

# ***Ballaghanā ‘an an-Nabī: early Basran and Omani Ibādī understandings of sunna and siyar, āthār and nasab***

Adam Gaiser

Florida State University

[agaiser@fsu.edu](mailto:agaiser@fsu.edu)

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the usages of four concepts – *sunna*, *sīra*, *āthār*, and *nasab* – mainly in early Ibādī epistles, but also in other types of Ibādī literature, to examine how early Ibādīs understood the legacy of the Prophet Muḥammad, and their relation to that legacy. It argues that before the sixth/twelfth century a notion of communal pedigree occupied pride of place in early Ibādī conceptualizations of legality and legitimacy. Thus, Ibādī *sunna* was “communal *sunna*”. The accumulated weight of Ibādī tradition – what is known as *āthār* in Ibādī literature – operated authoritatively as a counterpart to *sunna*; and the Ibādī *siyar* tradition did not focus on the Prophet exclusively, but rather described the scholarly community as an imagined whole. Moreover, Ibādīs explicitly articulated their communal pedigree in “teacher lines” (called *nasab al-dīn* or *nasab al-islām*) in Omani literature, and through the structure of their *ṭabaqāt/siyar* works in North Africa. Appreciating the importance of this communal pedigree, and the nexus of concepts through which it was articulated, helps us to understand the relative lack of emphasis placed on collecting and documenting ḥadīth (Ibādīs employ ḥadīth, but they did not use *isnāds*, nor did they appear to have a ḥadīth collection until the sixth/twelfth century), as well as the general absence of Prophetic biography among them (which also does not appear until the sixth/twelfth century).

**Keywords:** Kharijites, Ibādīs, Prophet, *Sīra*, *Siyar*, *Āthār*, *Nasab*, *Sunna*, Oman

From a modern Sunni or Shi‘i Muslim perspective, early Ibādī attitudes towards *ḥadīth* and *sīra* might seem puzzling, leading the observer to assume that early Ibādīs placed little emphasis on *ḥadīth*, and none on Prophetic biography. For example, *ḥadīth*, both Prophetic and non-Prophetic, appear in the early Ibādī epistles (*siyar*) but sparsely, and without *isnāds*.<sup>1</sup> Ibādīs do not seem to have a formal *ḥadīth* collection until quite late – Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf al-Warjlanī’s (d. 570/1174) sixth/twelfth-century *Tarīb al-musnad* is the earliest example

1 One exception is the *sīra* (epistle) of Shabīb b. ‘Aṭīyya, which contains a number of well-known and widely disseminated *ḥadīth*. See Abdulrahman Al-Salimi and Wilferd Madelung, *Ibādī Texts from the 2nd/8th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 149–222.

(though Ibādīs have claimed that other, earlier collections existed).<sup>2</sup> Finally, there are no examples of Prophetic biography (either *maghāzī* or *sīra*) in the first six centuries of Ibādī writings. To be sure, Ibādī texts provide details about the Prophet's life, but the first biography – meaning a recognizable account of the Prophet's life that narrates all or some of it in some sort of order – is contained in an Omani sixth/twelfth century text, Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Sa'īd al-Qalhātī's *al-Kashf wa'l-bayān*.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the term *sīra*, among Omanis, denotes an epistle, while among North Africans it comes to mean "biography" in general, though none of the North African Ibādī *kutub al-siyar* that were penned before the eighth/fourteenth century contain a biography of the Prophet Muḥammad. So early Ibādī usages of these concepts seem far askance of what develops among their Sunni and Shi'a counterparts, and this is reflected in the ostensible absence of certain genres (like *ḥadīth* collections and Prophetic biography) among them before the sixth/twelfth century.

At the same time, it is clear from the early to medieval (and indeed, modern) Ibādī textual corpus that the group cherished the memory of the Prophet, preserved it amongst themselves, and considered his actions and direction worthy of emulation as *sunna*. In other words, Ibādīs certainly valued what reached them about the Prophet (to play on the title of this paper), but they framed and utilized that body of memory differently from their later Sunni and Shi'i counterparts in the first six or so centuries of their history. This paper, then, explores early Ibādī, mainly Basran and Omani, perspectives towards the Prophetic legacy and its relation to the Ibādī community as an opportunity to chart alternatives to the now-dominant and largely Sunni-centric (and perhaps, secondarily, Shi'i-centric) paradigms of Prophetic *ḥadīth* and *sīra*. It will examine a cluster of concepts – namely the concepts of *sunna*, *sīra*, *āthār*, and *nasab* – as they appear in early Basran and Omani Ibādī writings in order to arrive at some conclusions about how Ibādīs established connections to Prophetic tradition writ large. In particular, the paper focuses on the early Ibādī *siyar* (epistles), as they represent the earliest strata of available Ibādī texts, and specifically, it examines the epistle (*sīra*) of Abū Mawdūd Ḥājjib al-Ṭā'ī, an early Basran 'ālim who died some time in the second half of the second/eighth century. Although the Ibādī tradition casts earlier figures such as Jābir b. Zayd and Abū Bilāl Mirdās b. Udayya as Ibādīs proper, Wilkinson has argued that these figures are better understood as "proto-Ibādīs", or as undifferentiated moderate Khārijites of a sort. Abū Mawdūd, on the other hand, hails from the following generation, in which something recognizable as Ibādism proper had developed from the earlier moderate Khārijites of Basra.<sup>4</sup> Abū Mawdūd is thus one of the first recognizably Ibādī intellectuals, and his epistle hails from the earliest strata of Ibādī writings. His *sīra* thus allows for a glimpse

2 For references to other Ibādī *ḥadīth* collections, see 'Amr K. Ennāmi, *Studies in Ibādism (al-Ibādīyah)* (Muscat: Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, n.d.), 115–6.

