of a Christian population on the island who used to be under covenant, with some of them

³⁴ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 166.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

breaking their treaty.³⁶ On the other hand, Aṭṭfayyish's footnote indicates that the Socotran Christians were aided by an Abyssinian intervention.³⁷ Another lead to support this theory may be taken from the letter itself: the Imam's order to follow the enemy to the African coastline (*ra's al-zinj*) if necessary.³⁸ It alludes to the possibility that the danger emerged from the African mainland, implying Abyssinian intervention.³⁹

Al-Ṣalt's order to take with them those Socotran Muslims who wished to leave the island may hint at the expectation that the island would be abandoned by the Muslim forces, so that it would not be safe for Muslims to stay on, for fear of repercussions. The island would therefore become *dār al-ḥarb*, and be subject to new raids from Abyssinian troops, as Hāshim interprets.⁴⁰ Some secondary sources mention Abyssinian intervention without any discussion of intrinsic or extrinsic evidence.⁴¹ As al-Riyāmī rightly states, these are mere inferences in the absence of clear-cut evidence.⁴²

³⁶ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 171, 173, 174; Other historians emphasize this point, e.g., al-Riyāmī, *Qaḍīyyat 'azl al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 49; al-'Ubaydlī, *Ḥamlat al-Imām al-Ṣalt ibn Mālik 'alā jazīrat Suqāṭrā*; cf. also al-Aghbarī, who takes this as a reason to discuss the theme of a "fifth column." Al-Aghbarī, *Abd al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 81, 83.

³⁷ Hāshim, *al-Ḥarakab al-Ibāḍīyyab*, 225.

³⁸ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 182. The place is on today's Somali coastline (Cape Guardafui), about 120 miles from Socotra, and 500 miles from Aden (Hāshim, *al-Ḥarakab al-Ibāḍīyyab*, 227); cf. al-Riyāmī, who suggests that *ra's al-zinj* is Guardafui [Ra's Ghafrad Fawī]. Al-Riyāmī, *Qaḍīyyat 'azl al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 67.

³⁹ "Socotra itself was indefensible from Oman, thus the order from Imām al-Ṣalt to his army to aid those Socotran Muslims who wished to leave, to do so. Such was the degree of involvement of the Abyssinians in the affairs of the island." Al-Rawas, "Early Islamic Oman," 274.

⁴⁰ Hāshim, *al-Ḥarakab al-Ibāḍīyyab*, 227.

⁴¹ Al-Siyābī mentions an outward Christian aggression (*ʿUmān 'abra l-tārīkh*, 313); Hāshim supports this theory (*al-Ḥarakab al-Ibāḍīyyab*, 66); al-Nabhānī supports the idea of an outside Abyssinian support of the insurrection, but does not produce any evidence ("Āl al-Ruḥayl," 66); al-Aghbarī suggests an insurrection of Abyssinian Christians, while acknowledging the lack of historical evidence (*Abd al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 81).

⁴² Al-Riyāmī, *Qaḍīyyat 'azl al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 50.

IV. Date of the Campaign

With regard to the exact date of the campaign, difference of opinion exists in the literature. Al-Sālimī himself does not mention an exact date. Al-Riyāmī discusses the suggestions made: he dismisses 253/867, a date suggested by al-Ḥārithī,⁴³ as too close to the devastating storm that hit Oman in 251/865 and forced substantial portions of the population to migrate⁴⁴, an event that must have strained the state budget so severely as to preclude equipping a military campaign of that dimension. Al-ʿUbaydlī relies on the fact that Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb, as writer of the Imam’s letter to his troops, died in 260/882, and posits that the campaign must have taken place before this date. Al-Sālimī himself mentions the event after relating the death of ʿAzzān ibn al-Ṣaqr, that is, after 268/881, if one is to follow the generally chronological outline with which al-Sālimī makes mention of events.⁴⁵

Al-Rawas dates the Socotran insurrection toward the end of al-Ṣalt’s rule: “Support for this comes from the call made by the Imam’s detractors for him to step down as a result of his failure, itself a symptom of old age and ineptitude, to protect Socotra from its invaders. The most likely time is between 269/882 and 273/886.”⁴⁶

If we are to take into consideration the assumed role of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb in writing the letter, and the constraints to the military budget the storm and its aftermath must have had, in the absence of other evidence, we may cautiously date the event between 249/863, the year of Ibn Maḥbūb’s investiture as chief *qāḍī*, and 253/867, the year of the storm, in any case well before Ibn Maḥbūb’s death in 260/874.

V. The *Qaṣīdah* and Its Author

The *Tuḥfab* now propounds the reason for al-Ṣalt’s intervention:

⁴³ Saʿīd ibn Ḥamad ibn Sulaymān al-Ḥārithī, “Muqaddimah,” in Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥārithī and Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥumayyid al-Sālimī, *al-Yusrā fī inqādh jazīrat Suqatṛā* (Muscat: Maktabat al-Ḍāmīrī li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1992), 2.

⁴⁴ See al-Riyāmī, *Qaḍīyyat ʿazl al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 41-42.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

⁴⁶ Al-Rawas, “Early Islamic Oman,” 274-275.

“A woman from the people of Socotra named al-Zahrā⁴⁷ wrote to the Imām, may Allāh be pleased with him, a *qaṣīdah*, mentioning to him what the Christians had done in Socotra, complaining about their injustice, and asking him for assistance against them.”⁴⁸ It may be this background to the Socotra campaign, a Muslim woman’s call for help in the face of non-Muslim aggression, as well as the immediate reaction, that led to its comparison to the Abbasid caliph al-Mu‘taṣim’s campaign on ‘Amūriyyah in 223/838.⁴⁹ Cases involving the fate of Muslim women under military invasion or rule by non-Muslims and the scholars’ empathy for them are not unusual in *fiqb* literature.⁵⁰

The *qaṣīdah* describes the fate of the Muslim people of Socotra, particularly the women, after the Christian takeover – justice has been replaced by injustice and the Muslim call to prayer by church bells; women are being enslaved and raped – and dramatically culminates in a personal call to the Imām:

What is wrong with al-Ṣalt who happily sleeps at night, while there are women in Socotra at risk of being violated?
Men! Rescue every Muslim woman, even if you have to crawl on your chins and knees,

⁴⁷ Al-Sālimī does not offer details on the origins of the author of the *qaṣīdah*, and ample difference of opinion exists in the literature. According to al-Shaqṣiyyah, her name is Fāṭimah bint Ḥamad ibn Khalfān ibn Ḥumayd al-Jahḍamiyyah, raised in Samad al-Sha‘n, a village in Wilāyat al-Muḍaybi, al-Sharqiyyah, Oman. She went to Socotra with her father to visit their relative, the governor of Socotra, al-Qāsīm ibn Muḥammad al-Jahḍamī al-Samadī, when the events took place; Badriyyah bint Ḥamad al-Shaqṣiyyah, *al-Sīrah al-zakiyyah li-l-mar‘ab al-Ibāḍiyyah* (Muscat: Maktabat al-Jil al-Wā‘id, 2014), 72; Sulṭān ibn Mubārak al-Shaybānī, *Mu‘jam a‘lām al-nisā’ al-Ibāḍiyyāt: qism al-masbriq* (al-Sīb, Oman: Maktabat al-Sayyid Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, 2001), 17.

