Ibāḍīs are a Muslim community that originated in dissociation from the violent and secessionist Khārijīyya movement in the seventh century. Even though they still maintain a certain tendency to keep apart from other Muslim communities, they are generally considered as moderate and interact peacefully with others. Today, Ibāḍī communities can be found mainly in Oman, East Africa, the Mzāb valley in Algeria, and the Jabal Nafūsa region in Libya.\(^1\)

In contrast to Sunnī and Shiʿī communities, Ibāḍīs refrain from any pompous celebration of the Prophetic birthday (*al-mawlid al-nabawī*) in Oman. Among Sunnīs and Shiʿīs, particularly their Sufi currents, these festivities have become extremely popular in the course of history,\(^2\) whereas Ibāḍīs, with their rather purist interpretation of Islam, reject them largely as un-Islamic. Instead, they see the call to follow the example of the Prophet and to adhere to his *sunna* as the only legitimate way of expressing love and respect for Muḥammad.\(^3\) From the nineteenth century onwards, however, Ibāḍīs have increasingly used the Prophet’s birthday to gather in mosques or at home in order to read *mawlid* texts about Muḥammad’s biography. Interestingly, several Ibāḍī scholars of renown stand out among this community’s mainstream since they were deeply influenced by Sufi thinking during a period of Ibāḍī renaissance and reform in the late nineteenth century.\(^4\) One of them, the well-known Zanzibari *qāḍī* and Oman’s most important poet Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī (1860–1920),\(^5\) produced

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4. Hoffmann, “Mysticism, Rationalism and Puritanism”.
5. In 2019, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) included Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī among the globally influential figures on the occasion of the centenary of his death (“List of Anniversaries”).

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with his al-Nash’a al-muḥammadiyya (The Muhammedan formation) a mawlid text that features Sufi ideas prominently and that emerged as the standard Ibāḍī text to be read on the Prophet’s birthday.

This contribution will scrutinise the emergence of Bahlānī’s text as the standard mawlid for Ibāḍīs through a historical and ethnographic approach. This emergence will be contextualised as part of a wider mawlid renaissance in the context of a new wave of expansion of Sufi orders in the Gulf region and along the East African coast during the late nineteenth century with a special focus on its merger of Ibāḍīsm with Sunni and Shi‘ī Sufi ideas. It will, furthermore, trace al-Nash’a al-muḥammadiyya’s role in the nation-building process and its religious adaptation in twentieth-century Oman, thereby detecting a shift in Ibāḍī scholarly thinking about the Prophet. Finally, ethnographic observations about the ritual reading of mawlid texts on the private and national levels will shed light on the varying and ambiguous forms of popular and state Islam in contemporary Oman.

The Renaissance of the Mawlid in the Gulf Region and along the East African Coast in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

The observance of the Prophet’s birthday originated most probably among Imamite Shi‘īs in the tenth century, whereas the first documentations of mawlid celebrations appear only later in Fāṭimid Egypt but also among Sunnis in northern Mesopotamia in the twelfth century. Despite an emerging criticism against the mawlid and its narratives by scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who provoked a number of reactions in defence of the practice by leading Sunni religious scholars, the mawlid spread successfully until the fifteenth century. A resurgence of official state-supported mawlid celebrations can be observed in the sixteenth century after the rise of the Ottoman Empire and the Sharīfian dynasties in Iran and Morocco. As shown by Marion Holmes Katz, the legal status and proper way of celebrating the Prophetic birthday have been subjects of constant discussions and disputes among religious scholars, but by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the celebration of the mawlid has become an overwhelmingly accepted practice throughout the Islamic world. The festivities were largely endorsed by the leading religious scholars

6 Kapteijn, Muhammad’s Birthday Festival; Katz, The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, 1–5.
7 See Chih, “La célébration de la naissance du Prophète”, 182; and Reichmuth, “Aspects of Prophetic Piety”.
and lavishly sponsored by rulers such as Aḥmad Bey 1 (r. 1837–55) in Tunis, Khedive Tawfiq (r. 1879–92) in Cairo, or the Ottoman sultan ʿAbdūlhamid 11 (r. 1876–1909).  

In the modern period, reformist criticism against the celebration of the Prophetic birthday has further grown throughout the whole Islamic world and ranges from its total rejection as un-Islamic to the partial opposition against certain aspects of its ritual performance and the contents of its narratives. A new challenge for the mawlid emerged, for instance, in the late eighteenth century with the rise of the Wahhābī movement and its literalist interpretation of Islam that rejects and fights the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday completely as an unlawful innovation. Yet, this Wahhābī opposition to the mawlid remained a marginal phenomenon on the Arabian Peninsula until the late nineteenth century. On the contrary, Katz has shown that antipathy towards the Wahhābis even invigorated a more pronounced support of the practice to celebrate the Prophetic birthday among the Ḥijāzī scholarly elites and beyond through a growing number of endorsing commentaries (shurūḥ) on the most prominent mawlid texts and fatwas in support of these festivities by luminaries such as Mecca’s influential Shāfiʿī mufti Aḥmad b. Zaynī Dāḥlān (1817–86).  

In fact, this counteraction of mainstream scholars in the wider region seems to have ushered in a yet further increase in popularity of mawlid celebrations in the Gulf region, Yemen, and along the East African coast. As will be outlined in the following paragraphs, this development was strongly influenced by the increased proselytising activities of Sufi orders in the mentioned regions and contributed to the unprecedented dissemination of certain mawlid texts such as those of the Shāfiʿī mufti of Medina, Jaʿfar b. Ḥasan b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Barzanji (d. 1764). The popularity of Barzanji’s famous ‘Iqd al-jawhar fi mawlid al-nabī al-azhar (The necklace of jewels on the birth of the luminous Prophet), widely known as Mawlid al-Barzanji, in particular illustrates this development quite well since it emerged most probably during this period as one of the most popular mawlid texts in the Islamic world until today.  

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, several scholarly commentaries on the most important mawlid texts were produced, including two on the Mawlid al-Barzanji: one by the author’s descendant and Shāfiʿī mufti of

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8 Katz, The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad, 169–70.  
9 Katz, The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad, 170–74. Dāḥlān also wrote a biography on the Prophet in which he argued for the legitimacy of mawlid celebrations, al-Siʿra al-nabuwīyya wa-l-āthār al-muḥammadiyya. It was printed in the margins of ʿAlī b. Burhān al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī’s Insān al-ʿuyūn fi sīrat al-ʿamin al-maʿmūn (Cairo, Maṭbaʿat Muḥammad Aḥfandi Muṣṭafā, n.d.). The legacy of scholars like Dāḥlān has been preserved in the writings of Muḥammad ʿAlawī al-Mālikī in late twentieth-century Saudi Arabia (see Chapter 14 in the present volume).
Medina, Jaʿfar b. Ismāʿīl al-Barzanjī (d. 1899–1900), *al-Kawkab al-anwār ‘alā ʾiqd al-jawhar fī mawlid al-nabī al-azhar* (The star of lights on the Necklace of jewels on the birth of the resplendent Prophet) and one by the Egyptian Mālikī mufti Muḥammad ʿIlāysh (d. 1881), *al-Qawl al-munjī ʿalā mawlid al-Barzanjī* (The safe account on the Mawlid al-Barzanjī). By the late nineteenth century, several Sufi orders used the *Mawlid al-Barzanjī* and other important texts as a central piece of their endeavour to reorganise and (re)introduce *mawlid* celebrations with a *daʿwa*-incentive. They brought these celebrations out from the more exclusive and, at times, class-based sphere of the private houses to the inclusive sphere of the public space. This is not to say that there were no public *mawlid* celebrations before, but in many regions, as shown, for instance, by Anne Bang, active participation in them was often limited to certain parts of society. The new stress on opening the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday to the broader public by these Sufi orders often linked the *mawlid* to the spread of a more “orthodox” expression of Islamic devotion and *sharīʿa*-oriented religious education about Islam’s central beliefs in opposition to the widespread merging of Sufi practices with local traditions and customs in the different regions.