3 Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Sa'īd al-Qalhātī, *al-Kashf wa'l-bayān*, ed. Sayyida Ismā'īl Kāshif (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa'l-Thaqāfa, n.d.), 2: 113–89.

4 John C. Wilkinson, *Ibādism: Origins and Early Development in Oman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 154–77.

into one early Ibādī thinker's conceptualizations of *sunna*, *sīra*, and *āthār*, and offers a bridge towards understanding how those concepts would shape later Ibādī usages of *nasab*.

Building from Abū Mawdūd's *sīra* to other pre-sixth/twelfth century Ibādī writings (such as al-Kindī's *Bayān al-shar'*), this paper argues that a notion of a communal pedigree underlies and connects these four concepts, such that early Ibādī self-fashioning can be viewed as a process of imagining and constructing Ibādism as a kind of "thoroughbred" Islam. By contrast, nascent Sunnis and Shi'is increasingly moved towards an approach to the Prophetic legacy that, on the one hand, atomized that legacy in discrete *ḥadīths* and, on the other, narrativized it as edifying story (*qiṣṣa*) qua biography (*sīra*). In his seminal work on Islamic law, Schacht argued that a notion of "living tradition" preceded al-Shāfi'ī's turn towards a more exclusive notion of Prophetic *sunna*.<sup>5</sup> Although Schacht's notion of regional schools has been challenged, the underlying insight was that *sunna* was not initially located exclusively in the person of the Prophet, but rather was assumed by some Muslims to be the purview of the community.<sup>6</sup> Rahman, responding to Schacht, argued that the notion of Prophetic *sunna* in the early period encompassed interpretation and (an informal and emerging) consensus on those interpretations – a kind of *ijmā'* – but that the *ḥadīth* movement broke this "organic relationship" between *sunna*, interpretation, and consensus.<sup>7</sup> In another later article refining Schacht's notion of communal *sunna*, Dutton notes how certain Muslim groups, such as the Ibādiyya, continued to regard the actions (*'amal*) of the community (or of certain members of the community) as authoritative indicators of what proper Islamic action should be.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Francesca notes how in early Ibādī legal works *sunna* is more often derived from the Companions and Successors of the Prophet (not including 'Uthmān or the Umayyads), or from the early legal luminaries of the Ibādiyya.<sup>9</sup> This article builds on the work of these scholars, but draws particular attention to the idea of communal pedigree as critical not only to the socio-legal endeavour of establishing the *sunna*, but also to the socio-historical endeavour of bounding a righteous community.<sup>10</sup> In other words, I emphasize

- 5 Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), 58–81.
- 6 Nimrod Hurvitz, "Schools of law and historical context: re-examining the formation of the Ḥanbalī Madhhab", *Islamic Law and Society* 7/1, 2000, 37–64; Wael Hallaq, "From regional to personal schools of law? A reevaluation", *Islamic Law and Society* 8/1, 2001, 1–26.
- 7 Fazlur Rahman, "Concepts *Sunnah*, *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'* in the early period", *Islamic Studies* 1/1, 1962, 8, 16–18.
- 8 Yasin Dutton, "'Amal v Ḥadīth in Islamic law: the case of *Sadl al-Yadayn* (Holding one's hands by one's sides) when doing the prayer", *Islamic Law and Society* 3/1, 1996, 16. See also the discussion of Schacht, Dutton and others' view towards *sunna* in Volkan Stodolsky, *A New Historical Model and Periodization for the Perception of the Sunnah of the Prophet and his Companions* (Chicago: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2012), 19–41.
- 9 Ersilia Francesca, "The concept of *sunna* in the Ibādī school", in Adis Duderija (ed.), *The Sunna and Its Status in Islamic Law* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 97–115.
- 10 Moreover, this work relies largely on the early Ibādī *siyar*, recently published in Al-Salimi and Madelung's *Ibādī Texts from the 2nd/8th Century*.

how, from an Ibādī perspective, the collective genealogy of Ibādī scholars, Successors, Companions and, indeed, the Prophet himself, confirms the Ibādī community as the purest in belief and practice, thereby guaranteeing that the *sunna* preserved by it remains untainted.