⁴⁸ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 166-167.

⁴⁹ On the comparison to ‘Amūriyyah, see also al-Shaqṣiyyah, *al-Sīrah al-zakiyyah*, 72; al-Ḥārithī, *al-Yusrā*, 2 & 6-7; see also al-Riyāmī, *Qaḍiyyat ‘azl al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 48-49, and Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Bār, “Yawm al-Mu‘taṣim fī ‘Amūriyyah wayawm al-Ṣalt fī Suqaṭrā,” *Star Times* (2 June 2009), <http://www.startimes.com/?t=17172523>, accessed August 8, 2017.

⁵⁰ See Anke Iman Bouzenita, *The Political Legacy of Abd al-Raḥmān al-Awzā‘ī*, (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2008), 17-20.

Until the pillar of religion is re-erected, and Allāh makes the adherents of injustice and mistrust vanish.

Then the supplication of Zahrā' will come true after debauchery, and the *sunnah* of the books will live again.⁵¹

Al-Sālimī does not specify how this letter reached the Imām; some sources suggest that she threw it into the sea and it miraculously reached him through a fisherman who found it; as al-Nadābī has pointed out, the function of this story may be to ascribe miracles (*karāmāt*) to al-Ṣalt.⁵²

Setting aside the veracity of this story as the reason for dispatching an armada of 101 ships to Socotra, considering the importance of the ongoing trade at the time, one may suppose that secure methods of communication between this outpost of the Omani imamate and its center must have been established.⁵³

VI. Results of the Campaign

In an afterword to the *qaṣīdah*, al-Sālimī states:

So the Imām gathered his troops, and equipped the ships, and appointed in charge of them Muḥammad ibn ʿAshīrah and Saʿīd ibn Shamlāl, and if anything happens to [one of] them, the survivor takes the place of the other; if something happens to both, we appoint in their place Ḥāzim⁵⁴ ibn Hammām, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn Yazīd, and ʿUmar ibn Tamīm. And he wrote them a letter, explaining in it what they were supposed to do and what to leave, and it is said that the ships gathered for this campaign were one hundred and one. So they set off for them, and Allāh granted them victory against them: they captured the land and defeated the enemies, and returned victorious

⁵¹ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 168.

⁵² Nāṣir al-Nadābī, "Imāmat al-Imām al-ʿUmānī al-Ṣalt ibn Mālik al-Kharūṣī," Public lecture held at Markaz Dār al-Qurʾān, al-Sīb, Oman, date unknown, video published 8 February 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSo43_R-2nc. While al-Ḥārthī (*al-Yusrā*, 7-8) supports this version, other authors, like al-Aghbarī, underline that the real *karāmāh* in this story is that the Imām dispatched his troops to reinvest Islamic rule and order, and that there is no need for additional stories to emphasize this. Al-Aghbarī, *ʿAbd al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 85.

⁵³ Cf. al-Riyāmī, *Qaḍīyyat ʿazl al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 52.

⁵⁴ In al-Kindī's version, this is "Khāzim." Al-Kindī, *Bayān al-sbar*^ᶜ, LVII, 181.

and with glad tidings, because Allāh stands by those who stand by Him.⁵⁵

The number of ships dispatched by al-Ṣalt is remarkable, and is an indication of the military power of the imamate. There is no historical information on the military strength of al-Ṣalt's state; but reports exist about his predecessor, Imām al-Muḥannā ibn Jayfar (226-237/840-851), who had at his command three hundred ships equipped for warfare, and in the town of Nizwa (*Nizwā*), then capital of the imamate, eight or nine thousand mounts, in addition to ten thousand soldiers. The fleet had already been developed during the rule of Imām Ghassān (d. 207/822).⁵⁶ The possible impact of the tropical storm (which devastated large areas of the country) on the military capability of the imamate at this point of time should be taken into consideration for an assessment.⁵⁷ Al-Riyāmī suggests that the campaign was launched from Sohar (*Ṣuḥār*), given this Omani coastal town's importance at the time.⁵⁸

It is striking that al-Sālimī refers to the campaign as “successful” in that control over the island had been reasserted by the Imām and his troops. Apart from the *Tuḥfab* and those authors subscribing to its main assumptions, there is no extant historical evidence regarding the campaign or its aftermath, once it landed on the island.⁵⁹ While we have already quoted some details of the letter that may have anticipated an unsuccessful outcome of the campaign, indicators in some Omani primary sources support the theory that the campaign may indeed have been unsuccessful.

The earliest available trace of this reproach against al-Ṣalt (that the Christians took the island away from him and broke their treaty, and that he did not defeat them), may be the one found in the *sīrah* of Ibn Abī Rūḥ, one of the students of Ibn al-Ḥawwārī, who lived in the 3rd/9th century.⁶⁰ *Kitāb al-ibtidā'* mentions as one of the opponents' arguments that Socotra “was taken away from him” and that he was

⁵⁵ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 168.

⁵⁶ See al-Aghbarī, *ʿAbd al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 79.

⁵⁷ Al-Riyāmī, *Qaḍīyyat ʿazl al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁹ Al-Nadābī, “Imāmat al-Imām al-ʿUmānī al-Ṣalt ibn Mālik al-Kharūṣī.”

⁶⁰ Al-Shaybānī, *Amālī l-turāth*, 127.

unable to protect it.⁶¹ The *Bayān al-sbar*^c mentions as one of the arguments forwarded by those who forced al-Ṣalt into abdication that “he did not rescue the people of Socotra and did not restore their right from those who transgressed against them.”⁶² Sulṭān al-Shaybānī, a contemporary expert on Omani manuscripts and heritage, asserts that the case is subject to difference of opinion among the authors of Omani *siyar*.⁶³

Evidence that fighting must have taken a substantial toll is to be found in *Bayān al-sbar*^c, where al-Kindī mentions in the chapter on the missing person (*al-mafqūd*), that Khāzim ibn Hammām and ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (who had been appointed as substitutes in charge of the campaign, as the letter postulates) had been killed, and that whoever was known to have been on their ship may be considered missing.⁶⁴

VII. An Introductory Note on the Treatment of *Abl al-dbimmah* in al-Ṣalt’s Imamate

Al-Sālimī’s *Tuḥfab*, our main historical source for the Socotra campaign and the Imām’s letter, also preserved al-Ṣalt’s lengthy advice to the newly appointed governor of Rustaq (*al-Rustāq*), Ghassān ibn Julayd.⁶⁵ This advice is an additional resource in understanding the main theme of the letter, the treatment of non-Muslims living under Islamic covenant, *abl al-dbimmah*, and the relationship with them in the particular case of insurgency. Amongst the details on *zakāb* eligibility and collection, there is some advice on the treatment of *abl al-dbimmah* (and non-Ibāḍī Muslims) in the text; it is to be expected that the policy with regard to *abl al-dbimmah* was the same throughout the realm of his influence, inclusive of Socotra, prior to the insurgency. It may therefore help to elucidate

⁶¹ Al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-ibtidā’ wa-l-muntakhab min sīrat al-Rasūl (a.s.s.) wa-a’immat wa-‘ulamā’ Umān*, ed. Sayyidah Ismā‘il Kāshif (Salṭanat ‘Umān: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfah, 1985), 51; see also al-Riyāmī, *Qaḍīyyat ‘azl al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 77.

