ON THE HISTORY OF THE ISMĀʿĪLĪ "HIDDEN IMĀMS" AS REFLECTED IN THE *KITĀB AT-TARĀTĪB AS-SABʿA*

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1. The short treatise that forms the subject of our study, the full title of which is *Kitāb at-taṛātīb as-sabʿa wa-hiya sabʿa tarātīb ʿalā t-tamām wa-l-kamāl* (The Book of the Seven Successions, or Seven Successions to the Perfection and Completeness), has been published by Suhayl Zakkār in the collection that he edited of the sources of the early Ismāʿīlī (Qarmaṭī) movement (Zakkār 1987:I, 287-91). This work, which appears to be part of a longer one, originates, to the best of our knowledge, in Ismāʿīlī circles. Its author is thought to have been Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl b. ʿAlī al-Bazāʿī (Ivanow 1963:173; Poonawala 1977:297; Zakkār 1987:I, 38-39), an otherwise unknown personage within the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* who was a contemporary chronicler of the establishment of the Fāṭimid state (297/909) and perhaps of earlier events too. Unfortunately, nothing else is known about his life and works.

Provided this work is genuinely his, it is particularly worth studying, since it offers such contemporary, if brief, information on the early period of the movement, the internal affairs of the Ismāʿīliyya, and especially the forerunners of the self-declared leader of the movement (the hidden imāms), as will, after a comparison with sources already familiar to scholars, help modify, nuance and perhaps alter our perceptions of the events of the relevant historical era.

2. The beginnings of the Ismāʿīlī movement – the self-styled 'rightly-guided mission' (*ad-daʿwa al-hādiya*) – can be traced back to the heated controversies surrounding the choice of the successor of the sixth Šīʿite imām, Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765). These controversies already began in his lifetime. According to most sources, he named his eldest son, Ismāʿīl as his successor, in accordance with the principles of 'appointment' (*naṣṣ*). Ismāʿīl, however, died before his father, and Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq appears not to have made a second appointment in favour of any of his remaining sons. This would explain the fact that on the death of aṣ-Ṣādiq, as many as three of his offspring, including his son Mūsā al-Kāẓim (the seventh imām of the 'Twelver' Šīʿa) and Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl (his eldest grandson), claimed the imāmate each for himself[1]. On account of the disputes over entitlement to the supreme authority, the Imāmite Šīʿite community centred in al-Kūfa split into no less than six groups, two of which would serve as a core for the emerging Ismāʿīlī movement. It was at this

[1] On the disputes surrounding the succession after Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq and the events subsequent to them, as well as a re-evaluation of the relevant sources, see Daftary 1990:93-97.

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phase that the two groups acknowledging the legitimacy of either Ismāʿīl b. Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq or Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl (*al-ismāʿīliyya al-ḫāliṣa* and *al-mubārakiyya* respectively) grew out of the Imāmite movement (Daftary 1991).

Precious little is known about the career of early Ismāʿīlī cells up to the time when the united Ismāʿīlī movement suddenly appears on he scene around the middle of the 3rd/9th century. By this time, the Ismāʿīliyya had evolved into a well-organized, centralized revolutionary movement with an elaborate doctrinal system. The leading personalities of the movement are likewise shrouded in obscurity. The first phase of the history of the early Ismāʿīliyya and its most famous offshoot, the Fāṭimids, is the period of 'hiding', for the imāms of this phase took care to hide themselves well[2]. Ismāʿīlīs seem to have vacillated between the two concepts of the real, living, manifest imām, and the absent, 'hiding' imām, respectively. The original doctrine of the movement was, however, that of 'hiding'. According to the internal sources, the period of 'hiding' began with Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, when he was entrusted, either by his grandfather Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq or his father Ismāʿīl, to the care of Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ (Ǧaʿfar, *Sarāʾir* 262-264; Idrīs, *ʿUyūn* IV, 332-335)[3]. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl was recognized to be al-Mahdī (the 'Divinely Guided One') and al-Qāʾim ('He Who Appears'). He was conceptualized as having concealed himself somewhere and coming back soon to restore justness to the world and herald the ultimate, seventh epoch of human history as envisaged by the cyclic world-view already elaborated by the early Ismāʿīlīs.

3. A fundamental problem in the study of the period of 'hiding' is of a genealogical nature, since several, heavily divergent, versions of the imāms' lineage between Ismāʿīl and ʿAbdallāh (ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdī (founder of the Fāṭimid dynasty, d. 322/934) have been transmitted to us, which makes the continuity of succession less than certain. The genuine ʿAlid descent of the Fāṭimid caliphs recruited from the leadership of the movement has continued to be questioned ever since their appearing on the scene, and these controversies have not subsided to this very day[4].

3.1 ʿAbdallāh (ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdī reports in his *Kitāb (Letter to the Yemeni Community)* that the imām after Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq was not his son Ismāʿīl, but his other son, ʿAbdallāh [al-Afṭaḥ], who was later given his brother's name, Ismāʿīl, as an as-

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[2] Regarding this fact, Halm (1988:194) observes that the Ismāʿīlī movement underwent repeated crises during its early career, as had happened before to the Imāmite Šīʿites.

[3] For an evaluation concerning the sources on Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, see Daftary 1990:102-103; and cf. Ġālib 1964:447-454 & 1965:130-139; Tāmir 1970:47-49.

[4] For different modern views concerning the problem Fāṭimid lineage, see Lewis (1940:71-73), Ivanow (1940:73-74; 1942:54-56; 1946:28-103), al-Hamdānī (1958:180, 188), ʿInān (1959:47-78), Stern (1961:100, 101, 104), Madelung (1961:69ff), Ġālib (1964, 1965), Makarem (1969), Tāmir (1970: 46-68, 107-112), Nagel (1972), Naššār (1977:279-283, 285-289, 293-298), Hamdani & de Blois (1982:200-202), Ġālib (1982), ʿAwīs (1986:3-

sumed name. After him, his son Muḥammad became imām and assumed the name of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl. Then came his son ʿAbdallāh, followed by the latter's son Aḥmad, followed in turn by Aḥmad's son Muḥammad.