Before delving into examples of *ḥadīth* from the Ibādī *siyar*, it is important to address some questions regarding the most widely known Ibādī *ḥadīth* collection. Modern Ibādīs consider al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb al-Farāhīdī's (d. c. 175/791) *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* (also known as the *Musnad al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb*) to be the authoritative collection of Ibādī *ḥadīth*.<sup>11</sup> Yet the earliest version of this collection seems to be the aforementioned Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf al-Warjlānī's (d. 570/1174) sixth/twelfth-century North African *Tartīb al-musnad*, so this assumption requires more research. Certainly, some of the material in the *Musnad* hails from the early period, but it is unclear how much of it, how this material came to al-Warjlānī's attention in the first place, and in what form it did so.<sup>12</sup>

Equally unclear is when this Ibādī *ḥadīth* collection became widespread and accepted as particularly authoritative among Ibādīs. It is noteworthy that the first commentary on the *Musnad* (to my knowledge), Abū Sitta al-Qaṣabī's (d. 1088/1677) *Ḥawāshī al-tartīb*, dates from the *nahḍa* period (i.e. eleventh–thirteenth/seventeenth–nineteenth centuries).<sup>13</sup> This very same work was one of the first books to be published by the Zanzibar press, which was promoted by the Ibādī sultan Barghash b. Sa'īd (r. 1870–88) in the late 1800s. It would appear, then, that the *Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* came to be regarded as especially authoritative at a comparatively late date, at least among the Ibādīs of Oman and Zanzibar. Undoubtedly, two additional late eighteenth- to early twentieth-century commentaries solidified its status among Ibādīs in the modern era: the *Sharḥ al-jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* by the blind Shaykh 'Abdallāh b. Ḥumayd al-Sālimī (d. 1914), who is widely regarded as one of the most important modern Omani Ibādī intellectuals; and the second, the *Tartīb al-tartīb* by Muḥammad b. Yūsuf Aṭṭayyish (d. 1914), one of the most prolific and influential North African Ibādī scholars of the late *nahḍa* period.<sup>14</sup>

Comparing the appearance and usage of *ḥadīth* in second/eighth-century Basran and Arabian Ibādī epistles (*siyar*) with those found in al-Warjlānī's collection can illustrate a number of points about the early conceptualization, as well as later development, of the concept of *sunna* among the Ibādīyya. For

11 al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ musnad al-imām al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb* (Muscat: Maktabat al-Istiḳāma, 2003); al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb, *Musnad al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb b. 'Amr al-Azdī al-Baṣrī 'alā tartīb Abī Ya'qūb Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm al-Warjlānī*, ed. 'Abdallāh b. Ḥumayd al-Sālimī (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Najāh, 1910).

12 See Francesca, "The concept of *sunna* in the Ibādī school", 109–10; Josef Van Ess, "Untersuchungen zu einigen ibādītischen Handschriften", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 126/1, 1976, 32–3; Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im Frühen Islam* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991–95), 2: 134; Mohamed Talbi, *Etudes d'Histoire Ifriqiyenne et de Civilisation Musulmane Medievale* (Tunis: Université de Tunis, 1982), 36 ff.; John C. Wilkinson, "Ibādī ḥadīth: an essay in normalization", *Der Islam* 62/2, 1985, 231 ff.; Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 56.

13 Wilkinson, "Ibādī ḥadīth", 231.

14 Wilkinson, "Ibādī ḥadīth", 231.

example, the second/eighth-century *sīra* of Abū Mawdūd Ḥājib al-Ṭā'ī contains three *ḥadīth*: two from the Prophet,<sup>15</sup> and one from the Caliph 'Umar.<sup>16</sup> Only one of the two Prophetic *ḥadīth* – the one that reads “whoso commits a misdeed or accommodates a sinner, upon him is the curse of God” – appears in al-Rabī's (via al-Warjlānī) *Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, in two different places. The first instance (no. 42) presents it with a variant word order from that in Abū Mawdūd's *sīra*: “the curse of God on whoso commits a misdeed or accommodates a sinner” (*la'nat Allāh man aḥdatha ḥadathan ow āwā muḥdithan*).<sup>17</sup> The second *ḥadīth* (no. 753) places this phrase in the context of a longer narration, and changes the wording in a more profound way: “and whoso commits in Islam a misdeed, or accommodates a sinner, he is not of us” (*wa man aḥdatha fī al-islām ḥadathan or āwā muḥdithan fa-laysa minnā*).<sup>18</sup>

Both *ḥadīth* as they appear in al-Rabī's collection also have *isnāds*: no. 43 traces itself from Abū 'Ubayda (Muslim b. Abī Karīma – who Ibādīs regard as the first imam of their group),<sup>19</sup> Jābir b. Zayd, Ibn 'Abbās, to the Prophet. The second (no. 753) traces itself from al-Rabī himself, Jābir b. Zayd, to the Prophet. Both contain Jābir b. Zayd, who Ibādīs consider the real founder of the group, as the common link.<sup>20</sup> The second *isnād*, however, remains attenuated.

A comparison of these two sources brings to light a few observations about the role of *ḥadīth* in establishing early Ibādī notions of *sunna*.<sup>21</sup> First, altered word order, apparently, did not pose a problem for Ibādīs. This fact is borne out from other sources: Abū 'Ubayda, a contemporary of Abū Mawdūd (who is also the first link in *ḥadīth* no. 42's *isnād*), is reported to have said: “it does not matter to change the position of the words of the Traditions of the Prophet or of the *Āthār* by bringing them forward or putting them back if the meaning is the same”.<sup>22</sup> He also held that specific knowledge of the *ḥadīth* was not necessary for a person to be considered a reliable source of knowledge (*'ilm*) and legal opinions (*fiqh*).<sup>23</sup> Second, it does not seem as if Ibādīs obsessively collected *ḥadīth*, such that two of Abū Mawdūd's examples of it did not make it into the later “definitive” collection. Third, early Ibādī *ḥadīth* rarely have

15 “A people is destroyed when they argue with themselves [by their deeds], they [know that they] depict their own destruction, but do not desist” (*mā halakat umma ḥattā tuḥijj unfusahā yaṣīfūna halakat unfusahum wa lā yanza'ūn*). See al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts from the 2nd/8th Century*, 72; “Whoso commits a misdeed or accommodates a sinner, upon him is the curse of God (*man aḥdatha ḥadathan aw āwā muḥdithan fa-'alayhī la'nat Allāh*). See al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts from the 2nd/8th Century*, 74.

