

# THE EARLIEST ISMĀ'ĪLĪS

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The students of Ismā'īlism are well acquainted with the numerous dark periods and obscure issues regarding this sect of Šī'ī Islam. Early Ismā'īlism, representing the period of fermentation and incubation of the movement, is perhaps the most obscure major phase in the entire history of Ismā'īlism. It extends from the proto-Ismā'īlī origins of the movement, in the middle of the 2nd/8th century, to the establishment of the Fāṭimid Caliphate in the year 297/909, a period of almost one and a half centuries. And the first century of early Ismā'īlism, during which the earliest Ismā'īlīs successfully laid the foundations of their revolutionary movement, is shrouded in even greater mystery.

The early Ismā'īlīs evidently produced only a few treatises which circulated mainly among the most trusted members of their community. Even then, however, utmost effort was made to conceal the identity of the authors. Furthermore, the meagre literary output of the early Ismā'īlīs soon became obsolete and was subjected to censorship by the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlīs; not only because the earlier works appeared rather crude compared to the elaborate treatises of the Fāṭimid period but, more importantly, because the views contained in them were in conflict with the official Fāṭimid doctrines. Nevertheless, a small collection of Ismā'īlī texts from the pre-Fāṭimid period has survived to the present day.

The production of Ismā'īlī literature on a much larger scale, occurred only after the foundation of the Fāṭimid Caliphate when the great Ismā'īlī *dā'īs* and thinkers embarked on their activities. A good portion of this literature, preserved especially in India and Yaman, has now become available to researchers in the course of the modern progress in Ismā'īlī studies which began in the 1930's; a progress that has necessitated drastic revisions in our ideas concerning the Ismā'īlī movement. Unfortunately, it has also become clear that Ismā'īlī sources, being essentially religious and philosophical in their character, contain little historical information, especially on

the initial period of the movement. Only one general history of Ismā'īlism seems to have been written by an Ismā'īlī; the *'Uyūn al-ahbār* of Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn (d. 872/1468), the nineteenth Musta'li-Tayyibī *dā'ī* in Yaman.<sup>1</sup> But this seven-volume history, too, treats the opening stage of the Ismā'īlī movement with great obscurity. For this earliest phase, the accounts of the early Imāmī heresiographers al-Hasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbaḥtī (died between 300 and 310/912–922) and Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Aṣ'arī al-Qummī (d. 301/913–4), who are well-informed about the Šī'ī divisions, in fact provide our main sources of information.<sup>2</sup> These valuable sources, written during the last decades of the 3rd century A. H., were recovered in recent times, and both authors evidently drew extensively on an earlier account written during the 2nd/8th century by Hišām b. al-Hakam (d. 179/795–6),<sup>3</sup> the eminent Imāmī scholar in the entourage of the *Imām* Ġa'far al-Šādiq who also played a major part in elaborating the central Šī'ī doctrine of the imāmate.

Under these circumstances, the Ismā'īlīs of different periods were studied and judged, until recent times, almost entirely on the basis of evidence collected, or often fabricated, by their adversaries. With the modern progress in Ismā'īlī studies, however, we have now acquired a much better understanding of different phases in the history of Ismā'īlism, including early Ismā'īlism, thanks to the availability of the Ismā'īlī sources, the pioneering efforts of a few scholars, notably Wladimir Ivanow (1886–1970), and the more recent contributions of Samuel M. Stern (1920–1969) and Wilfred Madelung. It is the purpose of this article to investigate the earliest Ismā'īlīs, who lived during the more or less first century of Ismā'īlism, in the light of the accounts of al-Nawbaḥtī and al-Qummī and the results of modern scholarship on the subject.

The history of Ismā'īlism as an independent movement may be traced to the dispute over the succession to the *Imām* Ġa'far al-Šādiq. Al-Šādiq himself had succeeded to the imāmate of a group of the Imāmī Šī'īs around 117/735, following the death of his father Muḥammad al-Bāqir. During his long imāmate of some thirty years, Ġa'far al-Šādiq had gradually acquired a widespread reputation for religious learning. Reporting *ḥadīth* and teaching *fiqh*, he acquired a position of prominence amongst the Šī'a and the 'Alid family circles, especially during the last decade of his imāmate. Following the victory of the 'Abbāsid revolution in 132/750, and the failure of the revolt of the Ḥasanid Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya in 145/762–3, the Ḥusaynid Ġa'far al-Šādiq had in fact emerged as the main rallying point for the allegiance of the Šī'īs, especially in southern 'Irāq; and his imāmate now provided the basis for the most important Šī'ī sects, the Twelvers and the Ismā'īlīs. In time, the *Imām* Ġa'far had also collected a group of thinkers around himself, and had become the object of more speculations than any other 'Alid by the *Gulāt*, the radical Šī'īs. Most of these thinkers lived in Kūfa, the seat of early Šī'ism, like the bulk of al-Šādiq's partisans from amongst both the ordinary Imāmī Šī'īs upholding the legitimacy of the

Husaynid 'Alid line of imāms, and the more radical ones representing the heritage of the earlier Kaysānī Šī'īs of the Umayyad times who had supported various Hanafid 'Alids.

At the same time that the *Imām* al-Šādiq encouraged the speculations of his disciples and associates, however, he made a point of keeping them within tolerable bounds by imposing a certain doctrinal discipline. This formal disciplining seems to have been particularly enforced after the accession of the 'Abbāsīd al-Manšūr (136–158/754–775), in response to the latter's anti-Šī'ī policies. As a result, while the imāmate of al-Šādiq was invigorated by the ideas of the Šī'ī *Gulāt* and other types of thinkers in his entourage, such ideas were kept in check, and often reconciled with one another, so as not to permit them to go too far beyond the limits acceptable to Sunnī Islam and the Muslim majority. There were several noteworthy *Gulāt* contributing to the rich and varied intellectual life of Ġa'far's coterie; not only semi-extremists such as Ġābir al-Ġu'fī (d. 128/745–6), but most significantly, Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb Muḥammad b. Abī Zaynab Miqlāš al-Aġda' al-Asadī, the most prominent of all the early Šī'ī *Gulāt*. He was also the first Šī'ī to have organized a movement of a specifically *bāṭinī* type, viz., esoteric and gnostic.<sup>4</sup>

For quite some time, Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb was an intimate associate of the *Imām* al-Šādiq who had appointed him as his chief *dā'ī* in Kūfa. Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb acquired many followers of his own, known as the *Ḥaṭṭābiyya*, while he remained a zealous disciple of the *Imām* Ġa'far and made exaggerated claims about him, in addition to believing in the divinity of the *imāms* and holding other extremist views. The situation of this outspoken disciple eventually became intolerably dangerous to his quiescent and dissimulating *imām*. Consequently, Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb, who had also found one of the *imām*'s sons, Ismā'īl, responsive to his militant views and objectives, was accused of erring and was publicly cursed by Ġa'far al-Šādiq. This repudiation, which probably took place soon after the caliph al-Manšūr's accession in 136/754, caused great consternation among the *imām*'s followers. Shortly afterwards, in 138/755–6, Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb and seventy of his enthusiastic supporters assembled in the mosque of Kūfa under obscure circumstances and possibly for rebellious purposes. They were attacked and massacred by the troops of the city's alert governor, 'Isā b. Mūsā. Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb himself was arrested and then crucified. On the death of Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb, who had remained loyal to the *Imām* al-Šādiq till the very end, the *Ḥaṭṭābiyya*, identified by al-Nawbaḥṭī and al-Qummī with the nascent *Ismā'īliyya*, split into several groups. Some of the *Ḥaṭṭābīs*, as we shall presently see, transferred their allegiance to Ismā'īl b. Ġa'far, the eponym of the *Ismā'īliyya*, and to the latter's son Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, the last *imām* of the earliest *Ismā'īlīs*.

Only fragmentary information is available on the doctrines upheld by Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb and the early *Ḥaṭṭābīs*. Aside from speculating about the broad intellectual issues of the time, like other *Gulāt*, Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb and his

followers seem to have been particularly concerned with spiritual ranking and spiritual adoption. They ranked persons as angels, prophets, divine messengers, or even gods. Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb is said to have taught that at all times there must be two prophets, one speaking (*nāṭiq*) and the other silent (*ṣāmit*); in Muḥammad's era, he had been the speaking prophet and 'Alī the silent one, and now Ġa'far and Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb were, respectively, the speaking and silent prophets. The early Ḥaṭṭabīs preached the divinity of the *imāms*, on the basis of the divine light or *nūr* inherited by them. They are also credited with emphasizing the *bāṭinī ta'wīl*, the esoteric or allegorical interpretation of the *Qur'ān* and the sacred prescriptions; a method adopted and refined to its fullest extent by the Ismā'īlīs. In cosmogony, they replaced the use of the letters of the alphabet, as introduced by al-Muḡīra b. Sa'īd (d. 119/737), one of the most famous early *Ġulāt*, by their corresponding numerical values.

Having consolidated Šī'ism and established a solid foundation for its further doctrinal development, Abū 'Abd Allāh Ġa'far b. Muḥammad al-Šādiq, the last *imām* recognized by both the Twelvers and the Ismā'īlīs, being the sixth one for the former and the fifth for the latter, died (or poisoned according to some Šī'īs, on the caliph al-Manṣūr's orders) in 148/765. The dispute over his succession, as noted, marks the official beginning of what was to become known as the Ismā'īlī movement.

At this juncture, a few words are in order concerning the name *al-Ismā'īliyya*, which apparently was never used by the early Ismā'īlīs themselves. This designation, as we shall see, owes its origins to the heresiographical works, notably those of al-Nawbaḥtī and al-Qummī. The early Ismā'īlīs, when not referred to abusively as the *Malāḥida*, were normally denominated as Qarmaṭīs or Bāṭinīs by their contemporaries. They themselves, however, seem to have designated their movement simply as *al-da'wa*, «the mission», or more formally as *al-da'wa al-hādiya*, «the rightly-guiding mission».<sup>5</sup> Such expressions, stressing the attitude of the sectarians towards their movement, continued to be utilized by the Ismā'īlīs through the Fātimid and later times.

