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AN EARLY FĀṬIMID SOURCE ON THE TIME
AND AUTHORSHIP
OF THE *RASĀ'IL IḤWĀN AL-ŞAFĀ'* *

BY

ABBAS HAMDANI

The great encyclopaedic work of medieval Islam, *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-şafā'* has been described as Mu'tazilite, Sunnī, Şūfī, Şī'ite, Ismā'ili or Qarmāṭian. Its Fāṭimid character is now no longer in dispute (see art. *Iḥwān al-şafā'* in *E.I.*²). Various dates have been suggested for its appearance ranging from 350/961 to 557/1162. The most tenacious theory about the authorship of the *Rasā'il* and its time of composition is the one derived from Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (320-414/932-1023) who supposedly provides a contemporary evidence. I have, however, refuted this theory in a recent article awaiting publication¹.

Here, I would like to examine the information given by the Fāṭimid Dā'ī Ğa'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman in his biography of his father entitled *Sīrat Ibn Ḥawṣab*. Dā'ī Ğa'far had witnessed the pre-Caliphate days of the Fāṭimid movement and was a contemporary of the early Fāṭimid Caliphs.

The Arabic appendix to this article contains the text referring to the *Rasā'il* taken from Ğa'far's *Sīra* by the eighth Yamani Ṭayyibī Fāṭimid Dā'ī Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walid (d. 667/1268) and embodied in his *al-Risālat al-wahīda fī taṭbīt arkān al-'aqīda*².

* This is a revised version of the paper given under the same title at the 27th Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, Detroit, 29th April to 1st May 1977. I would like to acknowledge gratefully the help given by my colleagues, Professors James Brundage and John McGovern and by Professor Ḥasanayn Rabī' in this revision, and by Ms. Ilga Strazdins for typing the ms. of this article. I dedicate this article to the memory of the late Dr. Abdul-Karim Karimjee, benefactor of the Bohra community.

1. See note 25 below.

2. See W. IVANOW's bibliography, *Ismā'ili Literature*, Teheran, 1963, p. 75, no. 258. The ms. used is the one belonging to the Hamdani collection and in my possession. Another ms. of *al-Wahīda* exists in the Bombay University Library (see M. GORLA WALA, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Fyzee Collection of Ismā'ili Manuscripts*, Bombay, 1965, p. 101, no. 125).

Arabica, Tome XXVI, Fascicule 1

A translation of it is as follows :

Know, O brother, that when the concealment (*iḥtiğāb*) of al-Maḳām (the Imām) — May peace be on him — occurred [concealing him] from the sight of the observers, his substance [i.e. guidance] was not cut off from his dā'is [*ḥudūd dīnihi*], past and present, as is the celestial impact of the Sun in reaching out to the stars so that the management [of communal affairs] could be completed and the organisation [*ḥilqa* = constitution, creation] be perfected according to the desire of the Almighty. So the Exalted Person (*al-Šaḥṣ al-Fāḍil*), the issuer (*munšī'*)¹ of the *Rasā'il* — may the peace of God be on him — has mentioned in the « Tract on Magic and Spells »² when discussing the Imāms — may peace be on them —; they are the Deputies (*Ḥulafā'*) in fact in both the Period of Declaration (*kašf*) when their dominion (*mulk*) becomes apparent in the [world of] material and spiritual beings and in the Period of Concealment (*satr*) when their authority (*umūr*) extends to souls and minds. Stronger are the deeds of Satan in the Period of Concealment, because the Proof of God on His Earth [i.e. the Imām] is concealed although his light shines in the hearts of his devotees who turn to him. This is his saying.

[This is also supported] by what has come to us from Sayyidnā Ġa'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman — may God sanctify his soul — in his book, the biography of his father [i.e. *Sīrat Ibn Ḥawšab*]. Probably he bestowed [this knowledge] for our time [also] and hinted to our Imām³ — may the blessings of God be on him — because after his [i.e. Dā'i Ġa'far's] words, none of the Imāms disappeared except our Lord — may peace be on him. He (Ġa'far) said : « When the concealment of the Imām occurred, his *Da'wa* was not discontinued even in a single sector of the Earth. It continued by his order and the order of his successor. He is present

1. The lexicon *Lisān al-'Arab* gives the meaning of *anša'a* as *aqbalā*. Again *anša'a fulānun ḥadīṭan ay ibtada'a ḥadīṭan wa-rafa'ahu*.

2. The 11th and last tract of the last part of the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*, Beirut ed., 1957, IV, 283-463.