16 “Woe to us if we don't fear God, and woe to us if we make people afraid to command us to Godly piety (*wayl lanā in lam nataq Allāh wa wayl lanā idhā khāfnā al-nās an ya'mirūnnā bi-taqwā Allāh*). See al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts from the 2nd/8th Century*, 78.

17 al-Rabī b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 36 (no. 42).

18 al-Rabī b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 291 (no. 753).

19 Ennāmī, *Studies in Ibādism*, 81 ff.

20 See Ennāmī, *Studies in Ibādism*, 57 ff.

21 See also Francesca, “The concept of *sunna* in the Ibādī school”, 100–03.

22 Ennāmī, *Studies in Ibādism*, 116.

23 Ennāmī, *Studies in Ibādism*, 87.

much by way of *isnād*. In fact, the appearance of *isnāds* in al-Warjlānī's *Tartīb* led Wilkinson to suspect forgery (though a more generous assumption would be that al-Warjlānī was simply filling in lacunae that seemed obvious to him).<sup>24</sup>

What, then, might reasonably be concluded about the early Ibādī notion of *sunna* in Abū Mawdūd's epistle? Precision in the wording, collection, or documentation of *ḥadīth* does not seem necessary to establish it: rather, the impression or the general sense of the Prophetic example is sufficient. It is as if Prophetic *sunna* is but one thread of a larger tapestry, and this suspicion is borne out in how non-Prophetic *ḥadīth* also establish *sunna*. 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb's narration from Abū Mawdūd's *sīra* does not appear in the *Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*. However, the existence of *akhbār* attributed to the Companions in early Ibādī literature is widespread. In fact, in a different early epistle, Abū 'Ubayda's *sīra* on *zakāt*, *akhbār* attributed to 'Umar appear seven times, Abū Bakr five times, Abū 'Ubayda's "associates" (*aṣḥābunā*) four times, the *fuqahā* twice, while Ibn 'Abbās, Jābir b. Zayd, 'Ā'isha and even 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib receive single citations. Prophetic *ḥadīth*, on the other hand, do not appear at all.<sup>25</sup>

The notion that Companions and co-religionists (*aṣḥābunā*) constitute legitimate sources for emulation finds its reflection in Abū Mawdūd's overall conceptualization of *sunna*. In his *sīra* it is not something restricted to the Prophet alone, but is also something produced by the "people of justice" (*ahl al-'adl*) and God's *awliyā'*, who are elsewhere in the *sīra* defined in reference to Quran 8: 34 as the righteous (*mutaqqūn*).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Abū Mawdūd identifies the *awliyā'*, along with the "righteous" (*ṣāliḥūn*), the just imams, and the "forbearers who are worthy of emulation" (*al-salaf al-muqtadā bihim*) as those who enact God's truths (*ḥuqūq Allāh*). In so doing, they establish an *āthār* – a legacy or tradition.<sup>27</sup> Abū Mawdūd clearly considers this *āthār* to be a source of guidance for the community alongside the Prophet's *sunna* and the Quran. In other places, Abū Mawdūd implies that the *āthār* is the enactment of the Prophet's *sunna* and the truth of the Quran, as when he mentions the "well known truth of the Book of God, the *sunna* of His Prophet, and the *āthār* of the righteous who enact it" (*al-ḥaqq al-ma'rūf fī kitāb Allāh wa sunnat nabīhi wa āthār al-ṣāliḥīn al-ma'mūl bihā*).<sup>28</sup>

In this way, Abū Mawdūd's *sīra* presents an example "communal *sunna*" whereby, as Dutton explains in another article, the actions (*'amal*) of the community (or of certain members of the community) are taken as authoritative

24 Wilkinson, "Ibādī ḥadīth", 245. On the authenticity of Ibn Ḥabīb's *isnāds* see also: Van Ess, "Untersuchungen zu einigen ibādītischen Handschriften", 36–8; Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 2: 134; Mohamed Talbi, *Etudes d'Histoire Ifriqiyenne et de Civilisation Musulmane Medievale*, 36 ff.; Ersilia Francesca, "La fabbricazione degli *isnād* nella scuola Ibādīta: Il *Musnad* Ar-Rabī b. Ḥabīb", in U. Vermeulen and J.M.F. Van Reeth (eds), *Law, Christianity and Modernity in Islamic Society* (Leuven: Uitgeveru Peeters, 1998), 39–59.

25 Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts from the 2nd/8th Century*, 119–46.

26 Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts from the 2nd/8th Century*, 65, 71, 75, 77.

