The purpose of this article is no more than a brief analysis of two episodes of medieval Ismā'īlī history which, although taking place in quite different historical periods and geographical regions, display a number of shared features, in particular the occurrence of the notion of Paradise as a structuring principle. One of these episodes is the attempt by the Qaraqita of Bahrain (273/886-470/1078), or dissident Ismā'īlīs, to restore the »original religion of Paradise« in the opening decades of the 4th/10th century, while the other is the use of the concept of Paradise as manifested in the declaration of Resurrection (qiyāma) by the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs during the Alamut period (483/1090-654/1256) in the second half of 6th/12th century.

A couple of preliminary observations about the Ismā'īlī movement will be in order. The earliest Ismā'īlīs were a branch of the Imāmī Šī'a, arising from a schism about the succession to the 6th imām, Ġa'far as-Sādiq on his death in 148/765. These splinter groups, centered in southern Iraq, now acknowledged the claims of as-Sādiq’s eldest son Ismā‘īl al-Mubārak (d. 136/754) or the latter’s son Muḥammad al-Maktūm (d. after 179/795 or about 184/800) to the imāmate (Daftary 1900:93-96).

The early Ismā'īlīs had a very particular conception of their own about the nature of religious authority, the essence of which can be summarized as the continuous need of mankind for a divinely guided spiritual guide (imām), an authoritative master who possesses knowledge (īlm) inaccessible to ordinary men. By virtue of that knowledge, he was regarded as the genuine source of religious guidance, the real interpreter of the true meaning of the Qur’ān and the Islamic sacred law (fiqī‘a).

The Ismā'īlī movement itself appeared on the scene in the mid-3rd/9th century as a large-scale centralized underground movement, whose main purpose was to overthrow the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate in Baghdād. Several early sources agree that the earliest Ismā'īlī mission was related to the expectation of the immediate reappearance of Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl as al-Mahdī, who died about 184/800 and would after his return end the era of Islam and proclaim the hidden truth (ḥaqā‘iq)

---

of former religions. Rather than calling themselves Isma'ili, these adherents dubbed themselves 'People of the Truth' (ahl al-haqq), their own religious persuasion the true religion (din al-haqq), and their mission 'call to truth' (da'watu al-haqq), or 'the rightly guided mission' (ad-dawr al-haqq). Their revolutionary message, which basically consisted of preaching the imminent advent of the 'Truly Guided One' (al-Mahdi), was spread abroad in the strictest confidentiality throughout the Islamic world, from Central Asia to Iran, Iraq, Arabia, Yemen and North Africa.

Several treatises which have survived from the time of the underground propaganda prove that the doctrine embraced by the early Isma'ili was composed of a cyclical history of revelation and a gnostic cosmology. This teaching held that in every cycle (dawr), there succeeded seven imams, and the last one among them would always be elevated to the status of Spokesman-Prophet (natiq), who in turn would reveal it to a very limited number of individuals worthy of such initiation (Esmail & Nanji 1977:239). In every cycle, there would succeed seven imams, and the last one among them would always be elevated to the status of Spokesman-Prophet (natiq), who in turn would reveal it to a very limited number of individuals worthy of such initiation (Esmail & Nanji 1977:239). In every cycle, there would succeed seven imams, and the last one among them would always be elevated to the status of Spokesman-Prophet (natiq), who in turn would reveal it to a very limited number of individuals worthy of such initiation (Esmail & Nanji 1977:239). In every cycle, there would succeed seven imams, and the last one among them would always be elevated to the status of Spokesman-Prophet (natiq), who in turn would reveal it to a very limited number of individuals worthy of such initiation (Esmail & Nanji 1977:239). In every cycle, there would succeed seven imams, and the last one among them would always be elevated to the status of Spokesman-Prophet (natiq), who in turn would reveal it to a very limited number of individuals worthy of such initiation (Esmail & Nanji 1977:239).

According to the early Isma'ili doctrine, the seventh imam of the sixth cycle was Muhammad ibn Isma'il, which is to say he would then become the seventh and last Spokesman-Prophet (natiq). He did not die, but went into hiding instead, and will appear once more as the Mahdi-Qa'im. The contemporary Imami Shi'i heresiographers, reporting on the abrogation of Muhammad's law (nash al-sarar al-Muhammad), narrate: 'They [the early Isma'ili] say that God is giving Adam's Paradise to Muhammad ibn Isma'il, which means, according to their doctrine, that all forbidden things and everything that God has created in the world are allowed'. Nevertheless, instead of coming up with a new religion of law (sarar), he will declare all the old ones obsolete, including that of Islam.

The 'repeal of the laws' (raf'al-sarar) would clear the way for the original religion of Paradise with no prescribed ceremonial or legal system. This was the religion thought to have been the one practised by Adam and the angels in Paradise before the Fall: 'the primal religious of Adam (din Adam al-awwal), confined to the praise of the Creator and the recognition of His oneness (tawhid). The seventh imam, whose function included the full revelation of all formerly esoteric truths (haqiqat), would reign over and bring to perfection the world in his capacity as al-Qa'im and al-Mahdi.

The early Isma'ili movement underwent a schism in the late 3rd/9th century. 'Abdallah/Ubaydallah, who was later – after the foundation of the new caliphate (297/910) – to become the first Fatimid caliph al-Mahdi, now declared himself imam before the public, and was subsequently recognized as such by the bulk of the movement, that is the communities in North Africa, the Yemen, Egypt and Sind. By doing so, he also rejected the idea of the return of Muhammad ibn Isma'il as the expected Mahdi. The dissident party of the movement, known as the Qarmats or al-Qaramita, and composed of the communities in the East, broke with him and remained devoted to the original creed of the imminent advent of Muhammad ibn Isma'il as al-Qa'im and al-Mahdi. After the schism, 'Ubaydallah and later his successors the Fatimid caliphs – claiming as they did the imamate for themselves – were obliged to modify the original doctrine of the Isma'ilis about Muhammad ibn Isma'il being the final imam, al-Qa'im. The first caliph himself left no doubt in his 'Letter to the community in Yemen': that, far from being the saviour at the end of time, he was simply the first of a long series of future imams who would succeed to one another in an infinite number of cycles of seven until the reign of the very last of the line. As his actual words are quoted to have stated: 'There will be as many imams as God wills, until suddenly and unexpectedly, [the last] Speaker-Prophet appears, God willing'. Consequently, the Fatimid doctrine counted with more than one heptade of imams during the era of Islam, postponing the expectations connected with the coming of the al-Qa'im further and further into the future (Halm 1978:10-11).

The greatest insufficiency of this doctrinal modification was the inevitable loss of the eschatological role of the seventh imam, and the vital source of motivation that it had provided to the early Isma'iliyya. Thus, the days of the promised rule of the true religion (din al-haqq) were indefinitely postponed to some uncertain date. This

---

2 The notion of the gayba was clearly the original doctrine. On the details of the early imami doctrine, see art. 'Carmathes', EIR I, 825-826; Cf. Daftary 1991:228-231, Halm 1988:168.

3 On the repeal of the religions of law (raf'al-sarar?), see an-Nawbalghi, Firaq 62.8-10, 62.16-17, 63.2-4, al-Qummi, Maqalat 84.6-8, 84.13, 84.16-17, and the isma'ili author, as-Sigistanî, Isbat 177-180.

4 See the details in the relevant sources: an-Nawbalghi, Firaq 62.8-10, 62.16-17, 63.2-4, al-Qummi, Maqalat 84.6-8, 84.13, 84.16-17, and the isma'ili author, as-Sigistanî, Isbat 177-180.

5 On the repeal of the religions of law (raf'al-sarar?), see an-Nawbalghi, Firaq 62.8-10, 62.16-17, 63.2-4, al-Qummi, Maqalat 84.6-8, 84.13, 84.16-17, and the isma'ili author, as-Sigistanî, Isbat 177-180.


of former religions. Rather than calling themselves Isma'ili, these adherents dubbed themselves 'People of the Truth' (abl al-haqqa'i), their own religious persuasion the true religion (din al-haqqa'i), and their mission 'call to truth' (da'wat al-haqqa), or the rightly guided mission (ad-da'wa al-hadiyya) (Halm 1988:162). Their revolutionary message, which basically consisted of preaching the imminent advent of the 'Truly Guided One' (al-Mahdi), or 'The One Who Appears' (al-Qa'im), was spread abroad in the strictest confidentiality throughout the Islamic world, from Central Asia to Iran, Iraq, Arabia, Yemen and North Africa.

Several treatises which have survived from the time of the underground propaganda prove that the doctrine embraced by the early Isma'ili was composed of a cyclical history of revelation and a gnostic cosmology. This teaching held that in every cycle (dawr), there succeeded seven imams, and the last one among them would always be elevated to the status of Spokesman-Prophet (natiq), who would in turn reveal it to a very limited number of individuals worthy of such initiation (Esmail & Nanji 1977:239).

In every cycle (dawr), the seventh imam, whose function included the full revelation of all formerly esoteric truths (haqqi'iq), would reign over and bring to perfection the world in his capacity as al-Qa'im and al-Mahdi.

The early Isma'ili movement underwent a schism in the late 3th/9th century. 'Abdallah//Ubaydallah, who was later — after the foundation of the new caliphate (297/910) — to become the first Fatimid caliph al-Mahdi, now declared himself imam before the public, and was subsequently recognized as such by the bulk of the movement, that is the communities in North Africa, the Yemen, Egypt and Sind.

By doing so, he also rejected the idea of the return of Muhammad ibn Isma'il as the expected Mahdi. The dissident party of the movement, known as the Qarmatis or al-Qaramita, and composed of the communities in the East, broke with him and remained devoted to the original creed of the imminent advent of Muhammad ibn Isma'il as al-Qa'im and al-Mahdi. After the schism, 'Ubaydallah and later his successors the Fatimid caliphs — claiming as they did the imamate for themselves — were obliged to modify the original doctrine of the Isma'ili's about Muhammad ibn Isma'il being the final imam, al-Qa'im. The first caliph himself left no doubt in his 'Letter to the community in Yemen' that, far from being the saviour at the end of time, he was simply the first of a long series of future imams who would succeed to one another in an infinite number of cycles of seven until the reign of the very last of the line. As his actual words are quoted to have stated: "There will be as many imams as God wills, until suddenly and unexpectedly, [the last] Speaker-Prophet appears, God willing." Consequently, the Fatimid doctrine counted with more than one heptade of imams during the era of Islam, postponing the expectations connected with the coming of the al-Qa'im further and further into the future (Halm 1978:10-11).

The greatest insufficiency of this doctrinal modification was the inevitable loss of the eschatological role of the seventh imam, and the vital source of motivation that it had provided to the early Isma'iliyya. Thus, the days of the promised rule of the true religion (din al-haqqa'i) were indefinitely postponed to some uncertain date. This

---

2 The notion of the gayba was clearly the original doctrine. On the details of the early Isma'ili doctrine, see art. 'Carmathian', EIR I, 825-826; Cf. Daftary 1991:228-231, Halm 1988:168.