According to the majority of the available sources, the *Imām* al-Šādiq had initially designated his son Ismā'īl as his successor, by the rule of the *naṣṣ*, whereby an *imām* under divine guidance nominated his successor by an explicit designation. There can be no doubt about the authenticity of this designation, which forms the basis of the claims of the *Ismā'īliyya* and which should have settled the question of al-Šādiq's succession in due course. But Ismā'īl died before his father, and his death raised some questions in the minds of some of al-Šādiq's followers who did not understand how a divinely-guided *imām* could be fallible regarding so crucial a matter as the *naṣṣ*. A group of these Imāmī Šī'īs, having become doubtful about the *Imām* al-Šādiq's *'ilm* or special religious knowledge and his own claim to the *imāmate*, had already left him during his lifetime.<sup>6</sup> Anti-Ismā'īlī sources also

add that Ismā'īl had been deprived of his succession rights due to his indulgence in drink. Such reports about Ismā'īl's dipsomania and his disavowal by his father may however represent later fabrications by those who did not accept the Ismā'īlī line of *imāms*. As shall be seen, the *Imām* al-Šādiq had been apprehensive of Ismā'īl for the more serious reason of the latter's association with extremist circles. It is not absolutely certain whether the *Imām* al-Šādiq designated another of his sons after Ismā'īl's death, although the later Twelver Šī'īs claimed such a *naṣṣ* for Mūsā b. Ġā'far, the younger half-brother of Ismā'īl, producing several *ḥadīṡs* to this effect.<sup>7</sup> However, the fact remains that three of al-Šādiq's surviving sons simultaneously claimed his succession, while none of them could convincingly prove to have been the beneficiary of a second *naṣṣ*. As a result, the *Imām* al-Šādiq's Šī'ī partisans split into six groups, two of which constituted the nucleus of the nascent *Ismā'īliyya*.

A small group refused to believe in al-Šādiq's death and awaited his reappearance as the *Mahdī*; they were called the *Nāwūsiyya* after their leader, a certain 'Abd Allāh (or 'Iḡlān) b. al-Nāwūs. A few others recognized Muḥammad b. Ġā'far, known as al-Dībāḡ, the younger full-brother of Mūsā; they became denominated as the *Šumayṡiyya* (*Šumayṡiyya*) after their leader Yaḥyā b. Abī al-Šumayṡ (al-Sumayṡ). Muḥammad al-Dībāḡ revolted unsuccessfully in 200/815–6 against the caliph al-Ma'mūn (198–218/813–833), and died soon afterwards in 203/818. But the majority of al-Šādiq's partisans now accepted his eldest son 'Abd Allāh al-Aftaḥ, the full-brother of Ismā'īl, as their new *imām*. 'Abd Allāh seems to have claimed a second *naṣṣ* from his father; and his adherents, the *Aftaḥiyya* or *Faṡḥiyya*, cited a *ḥadīṡ* from the *Imām* al-Šādiq to the effect that the *imāmate* must be transmitted through the eldest son of the *imām*. At any rate, when 'Abd Allāh died without sons, about seventy days after his father, the bulk of his supporters went over to Mūsā b. Ġā'far, later called al-Kāẓim, who had already been acknowledged as his father's successor by some of the *Imāmiyya*. Mūsā, later counted as the seventh *imām* of the Twelvers, refrained from all political activity and was more quiescent than his father. Nevertheless, he was not spared the Šī'ī persecutions of the 'Abbāsids. He was arrested several times and finally died, or was poisoned, in 183/799, whilst imprisoned at Baghdād. Subsequently, one group of the *Imām* Mūsā's partisans acknowledged the *imāmate* of his eldest son 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Ridā (d. 203/818), who later became the heir-designate and son-in-law of the caliph al-Ma'mūn; and then most of them traced the *imāmate* through four more *imāms*, the direct descendants of al-Ridā. This sub-sect of the *Imāmiyya* eventually became known as the *Iṡnā'ašariyya*, or the Twelver Šī'a.

Two other groups supporting the claims of Ismā'īl b. Ġā'far and constituting the proto-Ismā'īlīs, now separated from the *Imāmī* Šī'ī following of the *Imām* al-Šādiq. These groups had actually come into being earlier, on the death of Ismā'īl. However, these pro-Ismā'īl or proto-Ismā'īlī groups

seceded from the rest of the *Imāmiyya* only after al-Šādiq's death. One group, denying the death of Ismā'īl during his father's lifetime, maintained that he was the true *imām* after al-Šādiq; they further believed that Ismā'īl remained alive and would eventually return as the *Mahdī*. These Šī'īs defended their claims by noting that al-Šādiq, who as an *imām* could speak only the truth, had done nothing to revoke Ismā'īl's succession rights to the imāmate; accordingly, they had no reason for renouncing their allegiance to Ismā'īl. They believed that the *Imām* al-Šādiq had announced Ismā'īl's death merely as a ruse to protect his son, whom he had hidden because he feared for his safety. Al-Nawbaḥtī and al-Qummī call the members of this group, recognizing Ismā'īl as their *Imām-Mahdī*, the «pure Ismā'īliyya» (*al-Ismā'īliyya al-ḥālīṣa*).<sup>8</sup> Some later heresiographers, notably al-Šahrastānī (d. 548/1153), designate this group as *al-Ismā'īliyya al-wāqifa*, referring to those who stopped their line of *imāms* with Ismā'īl.<sup>9</sup>

There was a second group of pro-Ismā'īl Šī'īs who, affirming Ismā'īl's death during the lifetime of al-Šādiq, now recognized Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl as their *imām*. They held that he was the rightful successor to Ismā'īl and that the *Imām* al-Šādiq had personally designated him as such, after Ismā'īl's death. According to these partisans of Muḥammad, the imāmate could not be transferred from brother to brother after the case of the *Imāms* al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī. This was the reason why they rejected the claims of Mūsā and other brothers of Ismā'īl, as they did that of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya who, according to them, had falsely claimed the imāmate in rivalry with his nephew 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidīn. The Imāmī heresiographers call this group the *Mubārakiyya*, named supposedly after their leader al-Mubārak, a *mawlā* of Ismā'īl.<sup>10</sup> However, Ivanow has shown that in all probability al-Mubārak was the epithet of Ismā'īl himself, citing some passages from the famous Ismā'īlī *dā'i* of the 4th/10th century, Abū Ya'qūb al-Siġistānī, in which Ismā'īl is repeatedly referred to by this name.<sup>11</sup> More instances of the application of the name al-Mubārak to Ismā'īl have now come to light, lending strong support to Ivanow's hypothesis.<sup>12</sup> It seems likely then that the *Mubārakiyya* were at first the upholders of Ismā'īl's imāmate; and it was only after the *Imām* al-Šādiq's death that the bulk of Ismā'īl's supporters rallied to the side of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl and recognized him as their new *imām*. At the same time, Ismā'īl had to be elevated retrospectively to the imāmate.<sup>13</sup> In other words, it was maintained that while al-Šādiq was still alive, the imāmate had passed from him to Ismā'īl. At any rate, it is certain that *al-Mubārakiyya* was the original name of the nascent *Ismā'īliyya*.

Al-Qummī identifies *al-Ismā'īliyya al-ḥālīṣa* with the *Ḥaṭṭābiyya*; and al-Nawbaḥtī has a similar statement.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, both authors, intent on showing the influence of the Ḥaṭṭābīs on the nascent *Ismā'īliyya*, report that a group of Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb's followers after his death joined the supporters of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, claiming that the spirit of the *Imām* al-Šādiq had

passed into Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb and from him to Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl.<sup>15</sup> The exact nature of the relationships between *al-Ismā'īliyya al-ḥāliṣa* and the *Mubārakiyya* on the one hand, and the *Ḥaṭṭābiyya* on the other, remains rather obscure. It is certain, however, that all these groups in the following of the *Imām* al-Šādiq, were comprised of radical Šī'īs who provided the milieu in which Ismā'īlism originated.

It will be useful at this point to know more about the life and activities of Ismā'īl himself. For the Ismā'īlīs, he is an *imām*, the sixth one counting from al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī. As such, he is highly revered by them, but the Ismā'īlī sources like the *'Uyūn al-aḥbār* contain little historical information of any value concerning him. On the other hand, the Twelver sources which are better informed than the Sunnī ones regarding the Šī'ī sub-sects, are basically hostile towards Ismā'īl and the claims raised on his behalf. The Twelvers, who recognize Mūsā al-Kāzim as their *imām* after al-Šādiq, in effect, are interested in upholding Mūsā's rights against Ismā'īl.<sup>16</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that these sources regard Ismā'īl as a reprobate. We have to keep these reservations in mind in utilizing the Twelver references to Ismā'īl, about whom our knowledge is extremely limited.

Abū Muḥammad Ismā'īl b. Ġā'far (*al-Mubārak*) and his full-brother 'Abd Allāh were the eldest sons of the *Imām* al-Šādiq by his first wife Fāṭima, a granddaughter of the *Imām* al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī. It is related that al-Šādiq did not take a second wife as long as Fāṭima was alive. As a result, there was a significant age difference between 'Abd Allāh and Ismā'īl on the one hand, and Mūsā, Ishāq and Muḥammad, al-Šādiq's sons from a slave concubine, on the other. Ismā'īl's birth date is unknown; but he was the second son of al-Šādiq, born between 80 and 83/699–702, and was apparently also some twenty-five years older than Mūsā who was born in 128/745–6. It seems likely then that Ismā'īl was born sometime during the initial years of the second Islamic century.<sup>17</sup> The exact date and the circumstances of Ismā'īl's death also remain unknown. However, the majority of sources, except some Ismā'īlī ones, report that he predeceased his father in Medina, and was buried in the Baqī' cemetery. Many Ismā'īlī sources repeat the story of how, before and during Ismā'īl's funeral procession, the *Imām* al-Šādiq made deliberate attempts to show the face of his dead son to witnesses.<sup>18</sup> There are few other indisputable facts available on Ismā'īl's biography. Al-Kaššī relates several versions of an event regarding how Ismā'īl acted on behalf of his father to protest against the killing of al-Mu'allā b. Ḥunays, one of the *Imām* al-Šādiq's extremist followers.<sup>19</sup> The execution of al-Mu'allā, which greatly angered the *imām*, had been ordered by the governor of Medina, Dā'ūd b. 'Alī. As the latter's term of office lasted only a few months during 133/750, it is possible to infer that Ismā'īl was still alive in that year. Ibn 'Inaba (d. 828/1424), an important *Imāmī* genealogist, actually places his death in the year 133 A.H.<sup>20</sup> All other sources, however, mention later years, the latest one

being 145/762–3.<sup>21</sup> In addition, in the accounts of Ismā'īl's death and burial, al-Manṣūr who succeeded his brother in 136/754, is usually named as the ruling 'Abbāsid caliph. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that Ismā'īl's premature death occurred between 136 and 145/754–763, probably soon after the former year.