27 Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts from the 2nd/8th Century*, 65–6, 70.

28 Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts from the 2nd/8th Century*, 70.



indicators of what proper Islamic action should be.<sup>29</sup> For Abū Mawdūd, as for other early Muslims, the authority of the action (*'amal*) or legacy (*āthār*) of the community stands beside a notion of *sunna* coming from the Prophet or the Companions.<sup>30</sup> Abū Mawdūd provides *aḥādīth* from both the Prophet and 'Umar, and invokes the legacy (*āthār*) of the *awliyā'* and *ahl al-'adl* as sources of *sunna*. The difference, then, between *sunna* and *āthār* is not a strong one and much of Abū Mawdūd's usage in his *sīra* suggests a degree of synonymy between them.

Abū Mawdūd's conflation of *sunna* and *āthār* is probably one of the oldest in Ibādī writings, as Abū Mawdūd hailed from the Basran Ibādīs of the first half of the second/eighth century. Slippage between the concepts of *sunna* and *āthār*, however, can be found in another early (and Eastern) Ibādī text as well: Ibn Dhakwān, for example, seems to view these terms as interchangeable when he addresses those who "proceed (*tasirūn*) in the *āthār* of predecessors who went their ways, some right, some wrong" (*tasirūn fī āthār aslāf qad maḍū bayn rāshidīn wa ghāwin*).<sup>31</sup> Similarly, yet without openly stating it as such, Abū 'Ubayda's *sīra* on *zakāt* strongly implies that authoritative examples can be found among the Companions, as does Shabīb b. 'Aṭīyya when (in another early *sīra*) he condemns 'Uthmān for having abandoned "the *sunna* of the Prophet of God, and the guidance (*hudā*) of the two Caliphs after him".<sup>32</sup> The synonymy between the concepts of *sunna* and *āthār*, then, was widespread among early Basran and Omani Ibādīs.

Among North African Ibādīs, attitudes towards the synonymy between *sunna* and *āthār* are more difficult to discern, in large part because of the nature of North African Ibādī sources, which tend towards the historical and prosopographical (and less towards the epistolary). Nevertheless, one of the earliest North African Ibādī sources, the *Kitāb Ibn Sallām* (third/ninth century), quotes the Companion Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yaman, in the context of a discussion about who cleaves to the true *jamā'a*, as saying: "if you follow our *āthār*, then you have arrived at a clear precedent" (*in tab'ū āthāranā fa-qad sabaqtum sabaqan mubīnan*).<sup>33</sup> North African Ibādīs, it seems, considered at the very least the *āthār* of the Companions as a valid source of religious example.

This view towards *sunna* and *āthār* simultaneously addresses the Ibādīs' seemingly lax attitudes towards *ḥadīth* and *isnād*: it is the collective and accumulated pedigree of the community (meaning, by and large, its scholars) that "guarantees" the veracity of the *sunna/āthār* that they established. Put another way, it is the extent to which they reflect and enact (*'amala bi*) the Quran and the Prophetic example that makes the scholars and luminaries of the Ibādī

29 Dutton, "Amal v ḥadīth in Islamic law", 16.

30 See also Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, 62 (quoting Ibn Qāsim using *āthār* and *sunna* of the Companions interchangeably).

31 Patricia Crone and Fritz Zimmerman (ed. and tr.), *The Epistle of Sālim Ibn Dhakwān* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 48.

32 Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts from the 2nd/8th Century*, 153.

33 Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb Ibn Sallām al-Ibādī: al-Islām wa Tārīkhihi min Wijhat Naẓar Ibādī*, ed. R.F. Schwartz and Sālim b. Ya'qūb (Beirut: Dār Iqra', 1985) 92–3.

community a legitimate source of religious guidance and creates *āthār* that can be emulated by succeeding Ibādī generations.

This notion of a communal pedigree finds its reflection in how early Ibādīs imagined and presented their communities as the product of pious forebears. Later Ibādīs of Oman and North Africa, it seems, both wove the idea of a communal lineage into their writings, but they did so differently. In Oman, Ibādīs employed what Wilkinson calls “teacher lines” to establish it.<sup>34</sup> It is worth noting that Omani Ibādīs sometimes use genealogical language, specifically the term *nasab al-islām* (genealogy of Islam), to describe these teacher lines.<sup>35</sup> For example, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kindī’s *Bayān al-shar‘*, a sixth/twelfth century multi-volume compendium covering a variety of topics (most of them legal), contains a section on *nasab al-islām*.<sup>36</sup> In it, al-Kindī gives the lineage of the religion (*dīn*) of the people of righteousness (*ahl al-istiqāma*) – another name for the Ibādīyya. This religion, he claims, is the religion of the Prophet Muḥammad, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, ‘Ammār b. Yāsir, ‘Abdallāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī, ‘Abdallāh b. Ibād, ‘Abdallāh b. Yaḥyā, Wā’il b. Ayyūb, Maḥbūb b. al-Ruḥayl, Ghazān b. al-Ṣaqr, Mūsā b. Abī Jābir, Mūsā b. ‘Alī, and Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb. Examining the personalities on al-Kindī’s teacher line, it becomes readily apparent that this is a list of notables considered important to the medieval Ibādīyya. Moreover, it is given in genealogical order beginning with the Prophet, the first two Caliphs, a prominent early supporter of ‘Alī (‘Ammār b. Yāsir, who plays an important role in Ibādī versions of the Ṣiffīn narrative),<sup>37</sup> the first imam of the Muḥakkima (Ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī), and the eponymous “founder” of the Ibādīyya (Ibn Ibād, who Ibādīs consider to be a kind of subordinate to Jābir b. Zayd, who they posit as their true founder).<sup>38</sup> Next in the lineage comes ‘Abdallāh b. Yaḥyā, also known as Ṭalīb al-Ḥaqq, who was an Ibādī rebel leader in the Yemen in 129/746, and then Wā’il b. Ayyūb, an imam in Basra after al-Rabī‘ b. Ḥabīb. The remaining names in the list are prominent ‘ulamā’, most of whom were from (or settled in) Oman. Al-Kindī musters them to establish Ibādism as a kind of “thoroughbred” Islam, establishing the pedigree of the group in a manner that parallels how Arabs more generally employed the science of *nasab* to establish nobility (*sharaf*) and pre-eminence (*faḍl*) in family lineages. Teacher lines, in other words, are the community’s pedigree made explicit, and they reflect and