3. Imām Ṭayyib, son of the tenth Fāṭimid Caliph al-Āmir (d. 524/1130). On al-Āmir's death, the Yamani *Da'wa* separated from the Fāṭimid Caliphate, espousing the cause of Ṭayyib who disappeared and is referred to by the author as *Imām al-'Aṣr* (the Imām of the Age), i.e. of the new period of concealment. It seems that the author does not refer to an Imām in his time descended from Imām Ṭayyib. Such a reference would have been more accurate.

and his presence is attested by the presence of his *dā'īs* (*ḥudūd*) who point to him and invite people to him and who occupy the positions of his *Da'wa* in its commands and traditions, permissions and prohibitions. The declaration and establishment of his mission are achieved by the existence of three ranks, those of *al-dā'ī al-muṭlaq*, *al-ma'dūn al-muṭlaq* and *al-ma'dūn al-maḥṣūr*. As for the *bābs*, the *ḥuḡḡās* and the *du'āt al-balāḡ*, they remain with him in concealment»¹. [Dā'ī Ğa'far], may God sanctify his soul, further said, «The Imām is said to be present by the presence of these *dā'īs* in the same way as God (is said to be present). He is not recognised by any of his people nor seen by any of his creation in goodness and evil, in profit and loss, except by the establishment of each Prophet, *Waṣī* (executor of the Prophet's will) and Imām among [His] peoples for their direction and guidance. He, the Praiseworthy, is apparent [and] existent by [the presence of] these dignitaries. So is the Imām — may peace be on him — present by the presence of these *dā'īs*. His substance flows in them, and they are encompassed by his blessings. They see with a light from God in continuity, never with an interruption.

«'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Ismā'il was concealed — may the peace of God be on all of them — until his *Šī'a* and his *dā'īs* lost contact with him. They established his mission by order of his father (i.e. Muḥammad b. Ismā'il) and his *waṣī* (i.e. 'Abd Allāh). They did not spare an effort nor neglect a condition till his (i.e. 'Abd Allāh's) son Aḥmad arose (i.e. became the Imām). He was also not recognised. He went through many a difficulty and fear and the destruction of his family, whose description cannot be lengthier, until he issued (*anša'a*) the *Rasā'il*, and was contacted by a man called Abū Ḡafir from among his *dā'īs*. He (Aḥmad) charged him (the *dā'ī*) with his mission as was necessary and asked him to keep his identity concealed». These are the words of [Dā'ī Ğa'far], may God sanctify his soul.

Before analysing our source, I must first discuss some issues concerning Dā'ī Ğa'far and his *Sīra*. Although the date of Ğa'far's birth is not known, it is evident from his works and also from the above quotation that he wrote from personal knowledge of the period

1. For an explanation of these hierarchical ranks see my article: *Evolution of the Organisational Structure of the Fāṭimī Da'wa*, *Arabian Studies* (Cambridge University), III (1976), 85-114.

preceding the establishment of the Fāṭimid Caliphate in 297/909. Earlier than this, his father Ibn Ḥawṣab Maṣṣūr al-Yaman from a Šī'ite family of Kūfa had been sent by the predecessor of the Fāṭimid al-Mahdī to Yaman where he had established the first political base of the Fāṭimid movement in 270/883¹. On his father's death in 302/914 a quarrel for leadership arose between one of Ġa'far's brothers and the new *dā'ī* 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās al-Šawirī and Ġa'far decided to leave Yaman and go to the Fāṭimid headquarters in the Mağrib. He arrived there after the accession of the second Caliph al-Qā'im in 322/934². Most of his works as listed by Ivanow³ were written while in the service of the Fāṭimid Caliphs al-Qā'im (322-334/934-946), al-Manṣūr (334-341/946-953) and al-Mu'izz (341-365/953-975), when he rose to a high rank in the Central *Da'wa*, just as his contemporary Qādī l-Nu'mān rose to the chief rank in the Judiciary. Ġa'far's high position is mentioned by another contemporary, Ustād Ġawḍar (d. 362/973)⁴, the treasurer of al-Mu'izz⁵. Dā'ī Idrīs relates a story about the reverence in which the caliph al-Mu'izz and the Qādī l-Nu'mān held Ġa'far⁶. The same *dā'ī* mentions the Caliphal retinue that accompanied al-Mu'izz to Egypt in 362/973. A list of the prominent men of his Court is given⁷; this does not include the name of Ġa'far. It is likely that the latter died in the Mağrib before this date. We can therefore make an approximate estimate of the time Dā'ī Ġa'far lived, somewhere between 270/883 and 360/970, reaching an advanced age of between 80 to 90 years. This brief sketch should be sufficient to dispel Ivanow's doubt about Dā'ī Ġa'far's identity, for the former had considered Ġa'far to be a grandson or a great

1. QADĪ L-NU'MAN (d. 363/973), *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa*, ed., Wadād AL-QĀḌĪ, Beirut, 1970, 44.

