ON THE HISTORY OF THE ISMĀ‘ILĪ “HIDDEN IMĀMS”
AS REFLECTED IN THE KITĀB AT-TARĀṬĪB AS-SĀḤA

István Hajnal

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

1. The short treatise that forms the subject of our study, the full title of which is Kitāb at-tarāṭīb as-sāḥa wa-hiya sab‘a tarāṭīb ‘alā t-tamām wa-l-kamāl (The Book of the Seven Successions, or Seven Successions to the Perfection and Completeness), has been published by Suhayl Zakkar in the collection that he edited of the sources of the early Ismā‘ili (Qarmatī) movement (Zakkar 1987:I, 287-91). This work, which appears to be part of a longer one, originates, to the best of our knowledge, in Ismā‘ili circles. Its author is thought to have been Muḥammad b. al-Ḥāḍir b. ‘Alī al-Bazā‘i (Ivanov 1963:173; Poonawala 1977:297; Zakkar 1987:I, 38-39), an otherwise unknown personage within the Ismā‘ili da‘wa who was a contemporary chronicler of the establishment of the Fātimid 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 Ismā‘iliyya, 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 Ismā‘ili movement – the self-styled ‘rightly-guided mission’ (ad-da‘wa al-hādiya) – can be traced back to the heated controversies surrounding the choice of the successor of the sixth Shi‘ite imām, Ğafar as-Sādiq (d. 148/765). These controversies already began in his lifetime. According to most sources, he named his eldest son, Ismā‘il as his successor, in accordance with the principles of ‘appointment’ (nass). Ismā‘il, however, died before his father, and Ğafar as-Sādiq 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 as-Sādiq, as many as three of his offspring, including his son Mūsā al-Kāzim (the seventh imām of the ‘Twelver’ Shi‘a) and Muḥammad b. Ismā‘il (his eldest grandson), claimed the imāmace each for himself. On account of the disputes over entitlement to the supreme authority, the Imamite Shi‘ite community centred in al-Kūfrah split into no less than six groups, two of which would serve as a core for the emerging Ismā‘ili movement. It was at this

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1 On the disputes surrounding the succession after Ğafar as-Sādiq and the events subsequent to them, as well as a re-evaluation of the relevant sources, see Daftary 1990:93-97.
phase that the two groups acknowledging the legitimacy of either Ismā‘īl b. Ǧa‘far as-Šādiq or Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl (al-īsma‘ilīyya al-ḥāliṣa and al-mubārakīyya respectively) grew out of the Imāmīte movement (Daftary 1991).

Precious little is known about the career of early Ismā‘īlī cells up to the time when the united Ismā‘īlī movement suddenly appears on the scene around the middle of the 3rd/9th century. By this time, the Ismā‘īlīyya 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 Ismā‘īlīyya and its most famous offshoot, the Fāṭimids, is the period of ‘hiding’, for the imāms of this phase took care to hide themselves well. Ismā‘īlis 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. Ismā‘īl, when he was entrusted, either by his grandfather Ǧa‘far as-Šādiq or his father Ismā‘īl, to the care of Maymūn al-Qaddāh (Ǧa‘far, Sava‘iır 262-264; Idrīs, ‘Uyūn IV, 332-335). Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl was recognized to be al-Mahdi (the ‘Divinely Guided One’) and al-Qā‘im (‘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 Ismā‘īlis.

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 Ismā‘īl and ʿAbdallah (ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdi (founder of the Fāṭimid dynasty, d. 322/934) have been transmitted to us, which makes the continuity of succession less than certain. The genuine Ṭalid 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.

3.1 ʿAbdallah (ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdi reports in his Kitāb (Letter to the Yemeni Community) that the imām after Ǧa‘far as-Šādiq was not his son Ismā‘īl, but his other son, ʿAbdallah [al-Ăfṭah], who was later given his brother’s name, Ismā‘īl, as an as-

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2 Regarding this fact, Halm (1988:194) observes that the Ismā‘īli movement underwent repeated crises during its early career, as had happened before to the Imāmīte Shi‘ites.