34 Wilkinson, *Ibādism*, 419; Adam Gaiser, “Teacher lines in al-Qalhātī’s *al-Kashf wa’l-Bayān*: the accumulation of a medieval Ibādī identity”, *The Muslim World* 105/2, 2015, 157–62.

35 See also the *Sīrat Muḥīr b. Niyyar al-Ja’lānī* in Kāshif, Sayyida Ismā’il (ed.), *al-Sīyar wa al-jawabāt li-‘ulamā’ wa ā’immat ‘Umān* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa’l-Thaqāfa, 1989), 1: 234–5; al-Qalhātī, *al-Kashf wa’l-bayān*, 2: 471–7; Salama b. Muslim b. Ibrāhīm al-‘Awtabī, *Kitāb al-diyā’* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa’l-Thaqāfa, 1990), 3: 149–50.

36 Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kindī, *Bayān al-shar‘* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa’l-Thaqāfa, 1984), 3: 270–71.

37 See Adam Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends, Ibādī Identities: Martyrdom, Asceticism, and the Making of an Early Islamic Community* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016), 126–8.

38 Ennāmī, *Studies in Ibādism*, 26.



naturally grow from the early Ibādī conceptualization of communal *sunna* and *āthār* as grounded in the righteous community and its practice.

Although al-Kindī is the first (to my knowledge) explicitly to frame his teacher line in terms of the language of *nasab*, it is worth noting that earlier Basran and Omani Ibādīs employ virtually the same technique in their writings: for example, Ibn Dhakwān provides a kind of proto-teacher line in the second section of his epistle, wherein he connects the true line of Muslims to those who followed the Prophet, Abū Bakr and 'Umar, but who then rejected 'Uthmān and then 'Alī.<sup>39</sup> So too, Abū Mū'thir's *sīra*, written before the author's death in 280/893–4, contains a chapter outlining the “imams of the Muslims from among the Companions of the Prophet, and those after them”, which establishes the authorities and imams of the Ibādīyya as a teacher line.<sup>40</sup>

North African Ibādī writings do not present teacher lines, per se, yet the aforementioned *Kitāb Ibn Sallām* contains a chapter outlining the merits (*fadā'il*) of certain Companions, followed by two chapters that outline how the Ibādī path (*dīn*) is the path of Khuzayma b. Thābit and “the majority of the Companions” (*al-jamā'a min aṣḥāb al-Nabī*).<sup>41</sup> This is not a teacher line, exactly, but it does emphasize the North African Ibādīyya's communal pedigree. Moreover, the *Kitāb Ibn Sallām* anticipates a similar focus on communal pedigree in the distinctive, and somewhat later, Ibādī genre of *siyar*.<sup>42</sup> These prosopographies deploy the concept of *sīra* or *siyar* to accomplish what in places further east the *ṭabaqāt* or even *ansāb* genres achieved (and indeed, al-Darjīnī's work calls itself a *ṭabaqāt*).<sup>43</sup> That is, they create a sense of an Ibādī community through the interconnectedness of the persons who appear in the individual entries.<sup>44</sup> Anecdotal piety plays a significant role in how each author frames his accounts, which in its totality frames the community as a righteous community. For example, Abū Zakariyya's account of the first Rustumid

39 See Crone and Zimmerman, *The Epistle of Sālim Ibn Dhakwān*, 57–99.

40 See Kāshif, Sayyida Ismā'īl, *al-Siyar wa'l-jawabāt li-'ulamā' wa ā'immat 'Uman* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa'l-Thaqāfa, 1986), 2: 314–5.

41 Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb Ibn Sallām*, 79 ff., 89 ff., 91 ff. The North African Ibādī concept of *silsilat al-dīn* requires more research to determine when it came into use, and to what extent it overlaps with the Omani Ibādī notion of *nasab al-dīn*. My thanks to my anonymous reviewer for pointing out this term, and apologies for not being able to pursue it further.