2. IBN MĀLIK AL-ḤAMMĀDĪ (5th/11th cent.), *Kašf asrār al-bāṭiniyya*, Cairo, 1939, 40, where Ġa'far is mentioned by name and also his arrival in the Mağrib in the time of al-Qā'im. This information is confirmed by Dā'ī Idrīs 'Imād al-dīn (d. 832/1428) in his *Kitāb nuzhat al-afkār*, ms. Hamdani collection, I, 33.

3. IVANOW, *ibid.*, 21-22.

4. Ġawḍar's death is mentioned by IDRĪS 'IMĀD AL-DĪN, '*Uyūn al-aḥbār*', VI (ms. of the Hamdani collection), 162-63.

5. Ustād Ġawḍar in his diary reproduced later by his secretary ABŪ MAṢṢŪR AL-'AZĪZ AL-ĠAWḌARĪ in the time of the Caliph al-'Azīz (r. 365-386/976-996) in his *Sīrat Ustād Ġawḍar*, Cairo, 1953, 126-7.

6. IDRĪS, '*Uyūn*', VI, 39-40.

7. *Ibid.*, VI, 161-165.

grandson of Ibn Ḥawṣab, contrary to the information on this *dā'i* given by the entire historical literature of the Yamani *Da'wa* ¹.

Now, let us consider the work itself, the *Sīrat Ibn Ḥawṣab*. The work is lost and is not at present traceable. That has occasioned Ivanow's skepticism about Ğa'far being its author ². The quotation we have given above is contained in a much later Yamani work *al-Risālat al-Waḥīda* of the Dā'i Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd who died in 667/1268. Our choice of the latter text is based on the fact that a long enough direct quotation from the *Sīra* was available in it. It does not mean that there were no citations from and references to this *Sīra* before and after the time of Dā'i Ḥusayn. A part of the same passage is contained in *Kitāb Maǧmū' al-tarbiya* of the Dā'i Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Ḥārītī (d. 584/1188). The title of the *Sīra* and the name of its author, Ğa'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, are mentioned ³. The *Sīra* of Ibn Ḥawṣab without the name of its author is also mentioned by the Dā'i al-Ḥaṭṭāb b. al-Ḥasan al-Hamdānī (d. 533/1138) in his *Ġāyat al-Mawālīd* ⁴. Dā'i Idrīs in his history '*Uyūn al-aḥbār*' mentions Dā'i Ğa'far's biography of his father al-Manṣūr and the latter's conquest of Yaman ⁵. For some strange reason Dā'i Ğa'far's contemporary Qāḍi l-Nu'mān in the beginning of his *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa* ⁶ keeps anonymous a long report of the establishment of the *Da'wa* in Yaman. It is mainly related in the words of Ibn Hawṣab himself, but when it comes to mentioning the source Qāḍi l-Nu'mān vaguely refers to *ahl al-'ilm wa-l-ṭiqa min*

1. IVANOW, *ibid.*, 21. Ivanow's doubt is raised by one of Ğa'far's works, *Asrār al-nuṭaqā'* where the latter says that 120 years have passed since the disappearance of the twelfth Iṭnā 'Aṣārī Imām in 260/874. Two separate works, *Asrār al-nuṭaqā'* and *Sarā'ir al-nuṭaqā'*, have in common their first 50 pages. This portion should be the genuine composition of Ğa'far. The later portions of the two works are different and amplified, probably in later times. Any reference contained in this part, such as the above-mentioned one, should not be taken as the actual remark of Ğa'far. Ivanow's assumption, therefore, does not seem to be correct.

2. IVANOW, *ibid.*, 22, no. 23.

3. Vol. I, *risāla* no. 11, pp. 311-312 of the ms. in Hamdani collection. Cf. IVANOW, *ibid.*, no. 205/xi, p. 55.

4. See extract from the *Ġāyat al-Mawālīd* in IVANOW's *Rise of the Fāṭimids*, Calcutta, 1942, Arabic text, p. 36.

5. '*Uyūn*', VI, 40.

6. *Iftitāḥ*, Beirut ed., pp. 32-54, quoted *verbatim* by AL-MAQRĪZĪ in his *al-Muqaffa'*, Paris ms. 675, fol. 210 seq. and translated by QUATREMÈRE in *Mémoires*, J.A., 1836, 123-131.

aṣḥābiḥī (knowledgeable and trustworthy people among his companions)¹. This seems most likely to be a quotation from Dā'ī Ġa'far's *Sīra*². If this be the case, the *Sīra* would have been a proscribed book almost immediately after its composition, which would explain Qāḍī l-Nu'mān's guarded reference to its author and also why it later became rare and then was lost. Another example of an early work which is lost is *al-Maḥṣūl* of the early *dā'ī* al-Nasafī (d. 331/942)³, probably due to a ban imposed on it. It only surfaced in part in later quotations, in the same manner as our Dā'ī Ġa'far's *Sīra*.