On the coast of the Gulf of Oman, evidence of Sufi life can be established already in the eighteenth century through a branch of the ʿAlawīyya of Shaykh ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥaddād (1634–1719), a Sufi and tribal network that originated in the Ḥadramawt region in Yemen. Deputies of this shaykh had settled in the region of al-Ṣīr in today’s Raʾs al-Khayma and had gained a strong influence among the Qawāsim shaykhs and the Zuʿāb tribe. However, this Sufi influence was extinguished with a Wahhābī military expedition in 1799 that forced the Qawāsim shaykhs to surrender to the staunchly anti-Sufi Wahhābī *daʿwa*. A revival of Sufi life at the northern edge of the Gulf of Oman can be observed only in the last third of the nineteenth century. Between 1859 and 1886, a Qādirī shaykh named Muhammad ʿUmar al-Afghānī arrived in Abu Dhabi and spread his order from there to Dubai and Oman’s northern Bāṭina region between 1886 and 1916. Together with his leading Iranian disciple (*murīd*) and Rifāʿī Sufi ʿAbd Allāh al-Kūkherdi (al-Murīd) who joined him from northern Oman, he revived the *mawlid* celebration in the form of a collective liturgical exercise (*ḥalaqāt al-mawlid*) as a central element of their Sufi path and strongly promoted the memorisation of the *Mawlid al-Barzanjī*. Both organised these

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mawlid exercises regularly not only on the birthday of the Prophet but also for many other festivities such as marriages. It is not entirely clear from where Shaykh al-Afghānī arrived in Abu Dhabi. Three different accounts claim that he came either from Mecca where he had worked as a teacher, or from Egypt, where he had studied at al-Azhar University, or form Bahrain.13 His emphasis on the spread and organisation of the mawlid would fit to a Ḥijāzi influence at that time and the following paragraphs will show that he was not an exception. Henceforth, their re-establishment of mawlid celebrations (or mālid in Emirati vernacular) as a popular religious tradition led to the emergence of a new folkloric form of art, the fann al-mālid that formed a central part of the Emirates’ and Oman’s cultural and national heritage throughout the twentieth century until today.14

Similar to the north of the Gulf of Oman, Sufi orders spread massively in south Arabia and far beyond in the second half of the nineteenth century and many of them strongly pursued the re-organisation and popularisation of the mawlid. One of the most successful was the aforementioned ʿAlawīyya. Beginning in the fifteenth century, leading clans of the ʿAlawīyya had successfully built up a vast network of spiritual centres via trading and migration routes to Oman’s neighbouring Dhofar region,15 and even further throughout the Indian Ocean and along the East African coast. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the spread of this Sufi network intensified considerably. Then, the Swahili coast in particular saw a growing migration wave from the Comoros, south Somalia, and Ḥaḍramawt that contributed to an unprecedented spread of Sufi orders, such as the Qādiriyya, Shādhiliyya, and ʿAlawīyya, and brought a resurgence of the mawlid in this region.16 According to Bang, this migration wave was a consequence, on the one hand, of political turmoil at home and easier travel options but, on the other, also of the encouragement of the Omani sultans who created a welcoming climate for trade and religious learning under their rule in Zanzibar and their dominions on the East African coast.17

The studies by Jonathon Glassman, Jan Knappert, and Bang suggest several parallel and interrelated developments that can account for the growing popularity of the mawlid through the activities of Sufi orders in cities along

14 For a full account on Shaykh al-Afghānī, see Jumayrī, “al-Ṣūfiyya fī Dubay”, 16–33.
15 There is an important shrine of the early ʿAlawī leader figure Muḥammad Ṣāḥib Mīrbāt (d. 556/1161) located near the city of Ṣalāla, the capital of the Dhofar governorate (Bang, Sufis and Scholars of the Sea, 22).
16 Glassman, Feasts and Riot, 137–38; Nimtz, Islam and Politics in East Africa.
17 Bang, Sufis and Scholars of the Sea, 25.
the East African coast, such as Lamu, Pangani, and Zanzibar, during the mentioned period. First of all, the religious elites among the local Swahili-speaking “Shirāzi” patricians, who claimed a fictive Middle Eastern or Persian origin to authenticate their orthodox Islam, practised an exclusive celebration of the mawlid in their private houses with the recitation of Arabic texts and only on the Prophet’s birthday well before the arrival of Ḥāḍramātī Sufis. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the newly arriving Sufis of the ʿAlawīyya and Qādiriyya promoted more innovative, inclusive, and public mawlid celebrations in Swahili vernacular\(^\text{18}\) that were performed on many rites of passage such as marriages, births, or circumcisions. Due to the growing influence of lower-class preachers, freed or runaway slaves, and petty traders, that is, so-called waungwana, within the Sufi orders, the mawlids became increasingly merged with local customs featuring the use of drums, competitive dancing, spirit cults, and the participation of women.\(^\text{19}\) These innovations certainly facilitated the spread of this ritual practice but they were also heavily criticised by Sufi shaykhs with a scholarly background such as ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿAbd al-Ghānī al-Amawī (1838–96), who had introduced the Qādiriyya to Zanzibar,\(^\text{20}\) and also by a new generation of ʿAlawī shaykhs.

Beginning in the 1870s, the religious education practised by ʿAlawīs in Ḥāḍramawt and among their migrant disciples underwent considerable organisational reforms, including an Arabisation (with a stress on scriptural Arabic, the holy cities of the Ḥijāz, and an idea of Arabness) and a growing scripturalism.\(^\text{21}\) From the 1870s onwards, leading ʿAlawī shaykhs, all of whom had studied under Mecca’s Shāfīʿī mufti Aḥmad b. Zaynī Daḥlān and some additionally at Cairo’s al-Azhar and in the Ottoman Empire, were driven by a renewed activism to found and export a new kind of religious college, so-called ribāṭāt, that was inspired by the Azhari and Ottoman religious reforms at that time.\(^\text{22}\) With the establishment of new ʿAlawī religious colleges in Ḥāḍramawt – such as the ribāt of ʿAli b. Muḥammad al-Ḥibshī (1843–1915) in Sayʿūn – and in East Africa – such as the Riyāḍ mosque-college in Lamu in 1901 and the Madrasa Bā Kathīr in Zanzibar in 1909\(^\text{23}\) – mawlid celebrations received once

\(^{18}\) See, for instance, Knappert, Swahili Islamic Poetry 1; and Knappert, Swahili Islamic Poetry 3. A translation of the Mawlid al-Barzanjī from Swahili into English can be found in Knappert, Swahili Islamic Poetry 1, 48–60.

\(^{19}\) Glassman, Feasts and Ritual, 139–41.

\(^{20}\) Glassman, Feasts and Ritual, 143–44.


\(^{22}\) Bang, Sufis and Scholars of the Sea, 63–66, 71–72.

\(^{23}\) Bang, Sufis and Scholars of the Sea, 144, 147. The Bā Kathīr madrasa in Zanzibar offered a non-sectarian programme of study with Shāfīʿī works next to Ibāḍī ones and Ibāḍīs such as ʿAli Muḥsīn al-Barwānī taught there (Bang, Sufis and Scholars of the Sea, 147–48).
more a new impetus.\textsuperscript{24} According to Bang, \textquotesingle{}Alawí scholars of this new generation, such as Ahmad b. Abī Bakr b. Șumayṭ (1861–1925) in Zanzibar, condemned the merger of the \textit{mawlid} and the \textit{dhikr} with what they saw as un-Islamic local customs and practices but they still used \textquotesingle{}Alawí \textit{mawlid}s with an inclusive and public character and the recitation of their own Arabic texts as vehicles of Islamisation and social re-stratification.\textsuperscript{25}

According to a Swahili informant of the German linguist Carl Velten, who served the German colonial administration in East Africa from 1893 to 1896, there were two kinds of popular \textit{mawlid}s (or \textit{maulidi} in Swahili), the \textit{maulidi ya barzandi}, most probably the prose text (\textit{nathr}) of Barzanjī, mostly read by the Arabs, and the \textit{maulidi ya shária al-anāmī} (\textit{mawlīd sharaf al-anām})\textsuperscript{26} that was used by the Swahili population. By that time, according to Carl Heinrich Becker, a collective volume with both of Barzanjī’s \textit{mawlid} texts (\textit{nazm} and \textit{nathr}) together with other popular ones printed in Bombay in 1890 as well as the aforementioned commentaries on the \textit{Mawlid al-Barzanjī} were available en masse on the East African book markets.\textsuperscript{27} The popularity of the \textit{Mawlid al-Barzanjī} increased to such a degree that, as found by Roman Loimeier, it formed, next to the Qurʾān, an integral part of the formal syllabus in Zanzibar’s religious schools (\textit{madāris}) and government schools until 1965.\textsuperscript{28} Interestingly, this Sufi \textit{mawlid} renaissance, which included the whole region from the Gulf to the East African coast, did not remain limited to Sunnis alone but had also a considerable impact on Ibāḍī communities in Zanzibar and Oman.

2 Islamic Reform and the \textit{Mawlid} among Ibāḍīs: Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī’s \textit{al-Nash‘a al-muḥammadiyya}

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Oman experienced tremendous economic, political, and social transformations including an economic decline that was due to a growing marginalisation from global trade, the British colonial encroachment, and an emerging movement of Islamic revival and reform among Ibāḍīs. Beginning in the late 1860s, a scholarly-led movement of Ibāḍī revival (\textit{nahda}), called the \textit{muṭāwi‘a}, emerged with several attempts to revive the lapsed traditional Ibāḍī imamate in their central Omani stronghold Nizwā. It commenced with the short-lived imamate of ‘Azzān b. Qays and his scholarly

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Bang, \textit{Sufis and Scholars of the Sea}, 148–50.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Bang, \textit{Sufis and Scholars of the Sea}, 22, 142, 149.
\item \textsuperscript{26} This is one of the most popular \textit{mawlid} texts of unknown authorship. For a discussion about the authorship, see Katz, \textit{The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad}, 52.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Becker, "Materialien zur Kenntnis des Islam", 28.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Loimeier, \textit{Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills}, 209.
\end{itemize}
supporter Saʿīd b. Khalfān al-Khalīlī from 1868 to 1871 and was successfully established under Imam Sālim b. Rāshid al-Kharūṣī and the religious scholar ʿAbd Allāh al-Sālimī (1869–1914) from 1913 to 1954. The traditional political and religious leadership of the Ibāḍī community in the form of an elected imam had lapsed with al-Bū Saʿīdī rule by the end of the eighteenth century due to disputes over succession within the ruling elite, ushering in the emergence of several smaller emirates and eventually a mere political al-Bū Saʿīdī sultanate. In the early nineteenth century, Sultan Saʿīd b. Sulṭān relocated the centre of his political power and trading economy from Musqat in Oman to Zanzibar which emerged henceforth also as a centre for Islamic scholarship. However, a further dispute among his sons over succession together with a British intervention led to the partition of Zanzibar and Musqat and the emergence of two rivalling sultanates in 1856. Thus, the Ibāḍī imamate movement that sparked in central Oman a decade later constituted a third political agitator against the sultan and British influence and promoted the idea of Ibāḍī unity.