42 On the North African Ibādī *siyar* tradition, see Paul M. Love, *Ibadi Muslims of North Africa: Manuscripts, Mobilization, and the Making of a Written Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

43 The five principal North African Ibādī *siyar* are: Abū Zakariyya Yahyā b. Abī Bakr al-Warjlānī's *Kitāb siyar al-ā'imma wa akhbārihim* (Algiers: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1979), which was written after 504/1111; Abū al-Rabī Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Salām b. Hassān al-Wisyānī's (d. sixth/twelfth century) *Siyar al-Wisyānī* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa'l-Thaqāfa, 2009), on which see Love, *Ibadi Muslims of North Africa*, 55; Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Sa'īd al-Darjīnī's (d. c. 670/1272) *Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-mashāyikh bi'l-Maghrib* (Algiers: Alger-Constantine, n.d.); Abū al-Faḍl/al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Barrādī's (d. 2nd half of eighth/fourteenth century) *al-Jawāhir al-muntaqāt fī itmām mā akhalla bihi kitāb al-ṭabaqāt* (Cairo: Lithograph, 1885); and Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Sa'īd al-Shammākhī's (d. 928/1522) *Kitāb al-siyar* (Beirut: Dār al-Madār al-Islāmī, 2009).

44 Love, *Ibadi Muslims of North Africa*, 3.

imam, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rustum, portrays the imam as especially devout and ascetic.<sup>45</sup> In this fashion, and on a grand scale, the Ibādī community becomes constituted by the pious scholars, students and imams who populate the pages of the *siyar* works, establishing communal pedigree in a manner parallel to what teacher lines accomplish in Omani Ibādī writings.

It is also clear that by *sīra/siyar*, North African Ibādīs meant biography in general (reflecting an early Islamic usage of that term), not Prophetic biography exclusively.<sup>46</sup> In fact, only two of these works – both post-sixth/twelfth century – include short *sīras* of the Prophet Muḥammad: al-Shammākhī’s entry on the Prophet is 14 published pages in the 2009 edition of the *Kitāb al-siyar*;<sup>47</sup> al-Barrādī’s entry is 24 lithographed pages in the 1885 Cairo edition of the *Kitāb al-jawāhir*.<sup>48</sup> Thus, early North African Ibādī authors did not include Prophetic *sīra* in their collection of *siyar*: it is only after the seventh/thirteenth century that they began to do so.

Similarly, in Omani Ibādī literature *sīra/siyar* denotes an epistle.<sup>49</sup> To my knowledge, the first recognizable Prophetic biography in Omani Ibādī literature can be found in the second volume of Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd al-Qalhātī’s sixth/twelfth-century *al-Kashf wa’l-bayān*.<sup>50</sup> This account is significantly larger than its North African counterparts at 76 printed pages. Thus, in both the Omani and the North African cases, the term *sīra/siyar* did not come to indicate Prophetic biography exclusively, and Ibādīs from these regions did not write Prophetic biographies until the sixth/twelfth century.

That the sixth/twelfth century is a crucial moment for Ibādī engagements with the wider genre of Prophetic biography is hardly surprising. Wilkinson argues, first in an article on Ibādī *ḥadīth* and then again in *Ibādism: Origins and Early Development in Oman*, that in the sixth/twelfth century the process of “madhhabization” (in the earlier article he uses the term “normalization”) among Ibādīs significantly accelerated. During this process, “Ibādīs began to develop their school into a *madhhab*” by accepting “the basic methodology of their opponents”, meaning especially Sunni norms of *uṣūl al-fiqh*.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the sixth/twelfth century is a period when Ibādīs developed a formal *ḥadīth* collection, more and more engaged with Sunni *uṣūl al-fiqh* works, wrote formal

45 Abū Zakariyya, *Kitāb siyar al-ā’imma wa akhbārihim*, 82–4.

46 Wim Raven, “Sīra”, in P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Consulted online 07 May 2019 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_1089](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1089).

47 al-Shammākhī, *Kitāb al-siyar*, 1: 109–23.

48 al-Barrādī, *al-Jawāhir al-muntaqāt*, 13–37.

49 On the Ibādī notion of *sīra* as epistle, see Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 6 ff.; Crone and Zimmerman, *The Epistle of Sālim Ibn Dhakwān*, 15–19; on the Omani Ibādī *siyar* specifically, see Abdulrahman al-Salimi, “Identifying the Omani/Ibādī *Siyar*”, in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 55/1, 2010, 115–62; “Themes of the Omani/Ibādī *Siyar*”, in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 54/2, 2009, 475–514.

50 al-Qalhātī, *al-Kashf wa’l-bayān*, 2: 113–89. On the Ibādī notion of *sīra* as epistle, see Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 6ff; Patricia Crone and Fritz Zimmerman (trs. and eds.), *The Epistle of Sālim Ibn Dhakwān* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15–19.

51 Wilkinson, “Ibādī *ḥadīth*”, 413 ff.

heresiographies, and so on. It is understandable, then, why Ibādīs begin to incorporate Prophetic biography into their corpus at this time.