Coming now to the passage reproduced above, two issues seem to be intertwined in it: the question of the names of the Imāms of the period of *satr* (concealment) and the attribution of the *Rasā'il* to one of them as their « issuer ». The three Imāms who are mentioned are Muḥammad b. Ismā'il, his son 'Abd Allāh and the latter's son Aḥmad. All of these went through the difficulties of an underground existence, namely persecution and the loss of contact with the community. The question of the genealogy of the Fāṭimid Caliphs itself was the topic of our Dā'ī Ġa'far's revealing statement in another work of his, *Kitāb al-Farā'id wa-ḥudūd al-dīn*⁴ which need not detain us here. What is relevant is the chronology of Aḥmad's career which probably coincided with the disappearance of the last Imām of the Iṭnā 'Aṣariyya, Muḥammad, in 260/873. Thus, the Fāṭimid *Da'wa* itself could capitalise on the generally prevalent messianic expectations of the Šī'a. Shortly after this, Imām Aḥmad would have died and his successor then sent Ibn Ḥawṣab to Yaman where a Fāṭimid base was established in 270/883.

The *Satr* period is characterised by a peculiar messianism of the Fāṭimid movement, namely a *wāqifi* view of the seventh Imām Muḥammad b. Ismā'il who is awaited as the Qā'im or the Mahdī and at the same time the continuing underground movement led by his descendants and aided by their *dā'īs* for the establishment of a Caliphate. If it was a purely religious movement, the first aspect

1. *Iftitāḥ*, Beirut ed., 33.

2. Ivanow was so carried away by the possibility of Qāḍī l-Nu'mān having used Dā'ī Ġa'far's *Sīra* that he mentions it repeatedly as a fact (See his earlier work *Rise*, 33, 37, 47, 50, 74 and 211 note 1). From this Ivanow made a complete reversal of position by doubting the genuineness of the *Sīra*'s authorship altogether. See his later work, *Ismā'īlī Literature*, 22.

3. IVANOW, *Ism. Lit.*, p. 23, no. 24.

4. Dā'ī Ġa'far's statement is discussed in HUSAYN HAMDANI, *Genealogy of the Fāṭimid Caliphs*, American University in Cairo, 1958.

would have been sufficient. Since, however, it had political ambitions, the second aspect had ultimately to prevail. This apparent contradiction has created much confusion in interpreting the movement and detracted from a proper understanding of its dynamic motivation. Since the Imāms were in hiding between 148/765 and 297/909, any attempt at active preaching on their behalf would have led to exposure and repression by the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate; hence it was necessary to make the symbolism of Muḥammad b. Ismā'il an ongoing one till such time as it would become expedient to abandon it. Such a tactic had its own danger. Should some of the *dā'īs* wish to separate and go their own way, the *wāqifī* belief in the return of Muḥammad b. Ismā'il could provide ground for defiance of the continuing line of Imāms in hiding, and might be even successful for two reasons: the inability of the central organisation to impose disciplinary action because of its underground existence and the possibility of the support of the mass of ordinary faithful who were, in any case, in the dark. Such separations constituted the ever-growing platform of Qarmatianism.

It is in the light of such an interpretation, I believe, that the internal references in the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'* must be viewed. Only then can we come back to the information of Dā'ī Ġa'far and see whether it accords with reality. On the one hand, the *Rasā'il* show a devoted adherence to the Seventh Imām; on the other, they indicate the existence of a later living Imām who or his successor is about to establish the new Caliphate. The *Rasā'il* lay great emphasis on the number seven as the perfect number that includes the meaning of all numbers (Beirut ed., I, 58) and yet they attack the *musabbī'a* (the Seveners) because « their outlook is partial and their dialectic, not universal » (I, 217); again « the Seveners exaggerate the exposition of sets of seven and exhibit in this field strange instances » (III, 180). They speak of *al-Ġā'ib Amīr al-Mu'minīn* who is to return (IV, 362) and at the same time they criticise the Šī'a for holding that the « *Imām Muntazar* is hidden out of fear; nay he is present in their midst » (IV, 148). It is only a continuing Imāmate in a period of concealment and expectation that can make the *Rasā'il* speak of *al-A'immat al-Mahdiyyūn* (the *Mahdī Imāms*) in the plural (I, 274). In *al-Risālat al-Ġāmi'a* (Beirut ed., 1974) we have reference to « the Seventh *Ra'īs*, who comes at the end of time, the Lord of the Brethren of Purity » and yet he is the initiator of the first cycle (*al-munšī' al-naš'at al-ūlā*), also the repeater of another cycle (*mu'īd al-naš'at*