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

“Then Muḥammad b. Ahmad appointed his nephew and entrusted him, by God’s preference, with all the affairs [of the imamate]. [The nephew] styled himself Saʿīd [ʿAli] b. al-Husayn. 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.”

3.2 We know from the sources, that Ahmad’s younger son Abū ʿAli Muḥammad was also known as Abū ʿAbdallaḥ (Ṣalaḥaṭ). Abū ʿṢalaḥaṭ died in approximately 286/899, and having no male offspring of his own, he appointed his nephew Saʿīd b. al-Husayn to be his successor and married his daughter to him. Abū ʿṢalaḥaṭ abandoned the auxiliary job of the ‘hiding’ Mahdi’s trustee, claiming, at least among his intimates, the rank of imām, or legitimate successor of ʿAlī. The earliest extant Ismāʿīli writing reports these events as follows:

“Muḥammad b. Ahmad [Abū ʿṢalaḥaṭ] at first concealed his real identity from his enemies as a precautionary measure (taqāyya), pretending to act as a ‘trustee’ (buğga), always referring to the ‘imām’ but actually meaning himself. This fact, however, was known only to the few who were his most trusted dāris” (Gaʿfar, Kaʿf 98).

Gaʿfar also alludes that Abū ʿṢalaḥaṭ had already toyed with the idea of declaring himself the Mahdi. The historical if perilous assignment of the imām who appears to lead the community and replaces the ideal of Muḥammad b. Ismā’īl was finally undertaken by his nephew, Saʿīd al-Husayn, later known as ʿAbdallāh (ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdi. It was in accordance with his doctrinal reforms that earlier tenets of the movement concerning Muḥammad b. Ismā’īl’s being the Mahdi 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 Ṣaḥmīd empire (297/909).

3.3 Another Ismāʿīli source, titled Kitāb istitār al-imām, was composed by a certain an-Naysābūrī sometime between 365/975 and 411/1021. 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 الحسن، قيدت الدعاة إليه زماناً (بعد) ذلك، فلما ظهر أظهر محاصبه وأظهر اسم عبدالله...

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

الإشارة في هذا كانت في丑صر الإمام محمد بن أحمد عليه سلاطنة لأنه في أول أمره ستر نفسه لفترة من المنافعين، وجعل نفسه في مقام الحجة يشير إلى الإمام وهو يشير إلى نفسه ولم يكن يعلم ذلك إلا القليل من خواص دفاته.

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 ʿAbbasids 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 Hūzistān in the Northern Gulf area, in the vicinity of the river Kārūn, whence he travelled on first to Iraq, then to Salamyā in North-Central Syria, pretending to be an ordinary Hášimite and trader. Salamyā was to be the headquarters of the daʿwa and the residence of the imāms right up to the split that occurred within the Ismāʿiliyya 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 imāmāte 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-Ḥayr (= Muḥammad b. Aḥmad) to the post of trustee imām who tried unsuccessfully to usurp the imāmāte from his brother’s son (an-Naysābūrī, Iṣṭīʿār 93-107)9.

3.4 A very similar account is mentioned by the Taʿyībī-Ismāʿīlī dāʾī in Yemen, Idrīs ʿImād ad-Dīn (d. 872/1468) in his work ʿUyūn al-ʿabbār, which is the sole comprehensive historical work on the Ismāʿīliyya, that the first imām of the ‘hiding’ period was the Hidden’ (al-Makṭūm) ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad, also known under the sobriquet ar-Raḍī. He was the one to move to Salamyā and send missionaries over to North Africa (al-Maʿṣīḥī). 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-Zākī 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-Ḥayr and his failed attempt to usurp the imāmāte (Idrīs, ʿUyūn IV, 357-358, 365-366, 393, 402)10.