Regarding Ismā'īl's activities, reference has already been made to his contacts with the extremist Ṣī'īs in his father's following. These contacts are clearly alluded to in several traditions reported by the Imāmī traditionist al-Kaṣṣī,<sup>22</sup> showing Ismā'īl's popularity amongst the radical Ṣī'īs and his close association with them, especially with al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ġu'fī. At the same time, these traditions reveal al-Ṣādiq's dissatisfaction with those radical Ṣī'īs who were leading his son astray. Al-Mufaḍḍal, the supposed author of several works, was an extremist disciple of the *Imām* al-Ṣādiq and initially an associate of Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb. He is also mentioned as the leader of one of the sub-groups, the *Mufaḍḍaliyya*, into which the *Ḥaṭṭābiyya* split after Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb's disavowal by the *Imām* al-Ṣādiq. However, unlike the other Ḥaṭṭābi sub-groups, the *Mufaḍḍaliyya* repudiated Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb. And the *Imām* al-Ṣādiq, though making some uncomplimentary remarks about him, never openly denounced al-Mufaḍḍal, as he did in the case of other Ḥaṭṭābī leaders. At any event, al-Mufaḍḍal later became an adherent of Mūsā al-Kāẓim during whose imāmate he died, but he did not lend support to the condemnation of Ismā'īl by certain Imāmī circles. According to another report, Ismā'īl was evidently involved in some militant anti-'Abbāsid plot in collaboration with several others, including Bassām b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ṣayrafī, another extremist Ṣī'ī engaged in money lending in Kūfa.<sup>23</sup> The caliph al-Manṣūr summoned Ismā'īl along with the *Imām* al-Ṣādiq, as well as Bassām, to his administrative capital at al-Hīra near Kūfa. The 'Abbāsid caliph had Bassām executed but spared Ismā'īl. This is one of the occasions, reported by the Imāmī sources, during which al-Ṣādiq expressed his strong disapproval of Ismā'īl's activities.

All this evidence confirms the existence of close relations between Ismā'īl and the radical circles in the *Imām* al-Ṣādiq's following; and it definitely places the young Ismā'īl amongst those Ṣī'īs who were not satisfied with their imām's conservatism and passivity. Ġa'far al-Ṣādiq naturally disapproved of such activities that threatened his efforts to consolidate Ṣī'ism on a quiescent and compromising basis. As noted, some Imāmī sources do identify the early *Ḥaṭṭābiyya*, one of the most extremist Ṣī'ī groups, with the nascent *Ismā'īliyya*. This identification is also reflected in the enigmatic *Umm al-kitāb*, preserved by the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs of Central Asia, in which the Ḥaṭṭābīs are mentioned as the founders of Ismā'īlism.<sup>24</sup> But recent scholarship has revealed that the *Umm al-kitāb* originated, probably during the second half of the 2nd/8th century, in the Ṣī'ī Ġulāt milieus of southern 'Irāq which gave rise to the *Muḥammisa* and later to the *Nuṣayriyya* traditions.<sup>25</sup> This treatise, which does not in fact reflect the



beliefs of the earliest Ismā'īlīs, underwent later changes and was eventually adapted, under obscure circumstances, into the Ismā'īlī literature preserved in the upper Oxus region. In modern times, too, the identification between the earliest Ismā'īlīs and the Ḥaṭṭābīs has been maintained by certain scholars, notably Massignon who has in fact suggested that Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb was the spiritual or adoptive father of Ismā'īl, whence his *kunya* of Abū Ismā'īl.<sup>26</sup>

However, such interconnections as may have existed between the proto-Ismā'īlīs or the earliest Ismā'īlīs and the Ḥaṭṭābīs should not be exaggerated, especially in the doctrinal domain, although certain ideas and terminologies attributed to Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb and his followers were subsequently adopted by the earliest Ismā'īlīs. The *Ḥaṭṭābiyya*, as noted, believed in the divinity of the *imāms* and also held that al-Šādiq's spirit had passed to Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb, while some of them maintained that after the latter's death this spirit had devolved to Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. The *Mubārakiyya* and their successors, on the other hand, did not entertain such beliefs; they simply upheld the imāmate of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, who later came to be regarded as the awaited *Mahdī* by the bulk of the earliest Ismā'īlīs. Fāṭimid Ismā'īlism, in fact, regarded Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb as a heretic and repudiated the *Ḥaṭṭābiyya*, though it may be added that the official doctrine of that period aimed at disclaiming the movement's extremist origins and any possible early connections with disreputable persons, such as Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb.<sup>27</sup>

As in the case of Ismā'īl, little is known about Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, the seventh *imām* of the earliest Ismā'īlīs. No specific details are related about him in Muslim historical literature as he did not participate in any anti-Abbāsīd revolt. In Ismā'īlī literature, he is treated briefly and with numerous anachronisms. The relevant information contained in Ismā'īlī sources has been collected by the *dā'ī* Idrīs who provides the most detailed biographical account of him.<sup>28</sup> Muḥammad was the eldest son of Ismā'īl who had at least another son called 'Alī. He was also the eldest grandson of the *Imām* al-Šādiq and, according to Ismā'īlī tradition, was twenty-six years old at the time of the latter's death.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, all sources agree that he was older than his uncle Mūsā by about eight years. On the basis of these details, Muḥammad must have been born around 120/738. The *Dastūr al-munaḡḡimīn*, an anonymous Ismā'īlī treatise, in fact, places his birth in *Du'l-Ḥiḡḡa* 121 A.H.<sup>30</sup> He was the *imām* of the *Mubārakiyya* and became the eldest male member of the *Imām* al-Šādiq's family, after the death of his uncle 'Abd Allāh al-Afṭah; as such, he enjoyed a certain degree of respect and seniority in this Fāṭimid branch of the 'Alid family. However, after the recognition of the imāmate of Mūsā al-Kāzīm by the majority of al-Šādiq's followers, Muḥammad's position became rather untenable in his native Ḥiḡāz where his uncle and chief rival Mūsā also lived. It was probably then, that Muḥammad left Medina for the east and went into hiding; henceforth, he acquired the epithet al-*Maktūm*, the Hidden. As a result, he was saved

from persecution by the 'Abbāsids, while continuing to maintain close contacts with the *Mubārakiyya* who like most other Šī'ī groups of the time were centred in Kūfa. Different sources mention various localities and regions as Muḥammad's final destination; but it is certain that he first went to southern 'Irāq and then to Persia. According to the later Ismā'īlīs, this emigration marks the beginning of the period of concealment (*dawr al-satr*) in the history of early Ismā'īlism, and which lasted until the establishment of the Fāṭimid Caliphate.

Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl seems to have spent the latter part of his life in Ḥūzistān, in south-western Persia, where he had a certain number of supporters and from where he despatched his own *dā'īs* to adjoining areas. The exact date of Muḥammad's death remains unknown. But it is almost certain that he died during the caliphate of the celebrated Hārūn al-Rašīd (170–193/786–809), perhaps soon after 179/795–6,<sup>31</sup> the year in which al-Rašīd continuing the anti-'Alid policy of his predecessors, arrested Mūsā al-Kāzīm in Medina and banished him to 'Irāq as a prisoner. The Twelver sources, which are hostile to Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, maintain that it was he who betrayed Mūsā to the 'Abbāsids, though they also relate the story of a reconciliation between these two Fāṭimids prior to Muḥammad's departure for 'Irāq.<sup>32</sup> Muḥammad had at least two sons, Ismā'īl and Ġa'far, while he lived openly in Medina; after his emigration, he had four more sons, including 'Abd Allāh who, according to the later Ismā'īlīs, was his rightful successor.<sup>33</sup>

Not much is known with certainty about the subsequent history of Ismā'īlism until the middle of the 3rd/9th century. On the basis of the opening remarks of al-Nawbaḥtī and al-Qummī on the *Qarāmiṭa*, and in view of the later history of the sect, however, it may be assumed that the *Mubārakiyya* split into two groups on the death of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl.<sup>34</sup> One small and obscure group apparently traced the imāmate in the posterity of the deceased *imām*. However, the separate existence of this group has not been recorded in any contemporary source, until 'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī, the future leader of the movement who established the Fāṭimid dynasty, introduced radical changes into the doctrines of the sect and claimed the imāmate of the Ismā'īlīs for himself and his ancestors. There was a second group, comprising the bulk of the *Mubārakiyya*, who refused to acknowledge the death of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. For these sectarians, identified by the Imāmī heresiographers as the immediate predecessors of the Qarmatīs, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl was regarded as their seventh and last *imām* who was expected to reappear as the *Mahdī* or *Qā'im*, «riser». It should be added that the terms *al-Mahdī* and *al-Qā'im* are basically synonymous in their Šī'ī usage, though *al-Qā'im* came to be preferred by the Ismā'īlīs, especially after the accession of 'Ubayd Allāh to the Fāṭimid Caliphate. Such sects of the so-called *Wāqifiyya*, «those who stand fast» by their last imām upholding his imminent return as the *Mahdī* to fill the earth with justice, were quite

numerous during the 2nd/8th century. And Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl who had a considerable following, could easily have qualified for the position of the eschatological *Mahdī*.

More details of the original beliefs of the Ismāʿīlīs can be derived from what al-Nawbaḥtī and al-Qummī relate about the Qarmatīs.<sup>35</sup> These writers do not mention any other Ismāʿīlī group of their time, and their accounts apparently antedate the doctrinal reform of ʿUbayd Allāh and the splitting up of the movement in 286/899; although al-Qummī's book may have been completed a few years later. According to their accounts, the Qarmatīs who had issued from the *Mubārakiyya*, limited the number of their *imāms* to seven, which also explains why the *Ismāʿīliyya* later acquired the additional denomination of the *Sabʿiyya* or the Seveners. These *imāms* were ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, who was both an *imām* and a messenger-prophet (*rasūl*), al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿAbidīn, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Bāqir, Ġaʿfar b. Muḥammad al-Šādiq, and finally Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. Ġaʿfar, who was the *Imām al-Qāʾim al-Mahdī* and also a messenger-prophet. It is interesting to note that in order to keep within the limit of seven, and starting with ʿAlī, both authors omit the name of Ismāʿīl b. Ġaʿfar from the series of the *imāms* recognized by the Qarmatīs. As a result, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl ranks as the seventh *imām* in the series. At the same time, however, these Imāmī heresiographers contradict themselves by adding that according to the Qarmatīs, the imāmate had in effect been transferred during the lifetime of the *Imām* al-Šādiq to his son Ismāʿīl, just as the position of God's emissary and messenger-prophet had passed by divine command at Ġadīr Ḥumm, from Muḥammad to ʿAlī while the former was still alive. On the basis of this reckoning, Ismāʿīl would have to be counted as an *imām*, the seventh one, with the result that his son Muḥammad would now become the eighth *imām* in the series. The matter is not very clear, however. It seems that some Qarmatīs or earliest Ismāʿīlīs included Ismāʿīl, while others omitted him as an *imām*. In later Ismāʿīlī literature, ʿAlī acquires a higher rank than that of an ordinary *imām*, being regarded as the foundation of the imāmate (*asās al-imāmā*), and Ismāʿīl is always included in the list of the *imāms*. According to this enumeration, still maintained by the Mustaʿlawī Ismāʿīlīs, al-Ḥasan is counted as the first *imām*, with Ismāʿīl and Muḥammad occupying respectively, the sixth and seventh positions. The latter system of enumeration was somewhat modified by the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs who, emphasizing the equality of all *imāms*, counted ʿAlī as the first and al-Ḥusayn as the second *imām*. The Nizārīs exclude al-Ḥasan who according to them was merely a temporary or trustee (*mustawdaʿ*) *imām* as distinct from the permanent (*mustaqarr*) *imāms*.