> "Then Muḥammad b. Aḥmad appointed his nephew and entrusted him, by God's preference, with all the affairs [of the imamate]. [The nephew] styled himself Saʿīd [ʿAlī] b. al-Ḥusayn. The *daʿwa* was directed in his name for some time. When he came to power, he declared his position and declared that his name was ʿAbdallāh"[5].

3.2 We know from the sources, that Aḥmad's younger son Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad was also known as Abū š-Šalaġlaġ (Šalaʿlaʿ). Abū š-Šalaġlaġ died in approximately 286/899, and having no male offspring of his own, he appointed his nephew Saʿīd b. al-Ḥusayn to be his successor and married his daughter to him. Abū š-Šalaġlaġ abandoned the auxiliary job of the 'hiding' Mahdī's trustee, claiming, at least among his intimates, the rank of imām, or legitimate successor of ʿAlī. The earliest extant Ismāʿīlī writing reports these events as follows:

> "Muḥammad b. Aḥmad [Abū š-Šalaġlaġ] at first concealed his real identity from his enemies as a precautionary measure (*taqīya*), pretending to act as a 'trustee' (*ḥuǧǧa*), always referring to the "imām" but actually meaning himself. This fact, however, was known only to the few who were his most trusted *dāʿīs*" (Ǧaʿfar, *Kašf* 98)[6].

Ǧaʿfar also alludes that Abū š-Šalaġlaġ had already toyed with the idea of declaring himself the Mahdī. The historical if perilous assignment of the imām who appears to lead the community and replaces the ideal of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl was finally undertaken by his nephew, Saʿīd al-Ḥusayn, later known as ʿAbdallāh (ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdī. It was in accordance with his doctrinal reforms that earlier tenets of the movement concerning Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl's being the Mahdī came to be rejected and the legitimacy of the imāmate of the past leaders of the movement was now openly taught. These alterations led to a schism in the movement (286 /899) and were in fact instrumental in facilitating the founding of the Fāṭimid empire (297/909).

3.3 Another Ismāʿīlī source, titled *Kitāb istitār al-imām*, was composed by a certain an-Naysābūrī sometime between 365/975 and 411/1021[7]. It lets us know that the first imām of the 'hiding' period was called ʿAbdallāh ar-Raḍī [al-Akbar], who had come from the East in the mid-3rd/9th century, sought refuge from the persecution

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[5] al-Hamdānī 1958:11. The Arabic version runs as follows:

ثم أوصى محمد بن أحمد إلى ابن أخيه، وأعطاه باختيار الله أمره كله، وتسمى سعيد بن الحسين. فجرت الدعوة إليه زماناً (بعد) ذلك. فلما ظهر أظهر مقامه وأظهر اسم عبدالله ...

[6] Cf. Madelung 1961:55. The original version is:

الإشارة في هذا كانت في عصر الإمام محمد بن أحمد علينا سلامه لأنه في أول أمره ستر نفسه للتقية من المنافقين، وجعل نفسه في مقام الحجة يشير إلى الإمام وهو يشير الى نفسه ولم يكن يعلم ذلك إلا القليل من خواص دعاته.

[7] For all we know, the author was a high-ranking official in the Fāṭimid court, and the work was intended to serve as an official chronicle acceptable to the rulers themselves. As such, it contains information on the founder of the mission and his progeny, the 'hiding' imāms, and is likely to have incorporated several family traditions.

by ʿAbbāsids in various regions of Persia, revealing his identity and place of residence solely to a handful of his trusted companions. He disseminated the new tenets in Ḫūzistān in the Northern Gulf area, in the vicinity of the river Kārūn, whence he travelled on first to Iraq, then to Salamya in North-Central Syria, pretending to be an ordinary Hāšimite and trader. Salamya was to be the headquarters of the *daʿwa* and the residence of the imāms right up to the split that occurred within the Ismāʿīliyya in 266/899. ʿAbdallāh had two sons, named Aḥmad and Ibrāhīm respectively, of whom it was Aḥmad that he appointed as his successor before his death (ca. 212 / 827-28)[8]. After Aḥmad's death the imāmate passed on to his son al-Ḥusayn who, in turn, appointed his son, ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī (the first caliph of the Fāṭimid state) as the next imām. Feeling the approach of death, al-Ḥusayn appointed his brother Saʿīd al-Ḫayr (= Muḥammad b. Aḥmad) to the post of trustee imām who tried unsuccessfully to usurp the imāmate from his brother's son (an-Naysābūrī, *Istitār* 93-107)[9].

3.4 A very similar account is mentioned by the Ṭayyibī-Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī* in Yemen, Idrīs ʿImād ad-Dīn (d. 872/1468) in his work *ʿUyūn al-aḫbār*, which is the sole comprehensive historical work on the Ismāʿīliyya, that the first imām of the 'hiding' period was 'the Hidden' (al-Maktūm) ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad, also known under the sobriquet ar-Raḍī. He was the one to move to Salamya and send missionaries over to North Africa (*al-Maġrib*). ʿAbdallāh ar-Raḍī appointed his son Aḥmad at-Taqī to the dignity of being the next imām, who in turn appointed his son al-Ḥusayn az-Zakī to the same position, who in turn was succeeded by his son ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī. Idrīs also makes mention of the story of Saʿīd al-Ḫayr and his failed attempt to usurp the imāmate (Idrīs, *ʿUyūn* IV, 357-358, 365-366, 393, 402)[10].

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[8] Cf. Idrīs, *ʿUyūn* IV, 366, 394; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz* VI, 19.

[9] For the English translation, see Ivanow 1942:157-183. The Arabic original is as follows (an-Naysābūrī, *Istitār* 95-96):

وهو عبدالله الأكبر، وبعث دعاته إلى جميع البلدان سراً، (...) وولد له بها (بسلمية) أحمد وابراهيم وتوفي وكانت الإمامة بعده لأحمد دون ابراهيم، وولد لأحمد بن عبدالله الإمام الحسين وهو والد المهدي، وسعيد الخير، وأقام الحسين إلى أن ولد له المهدي عليه السلام. فلما أتت نقلته استودع له أخاه سعيد الخير اذ كان ولده يومئذ في حالة الطفولة، واستبد سعيد بالإمامة ونص بها على ولده، فهلك الولد، ثم نص على ولده الثاني فهلك، وكان له عشرة أولاد فلم يزل ينص على كل واحد منهم إلى أن هلكوا بأجمعهم، فعلم حينئذ سعيد الخير أن الحق لا يفارق أهله، فتاب وأناب إلى الله تبارك وتعالى، وجمع دعاته وعلمهم أنه مستودع للمهدي صلوات الله وسلامه عليه، وسلم إليه الإمامة واعترف له بالوديعة، وتنصل إليه مما تقدم منه قبل ذلك، وصارت الإمامة إلى المهدي عليه السلام.