al-uḥrā) (I, 286). Then follow three parallel and analogous cycles of Prophethood, embryonic development of the child and Imāmate in the last few sections of *al-Risālat al-Ġāmī'a*. What is said about one cycle, could by analogy be applied to the other. Talking of the seventh month of pregnancy, it is stated that the child can be born, but in the eighth month the child does not attain its position, does not rise in rank and is aborted (*sāqīṭ*) from reaching its due place (*martabat al-balāġ*). The days of the eighth month pass (or return = *ya'ūd*) into the ninth when delivery takes place, the creation is completed and another cycle begins (p. 524). In another passage it is stated that the child dies between the seventh and the eighth months, but can be born in the ninth and sometimes even in the tenth (519, 520). If we were to extend the analogy to the Imāms of the *Satr* period, the time of the eighth Imām 'Abd Allāh was one of difficulty, but that of the ninth, i.e. Aḥmad, was pregnant with possibility. If the mission is not successful at this time, it may be accomplished in the time of the tenth Imām. Again the awaited Seventh is mentioned but is identified with Aḥmad *al-mab'ūt*. He is surrounded by his *ḥudūd* (*dā'īs*). This is described as another cycle and a new *amr* which the reader is going to behold (p. 516-17).

Emphasising only the *wāqifī* aspect of the *Rasā'il*, Zāhid 'Alī¹ and Madelung² have described the work as Qarmāṭian. Madelung emphasises the reference to the son of the Seventh Imām having fallen from his position; but as pointed out above, the passage relates to the embryonic development of the child. The analogy of the continuing Imāmate and the reference to Aḥmad should not be missed. Another reason for their acceptance of Qarmāṭian authorship is their acceptance of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's story. Indeed, the names of the Baṣran individuals cited by Abū Ḥayyān indicate Qarmāṭian connections. Moreover, the late date of composition, i.e. 373/983, implied by Abū Ḥayyān may also cover up some internal allusions, such as verses of al-Mutanabbī, al-Fārābī's qualifications of an Ideal Ruler and a reference to al-Aṣā'ira included in the *Rasā'il*. I have explained in another article why Abū Ḥayyān's story is not correct, its purpose being to establish the heresy of Zayd b. Rifā'a rather than to state the correct names of the *Rasā'il*'s authors³. Again, I explained the use of a common source, an early Arabic

1. ZAHID ALI, *Ta'rīḥ-i-Fāṭimiyyān-i-Miṣr*, Hyderabad, 1948, 522-526.

2. W. MADELUNG, *Qarmāṭi*, E.I. 2.

3. *Abū Ḥayyān and the Brethren of Purity*, awaiting publication in *I.J.M.E.S.*

translation of Plato's *Republic*, by both al-Fārābī and the Iḥwān in another article¹. Other scattered references of later origin are editorial interpolations, probably inserted by a Sunnī Ṣūfī editor of the post-Ġazzālī period².

Dā'ī Ġa'far's *Sīra* is the earliest source, Fāṭimid or otherwise, that gives the time of the *Rasā'il*'s composition, i.e. the Imāmate of Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Ismā'il and there is nothing in it that makes me doubt its authenticity. Imām 'Aḥmad is not mentioned as the author, i.e. *ṣāhib* or *mu'allif*, but only as *al-munṣi*', the issuer or the presenter. It is possible that it is the work of some of his *dā'īs* whose names may never be known. There is an indication that some of them at least were Persian, as the work contains some Persian verses and expressions³. It is also likely that one member of the group of authors acted as their co-ordinator and copyist because the usual plural form of address keeps lapsing from time to time into the singular. It is further likely that some parts of it were deliberately issued as the composition of the Imām himself⁴. It not only prophecises that the Kingdom of the People of Good (*Ahl al-ḥayr*), that is the new Caliphate, is about to be established, but seems to have the knowledge and the confidence that work was already afoot towards the realisation of this project⁵. There is an air of imminence about the *Rasā'il*. The internal evidence accords with the time indicated by the *Sīra* of Dā'ī Ġa'far.