8 Cf. Idrīs, ʿUyūn IV, 366, 394; Ibn ad-Dawdārī, Kanz VI, 19.
9 For the English translation, see Ivanow 1942:157-183. The Arabic original is as follows (an-Naysābūrī, Iṣṭīʿār 95-96):

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-Maquzī (d.845/1441) claims in his historical work on the Fāṭimid caliphate that the first imām of the period of ‘hiding’ was Gaʾfar b. Muḥammad ‘the Hidden’ (al-Makṭūm), who used the sobriquet al-Muṣāʾaddiq. Gaʾfar al-Muṣāʾaddiq 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-Maqzī, Intro L, 16). The evident contradictions in the historical accounts were happily utilized by the ʿAbbasid propagandists to cast doubts on the ‘Alīd descent of the Fāṭimids (Mamou 1934:16-29; Lewis 1940:117-63; Dafτury 1994:23-25).
4. The identity of ʻAbdallāh, the *de facto* founder of the movement, the initiator of Ismā'īlī teachings, and the predecessor of the Fātimid caliphs is rather obscure. According to Ismā'īlī traditions, he was an ʻAlid, being a great-grandson of ʻAbdullāh b. ʻAbdullāh. The polemic sources coming from non-Ismā'īlī, mostly Sunnite, circles, however, paint ʻAbdallāh – who is the first person of the Ismā'īlī movement mentioned in non-Ismā'īlī 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 Ismā'īliyya and the Fātimids spread rumours to the effect that ʻAbdallāh had in fact been a son of the heretic Maymūn al-Qaddāh, bent on destroying Islam from within by his evil tenets. The first Sunnite work to incorporate the ‘black’ legend of Maymūn al-Qaddāh and his putative son ʻAbdallāh is an anti-Ismā'īlī pamphlet by Ibn Rizām (early 4th/10th cent.), who sought to trace the ancestry of the Fātimids back to these two individuals (Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 238-240; an-Nuwayrī, *Niḥāya* XXV, 187-317; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz* VI, 44-179; al-Maqrīzī, *Iṣṭīʿāzi* I, 151-178)11. There is no mention of Ibn Qaddāh either in other Sunnite, Ismā'īmite, or early Ismā'īlī sources. After Ibn Rizām had composed his work, the official Fātimid ideology refused to acknowledge any connection whatsoever between these personalities and the Ismā'īlī movement12.

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 Ismā'īlī movement, owing to the persecution they continually faced. As ʻAbdallāh ʻAbaydallāh al-Mahdi tells in his *Kitāb*, the real imām after ʻAbdullāh b. ʻAbdullāh assumed sobriquets to hide their own names, referring to themselves as Mubārak (Blessed), Maymūn (Lucky) or Saʻīd (Happy) (al-Hamdānī 1958:9-10)13. Ismā'īlī sources made it clear that the pseudonym Mubārak in fact concealed Ismā'īl b. ʻAbdullāh. The name Saʻīd, according to several sources, was used by ʻAbdallāh ʻAbaydallāh al-Mahdi prior to his appearance in North Africa14.

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فلمَا آرَاد الأَنْسَةَ مِنَ اللَّهِ جَعَلَهَا إِمَامًا لَّهَا. خَانَفَ خَانَفَ مِنْ نَفْقِهِ، فَكَتَبَ في أَسْمَاهَا فَجَبَلَ أَسْمَاهَا مِنَ الدِّعَا.

14 As Ivanow indicated (1946:110-12) before the publication of al-Mahdi’s *Kitāb*. Cf. Mamour 1934:68. Daftary (1990:112) opines that the identity of ʻAbdallāh b. Maymūn can also be determined in view of the fact that Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl used Maymūn as his pseudonym, as hinted at by al-Mahdi, *Kitāb*. 
The earliest ‘official’ refutation of the Qaddāhid legend, however, is in all likelihood a letter (siğil) written in 354/965 by the Fāṭimid caliph al-Muʿizz to his chief dāʾi in Sind, in which he confirms the ‘Alid descent of the Fāṭimids (Idris, ‘Uyūn V, 160-162). In this letter, the caliph claims that once the missionary activity conducted in the name of Muhammad b. Ismāʿīl had spread wide, the ‘Abbāsid 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 dāʾis to protect the imāms by using pseudonyms or esoteric names in reference to them. Thus did they come to mention ‘Abdallāh, actually the son and heir of Muhammad b. Ismāʿīl, as son of Maymūn al-Qaddāh. Imāms coming after ‘Abdallāh 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. Qaḍī an-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974) has documented a conversation between the caliph al-Muʿizz and his dāʾis’ messengers, which confirms the contents of the above-mentioned letter (an-Nuʿmān, Maǧālis 405-411, 523-525). In this conversation, the Fāṭimid caliph emphasized that ‘Abdallāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh was in fact a pseudonym of ‘Abdallāh b. Muhammad b. Ismāʿīl, the ‘hiding’ imām whom the Fāṭimids regarded as their forefather, since the appellations al-Maymūn and al-Qaddāh were commonly used as pseudonyms of the real imāms originating from the Prophet’s lineage.