Before the sixth/twelfth century, however, Ibādī attitudes towards *sunna* and *siyar* remain distinct from the approaches towards Prophetic *sunna* and *sīra* that developed among the nascent Sunnis and, somewhat later, Shiites. On this development among Sunnis, Wansbrough, building on Schacht, saw an evolution from “loosely structured narrative to concise *exemplum*”.<sup>52</sup> Bravmann, criticizing Schacht, notes that the terms *sīra* and *sunna* originally “designate two different aspects of the same idea” with *sīra* delineating the manner of proceeding with respect to a certain affair and *sunna* describing this manner of proceeding by pointing to established precedent.<sup>53</sup> What Schacht, Wansbrough and Bravmann all point towards is how the genres of *sīra* and *sunna* diverge once the figure of the Prophet becomes the focal point for a universalizable Islamic life – a distinctly ‘Abbāsīd-era project that is exemplified by al-Shāfi‘ī.<sup>54</sup> This divergence characterizes how medieval Sunnis and Shiites positioned their communities in relation to the Prophetic legacy.

Among Ibādīs, by contrast (and before the sixth/twelfth century, for the most part), the twin ideas of *sunna* and *siyar* remained collapsed, and connected in profound ways to how Ibādīs linked themselves communally to the Prophetic legacy. *Sunna* was not laser focused on the Prophet, but continued to be collective and (we must assume) somewhat informal in comparison to developments elsewhere in the Islamic world. The counterpart to *sunna* – the thing which pointed towards the recognized manner of proceeding in any given affair – was the *āthār*, which also remained the purview of the Ibādī community. This was reflected in how North African Ibādīs developed their biographical (*siyar*) literature around the community, and in how Omani Ibādī teacher lines (later characterized by al-Kindī as *nasab al-islām*) functioned as a kind of meta-*isnād* for authenticating the collective endeavour of Ibādīsm. Underlying and sustaining all of these notions was the idea that the Ibādī community possessed a religious pedigree that connected it through the generations of righteous luminaries and predecessors to the Prophet himself, providing it with legitimacy as a repository for proper religion.

To be clear: it is not that the early Ibādī nexus of concepts that have been discussed here somehow preserve an earlier (and now lost) pre-Shāfi‘ite attitude towards *sunna* and *sīra* among the Arab-Muslims.<sup>55</sup> While there are undoubtedly some strong parallels between how early Ibādīs and early Muslims in general seem to have approached the idea of *sunna* as something constituted not

52 John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 77–8; Martin Hinds, “*Maghāzī* and *Sīra* in early Islamic scholarship”, in Martin Hinds, Jere Bacharach, Lawrence Conrad, and Patricia Crone (eds), *Studies in Early Islamic History* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1996), 195.

53 M.M. Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 169.

54 See also Rahman, “Concepts *Sunna*, *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā‘*”, 18–20.

55 Ibādīs may indeed be preserving earlier conventions in the details of their practice, such as the holding of one’s hands at one’s sides during prayer (i.e. *sadl al-yadayn*), but that is not to imply that the larger conceptual apparatus that buoys Ibādī approaches to *sunna* and *siyar* is itself preserved from the earliest periods. See also Dutton, “‘Amal v ḥadīth in Islamic law”, 38.

simply by the Prophet, but also as embodied in the practices and opinions of those who followed him, what this article has hoped to emphasize is how the Ibādī notion of a communal pedigree made their claim to preserve right practice at once more explicit and exclusive. A pedigree establishes claims to purity, authenticity, and exclusivity, thereby affording the owner of the pedigree a certain status and, possibly, attendant privileges. The early Ibāḍiyya were certainly interested in presenting their community as the most upright and accurate, and what this meant to them was that they were the sole remaining righteous remnant of the true Muslim community. The idea of a communal pedigree, then, remained vital to early Ibādī self-fashioning, shaping a host of concepts towards proving the soundness of *islām* in the Ibādī way.

The value, then, of examining early Ibādī attitudes towards *sunna*, *siyar*, *āthār*, and *nasab* lies, in a narrow sense, in how it illuminates some discursive practices of an early Muslim community. Beyond this, however, there is significance in how understanding this Ibādī cluster of concepts can clarify some of the shifts in attitude towards these same concepts that began perhaps as early as the mid-second/eighth century and accelerated among nascent Sunnis in the third/ninth century.<sup>56</sup> That this emerging Sunni view came to predominate – to the point that Shiites and eventually the Ibāḍiyya themselves largely adopted it – makes examining its emergence all the more vital.

It is hoped, then, that this paper might point the way towards further inquiries into the usages, nature, and development of these concepts among early Ibādīs. I have focused in large part on the early Ibādī *siyar*, which survive mainly in Oman. There is much in this literature that can still be found to hone or complicate the picture of *sunna*, *sīra*, *āthār*, and *nasab* that I have proposed here. Likewise, there is a vast medieval Omani Ibādī literature – largely legal in nature – that spans the third–fifth/ninth–eleventh centuries, offering the potential to chart the development of these concepts through the early stages of madhhabization to its maturation in the sixth/twelfth century. The idea of teacher lines, for example, would benefit from a more systematic study. So too, I have left the North African Ibādī materials largely untapped, in part because the nature of this material requires a more far-reaching and detailed approach than that I've attempted to accomplish in this short overview. In outlining the various ways that I view the early Ibāḍiyya as conceptualizing a communal pedigree, my desire is to invite further scrutiny and investigation.

56 Stodolsky, *A New Historical Model and Periodization*, 45.