Oman’s imamites received a strong support by Zanzibar’s Ibāḍī intellectual elites. The most outstanding among these was the scholar Nāṣir b. Sālim b. ʿUdayyim al-Rawāhī who became famous as Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī. Born in 1860 in central Oman’s Wādī Maḥrām, he relocated with his father, who had been a qāḍī under the short-lived imamate of ‘Azzān b. Qays, to the cosmopolitan island of Zanzibar under the rule of Sayyid Barghash b. Saʿīd (r. 1870–88) in 1878/79. By the 1890s, he himself served as chief qāḍī and close confidante to the successive sultans Hamad b. Thuwaynī (r. 1893–96) and Ḥamūd b. Muhammad (r. 1896–1902) until his forced retirement by the British in 1907. He even became a persona non grata after publishing an article in Egypt’s al-Ahrām in order to make cause for the Omani nahḍa movement. As an attentive reader of the circulating Egyptian press and reformist journals such as al-ʿUrwā al-Wuthqā (The firmest bond) and al-Manār (The lighthouse) in Zanzibar, Bahlānī had become inspired by Salafiyya concepts of Muslim unity and the harmony between religion and politics of thinkers such as Muḥammad ʿAbūh (1849–1905) and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838/39–1939). Even though there is no evidence of a personal contact to the Egyptian doyens of the Salafiyya, he stood in contact with other Ibāḍī scholars in the diaspora, such as Qāsim al-Shammākhī who was closely associated with Egypt’s Sunni reformist movement. Bahlānī himself had founded the reform party al-Iṣlāḥī and had launched the first Arabic newspaper in Zanzibar called al-Najāḥ (Success) in 1910. He emerged as the figurehead

of Zanzibar’s and Oman’s *nahḍa* embodying pan-Ibāḍīsm, pan-Islamism, and Islamic reform.\textsuperscript{31}

Bahlahī represented a controversial, mystical current among Ibāḍī scholars that can be traced back to the mid-eighteenth century and that was influenced by Sufi ideas of Ibn al-Fārīḍ (d. 632/1234) and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111/505).\textsuperscript{32} This Ibāḍī mystical current still needs to be studied in depth. Its emergence might be influenced by the strong presence of the ‘Alawīyya and its emphasis on Ghazālī’s books such as *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm-dīn* (*The revival of the sciences of religion*) and the belief in the Muḥammadan Reality (*al-Ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*) in this region.\textsuperscript{33} In addition, the cosmopolitan environment of Zanzibar with its multi-ethnic, Sunnī-Shāfī‘ī majority population exposed Ibāḍīs to contemporary Islamic trends and provided an even more fertile ground for cross-sectarian cooperation than the remote and isolated region of central Oman. After the initial and staunch defence of Ibāḍīsm against the Shāfī‘ī school of law under Sayyid Barghash following a series of conversions by Ibāḍīs to Sunnism,\textsuperscript{34} Zanzibar’s Ibāḍī scholars entered a period of amicable relations and exchange with their Sunnī and Sufi counterparts in the last quarter of the nineteenth century – and notably against their traditional doctrine of dissociation (*barā‘a*) from non-Ibāḍīs.\textsuperscript{35} Bahlahī expressed his mysticism, in Ibāḍī terms *‘ilm al-sulūk* – that is, the wisdom of wayfaring on the path of

\textsuperscript{31} Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism*, chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{32} Hoffman, “Mysticism, Rationalism and Puritanism”, 257–65; see also Hoffman, “The Articulation of Ibāḍī Identity”.

\textsuperscript{33} Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea*, 15; Peskes, *Al-ʿAidarūs und seine Erben*.

\textsuperscript{34} Prominent instances are the Mazrūʿī and Barwānī families; see Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea*, 95.

\textsuperscript{35} According to Ibāḍī doctrine, believing Ibāḍīs have to dissociate from sinning Ibāḍīs or non-Ibāḍī Muslims since they are neither considered Muslims or believers nor unbelievers but as people who are unfaithful to God and ungrateful for His blessings (*kuffār niʿma*). However, the interpretation of dissociation could vary. Bahlahī, for instance, seemingly interpreted it as a sort of inner awareness that someone is not a brother in faith, but this did not affect external behaviour and left room for affection (Hoffman, “The Articulation of Ibāḍī Identity”, 210–11; Hoffman, “Ibāḍī Scholars”, 96–112; Hoffman, “Mysticism, Rationalism and Puritanism”, 252–53). Anne Bang found that a member of the Ibāḍī Mundhirī family, who were also close consultants to the al-Bū Saʿīdī rulers in Zanzibar, had copied a manuscript of the ‘Alawī *mawlid* text *Rātib al-Ḥaddād* (*The supererogatory exercise of al-Ḥaddād*) in 1866. Bang evaluates this finding as an indication either of the fact that Ibāḍīs, too, recited this Sunnī text, or that the conversion of prominent Ibāḍī families began shortly after the al-Bū Saʿīdī rulers transferred their capital to Zanzibar (Bang, *Islamic Sufi Networks*, 153).
self-purification and devotion to God\textsuperscript{36} – as a prolific poet who made himself a name as “the poet of the Arabs” and, unusual for Ibāḍīs, as author of two mawlid prose texts. One of these mawlid texts gained fame as the Ibāḍī standard text and alternative to the Maślīd al-Barzanjī in Oman and beyond.\textsuperscript{37} The first is titled al-Nūr al-muḥammadī (The Muḥammadan light) and the second, which is the central focus of this contribution, al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadīyya.

A Sunnī influence on these texts by Bahlānī is clearly discernible. A printed version of al-Nūr al-muḥammadī was published in a collective volume together with three books of ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Mundhīri, the former chief Ibāḍī judge in Zanzibar, by Cairo’s Bārūnī printing house in 1900.\textsuperscript{38} Thus, the text seems to have been accepted by leading Ibāḍī scholars and it appeared at a time when the mawlid celebrations had reached a massive popularity with the growing importance of Sufi orders in Zanzibar. In 1918, Bahlānī published al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadīyya under the original title al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadīyya fi mawlid khayr al-bariyya (The Muḥammadan formation: On the birth of the best of creatures).\textsuperscript{39} The book was printed by the sultan’s printing house in Zanzibar and in Cairo during the author’s lifetime, suggesting that both texts were already used during mawlid celebrations by Zanzibar’s Ibāḍīs.\textsuperscript{40} The mere titles of al-Nūr al-muḥammadī and al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadīyya might give the impression of a rather different programmatic approach to the Prophet in each book since the former concentrates on the controversial concept of the Muḥammadan light (more on that later) and might be more mystically oriented whereas the latter focuses on Muḥammad’s formation with a stronger Salafī orientation. However, a comparison between both texts reveals that their contents are quite similar.

Al-Nūr al-muḥammadī consists of eighteen passages and al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadīyya only of fifteen. The passages in both texts are divided by invocations of blessings upon the Prophet (used as a taʿṭīra) but only in al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadīyya each passage begins with an additional invocation upon Muḥammad (taṣlīya). In al-Nūr al-muḥammadī, some passages are

\textsuperscript{36} Hoffman, “Mysticism, Rationalism and Puritanism”, 257.

\textsuperscript{37} During one of our conversations, Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Maʿmārī, scientific advisor to the Ministry of Awqāf and Religious Affairs in Oman, mentioned that Ibāḍīs used the Maślīd al-Barzanjī before al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadīyya became their standard text in the twentieth century.


\textsuperscript{39} Bahlānī, al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadīyya. The text was printed by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture (Wizārat al-Turāth wa-l-Thaqāfa) in 1918. No place of publication is given.

\textsuperscript{40} Kiyūmī, al-Ḥaraka al-ʿilmīyya fi Zanjībār, 290.
more detailed and include long poems about episodes of Muḥammad’s life that are missing in *al-Nash’a al-muḥammadiyya*. The composition of the passages, too, differs in both texts as we find, for instance, the last part of *al-Nūr’s* sixth passage at the beginning of *al-Nash’a’s* seventh passage. Overall, large parts of both texts have the very same content in a slightly different phrasing and references to the Muḥammadan light appear a bit more often in *al-Nūr* but this is not to say that this concept is not prominent in *al-Nash’a* as will be seen below. With regard to the topic of the Muḥammadan light, I could not find a clear programmatic difference between both *mawlid* texts. On the contrary, they give the impression that one definitely served as a template for the other. Moreover, both *mawlid* texts seem to be inspired by and written after the pattern of the prose version of the *Mawlid al-Barzanjī* with which they share the same structure of the classical *mawlid* prose model according to Katz: an introductory passage (*dibāja*) of flowery rhymed prose followed by alternating passages of rhymed prose with interludes of devotional poetry, each of which is interspersed with a repeated refrain (a so-called *taʾṭīra* (perfuming)), that is, the invocation of prayers upon the Prophet.  