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) Muhammad by his son Ahmad ar-Raḍī, who found a way of hiding himself behind the persona of a certain individual, whom he used for protection, as a ‘veil’ (biğūb). This individual, known as Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ, was given this appointment by the then imām himself. With the demise of Ahmad, the imāmate went to his son Muhammad. By appointment from the imām, ‘Abdallāh, son of Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ, acted on behalf of Muhammad, even making people swear allegiance to himself. The source thus testifies that al-Qaddāḥ and his son ‘Abdallāh acted as trustees (mustawda’) of the imāms. With the death of Muhammad, the imāmate was

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15 Also cf. Ivanow 1940:74-76; Stern 1955:11-13, 26-27.  
17 Daftary (1990:113) opines that the notions over the supposed Qaddāhid descent of the Fāṭimids must have been formed within such Ismāʿīlī circles as, having been influenced by the Eastern sectarian Qarmatīs, differed from the official view, and opined that the leadership of the Ismāʿīlī movement had passed into the hands of ‘Abdallāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ and his descendants and had only subsequently been retaken by the offspring of Muhammad b. Ismāʿīl, the later Fāṭimid caliphs. Cf. Stern 1955:18-22.
inherited by his son Ahmad, 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, Muhammad [sic] al-Mahdi. This is how we learn of the fact that the role played by the family al-Qaddāh in the career of the hiding imāms had come to an end. And to this paternal uncle did Muhammad al-Mahdi 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, Muhammad al-Mahdi, who, after the death of his uncle, appointed his brother ‘Abdallāh 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).

The content of this passage of the Tarātīb is virtually identical with that presented by other Ismā’īlī sources reporting on the same sequence of events. Two remarkable differences are the occurrence of Muhammad as the personal name of al-Mahdi, as opposed to the commonly cited and accepted ʿAbdallāh (or ʿUbaydallāh), and the mention of the uncle (presumably Abū ḡ-Salāqlaḡ) as a ‘trustee’ imām. The report that the death of the imām (Muḥammad al-Mahdi) 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 Muhammad al-Mahdi, before his death, handed over the imāmate to his son al-Qā’īm 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’īm as his own son, strengthening thereby al-Qā’īm’s position and mission, as he (al-Mahdi) 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 Ahmad’s brother (or, according to another source, a son of his and brother of the next imām, al-Husayn) was named Muhammad, or Saʿīd al-Ḥayr, or Abū ḡ-Salāqlaḡ, or al-Halūm. See an-Naysābūrī, Istīḥār 95; Idrīs, ʿUṣūn IV, 402, 404; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, Kanz VI, 19, 21; al-Maqrizī, Istīḥār I, 26, 41-42; al-Hamdānī 1958:10-11.

19 The original is as follows:

فأَمَّرَ الامامَ أَحَمَدُ أَخِاهَ أَنْ يَقْفُوُنَّ مَعَهُ وَيَباَذِلَ الْمَهْدِيَّ عَلَى الْمَهْدِ عَلَى الْإِسْمَائِيِّ فَهُمُتُوْنَتُ عَلَى الْإِسْمَائِيِّ عَلَى الْإِسْمَائِيِّ عَلَى الْإِسْمَائِيِّ عَلَى الْإِسْمَائِيِّ عَلَى الْإِسْمَائِيِّ عَلَى الْإِسْمَائِيِّ عَلَى الْإِسْمَائِيِّ عَلَى الْإِسْمَائِيِّ
meanings should be complete.\textsuperscript{20} If we accept what this source tells us, \textsuperscript{3}Abdallāh was the first Fāṭimid caliph to become known under the laqab al-Mahdi (Tarātīb 288-290).