⁶² Al-Kindī, *Bayān al-sbar*^c, LXVIII, 399; cf. al-Nabhānī, “Āl al-Ruḥayl,” 67-68.

⁶³ Al-Shaybānī, *Amālī l-turāth*, 127. The contemporary *Mu‘jam a‘lām al-Ibāḍīyyah* follows the interpretation of a successful campaign: “Al-Ṣalt has become famous for liberating Socotra from the hands of the Christians and regaining it from them.” Nāṣir and al-Shaybānī, *Mu‘jam a‘lām al-Ibāḍīyyah*, 249.

⁶⁴ Al-Kindī, *Bayān al-sbar*^c, LVII, 181; cf. al-Nabhānī, “Āl al-Ruḥayl,” 67.

⁶⁵ Or “Khulayd,” see al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 184.

Muslim-Christian relations in al-Ṣalt's imamate at the time. The letter stipulates that *jizyah* is to be taken at the end of every month,⁶⁶ according to the following pattern: the rich pay four *dirham* a month per head; the moderately affluent pay two *dirham* a month per head; while children, the poor, the elderly, women, and male and female slaves do not pay at all. The Imām implements a policy of distinguishing between Muslims and non-Muslims in outer appearance that was commonplace at the time throughout the Islamic world.⁶⁷ He adds that *dhimmīs* are not to buy male or female slaves from Muslims, but in case this has already taken place, they shall be asked to sell them to Muslims – probably for fear of proselytization or exposing the secrets of Muslims. On whatever a *dhimmī* buys from a Muslim he must pay a 10% tax (*ʿushr*) on it, and *zakāb* has to be paid on cattle bought from Muslims. Al-Ṣalt asked his governor to be strict with regard to people who follow divergent opinions, clearly identified by him as Qadariyyah, Muʿtazilah, Khawārij, and Murjiʿah; these are not to call to their ideas in public.⁶⁸

The *Jāmiʿ* of Ibn al-Ḥawwārī, a student of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb, reiterates the same orders (consistent with the orders of Imām al-Ṣalt in his appointment letter) on the appropriate behavior of *ahl al-dhimmah*.⁶⁹ Importantly, Abū l-Ḥawwārī emphasizes that *jizyah* is only to be taken from people of the covenant if the Muslims are able to protect them from injustice.⁷⁰

The Ibādī *fiqh* literature specifies exactly what constitutes a breach of treaty, or the *dhimmah* covenant, very often with reference to Socotra as a precedent case. We may infer from this that the events of Socotra were well established in the collective memory of scholars. Many of these references are made on the authority of (*ʿan*) Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb, which may serve to emphasize his importance in relation to the event.

The consensus of the literature is that if the non-Muslims under

⁶⁶ This seems to be the particular interpretation of the Imām, as *jizyah* is usually collected after one lunar year (*ḥawl*).

⁶⁷ Cf. al-Rawas, "Early Islamic Oman," 270.

⁶⁸ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 192.

⁶⁹ Al-Faḍl Ibn al-Ḥawwārī, *Jāmiʿ al-Faḍl*, III, 202-204.

⁷⁰ Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥawwārī, *Jāmiʿ Abī l-Ḥawwārī* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfah, 1985), II, 36.

covenant commit an aggression, assault, or attack, the state of war returns regarding them; that is, they have thereby broken their treaty.⁷¹ Both Muslims and non-Muslims under covenant are bound by their first treaty.⁷² A transgression could consist of assisting military

⁷¹ To draw more extensively on the *Ibāḍī* *fiqh* heritage, the following excerpts from the *Kitāb al-muḥārabah* of Bashīr ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb (alive in 273/886), may illustrate the point further. For Bashīr ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb see Nāṣir and al-Shaybānī, *Muʿjam aʿlām al-Ibāḍiyyah*, 70-71:

The Messenger of Allāh (pbuh) also established the *sunnah* that “the lowest of the Muslims gives an *amān* (here: guaranty of security for life and possessions) binding for all of them,” and all of the Muslims, the free person, the slave, male and female, have to allow this; and there is no *ṣulḥ bi-l-muwādaʿah* [ending of war through treaty] between the Muslims and the people of war without the latter deferentially succumbing to the former, through deferment, humbleness, and submission to the rule of Allāh, by paying *jizyah* while being deferential, unless there is strong fear among the Muslims that they prevail over the Muslims due to their great numbers and [the Muslims] fear their [non-Muslims] power. And Allāh, may He be exalted, says: “Do not faint, and do not grieve, for you will overcome if you are true believers.” (Q 3:139). And if there is a treaty (*ʿabd*) and *ṣulḥ* between them, it is incumbent upon the Muslims to abide by it; be it limited in time or not; and it is not allowed for any of the Muslims to impose more on them than has been specified in their treaty (*ṣulḥ*); and there is no *ṣulḥ* that contains any display of a call to disbelief, or of honoring it, in *dār al-Islām*. If the disbelievers in *dār al-Islām* transgress aggressively, this is considered a breach of their treaty from their side, and [the state of] war will return regarding them. Abdulrahman al-Sālimī and Wilferd Madelung, eds., *Early Ibāḍī Literature: Abu l-Mundhir Bashīr ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb*: Kitāb al-Raṣf fī l-tawḥīd, Kitāb al-muḥārabah and Sīra, vol. 75 of *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, ed. Florian C. Reiter (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 36-37.

⁷² *Bayān al-sbar*^c specifies, on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb:

And from the book, in the answer of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb, may Allāh have mercy on him, about the Christians of Socotra and the treaty (*ṣulḥ*), can they terminate this *ṣulḥ*, or can the Muslims terminate it? He said, “Neither of the two groups can terminate it; they are both bound by their first treaty (*ṣulḥ*). They have to deduct, depending on the number of heads, who has the means for it; not the poor, nor the old, children, and women ...” al-Kindī, *Bayān al-sbar*^c, LXX, 355.

The 4th/10th century *faqīh* al-Bisyawī refers to the Socotra event in his *Jāmi*^c within the discussion of buying slaves from *abl al-ḥarb*:

aggression by a third party⁷³ or assaulting Muslim women.

VIII. Al-Sālimī's Text: The Letter and Its Interpretation

The following relies on the translation and interpretation of chosen excerpts of the letter. Al-Siyābī in his *Umān 'abra l-tārikk* appraises the letter, as it contains thirty-five verses from the Qur'ān and the contents of more than one hundred prophetic hadīths, and does not leave unanswered any *fiqh* ruling concerning warfare.⁷⁴ I have chosen not to translate the Qur'ānic references due to the space limitations of this paper.