When the Yamānī writers refer to the author as a collective entity they use the term *al-ṣaḥṣ al-fāḍil ṣāhib al-Rasā'il*, with the benediction *naḍḍar Allāh waḡhahu* which is not applied to the Imām. Such is the reference of the Dā'ī Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥāmidī (d. 557/1162)⁶. We find from the passage quoted above from *al-Wahīda*

1. *Al-Fārābī and the Brethren of Purity*, awaiting publication in a volume edited by Professor Parvez Morewedge.

2. Such a conclusion is based on internal evidence. References to al-Siddīq, al-Fārūq and Dū l-Nūrayn (i.e. Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uṭmān) (IV, 269), a saying of 'Ayiṣā (I, 358), the praise of *Ahl al-Waḡd* (I, 240) and the description of a perfect man to be a Ṣūfī in character (II, 376) are to be found in *Rasā'il*. There is no doubt that there have been editorial interpolations. For example, in the body of the text itself we find the expression: *kamā qāla l-muḥaqqiq ṣi'ran*, introducing three verses (IV, 76). If such an editorial note can be introduced in the text, it seems certain that many others have also found their place in it and have later passed as the text itself.

3. *Rasā'il*, I, 139, 209, 235; IV, 226.

4. *Ibid.*, IV, 145-148.

5. *Ibid.*, IV, 146, 148.

6. As found in *K. kanz al-walad* and reported by IVANOW, *Ism. Lit.*, p. 19.

that as late as the time of the Dā'i Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (d. 667/1268) Imām Aḥmad is not referred to as the author but only the issuer (*munši'*). That was the traditional view of the *Da'wa*, until at a very late stage the Dā'i Idrīs 'Imād al-dīn (d. 832/1428) not only made Imām Aḥmad the author but also placed him and the *Rasā'il* in the early period of the 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198-218/813-833). Idrīs 'Imād al-dīn further relates the story of al-Ma'mūn being so anxious to punish the Imām-author of the *Rasā'il* that he by mistake had a certain Dā'i al-Tirmiḍī executed who was impersonating the Imām at the latter's instructions¹. Dā'i Idrīs has elaborated on a report of Qāḍī l-Nu'mān in his *Šarḥ al-aḥbār* about the above-mentioned action of al-Ma'mūn. Qāḍī l-Nu'mān, however, does not make any reference to the *Rasā'il* in this connection², but the Dā'i 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd (d. 612/1115), Dā'i Idrīs' ancestor, does in his *Kitāb Dāmiğ al-bāṭil*, without the name of the hidden Imām³.

Dā'i Ġa'far refers in the passage quoted above from his *Sīra* to a certain dā'i Abū Ġafir who established contact with Imām Aḥmad at his place of hiding. Although this reference follows immediately after the statement that Imām Aḥmad issued the *Rasā'il*, there seems to be no connection between the two. It may be noted in passing that a long-winded story about the contact of Abū Ġafir and six other dā'is with the Imām is found in the *Istitār al-Imām*⁴ of the Dā'i Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Naysābūrī of the time of the Fāṭimid Caliph al-'Azīz (r. 365-386/976-996). The name of the Imām given is 'Abd Allāh, not Aḥmad and one of the colleagues of Abū Ġafir is a certain Abū l-Ḥasan b. al-Tirmiḍī. One can understand from this that Dā'i Idrīs' story is but an attempt to synthesise earlier sources, namely the *Sīra*, *Šarḥ al-aḥbār*, *Istitār al-Imām* and *Dāmiğ al-Bāṭil*. In doing so he was driven to push back the time of Imām Aḥmad to coincide with the reign of al-Ma'mūn.

Again in Dā'i Ġa'far's statement Imām Aḥmad is not the author, but the *munši'* of the *Rasā'il*. That presupposes the existence of

1. IDRIS, *'Uyūn al-aḥbār*, IV (ed. MUSTAFA GHALIB), Beirut, 1973, 367-368, 391-392. A useful summary of the contents of the *Rasā'il* is found on pages 368-390.

2. Extract from *Šarḥ al-aḥbār* quoted in HUSAYN HAMDANI, *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-Šafā'* in the Literature of the Ismā'īlī Taiyibī Da'wat, *Der Islam*, XX (1932), 299-300.

3. S. M. STERN, *New Information about the Authors of the « Epistles of the Sincere Brethren », Islamic Studies*, III (1964), 417-18.