[10] A number of apparent contradictions exist between the respective data on the 'hiding' imāms furnished by the sources cited above. This makes it all the less surprising that even greater contradictions can be observed among non-Ismāʿīlī sources. al-Maqrīzī (d.845/1441) claims in his historical work on the Fāṭimid caliphate that the first imām of the period of 'hiding' was Ǧaʿfar b. Muḥammad 'the Hidden' (al-Maktūm), who used the sobriquet al-Muṣaddiq. Ǧaʿfar al-Muṣaddiq appointed his son Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb to be the next imām, and the latter was the father of ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī, the first Fāṭimid ruler (al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ* I, 16). The evident contradictions in the historical accounts were happily utilized by the ʿAbbāsid propagandists to cast doubts on the ʿAlid descent of the Fāṭimids (Mamour 1934:16-29; Lewis 1940:117-63; Daftary 1994:23-25).

4. The identity of ʿAbdallāh, the *de facto* founder of the movement, the initiator of Ismāʿīlī teachings, and the predecessor of the Fāṭimid caliphs is rather obscure. According to Ismāʿīlī traditions, he was an ʿAlid, being a great-grandson of Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq. The polemic sources coming from non-Ismāʿīlī, mostly Sunnite, circles, however, paint ʿAbdallāh – who is the first person of the Ismāʿīlī movement mentioned in non-Ismāʿīlī sources – as an impostor of dubious if not forged pedigree, and a heretic too (Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 238; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz* VI, 17-19).

4.1 In the early 4th/10th century, the adversaries of the Ismāʿīliyya and the Fāṭimids spread rumours to the effect that ʿAbdallāh had in fact been a son of the heretic Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ, bent on destroying Islam from within by his evil tenets. The first Sunnite work to incorporate the 'black' legend of Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ and his putative son ʿAbdallāh is an anti-Ismāʿīlī pamphlet by Ibn Rizām (early 4th/10th cent.), who sought to trace the ancestry of the Fāṭimids back to these two individuals (Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 238-240; an-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXV, 187-317; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz* VI, 44-179; al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ* I, 151-178)[11]. There is no mention of Ibn Qaddāḥ either in other Sunnite, Imāmite, or early Ismāʿīlī sources. After Ibn Rizām had composed his work, the official Fāṭimid ideology refused to acknowledge any connection whatsoever between these personalities and the Ismāʿīlī movement[12].

4.2 We must not fail to mention the arguments provided by the imāms themselves for a scrutiny of the 'hiding' period. We are well aware of the enormous secretiveness, going as far as a deliberate concealing of one's identity, that characterized the lifestyle of the leaders of the early Ismāʿīlī movement, owing to the persecution they continually faced. As ʿAbdallāh (ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdī tells in his *Kitāb*, the real imāms after Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq assumed sobriquets to hide their own names, referring to themselves as Mubārak (Blessed), Maymūn (Lucky) or Saʿīd (Happy) (al-Hamdānī 1958:9-10)[13]. Ismāʿīlī sources made it clear that the pseudonym Mubārak in fact concealed Ismāʿīl b. Ǧaʿfar. The name Saʿīd, according to several sources, was used by ʿAbdallāh (ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdī prior to his appearance in North Africa[14].

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[11] Cf. Halm 1991:17-18, 24-25; Daftary 1995:25-26.

[12] Daftary (1990:112-13; 1994:26-27) and Halm (1991:18; 1988:165), equally reject the Qaddāḥid legend as a fabrication of an obviously polemic nature by opponents of the Ismāʿīlī movement. Halm (1988:197) interprets the ever-modifying ʿAlid pedigree of the Fāṭimids as a tool of political propaganda aiming at legitimizing the dynasty.

[13] See also Idrīs, *ʿUyūn* IV, 393-394. Cf. Tāmir 1964:109-110; Halm 1978:9-10. The original text reads: فلما أراد الأئمة من ولد جعفر إحياء دعوة الحق خافوا من نفاق المنافقين، فتسموا بغير أسمائهم فجعلوا أسماءهم للدعوة في مقام الحجج، وتسموا بمبارك وميمون وسعيد للفأل الحسن في هذه الأسماء.

[14] As Ivanow indicated (1946:110-12) before the publication of al-Mahdī's *Kitāb*. Cf. Mamour 1934:68. Daftary (1990:112) opines that the identity of ʿAbdallāh b. Maymūn can also be determined in view of the fact that Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl used Maymūn as his pseudonym, as hinted at by al-Mahdī, *Kitāb*.

The earliest 'official' refutation of the Qaddāḥid legend, however, is in all likelihood a letter (*siğill*) written in 354/965 by the Fāṭimid caliph al-Muʿizz to his chief *dāʿī* in Sind, in which he confirms the ʿAlid descent of the Fāṭimids (Idrīs, *ʿUyūn* V, 160-162)[15]. In this letter, the caliph claims that once the missionary activity conducted in the name of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl had spread wide, the ʿAbbāsid authorities took to seeking the individual whom they could regard as the head of the movement, forcing thereby the imāms to go into hiding, and the *dāʿīs* to protect the imāms by using pseudonyms or esoteric names in reference to them. Thus did they come to mention ʿAbdallāh, actually the son and heir of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, as son of Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ. Imāms coming after ʿAbdallāh would use similar names. The meaning of such cryptic names could not be divulged to outsiders, therefore they were a source of mistaken and misleading notions. Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974) has documented a conversation between the caliph al-Muʿizz and his *dāʿī*'s messengers, which confirms the contents of the above-mentioned letter (an-Nuʿmān, *Maǧālis* 405-411, 523-525)[16]. In this conversation, the Fāṭimid caliph emphasized that ʿAbdallāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ was in fact a pseudonym of ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, the 'hiding' imām whom the Fāṭimids regarded as their forefather, since the appellations al-Maymūn and al-Qādiḥ were commonly used as pseudonyms of the real imāms originating from the Prophet's lineage[17].