A. The Letter of Imām al-Ṣalt to His Army

The letter starts, after the proclamation of faith, with a general reminder of many aspects of Islamic rules and ethics, particularly those that may often be neglected in warfare:

Repent to Allāh for the wrongdoings of the past, and be virtuous in what is left [of your lives] in that which pleases Him. Safeguard your religion, and do not sell your religion for your own or the worldly matters of others. Stay away from whatever is doubtful. Abstain from prohibited desires; lower your gaze lest you fall into illicit sexual relations; protect your intimate parts from what is prohibited (*ḥarām*), and keep your hands and tongues away from the lives, possessions, and honor of people, if you have no legal claim thereupon. Avoid bearing false witness, prohibited food and drink, bad companionship, and flattering the enemy; and return entrusted

... and it is not permissible to take the slaves of those who have taken *amān* with him; as it has already been said about the Christians of Socotra and the treaty (*ṣulḥ*) they were under; that neither they nor the Muslims can break the contract, and that they are all of them still under the first contract, and that [*jizyah* is levied] per head, from those who are affluent, [but] not from the poor, nor the elderly, nor children, nor women. Al-Bisyawī, *Jāmi' Abi l-Ḥasan al-Bisyawī*, IV, 147-148.

⁷³ "If the people under covenant (*abl al-'abd*) assist *abl al-ḥarb* in fighting against the Muslims, they have thereby broken their treaty": Khamīs ibn Sa'īd ibn 'Alī ibn Mas'ūd al-Shaqṣī, *Manhaj al-ṭālibīn wa-balāgh al-rāghibīn*, ed. Muḥammad Kamāl al-Dīn Imām (Muscat: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu'ūn al-Dīniyyah, 2011), X, 318.

⁷⁴ Al-Siyābī, *Umān 'abra-l-tārikk*, 315.

goods to their owners.⁷⁵

He also reminds them not to lie or to break a promise, and to perform prayer in its best form and with humility. He calls upon them to understand and accept the provisions (orders) that Allah has given, and not to falter in their obedience to Him for any reason, be it inclination or laziness, as this is a prerequisite for His assistance and victory over the enemy.⁷⁶

The Imām informs his soldiers, whom he addresses as “*yā maʿshar al-shurāt wa-l-mudāfaʿab*,” thereby referring to various divisions of the army,⁷⁷ of the authority of the people in charge over them as well as “all the people of Socotra, the people of peace and war (*abl al-silm wa-l-ḥarb*).” Authority includes the collection of *zakāb* and *jizyah*, concluding treaties (*mušālahab* and *musālamab*), and waging war on Christians who break their treaty with Muslims (*abl al-nakb min al-naṣārā*) or on polytheists who attack Muslims, whether during travel or residence. Authority also entails jurisdiction; the distribution of one third of *ṣadaqāt*;⁷⁸ enabling women, when

⁷⁵ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 170.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* The term *shārī* originally goes back to the Qurʾān 9:3, whereas the theme has a particular connotation in the Ibāḍī legacy; al-Rawas, “Early Islamic Oman,” 144-145.; see also Amr Ennamī, *Studies in Ibadism (al-Ibāḍīyah)* (Muscat: Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, 2008), 339-340. From the imamate of al-Julandā ibn Masʿūd, the *shurāt*, a particularly motivated volunteer section of the army, were organized in groups of from 200 to 400 people under a tribal leader, overseen by a fully trained Baṣṣī scholar. Wilkinson, *Imamate*, 183-185; al-ʿUbaydlī, *Ḥamlat al-Imām al-Ṣalt ibn Mālik ʿalā jazīrat Suqaṭrā*; al-Rawas, “Early Islamic Oman,” 179; The term *mudāfaʿab* (defenders) refers to a particular division of the army.

⁷⁸ The term *ṣadaqāt* is usually used synonymously for *zakāb*; it seems to have been the interpretation of the Imām to distribute one-third of the *zakāb* among the poor people on the island, while two-thirds are to be brought back to him (cf. *Tuḥfab*, 180, where the same stipulation is made). This seems to be the particular interpretation of the Imām in terms of warfare and may be understood as his *ijtibād*. *Zakāb* money is to be distributed, according to the Qurʾān 9:60, among eight categories of recipients. The Imām does not mention the other categories of recipients, probably as these are already known and not applicable to the situation at hand. He therefore focuses on the one-third that ought to be distributed among the poor (*al-fuqarāʾ*). Along the same lines, al-Ṣalt’s letter to

they cannot rely on their own guardians, to marry according to their wishes with a dowry of no less than four *dirhams*; guardianship over orphans and missing persons in financial matters; levying *zakāb* on the wealth of orphans; and implementing the right of maintenance for women.

In his letter, al-Ṣalt emphasizes the need to listen to and obey the two appointed leaders, Muḥammad ibn ‘Ashīrah and Sa‘īd ibn Shamlāl.⁷⁹ The authority of these military leaders is comprehensive and comparable to that of a governor. No mention of these military leaders is found in the biographical literature.⁸⁰ An ‘Ashīrah ibn ‘Abd Allāh is mentioned as governor of Samā’il during the rule of Imām Ghassān; it is, however, not verifiable if this is one and the same person.⁸¹ It is striking that their tribal affiliation, although well known, is not mentioned, and this may be neither coincidence nor neglect. It may have been deliberately not mentioned so as to overcome any form of tribalism during the campaign.

Important to note here is that the letter is addressed to all the troops, not to the military leaders alone. This speaks to a high degree of transparency as well as to intentionality in creating a sense of a common destiny and shared responsibility: simple soldiers are thereby asked to take responsibility for their own and their leaders’ actions.⁸² The practice of appointing substitutes for the military leaders should they be killed or incapacitated is an important part of military strategy and goes back to the Prophet’s practice at the battle of Mūtah in 8/629. On another level, it reveals that the Socotra campaign was a major event with an expected high toll among the troops.

The Imām explicitly calls upon his soldiers to consult and support their appointed leaders and to uphold the highest of ethics, even

the newly appointed *wālī* of Sohar (in *Tuḥfab*, 184ff.) specifies *zakāb* collection and mentions the distribution of one-third among the poor (see *Tuḥfab*, 190ff.); the distributors (*su‘āb*) are not to count their sustenance from that third, which indeed hints at another category mentioned in the Qur’ān, *al-‘āmilīn ‘alayhā*: those in charge of collecting and distributing *zakāb*.

⁷⁹ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 171-172.

⁸⁰ Al-Riyāmī, *Qaḍīyyat ‘azl al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 54.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 57.

amongst themselves, in order to strengthen their solidarity. He points out the importance of abiding by the Islamic rules of brotherhood and solidarity, so as to be granted success and victory from Allah. With regard to military tactics, al-Ṣalt asks the troops to take care that the steersmen do not to let their boats disperse too far away from each other, and not to precede one another, so that they stay within calling reach: a vitally important command, given the number of boats and the limited means of communication at the time.

Once they reach the island, they are to discuss and consult among themselves, and hope that Allah does not let them unite in misguidance. Following the principle of consultation or *shūrā*, one of the basic distinctions of the Islamic political system, is a recurrent theme in this letter. Instead of instilling in his soldiers' lust for revenge, or activating stereotypical dehumanizing imagery of the enemy, which throughout the history of humankind has remained a rather common means to direct soldiers against their adversaries, the Imām expresses a distinctively Islamic approach:

And convey to them, through your messengers, that they are safe (*āminūn*) as regards their lives, and women and children, and possessions, and that you abide by the prior covenant between them and the Muslims, through treaty (*‘abd*), *dbimmah*, and *jizyah*, and that these will neither be broken nor changed. And ask them to bring you their *jizyah*.⁸³

It seems to be the analysis of al-Ṣalt, either based on previous information or due to his political and strategic analysis, that some, but not all, of the Christians in Socotra have broken their treaty with the Muslims. He therefore builds on reminding the community of *abl al-dbimmah* of their covenant with the Muslims, whereby the *jizyah* is a symbol of submission to Islamic rule; hence, he insists that *jizyah* must be brought to the army. To restore the security of Islamic rule is therefore the aim of the military envoy, rather than taking revenge for the events.