3 On the repeal of the religions of law (raf al-sara'a), see an-Nawbahti, Firaq 62.8-10, 62.16-17, 63.2-4, al-Qummi, Maqalat 84.6-8, 84.13, 84.16-17, and the isma'ilic author, as-Sijistani, Iṣḥāq 177-180.

4 See the details in the relevant sources: an-Nawbahti, Firaq 62.8-10, 62.16-17, 63.2-4, al-Qummi, Maqalat 84.6-8, 84.13, 84.16-17, and the isma'ilic author, as-Sijistani, Iṣḥāq 177-180.

5 With this innovation the isma'ilyya turned away from the notion of occultation (gayba) to recognize living Imams.


was bound to be a huge disappointment to a lot of the followers of the movement. The Fātimids, for their part, did not allow any antinomian experiments whatsoever; the qiyāma, the era of the Qāʿīm – whose identity otherwise remained hidden – was shifted into the distant future; a whole series of future Imāms was envisaged, although speculations about the date of the beginning of the qiyāma did not cease⁹. Until then, however, observance of Islamic law was to be obligatory even for the Ismāʿīlīs.

Nevertheless, the latent antinomian tendencies within their ranks surfaced time and time again, leading to such extreme sets of events as those initiated by the Qārmaṭīs in Bahrayn, or the Druzes, or the Nīzarī Ismāʿīlīs of Alamūt (Halm 1991:249-250).

It is in the light of the previous observations that we wish to turn our attention to the events in Bahrayn that attempted to restore the original religion of Paradise. After the break with the Fātimids, the headquarters of the radical dissidents of the Ismāʿīlī movement, that is the Qārmaṭīs, was transferred to Bahrayn, in the Eastern coastal region of Arabia. Here they established their own state, whose power was rooted in the Bedouin tribes of the Northern part of the Arabian peninsula. Their leading ideological authorities, however, lived mostly in Iran. From their stronghold, the Qārmaṭīs led a messianic revolutionary movement with marked antinomian tendencies against the Sunnī Caliphate. They earned a particularly frightful reputation in the Eastern as well as the Western territories of the ʿAbbāsid Empire, shaking the Muslim word for almost two centuries. Their constant raids and marauding expeditions destroyed the caravan and pilgrim routes of South Iraq and the urban centres of the region. Their military presence posed a permanent threat to the whole area, and it was to become one of the principal factors contributing to the disintegration of the Caliphate.

As far as they were concerned, recognizing the Fātimid caliph ʿUbaydallāh as the Mahdī was out of the question, as the ‘Expected One’ was still to arrive. Parallel to their military offensives, they also gave expression to their firm belief in the imminent appearance of the Mahdī on several occasions. Abū Saʿīd al-Ḡannābī (d. 300/913) one of the founding fathers of the daʿwa in Bahrayn claimed to be acting on behalf of the expected Mahdī who was to appear in 300/912. The unfulfilled expectations of the adherents quite probably caused internal frustrations within the daʿwa, which may have contributed to the murder of Abū Saʿīd al-Ḡannābī and of several leaders of the movement in the summer of 330/913¹¹.

Otherwise, political astrology played an important role in the history of the entire Ismāʿīlī movement. This distinctive Muslim science for the astral determination of political changes was developed after the ʿAbbasid takeover. It adopted the Sasanian astrological techniques for predictions of dynastic change on the basis of Ptolemaic astronomy, combined with Zoroastrian millenialism. It became the most respected science of the prediction of the predetermined future turnings in world domination, and thus instigated rebellions throughout Islamic history¹².

In the first half of the 4th/10th century, in a famous encyclopaedic work (Rasāʾīl) that is said to have been compiled in early Ismāʿīlī circles, the ʿIḥwān as-Safaʿ (The Brethren of Purity) had developed political astrology in an astrally determined cyclical theory of history. According to it, the conjunction of the stars determined major changes in world history. The ʿIḥwān as-Safaʿ reconciled a duodecimal system of the Zodiac with the heptads of the Judeo-Christian hierohistory. With reference to one of the Prophet’s statements that “[t]he life of this world is seven thousand years. I have been sent in the last of these millennia”, in the conception of the ʿIḥwān as-Safā’, each millennium (960 solar years) is divided into two complete cycles, each consisting of four (120-year) quarters of ascension, apogee, decline and clandestinity. Each quarter cycle is inaugurated by a Qāʿīm, who is followed by six imams. The seventh imam, who completes the heptad, is the Qāʿīm of the next quartercycle. The Qāʿīm of the Resurrection (qiyāma) would be expected at the end of the millennium of the Prophet Muhammad, which is the final millennium (Arjomand 2002:120-121). These ideas, like other teachings of the ʿIḥwān as-Safāʿ concerning human relations, probably retained great influence among later Ismāʿīlīs.

Al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048) mentions a prediction, based on erroneous astronomical calculations, of the appearance of the Qāʿīm at the eighteenth conjunction after the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, which is made to coincide with ‘the tenth millennium, which is presided over by Saturn and Sagittarius’. At that time, the era of Islam and the rule of the Arabs will come to an end. The Qāʿīm ‘will rise and will restore the rule of Magism’¹³.

The Iranian Ismāʿīlī daʿī in Rayy, Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī (d. 322/934), had been spreading the same astrological prediction on the coming of the Qāʿīm¹⁴.

Then the second successor of Abū Saʿīd al-Ḡannābī in the leadership of the Qārmaṭī community in Bahrayn, his son Abū Tāhir (d. 322/944), prophesied the Mahdī’s imminent arrival after the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 316/928.

---

¹⁰ Abū Saʿīd’s prophecies on the awaited Mahdī see ʿAbd al-Ḡabbār, Taḥḥīt II, 379-381.
¹¹ On these events see ʿAbd al-Ḡabbār, Taḥḥīt II, 379-381, al-Maʾṣūdī, at-Tanbih 373, an-Nuwayzī, Ṣūḥāyat XXV, 243, Ibn ad-Dawadari, Kanẓ VI, 61, al-Maqrīzī, Ittīrāz I, 164.
¹³ al-Bīrūnī, ʿAjāʾib 213; Cf. Chronology 196-197.
was bound to be a huge disappointment to a lot of the followers of the movement. The Fatimid, for their part, did not allow any antinomian experiments whatsoever; the giyāma, the era of the Qāʾīm – whose identity otherwise remained hidden – was shifted into the distant future; a whole series of future Imams was envisaged, although speculations about the date of the beginning of the giyāma did not cease. Until then, however, observance of Islamic law was to be obligatory even for the Ismaʿīlīs.

Nevertheless, the latent antinomian tendencies within their ranks surfaced time and time again, leading to such extreme sets of events as those initiated by the Qarāmita in Bahrayn, or the Druzes, or the Nīzarī Ismaʿīlīs of Alamut (Halm 1991:249-250).

It is in the light of the previous observations that we wish to turn our attention to the events in Bahrayn that attempted to restore the original religion of Paradise. After the break with the Fatimid, the headquarters of the radical dissidents of the Ismaʿīlī movement, that is the Qarāmite, was transferred to Bahrayn, in the Eastern coastal region of Arabia. Here they established their own state, whose power was rooted in the Bedouin tribes of the Northern part of the Arabian peninsula. Their leading ideological authorities, however, lived mostly in Iran. From their stronghold, the Qarmatīs led a messianic revolutionary movement with marked antinomian tendencies against the Sunni Caliphate. They earned a particularly frightful reputation in the Eastern as well as the Western territories of the ʿAbbasid Empire, shaking the Muslim word for almost two centuries. Their constant raids and marauding expeditions destroyed the caravan and pilgrim routes of South Iraq and the urban centres of the region. Their military presence posed a permanent threat to the whole area, and it was to become one of the principal factors contributing to the disintegration of the Caliphate.

As far as they were concerned, recognizing the Fatimid caliph ʿUbaydallāh as the Mahdi was out of the question, as the ʿExpected One was still to arrive. Parallel to their military offensives, they also gave expression to their firm belief in the imminent appearance of the Mahdi on several occasions. Ābū Saʿīd al-Ǧannābī (d. 300/913) one of the founding fathers of the daʿwa in Bahrayn claimed to be acting on behalf of the expected Mahdi who was to appear in 300/912. The unfulfilled expectations of the adherents quite probably caused internal frustrations within the daʿwa, which may have contributed to the murder of Ābū Saʿīd al-Ǧannābī and of several leaders of the movement in the summer of 330/913.

Otherwise, political astrology played an important role in the history of the entire Ismaʿīlī movement. This distinctive Muslim science for the astral determination of political changes was developed after the ʿAbbasid takeover. It adopted the Sasanian astrological techniques for predictions of dynastic change on the basis of Ptolemaic astronomy, combined with Zoroastrian millennialism. It became the most respected science of the prediction of the predetermined future turnings in world domination, and thus instigated rebellions throughout Islamic history.

In the first half of the 4th/10th century, in a famous encyclopedia work (Rasāʾīl) that is said to have been compiled in early Ismaʿīlī circles, the Ijwān as-Safaʿ (The Brethren of Purity) had developed political astrology in an astrally determined cyclical theory of history. According to it, the conjunction of the stars determined major changes in world history. The Ijwān as-Safaʿ reconciled a duodecimal system of the Zodiac with the heptads of the Judeo-Christian hierohistory. With reference to one of the Prophet’s statements that “[t]he life of this world is seven thousand years. I have been sent in the last of these millennia”, in the conception of the Ijwān as-Safaʿ, each millennium (960 solar years) is divided into two complete cycles, each consisting of four (120-year) quarters of ascension, apogee, decline and clandestinity. Each quarter cycle is inaugurated by a Qāʾīm, who is followed by six imams. The seventh imam, who completes the heptad, is the Qāʾīm of the next quartercycle. The Qāʾīm of the Resurrection (giyāma) would be expected at the end of the millennium of the Prophet Muhammad, which is the final millennium (Arjomand 2002:120-121).

These ideas, like other teachings of the Ijwān as-Safaʿ concerning human relations, probably retained great influence among later Ismaʿīlīs.

Al-Birūnī (d. 440/1048) mentions a prediction, based on erroneous astronomical calculations, of the appearance of the Qāʾīm at the eighteenth conjunction after the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, which is made to coincide with ‘the tenth millennium, which is presided over by Saturn and Sagittarius’. At that time, the era of Islam and the rule of the Arabs will come to an end. The Qāʾīm ‘will rise and will restore the rule of Magism’.12

The Iranian Ismaʿīlī daʿī in Rayy, Ābū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī (d. 322/934), had been spreading the same astrological prediction on the coming of the Qāʾīm.13

Then the second successor of Ābū Saʿīd al-Ǧannābī in the leadership of the Qarmatī community in Bahrayn, his son Ābū Tāhir (d. 322/944), prophesied the Mahdi’s imminent arrival after the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 316/928,

13 al-Birūnī, Ṭarābur, 213; Cf. Chronology 196-197.
marking the end of the Islamic period, and the beginning of the final religious era, as did other Qarmatı missionaries in Northern Iran15.