At any event, the Qarmatīs and their predecessors, viz., the earliest Ismāʿīlīs, maintained that Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, who remained alive, was the *Qāʾim* and the last of the great messenger-prophets. On his reappearance, he would bring a new religious law or *Šarīʿa*, abrogating the one announced

by the Prophet Muḥammad. They recognized a series of seven such law-announcing (*Ṣārī'*) prophets, the so-called *ūlū'l-ʿaẓm* or the prophets «with resolution», namely, Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, ʿĪsā, Muḥammad, ʿAlī, and Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, the seal of the series. The inclusion of ʿAlī in this sequence cannot easily be understood. As the earliest Ismā'īlīs emphasized the distinction between the inward and outward aspects of the religious scriptures and commandments, this inclusion may have been due to the role conceived for ʿAlī as the revealer of the all-important inner (*bāṭin*) meaning of the *Ṣārī'a* delivered by Muḥammad, rather than his having promulgated a religious law of his own, replacing Muḥammad's. The latter role was clearly reserved for the *Qā'im* Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. Indeed, it cannot be doubted that the bulk of the Ismā'īlīs originally preached the Mahdīship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. Aside from the testimony of our Imāmī here-siographers, this is confirmed by the already-mentioned letter of the first Fāṭimid caliph ʿUbayd Allāh *al-Mahdī*,<sup>36</sup> as well as by the few other extant early Ismā'īlī sources. The *Kitāb al-ruṣd*, for instance, centres around the idea of the reappearance of the *Mahdī*, the seventh *nāṭiq* and the eighth *imām* whose name is Muḥammad.<sup>37</sup> There is another pre-Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī text, the *Kitāb al-kaṣf*, a collection of six short treatises, written separately but attributed to Ġaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman who apparently acted only in the capacity of the compiler and editor of the collection. In this work, too, the expectation of the return of the seventh speaker-prophet (*nāṭiq*) as the *Mahdī* or *Qā'im*, often referred to as the *Ṣāhib al-Zamān*, plays a significant part.

After these obscure and underground beginnings, lasting for almost a century, the Ismā'īlī movement appeared suddenly on the historical stage shortly after the middle of the 3rd/9th century. The movement now emerged as a dynamic revolutionary organization conducting intensive *da'wa* activity through a network of *dā'īs*. Behind this outburst of activity, one can clearly discern the guiding hands of an energetic and secret central leadership. The Ismā'īlīs who were still awaiting the reappearance of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl as the *Qā'im*, now began to attract the attention of the ʿAbbāsīd officials and the public at large, under the name of *al-Qarāmīta*. In fact, al-Nawbaḥtī and al-Qummī, who as well-informed contemporary writers describe the situation of the Ismā'īlīs around the year 286/899, when a schism occurred in the movement, mention no other Ismā'īlī group besides the Qarmatīs. They report that at the time they were writing, there were some 100,000 Qarmatīs concentrated chiefly in the Sawād of Kūfa, Yaman and Yamāma;<sup>39</sup> this figure and the designation *al-Qarāmīta* were obviously meant to refer to the whole movement. The Ismā'īlīs *da'wa* soon met with unprecedented success; it managed, in a few decades, to spread rapidly from south-western Persia and southern ʿIrāq to several other parts of the Muslim world, including Yaman, Baḥrayn, Syria, the Ġibāl, Khurāsān, Transoxania, Sind, and North Africa where the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī *Imām* was finally installed to a new caliphate.

There are diverse accounts of the exact religious functions and pedigree of the central leaders who were responsible for organizing and directing the Ismā'īlī movement during the first half of the 3rd/9th century. There is the brief and vague official version, sponsored by the Fāṭimid caliphs who censured the extremist origins of the sect. This version is summed up in the fourth volume of the *ʿUyūn al-aḥbār* of the *dāʿī* Idrīs who based himself on the few Ismā'īlī historical sources produced during the 4th/10th century. There is, on the other hand, the anti-Ismā'īlī version of the Sunnī pamphleteers and polemist who gave rise to a fanciful «black legend» regarding early Ismā'īlism and its alleged founder, a diabolical non-ʿAlid bent on destroying Islam from within. This hostile account can be traced in its main outline, to a work written in the refutation of Ismā'īlism by Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Rizām (or Razzām) al-Ṭāʾī al-Kūfī who flourished in the opening decades of the 4th/10th century.

According to the official Fāṭimid version, the founder of the Fāṭimid dynasty ʿUbayd Allāh, was preceded by a series of «hidden imāms» (*al-a'imma al-mastūrīn*) who were descendants of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl.<sup>40</sup> Al-Nawbaḥtī and al-Qummī, it is true, refer to a sub-group of the *Mubārakiyya* who maintained the imāmate in the progeny of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. However, as the same writers indicate, the majority of the earliest Ismā'īlīs, known as the *Qarāmiṭa* by the middle of the 3rd/9th century, did not recognize any *imāms* after Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. As we shall indicate later on, it seems that the ancestors of the Fāṭimids, the central leaders of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa*, were initially regarded as the lieutenants or representatives of the *Qā'im*; and it was only due to the doctrinal reform of ʿUbayd Allāh that the imāmate came to be retrospectively claimed for these past leaders. According to this official version, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl appointed as his successor his eldest son ʿAbd Allāh, the first of the second heptad of the Ismā'īlī *Imāms*. In order to escape ʿAbbāsīd persecution, ʿAbd Allāh who later received the surname *al-Raḍī*, sought refuge in different parts of Persia and did not reveal his identity and place of residence except to a few trusted associates. Eventually, he settled in Ahwāz, in the province of Ḥūzistān, whence he later fled to ʿIrāq, and then to Salamiyya in northern Syria. In Salamiyya, the residence of the *imāms* and the headquarters of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* for the next few decades, he posed as an ordinary Hāshimīd, of whom there were many in that locality, and as a merchant.<sup>41</sup> Before dying around 212/827–8, ʿAbd Allāh had designated his son Aḥmad as his successor. Aḥmad was, in turn, succeeded by his son al-Ḥusayn and then by the latter's son ʿAbd Allāh (ʿAlī) also called Saʿīd, who later became known as ʿUbayd Allāh al-Mahdī. ʿUbayd Allāh was born in 259 or 260/873–4, and he was about eight years of age when his father died around 268/881–2. In fact, ʿUbayd Allāh spent many years under the care and tutelage of his paternal uncle and future father-in-law Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, known as Saʿīd al-Ḥayr and Abū Ḥakīm with the additional *kunya* Abū l-Salāḡlaḡ (or Šalaʿlaʿ).

It is not clear whether or not Muḥammad b. Aḥmad himself had meanwhile succeeded to the leadership of the movement.<sup>42</sup> However, it is reported that before 'Ubayd Allāh took charge of the leadership, his uncle Muḥammad had attempted several times, in vain, to usurp the leadership for his own sons, all of whom died prematurely.<sup>43</sup>

The origins of this official Fāṭimid version may be traced to the doctrinal reform of 'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī in 286/899, not long after he himself had succeeded to the central leadership of the Ismā'īlī movement. According to this reform, which now introduced continuity in the imāmate, 'Ubayd Allāh claimed the imāmate of the Ismā'īlīs for himself and his ancestors who had led the movement after Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. In order to fully appreciate the significance of this reform, it is necessary to understand the nature of the authority assumed by these central leaders up to that time; especially since the original Ismā'īlī belief in the Mahdīship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl had left no place for any further *imāms*. On the basis of certain allusions found in the early Ismā'īlī sources, it seems that the central leaders of the sect, before 'Ubayd Allāh's reform, assumed the rank of the *ḥuḡḡa* for themselves.<sup>44</sup> It was through the *ḥuḡḡa* that one could establish contact with the *imām*; and the *imām* referred to the hidden *Mahdī*. According to this usage of the term, it seems that in the absence of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, his *ḥuḡḡa* was his full representative in the Ismā'īlī community. This also explains why the drastic reform of 'Ubayd Allāh did not meet with more resistance on the part of the sectarians. After all, 'Ubayd Allāh and his ancestors, as the powerful *ḥuḡḡas* of the hidden *Qā'im* and leaders of the movement had already enjoyed considerable authority in the community, summoning the Ismā'īlīs to obey Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. However, by his doctrinal reform, 'Ubayd Allāh had in effect elevated himself and his predecessors from the *ḥuḡḡas* of the hidden Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl to actual *imāms*. This, of course, also implied the denial of the Mahdīship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, the final *imām* of the earliest Ismā'īlīs.

Others aspects of 'Ubayd Allāh's doctrinal reform, which caused a major split in the Ismā'īlī movement, are revealed in his letter to the Ismā'īlīs of Yaman. In his letter, 'Ubayd Allāh explains his genealogy, divulging the names of the «hidden *imāms*», in the manner he desired them to be known. He does claim a Fāṭimid 'Alid ancestry by declaring himself to be 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ġa'far al-Sādiq. But strangely enough, instead of tracing his descent to Ismā'īl b. Ġa'far, he names Ġa'far's eldest son 'Abd Allāh as his progenitor, whom he regards as the *Ṣāhib al-Ḥaqq* or the legitimate successor to the *Imām* al-Sādiq.<sup>45</sup> He also explains how the «misunderstanding» concerning the Mahdīship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl had come about. According to him, the name Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl referred to all the true *imāms* in the progeny of 'Abd Allāh who had assumed the name Ismā'īl and whose successors had adopted the name Muḥammad as a code-name in addition to other pseudonyms

whilst assuming the rank of *huḡḡa*, for the sake of *taqiyya*. Later, however, as a result of the doctrinal reform of the fourth Fāṭimid caliph al-Mu'izz (341–365/953–975), there occurred at least a partial return to the original doctrine of the imāmate held by the bulk of the earliest Ismā'īlīs.<sup>46</sup> This reform also found its initial expression in the works of al-Qādī I-Nu'mān and Ġa'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman. As a result, the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlīs came to acknowledge, once again, the imāmates of Ismā'īl b. Ġa'far and his son Muḥammad, to whom al-Mu'izz traced his genealogy. Al-Mu'izz also attributed to Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, as the seventh *imām* of the era of Islam, the rank of the *Qā'im* and the *nāṭiq* of the final era, but with a different interpretation compared to that held by the earliest Ismā'īlīs. Since the *Qā'im* Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl had appeared in the time of complete concealment, his functions were to be undertaken by his deputies or *ḥulafā'*, the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī *imāms* who were his descendants and would continue to rule until the end of the corporeal world. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl himself was no longer expected to return in person.