He further asks the troops to send to the insurgents people of their choice, and to choose from among the best and most trustworthy

⁸³ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 174.

Muslims⁸⁴ two representatives, or if they cannot find two who meet the conditions, only one, and “ask them to convey to the insurgents, on my behalf and on yours, to enter Islam, perform prayers and pay *zakāb*, to respect the rights of Allah,⁸⁵ and abstain from disobeying Him; if they accept this, it is the better choice, and will erase whatever they have committed before.”⁸⁶

The order to choose two (or even one) trustworthy Muslims from the local population to be sent as negotiators to the insurgents may throw some light on the ethnic and religious demographics of the island’s inhabitants; this order would only make sense if the local Muslims, who are supposedly and on the basis of the above-mentioned terminological distinction not affiliated with the Ibāḍī school, shared a language and/or ethnic background with the insurgent Christians, thereby facilitating negotiations. The key to understand this order may be that both Christians and non-Ibāḍī Muslims have Mahrī origins, as mentioned earlier.

In case they do not accept the offer to become Muslim, the insurgents are to be asked to repent, to return to their first covenant with the Muslims, and to release any Muslim women still in their hands. They are to be given a specified time limit for this. The Imām emphasizes that the Muslim envoys are not to marry from among the insurgents until all of the enslaved Muslim women are released. Those of the insurgent non-Muslims (*abl al-ḥarb*) who submit, repent, and release the Muslim womenfolk are not to be killed; womenfolk and children are not to be enslaved, nor possessions taken; it is not permissible to betray them, whether in the short or long term. However, the troops are to make sure that these people do not evade and convince their fellow insurgents to follow their ways. *Jizyah* is to be taken from those people. *Jizyah* is not accepted, however, from those who want to send it, staying in their homes, without repenting their deeds. Those who do surrender are to be safe

⁸⁴ The term used here is *abl al-ṣalāb*, “people of the prayer;” it is synonymously used with *abl al-qiblab* in Ibāḍī terminology to designate Muslims of other schools.

⁸⁵ Under *ḥaqq Allāb*, as compared to *ḥaqq al-‘ibād*, fall those rights that target the general welfare, such as prescribed penalties (*ḥudūd*), *zakāb*, and expiations (*kaffārāt*); Majmū‘ah min al-bāḥithīn, *Mu‘jam muṣṭalaḥāt al-Ibāḍiyyah*, 2nd ed. (Salṭanat ‘Umān: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu‘ūn al-Dīniyyah, 2012), I, 266.

⁸⁶ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 174.

in the captivity of the Muslims, with appropriate treatment in terms of food and drink, until they reach the *wālī* of the Muslims. This stipulation implies that legal action will be taken for the preceding rebellion.⁸⁷

In case they refuse both options (accepting Islam or repenting from their deeds and returning to their initial covenant with the Muslims), and this refusal is established by two, or even one trustworthy person from among the Muslims (*abl al-ṣalāb*) whose integrity in conveying information is trusted, al-Ṣalt orders his followers to fight them, inclusive of the permission to employ cunning ruses and to enslave women and those children born to them during the period in which the treaty was breached. Those born during the time of the treaty are not to be enslaved. He later stipulates that, in case of doubt about their time of birth, they are not to be enslaved.⁸⁸

The pages of the letter that follow are filled with rulings concerning war booty. The Imām first emphasizes that no part of the booty, be it small or large, neither thread nor needle, is permissible for use; he underlines that it is prohibited (*ḥarām*) to have sexual

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 179. The same ruling resonates in *Ibāḍī fiqh* compendia, such as Bashīr ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb's *Kitāb al-muḥārabab*: "As to those who commit aggression (*al-muḥāribūn*) after they had already entered peace and were under treaty, whosoever is born of their children during their state of breaking the treaty and annulling their *dbimmah* status is enslaved, regardless of whether they are Arabs or not; as for those who were born during the time of the covenant, they are not to be enslaved." Al-Sālimī, *Early Ibāḍī Literature*, 38. Cf. al-Shaqṣī's *Manhaj al-ṭalībīn*: "Whosoever from *abl al-dbimmah* breaks their treaty, their blood is permissible, and their wealth is booty, their women and children who were born after the treaty was broken are enslaved." (V, 98).

Al-Kindī explicitly refers to Socotra in his *al-Muṣannaḥ*:

Case Study. Abū 'Abd Allāh, to Ghassān, about the women of the people of Socotra who broke their treaty: If a woman from them says, "I did not fight, and did not break any treaty," is it permissible to enslave women for the offenses committed by men? Yes, it is permissible to enslave their women, when they [the men] have waged war. Enslavement concerns women and those born after breaking the treaty, even if they have not waged war. This has been established in the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (pbuh). Al-Kindī, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, XI, 154.

intercourse with captured women (*sabāyā*); that embezzling from war booty is a shameful act and will be punished by hellfire.⁸⁹ Once the booty is sold, one fifth (*kbums*)⁹⁰ is to be withheld by the people in charge of this, Muḥammad ibn ‘Ashīrah, and Sa‘īd ibn Shamlān, and in case something happens to them, Ḥāzim ibn Hammām, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Yazīd, and ‘Umar ibn Tamīm would replace them. He reiterates mention of the people in charge as if to erase any doubt regarding their comprehensive authority. Captured women and children are to be brought to the Imām and not sold. During this time, they are to be sustained from the *kbums*.⁹¹

At a later stage in the letter, he again refers to the distribution of booty: nothing may be kept of weapons, food, cattle or furniture, be it little or much: whatever cannot be carried is to be sold by Muḥammad ibn ‘Ashīrah and Sa‘īd ibn Shamlāl; the *kbums* of it is to be sent to the Imām, while the remaining four-fifths are to be distributed in equal shares among those who participated in the war.⁹² It is noteworthy that the letter does not refer to the discussion common in *fiqh* compendia on the shares for infantrymen versus cavalrymen; this is not an issue particular to the Ibāḍī school;⁹³ rather, it is more likely that the letter does not discuss it because al-Ṣalt’s army did not rely on horses in this battle.

A distinctive feature in these orders is that, although the war booty is collected, whatever cannot be transported back to Oman is to be sold, the *kbums* deducted, and equal shares of the remaining four-fifths allotted among the soldiers who partake in warfare. The Imām exempts captured women and children from this. They are not to be sold and obviously are not part of the soldiers’ shares; sexual

⁸⁹ For a discussion of defalcation from war booty (*gbulūl*) see Jumayyil ibn Khamīs al-Sa‘dī, *Qāmūs al-sbarī‘ab al-ḥawī ṭuruqabā al-wasī‘ab: mawsū‘ab ḍakbmab taḍumm tis‘in juz‘an fī mukbtalaf funūn al-sbarī‘ab muqābalatan ‘alā makḥṭūṭātībā* (Muscat: Maktabat al-Jīl al-Wā‘id, 2015), LXXXIX, 308.