As the much-awaited date was drawing near, the Qarmatis increased their offensive activity against the dominions of the Caliphate. They embarked on a series of raids against Southern 'Iraq, pillaging the pilgrims’ caravans returning from Mecca, and, in 315/927, they even made an attempt, unsuccessful though it was, at seizing Bağdäd14.

As a result of the advances of the Mahdi’s messengers in Southern ‘Iraq, the local partisans of the Mahdi revealed their allegiance in the Sawād of Kufa, attaching exaggerated expectations to the personality of Abū Tahir. They said that the ‘Truth’ had appeared and the Mahdi had resurrected: the ‘Abbāsiids had come to their end, as had all Sunni dignitaries. “We have not come to establish another dynasty, but to abolish the sāri‘a” (mā ǧi‘na li-iqamat dawla wa-lākin li-iżalat sāri‘a) – they claimed; and they announced the realm of the Mahdi and collected the poll-tax, but government troops very soon suppressed this uprising17.

Al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048) mentions in his report “on the eras of pseudo-prophets” that the Qarmatis of Bahrayn ‘promised each other the arrival of the >Expected One< (al-muntazar) in the seventh conjunction of the Fiery Triplicity18. When that conjunction occurred in 317/928 a young man from Isfahān was ready to set off for Bahrayn to claim to be the expected Qa’im-Mahdi.

Afterwards, the Qaramita unexpectedly returned from their military expedition to Bahrayn, where construction works on a fortified refuge (dār al-biğra), the prospective residence of the awaited Mahdi, had been completed. Later, in 319/930, they arrived without warning in Mecca during the pilgrimage season, subsequently committing a dreadful slaughter of the pilgrims and inhabitants, acting exactly like infidels. They finally tore out and carried off the Black Stone (al-hağar al-aswād) of the Ka‘ba, presumably with the aim of symbolizing the end of Islam.

It is these disastrous events that lead us to the curious incidents in Ramadan 319/September-October 931, when Abū Tahir presented a young Persian prisoner of war as the expected Mahdi to his community, handing over authority to him and declaring all previous religions to be invalid: the true religion – “the religion of our father Adam” – that is “the religion of Paradise” without laws – had now been revealed and “the talk of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad had shown itself to be lies and deception”19. The latent antinomian tendencies which from the very beginning mark the Ismā‘īlī daw‘us, become evident here for the first time20. According to their tenets, the religions of the Sacred Law which have been revealed before – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – are only changing outer shells for the ‘True religion’ (dīn al-haqq), the original Religion of Paradise exempt from cultic duties, commandments and prohibitions: the pure worship of God which Adam and the Angels used to practice before the Fall. The Mahdi – according to their expectations – will restore this original religion to mankind; what could be more obvious, now that he had come, than to declare the time fulfilled, and to abolish the outer shell of the law (raf al-tara‘ī). Nevertheless, let us have a look into the relevant reports.

All the sources agree that the youth was a young Persian from Isfahān or Hurāsān; some even asserted that he was a descendant of the Persian kings and described him as a ‘Zoroastrian’ or a ‘Magian’21. Isfahān, his home town, had long been associated by the the astrologers with the rise of a Persian dynasty which would overthrow the Arab Caliphate.

However, the reports surrounding the events connected to his appearance are contradictory, confused, and they differ radically from one another22. It is also reported that the young man was of a charismatic character, excelled in intelligence and learning, and soon was initiated into the affairs of the Qaramita. His proud behaviour and noble mien catching the attention of those around him, he was taken before the chief dā‘i Abū Tahir. In a passage, (‘Arib, Sila‘ 163.2-4) there is a mention of a sign (adâma) by which the Isfahāni was able to make Abū Tahir and his brothers believe that he was the >Expected One< (al-muntazar). According to al-Bīrūnī23 the date of the Isfahāni’s arrival was chosen to coincide with the passing of 1500 years from the death of the prophet Zoroaster, at the year 1242 of

---

15 On the prophecies of Abū Tahir see ‘Abdālghabbār, Tağbīt II, 381, al-بغدادی, Farq 287; The expectation of the Mahdi is also reflected in a propagandistic poem by Abū Tahir. In it he designates himself as the one who summons to obey the Mahdi. For the fragments of the poem, see al-Bīrūnī, Aṣār 214; al-بغدادی, Farq 287; Cf. de Goeje 1886:113-115, Madelung 1959:79ff, Nasīrāt 1977/III, 341-342, Halm 1991:229.

16 On the details of the military events see Miskawayhi, Tağāvīb I, 172-177.


18 al-Bīrūnī, Aṣār 313-314; Cf. Chronology 197.


20 In fact, similar events had occurred in the ismā‘īlī communities before in Yemen in 299/912 and in Hīrījya 309/921. See the details in Sirat al-Hādī 262 and Ibn Idārī, Bayān I, 187; Cf. Halm 1991:223-224.


23 al-Bīrūnī, Aṣār 313, Cf. Chronology 197.
marking the end of the Islamic period, and the beginning of the final religious era, as did other Qarmatī missionaries in Northern Iran.15

As the much-awaited date was drawing near, the Qarmatīs increased their offensive activity against the dominions of the Caliphate. They embarked on a series of raids against Southern Iraq, pillaging the pilgrims' caravans returning from Mecca, and, in 315/927, they even made an attempt, unsuccessful though it was, at seizing Baghdad.16

As a result of the advances of the Mahdi's messengers in Southern Iraq, the local partisans of the Mahdi revealed their allegiance in the Sāwād of Kufa, attaching exaggerated expectations to the personality of Abū Tahir. They said that the 'Truth' had appeared and the Mahdi had resurrected: the 'Abbasids had come to their end, as had all Sunni dignitaries. "We have not come to establish another dynasty, but to abolish the shari'ā (mā gī'īna li-iqdmat dawla wa-lākin li-izdlat shari'ā) - they claimed; and they announced the realm of the Mahdi and collected the poll-tax, but government troops very soon suppressed this uprising.17

Al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048) mentions in his report "on the eras of pseudo-prophets" that the Qarmatīs of Bahrain promised each other the arrival of the 'Expected One' (al-muntazar) in the seventh conjunction of the Fiery Triplicity.18 When that conjunction occurred in 317/928 a young man from Isfahan was ready to set off for Bahrain to claim to be the expected Qa'im-Mahdi.19

Afterwards, the Qaramita unexpectedly returned from their military expedition to Bahrain, where construction works on a fortified refuge (dār al-bīgira), the prospective residence of the awaited Mahdi, had been completed. Later, in 319/930, they arrived without warning in Mecca during the pilgrimage season, subsequently committing a dreadful slaughter of the pilgrims and inhabitants, acting exactly like infidels. They finally tore out and carried off the Black Stone (al-hagar al-aswād) of a sign (md gi'nd li-iqdmat dawla wa-ldkin li-izdlat sarica) - they claimed; and

It is these disastrous events that lead us to the curious incidents in Ramadan 319/September-October 931, when Abū Tahir presented a young Persian prisoner of war as the expected Mahdi to his community, handing over authority to him and declaring all previous religions to be invalid: the true religion - "the religion of our father Adam", that is "the religion of Paradise" without laws - had now been revealed and "the talk of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad had shown itself to be lies and deception"19. The latent antimonal tendencies which from the very beginning mark the Ismā'īlī da'īwa, become evident here for the first time.20 According to their tenets, the religions of the Sacred Law which have been revealed before - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - are only changing outer shells for the "True religion" (dīn al-haqq), the original Religion of Paradise exempt from cultic duties, commandments and prohibitions: the pure worship of God which Adam and the Angels used to practice before the Fall. The Mahdi - according to their expectations - will restore this original religion to mankind; what could be more obvious, now that he had come, than to declare the time fulfilled, and to abolish the outer shell of the law (ra's al-tara'i'). Nevertheless, let us have a look into the relevant reports.

All the sources agree that the youth was a young Persian from Isfahan or Hurasan; some even asserted that he was a descendant of the Persian kings and described him as a 'Zoroastrian' or a 'Magian'.21 Isfahan, his home town, had long been associated by the the astrologers with the rise of a Persian dynasty which would overthrow the Arab Caliphate.

However, the reports surrounding the events connected to his appearance are contradictory, confused, and they differ radically from one another.22 It is also reported that the young man was of a charismatic character, excelled in intelligence and learning, and soon was initiated into the affairs of the Qaramita. His proud behaviour and noble men catching the attention of those around him, he was taken before the chief dā'i Abū Tahir. In a passage, (Arib, Sila 163.2-4) there is a mention of a sign (adāma) by which the Isfahāni was able to make Abū Tahir and his brothers believe that he was the 'Expected One' (al-muntazar). According to al-Bīrūnī23 the date of the Isfahāni's arrival was chosen to coincide with the passing of 1500 years from the death of the prophet Zoroaster, at the year 1242 of

---

15 On the prophecies of Abū Tahir see 'Abdalghäbbār, Taḥbit II, 381, al-Baghdādī, Farrā 287; The expectation of the Mahdi is also reflected in a propagandistic poem by Abū Tahir. In it he designates himself as the one who summons to obey the Mahdi. For the fragments of the poem, see al-Bīrūnī, Ağār 214; al-Baghdādī, Farrā 287; cf. de Goeje 1886:113-115, Madelung 1959:79ff, Nafṣār 1977:11, 344-342, Halm 1991:229.

16 On the details of the military events see Miskawayhi, Tağārīb I, 172-177.


18 al-Bīrūnī, Ağār 313-314; Cf. Chronology 197.


23 al-Bīrūnī, Ağār 313, Cf. Chronology 197.
Alexander’s era for which prophecies attributed to Zoroaster and Ğamāsp were predicting the restoration of the reign of the Magians.

Among the reports of the emergence of the young Isfahāni, there is a particularly valuable Sunni eyewitness account from within the personal entourage of Abu Ṭāhir, by his personal physician²⁴.

This doctor (a certain Ibn Ḥamdān) tells us how the power was handed over. According to his report, when the chief dāʾī was presenting the youth to the community, “the people, including the Qarmātī Abū Ṭāhir and his brothers, were staying around him. Then Abū Ṭāhir called out as loudly as he could: ‘You people! Know: We and you also were all donkeys! But now God has sent us this person,’ and he pointed to the youth - ‘this is my Lord and your Lord (rabbu•h• and ilahi•). We are all his slaves! The rule has now been transferred to him, and he will be king of us all (wa•huwa zamlukun• kullanā)’.”

Then the eyewitness proceeds to narrate that Abū Ṭāhir and all the others took a handful of earth and strewed it over their heads. Thereupon Abū Ṭāhir declared: “Know, you people, that the [true] religion has now appeared. It is the religion of our father Adam (huwa din abinā Adam) and all religions we have belonged to until now are null and void, and everything that the dāʾīs have been telling you is null and void and false, all the talk about Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad! The true religion is the original religion of Adam, and those are all wily deceivers, so curse them!’ Then the people cursed them including Abraham, Muhammad, even ‘Ali and his descendants.