5. Having presented the information contained in the sources, Ismāʿīlīte and otherwise, and touched upon the chief problems that have emerged in the study of Ismāʿīlīte history, let us turn our attention to the information contained by the tradition of the *Tarātīb*.

5.1 The author of the *Tarātīb* informs us that the imāmate was inherited after 'the Hidden' (al-Maktūm) Muḥammad by his son Aḥmad ar-Raḍī, who found a way of hiding himself behind the persona of a certain individual, whom he used for protection, as a 'veil' (*ḥiǧāb*). This individual, known as Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ, was given this appointment by the then imām himself. With the demise of Aḥmad, the imāmate went to his son Muḥammad. By appointment from the imām, ʿAbdallāh, son of Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ, acted on behalf of Muḥammad, even making people swear allegiance to himself. The source thus testifies that al-Qaddāḥ and his son ʿAbdallāh acted as trustees (*mustawdaʿ*) of the imāms. With the death of Muḥammad, the imāmate was

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[15] Also cf. Ivanow 1940:74-76; Stern 1955:11-13, 26-27.

[16] Cf. Stern 1955:14-17, 28-33.

[17] Daftary (1990:113) opines that the notions over the supposed Qaddāḥid descent of the Fāṭimids must have been formed within such Ismāʿīlī circles as, having been influenced by the Eastern sectarian Qarmaṭīs, differed from the official view, and opined that the leadership of the Ismāʿīlī movement had passed into the hands of ʿAbdallāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ and his descendants and had only subsequently been retaken by the offspring of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, the later Fāṭimid caliphs. Cf. Stern 1955:18-22.

inherited by his son Aḥmad, who, having died at an early date, appointed before his death his brother as a 'trustee' imām temporarily to substitute his son, the 'real' or 'permanent' imām, Muḥammad [sic] al-Mahdī[18]. This is how we learn of the fact that the role played by the family al-Qaddāḥ in the career of the hiding imāms had come to an end. And to this paternal uncle did Muḥammad al-Mahdī link his filiation. As the uncle acting on behalf of the real imām had several sons, he started to arrange for his sons to inherit the imāmate, only to be frustrated by the successive deaths of his sons. Eventually the imāmate returned to its legitimate holder, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, who, after the death of his uncle, appointed his brother ʿAbdallāh to the position of trustee imām. It was during his being imām that the 'manifestation' took place, but it was cut short by his sudden demise (*Tarātīb* 289)[19].

The content of this passage of the *Tarātīb* is virtually identical with that presented by other Ismāʿīlī sources reporting on the same sequence of events. Two remarkable differences are the occurrence of Muḥammad as the personal name of al-Mahdī, as opposed to the commonly cited and accepted ʿAbdallāh (or ʿUbaydallāh), and the mention of the uncle (presumably Abū š-Šalaġlaġ) as a 'trustee' imām. The report that the death of the imām (Muḥammad al-Mahdī) had happened prior to the full manifestation of his imāmate may well be a covert reference to his careful re-directing all eschatological expectations away from himself and towards another person.

5.2 Further on, we learn from the reports of the *Tarātīb* that Muḥammad al-Mahdī, before his death, handed over the imāmate to his son al-Qā'im in an assembly of the leaders of his mission, ordering his brother ʿAbdallāh to act on his behalf, borrow his name, pretend to be identical with him – in short, replace him fully, even to the extent of adopting al-Qā'im as his own son, strengthening thereby al-Qā'im's position and mission, as he (al-Mahdī) was to be the 'Master of the Revealing', by whom the process of 'manifestation', salvation and the revelation of esoteric

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[18] Imām Aḥmad's brother (or, according to other sources, a son of his and brother of the next imām, al-Ḥusayn) was named Muḥammad, or Saʿīd al-Ḫayr, or Abū š-Šalaġlaġ, or al-Ḥalūm. See an-Naysābūrī, *Istitār* 95; Idrīs, *ʿUyūn* IV, 402, 404; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz* VI, 19, 21; al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ* I, 26, 41-42; al-Hamdānī 1958:10-11.

[19] The original is as follows:

فأمر الإمام أحمد أخاه أن يقوم مقام ولده، ويأخذ العهد لنفسه، وحجاباً لولده، محمد المهدي عليه السلام، وأنه إذا حضرته النقلة يسلم الأمر إليه بمحضر من الدعاة والحجج ويعلمهم أنه كان خليفة الإمام مستودعاً لا مستقراً، فقام محمد المهدي عليه السلام بالإمامة وقام عمه بالخلافة، وانتسب محمد المهدي عليه السلام بالنبوة [بالبنوة؟] لعمه كما جرى ذلك فيما تقدم، كيما تثبت فضيلته ويتم أمره، وأن هذه الخليفة كان له عشرة أولاد ذكور، فطمع في الأمر، وأراد أن يكون في عقبه، ويخرج ابن أخيه منه، فلما كان ذلك في وهمه أحضر بعض أولاده ممن ارتضاه لذلك الأمر، وأضاف مقاليد الدعوة ليده، فما كان إلا قليلاً حتى مات ذلك الولد الذي سلم إليه الأمر، ولم يزل يسلم إلى ولد بعد ولد وهو يموت حتى مات جميع أولاده، وانبتر الأمر من يده، فلما أيس ورجع بالأمر إلى مستحقه وهو محمد المهدي ابن أخيه أحمد عليهما السلام (...) وكان أمر الظهور قد اقترب بأوان طلوع الشمس من مغربها، فحضرته النقلة دون الظهور الكلي ...

meanings should be complete[20]. If we accept what this source tells us, ʿAbdallāh was the first Fāṭimid caliph to become known under the *laqab* al-Mahdī (*Tarātīb* 288-290).