⁹⁰ *Kbums*, one-fifth of the war booty, is to be allotted to *bayt al-māl* (the state treasury), to be distributed among specified groups: see Q 8:41.

⁹¹ “*min māl Allāb min al-gbanā‘im*” (al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 176); “*min māl Allāb min al-magbānim*” (al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 179).

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Cf. al-Shaqṣī, who mentions a distribution of two shares to the cavalryman and one to the infantryman (*Manhaj al-ṭālibīn*, V, 95); see also the discussion in al-Sa‘dī, *Qāmūs al-sbarī‘ab*, LXXXIX, 293-299.

intercourse with these women is prohibited. Generally referred to as *sabāyā*, the overall tenor of the *fiqh* compendia (of all schools) is that intercourse with captured women is permissible under certain conditions, among which that they are allotted in a soldier's share.⁹⁴ It seems to be the Imām's *ijtibād* to exempt women and children from the soldiers' shares.⁹⁵ Given the circumstances that triggered the campaign, in which Muslim women were captured, enslaved, and raped by the Christian insurgents, it seems that al-Ṣalt wants to emphasize the distinctively more ethical dimension of Islamic warfare in this regard.

In case of doubt concerning the insurgents' refusal of both options (Islam or repentance and surrender), no cunning ruses or killing are to be carried out, and no captives or booty are to be taken. Interestingly, the case of doubt is established through the witnesses: "If neither two men nor one of the Muslims whom you trust is available as a messenger to inform them of evidence against them and transmit their answer..."⁹⁶ This point is mentioned repeatedly, just as the three choices of Islam, repentance and return to the former treaty, or fighting are reiterated several times, as if to ascertain that the message reaches all of the soldiers involved.

⁹⁴ Anke Bouzenita, *ʿAbdarrāḥmān al-Auzāʿī – ein Rechtsgelehrter des 2. Jabrbunderts d.H. und sein Beitrag zu den Siyar. Erarbeitet auf der Grundlage des k. ar-Radd ʿalā siyar al-Auzāʿī*, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, Band 240 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2001), 218-220.

⁹⁵ There is, however, an ambiguity in the letter; where it states on p. 179, "and whoever makes booty and womenfolk fall into his hands, he shall fear Allāh and not have intercourse with them, until he sells them and retains their price," whereas the previous order was that women and children in captivity are not to be sold, but sent to the Imām. The focus on the prohibition of intercourse is persistent, however. It is hoped that this ambiguity may be resolved through an analysis of the manuscript, should it be found. Al-Bisyawī specifies:

And it was said that ʿUmar told his son: "Do not commit adultery, and do not have intercourse with a (captive women) from the booty, as it is not allowed for a man to have intercourse with a woman until she has been allotted to him in his share, and not before her womb is proven empty, and he teaches her the great ablution (*ghusl*) from the greater ritual impurity and he teaches her prayer and shaving her private parts (*ḥalq al-ʿānah*) after her conversion to Islam." *Jāmiʿ*, IV, 149.

⁹⁶ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 176.

B. Fighting as the Last Resort

One of the most striking elements of this letter may be that, although the Imām dispatches his troops in great numbers to restore the island of Socotra to Islamic rule upon a breach of treaty and insurgency on the part of some Christian *dbimmī*, he still advises his troops to take the same steps that are taken during a military campaign to open a territory to Islam, rather than to wage a campaign of punishment or retribution: namely, to call them to Islam, and if they refuse, they are to pay the *jizyah* and thereby succumb to Islamic rule, and only to fight them when those two options are forfeited.⁹⁷ As the insurgents had already been under covenant and broke it, and the island of Socotra was legally under Islamic rule, al-Ṣalt could have advised his soldiers to fight, kill, and punish. In his legacy, military combat is definitely described as the last resort, and the Imām is adamant about seeing all the Islamic ethical standards of warfare applied if fighting were deemed necessary.

The strict adherence to giving these options of Islam, *dbimmah*, or fighting is pervasive in the *fiqh* literature of the Ibādī school.⁹⁸ Al-Kindī, author of *al-Muṣannaf*, refers to the Socotra case in his chapter on the people of the covenant, their treaty, breach of treaty, and the legal rules for both cases, in the dictum of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb, the content of which is identical with al-Ṣalt's legacy. Upon a breach of treaty, *abl al-ḥarb* are first asked to embrace Islam; in case they decline, they are asked to return to the terms of treaty; in case they refuse, it is permissible to fight them, their lives and possessions are permissible, and those of their children born after breaking the treaty may be enslaved.⁹⁹ The same terms of *jizyah* are reiterated, again on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Farḥāt al-Jaʿbūrī also draws a parallel to the sermons of Ṭalīb al-Ḥaqq and his military leader, Abū Ḥamzah al-Shārī, which specify the Ibādī “law of jihād for the sake of Allāh,” and this was implemented in all of their combats. al-Jaʿbūrī, *al-Tadwīn al-fiqhī*, 63.

⁹⁸ Striking is the emphasis on the necessity for the call to Islam prior to any military action, be it against *musbrīkūn* (polytheists), *murtaddūn* (renegades) or *bughāt* (rebels); cf. *Jāmiʿ Abī l-Ḥawwārī*, I, 78ff., and more particularly, *Jāmiʿ al-Faḍl Ibn al-Ḥawwārī*, II, 127-138.

⁹⁹ Al-Kindī, *al-Muṣannaf*, XI, 150-157.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

The *sīrab* of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb to the people of the Maghrib has an extensive discussion on the necessity to call every adversary to Islam before taking up any military action:

The same applies to the polytheists, if the Muslims raid them, regardless of whether they are under *dhimmah* and covenant or not; so if they [the Muslims] enter their territory, they must neither kill, nor enslave, nor take spoils of war before they call them to Islam. If they called them, and they rejected the call, it is permissible to fight them, to enslave their children, and to take their possessions as spoils.¹⁰¹

The Imām also gives advice for the organization of warfare: the positioning and formation of lines and flanks, the possibility of setting up an ambush, and how to keep motivation high.¹⁰² The motto of the soldiers should be “There is no deity but Allāh, and Muḥammad is His messenger; rule belongs only to Allāh, and no authority is due to whoever does not govern by what Allāh has revealed, in dissolution, disassociation and separation from all the enemies of Allāh.”¹⁰³ With his reference to *barā’ab* (disavowal, disassociation), he uses themes of particular importance for the Ibāḍī school.¹⁰⁴

Although no explicit reference is made to Ibāḍī teachings in the letter other than what can be inferred through the particular terminology, such as the above-mentioned focus on dissolution and disassociation (here: *kbul^{am} wa-barā’at^{am}*; usually *al-walāyah wa-l-barā’ab*: loyalty and disavowal), the letter mentions the Muslims in Oman as being in charge on the island:

¹⁰¹ Kāshif, *al-Siyar wa-l-jawābāt*, 251; The part on warfare in this *sīrab* is not identical with the Imām’s legacy.