The doctor’s report further states: “Abū Ṭāhir and the people used to circle around him [the incarnate God], completely naked, shouting: ‘Our God, he is mighty and exalted!’”

Heinz Halm was the first to interpret these ritual ceremonies correctly as a Qarmātī attempt at restoring the religion of Adam, a way of “returning to Paradise”²⁵. The circling in the nudity of Paradise around the God who had become visible and walked among the men fits entirely into the early Ismāʿīlī notion of the original religion of Paradise. A century later entirely similar ideas were to be found among the Druzes, who were also Ismāʿīlī dissenters²⁶.

According to our sources the Isfahāni who evidently took the astral sign to indicate the end of the era of world dominion by the Arabs and the beginning of the domination of the Persians, had initiated a number of strange ceremonies. He prescribed pederasty and incest with their own sisters for them, and he ordered that all beardless youths who refused should be put to death. He also ordered them to worship the fire and to cut off the hand of everybody who put out the fire with his hand or the tongue of everybody who extinguished it by blowing and then began to execute the notables of Bahrayn²⁷.

Therefore after a while Abū Ṭāhir was obliged to acknowledge that the Isfahāni had been an impostor who had led him astray and had him killed²⁸.

Regarding the events Abū Ṭāhir could perhaps reckon with certain sentiments for some aspects of Persian religious tradition among the Qarmātī community in Bahrayn. And there were evidently some links with established Zoroastrianism, for the chief priest of the Magians, Isfandiyār ibn Ādarbād, was accused of complicity with Abū Ṭāhir and executed by order of the caliph ar-Rādi (322/934-329/940) (al-Maṣūdī, Tanbih 104-105). But we think that the central incentives of the developments were implied in the traditional Ismāʿīlī doctrine and the expectations concerning the advent of the seventh Speaker-Prophet (nāṭiq), the Qāʾim-Mahdi. Ad-Dāhābi relates that exaggerated expectations were attached to Abū Ṭāhir’s personality by his followers, like those we mentioned in connection with the uprising in the Sawaʿd of Kūfa. He completes his account by saying that, “given no more delay by God, [Abū Ṭāhir] felt that his downfall was near, so he handed his power over to Abū l-Fadl al-Mağṣūsi al-ʿAğami.”

De Blois (1986:18) regards the Isfahāni as a puppet created by Abū Ṭāhir, who arranged the whole intermezzo in order to fulfill his plans of gaining more power. Halm’s (1991:235ff) careful reconstruction of the occurrences even depicts this obscure episode as a well-designed scenario, which comprises the capture of the young Persian (316/928), the arrangement of the predicted catastrophe with the disgrace of the sanctuary in Mecca (317/930), and also the disclosure of the youth’s divinity to the community (319/931).

After all this unfortunate experiment with the incarnate God had seriously demoralised the Qaramīta in Bahrayn and weakened their influence over the Ismāʿīlī communities in the East, the movement’s ideologists in the Iranian territories tried to restore the doctrinal unity of Qarmātī Ismāʿīlīs, with but little success. Abū
Alexander’s era for which prophecies attributed to Zoroaster and Ġámāisp were predicting the restoration of the reign of the Magians.

Among the reports of the emergence of the young Isfahāni, there is a particularly valuable Sunni eyewitness account from within the personal entourage of Abū Ṭāhir, by his personal physician24.

This doctor (a certain Ibn Ḥamdān) tells us how the power was handed over. According to his report, when the chief dā‘i was presenting the youth to the community, “the people, including the Qarmatī Abū Ṭāhir and his brothers, were staying around him. Then Abū Ṭāhir called out as loudly as he could: ‘You people! Know: We and you also were all donkeys! But now God has sent us this person’, and he pointed to the youth – ‘this is my Lord (bādā‘ rabbi) and your Lord (rabbukum), and my God (ilāhi) and your God (ilāhukum). We are all his slaves! The rule has now been transferred to him, and he will be king of us all (wa-huwa yamālutkunā kullanā).”

Then the eyewitness proceeds to narrate that Abū Ṭāhir and all the others took a handful of earth and strewed it over their heads. Thereupon Abū Ṭāhir declared: “Know, you people, that the [true] religion has now appeared. It is the religion of our father Adam (huwa din abīnā Adam) and all religions we have belonged to until now are null and void, and everything that the dā‘is have been telling you is null and void false, all the talk about Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad! The true religion is the original religion of Adam, and those are all wily deceivers, so curse them!” Then the people cursed them including Abraham, Muhammad, even “Ali and his descendants.”

The doctor’s report further states: “Abū Ṭāhir and the people used to circle around him [the incarnate God], completely naked, shouting: ‘Our God, he is mighty and exalted!’”

Heinz Halm was the first to interpret these ritual ceremonies correctly as a Qarmatī attempt at restoring the religion of Adam, a way of returning to Paradise25. The circling in the nudity of Paradise around the God who had become visible and walked among the men fits entirely into the early Ismā‘ī‘ī doctrine of the original religion of Paradise. A century later entirely similar ideas were to be found among the Druzes, who were also Ismā‘ī‘ī dissenter26.

According to our sources the Isfahāni who evidently took the astral sign to indicate the end of the era of world dominion by the Arabs and the beginning of the domination of the Persians, had initiated a number of strange ceremonies. He prescribed pederasty and incest with their own sisters for them, and he ordered that all beardless youths who refused should be put to death. He also ordered them to worship the fire and to cut off the hand of everybody who put out the fire with his hand or the tongue of everybody who extinguished it by blowing and then began to execute the notables of Bahrayn27.

Therefore after a while Abū Ṭāhir was obliged to acknowledge that the Isfahāni had been an impostor who had led him astray and had him killed28.

Regarding the events Abū Ṭāhir could perhaps reckon with certain sentiments for some aspects of Persian religious tradition among the Qarmatī community in Bahrayn. And there were evidently some links with established Zoroastrianism, for the chief priest of the Magians, Isfandiyār ibn Ādārābd, was accused of complicity with Abū Ṭāhir and executed by order of the caliph ar-Rādī (322/934-329/940) (al-Mas‘ūdi, Tanbih 104-105). But we think that the central incentives of the developments were implied in the traditional Ismā‘ī‘ī doctrine and the expectations concerning the advent of the seventh Speaker-Prophet (nātīq), the Qā‘im-Mahdi. Ad-Dahabi relates that exaggerated expectations were attached to Abū Ṭāhir’s personality by his followers, like those we mentioned in connection with the uprising in the Sā‘āđ of Kūfa. He completes his account by saying that, “given no more delay by God, [Abū Ṭāhir] felt that his downfall was near, so he handed his power over to Abū l-Fadl al-Muqṣūsī al-Ġaμami.”

De Blois (1986:18) regards the Isfahāni as a puppet created by Abū Ṭāhir, who arranged the whole intermezzo in order to fulfil his plans of gaining more power. Halm’s (1991:235ff) careful reconstruction of the occurrences even depicts this obscure episode as a well-designed scenario, which comprises the capture of the young Persian (316/928), the arrangement of the predicted catastrophe with the disgrace of the sanctuary in Mecca (317/930), and also the disclosure of the youth’s divinity to the community (319/931).

After all this unfortunate experiment with the incarnate God had seriously demoralised the Qaramita in Bahrayn and weakened their influence over the Ismā‘ī‘ī communities in the East, the movement’s ideologists in the Iranian territories tried to restore the doctrinal unity of Qarmati Ismā‘ī‘īs, with but little success. Abū
Tähir and his advisers were, nevertheless, able to maintain their power. The Muslim rites were restored to their rightful position, since the Mahdi still had not arrived. A century later, Näsir-i Ḥosrö (d. 481/1089), the ismā'īli dā'ū and famous traveler and author, reported that the Qarmata of Bahrayn still believed they were in the era of the Prophet Muhammad and of Islam, and they abstained from drinking wine. He also relates the interesting details, certified for the most part by Abū-1 cAlá al-Macarrí (d. 449/1057) (Gufran III, 235) that the Qarmata community had continued to await the Šarīf Abū Sa'id's return from death [sic!], as he himself had promised.

It is worth mentioning that the expectation of the return of the Hidden Imäm remained a popular eschatological belief. By 483/1092, the underground passage to a water well (sardáb) in Sāmarrá', where the Hidden Imäm, Muhammad al-Mahdi, was believed to have disappeared in 260/874, had become a place of pilgrimage. At about the same time, the šī'ī inhabitants of the city of Kāşān in central Iran are reported to have expected the return of the Mahdi and regularly organized processions on horseback, fully armed, determined to return with him only. Similar outward demonstrations of šī'ī eschatological expectation are reported by Ibn Bābüya (d. 381/991) and Ibn Haldūn (d. 809/1406) in the 8/14th century.  

In the case of the Qarmātīs of Bahrayn the former idea of the Mahdi had, in about a century, crystallized as a myth, and some facets of the theocratic attributes of the Īmām-Mahḍī were inherited by the founder of the da'wa in the region as was bound to happen in other areas and times too in a šī'ī milieu. Incidentally, the intermezzo of the Pseudo-Mahdi in Bahrayn gave rise to the persistent charges of Sunni polemicists and other adversaries of the Ismā'īlis that the core of their doctrine was a dualist atheism and that its founders were some non-ʿAlīd heretics plotting to destroy Islam from within, and so they gradually created the šī'ī legend of the Imām-Mahḍī of Bahrayn.

The lack of a united leadership and the ideological disagreement among the Qarmātīs evidently aided the Fatimid efforts to regain the allegiance of the dissenting Ismā'īlī communities in the East. The qarmātī dā'ī could either remain loyal to their original eschatological ideas, or accept a secularization of the role of the Mahdi, whose manifestation would then be understood symbolically, as the dynastic revolution brought by the Fatimid. Some missionaries attempted to achieve a compromise between loyalty to a secular power and the eschatological import of their original belief (Cortese 1993:68). It is not difficult to appreciate that the expectation of the imminent return of the Mahdi-Qa'im and the concomitant advent of the primeval lawlessness and paradisiacal religions must have contributed significantly to the popular appeal of the Ismā'īli da'wa. But it was not long before the delay in the messianic arrival caused problems for the Qarmātīs; thus the Iranian dā'ī Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāżī from Rayy had been obliged to flee when the date predicted by him for the return of the Mahdi passed uneventfully, and in Bahrayn in 319/931 a pseudo-Mahdi had even been presented, and the Islamic Sacred law declared to be annulled. Likewise the Fatimid in the period following their ascent to power faced a problem similar to the movement which had preceded them. This problem was partly one of wrestling with the expectations of the people who had supported the movement when it was still seeking to gain power. By establishing a dynasty of Imāms in the Fatimid da'wa the return of the Mahdi-Qa'im was pushed into the distant future. By the 5/11th century, it was evident that the Fatimid imām-caliphs, despite having established a powerful empire, had not realised the promises which had given the dynasty its messianic character. Thus the overthrowing of the 'Abbasids and the unity of the whole Muslim community under the guidance of the Imām had been unfulfilled. But the messianic expectations and the event then latent antimessianic inclinations remained virulent and at the beginning of the century broke out in the full-scale antimessianic movement of the Druzes. Their chief dā'ī maintained that the era of the Qā'im (qiyāma) had begun, and the Caliph al-Hākim (386/996-411/1021) was God and that the Islamic revelation and its Ismā'īli interpretation were superstitious. Followers of the worship of the Caliph al-Hākim seem to have been eager to precipitate events by proclaiming the abolition of all beliefs including the Sacred law of Islam (ṣāriʿa) and its esoteric (bātinī) interpretation. Far less disastrous and more durable was the proclamation of the Great Resurrection (qiyamat) or Resurrection of the Resurrections (qiyamat-i qiyamat) by the Nizārī Ismā'īlis two centuries later.