The remarkable element in this report is that on the end of the 'trusteeship' of the uncle (Abū š-Šalaġlaġ?) it was another member of the family, a brother of al-Mahdī, by name ʿAbdallāh, who filled this position and administered the duties incumbent upon the function of al-Mahdī. This description of the events, however, is diametrically opposed to the information on al-Mahdī and his son that one can gather from other Ismāʿīlī sources. Some of the later Ismāʿīlī sources, as well as anti-Ismāʿīlī works, question the filial relationship between ʿAbdallāh (ʿUbaydallāh) and al-Qā'im, attributing a Qaddāḥid ancestry to the former while taking al-Qā'im and his offspring for genuine Fāṭimids. In contrast, the report of the *Tarātīb* casts doubts on the real identity of al-Mahdī by its calling the 'permanent' imām Muḥammad and the 'trustee' imām ʿAbdallāh. However, the doubts in both cases are closely linked with the appearance of the 'trustee' imāms, ascribing to them a Qaddāḥid descent in the former case and a real ʿAlid one in the *Tarātīb*. That said, the latter source of information regrettably leaves it in obscurity just where and in what circumstances the appointment of the 'trustee' took place. The last passages of this source show how important it would be to get answers to these questions if we are to make judgements over the later course of events, and indeed the reliability of our source as a whole.

5.3 The report then concludes with an extraordinarily obscure piece of information which, if we interpret it correctly, could be summarized as follows: the 'trustee' who went to Siǧilmāsa and grabbed the leadership there was actually ʿAbdallāh, brother of Muḥammad al-Mahdī. The move to al-Mahdiyya, however, was made by the 'Master of the Revealing', the real (Muḥammad) al-Mahdī, who had been born in Salamya. It was in ʿAbdallāh's time that the mission's message was disseminated in Yemen by Manṣūr al-Yaman and in the Maġrib by Abū ʿAbdallāh aš-Šīʿī. Seeing that his cause had made a progress even greater than expected, ʿAbdallāh made an open declaration of his imāmate and rule; his name was subsequently included in the Friday sermons far and wide. He claimed to have reinforced the laws of his ancestor the Prophet Muḥammad which he claimed had been sadly neglected before, and to have explained the esoteric meaning hidden behind the Revelation. This change of roles nevertheless did not escape the attention of Abū l-ʿAbbās, a brother of the chief North African missionary, Abū ʿAbdallāh aš-Šīʿī, being as he was personally acquaint-

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[20] The Arabic original reads:

فعندها أحضر المهدي ولده القائم وسلم إليه بمحضر من خواص الدعاة وأكابر الحجج، وأمر أخاه عبدالله أيضاً بأن يقوم مقامه - أي الإمام محمد المهدي أبو القائم - وينوب منابه ويتسمى باسمه وينعت نفسه بنعته وينسب القائم عليه السلام أنه ولده كيما تعلو كلمته تثبت دعوته، لأنه صاحب الكشف، على يده يكون الظهور والفرج، وبروز كل أمر من الدين مستور.

ed with al-Qā'im's father, the real Mahdī. Doubts having arisen in his brother too, they both rejected the 'trustee' imām, which put an end to their earthly career[21].

5.4 Analysing these data, we must again conclude that it would be crucial to have a sound knowledge of where and in which phase of the events the appointment of the 'trustee' imām was done. The more so because, for all we know, the events described here and in this context represent a unique piece of information[22]. Noteworthy, however, is a statement in our source to the effect that there was a continuous succession of 'trustees' assisting the hiding imāms. Without wishing to revive the claims of Lewis regarding this point (1940:44-54), we favour the opinion that the sources do tangibly suggest the existence from quite early times of a division of tasks within the family that served as the fundament on which to build the leadership of the Ismāʿīlī movement and the mission (*daʿwa*). According to the information provided by Idrīs ʿImād ad-Dīn (*ʿUyūn* IV, 362), a spirit of family cooperation was already observable when ʿAbdallāh al-Akbar entrusted his brother al-Ḥusayn to act on his behalf in the affairs of the *daʿwa*. Idrīs also tells us that this entrustment, which is likely to have been born within a comparatively restricted circle of intimates, eventually led to serious disputes over the identity of the real imām[23]. As to exactly which members of which branch of the family, when, where, and in what capacity, participated in the family-wide division of labour, it is for the above-mentioned reasons impossible to tell with absolute certainty. At any rate, participation in organizing the *daʿwa* network was largely determined – as Hamdani has pointed out (1990:236) – by a strong call for a radical stance against the ʿAbbāsid government.

The most important observation that we are able to make in an evaluation of the *Tarātīb* is that in case it is indeed an authentic source, the information it provides

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[21] Halm (1988:209) holds the view that ʿAbdallāh (ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdī's being unable to bring about the divine signs expected of him led to a feeling of despair among his supporters, turning later into outright rebellion, which could only be quelled by killing the leaders of the movement.

[22] It would certainly prove worth comparing this information of the *Tarātīb* with two other sources: a work titled *Ġāyat al-mawālīd*, written by the Yemeni Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī* al-Ḥaṭṭāb b. al-Ḥasan al-Hamdānī (d. 533/1138) (Ivanow 1942:37), and the *Ẓahr al-maʿānī* of Idrīs ʿImād ad-Dīn (Ivanow 1942:66).

[23] Ibid. 363-64:

وخرج الحسين بن محمد عليه السلام مع الحاج إلى مكة في زي التجار، ووصل إلى سامرا ومعه جماعة من الدعاة والأولياء، وفرق بها الدعاة إلى الآفاق للدعوة إلى أخيه الإمام عبدالله بن محمد بن اسماعيل عليه السلام (...) وكان رجل من الدعاة يدعو إلى الحسين بن محمد بن اسماعيل وقال لهم: إن الإمام عبدالله بن محمد أوصى إليه وأنه الإمام فلما بلغ ذلك الحسين رضوان الله عليه قصد الموضع الذي فيه الداعي، ذلك الذي يدعو إليه، وجمع الناس والمستجيبين وقال لهم ما أنا الإمام، وانما استخلفني أخي عبد الله عليه السلام وهو الإمام، وأنا من خوله وعبيده، وأنكر على الداعي ما دعا إليه من إمامته، فلما سمع الناس قوله ازدادوا رغبةً في طاعة عبد الله عليه السلام، ولا يعلم أحد مودعه إلا من اختصه من الدعاة بمعرفة ذلك.