As noted, there is also an anti-Ismā'īlī version of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* during the first half of the 3rd/9th century and of the genealogy of the Fāṭimids, which can be traced to Ibn Rizām. The original polemical treatise of Ibn Rizām has been lost, though excerpts of it have been preserved in some later works. It is quoted directly by Ibn al-Nadīm in his famous catalogue of Arabic books completed in 377/987–8.<sup>47</sup> Above all, it was utilized extensively in another anti-Ismā'īlī book written about 370/980 by the Šarīf Abū'l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. 'Alī, known as Aḥū Muḥsin, an 'Alid from Damascus and a descendant of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. Aḥū Muḥsin, who died around 375/985–6, was a polemist and one of the early genealogists of the 'Alid family. His book, which contained historical and doctrinal parts, is also lost. But substantial portions of it have been preserved by three Egyptian historians.<sup>48</sup> The Ibn Rizām-Aḥū Muḥsin account which aimed at discrediting the whole Ismā'īlī movement, provided the basis for most subsequent Sunnī writings on the subject. This anti-Ismā'īlī account became the standard treatment of the rise of Ismā'īlism and as such, it came to be adopted also by the majority of the nineteenth-century orientalists.

The most derogatory and lasting aspect of the Ibn Rizām-Aḥū Muḥsin narrative has been the allegation that a certain non-'Alid, 'Abd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh, was the founder of Ismā'īlism as well as the progenitor of the Fāṭimid caliphs. According to this allegation, Maymūn al-Qaddāh was a follower of Abū'l-Ḥaṭṭāb and founded a sect called *al-Maymūniyya*. He was also a Bardesian (Daysānī), an adherent of Ibn Daysān (Bar Dīšān or Bardesanes), the celebrated heresiarch of Edessa and a dualist who founded the Christian Gnostic sect of the Bardesians or *Daysāniyya* and died at the beginning of the third century A.D. This explains why in some later sources, following Aḥū Muḥsin, Maymūn was

referred to as the son of Daysān. Maymūn's son, 'Abd Allāh, claimed to be a prophet and supported his claim by conjuring tricks. He organized a movement and instituted a system of belief, consisting of seven stages that culminated in libertinism and atheism; he pretended to preach on behalf of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl as the expected *Mahdī*. 'Abd Allāh came originally from the vicinity of Ahwāz, but later moved to 'Askar Mukram in Ḥūzistān, and then to Baṣra, fleeing from the Sī'īs and the Mu'tazilīs, and accompanied by an associate al-Ḥusayn al-Ahwāzī. Later, he fled to Salamiyya, where he remained in hiding until his death, occurring sometime after 261/874. From Salamiyya, *dā'īs* were sent to 'Irāq, one of whom converted a certain Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ. 'Abd Allāh was succeeded by his son Aḥmad, and then by the latter's descendants who extended the *da'wa* to many regions, as their *dā'īs* operated in 'Irāq, Yaman, Baḥrayn, Rayy, Ṭabaristān, Ḥurāsān and Fārs. Eventually, one of 'Abd Allāh's Qaddāhid successors, Sa'īd b. al-Ḥusayn, went to the Maḡrib in North Africa and founded the Fātimid dynasty. He claimed to be a descendant of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl and called himself 'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī.

This is essentially what Aḥū Muḥsin and his source, Ibn Rizām, have to say on Ibn al-Qaddāh and the origins of Ismā'īlism. Aḥū Muḥsin also included in his book an outline of the doctrines of the Ismā'īlīs. The doctrine of the imāmate described by him, agrees almost perfectly with that ascribed to the Qarmaṭis by al-Nawbaḥtī and al-Qummī. Aḥū Muḥsin lists the same series of seven *imāms*, starting with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and ending with Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, and states that the seventh *imām* was the expected *Qā'im*. However, by counting 'Alī as the first *imām*, he faces the same problem as the Imāmī heresiographers, and like them, mentions that some included while others omitted Ismā'īl as an *imām*. Another important piece of information is Aḥū Muḥsin's reference to a schism in the movement, resulting from some doctrinal changes. In particular, he notes, there was a change of opinion about Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl for whom they had first demanded recognition as the *Imām-Mahdī*, but whom they then replaced by a descendant of 'Abd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh, whose progeny have ruled in the Maḡrib, Egypt and Syria.

The modern progress in Ismā'īlī studies has shown that the Ibn Rizām-Aḥū Muḥsin account, despite its hostile intentions and false accusations, sheds valuable light on early Ismā'īlism. Aside from containing certain valid points of the earliest Ismā'īlī doctrine, it also provides the main source of information on the history of the Ismā'īlī movement during the second half of the 3rd/9th century. But the section which treats Ibn al-Qaddāh as the founder of Ismā'īlism and the ancestor of 'Ubayd Allāh, the most controversial part of the account, seems to have been motivated by strongly anti-Ismā'īlī sentiments. Al-Nawbaḥtī and al-Qummī, as well as many other important early authorities such as al-Ṭabarī and 'Arīb b. Sa'd, do not mention Ibn al-Qaddāh in connection with the *Ismā'īliyya*; nor is he named



in the anti-Fāṭimid Baġdād manifesto of 402/1011. In modern times, W. Ivanow produced the most detailed study of the true personalities of these individuals, based on a comprehensive survey of various types of Twelver Šīʿī sources.<sup>49</sup> In fact, Ivanow made every effort to refute what he called the myth of Ibn al-Qaddāh; a myth which, according to him, was probably invented by Ibn Rizām himself.

Maymūn b. al-Aswad al-Qaddāh al-Makkī, a *mawlā* of the Banū Maḥzūm and a resident of Mecca, was actually a disciple of the *Imām* Muḥammad al-Bāqir, from whom he reported a few *ḥadīths*. Maymūn's son 'Abd Allāh, who died sometime during the second half of the 2nd/8th century, was a companion of the *Imām* al-Šādiq and a reporter (*rāwī*) of numerous traditions from him. These Qad-dāhids may also have taken care of the properties of the *imāms* in Mecca. At any event, Maymūn al-Qaddāh and 'Abd Allāh are known in the Twelver literature as respected Šīʿī traditionists from the Ḥiġāz,<sup>50</sup> and not as Bardesaniens originating in Hūzistān. It is, therefore, important to know why this Ibn al-Qaddāh who lived in the 2nd/8th century, was chosen by Ibn Rizām as the organizer of a movement that occurred in the 3rd/9th century, several decades after his death. Recent access to Ismāʿīlī sources has made it possible to formulate a plausible answer to this question.

As noted, the early leaders of the Ismāʿīlī movement lived under utmost secrecy and kept their identity hidden, in order to escape from persecution. In his letter to the Yamanī Ismāʿīlīs, 'Ubayd Allāh explains that the true *imāms* after Ġa'far al-Šādiq indeed assumed names other than their own; calling themselves *Mubārak* (the Auspicious One), *Maymūn* (the Blessed One), and *Sa'īd* (the Happy One).<sup>51</sup> It has now become evident that *Mubārak* was the epithet of Ismāʿīl b. Ġa'far; and, according to numerous Ismāʿīlī and non-Ismāʿīlī sources, Sa'īd was 'Ubayd Allāh's pseudonym. The myth of 'Abd Allāh b. Maymūn can be solved if it is shown that *Maymūn* was the sobriquet of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl. This conclusion is indeed implied by 'Ubayd Allāh's letter. It is also suggested by a report,<sup>52</sup> dating back to the 6th/12th century, naming Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl as the *imām* of the *Maymūniyya*, a sect which according to Ibn Rizām was founded by Maymūn al-Qaddāh. In all probability then, the *Maymūniyya*, like the *Mubārakiyya*, must have been one of the original designations of the earliest Ismāʿīlīs; in this case named after the epithet of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl.

There is, furthermore, the epistle of the Fāṭimid caliph al-Mu'izz, written in 354/965 and sent to the chief *dā'ī* of Sind, Ḥalam b. Šaybān.<sup>53</sup> This document, which represents perhaps the earliest official refutation of the myth of Ibn al-Qaddāh, re-asserts the 'Alid ancestry of the Fāṭimid caliphs. It states that when the *da'wa* on behalf of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl spread, the 'Abbāsids sought the person who was acknowledged as its leader. Therefore, the *imāms* went into hiding and the *dā'īs*, to protect them, called them by pseudonyms or esoteric names; referring, for instance, to 'Abd Allāh, the

son and successor of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl as the son of Maymūn al-Qaddāh. This is true, the epistle affirms, since 'Abd Allāh was the son of *Maymūn al-naqība* (the one with the happy disposition) and *al-Qādiḥ* and *al-hidāya* (striking the spark of right guidance). Similar names were applied to the *imāms* succeeding 'Abd Allāh, according to the instructions of the *imāms* to their *dā'īs*. But then, such code-names reached those who did not understand their real meaning: so they erred and misled others. The substance of this epistle is confirmed by an earlier document, preserved in one of al-Qādī al-Nu'mān's books, reporting a conversation between al-Mu'izz and some envoys sent by a *dā'ī* from a distant land.<sup>54</sup> In this audience, which took place about the year 348/959–60, the Fāṭimid caliph again explains that *Maymūn* and *Qādiḥ* had been the pseudonyms of the true *imāms* from the family of the Prophet. In short, al-Mu'izz emphasizes that in reality 'Abd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh had been a code-name for 'Abd Allāh, son of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, the «hidden *imām*» whom the Fāṭimids regarded as their ancestor. It is, therefore, not surprising that the name of this Fāṭimid 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad, esoterically called 'Abd Allāh b. Maymūn, should have been confused, deliberately or accidentally, with the Šī'ī traditionist of the earlier times, 'Abd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh.