We shall now devote some reflections to the problem of the place of Paradise in the thought of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs. We may start with some remarks about their historical background. At the end of 5th/11th century the unified Ismā'īli da'wa and community of Fatimid times were split into rival Musta'lli and Nizārī branches. The schism resulted from the dispute over the succession to the Fatimid caliph-imām al-Mustansir (d. 487/1094). The Nizārī had broken off the Fatimid in this schism, upholding the Imāmate of Nizār, the ousted older son of the caliph al-Mustansir.
Tahir and his advisers were, nevertheless, able to maintain their power. The Muslim rites were restored to their rightful position, since the Mahdi still had not arrived.

A century later, Nāṣīr-i Ḥosrö (d. 481/1091), the Ismā'ili dā'ī and famous traveler and author, reported that the Qaramīts of Bahrayn still believed they were in the era of the Prophet Muhammad and of Islam, and they abstained from drinking wine. He also relates the interesting details, certified for the most part by Abū-l Ḥāṣım al-Qaramī (d. 449/1057) (Gūfārī III, 235) that the Qaramī community had continued to await the Šarīf Abū Sa‘īd’s return from death [sic!], as he himself had promised.

It is worth mentioning that the expectation of the return of the Hidden Imām remained a popular eschatological belief. By 483/1092, the underground passage to a water well (sardāb) in Sāmarrā‘, where the Hidden Imām, Muhammad al-Mahdī, was believed to have disappeared in 260/874, had become a place of pilgrimage. At about the same time, the šī‘ī inhabitants of the city of Kāšān in central Iran are reported to have expected the return of the Mahdī and regularly organized processions on horseback, fully armed, determined to return with him only. Similar outward demonstrations of šī‘ī eschatological expectation are reported by Ibn Bābüya (d. 381/991) and Ibn Haldūn (d. 809/1406) in the 8/14th century.

In the case of the Qaramīts of Bahrayn the former idea of the Mahdī had, in about a century, crystallized as a myth, and some facets of the theocratic attributes of the Imām-Mahdī were inherited by the founder of the dā‘wa in the region as was bound to happen in other areas and times too in a šī‘ī milieu.

Incidentally, the intermezzo of the Pseudo-Mahdī in Bahrayn gave rise to the persistent charges of Sunni polemics and other adversaries of the Ismā‘īlis that the core of their doctrine was a dualist atheism and that its founders were some non-‘Alid heretics plotting to destroy Islam from within, and so they gradually created the ‘black legend’ of the Ismā‘īliyya.

The lack of a united leadership and the ideological disagreement among the Qaramīts evidently aided the Fātimids’ efforts to regain the allegiance of the dissident Ismā‘īlī communities in the East. The qaramī dā‘īs could either remain loyal to their original eschatological ideas, or accept a secularization of the role of the Mahdī, whose manifestation would then be understood symbolically, as the dynastic revolution brought by the Fātimids. Some missionaries attempted to achieve a compromise between loyalty to a secular power and the eschatological import of their original belief (Cortese 1993:68).

It is not difficult to appreciate that the expectation of the imminent return of the Mahdī-Qā‘īm and the concomitant advent of the primordial lawlessness and ‘paradisaical religions’ must have contributed significantly to the popular appeal of the Ismā‘īli dā‘wa. But it was not long before the delay in the messianic arrival caused problems for the Qaramīts; thus the Iranian dā‘ī Abū Ḥāṣım ar-Rāzī from Rayy had been obliged to flee when the date predicted by him for the return of the Mahdī passed uneventfully, and in Bahrayn in 319/931 a pseudo-Mahdī had even been presented and the Islamic Sacred law declared to be annulled.

Likewise the Fātimids in the period following their ascent to power faced a problem similar to the movement which had preceded them. This problem was partly one of wrestling with the expectations of the people who had supported the movement when it was still seeking to gain power. By establishing a dynasty of imams in the Fātimid dā‘wa the return of the Mahdī-Qā‘īm was pushed into the distant future. By the 5/11th century, it was evident that the Fātimid imām/caliphs, despite having established a powerful empire, had not realised the promises which had given the dynasty its messianic character. Thus the overthrowing of the ‘Abbāsids and the uniting of the whole Muslim community under the guidance of the Imām had been unfulfilled. But the messianic expectations and the even then latent antimessianic inclinations remained virulent and at the beginning of the century broke out in the full-scale antimessianic movement of the Druzes. Their chief dā‘īs maintained that the era of the Qā‘īm (qiyāma) had begun, and the Caliph al-Ḥakīm (386/996-411/1021) was God and that the Islamic revelation and its Ismā‘īli interpretation were superstitions. Followers of the worship of the Caliph al-Ḥakīm seem to have been eager to precipitate events by proclaiming the abolition of all beliefs including the Sacred law of Islam (ṣarī‘a) and its esoteric (ḥātīn) interpretation.

Far less disastrous and more durable was the proclamation of the Great Resurrection (qiyāmat-i qiyāmat) or Resurrection of the Resurrections (qiyāmat-i qiyāmat) by the Nizārī Ismā‘īlis two centuries later.

We shall now devote some reflections to the problem of the place of Paradise in the thought of the Nizārī Ismā‘īlis. We may start with some remarks about their historical background. At the end of 5th/11th century the unified Ismā‘īli dā‘wa and community of Fātimid times were split into rival Musta‘lī and Nizārī branches. The schism resulted from the dispute over the succession to the Fātimid caliph-imām al-Mustansīr (d. 487/1094). The Nizārīs had broken off the Fātimids in this schism, upholding the Imāmate of Nizār, the ousted older son of the caliph al-Mustansīr.

---

31 See the so-called Baghdād Manifesto of 403/1011 and of 444/1052 in Abūl-Fidā‘, Tārīkh II, 142-143, and Ibn al-технологий, Kāmil VIII, 73, 310-311, and about their ‘heretics’ see ibid Baghdād, Farruq 282, Modern 107, Niẓām al-Mulk, Siyyāsātnama 255-7-9, The Book of Government 188; Cf. Daftary, 1991:109, 111, 149, 194, 220.
Some Nizaris believed later that their Imam was in occultation and would return as the Qa'im-Mahdi.

The Isma'ili s of Persia by this time were already under the leadership of Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 518/1124) who in the succession dispute upheld the right of Nizar, the original heir-designate, who had been deprived of his succession rights. Hasan-i Sabbah, as the representative (huğğa) of the absent imam, founded an independent Nizari Isma'ili state and mission centred at the mountain fortress of Alamut in Northern Persia. In due course, the Nizari Isma'ili s also established a subordinate state in Northern Syria.

In the political field, Hasan-i Sabbah initiated a policy of armed revolt from a network of mountain fortresses against the Salquq sultanate backed by the Sunni establishment. In confrontation with the overwhelming military power of the Salguq opponents, Hasan-i Sabbah introduced the policy of spectacular murders of leading politicians and religious dignitaries by his fearless warriors or self-sacrificing devotees (fidā'i) for the purpose of intimidation and deterrence. The conduct of the Nizari emissaries seemed so irrational to the opponents that they called them hashish addicts (başişyayan).

At the same time the Nizari s had been waiting impatiently since Nizar's death for the appearance of their Imam, who would personally take charge of their leadership and guide them in those troubled times.

In the doctrinal field, Hasan-i Sabbah underlined their doctrinal independence by elaborating a new missionary doctrine which became known as the new preaching (da'wa, ḍadidj) in the history of the Isma'iliya. In a theological treatise he restated the inadequacy of human reason in knowing God and understanding the religious truths, arguing for the necessity of an authoritative teacher (mu'allim-i sadiq) for the spiritual guidance of mankind, and he concluded that this trustworthy teacher is none other than the Isma'ili imam of the time. Thus Hasan-i Sabbah reaffirmed the central teaching of the old Shi'i doctrine of the imamate, which now became commonly known as the doctrine of ta'lim or of divinely inspired and authoritative teaching by the imam. But the doctrinal innovation of Hasan-i Sabbah was hardly a radical challenge to Islam; yet by exalting the autonomous teaching authority of each imam in his time, in independence from his predecessors, he paved the way for the great outburst of radical religious activity and the antinomian tendencies of the later Alamut period, namely of qiyâma times.

As regards the notion of Paradise in the Nizari community, it is worth mentioning that by the 6th/12th century Muslims had long been familiar with the Islamic traditions, rooted in the Qur'an, which held that pious believers, those who feared God and followed the right path, as well as martyrs of Islam, would be guaranteed an eternal place in Paradise as their deserved reward in the afterlife. For the Shi'i Muslims, their imams would also ensure through their intercessory role on the Day of Judgement that their followers should receive their just reward by being admitted into Paradise (Ayyoub 1978:198-199, 204-205, 207, 210, 217, 221-222, 229). The Nizari Isma'ilis of the only rightful imam of the time, certainly expected to qualify as a saved community destined for salvation and the state of paradise in the afterlife.

There were, however, more specific reasons why the Nizaris in general and their emissaries (fidā'i) in particular expected to be deserving of Paradise. Ever since the martyrdom of the imam al-Husayn and his companions in 60/680, the theme of martyrdom had occupied a particular place in the Shi'i ethos, which accorded a unique status, comparable to that of pious believers, to those devotees who gave their lives in the service of their creed and of their imam. This was, indeed, the manner in which the fidā'is were viewed by the rest of the Nizari community during the Alamut period. These Nizari emissaries, whether they returned safely from their missions or lost their lives as martyrs, were held in high esteem, attested to by the rolls of honour kept at Alamut and other major Nizari fortresses. A rare instance of its kind is a poem by Ra'is Hasan, a Persian Nizari historian, poet and functionary of the early 7th/13th century, in which the three fidā'is who had killed a Turkish amir are praised for their self-sacrificing behaviour which had entitled them to the joys of the otherworldly Paradise (Daftary 1995:98). Similar ideas are echoed in the scattered and brief references to the fidā'is in Muslim historical sources. They reveal, for instance, that the mothers of the fidā'is would happily expect their sons to become martyrs and as such enter Paradise.