This opinion is given substance by the evidence amassed by Halm (1988:197, 1991:19-20) to confirm the ʿAqīlid ancestry of the movement's founder, ʿAbdallāh al-Akbar, as well as the reports about the appearance from Ṭāliqān of a close relative of the late Grand Master Abū š-Šalaġlaġ (or, probably, a brother of al-Mahdī) among the seceded communities, then among the Syrian rebels, after the schism within the movement (an-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXV, 230; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz* VI, 69, 2; an-Naysābūrī, *Istitār* 97, 14-16).

makes it probable that the text dates from a later, Fāṭimid, period, since it includes a certain version of the Qaddāḥid legend, which is never mentioned in the earlier extant Ismāʿīlī writings.

6. This as yet initial evaluation of our source certainly confirms Daftary's view (1990:108) that there existed very serious differences of opinion amongst the Ismāʿīlīs regarding the names, number, order and descent of the hiding imāms. Pinning down the actual facts is further hampered by the widespread practice among the imāms, the leaders of the movement, of using aliases to protect themselves. Opponents of the Ismāʿīlīs, for their part, also created their own (non-ʿAlid) version of the Fāṭimids' genealogy; and these fictitious reports, merging as they do legends with facts, only help obscure things further.

In view of this state of affairs, the Fāṭimid pedigree is understandably surrounded with many doubts and will obviously remain unsolved for some time to come.

THE BOOK OF THE SEVEN SUCCESSIONS
(*Kitāb at-tarātīb as-sabʿa*)

You should know, oh my brother – and God be praised, who is exalted above [all] causes and results, and who created with his order the essence of [all] souls and intellects -: [...] And in a similar manner had Muḥammad's cycle (*dawr Muḥammad*) proceeded, with the imāms being related to him through filiation (*min intisābi l-aʾimmati ... bi-l-bunuwwati lahu*), for He wished to be elevated and honoured. It is quite like Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq, who took up the responsibilities of imām, and whose time was a period similar to the cycle of the Prophet (*wa-kāna zamānuhu zamāna fatratin miṯla dawri r-rasūli*). In his era, an arch-enemy (*didd ʿaẓīm*), a [veritable] damned Satan, appeared, who is known as Abū Ǧaʿfar the Penny-Pinching (ad-Dawānīqī) [the Caliph al-Manṣūr]. Now, this enemy was manoeuvring to get Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq assassinated somehow, intending thus to extinguish God's light. God, however, will not let His light be put out! [The caliph] had spies around Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq, who were bringing to the former daily, nay hourly, reports. aṣ-Ṣādiq, for his part, was quite aware of the [Caliph's] intents against him, and of all the disbelief (*kufr*) and hypocrisy that burned in [the Caliph's] soul. All this led [Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq] to declare his giving the imāmate over to his son Ismāʿīl, so that the burning fire of this accursed [Caliph] should subside. Thus, aṣ-Ṣādiq summoned his envoys (*ḫuǧağ*), missionaries, followers and entourage, and in their presence handed over [the imāmate] to his son Ismāʿīl, ordering them to call the people to [Ismāʿīl] in all the major divisions (*ǧazāʾir*) of the world and all its subdivisions (*aqālīm*), and make them swear allegiance to him and [declare] that control over the missionary activity is entirely in his hands.

Therefore Ismāʿīl took up this responsibility, arranging the ranks of the missionaries, appointing envoys (*al-ḫuǧağ*), ordering them to call to his cause and forward all the levies, religious taxes and fees to him (*wa-rafʿ al-aʿmāl wa-z-zakawāt wa-l-fiṭr ilayhi*). The missionaries and the envoys did [as instructed]; and with the news having spread throughout the lands, the spies of Abū Ǧaʿfar ad-Dawānīqī also learned of the handing over of the leadership to [Ismāʿīl], and duly notified him of aṣ-Ṣādiq's having given over [the imāmate] to his son Ismāʿīl and totally renounced the imām's responsibilities, and Ismāʿīl's

having acquired full control of the propaganda activities. On learning this, [the Caliph], determined to do harm to Ismāʿīl, sent out someone to kill him, as he had already done with aṣ-Ṣādiq. This brought about the demise of Ismāʿīl. aṣ-Ṣādiq then gathered witnesses to testify to the death of Ismāʿīl, not letting him be buried for the length of three days, [during which] he collected written testimonies from all the pilgrims on [Ismāʿīl's] death. After three days, he had him buried. Descending to put him to his grave, he said: 'My grief is not over Ismāʿīl but over a deposit that I have placed with him.'

Upon this, the spies of Abū Ǧaʿfar ad-Dawānīqī hastened to write a letter, informing him of the passing away of Ismāʿīl. On receiving the news, he was overwhelmed with joy and his heart calmed down and his fright evaporated. The ignorant fool supposed that the descendants of al-Ḥusayn were done with forever, and they would be no more. Soon, however, he had to learn from some trustworthy person working for him that Ismāʿīl had appeared in al-Baṣra. When, accompanied by a multitude of people, he passed by a man suffering from an incurable disease for forty years, [those around him] were addressing him by his personal name and byname (*wa-hum yusammūnahu wa-yukannūnahu*), and [the sick man] said to him: 'Take my hand, oh you grandson of the Prophet, and may God take yours too!' Stepping near him, [Ismāʿīl] did take his hand and helped him stand up. At that very moment, [the patient] recovered and fully regained his health. Thereupon this incurably sick man, whenever asked by anyone who it was who had cured him, declared that he, Ismāʿīl b. Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq, had done so. Now, Abū Ǧaʿfar ad-Dawānīqī, having received news of the [re-]appearance of Ismāʿīl and his above-mentioned doings, felt frightened and all but overpowered. He sent for aṣ-Ṣādiq and had him brought before him. When [aṣ-Ṣādiq] was there, he addressed him thus: 'You tell me that Ismāʿīl has died and that you have received written testimonies on his death from the pilgrims, then I receive news that he has appeared. Well, what is this matter?' On hearing this, aṣ-Ṣādiq asked for the documents to be brought there in which all the pilgrims testified to the death of his son Ismāʿīl. Also, there were some individuals at [the Caliph's] *maǧlis* who had personally witnessed [Ismāʿīl's death]. aṣ-Ṣādiq stayed with [the Caliph] until the latter's alarm died off. That enemy of God had no knowledge of how God's secret [plan] runs through his chosen ones (*kayfa yaǧrī sirr Allāh fī awliyā'ihi*), and how they administer the world!