The remarkable element in this report is that on the end of the ‘trusteeship’ of the uncle (Abū ș-Šalāğla?) it was another member of the family, a brother of al-Mahdi, by name \textsuperscript{3}Abdallāh, who filled this position and administered the duties incumbent upon the function of al-Mahdi. This description of the events, however, is diametrically opposed to the information on al-Mahdi and his son that one can gather from other Ismā‘īlī sources. Some of the later Ismā‘īlī sources, as well as anti-Ismā‘īl works, question the filial relationship between \textsuperscript{3}Abdallāh (Ubaydallāh) and al-Qā‘im, attributing a Qaddāhid ancestry to the father 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-Mahdi by its calling the ‘permanent’ imām Muḥammad and the ‘trustee’ imām \textsuperscript{3}Abdallāh. However, the doubts in both cases are closely linked with the appearance of the ‘trustee’ imāms, ascribing to them a Qaddāhid descent in the former case and a real \textsuperscript{3}Alid 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 Siǧīlmāsā and grabbed the leadership there was actually \textsuperscript{3}Abdallāh, brother of Muḥammad al-Mahdi. The move to al-Mahdiyya, however, was made by the ‘Master of the Revealing’, the real (Muḥammad) al-Mahdī, who had been born in Salamyā. It was in \textsuperscript{3}Abdallāh’s time that the mission’s message was disseminated in Yemen by Maḥṣūr al-Yaman and in the Magrib by Abū \textsuperscript{3}Abdallāh aš-Šīrī. Seeing that his cause had made a progress even greater than expected, \textsuperscript{3}Abdallāh made an open declaration of his imāmāte 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-‘Abbās, a brother of the chief North African missionary, Abū \textsuperscript{3}Abdallāh aš-Šīrī, being as he was personally acquaint-

\textsuperscript{20} The Arabic original reads:
فمثلاً أحضر المهمي ولده العالم وسلم إليه بمحضر من خواص الدعاء وأكابر الحج، وأمر أخاه عبد الله أيضًا بأن يقوم مماليكه أي الإمام محمد المهمي أبو الخاتم - ويتناوب متابعته ويستحي باسمه وبينهم نفسه وبينهم عليه السلام. أنه ولده كيما تعلم كلئذة ثبت دعوته، لأنه صاحب الكشف، على يده يكون الأظهر والفرج، وبرز كل أمر من الدين مستور.
ed with al-Qā‘im’s father, the real Mahdi. Doubts having arisen in his brother too, they both rejected the ‘trustee’ imām, which put an end to their earthly career.

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. Note-worthy, 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 Iṣmā‘ili movement and the mission (dā‘wa). According to the information provided by Idris ‘Imād al-Dīn (‘Uyūn IV, 362), a spirit of family cooperation was already observable when ‘Abdallāh al-Akbar entrusted his brother al-Ḥusayn to act on his behalf in the affairs of the dā‘wa. Idris 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.

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 dā‘wa network was largely determined – as Hamdani has pointed out (1990:236) – by a strong call for a radical stance against the ʿAbbasid government.

The most important observation that we are able to make in an evaluation of the Tarāḥib 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 ‘Abdallāh (ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdi’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 Tarāḥib with two other sources: a work titled Ǧaḥṣ al-mawālid, written by the Yemeni Iṣmā‘ili dā’ī al-Ḥaṣāb b. al-Ḥasan al-Hamdani (d. 533/1138) (Ivanow 1942:37), and the Zahr al-muṣāfāt of Idris ʿImād al-Dīn (Ivanow 1942:66).

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36 Id. 363-64.