At any rate, it is certain that after Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad and his descendants organized the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* and led the earliest Ismā'īlīs, first from Ḥūzistān and eventually from Salamiyya. Shortly after the middle of the 3rd/9th century, the Ismā'īlī leadership intensified its activities by sending numerous *dā'īs* to various regions, especially to southern 'Irāq and the adjoining areas where earlier forms of extremist Šī'ism had been successful. Ibn al-Nadīm quotes Ibn Rizām as saying that the *da'wa* in 'Irāq was organized in 261 A. H., soon after the death of the eleventh *imām* and the occultation of the twelfth *imām* of the Twelvers in 260/874. It was in that year or in 264/877–8 according to Aḥū Muḥsin,<sup>55</sup> that Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ, the son of al-Aš'at, was converted to Ismā'īlism by al-Ḥusayn al-Ahwāzī. This prominent *dā'ī* had been sent to southern 'Irāq to propagate the doctrines of the sect. Ḥamdān organized the *da'wa* in the villages around Kūfa and in other parts of southern 'Irāq, appointing *dā'īs* for the minor districts. Soon, he succeeded in winning many converts who were named *Qarmaṭī* (plural, *Qarāmiṭa*) after their first local leader. Subsequently, this term came to be applied also to the sections of the Ismā'īlī movement not organized by Ḥamdān. At the time, there was one unified Ismā'īlī *da'wa* centrally directed from Salamiyya; and Ḥamdān, having his own headquarters near Bagdād, accepted the authority of the central leaders with whom he corresponded but whose identity continued to remain a well-kept secret. The doctrine preached by Ḥamdān, and his chief assistant 'Abdān, must have been that ascribed to the Qarmaṭīs by al-Nawbaḥtī and al-Qummī, and confirmed by the Ibn Rizām-Aḥū

Muḥsin account. There is no indication that at the time the beliefs of the Qarmatīs of ‘Irāq differed in any significant respect from those held by the rest of the Qarmatīs (Ismā‘īlīs).

The Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa* was started in other regions, besides ‘Irāq, in the 260’s/870’s. In southern Persia, the mission was apparently under the supervision of the *Qarmatī* leaders of ‘Irāq. The *da‘wa* in Yaman was from its inception in close contact with the central leadership of the movement. The despatch of the *dā‘īs* Ibn Hawšab and Ibn al-Faḍl to Yaman in 266/879–80, to start the *da‘wa* there, is fully narrated by al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān.<sup>56</sup> In eastern Arabia, the *da‘wa* appeared in 281/894 or even earlier. After his initial career in southern Persia, the *dā‘ī* Abū Sa‘īd al-Ġannābī was sent by Ḥamdān to Baḥrayn, entrusted with the mission there.<sup>57</sup> By 286/899, Abū Sa‘īd had in effect founded a prospering state in Baḥrayn which lasted for almost two centuries. Ismā‘īlism spread also in many parts of west-central and north-west Persia; and later the *da‘wa* was extended to Ḥurāsān and Transoxania. The most detailed account of this phase of early Ismā‘īlism is related by Nizām al-Mulk, the famous Salġūqid vizier who was assassinated by the Persian Ismā‘īlīs in 485/1092.<sup>58</sup>

It was under such circumstances that the doctrinal reform of ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī split the hitherto unified Ismā‘īlī movement into two factions in 286/899. This is reported in detail by Aḥū Muḥsin, who had probably derived his information from Ibn Rizām; and the main points of this anti-Ismā‘īlī account are corroborated by Ibn Ḥawqal,<sup>59</sup> the famous geographer and traveller of the second half of the 4th/10th century who was probably an Ismā‘īlī himself. On the one side there were those who accepted the reform, later incorporated into the official Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlī doctrine of the imāmate according to which there was a visible *imām* at the head of the Ismā‘īlī community. These Ismā‘īlīs maintained continuity in the imāmate and acknowledged the Fāṭimid caliphs as their *imāms*. In contrast, the dissident Ismā‘īlīs, initially led by Ḥamdān and ‘Abdān, and joined by Abū Sa‘īd al-Ġannābī, refusing to recognize ‘Ubayd Allāh’s claim to the imāmate, retained their original doctrine and expected the return of the hidden *Qā‘im*, Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl. Henceforth, the term *Qarāmiṭa* came to be generally applied to the latter sectarians, in southern ‘Irāq and Baḥrayn and parts of Persia, who subsequently did not acknowledge the Fāṭimid caliphs as their *imāms*. In 289/902, soon after the schism in the movement and fearing for his life, ‘Ubayd Allāh fled from the central headquarters of the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa* in Salamiyya. He had now embarked on the fateful journey that was to take him to North Africa, another region already penetrated by the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa*, where he was to establish the Fāṭimid Caliphate in 297/909. With this event, the period of early Ismā‘īlism during which time the earliest Ismā‘īlīs and then their successors in the second half of the 3rd/9th century had done so much in terms of founding a dynamic and revolutionary movement, had also come to an end.

By that time, the foundations of the Ismā'īlī religious system had already become fairly well-developed. In this system a fundamental distinction was made between the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*) aspects and dimensions of the sacred scriptures and ritual prescriptions of Islam, between the outward and the inward meanings of the Qur'ān and the *Šarī'a*. Accordingly, the revealed scriptures and the laws laid down in them had their apparent or literal meaning, the *ẓāhir*, which was contrasted to the *bāṭin*, containing their hidden and true meaning. The *ẓāhir* would undergo changes or abrogations with every law-announcing prophet (*nāṭiq*) initiating a new era (*dawr*). The *bāṭin*, by contrast, embodying the unchangeable truths or the so-called *ḥaqā'iq*, would remain immutable and eternal. The early Ismā'īlīs held that while the religious laws were announced by the prophets, it was the function of the *imāms* or the prophets' *awṣiyā'* (singular, *waṣī*), to interpret and explain their true meaning to the worthy few, those who were initiated into the sect and acknowledged the Ismā'īlī *Imāms*. Indeed, the unchangeable truths contained in the *bāṭin* were the exclusive property of the divinely guided, sinless and infallible Ismā'īlī *Imām* and the hierarchy of teachers or *dā'īs* installed by him. In the broadest terms, it seems that the *Qā'im* Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl was represented, during his concealment, by a number of *ḥuḡḡas*. And beneath the *ḥuḡḡas*, a hierarchy of *dā'īs* performed the various tasks of initiation and instruction.

The truths behind the revealed scriptures and laws could be made apparent through the so-called *ta'wīl*, viz., symbolical, allegorical or esoteric interpretation which came to be the hallmark of Ismā'īlism. The *ta'wīl* practised by the early Ismā'īlīs was often of a cabalistic form, relying on the mystical properties and symbolism of letters and numbers. Furthermore, the *ḥaqā'iq* in fact formed a gnostic system, mainly comprised of a cyclical interpretation of hierohistory and a cosmology. The early Ismā'īlīs conceived of time as a progression of successive cycles, with a beginning and an end. As a result, they worked out a cyclical view of history, or rather religious history, in terms of the eras of different prophets.<sup>60</sup> This view was combined with their doctrine of the *imāmate* which in its fundamental framework had been inherited from Imāmī Šī'ism. Accordingly, the early Ismā'īlīs believed that the hierohistory of mankind is consummated in seven eras of various durations, each one inaugurated by a speaker-prophet or enunciator (*nāṭiq*) of a revealed message, which in its exoteric aspect contains a religious law. In the first six eras of human history, the *nāṭiqs* had been Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. It may be recalled that according to al-Nawbaḥtī and al-Qummī, the earliest Ismā'īlīs had originally included 'Alī instead of Adam, in their list of law-announcing prophets, which represented an extremist viewpoint. It seems that sometime in the second half of the 3rd/9th century the Ismā'īlīs substituted Adam for 'Alī as one of the *nāṭiqs*, and changed 'Alī's rank from prophet to that of Muḥammad's successor, reflecting a less radical position. The early Ismā'īlīs

further maintained, probably by projecting their current ideas into the past, that each of the first six *nāṭiqs* was succeeded by a spiritual legatee or executor (*waṣī*), also called a foundation (*asās*) or silent one (*ṣāmī*), who interpreted the inner, esoteric (*bāṭin*) meaning of the revealed message of his era. Each *waṣī*, *asās*, or *ṣāmī* was, in turn, followed by seven *imāms*, who guarded the true meaning of the scriptures and the laws in both their *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* aspects. In every prophetic era, the seventh *imām* would rise in rank to become the *nāṭiq* of the following era, abrogating the law of the previous *nāṭiq* and promulgating a new one. This pattern would change only in the seventh, final era of the sacred history of mankind.

The seventh *imām* of the sixth era, the era of the Prophet Muḥammad, was Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl who had gone into concealment. On his *parousia*, he would become the seventh *nāṭiq*, and the *Qā'im* or *Mahdī*, ruling over the final eschatological era. Only he would unite in himself the ranks of *nāṭiq* and *asās*, being also the last of the *imāms*. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl would abrogate the sacred law of Islam and initiate the final era of the world. But now, he was not to announce a new religious law or *ṣarīʿa*. Instead, he would fully reveal the esoteric truths concealed behind all the preceding messages. In this final messianic era, when the *ḥaqāʾiq* would be made fully known, there would be no need for laws. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl would rule the world in justice and then end the physical world, sitting in judgement over mankind. His era would thus mark the end of time and human history. ʿUbayd Allāh al-Mahdī and his successor Fāṭimid caliphs, because of their claims to the imāmate, were forced to modify the original doctrine of the Ismāʿīlīs concerning the position of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl as the *Qā'im* and the final *imām*. Consequently, the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlīs allowed for more than one heptad of *imāms* during the era of Islam, removing the expectations connected with the coming of the *Qā'im* further and further into the future. A major result of these doctrinal adjustments was the loss of the eschatological significance of the seventh *imām* and of that vital sense of messianic anticipation which played such a crucial role in giving early Ismāʿīlism its popular appeal and success.