4. Text published in the *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts*, Egyptian University, Cairo, IV (1936); translation in W. IVANOW, *Rise of the Fāṭimids*, pp. 157-162.

certain authors (*dā'īs* or not) working under his direction. There is one Nizārī source that names them: *al-Uṣūl wa-l-aḥkām* attributed to the Syrian *dā'ī* Abū l-Ma'ālī Ḥātim b. 'Imrān (or Maḥmūd) b. Zuhrah (d. 498/1104-5)¹. Four *dā'īs* among others who collaborated in the composition of the *Rasā'il* are named: 'Abd Allāh b. Mubārak, 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥamdān, 'Abd Allāh b. Maymūn and 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'īd b. Ḥusayn. They are described as the *dā'īs* of the Imām 'Abd Allāh and his father Imām Muḥammad b. Ismā'il. The veracity of the names of these *dā'īs*, although not their authorship of the *Rasā'il*, is supposed to be attested by Qāḍī l-Nu'mān in *al-Risālat al-Mudāhhaba*², by its editor Arif Tamir. The titles of the individuals given are Al-Aḥḍaṭ, al-Muḥtalis and al-Qaddāḥ³. There is no way of telling that three of these titles out of four correspond with the names given in *al-Uṣūl wa-l-aḥkām*. And in any case their authorship of the *Rasā'il* is not mentioned at all in *al-Mudāhhaba*. *Al-Uṣūl's* information, however, has the value of the local tradition of an area (the Salamiyya-Aleppo region) in which the hidden Imāms lived and also of an earlier period than the Ṭayyibī tradition of Yaman. There is the possibility of the information being correct. It is only the convergence of four 'Abd Allāhs that makes it look rather dramatic!

Coming back to Dā'ī Ğa'far's work: In his article on the *Rasā'il* (*Der Islam*, 1932) Husayn Hamdani refers to *al-Risālat al-Waḥīda* of the Dā'ī Ḥusayn b. 'Alī and the reference in it to the Dā'ī Ğa'far's *Sīra* and its report about the *Rasā'il*⁴. Stern's comment on this was « Now this can hardly be so — otherwise al-Hamdani would surely have made more of this sensational piece of information »⁵. Husayn Hamdani missed the fact that *al-Waḥīda's* passage contained a direct quotation from the *Sīra* and he thought it was the report of the late *dā'ī*, although on the authority of Dā'ī Ğa'far. This is probably why he did not make much of it. The task now has fallen to Ḥusayn Hamdani's son! Stern, in any case, did consider this « a sensational piece of information »! Ḥusayn Hamdani had read the passage in question in terms of Imām Aḥmad's « compilation » of the *Rasā'il*, not their « issuance » or « presentation ».

1. Ed. ARIF TAMIR in *Ḥams Rasā'il Ismā'īliyyah*, Beirut, 1956, pp. 99-143. A passage relevant to our discussion is translated in STERN, *ibid.*, 415-416.

2. Ed. ARIF TAMIR in *Ḥams Rasā'il Ismā'īliyyah*, Beirut, 1956, pp. 27-87.

3. See ARIF TAMIR's note in *ibid.*, p. 72.

4. HUSAYN HAMDANI, *ibid.*, 295.

5. STERN, *ibid.*, 419.

In conclusion, the *Sīra*'s report is important, because it is the earliest and closest to the time of the *Rasā'il*. Again, because of it one can counter the usual argument that the early Fāṭimid literature did not mention the *Rasā'il*, so they could not have had any connection with the Fāṭimid movement. The *Sīra*'s report is also reliable because it contains simple, direct and unembellished information. Moreover, it does not make the claim, as it was later made, that Imām Aḥmad was its sole author, or even that he was one of the authors. Although I have doubts about the information regarding the four 'Abd Allāhs contained in *al-Uṣūl wa-l-aḥkām*, the work seems reliable generally in so far as the time of the *Rasā'il*'s composition is concerned. It does not seem to contradict the information of the *Sīra*, because the composition of the *Rasā'il* could have begun in the time of Imām 'Abd Allāh and completed in the time of Imām Aḥmad who ultimately issued them to the public. What is significant is that both the Nizārī and Ṭayyibī traditions consider the *Rasā'il* to belong to the *Satr* period. Such a view held independently in two areas far from each other in place and loyalties, enhances the possibility of its being correct. I would place the completion of the *Rasā'il*'s composition sometime between 260/873 and 297/909 during the generation just preceding the establishment of the Fāṭimid Caliphate, for which the *Rasā'il* became an ideological spearhead.

Although the *Rasā'il* describes a secret organisation and movement, complete with pass-words and identification (IV, 145), it was not itself a secret work and was intended to be publicised (I, 328) among the sympathisers of the Fāṭimid movement and, beyond them, among the masses of people. Its philosophy was popular and its style simple, eloquent and affectionate. The absence of the label Fāṭimid or Ismā'īlī and the adoption of cover names such as *Rabbāniyyūn*, *Ḥunafā'* or *Aḥbār* (IV, 126) were intended to attract wider support from people who did not belong to the movement. Its ambiguities, allusions, insinuations and even contradictions were calculated to evade 'Abbāsīd censorship and attack, which nevertheless, ultimately came. It is for the same reason that one secret remained a closely guarded one: the names of the author and his assistants.