A closer analysis of the content of these *mawlid* texts will follow in the next section. Here, we will, first of all, focus on the publication history.

After the initial Zanzibar and Cairo prints of *al-Nash’a al-muḥammadiyya*, another edition, titled *al-Mawlid al-nabawī l-musammā al-Nashʾa al-muḥammadiyya*, by the Algerian Ibāḍī scholar Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Aṭfayyish (1888–1965) and printed in Cairo’s Salafiyya Printing House, appeared in 1924. The editor prepended a lengthy foreword of fifteen pages to Bahlahnī's *mawlid* text in which he outlines a critique of historical and contemporary *mawlid* festivities that concurs largely with the modernist criticism against the performative aspects of the *mawlid* by Rashīd Riḍā. Similar to this figurehead of the modern Salafiyya in Egypt, Aṭfayyish considers the celebration of the *mawlid* as a good innovation (*bidʿa ḥasanah*), in fact, as one of the best traditions (*min akbar al-sunan al-ḥasana*). However, he strongly criticises the mere gossip and inappropriate and reprehensible actions that are narrated about the Prophet in many *mawlid* texts. Moreover, he condemns the utmost pomp (*ubbahā*) and embellishment (*zīna*) of many *mawlid* festivals – particularly in Tunisia and Egypt – that governments turned into official ceremonies including gun salutes, fireworks,

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41 See Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, 52.
42 Aṭfayyish maintained strong ties to Egypt’s Salafiyya and reformist movements and was a close friend of the Salafiyya printing houses’ founder Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1969) as well as of Rashid Riḍā (d. 1935), Ḥasan al-Bannā (d. 1949), and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) (Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism*, 95).
military parades, and the sponsorship of Sufi orders. Aṭfayyish sees these as the greatest and ugliest forbidden innovations and reprehensible actions by the mob (ghawghā) and the sinners (fasaqa) among the umma.43

As an alternative and commendable form to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet, Aṭfayyish presents the mawlds in his own home region in Algeria and, by implication, among Ibāḍīs in general. These are organised in mosques by religious associations in the night of the twelfth of Rabīʿ al-Awwal and include the public reading of parts of the Prophetic biography, the story of his birth, and the Qurʾān that are selected by the highest religious authority (haykh al-ʿazzābā), as well as the recitation of poems in praise of Muḥammad, and almsgiving.44 The greatest benefit of these readings appears to be that the common people learn about and understand the spirit of Islam, the truth of the revelation, and the perfection of Muḥammad.45 According to Aṭfayyish:

[h]is (ṣ) biography includes everything with which the umma becomes prosperous in its social and political life, and, today, the need for the recital of this biography is the strongest in order to revive the Islamic life within the souls, particularly because of the spread of the foreign poison and the widening of the distance between the successors of the Muslim community (khalaf) and the pious forefathers of the first three Muslim generations (salaf).46

The religious scholars write the mawlds, since their reading leaves “a positive impression, sublimity, and beauty” in the souls of the audience. It inculcates the love for the Prophet in their souls, and revives the love for the emulation of his tradition (sunna) and for being led by his right guidance. The mawlid celebration preserves the glory of Islam, the revival of its strength, and the gratefulness for the blessing of Muḥammad’s presence.47 Finally, the editor introduces Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī’s al-Nash’a al-muḥammadīyya as “the most beautiful arrangement [literally, ‘necklace’, in Arabic ‘iqd] on the life of the lord of beings (sayyid al-kāʾīnāt)”, even though Bahlānī followed in the path of others in reporting certain stories of weak authenticity (mustaḍʿafāt). Nevertheless, he praises the text as “the most brilliant of what raises the benefits upon its reading, the most beautiful that pleases the ears, as if the splendour of the rays of the Prophetic light shine from its interior”.48
Beginning with Atfayyish's edition in 1924, the text gained wide popularity among Ibāḍi communities throughout the Islamic world and, according to Mahrouqi, it is used as a mawlidīyya text at celebrations of the Prophet's birthday in Zanzibar, Oman, the Mizāb valley in Algeria, and the Tunisian island of Jerba.\(^4\) In 1946, the Atfayyish edition was still copied by hand by members of the Ṣawqī family in Zanzibar.\(^5\) The edition was also reprinted several times, one edition in Dubai as part of a collective volume (without a date),\(^6\) a second one by the Office of Mosques and Religious Schools (Dāʿirat al-Masājid wa-l-Madāris) of Oman's sultanic court, a third one by the national printing house in Oman (1986), and a fourth one by the Dāmirī bookshop in Sīb, Oman (1986).\(^7\) By the late 1980s or early 1990s, that is, about two decades after the ascendency of Sultan Qābūs b. Saʿīd al-Bū Saʿīdī (1940–2020) in Oman, Bahlānī's mawlid text gained importance for Oman's state and nation-building process. This development certainly went contrary to Atfayyish's criticism mentioned above. At that time, the special advisor to the sultan in religious and historical affairs, Muḥammad b. Ṣahmad b. Saʿūd al-Bū Saʿīdī, produced a slightly shortened and adapted version of al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadiyya that became the standard version used during official mawlid readings organised by the state throughout the 1990s until today. A third edition of this adapted version was published in 2004, and a fourth in 2014.\(^8\) A comparative analysis of the different versions of Bahlānī's mawlid texts in the next section, namely, Atfayyish's edition and the adapted al-Bū Saʿīdī edition, will reveal that, in the latter version, the text was not only shortened and adapted to fit it into the context of the state-organised readings, but seemingly also to clear it of controversial narratives about the Prophet from a traditional Ibāḍī perspective.

3 The Religious Adaptation of al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadiyya and Its Importance for Nation-Building in Twentieth-Century Oman

The Atfayyish edition and the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition of al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadiyya have largely the same pattern and content. After an introductory praise of God and the Prophet in rhymed prose, both texts recount largely the same episodes about the life and the characteristics of the Prophet beginning with his

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6. Rawāḥi, Majmiʿa.
7. Rawāḥi, al-Mawlid al-nabawi (1986); see also Kiyūmī, al-Ḥaraka al-ilmiyya fi Zanjībar, 293.
genealogy (*nasab*); the first edition in fourteen, the second in fifteen, passages. Moreover, the pattern and parts of the content of both texts are quite similar to the narratives of the seventeen passages in the *Mawlid al-Barzanjī*. The introduction and all following passages in both editions end with the same invocation of blessings upon the Prophet (the *taʾṭīr*) that is meant to function as a refrain for the collective recitation by the audience during the reading. The invocation reads “O God, fulfill his great fortune / With the purest blessing, closeness, and salvation” (*waffir Allāhumma ḥaẓẓahu al-ʿazīm / bi-azkā ẓalātin wa-qurbin wa-taslīm*). Here, Bahlānī was inspired by the model of Barzanjī’s invocation “O Lord, perfume his noble grave / With fragrant scents of blessing and greeting” (*ʿAṭṭir Allāhumma qabrahu al-karīm / bi-ʿarfin shadhīyin min ẓalātin wa-taslīm*). All three texts close with an epilogue, the *khātim*.

The *Aṭfayish* and al-Bū Saʿīdī editions differ from each other mainly with regard to style and certain phrases and passages of content that are, nevertheless, significant since they point to divergent religious outlooks of the author and the respective editors as well as to changing political contexts. The following comparative analysis of selected parts of both texts will reveal that, when Bahlānī wrote *al-Nashʿā al-muḥammadiyya*, he was strongly inspired by Sunnī and Sufi ideas some of which appear similarly in the *Mawlid al-Barzanjī* (*nathr*). Aside from the same pattern of the text, Bahlānī included controversial narratives about the Prophet and God, such as Muhammad’s pre-existence and his light, his intercession (*shafāʾa*) and role as mediator (*wasīl*), certain miracles, as well as anthropomorphic metaphors of God’s attributes. In a traditional Ibāḍī context, the respective ideas and concepts behind these mentioned narratives would not be acceptable but this did not prevent Ibāḍī poets and scholars, particularly those of the *sulūkī* tradition, from using them metaphorically in their poetry just like Sunnī and Shiʿī Sufis do. Interestingly, all the seemingly controversial passages have been deleted or corrected in the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition of *al-Nashʿā al-muḥammadiyya*. The following paragraphs will highlight the differences between both editions more closely.