وخرج الحسين بن محمد عليه السلام مع الحاج إلى مكة في زي النجاح، ووصل إلى سامراء، ومعه جماعة من الدعاة والأولياء، وفرق بها الدعاء إلى الأفاق للدعوة إلى أخوه الإمام عبد الله بن محمد بن سماعي عليه السلام (...). وكان رجل من الدعاة يدعو إلى الحسين بن محمد بن سماعي وقال لهما: إن الإمام عبد الله بن محمد أوعى إليه آخوه الإمام فلا يبلغ ذلك الحسين، فرضوان الله عليه فصد الموضوع الذي فيه الداعي: ذلك الذي يدعو إليه، جمع الناس والمستجيبين وقال لهم ما أنا الإمام، وأنا استخلفني أخى عبد الله عليه السلام وهو الإمام، وأنا من خوله وريدي، وأكره على الداعي ما دعا إليه من إمامته، فلما سمع الناس قوله أزادوا رغبة في طاعة عبد الله عليه السلام، ولا يعلم أحد موضعه إلا من اختبائه من الدعاء بحجة 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 Tālīqān of a close relative of the late Grand Master Abū ʿṢalāḥāḡ (or, probably, a brother of al-Mahdi) 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-Naysībūrī, Istīʿār 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-sabal)

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 Muhammad’s cycle (dawr Muḥammad) proceeded, with the imāms being related to him through filiation (min intisābī laʾimmātī ... bi-l-bunwuwatī lubu), for He wished to be elevated and honoured. It is quite like Gaʿfar as-Ṣādiq, who took up the responsibilities of imām, and whose time was a period similar to the cycle of the Prophet (wa-kāna zamānhūn zamānā fāṭratīn miṣla dawrī r-rasūlī). In his era, an arch-enemy (didd ʿazīm), a [veritable] damned Satan, appeared, who is known as Abū Gaʿfar the Penny-Pinching (ad-Dawānīqī) [the Caliph al-Mansūr]. Now, this enemy was manoeuvring to get Gaʿfar as-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 Gaʿfar as-Ṣādiq, who were bringing to the former daily, nay hourly, reports. as-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 [Gaʿfar as-Ṣādiq] to declare his giving the imāmate over to his son Ismāʿīl, so that the burning fire of this accursed [Caliph] should subside. Thus, as-Ṣādiq summoned his envoys (huqqaq), 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 (gazāʾir) of the world and all its subdivisions (aqālim), 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-huqqaq), ordering them to call to his cause and forward all the levies, religious taxes and fees to him (wa-raʾf al-aʾmāl wa-z-zakawāt wa-l-fīr ṭaybī). The missionaries and the envoys did [as instructed]; and with the news having spread throughout the lands, the spies of Abū Gaʿfar ad-Dawānīqī also learned of the handing over of the leadership to Ismāʿīl, and duly notified him of as-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 Ismā‘īl, sent out someone to kill him, as he had already done with ʾaṣ-Ṣādiq. This brought about the demise of Ismā‘īl. āṣ-Ṣādiq then gathered witnesses to testify to the death of Ismā‘īl, not letting him be buried for the length of three days, [during which] he collected written testimonies from all the pilgrims on [Ismā‘īl’s] death. After three days, he had him buried. Descending to put him to his grave, he said: ‘My grief is not over Ismā‘īl but over a deposit that I have placed with him.’

Upon this, the spies of Abū Ǧa‘far ad-Dawānīqī hastened to write a letter, informing him of the passing away of Ismā‘īl. 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 āl-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 Ismā‘īl had appeared in al-ʾBaṣra. 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 by name (wa-bum yusammūnabu wa-yukannīnabu), 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, [Ismā‘īl] 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, Ismā‘īl b. Ǧa‘far āṣ-Ṣādiq, had done so. Now, Abū Ǧa‘far ad-Dawānīqī, having received news of the [re-]appearance of Ismā‘īl and his above-mentioned doings, felt frightened and all but overpowered. He sent for āṣ-Ṣādiq and had him brought before him. When [āṣ-Ṣādiq] was there, he addressed him thus: ‘You tell me that Ismā‘īl 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, āṣ-Ṣādiq asked for the documents to be brought there in which all the pilgrims testified to the death of his son Ismā‘īl. Also, there were some individuals at [the Caliph’s] maqālīs who had personally witnessed [Ismā‘īl’s death]. āṣ-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 (ḥarṣa yaqīrī sīr Allāh fī awliyāʾībhi), and how they administer the world!