Yet after the establishment of the Fāṭimid Caliphate, the work seems to have been withdrawn¹. The revolutionary spirit it inculcated

1. There is no use made of it in the works of the *dā'īs* of the early Fāṭimid period. In case of the Dā'ī Ḥamid al-dīn al-Kirmānī (d. ca. 411/1020) this is particularly noticeable.

had served its purpose. It was not needed any longer, lest it should become dangerous to the Fāṭimid establishment itself. This was done with regard to other earlier works also.

Before the end of the Fāṭimid Caliphate, however, and at the loss of its political authority in Yaman in 524/1129, the Yamani Ṭayyibi mission revived the work. This mission now needed the revolutionary spirit of the epistles in order to survive and to strengthen the hope of its followers in the messianic reappearance of the Imām and the coming of «the rule of the people of Good». (I, 181; IV, 187)

فصل من

الرسالة الوحيدة في تثبيت أركان العقيدة

لسيدنا الحسين بن علي بن محمد بن الوليد أعلى الله قدسه ورزقنا أنسه

٥٦٦٧

المتوفي سنة

أخذ عن

نسخة خطية من المخطوطات الهمدانية

[ص ٢٤] فصل — واعلم أيها الاخ انه إن وقع احتجاب المقام — عليه السلام — عن أعين الناظرين فمواده غير منقطعة عن حدود دينه البادين منهم والحاضرين، كفعل الشمس الجرمانية في إمدادها لسائر الكواكب، ل يتم التدبير، وتكمل الخلقة فيما يريده العزيز القدير، كما قال الشخص الفاضل منشيء الرسائل — سلام الله عليه — في رسالة السحر والعزائم عند ذكر الائمه عليهم السلام، وهم الخلفاء بالحقيقة في الدورين جميعا، في دور الكشف يظهر ملكهم في الاجسام والارواح، وفي دور الستر تجرى أمورهم في الانفس والعقول. وأقوى ما [٢٥] تكون أفعال إبليس في دور الستر، وذلك لان حجة الله في أرضه يكون مخفيا مستورا، وإن كانت أنواره تضيء في أنفس العارفين به الراجعين إليه. هذا قوله وما جاء أيضا عن سيدنا جعفر بن منصور اليماني — قدس الله روحه — في كتاب سيرة أبيه — أعلى الله قدسها — وربما أنه عني به في وقتنا هذا، وأشار إلى إمامنا (صلع) إذ لم يستتر بعد كلامه أحد من الائمه الا مولانا عليه السلام

حيث قال : واذا وقع إستتار الامام لم تكن دعوته بمعدومة ولو في جزيرة من جزائر الارض بأمره أو بأمر الناص عليه والمشير إليه، وهو موجود ووجوده بوجود حدوده الذين يدلون عليه ويدعون وقيمون مناسك دعوته من فروضها وسننها وحلالها وحرامها وظهور دعوته وإقامتها بوجود ثلاث مراتب : وجود الداعي المطلق، والمأذون المطلق، والمأذون [٢٦] المحصور. فأما الابواب والحجج ودعاة البلاغ فلا يفارقونه من وراء سجد الاستتار إلى قوله — قدس الله روحه — فالامام عليه السلام يقال أنه موجود بوجود هؤلاء الحدود كما إن الله لا يدركه أحد من بريته، ولا يشافهه أحد من خليقته بخير ولا شر ولا نفع ولا ضرر، لولا قيام كل قائم من رسول الله ووصي وإمام في الخلائق لهدايتهم وارشادهم، فهو سبحانه ظاهر موجود بهؤلاء الحدود، وهكذا الامام عليه السلام ظاهر موجود بهؤلاء الحدود، ومواده سارية اليهم، وبركاته مشتملة عليهم، فهم ينظرون بنور من الله متصل غير منفصل. وقد استتر عبد الله بن إسماعيل عليهم السلام حتى لم يعرفه أحد من شيعة وحدوده فأقاموا دعوته بأمر أبيه ووصيه اليهم، ولم يألوا في ذلك جهدا، ولا فرطوا في حال الى أن قام [٢٧] ولده أحمد، ولم يعرف أيضا وجرى عليه من الحن والخوف وإحراق اولاد كانوا ما يطول به الشرح حتى أنشاء الرسائل واتصل به من الدعاة رجل يسمى أبو غفير، فأمره الى أهل دعوته بما يجب به الامر، واستكتمه حاله. هذا قوله قدس الله روحه.