### 3.1 *al-Nashʿā al-muḥammadiyya in a National Context*

In the original text of *al-Nashʿā al-muḥammadiyya* in the *Aṭfayish* edition and similar to the *Mawlid al-Barzanjī*, Bahlānī invokes God throughout the text in the first-person singular with the introduction beginning in the following way:

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55 For the translation, see Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*, 81.
56 *Majmūʿat min mawlid sharaf al-anām*, 72. I use an Indian collection of *mawlid* texts including the *Mawlid al-Barzanjī* which is available in Oman’s bookshops.
I begin in the name of God, the necessity of divinity and unity, devoting to Him, out of praise, what He loves and what He is pleased with, raising the voice for His abounding mercy in this world and the hereafter, awaiting from Him a glance with which I become happy through His miracle and His good will.\(^{57}\)

Contrary to this version, the al-Bū Saʿīdi edition is written throughout in the first-person plural (“We begin in the name of God”) suggesting not a single person that is invoking God with this text but its use in a collective reading ritual, such as for the Omani nation.\(^{58}\) Such a nationalisation of the mawlid text is also suggested by the epilogue (khātimā) of the al-Bū Saʿīdi edition. The epilogue of the Aṭfayyish edition is an extensive invocation of God and the Prophet for succour and includes the request to “support the sultan of the umma that reacts to those who treat it as an enemy”\(^{59}\). Here, Bahlānī might have had the colonial powers of his time in mind. He, furthermore, begs God to “release us from the clear injustice (of fitnā) and the power of the tyrants”\(^{60}\) and he asks for blessing and salvation upon the Ibāḍīyya at large (ʿalā kullī ahli al-istiqāma, the latter is the self-referential term for the Ibāḍīyya).\(^{61}\) Al-Bū Saʿīdi, by contrast, asks God to grant “power, respect, and a strong standing to the sultan of the country and the servants of God, our Lord Qābūs b. Saʿīd, may God protect him”, to strengthen his government, to let his soldiers triumph, and to promote the position of those who are close to him. In the end, he asks to protect Oman and the other Islamic countries and to let peace prevail.\(^{62}\)

3.2 The Light of Muḥammad and God’s Attributes
A prominent theme throughout the Aṭfayyish edition of al-Nashʾa al-muḥammadiyya is Muḥammad’s pre-existence in the form of light. This theme is also central to the Mawlid al-Barzanjī but its history is much older. The image of Muḥammad as light is of Qurʾānic origin where he is described as “a light-giving lamp” (sirājan munīrān) (Q 33:45–46) and ideas of his pre-existence in the form of a cosmic Muḥammadan light (nūr muḥammadi) that God created from His

\(^{57}\) Aftatiḥu bi-smi llāhi wājibi l-ulūḥiyyati wa-l-aḥadiyya, mukhlīṣan lahu min al-ḥamdi ma yuḥābbuhu wa-yaqūdāh. Mustahillan raḥmatahu al-wāsīʿata l-duraywīyyata wa-l-ukhrawiyya, nāẓiran minhu nazratan uflīhu maʿahā bi-karāmatihi wa-rīdāh (Rawāḥi, al-Mawlid al-nabawi (1924), 2).

\(^{58}\) Bū Saʿīdi, al-Nashʾa al-muḥammadiyya, 5.

\(^{59}\) Rawāḥi, al-Mawlid al-nabawi (1924), 43–44.

\(^{60}\) Rawāḥi, al-Mawlid al-nabawi (1924), 45.

\(^{61}\) Rawāḥi, al-Mawlid al-nabawi (1924), 47.

own light before anything else became prominent among Sunnīs and Shiʿīs, particularly Sufis, from the ninth century onwards. According to these ideas, the primordial substance of the Muḥamadan light was transmitted with the sperm through the generations of Muḥammad’s ancestors and Sunnī Sufis and Shiʿīs relate its transmission together with that of the light of God to the inner transformation of a mystic’s soul and to the lineage of the imamate, respectively. Even though the doctrine of Muḥammad’s light is not acceptable in Ibaḍīsm (more on that later), the Ibaḍī Bahlānī, nevertheless, uses this Prophetic image, at least metaphorically, in the introduction of the Aṭfayyish edition and its beginning quoted above continues as follows:

and I pray for and salute the one whose light is the origin of the cosmic circle and whose essence is the light of the lights of the throne and its secrets, Muḥammad, the spirit of the truth and the combiner of the messengers’ guidance, and to his people and Companions and those of who followed his example.

The emphasised part above refers to Muḥammad as a light that stands at the beginning of creation and the essence of which is the light of God’s throne and ultimately of God Himself. Unlike Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī, al-Bū Saʿīdī replaced the emphasised invocation of the Prophet as cosmic light and part of the light of God’s throne in his edition with a more “humanising” description of the Prophet: “and we pray for and salute the possessor of an exalted character and perfect attributes”. The replacement of the phrase above can be explained with the controversial status of its content from the perspective of Ibaḍīs. Not only is the concept of the light of Muḥammad clearly of non-Ibaḍī origin, Ibaḍī theologians also traditionally oppose any forms of anthropomorphism that ascribe human attributes such as parts of the human body to God who is neither to be seen in this world nor in the hereafter. Rejecting a literal understanding of God’s attributes in the Qur’an, they interpret physical descriptions of God metaphorically. His sitting on the heavenly throne (istiwā’ alā l-ʿarsh),

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64 Böwerin, “The Light Verse”, 127, 133.
65 Rubin, “Pre-existence and Light”, 113.
66 Wa-usahaan wa-usallimu alā man nūruhu ṣunṣurul-dāʾiratul-kawniyayya, wa-man ḥāṭuḥu nūru anwārul-l-ʿarsh wa-muḥṭawāḥ. Muḥammadin rūḥi l-ḥaqqī wa-jāmīʿ l-hīdāyati l-rusuliyaya, wa-alālā ḥālī wa-ṣāḥibīhī wa-man iqṭafāh (Ravāḥī, al-Mawlid al-nabawī (1924), 2 (emphasis added)).
for instance, is interpreted as His rule over the universe. Similarly, Ibādis see in God’s light (Q 24:35) a metaphor for His justice and guidance of the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth. Thus, if there is no light of God, He could not create Muḥammad’s light from it. Nevertheless, the concepts of the Muhammadan light and pre-existence reappear several times in the Aṭfayish edition. Despite the problematic character of the literal meaning behind these concepts for Ibādis, Bahlāni and other Ibādi poets still played with these controversial metaphors that al-Bū Saʿīdi seemingly deems unacceptable about seventy years later.

A poem at the end of the third passage, which is missing in the al-Bū Saʿīdi edition, refers again to Muḥammad’s presence at the throne of God as in the fourth verse, “You sit down cross-legged in the lodge of Jerusalem (al-quds) before them [i.e. the other prophets] / And you are with the great throne of the Most Sublime” Further details about Muḥammad’s pre-existent light are recounted in the fourth passage of the Aṭfayish edition:

O God, bless Muḥammad, grant him salvation and perpetuate the eminence and honour which You have given him, Your light that praised You a thousand years before Adam in time immemorial. With the Most Kind was his visible expression and his position. He was born worshipping with his luminous limbs, then, he raised his head performing the prayer or saying “My sublime Lord” with his hands straight to the ground. He was forecast to his forefather in his sleep, and he came and the angelic qualities shone upon him, and he led him into the Kaaba and he praised Allah being convinced that he is the best God.

68 Ennāmī, Studies in Ibādism, 155–56.
69 Ennāmī, Studies in Ibādism, 155–56.
70 Rawāḥi, al-Mawlid al-nabawī (1924), 11.
71 Similar descriptions can be found in Sunni Sufi sources of the tenth century and Shiʿi sources of the twelfth century; see, respectively, Katz, The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad, 14; and Rubin, “Pre-existence and Light,” 112.
72 Aṭfayish commented on this phrase suggesting that, in his view, the correct wording must be “the highest horizon” (al-ufiq al-aʾlā) instead of “the Most Kind” since the phrase refers to a ḥadīth in which Muḥammad, according to the angel Gabriel, appeared to be a star that became visible all seventy thousand years.
The part emphasised above appears in the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition shortened without the mentioning of the Muḥammadan light and its praising of God a thousand years before Adam:

O God, bless Muḥammad and grant him salvation, Your sincere friend who praised You in time immemorial, whom You chose as a guide and whose position You elevated. He was born humbly worshipping his lordly Highness. Then, he raised his head praying with his hands straight to the ground.74

The editor also changed Muḥammad’s “angelic qualities” into “Prophetic qualities”. Finally, the manifestation of the Muḥammadan light at the throne of God forms part of the beginning of the fifth passage in the Āṭfayyish edition and refers to its existence in the loins of Adam:

O God, bless Muḥammad, grant him salvation and perpetuate the eminence and honour which You have given him, whose light becomes manifest on each side of the throne that is located in the heavenly spheres, the one before whom the angels prostrated [when he was] in the loins of Adam and through whom every prophet was saved from His torment and trial.75

Al-Bū Saʿīdī rendered this phrase into:

O God, bless Muḥammad, grant him salvation and perpetuate the eminence and honour which You have given him, the praiseworthy who is present in the heavenly spheres, whom the angels glorified and acknowledged to be God’s close friend.76

Evidently, the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition avoids the narratives about the superhuman nature of the Prophet that so many Sunni Sufi and Shiʿī traditions uphold and

74 Allāhumma ṣalli wa-sallim ʿalā Muḥammadin ṣafiyika l-musabbiḥa laka fī l-qidamiyya * wa-lladhi ikhtartahu hadīyan wa-rafaʿa mustawāḥ * wa-wulida sājdān khāshiʿan li-l-ḥadrati l-rabbāniyya * thumma raqaʿa raʿsahu dhakiran mustawīyyatan ʿalā l-arḍi yadāh (Bū Saʿīdī, al-Nashʾa al-muḥammadiyya, 12–13).

75 Allāhumma ṣalli wa-sallim wa-bārīk ʿalā Muḥammadin al-sāṭiʾi nūrhu ʿalā arjāʾi l-ʿarshi l-sāʿihi fī l-aqṭāri l-malakātiyya, man sajadat lahu l-malāʾikatu fī ʿulhī Ādam wa-naqā bi-hi kullu nahrīn min karbihi wa-balwāh (Rawāḥī, al-Mawlid al-nabawī (1924), 13 (emphasis added)).