Finally, regarding the cosmology of the pre-Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlīs, which can be reconstructed only from the fragmentary evidence preserved in some later Ismāʿīlī texts,<sup>61</sup> it may be noted that there was a crude gnostic synthetic myth at the very basis of the earliest Ismāʿīlī cosmology. Various motif complexes were combined into a mythological cosmogony, describing the creation of the universe by divine command and through two original principles, called *kūmī* and *qadar*. In this cosmological system, the myth of the letters had an extremely important function; it provided a magical explanation for the genesis of the universe. The letters produced the names or the words that were, in effect, identical with the things created. The original cosmology of Ismāʿīlism was later replaced by a new Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic cosmology, first elaborated by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad

al-Nasafī, the chief *dā'ī* of Hurāsān and Transoxania who was executed by the Sāmānids in 332/943. Al-Nasafī was in fact the first Ismā'īlī thinker to introduce Neoplatonism, or more precisely a type of the then nascent Islamic Neoplatonism, into Ismā'īlī thought. This new Neoplatonic cosmological doctrine was officially adopted by the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī *da'wa* in the latter part of the imāmate of al-Mu'izz (d. 365/975), the Fāṭimid caliph-imām who also transferred the seat of the Fāṭimid Caliphate from *Ifriqiya* to Egypt in the year 362/973.

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### Notes

- 1 Idrīs'Imād al-Dīn b. al-Ḥasan, *'Uyūn al-aḥbār wa funūn al-āqār*, ed. M. Ḡalīb (Beirut, 1973–78), vols. 4–6, which are the only volumes published so far.
- 2 Al-Nawbaḥtī, *Firaq al-Šī'a*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931); French tr., *Les sectes Shiites*, tr. M. J. Mashkūr (2nd ed., Tehran, 1980); Muḥammad Javād Mashkur has also produced a valuable Persian translation of this book (Tehran, 1353/1974); al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt wa 'l-firaq*, ed. M. J. Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963), based on the only manuscript copy of the text discovered so far.
- 3 For further details on these books and the relationship between them, see W. Madelung, «Bemerkungen zur imamitischen Firaq-Literatur», *Der Islam*, 43 (1967), pp. 37–52, reprinted in his *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London, 1985), article XV.
- 4 The most detailed and accurate accounts of Abu'l-Ḥaṭṭāb, his ideas, and the various Ḥaṭṭābī sub-groups, are to be found in al-Nawbaḥtī, *Firaq*, pp. 37–41, 58–60. al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, pp. 50–55, 63–64, 81–82, and Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Kaššī, *Iḥtiyār ma'rifat al-riḡāl*, abridged by Muḥammad b al-Ḥasan al-Tūsī, ed. Hasan al-Muṣṭafawī (Mashhad, 1348/1969), pp. 224–226, 228, 290–308, 324, 344, 352–353, 365–366, 370, 482–483, 528–529, 571. See also B. Lewis, *The Origins of Ismā'ilism* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 32 ff.; W. Ivanow, *The Alleged Founder of Ismailism*. (Bombay, 1946), pp. 113–137; H. Corbin, «Une liturgie Shi'ite du Graal», in *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à Henri Charles Puech* (Paris, 1974), pp. 83–93; H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis* (Zurich, 1982), pp. 199–217.
- 5 Cf. *Kitāb al-ruṣd wa'l-hidāya*, ed. M. Kāmil Husayn, in *Ismaili Society, Collectanea*: Vol. 1 (Leiden, 1948), p. 212; English tr., «The Book of Righteousness and True Guidance», in W. Ivanow, *Studies in Early Ismailism* (2nd ed., Bombay, 1955), p. 58; S. M. Stern, «Ismā'īlīs and Qarmatians», in *L'Élaboration de l'Islam* (Paris, 1961), p. 100.
- 6 Al-Nawbaḥtī, *Firaq*, p. 55; al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, p. 78.
- 7 Cf. Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, ed. 'Alī Akbar al-Giffārī (Tehran, 1388/1968), vol. 1, pp. 307–311; al-Kaššī, *op cit*, pp. 451, 462.
- 8 Al-Nawbaḥtī, *Firaq*, pp. 57–58, al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, p. 80.
- 9 Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Sahrastānī, *al-Mīlāl wa'l-nihal*, ed. 'A M al-Wakīl (Cairo, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 27, 167–168; English tr.,

- Muslim Sects and Divisions*, tr. A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn (London, 1984), pp. 23, 144.
- 10 Al-Nawbaḥtī, *Fīraq*, p. 58; al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, pp. 80–81. See also ‘Alī b. Ismā‘īl al-Aṣ‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1929–39), pp. 26–27 ‘Abd al-Qāhir b. Tāhir al-Baḡdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-fīraq*, ed. M. Badr (Cairo, 1328/1910), pp. 46–47; English tr., *Muslim Schisms and Sects*, Part I, tr. K. C. Seelye (New York, 1919), pp. 65–66; al-Sahrastānī, *al-Milāl*, vol. 1, pp. 27–28, 168, 191 ff.; tr. Kazi, pp. 23, 144, 163 ff. Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Tūsī, *Riḡāl-Tūsī*, ed. M. S. Al Bahr al-‘Ulūm (Najaf, 1381/1961), p. 310.
  - 11 Ivanow, *Alleged*, pp. 108–112.
  - 12 Abū Ya‘qūb al-Siḡistānī, *Iṭbāt al-nubū‘āt (al-nubūwāt)*, ed. ‘Ārif Tāmīr (Beirut, 1966), p. 190. Mubārak is also mentioned as a pseudonym of Ismā‘īl in a letter sent by the first Fātimid caliph ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī to the Ismā‘īlīs of Yaman. This letter, as reported in the book *al-Farā‘id wa hudūd al-dīn*, written by Ġā‘far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, has been published, translated into English, and analyzed in Husayn F. al-Hamdānī, *On the Genealogy of Fatimid Caliphs* (Cairo, 1958), containing the relevant passage on Mubārak in text p. 10, translation p. 12.
  - 13 Al-Nawbaḥtī, *Fīraq*, p. 62; al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, p. 84; this can be gathered also from the earliest extant Zaydī reference to the nascent *Ismā‘īliyya* by the Zaydī Imām al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 246/860), see W. Madelung, «Das Imamāt in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre», *Der Islam*, 37 (1961), p. 46.
  - 14 Al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, p. 81, and al-Nawbaḥtī, *Fīraq*, pp. 58–59, where the group *al-Ismā‘īliyya* is identified with *al-Haṭṭābiyya*. However, since al-Nawbaḥtī does not discuss the group *al-Ismā‘īliyya*, it seems that by the latter designation, similarly to al-Qummī, he is referring to *al-Ismā‘īliyya al-ḥālīṣa*, one of the two proto-Ismā‘īlī groups covered in his book.
  - 15 Al-Nawbaḥtī, *Fīraq*, pp. 60–61; al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, p. 83.
  - 16 Cf. al-Nawbaḥtī, *Fīraq*, p. 90; al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, p. 103, where the claims of Ismā‘īl and his son Muḥammad are rejected. See also al-Kaššī, *op. cit.*, pp. 473–474, where Ismā‘īl is accused of being inclined to drink.
  - 17 See Ġā‘far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *Asrār al-nuṭaqā’*, in W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition concerning the Rise of the Fatimids* (London, etc., 1942), text p. 98, translation p. 295; *idem*, *Sarā‘ir wa asrār al-nuṭaqā’*, ed. M. Ḡālib (Beirut, 1984), p. 258, and Ivanow, *Alleged*, pp. 155–156. ‘Ārif Tāmīr places Ismā‘īl’s birth in 101/719–20 in his *al-Imārna fi’l-Islām* (Beirut, 1964?), p. 180; the same date is repeated in some Ismā‘īlī sources cited in M. T. Dānishpazhūh, «Dhaylī bar ta’rīkh-i Ismā‘īliyya», *Revue de la Faculté des Lettres, Université de Tabriz*, 18 (1345/1966), p. 21. But the late Muṣṭafā Ḡālib, a prominent Syrian Ismā‘īlī, mentions the year 110/728–9 in his biographical work *A‘lām al-Ismā‘īliyya* (Beirut, 1964), p. 161.
  - 18 Cf. *Asrār al-nuṭaqā’*, in Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, text pp. 103–104, translation pp. 301–302; ed. Ḡālib, p. 262; Idrīs, ‘*Uyūn*, vol. 4, p. 334.
  - 19 Al-Kaššī, *op. cit.*, pp. 376–382; see also Idrīs, ‘*Uyūn*, vol. 4, pp. 326–327; Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Naḡāsī, *Kitāb al-riḡāl* (Bombay, 1317/1899), p. 296; al-Tūsī, *Riḡāl*, p. 301; Ibn Sahrāsūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Tālib* (Bombay, 1313/1896), vol. 5, p. 29.
  - 20 Ibn ‘Inaba, ‘*Umdat al-tālib fi ansāh āl Abī Tālib*, ed. M. H. Al al-Ṭāliqānī (Najaf, 1961), p. 233. The late Zāhid ‘Alī, a learned Dā‘ūdī Bohra, also mentions the same year in his *Ta’rīkh-i Fātimiyyīn-i Miṣr* (2nd ed., Karachi, 1963), vol. 1, pp. 41, 42, 63.
  - 21 The year 138/755–6, for instance, is mentioned in Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz al-hunafā’*, ed. Ḡamāl al-Dīn al-Ṣayyāl (Cairo, 1967), vol. 1, p. 15.