The explanation of all that, my meritorious brother, is that the righteous imāmate (*al-imāma al-mardiyya*) and God's own word was already embodied in aṣ-Ṣādiq's lifetime by the true imām, Ismāʿīl, who was to appear in al-Baṣra and cure that incurable man. Mūsā al-Kāẓim, for his part, gave this outstanding post (*faḍīla*) to [Muḥammad,] the son of his brother Ismāʿīl, submitting it to him so as to divert the plots of that accursed enemy and show [the latter's] impotence, powerlessness and immeasurable ignorance. Ismāʿīl concealed himself behind a 'veil' [*alter ego*] (*satara ʿalā nafsihi ḥiǧāban*), for this was a trying epoch (*liʿiẓam al-fatra*) and the enemy had gained the upper hand. After Ismāʿīl, the [post of] imām was transferred to his nephew [*sic*!, or rather: his son], Muḥammad, because of the increasingly horrible epoch and the appearance of a lot of enemies. Muḥammad, feeling his death approaching, handed over the leadership to his son ar-Raḍī, who is the first of the 'hiding imāms' (*al-a'imma al-mastūrūn*). Thus Aḥmad [ar-Raḍī] took up the reponsibilities of imām, whereas his 'veil' [*alter ego*] behind whom he hided himself, putting him in his own place, was Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ. He was instructed by the imām to make people swear allegiance to himself, that is to Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ. And he did act as instructed by the imām, exercising his authority right up to the time when Aḥmad was about to die. When

the latter felt his death drawing near, he summoned his son Muḥammad, and transferred the imāmate to him in the presence of the cream of the most pious missionaries who had a sound knowledge of the Book. Thus Muḥammad assumed the position of authority. The imām also ordered the son of Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ to act as his 'veil' (*an yaqūma maqāmahu*) and make people swear allegiance to him as his father Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ had done. He did not cease to exercise control by appointment from the imām (*ʿan iḏni l-imām*) until Muḥammad felt the approach of death, whereupon he summoned his son Aḥmad, as well as the most prominent missionaries and the cream of his special envoys (*ḫawāṣṣ al-ḥuǧaǧ*), and in their presence handed over [the imāmate] as all his predecessors had done before him. So the imām Aḥmad ordered his brother to act as the substitute of his son, making people swear allegiance to him and concealing thereby his son, Muḥammad al-Mahdī [from all evil intents], and, should he feel his death approach, to hand the leadership over to [Muḥammad] in the presence of the missionaries and the special envoys (*ḥuǧaǧ*), informing them of the fact that he has been only a temporary, rather than a permanent, sucessor of the imām (*ḫalīfatu l-imāmi mustawdaʿan lā mustaqarran*). Thus did Muḥammad al-Mahdī assume the duties of imām, whereas his paternal uncle acted as a temporary successor (*qāma ʿammuhu bi-l-ḫilāfa*). Muḥammad al-Mahdī connected his filiation to his uncle (*intasaba ... bi-l-bunuwwati liʿammihi*) as had been the custom before, so that his high position (*faḍīla*) should gain stability and his purpose (*amr*) come true. Now, this [temporary] successor (*ḫalīfa*), who had ten male children, raised his ambitions to grab the leadership (*tamaʿa fī l-amr*), which he wished his own offspring to inherit, by excluding his nephew from it. Having become possessed of these vain ideas, he called for a son of his whom he thought fit for the position and handed over the control of the mission (*maqālīd ad-daʿwa*) to him. It did not take long, however, before this son to whom the leadership had been transferred died. He would then give the leadership over to one son after another as they were dying successively, till all his sons were dead, and all power slipped out of his hands. Thoroughly desperate, he returned the authority to its rightful possessor, that is Muḥammad al-Mahdī, the son of his brother Aḥmad. He composed these two verse lines on his rights: "God has given you that above which there is nothing, after [some people] wished to bar and block [your way to] it. "Yet God will not give it to anyone but you, and will adorn you with it!"[24] So did al-Mahdī put it to him in these two lines; God be praised, and not you, oh uncle![25]

Therefore al-Mahdī acted as imām and came to be famous as such. And the manifestation [of the truth] (*aẓ-ẓuhūr*) was to take place shortly, when the sun would rise from the West[26]. Death, however, approached him before the full manisfestation (*aẓ-ẓuhūr al-kullī*),

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[24] The original text of this poem (also transmitted with very minor variations in an-Naysābūrī, *Istitār* 97) is given as follows in the *Tarātīb* (290):

الله أعطاك التي لا فوقها * لما أرادوا منعها وعوقها
عنك ويأبى الله إلا سوقها * إليك حتى طوقك في طوقها

[25] Obviously, a sarcastic remark from the author.

[26] It is evidently a metaphorical reference to al-Mahdī, who did appear from the West. 'Rising Sun' (*aš-šams aṭ-ṭāliʿa*) is the *epitheton ornans* of the Mahdī usual in Ismāʿīlī writings. Cf. Idrīs ʿImād ad-Din, *Zahr al-maʿānī* in Ivanow 1942:66:

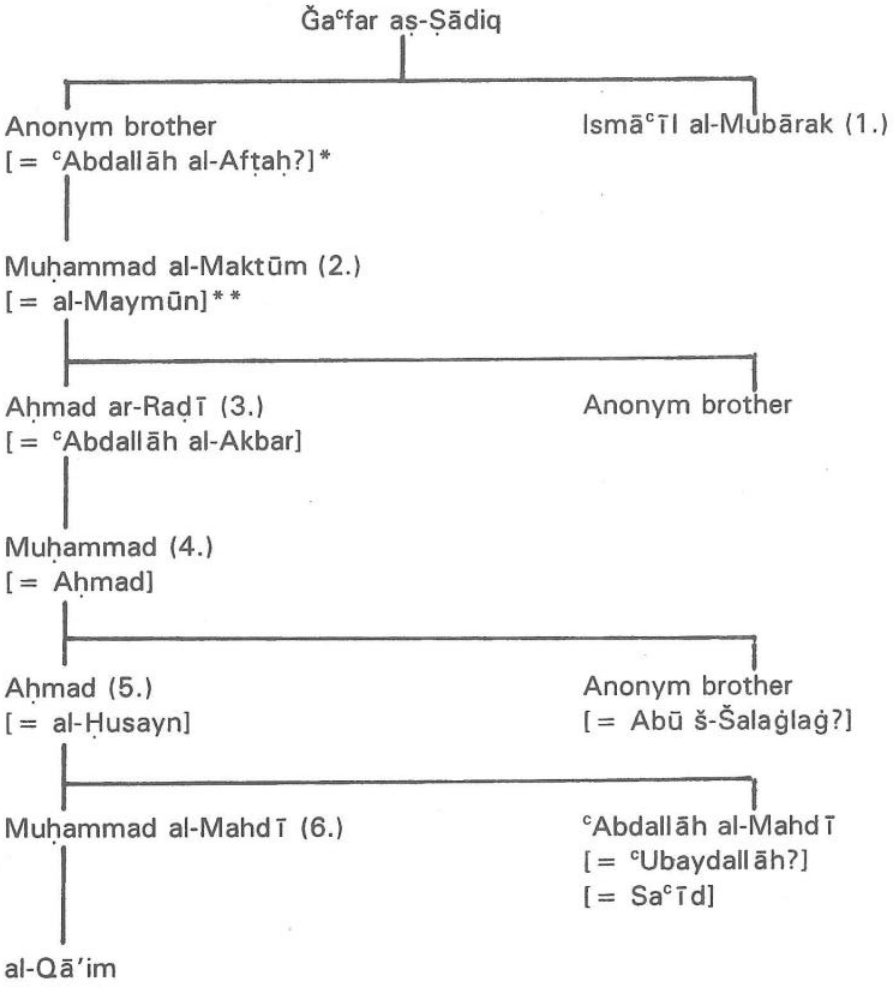
...وأمر الحدود (...) وأن يكنوه بالشمس الطالعة ستراً على ولي الله...(...) وبشروا بظهور الشمس من غربها ووعدوا بدنو الميقات لظهورها من استتار حجبها.

and then al-Mahdī summoned his son al-Qā'im and handed [the imāmate] over to him in the presence of the missionaries and the senior envoys (*akābir al-ḥuǧağ*). He also instructed his brother, ʿAbdallāh to substitute him, that is Muḥammad al-Mahdī, the father of al-Qā'im, act on his behalf, and even take his name and pretend to be the same person, adopting al-Qā'im as his own son, so as to strengthen [the latter's] authority and stabilize his mission. For he [al-Mahdī] should be the 'master of the revealing' (*ṣāḥib al-kašf*), who should fulfil the manifestation and bring salvation (*ʿalā yadihi yakūnu ẓ-ẓuhūru wa-l-faraǧ*) and bring to the light all the esoteric meanings of religion (*kullu amrin min ad-dīni mastūr*). al-Qā'im assumed the form of the absolute beneficence and the divine emanation (*al-ǧūd al-kullī wa-l-fayḍ al-ilāhī*), while his paternal uncle ʿAbdallāh acted as a temporary successor and deputy (*bi-l-ḫilāfa wa-n-niyāba*), taking up the nickname of al-Mahdī in accordance with the [former] imām's instructions. He conducted the propaganda for himself, sending forth missionaries and special envoys all over the major and minor divisions of the earth (*fī l-ǧazā'ir wa-l-aqālīm*) to call people to his cause and rule, he being the presupposed imām to whose rule the leading personalities of the *daʿwa* (*al-ḥudūd*) guided [the people], and who would undertake the manifestation (*aẓ-ẓuhūr*) and the revealing of all the esoteric meanings of religion. So did he act, till one of his missionaries, known as Manṣūr al-Yaman, introduced his propaganda to the Yemen. The propaganda also entered the West through the efforts of an Abū ʿAbdallāh aš-Šīʿī and grew ever more solid, as could be desired. He then openly declared himself to be the imām and the sovereign, and his name was mentioned in the Friday sermons in every city and region. What had previously weakened of the divine law of his ancestor [the Prophet] Muḥammad (*min šarīʿati ǧaddihi Muḥammad*) now gained renewed strength; what deviated from [that law] was now suppressed; for he restored [the *šarīʿa*'s] fundaments and raised it high, revealed the knowledge of esoteric meanings (*ʿilm at-taʾwīl*), explained the truths of the divine revelation, and strove as best as he could for the cause of God. He did not cease to do so until at last he felt his death draw near, whereupon he summoned his envoys and all his propagandists (*ḥuǧağahu wa-ḥudūd daʿwatihi*) and, in their presence, handed the supreme authority over to its rightful possessor, that is al-Qā'im Muḥammad b. al-Mahdī, the true imām. He asked all those present to testify that he had faithfully carried out all the tasks of the services and the temporary successorship (*al-ḫidma wa-l-ḫilāfa*) as he had been obliged to, and was now handing over the authority to its legitimate possessor (*sallama l-amra li-ṣāḥibi l-amr*).

al-Mahdī, al-Qā'im's father, was a brother of [the man] who moved to Siǧilmāsa. al-Mahdī, the 'Master of the Revealing' (*ṣāḥib al-kašf*), was the one who had been born in Salamya and moved over later to al-Mahdiyya, as the chronicles make clear. That is why Abū l-ʿAbbās, the brother of Abū ʿAbdallāh aš-Šīʿī would not accept the imāmate of al-Mahdī appearing in Siǧilmāsa, since he had [personally] known al-Mahdī, father of al-Qā'im. When he saw this affair, he aroused doubts in his brother Abū ʿAbdallāh aš-Šīʿī, saying: 'This man who claims to be the imām, to whom you have handed over the sovereignty (*mulk*) that lay in your hands, and who you have claimed is the awaited mahdī, has nothing that you have attributed to him. This matter is quite unlike you suppose it to be: he is not the Master of Authority (*ṣāḥib al-amr*), and indeed you have more right than he does the succession (*al-ḫilāfa*) and for the deputyship (*an-niyāba*).

As for the doings of Abū ʿAbdallāh aš-Šīʿī and his brother Abū ʿAbbās, they are well documented [in the chronicles].

The Family-Tree of the six "Hidden Imāms" of the Ismāᶜīlīs in the *Tarātīb*



* Equivalent personalities known from other sources.

** He is first mentioned in the *Tarātīb* as Ismāᶜīl's son, then as his nephew.

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