76 Allāhumma ṣalli wa-sallim wa-bārīk ʿalā Muḥammadin al-maḥmūdi l-mashḥūdi fī l-aqṭāri l-malakātiyya * man ʿazzamathu l-malāʾikatu wa-aqarrat bi-hi annahu ṣafiyu llāh (Bū Saʿīdī, al-Nashʾa al-muḥammadiyya, 14).
that Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī included prominently in his mawlid text. In contrast to these narratives, al-Bū Saʿīdī clearly emphasises the Prophet’s human nature. There are notably other parts in the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition that still refer to Muḥammad with a light metaphor. The second passages in the Mawlid al-Barzanjī and the Aṭfayyis/al-Bū Saʿīdī editions, for instance, describe the conception of Muḥammad’s mother, Āmina al-Zuhriyya, as God’s entrusting of the Muḥammadan light to her and her miraculous pregnancy without any hardships nor discomfort. However, this part can be read metaphorically merely meaning Āmina’s conception.

Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī’s ample and presumably metaphorical usage of Muḥammad’s pre-existing light and God’s anthropomorphic attributes in al-Nash’a al-muḥammadiyya constitute a remarkable similarity to Sunnī or Shi‘ī mawlid texts at that time. That Muḥammad’s light, as mentioned in the previous passages, was not a major concern among his Ibāḍī contemporaries in Oman can be illustrated with an example from a fatwa collection of ʿAbd Allāh al-Sālimī. Sālimī was asked whether the Muḥammadan light that existed before the creation of the world is a distinguishing mark of the Prophet, whether it came into existence with the creation of his person from clay, or whether it came from him. Oman’s most famous imamite scholar answered dryly: “I do not know its meaning. If it is true, perhaps the light is his noble spirit (rūḥuhu al-sharīf), prayer and peace be upon him, God knows best.” As shown by Valerie Hoffman, many of Bahlānī’s predecessors and contemporaries in Zanzibar critically engaged with and opposed Sunnī Shāfi‘ism accusing it of an anthropomorphic understanding of God. Yet, particularly this engagement with and close contact to Sunnism in Zanzibar’s cosmopolitan environment also seems to have shaped this poetic, mystical, and eclectic expression of Bahlānī’s Ibāḍī Islam.

3.3 Unauthentic Narratives about the Prophet

In the spirit of the growing scripturalism that can be observed throughout the Islamic world, al-Bū Saʿīdī also discarded unauthentic narratives about miracles that are related to the Prophet’s pre-existence or his birth. One instance is a miracle of the prophet Ilyās that appears similarly in the Mawlid al-Barzanjī

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77 For an account of Muḥammad’s human nature, see Denis Gril’s contribution, “The Prophet in the Qurʾān”, in volume one of this series, The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam.

78 Majmūʿa min mawlid sharaf al-anām, 76–78.

79 Rawḥī, al-Mawlid al-nabawī (1924), 7–9.

80 Sālimī, Jawābāt, 1136.

and the ḥaṭṭayish edition of *al-Nashʿa al-muḥammadīyya*. The first passages in all three texts are all dedicated to Muḥammad’s genealogical lineage (*nasab*). The seventeenth link among the ancestors in Muḥammad’s pedigree is the prophet Ḥiylās who receives the characterisation as “the one who heard the Prophet in his loins” (*sāmīʿ al-nabī ʿfi ṣulbiḥi*) in the ḥaṭṭayish edition. He is also the first one who hung something upon the neck of his camels as a sign that they are an offering to Mecca for sacrifice and sacrificed them (*wa-huwa awwal man qallada al-hady wa-ahdāhu*). The Barzanjī text offers, in reverse, a slightly more detailed characterisation of Ḥiylās, “the first one who brought his camels for sacrifice to the Sacred Precinct and in his loins the Prophet (ṣ) was heard invoking God, the Sublime, and addressing the *talbiya* to Him” (*wa-huwa awwal man aḥdā al-budna ilā l-riḥāb al-ḥaramiyya wa-sumiʿa ʿfi ṣulbiḥi al-nabī ʿallā Allāhu alayhi wa-sallam lā sharīka laka labbay wa-labbāhu*). Bahlānī took this particular miracle story most probably from the Sunnī Barzanjī.

Both short descriptions refer to a story according to which Ḥiylās, on leading his camels to the holy place of the *haram* in Mecca, heard the Prophet Muhammad, whose substance was already existing in his loins, uttering the *talbiya* “Labbayka” (Here I am!). The *talbiya*, originally a pre-Islamic tradition among the Arab tribes, is the loud and repeated invocation by the Muslim pilgrim on entering Mecca’s sacred area, the *haram*. According to Islamic tradition, the ProphetMuḥammad’s *talbiya* was “Here I am! Here I am! O Allah, who has no associate! To You are praise, grace, and power! You have no associate!” (*Labbayka Allāhumma labbayk, lā sharika laka labbayk, inna al-ḥamda wa-l-niʿmata laka wa-l-mulūk, lā sharika laka*). The story of Ḥiylās does not appear in Ibn Hishām’s famous and widely acknowledged biography of the Prophet but it is mentioned in a twelfth-century commentary on it by ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Suhaylī (598–81/1114–85) who labels it as a mere myth that the Prophet does not deserve to be associated with. The doubtful origin of this non-canonical story about the pre-existence of Muḥammad might be the reason why the phrase “*sāmīʿ al-nabī ʿfi ṣulbiḥi*” was deleted in the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition.

Next to other discarded miracle stories, the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition itself also includes popular and non-canonical traditions. The third passage in the

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83 Majmūʿa min mawlid sharaf al-anām, 75.
85 See, for instance, Fahd, “Talbiya”.
88 In the second passage of the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition, the editor deleted, next to several other minor corrections, a sentence with a miracle story in which the animals pronounced
Barzanji, Ḥafṣ al-Dīn Barzanji, and al-Bū Saʿīdī texts deals with the birth of the Prophet and, interestingly, they all refer to the popular story of the heavenly handmaids that attended the event. In the case of al-Nasha`a al-muḥammadiyya, these are the Ḥūrīs, Maryam, and Āsiya (the wife of the Pharaoh who had met the prophet Mūsā). Katz has already observed that not even leading religious scholars deemed the incorporation of this popular tradition in mawlid texts as problematic. Of course, the inclusion of such popular traditions qualifies Ḥafṣ al-Dīn Barzanji's initial criticism against inappropriate narratives in other mawlid texts.

### 3.4 Muḥammad’s Intercession and Mediation

In the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition, the third passage about Āmina’s birth of the Prophet differs considerably from the original passage. In the new edition, a whole part of five lines at the beginning of the original text is missing as well as a longer poem (briefly mentioned above) at the end. The missing lines at the beginning are the following:

O God, bless Muḥammad, grant him salvation and perpetuate the eminence and honour which You have given him, the gate of eternal mercy, grant him and his umma his unlimited desire. Following two months [after the conception of Āmina], his father went to the Shām region [Greater Syria], then he left for Medina where he died after one month of suffering. The angels had compassion for the destiny of Muḥammad’s orphanhood, but it was revealed to them that he is under the eye of God.

The death of Muḥammad’s father, ‘Abd Allāh, is also recounted by Barzanji with slightly more detail but without any reference to the compassion of Muḥammad’s delivery in the Kināna dialect of the Prophet’s tribe and rejoiced at it (Bū Saʿīdī, al-Nasha`a al-muḥammadiyya, 10). This story appears similarly in Majmūʿa min mawlid sharaf al-anām, 77. As shown by Katz, scholars such as Muḥammad b. Masʿūd al-Kāzarūnī criticised popular mawlid narratives while including non-canonical stories in their own texts already in the fourteenth century (Katz, The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad, 58).

the angels.\textsuperscript{94} The eye of God (as in Q 20:39, 21:37, or 23:27) is yet another anthropomorphic term which Ibāḍīs interpret usually as God’s protection or knowledge\textsuperscript{95} and the editor Aṭfayyish, in a footnote, reads it in this way as God’s protection and providence.\textsuperscript{96} Muḥammad’s epithet “gate of eternal mercy”, in turn, deserves closer attention since it refers to his role as intercessor for his community on Judgement Day and as mediator, a wasīla, in daily life. The fact that the Ibāḍī understanding of these two Prophetic roles differs markedly from the Sunnī and Shīʿī views might be another reason why these lines were deleted in the al-Bū Saʿīdī version. The poem at the end of the third passage, which is missing in the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition, also alludes in the seventh and eighth verses to Muḥammad’s intercession and mediatorship: “O greatest succour, O Chosen One (muṣṭafā), negotiate / For us aid through which we live and are being resurrected”, and “You are a medium for us in every aim / And you are a guarantor for the success of the hopeful”.\textsuperscript{97}

The same pattern of omission, particularly of the issue of mediatorship, can be observed in the epilogue (khātimā) of al-Nash’a al-muḥammadiyya. In the Aṭfayyish edition, the epilogue is a long invocation (tawassul) of God and the Prophet Muḥammad:

\begin{quote}
O God, we ask You through Your authority and Your divine truths, and we seek Your favour through Your power, Your majesty, and Your glory ... we turn our faces to You through Your great name that unites the realities of the divine names and attributes ... and we beseech You through the authority and sanctity of the Muḥammadan Reality, Your messenger Muḥammad.\textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

Al-Bū Saʿīdī, however, whose epilogue is markedly shorter than the original, only mentions the invocation of God through His names and attributes but completely discards the invocation through the authority of the Prophet.\textsuperscript{99}
The reason for this omission seems to be a shift in Ibāḍī scholarly thinking about the Prophet’s role in this context throughout the twentieth century.