The explanation of all that, my meritorious brother, is that the righteous imām (al-imāma al-mardīyya) and God’s own word was already embodied in āṣ-Ṣādiq’s lifetime by the true imām, Ismā‘īl, who was to appear in al-ʾBaṣra and cure that incurable man. Mūsā al-Kāẓim, for his part, gave this outstanding post (fāḍila) to [Mūhammad, ] the son of his brother Ismā‘īl, submitting it to him so as to divert the plots of that accursed enemy and show [the latter’s] impotence, powerlessness and immeasurable ignorance. Ismā‘īl concealed himself behind a ‘veil’ [alter ego] (satarat ʾalā nafisihī ḥiğābān), for this was a trying epoch (li-ʾizām al-fatrū) and the enemy had gained the upper hand. After Ismā‘īl, the [post of] imām was transferred to his nephew [sic!, or rather: his son], Mūhammad, because of the increasingly horrible epoch and the appearance of a lot of enemies. Mūhammad, feeling his death approaching, handed over the leadership to his son ar-Raḍī, who is the first of the ‘hiding imāms’ (al-ʾimma al-mastirīn). Thus Ahmad [ar-Raḍī] took up the reponsibilities of imām, whereas his ‘veil’ [alter ego] behind whom he hid himself, putting him in his own place, was Māyūm al-Qaddāḥ. He was instructed by the imām to make people swear allegiance to himself, that is to Māyūm al-Qaddāḥ. And he did act as instructed by the imām, exercising his authority right up to the time when Ahmad was about to die. When
the latter felt his death drawing near, he summoned his son Muhammad, and transferred the imāmīte to him in the presence of the cream of the most pious missionaries who had a sound knowledge of the Book. Thus Muhammad assumed the position of authority. The imām also ordered the son of Maymūn al-Qaddah to act as his 'veil' (an yaqūmī maqāmahī) and make people swear allegiance to him as his father Maymūn al-Qaddah had done. He did not cease to exercise control by appointment from the imām (an ʿignī l-imāmī) until Muhammad felt the approach of death, whereupon he summoned his son Ahmad, as well as the most prominent missionaries and the cream of his special envoys (hawāṣṣ al-huqūq), and in their presence handed over [the imāmīte] as all his predecessors had done before him. So the imām Ahmad ordered his brother to act as the substitute of his son, making people swear allegiance to him and concealing thereby his son, Muhammad al-Mahdi [from all evil intents], and, should he feel his death approach, to hand the leadership over to [Muhammad], in the presence of the missionaries and the special envoys (huqūq), informing them of the fact that he has only been a temporary, rather than a permanent, successor of the imām (balīfatu l-imāmī mustaw tadīn lā mustagarrār). Thus did Muhammad al-Mahdi assume the duties of imām, whereas his paternal uncle acted as a temporary successor (qāma ʿammahu bi-l-hilāfa). Muhammad al-Mahdi connected his filiation to his uncle (intasabba ... bi-l-bunwawatī li-ʿammiḥī) as had been the custom before, so that his high position (fadīla) should gain stability and his purpose (amr) come true. Now, this [temporary] successor (balīf), who had ten male children, raised his ambitions to grab the leadership (tumāsu 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 (maqālīdī 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 Muhammad al-Mahdi, the son of his brother Ahmad. 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-Mahdi put it to him in these two lines; God be praised, and not you, oh uncle!25 Therefore al-Mahdi acted as imām and came to be famous as such. And the manifestation [of the truth] (az-zuhūr) was to take place shortly, when the sun would rise from the West.26 Death, however, approached him before the full manifestation (az-zuhūr al-kullī),

24 The original text of this poem (also transmitted with very minor variations in an-Naysiburi, Istibar 97) is given as follows in the Tarātib (290):