¹⁰² Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 177.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁰⁴ For reasons of space restrictions, I will not discuss the concept in this paper. For an explanation of the Ibāḍī system of *walāyah* and *barā’ab* see Ennami, *Studies in Ibadism*, 286-309. Of the many Orientalist works on the topic, see Valerie J. Hoffman, “Ibāḍī Scholars on Association and Dissociation, from the 10th to the 21st Century,” in *Ibāḍī Jurisprudence. Origins, Developments and Cases: Studies on Ibadism and Oman*, Barbara Michalak-Pikulska and Reinhard Eisener, eds., vol. 6 of *Studies on Ibadism and Oman*, Abdulrahman Al Salimi and Heinz Gaube, eds., 185-193; Yohei Kondo, “Ibāḍī Discussions on Conversion and Commitment,” *Muslim World* 105, no. 2 (2015), 224-235, <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12093>.

If they (the army) reach them (the insurgents), they shall call them to Islam and to accept it; if they respond, it is accepted from them; and if they dislike it, they shall call them to be true to their covenant and return from insurgence to the rule of the Qurʾān and the rule of its people, the Muslims in Oman.¹⁰⁵

The letter contains at least one particularly Omani phrase: “and say, as your brothers have said: ‘Even if they beat us until we reach *al-Ghāf* in Oman, until we know that truth is with us, and falsehood with them, and that they are Satan’s party, while you are the party of the Merciful’.”¹⁰⁶ The saying may have been a proverb or a commonly shared reference in the third century; it could have been the name of a place at the time, or simply a reference to a typical and culturally significant species of Omani flora, the *ghāf* tree (*Prosopis cineraria*).

C. Nobody is Left Behind

Subsequently, the letter discusses a topic of high social importance for any traumatized society that has just overcome a state of civil war, military intervention, or occupation. The Imām specifies that children already born of or to be born of the Muslim women enslaved by the enemy are Muslims like their mothers and do not follow their fathers (in descent or religion), even if the fathers enter or return under the covenant with the Muslims.¹⁰⁷

The first important message is that children born under these circumstances – wherein their mothers have been enslaved and probably raped – are considered to be part of the Muslim community. This detail in a public address to the soldiers is highly significant, as it emphasizes societal solidarity with these women and their innocent children and is intended to remove the social stigma from them. Interestingly, neither contemporary nor later treatises on war-related topics raise this particular issue with a comparable openness. Al-Ṣalt’s order in this regard can only be described as exceptionally farsighted. At the same time the Imām does not lose sight of the fate of potential female prisoners of war, for he explicitly prohibits sexual relations with them. The measures he recommends are intended to restore

¹⁰⁵ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 176-177.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

internal peace and coherence to a society in the aftermath of civil war.

The letter further stipulates that, should any of the enslaved Muslim women have apostatized from Islam, she is to be forcefully returned to it.¹⁰⁸ With regard to the rule on apostasy (*irtidād*), the *Ibāḍī* school, like the majority *Sunnī* schools, but unlike the *Ḥanafī* school, does not appear to differentiate between male and female apostates in terms of punishment.¹⁰⁹ The mentioned “forceful return” to Islam seems to be the *Imām’s* *ijtibād* with regard to these women, whom he deems to have been forced into Christianity by enslavement.

The *Imām* continues with the description of other prohibitions during warfare that are reminiscent of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet and of *Abū Bakr’s* orders to the military leaders who entered Syria:

If war rages between them and you, do not kill a small child, nor an old man or a woman, other than an old man or a woman who assisted [the enemy] in fighting. Do not mutilate whomever you have killed during warfare, as the Messenger of Allāh, may peace be upon him, prohibited mutilation.¹¹⁰

It can clearly be inferred from the letter that al-Ṣalt considers Socotra as *dār al-Islām*; after ordering his troops to distribute one-third of the collected *zakāb* money among the poor on the island according to their discretion and return the remaining two-thirds to him, he emphasizes, “It is my firm point of view that this is your position in the village, as the governors of the Muslims had already settled there before you.”¹¹¹ Another point indicating this is that he orders his troops to perform the “unshortened” complete prayer

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ See al-Kindī, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, XI, 189ff., and al-Sa‘dī, *Qāmūs al-sharī‘ah*, XC, 12ff.

¹¹⁰ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 179-180. Compare the stipulations in Bashīr ibn Muḥammad’s *Kitāb al-muḥārabab*:

The Messenger of Allāh (pbuh) has established the *sunnab* that “war takes place only after the call to Islam,” and he “forbade defalcation” and “mutilation,” as well as “killing the aged man, women, and children,” and the messengers of the people of war and whosoever came to the Muslims from them with *amān*, as long as their messenger and whoever does not have a covenant (‘*abd*) with them does not annul the *amān* by aggression (al-Sālimī, *Early Ibāḍī Literature*, 36).

¹¹¹ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 180.

while they are “in the village,” meaning in a settlement, while they should pray the combined and shortened prayers (*jamʿ* and *qaṣr*) once they “leave the village” by a distance of two *farsakb*. Again, the Imām’s *ijtibād* has been incorporated here, as it is the teaching of the *madbbab* that two *farsakb* or 12 km is the minimum distance for shortening the obligatory prayers (which becomes the basic rule [*ʿazīmab*], while combining the prayers is optional [*rukḥṣab*]). Al-Ṣalt orders both, most likely due to the rather unsettled circumstances typical of warfare.¹¹²

Al-Ṣalt then expounds on the details of performing prayers during wartime (*ṣalāt al-ḥarb*),¹¹³ and again reminds his soldiers of the general Islamic ethics of warfare: “I advise you to fear Allāh, and do not sell any weapons in Socotra;¹¹⁴ do not drink *nabīdh*, and none of you shall approach any woman without marriage, do not insult each other, and let not your meetings be engaged in senseless distraction, amusement, jest, or lying.” Al-Ṣalt gives explicit permission to the leaders of the expedition, whom he names again, individually, to cut ties with those soldiers who are evidentially involved in any of these crimes, or who have inflicted harm on any Muslim or associated themselves with any of their enemies. These are to be ousted from the army and refused financial assistance; their weapons are to be confiscated. Even in this case, repentance is possible and will be accepted, upon which they are to be alimeted, but decisions (about individual cases) will be taken upon their return to the Imām.¹¹⁵ The responsibility of the Imām to investigate any transgression against lives or property on behalf of his army is emphasized in the *fiqh*

¹¹² It ought to be noted that the letter uses the terms *al-ʿishbāʿ* and *al-ʿatmab* in discussing the combination of two prayers (al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 180); this may be a mistake in the letter or its printed version, as both terms are used synonymously to designate the last prayer. It should have been *al-maghrīb* and *al-ʿishbāʿ* or *al-maghrīb* and *al-ʿatmab* instead. For the rules of *ṣalāt al-safar* in the Ibāḍī school, see *Muʿjam muṣṭalahāt al-Ibāḍīyyah*, I, 446.

¹¹³ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 180; See also Abū Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar al-Izkawī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Munʿim ʿĀmir (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth wa-l-Shuʿūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1981), II, 365.

¹¹⁴ On the sale of weapons in enemy territory see also al-Saʿdī, *Qāmūs al-sharīʿah*, LXXXVIII, 420ff.