With their noticeably strong emphasis on the belief in the tenets of Islam and strict observance of Islamic law, Ibāḍīs believe that the Prophet will only intercede for true believers, that is, true Ibāḍīs in word and deed on Judgement Day, but not for those who committed the grave sins of association and hypocrisy (kabā‘ir al-shirk wa-l-nifāq100 in Ibāḍī terms). In contrast to the Sunnī view, according to which even grave sinners (except those fallen into shirk) will enter paradise through Muḥammad’s intercession, Ibāḍīs consider them as doomed to eternal hellfire. However, certain traditions grant at least Muslim grave sinners the obligation of repentance in order to receive back the right of intercession.101 In this sense, the Prophet can still be a “gate of eternal mercy” but only for those true believers who have committed minor sins and not for the umma at large.102

The Prophet’s mediatorship must be clearly distinguished from his intercession since it is part of the ritual of tawassul that can be regularly practised by Muslims in their daily life. A widespread practice among Sunnīs and Shi‘īs, tawassul means the invocation of God through the authority of the Prophet, his prophetic predecessors, saints, or the pious, living or dead, as mediators (wasā‘il) in order to get a benefit or avoid harm. At the end of the nineteenth century, the leading Ibāḍī scholar ʿAbd Allāh al-Sālimī relied on Sunnī hadīth collections and approved of tawassul through the authority of the Prophet, his predecessors, and the pious, be they dead or alive – and under the condition that no other being than God is ultimately invoked since this would be equal to polytheism (shirk).103 By the early twenty-first century, however, his successors among Oman’s Ibāḍī scholars seem to have changed their opinion in this regard. The Ibāḍī hadīth scholar Sa‘īd b. Mabruk al-Qanubi (b. 1964) and the deputy of Oman’s grand mufti, Kahlān b. Nabhān al-Kharūsī, both consider the very same Prophetic traditions that Sālimī deemed authentic as weak and unreliable. On Omani television, both clearly reject tawassul through the authority of the Prophet on the basis that there is no authentic proof justifying

100 For the different categories of grave sins, see, for instance, Ennāmī, Studies in Ibāḍism, 169–70.
102 As shown by Ghazal, the Ibāḍī concept of the umma changed during the nineteenth century from the early exclusivist understanding of it, as limited to the Ibāḍī community, to a more inclusive Salafiyya-oriented and Pan-Arabist understanding of the Muslim community; see Ghazal, “The Other Frontiers of Arab Nationalism”.
103 Sālimī, Jawābāt, 1:46–51.
this practice and recommend invoking God directly; for instance, by mentioning His names and attributes in the invocation.\footnote{Hasani, “al-Shaykh Sa‘īd al-Qanūbī”; YouTube al-Istiqāma, “al-Tawassul”.} This is exactly what al-Bū Sa‘īdī retained of the original text in his adapted edition. Apparently, this change of opinions can account for the differences between the Aṭfayyish and al-Bū Sa‘īdī editions of al-Nash’a al-muḥammadiyya.

The comparative analysis of the two editions of al-Nash’a al-muḥammadiyya shows that the Ibāḍī mystic Abū Muslim al-Bahānī produced a mawlid text that was not only modelled after Barzanjī’s text but also infused with Sunni and Sufi concepts. By the late twentieth century, the use of these concepts in the mawlid text seems not acceptable anymore for many of Oman’s Ibāḍī scholars, but the adapted version of it by al-Bū Sa‘īdī, nevertheless, became an important marker of an Ibāḍī Omani national identity.

4 Ethnographic Observations: The Reading of the Mawlid among Oman’s Ibāḍī Population

Turning from the similarities and differences between the content of the two editions of al-Nash’a al-muḥammadiyya and the Mawlid al-Barzanjī to the use of these texts during mawlid reading performances in Oman illustrates a truism that has been stated already by Dale Eickelman and James Piscatory:\footnote{Eickelman and Piscatory, Muslim Politics, 20, 75, 131.} a certain fragmentation of sacred authority among various and oftentimes competing groups and actors in the religious field of modern Muslim societies. In Oman, this fragmentation relates not only to the multi-sectarian and multi-ethnic nature of the country’s religious landscape, but also to the Ibāḍī community itself. The parallel use and disregard of all three texts by different segments among Oman’s Ibāḍīs reflects the complex nature of Islam between theory and living practice and the relationship between the state, Ibāḍī religious scholars, and the Ibāḍī people at large – a relationship that vacillates between coexistence, competition, and close entanglement.

In Oman today, the birthday of the Prophet is celebrated not only by Sunnīs, particularly the Sufi communities in the northern Bāṭina regions and in the south of Ṣufār (Dhofar), and by Shi‘īs in Musqat but to a certain extent also among the Ibāḍīs. The latter observe the mawlid through the collective reading of the Prophetic biography, the recitation of panegyrical poems (madā‘īḥ), and even the performance of songs (anāshīd). Such events are organised on several levels: by the state as an official ceremony, by religious scholars in local...
mosques, and privately by certain families. The following overview is partially based on my observations during a two-week trip to Oman in order to research *mawlid* celebrations between 6 and 18 November 2019.

During my stay in Oman, I had the opportunity to visit and meet several Ibāḍī families and individuals of various backgrounds including middle-class schoolteachers, professors at Sultan Qābūs University, engineers, businessmen, army officers, and officials of the Ministry of Awqāf and Religious Affairs. Most have an Arab origin, others are Balūchīs, and the majority hails from Musqat, Samā‘īl, Nizwā, al-Ḥamrā‘, and Rustāq. Tellingly, most of them do not observe or celebrate the birthday of the Prophet in any way. A recurring answer to my queries on the celebration of the *mawlid* in Oman was that, originally, Ibāḍīs have never celebrated that day as compared to the rest of the Islamic world. Most see in the Ibāḍī observance of the *mawlid* a new development and consider it as merely optional noting that the mufti Aḥmad al-Khalīlī never did it.106 Thus, it appears safe to say that most Omani Ibāḍīs do not pay attention to the Prophetic birthday today. Notwithstanding this popular indifference, *mawlid* celebrations do receive a considerable promotion and attention by the state and by certain scholarly circles.

The day of the Prophetic birthday, in 2019 from the evening of 9 to 10 November, is a national holiday in Oman and the most prominent *ma wlid* celebrations are organised by the state, that is, by the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs founded in 1989. These *mawlids* are one part of a state project that began in the second half of the 1980s and that aims at a stronger emphasis on a distinct Ibāḍī religious and national identity but in the framework of a generic Omani Islam of tolerance and unity that dilutes sectarian differences between Ibāḍīs and Sunnis. This state policy started in reaction to a fatwa by the Saudi-Wahhābī scholar ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Bāz (1912–99) in 1986 in which the latter argued that Ibāḍīs, who do not believe that God will be seen on Judgement Day (*ru’yat Allāh*), deserve to be put to the sword.107 Severing relations between both countries, this fatwa was comprehended as a major affront not only to Ibāḍīs but to Omanis in general. In this context, it is interesting to observe that the *mawlid* ceremonies that were organised by the state from that period onwards centre on the reading of *al-Nash‘a al-muḥammadiyya* according to the adapted al-Bū Sa‘īdī edition as a distinct

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106 Interview with Aḥmad, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīḍ, and Jamāl from al-Ḥamrā‘ and Musqat, 12 November 2019.
Ibādī text cleared of Sunnī Sufi ideas and references to anthropomorphic attributes of God.

By 1993, the Omani television broadcasted the official mawlid reading of the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition in the presence of Sultan Qābūs b. Saʿīd in the hall of the presidential palace (qaṣr al-ḥuṣn) in Ṣalāla. Clouded by incense, five readers performed the text in front of the sultan in the middle of a large hall and surrounded by attending guests which included ministers, tribal shaykhs, and other luminaries.108 Since the 2010s, the Omani television annually broadcasts reading performances by ten to four readers who perform in important mosques and prestigious sites of Oman’s architectural heritage, such as the grand mosque in Şāḥm, the Sultan Qābūs Grand Mosque and the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque in Musqat, the grand mosque in Ṣuḥār, and the fort of Bahlā.109 In 2016, it produced a “spontaneous” reading performance in Muṣqat’s grand mall where four performers appeared one after the other in between the shopping customers in order to recite al-Nash'a al-muḥammadiyya on a prepared carpet on the ground.110

In recent years, official mawlid ceremonies were also organised under the auspices of ministers with different portfolios. In 2019, the mawlid celebration was arranged in the Sultan Qābūs Grand Mosque in Musqat by the secretary of the Ministry of Information (wizārat al-iʿlām), ‘Ali b. Khalfān al-Jābirī, and was attended by members of the Ministry of Awqāf and Religious Affairs and other prominent scholars and politicians. This celebration was orchestrated like a press conference in theatre style with the respective speakers and performers on stage in the front and the audience on chairs in the hall. The event was introduced by a Qur’ān recitation and the reading of a short part of al-Bū Saʿīdī’s al-Nash'a al-muḥammadiyya. The rest of the celebration included speeches on the Prophetic biography by members of the Ministry of Awqāf and Religious Affairs and the recitation of various poems (qaṣāʾīd and madāʾiḥ) on the Prophetic figure.111