Nevertheless, the Paradise conception of the Nizari community appears most definitely in the subsequent events. Their eschatological expectations and desires for Paradise culminated simultaneously when in 559/1164 on the astrologically determined date of 17th Ramadân/8th August the fourth Lord of Alamut, Hasan

---

35 For the time being, the Nizarî da'wa once more reverted to the notion of occultation (geyba) and propagated the idea of a hidden anonymous imam. Cf. Halm 1988:186.
38 The date was of significance to the Isma'ili s for two reasons: firstly, it marked the anniversary of the day that Imam 'Ali had been killed [40/661]. Secondly, it fell in the middle of Ramadân, a time when the Muslims generally were required to fast during the hours of daylight and eat only a very restricted range of foods during the hours of darkness.
Some Nizáríis believed later that their Imám was in occultation and would return as the Qā'im-Mahdí.

The Ismá'ílis of Persia by this time were already under the leadership of Hasan-i Sabbáh (d. 518/1124) who in the succession dispute upheld the right of Nizár, the original heir-designate, who had been deprived of his succession rights. Hasan-i Sabbáh, as the representative (huğğa) of the absent imám, founded an independent Nizárí Ismá'íli state and mission centred at the mountain fortress of Alamut in Northern Persia. In due course, the Nizárí Ismá'ílis also established a subordinate state in Northern Syria.

In the political field, Hasan-i Sabbáh initiated a policy of armed revolt from a network of mountain fortresses against the Salguq sultanate backed by the Sunni establishment. In confrontation with the overwhelming military power of the Salguq opponents, Hasan-i Sabbáh introduced the policy of spectacular murders of leading politicians and religious dignitaries by his fearless warriors or self-sacrificing devotees (fidá'í) for the purpose of intimidation and deterrence. The conduct of the Nizárí emissaries seemed so irrational to the opponents that they called them hashish addicts (baṣīšīyān).

At the same time the Nizáríis had been waiting impatiently since Nizár's death for the appearance of their Imám, who would personally take charge of their leadership and guide them in those troubled times.

In the doctrinal field, Hasan-i Sabbáh underlined their doctrinal independence by elaborating a new missionary doctrine which became known as the new preaching (da'wā ḍaḍīda) in the history of the Ismá'íliya. In a theological treatise he restated the inadequacy of human reason in knowing God and understanding the religious truths, arguing for the necessity of an authoritative teacher (mu'allim-i sáðiq) for the spiritual guidance of mankind, and he concluded that this trustworthy teacher is none other than the Ismá'íli imám of the time. Thus Hasan-i Sabbáh reaffirmed the central teaching of the old Shi'i doctrine of the imámate, which now became commonly known as the doctrine of ta'lim or of divinely inspired and authoritative teaching by the imám. But the doctrinal innovation of Hasan-i Sabbáh was hardly a radical challenge to Islam; yet by exalting the autonomous teaching authority of each imám in his time, in independence from his predecessors, he paved the way for the great outburst of radical religious activity and the antimonian tendencies of the later Alamut period, namely of qiyāma times.

As regards the notion of Paradise in the Nizárí community, it is worth mentioning that by the 6th/12th century Muslims had long been familiar with the Islamic traditions, rooted in the Qur'an, which held that pious believers, those who feared God and followed the right path, as well as martyrs of Islam, would be guaranteed an eternal place in Paradise as their deserved reward in the afterlife. For the Shi'i Muslims, their imáms would also ensure through their intercessory role on the Day of Judgement that their followers should receive their just reward by being admitted into Paradise.

There were, however, more specific reasons why the Nizáríis in general and their emissaries (fidá'í) in particular expected to be deserving of Paradise. Ever since the martyrdom of the imám al-Husayn and his companions in 60/680, the theme of martyrology had occupied a particular place in the Shi'i ethos, which accorded a unique status, comparable to that of pious believers, to those devotees who gave their lives in the service of their creed and of their imám. This was, indeed, the manner in which the fidá'ís were viewed by the rest of the Nizárí community during the Alamut period. These Nizárí emissaries, whether they returned safely from their missions or lost their lives as martyrs, were held in high esteem, attested to by the rolls of honour kept at Alamut and other major Nizárí fortresses. A rare instance of its kind is a poem by Ra'ís Hasan, a Persian Nizárí historian, poet and functionary of the early 7th/13th century, in which the three fidá'ís who had killed a Turkish amir are praised for their self-sacrificing behaviour which had entitled them to the joys of the otherworldly Paradise.

Nevertheless, the Paradise conception of the Nizárí community appears most definitely in the subsequent events. Their eschatological expectations and desires for Paradise culminated simultaneously when in 559/1164 on the astrologically determined date of 17th Ramadán/8th August the fourth Lord of Alamut, Hasan

---

35 For the time being, the Nizárí da'wā once more reverted to the notion of occultation (gâyba) and propagated the idea of a hidden anonymous imám. Cf. Halm 1988:186.
declared in the third year of his reign that the qiyāma, the era of the Qā'im, had begun and that the Islamic Sacred law (fiṣrā), which had until then been rigorously observed, was abrogated on the orders of the Hidden imām.

The accounts of what happened are preserved in the later Ismāʿīlī sources and also in the somewhat different reports in Persian Ilkhānī chronicles written after the fall of Alamūt. They provide information on these curious events. On the 17th day of the month of Ramadan in the year 559 (8 August 1164) Hasan ordered the erection of a pulpit (minbar) in the courtyard of Alamūt, facing West, with four great banners of four colours – white, red, yellow, and green – at the four corners. The people from different regions, whom he had previously summoned to Alamūt, were assembled in the courtyard – those from the East on the right side, those from the West on the left side, and those from the North in front, facing the pulpit. As the pulpit faced West the congregants were all standing with their backs toward Mecca. In the morning 'the inhabitants of the worlds, gīnns, men and angels', he announced that a message had come to him from the Hidden Imām, with new guidance. And then he said: "The Imām of our time has sent you His blessing and His compassion, and has called you His special chosen servants. He has freed you from the burden of the rules of the Sacred Law, and has brought you to the Resurrection".

And what is more the Hidden Imām required in His message that His šī'a must obey and follow Hasan 'alā dikrihi s-salām as His deputy (hālifs) in all religious and temporal matters, recognize His commands as binding, and regard His word as that of the imām. After completing his address, Hasan 'alā dikrihi s-salām stepped down from the pulpit and performed the two prostrations (rakāt) of the festival prayer (namāz-i 'id). Then He invited the people to join at a table which had already been prepared for the breaking of their fast. He declared that day the Festival of Resurrection (īd-i qiyāmat) and the people feasted and made merry. Messengers were sent to carry the glad tidings to East and West. The Nizāri communities in Quhistān followed suit. Islamic worship was forbidden on pain of punishment. The Ilkhānī sources also relate: "And that day on which these ignominies were divulged and these evils proclaimed in that nest of heretics, Muʿmīnībād, that assembly played harp and rebeck and openly drank wine upon the very steps of the pulpit and within its precincts".

In Syria too the word was received, and the faithful celebrated the end of the law (al-Bustān al-Gāmī 136). Accounts of a different kind relating to the proclamation of the Resurrection are to be found in the work of the Mamlūk historian Ibn ad-Dawadārī (d. 713/1313). He states that "the Ismāʿīlīs changed the Islamic religion and drank wine, had intercourse with daughters, mothers and sisters and did all the things forbidden in the month of Ramadan all day and night. They also burned all their mosques, shrines and pulpits".

The solemn and ritual infringement of the law – the congregants with their backs towards Mecca, the afternoon banquet in the midst of the fast – mark the culmination of eschatological expectations and strong antinomian tendencies which is recurrent in the Ismāʿīlīyya and has unambiguous parallels in the milieu of the Qārāmīta and, later, of the Druzes.

One wonders, however, what the introduction of these doctrines might have actually meant to the Nizāris in Persia and Syria. From the limited information which is available, it appears that the qiyāma, the awaited 'Last Day' – when mankind would be judged and committed for ever to either Paradise or Hell – was interpreted spiritually on the basis of the well-known Ismāʿīlī method of esoteric interpretation (tawiḵ)9. On this basis it was explained that the qiyāma meant the manifestation of the unveiled truth (haqqa) in the person of the Nizārī imām. This implied that the era (dawr) of the Sacred law (šarīʿa) and outer reality (zahir) had come to an end and the era of inner reality (bāṭin) had begun. All members of the Nizārī community could know God and the cosmic mysteries through the Imām, and God would constantly be in their hearts. The essence of these ideas, in Ġūwaynī's words,

[w]as that, following the Philosophers, they spoke of the World as being uncreated and Time as unlimited and the Resurrection as spiritual [...]. It was laid down in the Sacred law that men must worship God five times a day and be with Him. That charge was only formal but now in the Resurrection they must always

---


40 Abū ʿIṣḥāq Quhistānī, Ḥaṣb Bah 41, Kālām-i Pir 60-61, 115-117; Cf. Lewis 1985:72.


42 The idea of the messianic banquet is found in both the Jewish and Christian traditions where it is mentioned as the way in which the advent of the Millennium would be celebrated. Jesus said: 'And I will set up for you a kingdom [ ...] that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom'. Luke, 22.30. Cf. Zabdat 200, 202, 204.

The accounts of what happened are preserved in the later Ismāʿīli sources and also in the somewhat different reports in Persian Ilkhanid chronicles written after the fall of Alamūt. They provide information on these curious events. On the 17th day of the month of Ramadān in the year 559 (8 August 1164) Hasan ordered the erection of a pulpit (minbar) in the courtyard of Alamūt, facing West, with four great banners of four colours - white, red, yellow, and green - at the four corners. The people from different regions, whom he had previously summoned to Alamūt, were assembled in the courtyard - those from the East on the right side, those from the West on the left side, and those from the North in front, facing the pulpit. As the pulpit faced West the congregants were all standing with their backs toward Mecca. Then - says an Ismāʿīli report - “towards noon, the Lord (Hasan ‘alā dikrīhi s-salām), wearing a white garment and a white turban, came down from the castle pulpit facing West the congregants were all standing with their backs toward Mecca.

And what is more the Hidden Imam required in His message that His ši‘a must obey and follow Hasan ‘alā dikrīhi s-salām as His deputy (halifa) in all religious and temporal matters, recognize His commands as binding, and regard his word as that of the imām. After completing his address, Hasan ‘alā dikrīhi s-salām stepped down from the pulpit and performed the two prostrations (rakāt) of the festival prayer (namāz-i ‘id). Then He invited the people to join at a table which had been prepared for the breaking of their fast. He declared that day the Festival of Resurrection (ʿīd-i qiyāmat) and the people feasted and made merry. Messengers were sent to carry the glad tidings to East and West. The Nizārī communities in Quhistan followed suit. Islamic worship was forbidden on pain of punishment. The Ilkhanid sources also relate: “And that day on which these ignoracies were divulged and these evils proclaimed in that nest of heretics, Muʿīnibābūd, that assembly played harp and rebek and openly drank wine upon the very steps of the pulpit and within its precincts”. In Syria too the word was received, and the faithful celebrated the end of the law (al-Bustān al-Gāmî) Accounts of a different kind relating to the proclamation of the Resurrection are to be found in the work of the Mamluk historian Ibn ad-Dawādārī (d. 713/1313). He states that “the Ismāʿīlis changed the Islamic religion and drank wine, had intercourse with daughters, mothers and sisters and did all the things forbidden in the month of Ramadān all day and night. They also burned all their mosques, shrines and pulpits” (Ibn ad-Dawādārī, Kanz VI, 562-58).