- 22 Al-Kaššī, *op cit.*, pp. 217–218, 321, 325–326, 354–356, 390.
- 23 Al-Kaššī, *op cit.*, pp. 244–245; see also al-Nağāsī, *op cit.*, pp. 81–82; Lewis, *Origins*, p. 39.
- 24 «Ummu'l-kitāb», ed. W. Ivanow, in *Der Islam*, 23 (1936), text p. 11; Italian tr. Pio Filippini-Ronconi (Naples, 1966), p. 23.
- 25 H. Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismā'īliya* (Wiesbaden, 1978), pp. 142–168; *idem*, *Islamische Gnosis*, pp. 113–198; E. F. Tijdens, «Der mythologisch-gnostische Hintergrund der Umm al-kitāb», in *Acta Iranica*, 16 (1977) pp. 241–526.
- 26 L. Massignon, *Salmān Pāk* (Tours, 1934), pp. 16–19.
- 27 Cf. al-Nu'mān b. Muḥammad, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, ed. Asaf A. A. Fyzee (Cairo, 1951–61), vol. 1, pp. 49–50; *idem*, *The Book of Faith*, tr. A. A. A. Fyzee (Bombay, 1974), pp. 58–59; *idem*, *al-Mağālīs wa'l-musāyarāt*, ed. H. Feki et al. (Tunis, 1978), pp. 84–85.
- 28 Idrīs, 'Uyūn, vol. 4, pp. 351–356; *idem*, *Zahr al-ma'ānī*, in Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, text pp. 53–58, translation pp. 240–248; English summary in W. Ivanow, «Ismailis and Qarmatians», *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, New Series*, 16 (1940), pp. 60 ff.
- 29 *Asrār al-nuṭaqā'*, in Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, text p. 99, translation p. 296; ed. Gālib, p. 259.
- 30 Cited in M. Qazvīnī's notes to his edition of 'Aṭā Malik Juwaynī's *Ta'rikh-i jahān-gushāy* (London, 1912–37), vol. 3, pp. 148, 310–312, and in Dānishpazhūh, «*Dhaylī*», p. 22.
- 31 Qazvīnī's comments in Juwaynī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 3, p. 311; Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, p. 67. Zāhid 'Alī in his *Ta'rikh*, vol. 1, pp. 43, 65, places Muḥammad's death in 183/799, while both Tāmir, *al-Imāma*, p. 181, and Gālib, *Ta'rikh al-da'wa al-Ismā'īliyya* (2nd ed., Beirut, 1965), p. 146, mention the year 193/808–9.
- 32 Al-Kulaynī, *op cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 485–486; al-Kaššī, *op cit.*, pp. 263–265; Ibn Sahrāsūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 5, p. 77.
- 33 Ibn 'Inaba, *op cit.*, pp. 234 ff.; Idrīs, 'Uyūn, vol. 4, p. 356; *Dastūr al-munağğimīn*, quoted in M. J. de Goeje, *Mémoire sur les Carmathes du Bahraïn et les Fatimides* (2nd ed., Leiden, 1886), pp. 8–9, 203; Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, pp. 38–39.
- 34 Al-Nawbaḥtī, *Firaq*, p. 61; al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, p. 83. Just prior to their discussion of the *Qarāmita*, these authors also refer to a Ḥaṭṭābī sub-group recognizing a line of *imāms* descended from Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, a sub-group which may have actually issued from the *Mubārakiyya*. According to al-Aṣ'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, p. 27, the *Mubārakiyya* actually traced the imāmate in the progeny of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl.
- 35 Al-Nawbaḥtī, *Firaq*, pp. 61–64; al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, pp. 83–86; English tr. in S. M. Stern, *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism* (Jerusalem-Leiden, 1983), pp. 47–53, with a note therein by W. Madelung. See also Stern, «Ismā'īlīs and Qarmatians», pp. 102–103, 108; Madelung, «Das Imamāt», pp. 48 ff.
- 36 Al-Hamdānī, *Genealogy*, text pp. 10–11, translation p. 13.
- 37 *Kitāb al-ruṣd*, pp. 198 ff.; tr. Ivanow, *Studies*, pp. 43 ff.
- 38 Ġa'far b. Mansūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-kašf*, ed. R. Strothmann (London, etc., 1952), pp. 62, 77, 103–104, 109–110, 135, 160, 170 and elsewhere. See also *Sarā'ir wa asrār al-nuṭaqā'*, ed. Gāhb, pp. 21, 39, 109, 112.
- 39 Al-Nawbaḥtī, *Firaq*, p. 64, al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, p. 86.
- 40 Idrīs, 'Uyūn, vol. 4, pp. 357–367, 390–404; English summary in Ivanow, «Ismailis and Qarmatians», pp. 63 ff., and *idem*, *Ismaili Tradition*, pp. 33 ff. Another succinct Ismā'īlī account of the ancestors of 'Ubayd Allāh is found in the first



- volume of the *Kitāb al-azhār* of Ḥasan b. Nūḥ al-Bharūchī, in *Muntahabat Ismāʿīliyya*, ed. ʿĀdil al-ʿAwwā (Damascus, 1958), pp. 181–250; English summary in Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, pp. 29 ff.
- 41 The earliest Ismāʿīlī source relating these details is apparently the *Istitār al-imām* written by Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm (or Muḥammad) al-Nīsābūrī who flourished towards the end of the 4th/10th century: this work has been edited, together with another Ismāʿīlī text, by Ivanow in *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, University of Egypt*, 4(1936), pp. 93–107; English tr. in Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, pp. 157–183.
  - 42 In ʿUbayd Allāh's letter cited in al-Hamdānī, *Genealogy*, text pp. 10–11, translation p. 13, he is named as an *imām*, while ʿUbayd Allāh's father al-Husayn b. Aḥmad is not included among the «hidden *imāms*»; his *imāmate* is also implied in the *Kitāb al-kašf*, pp. 98–99. See Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, pp. 42–43, 59; Madelung, «Das Imamāt», pp. 55, 71 ff., where it is suggested that ʿUbayd Allāh's father may have been elevated to the *imāmate* only retrospectively.
  - 43 Al-Nīsābūrī, *Istitār*, pp. 95–96; tr. Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, translation pp. 37, 162–163.
  - 44 Cf. *Kitāb al-kašf* pp. 97 ff., 102 ff. See also Madelung, «Das Imamāt», pp. 54–58.
  - 45 Al-Hamdānī, *Genealogy*, text pp. 11–2, translation p. 14. See also Madelung «Das Imamāt», pp. 69–70. For a detailed analysis of ʿUbayd Allāh's letter, and an interesting hypothesis, see A. Hamdani and F. de Blois, «A Re-examination of al-Mahdī's Letter to the Yemenites on the Genealogy of the Fatimid Caliphs», *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1983), pp. 173–207.
  - 46 For a review of this reform, see Madelung, «Das Imamāt», pp. 86–101.
  - 47 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. G. Flügel (Leipzig, 1871–72), vol. 1, pp. 186–187; ed. M. R. Tajaddud (2nd ed., Tehran, 1973), pp. 238–239; English tr., *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, ed. and tr. B. Dodge (New York, 1970), vol. 1, pp. 462–467.
  - 48 Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, ed. Muḥammad Ḡābir ʿA. al-Ḥinī and ʿA. al-Ahwānī (Cairo, 1984), vol. 25, pp. 187–317; partial French tr., A. I. Silvestre de Sacy, *Exposé de la religion des Druzes* (Paris, 1838), vol. 1, introduction pp. 74–171, 184–238 ff.; Abū Bakr b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, ed. Š. al-Munaḡḡid (Cairo, 1961), vol. 6, pp. 6 ff., 17–21, 44–156; al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, vol. 1, pp. 22–29, 151–201.
  - 49 Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, pp. 127 ff., 140–156, *idem*, *Alleged*, especially pp. 28–82.
  - 50 Al-Kaššī, *op. cit.*, pp. 245–246, 389; al-Naḡāšī, *op. cit.*, p. 148; al-Ṭūsī, *Riḡāl* pp. 135, 225; Ibn Sahrāšūb, *Maʿālim al-ʿulamāʾ* ed. ʿA. Iqbāl (Tehran, 1934), p. 65; *idem*, *Manāqib*, vol. 5, p. 19. See also H. Halm, «ʿAbdallāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh», *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, pp. 182–183.
  - 51 Al-Hamdānī, *Genealogy*, text pp. 9–10.
  - 52 Cited in Ibn ʿInaba, *ʿUmdat al-tālib*, p. 233.
  - 53 This epistle has been preserved in Idrīs, *ʿUyūn*, vol. 5, pp. 160–162; it is published and translated in Ivanow, «Ismailis and Qarmatians», pp. 74–76, also in S. M. Stern, «Heterodox Ismāʿīlism at the Time of al-Muʿizz», *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 17 (1955), pp. 11–13, 26–27, reprinted in his *Studies in Early Ismāʿīlism*, pp. 259–261, 279–281.
  - 54 Al-Nuʿmān, *al-Maḡālis*, pp. 405–411, 523–525. The text and English translation of the relevant passages are to be found also in Stern, «Heterodox», pp. 14–17, 28–33, reprinted in his *Studies*, pp. 262–267, 281–288.
  - 55 As preserved by al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, vol. 25, p. 191; tr. de Sacy, *Exposé*, vol. 1, introduction p. 171; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz*, vol. 6, p. 46; al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, vol. 1, p. 153. It may be added that al-Masʿūdī

- mentions the year 260 A.H. in his *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1894), p. 395.
- 56 Al-Nu'mān, *Ifitāh al-da'wa*, ed. W. al-Qādī. (Beirut, 1970), pp. 32–47; see also Idrīs, *Uyūn*, vol. 4, pp. 396 ff.
- 57 See W. Madelung, «Faṭimiden und Bahrainqarmaten». *Der Islam*, 34 (1959), pp. 34 ff., which is the best modern survey of the sources and of the later history of the Qarmaṭīs of Bahrayn.
- 58 Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyar al-mulūk* (*Siyāsat-nāma*), ed. H. Darke (2nd ed., Tehran, 1347/1968), pp. 282–295, 297–305; English tr., *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, tr. H. Darke (2nd ed., London, 1978), pp. 208–218, 220–226. This is the main source in S. M. Stern's thorough study on the subject, «The Early Ismā'īlī Missionaries in North-West Persia and in Khurāsān and Transoxania», *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 23 (1960), pp. 56–90, reprinted in his *Studies*, pp. 189–233.
- 59 Ibn Hawqal, *Kitāb ṣūrat al-ard*, ed. J. H. Kramers (2nd ed., Leiden, 1938–39), p. 295.
- 60 The cyclical division of history into eras, and other related details, are clearly outlined in the *Kitāb al-ruṣd*, pp. 189, 197 ff.; tr. Ivanow, *Studies*, pp. 33, 41 ff., and in *Kitāb al-kašf*, pp. 14 ff, 104, 113–114, 132–133, 138, 143, 150, 169–170, as well as in many Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī works, such as al-Nu'mān, *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. 'Ārif Tāmīr (Beirut, 1960). For general discussions of time and cyclicism in Ismā'īlī thought, see H. Corbin, «Le temps cyclique dans le Mazdéisme et dans l'Ismaélisme», *Erano Jahrbuch*, 20(1951), pp. 183–217, reprinted in his *Temps cyclique et gnose Ismaélienne* (Paris, 1982), pp. 39–69; English tr., «Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism», in H. Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London, 1983), pp. 30–58; Paul E. Walker, «Eternal Cosmos and the Womb of History. Time in Early Ismaili Thought», *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9(1978), pp. 355–366.
- 61 Cf Abū Hātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-islāh*, still unpublished; Abū Ya'qūb al-Siġistānī, *Kitāb al-iftihār*, ed. M. Ghālib (Beirut, 1980), especially pp. 43–56, and a *Risāla* by Abū 'Isā l-Muršid, a *dā'i* of the time of al-Mu'izz, published in Stern, *Studies*, pp. 7–16. This cosmology has been investigated in some detail only; recently; see especially Stern, *Studies*, pp. 17–29, and Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre*, pp. 38–127.