Aside from these official mawlid ceremonies and broadcasting, reading performances are organised in minor mosques across the country in evening sessions throughout the entire month and most of them use the al-Bū Saʿīdī edition.112 However, in certain mosques in the north of Oman, I could identify

110 Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shuʿūn al-Diniyya, “Qirā’at al-mawlid”.
111 Oman Mubasher, “Ḥafl al-mawlid”.
112 During my stay in Oman, I found mawlid readings in different areas of Musqat, such as Bawshar, Mu’bayla, and Muṭraḥ, in Nizwā and Samā’il (central Oman), Rustqāq and Buraymī (northern Oman), and in southern Ẓufār.
religious scholars who still read the original version of Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī’s *mawlid* in the Aṭfayyish edition such as in the Misfāt Mosque in Rustāq or in the ‘Alawī Mosque in Buraymī.\(^{113}\) In the latter mosque, the shaykh who read the text is Mas’ūd b. Muḥammad al-Miṣqālī. He is popular for his online sermons and poem recitations and represents a mystical current among Oman’s Ibāḍī scholars who is strongly influenced by Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī and his Sufi-oriented predecessors. Hoffman found that there is no consensus about the appropriateness of mystical tendencies and Sufi practices among Ibāḍīs today, to say the least.\(^{114}\) Marc Valeri, too, refers to several lectures by the mufti Aḥmad al-Khalīlī in 2007 and 2008 in which he warned of an emerging trend of rationalists (‘aqlānyūn) among Ibāḍī scholars who condemn mystical tendencies in Ibāḍism.\(^{115}\) All this suggests that Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī’s mystical legacy is quite controversial among the contemporary Ibāḍī scholarly elite – which is quite reminiscent to the controversial status of Sufism in general in the mainstream of the whole Islamic world today.

Finally, there is evidence that Oman’s Ibāḍīs still read Sunnī *mawlid* texts such as the *Mawlid al-Barzanjī*, despite the state’s emphasis on a distinct Ibāḍism and its consistent use of the adapted al-Bū Saʿīdī edition during official ceremonies. In the night of 9 November, I attended a public *mawlid* reading that was organised by the Ministry of Tourism in the fort of Nizwā in central Oman. The event was open to all visitors and presented by the authorities as an example of local arts and heritage. Despite the tourist context, about a hundred local Ibāḍīs filled the court of the fort with a group of women sitting separately in a corner of the backyard – apparently, they came for spiritual reasons. After a short introduction, six performers recited one after the other passages from the *Mawlid al-Barzanjī* for about one hour. The event was closed by a collective invocation of God. Afterwards, rice and meat were served on large plates on the ground followed by coffee and sweets. This recitation of the Barzanjī text seems paradoxical given the fact that Nizwā is an Ibāḍī stronghold, close to Bahlānī’s birthplace, and the former heart of the Ibāḍī imamate. This is one instance where sectarian differences between Ibāḍīs and Sunnis are blurred through the ritual practice of the *mawlid*.

In the aftermath of the event, I intended to buy Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī’s *al-Nash’a al-muḥammadiyya* in the central bookshop of Nizwā’s market. The bookshop offered a considerable collection of religious literature with Qur’āns, ḥadīth collections, the books of the mufti Aḥmad al-Khalīlī, studies about

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\(^{113}\) al-Anbā’, “Qirā’at al-nash’a al-muḥammadiyya”.

\(^{114}\) Hoffman, “Mysticism, Rationalism and Puritanism”, 264.

\(^{115}\) Valeri, “Ibadism”, 172.
Ibāḍism, even the Ḥanbalī Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya’s Madārij al-sālikīn116 and many editions of the Mawlid al-Barzanjī but not a single book of Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī. In Musqat, the bookshops do have studies about Bahlānī in stock but no edition of al-Nashī‘a al-muḥammadiyya, which is only available in limited number in university and mosque libraries. Thus, the Mawlid al-Barzanjī is much more widespread in print in Oman than the mawlid text of the country’s most important poet and imamate supporter. Moreover, its use in private mawlid readings among Ibāḍī families was suggested by an interviewee from a family of Oman’s religious elite. She told me that in her childhood days, that is, in the late 1970s, the Barzanjī text was read in her family, but today they do not celebrate the mawlid at all.117 I was also invited to a private mawlid reading in the house of a prosperous businessman in al-Sib next to Musqat. There, too, the host gathered about thirty to forty men of his colleagues and friends, some of whom are high-ranking members of the Ministry of Awqāf and Religious Affairs and Ibāḍ scholars, for the reading of the Mawlid al-Barzanjī by six performers. Two of them were Sunnī Sufis from Egypt. These private gatherings are more the exception than the rule in Oman today depending on the respective personal passion for mawlid readings and poems about Muḥammad. But tellingly, their use of a Sunnī Sufi text that prominently praises Muhammad’s light and refers to other controversial non-canonical narratives shows that they do not pay attention to the theological and doctrinal subtleties of sectarian differences expressed by these texts. At this level, the state-promoted generic Islam of tolerance works well.

5 Conclusion

This contribution has shown how the scholarly defence of the mawlid in reaction to the Wahhābī onslaught in the early nineteenth century ushered in a new impetus for celebrations of the Prophetic birthday on the Gulf of Oman, in Yemen, and along the East African coast in the second half of this and the early twentieth century. A number of endorsing commentaries on important mawlid texts such as the Mawlid al-Barzanjī and fatwas by Ḥijāzī, Egyptian,

116 Madārij al-sālikīn fi manāzil ʿāyyaka naʿbudu wa-ʿāyyaka nastaʿīn (The ranks of the wayfarer between the abodes “You do we worship” and “You do we call for help”).
117 Interview with Zakiyya in Musqat, 14 November 2019. In this context, it should be noted, that, according to Eickelman, “Ibāḍ, Sunnī, and Shiʿī doctrines and teachings were not explicitly thought of as systems that could be compared and contrasted” in Oman until the 1980s. The only religious identity that counted was Islamic, pure and simple (Eickelman, “The Modern Face of Ibadism”, 154–55).
and other scholarly elite such as the Shāfiʿi mufti of Mecca Aḥmad b. Zaynī Daḥlān and the Sufi proselytism of his ‘Alawī disciples all contributed to this mawlid renaissance. This new popularity of the mawlid also left an imprint on Ibāḍīs in the cosmopolitan East African dominions of the al-Bū Saʿādī sultanate: despite the fact that they were generally not known for celebrating the Prophet’s birthday as Sunnīs and Shiʿīs do, Ibāḍī scholars began to copy and use Sunnī Sufi mawlid texts and, at the beginning of the twentieth century, one of their leading members and poets, Abū Muslim al-Bahlānī, wrote with al-Nūr al-muḥammadī and al-Nashʾa al-muḥammadiyya his own Ibāḍī versions.

In writing both texts, Bahlānī was strongly influenced by the new popularity of mawlid celebrations among the Sunni Sufi communities in Zanzibar. Both texts were not only written on the pattern of the Mawlid al-Barzanjī but they also include references to ideas and concepts that are popular among Sufis such as Muhammad’s pre-existing light, God’s anthropomorphic attributes, and Muḥammad’s intercession and mediatorship. These ideas are unusual for Ibāḍīs and even unacceptable for most contemporary Ibāḍī scholars. Bahlānī’s poetic merging of Sunni Sufi concepts with Ibāḍīsm is remarkable and illustrates an oft-observed eclecticism of Ibāḍī thinking along the East African coast. Al-Nashʾa al-muḥammadiyya in particular gained wide popularity among Ibāḍī communities throughout the Islamic world contributing to an Ibāḍī self-assertion and distinction with regard to the mawlid. By the late 1980s or early 1990s, an adapted, corrected, and nationalised version of this text emerged as the Ibāḍī standard text for official mawlid celebrations organised by the state in Oman. In the context of the state’s strong emphasis on a distinct Ibāḍī religious identity in reaction to the provocation by Ibn Bāz, al-Nashʾa al-muḥammadiyya was cleared of all controversial parts about the Muhammadan light, God’s anthropomorphic attributes, and the Prophetic intercession and mediatorship. In contrast to Zanzibar in the late nineteenth century, the leading Ibāḍī scholars of Oman today give preference to the Prophet’s human nature instead of his superhuman characteristics that are highlighted by many Sunnī and Shiʿī Sufis.

Beneath the state’s promotion of this adapted version of a distinct Ibāḍī mawlid text, others such as the Mawlid al-Barzanjī still circulate among Ibāḍīs in Oman. The original text by Bahlānī is still read on the Prophet’s birthday among a small circle of Ibāḍī scholars who are strongly influenced by the mysticism of Bahlānī and other figures such as Saʿīd b. Khaṭīb al-Khalīlī. However, this mystical current is controversial and among Oman’s Ibāḍī population today, only very few observe the birthday of the Prophet with a mawlid reading. Reflecting the state’s parallel promotion of a generic Islam that dilutes sectarian differences, the Sunnī Mawlid al-Barzanjī seems to be much more
widespread in print and use for private *mawlid* readings than Bahlānī’s *al-Nāsh'ā al-muḥammadiyya*. On this popular level of ritual practice, doctrinal and theological differences between the mentioned texts are largely ignored.

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