The solemn and ritual infringement of the law - the congregants with their backs towards Mecca, the afternoon banquet in the midst of the fast - mark the culmination of eschatological expectations and strong antinomian tendencies which is recurrent in the Ismāʿīlya and has unambiguous parallels in the milieu of the Qarāmītā and, later, of the Druzes.

One wonders, however, what the introduction of these doctrines might have actually meant to the Nizārīs in Persia and Syria. From the limited information which is available, it appears that the qiyāma, the awaited ‘Last Day’ - when mankind would be judged and committed for ever to either Paradise or Hell - was interpreted spiritually on the basis of the well-known Ismāʿīli method of esoteric interpretation (ta‘wīl). On this basis it was explained that the qiyāma meant the manifestation of the unveiled truth (haqiqa) in the person of the Nizārī imām. This implied that the era (dawr) of the Sacred law (lawḥa) and outer reality (zahir) had come to an end and the era of inner reality (batīn) had begun. All members of the Nizārī community could know God and the cosmic mysteries through the Imām, and God would constantly be in their hearts. The essence of these ideas, in Ġūwaynī’s words, “wjas that, following the Philosophers, they spoke of the World as being uncreated and Time as unlimited and the Resurrection as spiritual [...] It was laid down in the Sacred law that men must worship God five times a day and be with Him. That charge was only formal but now in the Resurrection they must always

40 Abū Isḥāq Quhīstānī, Ḥaft Bah 41, Kalam-i Pir 60-61, 115-117; Cf. Lewis 1985:72.
42 The idea of the messianic banquet is found in both the Jewish and Christian traditions where it is mentioned as the way in which the advent of the Millennium would be celebrated. Jesus said: ‘And I appoint unto you a kingdom [...] that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom’. Luke, 22.30. Cf. Cortese, 1993:159, n.35.
be with God in their hearts and keep the faces of their souls constantly turned in the direction of the Divine Presence, for such is true prayer\(^\text{46}\)6.

According to their beliefs only the Nizâris Iṣmâ'îli, - as the sole community of the true believers acknowledging the rightful imâm of the time - were capable of understanding the spiritual reality and the true meaning of all religions and, as such, Paradise had been created for them in this world. The Nizâris were henceforth collectively admitted into Paradise and their mission (da'wâ) implied an invitation into that paradisical state. By contrast, all other religious communities, who continued to adhere to the shell of the law, were condemning themselves to the Hell of spiritual non-being (Daftary 1995:41, 99).

The Ilhâmid historians relate that, in line with the expectations regarding the time of Resurrection, the Sacred law of Islam was abrogated in the Nizâri community\(^\text{5} \)6. “The true believers”, as was fitting in Paradise, could henceforth dispense with the obligations specified by the letter of law, since they had now found access to the meanings hidden behind those commandments. In another passage of his chronicle Ibn ad-Dawâdârî relates that at the time when the Ḥwârâzmşâh was proceeding towards the (Iṣmâ'îlî) territories Hasan ibn Muhammad (\('\text{ala dikrihi s-sâli\(m\))\) dreamed of the Imam ʻAli ibn Abî Tâlib who told him to relinquish the Sacred law of Islam its obligations and the sumna. Hasan, supposedly addressing himself to the believers, stated that because he had the right to impose the sâri\(a\), he also had the right to remove it\(^\text{48}\)\). According to the Sunni chroniclers, it was for their abolition of sâri\(a\) that the Nizâris became designated as heretics (malâhâdâ)\(^\text{49}\)\).

There are indications that among the Syrian Nizâris, who lived far away from Alamût in a different environment, the doctrine of qiyyâma, or more specifically its local version, was not fully understood by all the factions of the community. The sources mentioning the so-called episode of the ʻPurees (ṣuʃâf) state that these Nizâris in the Ġabal as-Summaq committed all sorts of forbidden actions and indulged in libertine practices in the belief that the exoteric rules of the sacred law (sâri\(a\)) were no longer to be observed after the proclamation of the qiyyâma at Alamût. Therefore those extremists, in order to celebrate this new freedom, held festivities alleged to have been accompanied by unlawful incidents\(^\text{50}\)\).

Both the anonymous chronicle al-Bustân al-Ṣâmi and Ibn Ğubayr (d. 614/1217) in his travels (Rihla) mention these events, and the Bustân gives the date as 561/1165. Ibn al-ʻAdîm (d. 660/1262) puts the date for the episode of the Șuʃâf some years later, at 572/1176-7. But the sources, with the exception of Ibn al-ʻAdîm, do not state that the contemporary head of the Syrian da\(\'\text{wa}Ra\(sh\)îd ad-Dîn Sinân (d. 588/1193), was responsible for the alleged debauchery in Ġabal al-Summaq. Nor is there in the sources any mention of the role of Alamût in these events.

Ibn al-ʻAdîm relates that a certain Șefîd from the district of al-Ǧazr said that Rašîd ad-Dîn Sinân had told the communities to live together in purity, to help one another, and co-operate in the full sense of the word. The people of al-Ǧazr went to Ġabal al-Summaq and said that they had been ordered to live in purity, and so on. Ibn al-ʻAdîm ends his account with the statement that Rašîd ad-Dîn Sinân summoned these people to the fortresses where he punished them and put some of them to death\(^\text{51}\)\).

Certainly such episodes provided further suitable excuses for the Muslim opponents of the Nizâris to accuse them of the outright abandonment of the law and of engaging in antinomian actions.

The declaration of the qiyyâma was later elaborated in terms of a theological doctrine and effectively replaced the doctrine of ta\(lîm\) as the pivot of Nizâri thought. In this capacity, it initiated a new spiritual and esoteric era in the life of the Nizâri community. Nevertheless, it represents the most controversial episode in the entire Nizâri history. Its impetus could not be permanently sustained. After the death of Hasan (II) ʻala dikrihi s-sâli\(m\) (561/1166) his son Muhammad (II) (561/1166 - 601/1210) claimed for the first time that he and his father were true descendants of the Fâṭimid Nizâr and thus were themselves Imâm-Qâ\(i\(m\) who bring in the qiyyâma and repeal the law replacing an apocalyptic Mahdi-Qâ\(i\(m\). But half a century later Hasan's second successor, Ġalâl ad-Dîn Hasan (III) put an end to the episode of qiyyâma, reintroduced the sâri\(a\) and made peace with an-Nâṣîr (575/1180 - 622/1225), the Sunnî ʻAbbâsid caliph of Bağdâd, whose political power and religious authority were considerably increasing at that time.

The proclamation of the qiyyâma has been the object of different interpretation by modern scholarship. Hodgson understood the introduction of the qiyyâma as "a declaration of independence of sovereign authority; they [the Nizâris] refused to guide

---


47 There is a different opinion among some modern sumâ\(i\)li scholars regarding Hasan's ʻala dikrihi s-sâli\(m\) proclamation. Esmâî & Nanji declare that 'However, the current view among some historians that the proclamation [of qiyyâma] involved an abrogation of shari\(a\) has never been substantiated.' Esmâî & Nanji 1977:249.

48 Ibn ad-Dawâdârî, Kanz VIII, 146. These informations indicate that the author had access sources different from those used by the Ilhâmid historians.


be with God in their hearts and keep the faces of their souls constantly turned in the
direction of the Divine Presence, for such is true prayer"46.

According to their beliefs only the Nizâris Isma'îlis, as the sole community of
the true believers acknowledging the rightful imâm of the time were capable of
understanding the spiritual reality and the true meaning of all religions and, as such,
Paradise had been created for them in this world. The Nizâris were henceforth
collectively admitted into Paradise and their mission (da'wâ) implied an invitation
into that paradisical state. By contrast, all other religious communities, who
continued to adhere to the shell of the law, were condemning themselves to the Hell

The Ilhânid historians relate that, in line with the expectations regarding the time
of Resurrection, the Sacred law of Islam was abrogated in the Nizâri community47.
"The true believers", as was fitting in Paradise, could henceforth dispense with the
obligations specified by the letter of law, since they had now found access to the
meanings hidden behind those commandments. In another passage of his chronicle Ibn ad-Dawâdârî relates that at the time when the Hâwarzmshâh was proceeding
towards the (Isma'îli) territories Hasan ibn Muhammad ('alâ dikrihi s-sâlâm)
dreamed of the Imâm 'Ali ibn Abî Talîb who told him to relinquish the Sacred law
of Islam its obligations and the sunna. Hasan, supposedly addressing himself to the
believers, stated that because he had the right to impose the sârî'a, he also had the
right to remove it48. According to the Sunni chroniclers, it was for their abolition
of sârî'a that the Nizâris became designated as heretics (malâhida)49.

There are indications that among the Syrian Nizâris, who lived far away from
Alâmût in a different environment, the doctrine of qiyyâma, or more specifically its
local version, was not fully understood by all the factions of the community. The
sources mentioning the so-called episode of the »Pures« (sûfât) state that these Nizâris
in the Gabal as-Summaq committed all sorts of forbidden actions and indulged in
libertine practices in the belief that the exoteric rules of the sacred law (sârî'a) were
no longer to be observed after the proclamation of the qiyyâma at Alamût. Therefore

47 There is a different opinion among some modern sunnî scholars regarding Hasan's 'alâ dikrihi s-sâlâm proclamation. Esmaîl and Nanji declare that 'However, the current view among some historians that the proclamation [of qiyyâma] involved an abrogation of shari'a has never been substantiated.' Esmaîl & Nanji 1977:249.
48 Ibn ad-Dawâdârî, Kanz VIII, 146. These informations indicate that the author had access to sources different from those used by the Ilhânid historians.

those extremists, in order to celebrate this new freedom, held festivities alleged to
have been accompanied by unlawful incidents50.

Both the anonymous chronicle al-Bustân al-Ğâmî and Ibn Ğubayrî (d. 614/1217)
in his travels (Rihla) mention these events, and the Bustân gives the date as 561/1165.
Ibn al-'Adîm (d. 660/1226) puts the date for the episode of the Sûfât some years
later, at 572/1176-7. But the sources, with the exception of Ibn al-'Adîm, do not state
that the contemporary head of the Syrian da'wâ Râšîd ad-Dîn Sinân (d. 588/1193),
was responsible for the alleged debauchery in Ğabal as-Summaq. Nor is there in the
sources any mention of the role of Alamût in these events.

Ibn al-'Adîm relates that a certain Șeyh from the district of al-Ğazr said that Râšîd
ad-Dîn Sinân had told the communities to live together in purity, to help one
another, and co-operate in the full sense of the word. The people of al-Ğazr went to
Alâmût as-Summaq and said that they had been ordered to live in purity, and so on.
Ibn al-'Adîm ends his account with the statement that Râšîd ad-Dîn Sinân
summoned these people to the fortresses where he punished them and put some of
them to death51.

Certainly such episodes provided further suitable excuses for the Muslim
opponents of the Nizâris to accuse them of the outright abandonment of the law
and of engaging in antinomian actions.