لا أرادوا منحني ووعفكما
* *
للإله美貌ظ النذة لا فروقها
إليك حتى طوقك في طوقكها

25 Obviously, a sarcastic remark from the author.

26 It is evidently a metaphorical reference to al-Mahdi, who did appear from the West. ‘Rising Sun’ (as-sams at-taṣlīra) is the epitheton orannis of the Mahdi usual in Ismā‘īlī writings. Cf. Idris ‘Imād ad-Din, Zabr al-ma‘ānī in Ivano 1942:66:

وأمر الحمدود (…) وأن يكنوا بالملائمة سقراً على ولي الله (…) وبشروا بظهور الشمس من خربها ووعدوا يبدون

المحيات لظهورها من استرار حجبها.
and then al-Mahdi 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-huğāq). He also instructed his brother, ʿAbdallāh to substitute him, that is Muḥammad al-Mahdi, 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-Mahdi] should be the ‘master of the revealing’ (sāhib al-kaṣf), who should fulfill the manifestation and bring salvation (ʿalā yadībi yakūnu z-żuhūru wa-l-faraj) 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-ṣūd al-kulli wa-l-fayd al-ilāhī), while his paternal uncle ʿAbdallāh acted as a temporary successor and deputy (bi-l-hilāfa wa-n-niyāba), taking up the nickname of al-Mahdi 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 (fi l-ğazā’ir wa-l-aqālim) to call people to his cause and rule, he being the presupposed imām to whose rule the leading personalities of the da’wa (al-hudūd) guided [the people], and who would undertake the manifestation (az-zubūr) and the revealing of all the esoteric meanings of religion. So did he act, till one of his missionaries, known as Maṣūr al-Yaman, introduced his propaganda to the Yemen. The propaganda also entered the West through the efforts of an Abū ʿAbdallāh aṣ-Ṣīrī 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 šarīṭa jādīdbi Muḥammad) now gained renewed strength; what deviated from [that law] was now suppressed; for he restored [the šarīʿa’s] fundamentals and raised it high, revealed the knowledge of esoteric meanings (ʿilm at-tawīl), 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 (huṣāghābu wa-ḥudūd da’watibī) and, in their presence, handed the supreme authority over to its rightful possessor, that is al-Qā’im Muḥammad b. al-Mahdi, 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-hidma wa-t-hilāfa) as he had been obliged to, and was now handing over the authority to its legitimate possessor (sallama l-amma li-sāhibi l-amr).

al-Mahdi, al-Qā’im’s father, was a brother of [the man] who moved to Sīḡilmās. al-Mahdi, the ‘Master of the Revealing’ (sāhib al-kaṣf), was the one who had been born in Salamiya and moved over later to al-Mahdiyya, as the chronicles make clear. That is why Abū l-ʿAbbās, the brother of Abū ʿAbdallāh aṣ-Ṣīrī would not accept the imāmate of al-Mahdi appearing in Sīḡilmās, since he had [personally] known al-Mahdi, father of al-Qā’im. When he saw this affair, he aroused doubts in his brother Abū ʿAbdallāh aṣ-Ṣīrī, 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 mahdi, 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 (sāhib al-amr), and indeed you have more right than he does the succession (al-hilāfa) and for the deputyship (an-niyāba).

As for the doings of Abū ʿAbdallāh aṣ-Ṣīrī and his brother Abū ʿAbbās, they are well documented [in the chronicles].
The Family-Tree of the six "Hidden Imāms" of the Ismāʿīlīs in the Tarātīb

Čaʻfar as-Šādiq

- Anonym brother
  - Ismāʿīl al-Mubārak (1.)
    - Muhammad al-Maktūm (2.)
      - [ = al-Maymūn]**
      - Aḥmad ar-Raḍī (3.)
        - [ = Aḥmad]
      - Muhammad (4.)
        - [ = Aḥmad]
        - Aḥmad (5.)
          - [ = al-Husayn]
          - Muhammad al-Mahdī (6.)
            - [ = ʿUbaydallāh?] [ = Saʿīd] [ = Saʿīd]
  - Anonym brother

al-Qā'im

* Equivalent personalities known from other sources.
** He is first mentioned in the Tarātīb as Ismāʿīl's son, then as his nephew.
REFERENCES

A. Primary sources


B. Secondary sources