¹¹⁵ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 181.

literature.¹¹⁶ Obviously, as is evident from the recommended interaction with the repenting insurgents, army leaders do not have the authority to implement *ḥudūd* or even *taʿzīr* punishments during times of warfare, because any related decision will be taken by the Imām. This may be commensurate with the limited authority of the *wāli* that is apparent from al-Ṣalt's previously mentioned letter to the governor of Rustaq,¹¹⁷ and constitutes further evidence of the centralized style of governance on the part of the Imām.

Al-Ṣalt also concedes that any Muslim (*min ahl al-ṣalāb*) man, woman, or child from the people of Socotra who wishes to come to the "lands of the Muslims" – and he obviously refers to Oman – may do so. There is no discrimination with regard to *madbbab* affiliation. The same applies to children of the *shurāt* and those (non-Muslims) who assisted the Muslims. They are to be transported and supported from the state treasury (*māl Allāb*; here: *al-khums*) until they reach the land of the Muslims "... because that territory (*dār*) is not suitable for them after war has been waged between us and them [the enemy]."¹¹⁸ This insightful decision takes the loss of rulership over the island into account; in al-Ṣalt's calculations, Socotra may revert to *dār al-ḥarb* after the campaign.

With regard to (Muslims') marrying Christian women from the people of Socotra, al-Ṣalt emphasizes that only those women of the Christians under covenant who read the Gospel may be married; the same restriction applies to the consumption of slaughtered animals and food, while the Muslims must not marry women of the insurgents (*ahl al-ḥarb*), whether they read the Gospel or not.¹¹⁹

In his *Kitāb min al-sunnab mukhtaṣarab*, Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb, the writer (and probably author) of this letter, mentions that marrying the free women of *ahl al-kitāb* is discouraged (*makrūb*), due to its prohibition by ʿUmar.¹²⁰ He probably refers to the case of

¹¹⁶ See al-Kindī, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, III, 140ff.

¹¹⁷ Hāshim, *al-Ḥarakab al-Ibāḍiyyab*, 221; this also corresponds to Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb's view in *al-Siyar wa-l-jawābāt*, 239.

¹¹⁸ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥḥab*, 182.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹²⁰ Sulaymān ibn Ibrāhīm Bābzīz al-Warjalānī, *al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb al-Ruḥaylī, ḥayātubū wa-āthārubū* (t. 260 AH) [Commentary on *Abwāb min al-*

Ḥudhayfah, whom ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb had asked to divorce the Jewish woman he had married in al-Madā’in. The author adds, “The marriage of female slaves from *abl al-kitāb* is prohibited (*ḥarām*).”¹²¹

Generally, the prohibition is vocalized with regard to marrying a *kitābiyyah* who does not live under Islamic rule, with differences of opinion among the Ibāḍī scholars.¹²² It is therefore interesting that the distinction focused on here is the level of religiosity subsequent to the condition of being under covenant; this seems to be the particular interpretation of al-Ṣalt. Interesting also is the lack of differentiation between slaughtered animals and other food.¹²³

Al-Ṣalt continues:

Whatever is doubtful to you and you do not find the answer to it in narrations (*athar*), in the Qur’ān (*Kitāb*) or Sunnah, or in this letter, abstain from making a decision about it until you submit it to me, Allāh willing. If the matter between you and your enemy extends to the African coastline (*ra’s al-zinj*), take it out there; and if the matter between them and you has been decided, do not violate your agreement, Allāh willing. Should the matter not be decided up to Tabramah, then take it as far as Tabramah,¹²⁴ Allāh willing. I hope that you will have enough food to last you until then, Allāh willing.

Do not differ in your opinions, whether in peace or war; and your consent shall be one, and your anger one, your friend and foe should be one, all the same, as is your blood.¹²⁵

He ends his advice with a prolonged supplication for their success.

sunnah mukhtaṣarab] (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfah, 2009), 234.

¹²¹ Al-Warjalānī, *al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb al-Ruḥaylī*, 234.

¹²² Al-Aghbarī, *‘Abd al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 93.

¹²³ Al-Sa‘dī in his *Qāmūs al-sharī‘ah* mentions the same distinction: meat slaughtered by *abl al-kitāb* may be consumed if they read the Gospels (XXXV, 82-83). As opposed to this, Bashīr ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb states, “... and Allāh has permitted to eat the slaughtered animals from *Abl al-kitāb*, and to marry the chaste of their women (*muḥṣanāt*), and prohibited the same from the *Majūs*.” Al-Sālimī, *Early Ibāḍī Literature*, 37.

¹²⁴ Tabramah could be the name of a town called Barmah on the East African coast, see al-Riyāmī, *Qaḍīyyat ‘azl al-Imām al-Ṣalt*, 67.

¹²⁵ Al-Sālimī, *Tuḥfab*, 182.

Conclusions and Implications

The letter of Imām al-Ṣalt is a unique document on international relations in the 3rd/9th century, from several perspectives. It sheds light on the *fiqh* rulings of relations with people under covenant in the particular case of their transgression and breach of a treaty. Warfare is portrayed as the last resort after all other possibilities have been exhausted, even in a highly emotionally sensitive situation. Even then, ethical standards are to be rigorously observed. The letter does not invoke any form of stereotypical denigration of the enemy, as this adversary may, through repentance and conversion, eventually become part of the Muslim community.

The messages of the letter seem to anticipate many rather modern deliberations. The focus on the fate of women under occupation, the need to liberate them from their oppressors, and the acceptance of their children, most likely conceived as a consequence of rape, as part of the Muslim community, are groundbreaking measures intended to restore peace and harmony within the society. At the same time, the order to respect the dignity of female non-Muslim prisoners by not allowing them to be subjected to a comparable fate is unusually farsighted and in contrast to the common practices of conquering armies worldwide.

Moreover, the letter gives insight into the military organization of the army in al-Ṣalt's imamate: demanding a high level of Islamic ethical standards from the soldiers, imbuing them with the spirit of individual and communal responsibility, as well as imposing a great degree of transparency. Decisions are to be taken through mutual consultation. Transgression against the rules is expressly forbidden, and the high ethical standard set by Imām al-Ṣalt means that what might pass for a minor offense in other contexts would constitute a transgression here; nevertheless, the perpetrator always has an option to return to the fold of the community through repentance.

The letter is reminiscent of the rulings of Islamic law found in any *fiqh* compendium, with some Ibāḍī interpretations and Omani particularities. It also allows an assessment of the relations between Ibāḍī Muslims and those following other legal schools in the 3rd/9th century, wherein no discrimination affecting rights and duties is found.

The historical details with regard to some of the circumstances of the campaign will remain at least partly unknown unless new sources on the period are uncovered; nevertheless, it has been possible to reconstruct, through the letter and its stipulations, the general spirit of the age and the region with regard to Muslim-Christian and international relations. On a final note, the survival of the dicta of the letter, on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Maḥbūb, in the *fiqh* books of the Ibāḍī school asserts the scholar's importance and role in al-Ṣalt's imamate.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to my colleagues and postgraduate students at the department of Islamic Sciences, College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, for their interest and willingness to discuss many details of this paper with me. I am also indebted to Dr. 'Alī al-Riyāmī, Dept. of History, SQU, for a copy of his book, and to Dr. Nāṣir al-Nadābī, expert at the Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman, for his valuable advice on some historical aspects of the topic.

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