The declaration of the qiyyâma was later elaborated in terms of a theological
doctrine and effectively replaced the doctrine of talîm as the pivot of Nizâri
thought. In this capacity, it initiated a new spiritual and esoteric era in the life of the
Nizâri community. Nevertheless, it represents the most controversial episode in the
entire Nizâri history. Its impetus could not be permanently sustained. After the
death of Hasan (II) ('alâ dikrihi s-sâlâm 561/1166) his son Muhammad (II) (561/1166
- 601/1201) claimed for the first time that he and his father were true descendants
of the Fâtimid Nîzâr and thus were themselves Imâm-Qâ'im who bring in the
qiyyâma and repeal the law replacing an apocalyptic Mahdî-Qâ'im. But half a century
later Hasan's second successor, Ğalâl ad-Dîn Hasan (III) put an end to the episode
of qiyyâma, reintroduced the sârî'a and made peace with an-Nâsir (575/1180
- 622/1225), the Sunni 'Abbasîd caliph of Baghdad, whose political power and religious
authority were considerably increasing at that time.

The proclamation of the qiyyâma has been the object of different interpretation by
modern scholarship. Hodgson understood the introduction of the qiyyâma as "a declaration
of independence of sovereign authority; they [the Nizâris] refused to guide

50 Ibn al-'Adîm, Zubdat III, 22, 31-12, 38-39; al-Bustân al-Ğâmî 136; Ibn Ğubayrî, Rihla 224, 229,
themselves by what Islamic society might think of them. But the same time it was an admission of defeat in the attempt to take over Islam at large" (Hodgson 1955:57).

According to Ivanow the revelation of the secret doctrine through the proclamation of qiyâma was a reward to the Nizârî community for the suffering which had accompanied its religious and military life for decades\(^5\). Stroeva saw the revelation as a means adopted by Hasan (II) to abolish class distinction between the Ismâ'îlî élite and the masses (1960:24-25). Buckley has investigated the events from an anthropological point of view and argued that the 'festival' of the qiyâma represented a temporary shifting from a 'normal-profane' order of existence (the period characterized by the practice of the šari'a) to an 'abnormal-sacred' order (the period introduced by the qiyâma abolishing the šari'a). The ceremony organized to celebrate such a 'shift' was a technique for changing the status of the people involved in it from 'profane' to 'sacred'.\(^5\)

Daftary (1991:389) is also of the opinion that the announcement of the qiyâma was in fact a declaration of independence from the larger Muslim society and, at the same time, an admission of the failure of the Nizârî struggle to take over that society, for the qiyâma declared the outside world irrelevant.

In recapitulation, we can make the following observations on the basis of our analysis of the above two historical events that took place in different periods and in rather dissimilar geographical and social settings. Both events may be regarded as historical responses to the challenges rooted in the peculiar messianistic doctrines of the Ismâ'îlî movement. The element linking these two distinct reactions is their overall pattern, whereby the qiyâma episode in Alamût had more or less the same function as the advent of the Mahdi among the Qarmatîs of Bahrayn. The eschatological beliefs concerning Paradise had a key role in both events.\(^4\)

And yet, a careful examination of the historical events which have been discussed here show that different motives can be detected behind them. In the pseudo-Mahdî intermezzo of Bahrayn, Abu Tâhir al-Ğannâbî, a successful military leader, was caught up in a sort of legitimacy crisis caused by various factors, namely the failure of the Qarmâtî invasion of Başdâd (316/928), the tragic turn of the events in Mecca (319/930), the internal tensions between the two opposing factions of the Qarmâtî leadership, and last but not least, the frustration felt by the Qarmâtîs over their unfulfilled expectations of the Mahdî's arrival. As a consequence, the charisma of

---

52 See Ivanow's Introduction, lxxv, in Tüsi, Rawdat.
54 Here I am basically in agreement with the findings of Madelung; Cf. his 1988:103.

---

Abu Tâhir was seriously impaired. He sought to solve this crisis by arranging a kind of theocratic coup d'état, that is, the intermezzo of the pseudo-Mahdî.\(^5\)

In the case of the Nizârîs' qiyâma episode, there also appears to have been an increasing level of frustration at the increasingly apparent likelihood of the imminent return of the Hidden Imâm, long awaited since the death of Nîzâr, which had occurred nearly half a century before. An additional source of frustration and anguish was the stalemate they had reached in the course of their conflict with the Saljuqs. There were malcontents in the community who looked back at the days of Hasan-i Sabbâh as a kind of heyday, when nothing was impossible for the rising movement. And it is a recurrent pattern in such conflicts, familiar to the historian, that deadlock against the external enemy will intensify internal discord.

On the other hand, the modification of the original Ismâ'îlî doctrine of ta'lim by Hasan-i Sabbâh, exalting as it did the autonomous teaching authority of each Imâm in his time, in independence from his predecessor, provided considerable free scope for action and ideological innovation by the Imâm and even his authorized representatives. This gave a remarkably free hand to the Lord of Alamût, Hasan (II) "ala dikrihi s-salâm, the then head of the Nizârî community, a man excelling in intelligence and learning to a far greater extent than his predecessors, who were primarily military leaders; and he was ready to use his new powers to find a solution to the internal crisis of his community.

REFERENCES

A. Primary sources

\(^5\)Abdalğabbâr, Tatbit = 'Abd al-Ğabbâr al-Hamadânî, Tatbit dala’il an-nubuwâ, II. Edited by 'Abdalkarîm 'Utmân, Beirut 1966.


themselves by what Islamic society might think of them. But the same time it was an admission of defeat in the attempt to take over Islam at large\(^5\) (Hodgson 1955:57).

According to Ivanow the revelation of the secret doctrine through the proclamation of *qiyyâma* was a reward to the Nizârî community for the suffering which had accompanied its religious and military life for decades\(^3\). Stroeva saw the revelation as a means adopted by Hasan (II) to abolish class distinction between the Ismâ‘îlî elite and the masses (1960:24-25). Buckley has investigated the events from an anthropological point of view and argued that the *festival* of the *qiyyâma* represented a temporary shifting from a *normal-profane* order of existence (the period characterized by the practice of the *sârî‘a*) to an *abnormal-sacred* order (the period introduced by the *qiyyâma* abolishing the *sârî‘a*). The ceremony organized to celebrate such a *shift* was a technique for changing the status of the people involved in it from *profane* to *sacred*\(^3\).

Daftary (1991:389) is also of the opinion that the announcement of the *qiyyâma* was in fact a declaration of independence from the larger Muslim society and, at the same time, an admission of the failure of the Nizârî struggle to take over that society, for the *qiyyâma* declared the outside world irrelevant.

In recapitulation, we can make the following observations on the basis of our analysis of the above two historical events that took place in different periods and in rather dissimilar geographical and social settings. Both events may be regarded as historical responses to the challenges rooted in the peculiar messianistic doctrines of the Ismâ‘îlî movement. The element linking these two distinct reactions is their overall pattern, whereby the *qiyyâma* episode in Alamût had more or less the same function as the advent of the Mahdî among the Qarmatîs of Bahrayn. The eschatological beliefs concerning Paradise had a key role in both events\(^4\).

And yet, a careful examination of the historical events which have been discussed here show that different motives can be detected behind them. In the pseudo-Mahdî intermezzo of Bahrayn, Abu Tâhir al-‘Aßânî, a successful military leader, was caught up in a sort of legitimacy crisis caused by various factors, namely the failure of the Qarmatî invasion of Bağdâd (316/928), the tragic turn of the events in Mecca (319/930), the internal tensions between the two opposing factions of the Qarmatî leadership, and last but not least, the frustration felt by the Qarmatîs over their unfulfilled expectations of the Mahdî’s arrival. As a consequence, the charisma of Abu Tâhir was seriously impaired. He sought to solve this crisis by arranging a kind of theocratic coup d’état, that is, the intermezzo of the pseudo-Mahdî\(^5\).

In the case of the Nizârîs’ *qiyyâma* episode, there also appears to have been an increasing level of frustration at the increasingly apparent likelihood of the imminent return of the Hidden Imâm, long awaited since the death of Nizâr, which had occurred nearly half a century before. An additional source of frustration and anguish was the stalemate they had reached in the course of their conflict with the Salğûqs. There were malcontents in the community who looked back at the days of Hasan-i Sâbah as a kind of heyday, when nothing was impossible for the rising movement. And it is a recurrent pattern in such conflicts, familiar to the historian, that deadlock against the external enemy will intensify internal discord.

On the other hand, the modification of the original Ismâ‘îlî doctrine of *talî‘im* by Hasan-i Sâbhâh, exalting as it did the autonomous teaching authority of each Imâm in his time, in independence from his predecessor, provided considerable scope for action and ideological innovation by the Imâm and even his authorized representatives. This gave a remarkably free hand to the Lord of Alamût, Hasan (II) “āli dikrihi ss-sâlam, the then head of the Nizârî community, a man excelling in intelligence and learning to a far greater extent than his predecessors, who were primarily military leaders; and he was ready to use his new powers to find a solution to the internal crisis of his community.

REFERENCES

A. Primary sources

\(^1\) Abdal-‘Arib ibn Sa’d al-Qurtubi, *Silat tarih at-Tabari* = *Contenu de l’histoire de Tabari*. Edited by Michael Jan de Goeje. Leiden 1965.


\(^3\) A. Primary sources


The vignettes of Paradise and Hell are amongst the most vivid that occur in the Qur'ān, equalled and perhaps even surpassed only by the events that immediately precede peoples' entry into them, those of the Day of Judgement.

If we look for their literary background, there is of course nothing like them in pre-Islamic literature, though the vignette, an impressionistic sketch that stirs the listeners' imagination, is a favourite, and wonderfully effective, device in pre-Islamic poetry. The ability to conjure up such sketches was something required of every poet, and real masters could do so in a handful of words. Just part of the first hemistich of aš-Ṣanfārā's Lāmiyyat al-ʿarab ¹
aqīmun ... sudūra matīyyi-kum
raise up the breasts of your riding camels
is enough to evoke all the activities connected with breaking camp and moving on.

More commonly a picture is fitted into a full line, no doubt due to the practice of treating the majority of lines as separate units, but larger pictures can then be built up by aggregating a number of such lines. This can be seen memorably in virtually great early Arabic poems. To stay with the same poem, the great 'wolf simile' in Lāmiyyat al-ʿarab ² consists of a number of pictures put together, not all of them closely connected with the main theme. Thus, tucked inside the description of the wolves we find first a brief but hardly connected sketch, though one that would have meant much to aš-Ṣanfārā’s contemporaries:
arrow shafts being shaken in the palms of the maysir dealer.

These are, typically, descriptions that invite the listener to add his own associations. The range of topics covered in poetic descriptive sketches is very wide. Among them are some that show a relentlessness of drive that is also to be found in Qur'ānic descriptive passages. Two examples will have to suffice here. The first again comes


1 See the edition and translation in my Early Arabic Poetry, I, 139-184.
2 Lines 26-35 of the poem.
3 Line 30.