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The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Āmir
(al-Hidāya al-Āmiriyya) - its Date and its
Purpose.

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The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Āmir
(al-Hidāya al-Āmiriyya)—its Date and its Purpose
By S. M. STERN

THE strife over the succession of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir left a decisive mark on the later history of the Ismaili sect.¹ The quarrel between the followers of his two rival sons, al-Musta'li and Nizār, did not end with the defeat and death of the latter; his adherents, the Nizāris, formed a sect of their own, and the rulers of the Musta'lid branch had no enemies more bitter. The fortunes of the whole Ismaili movement might have taken a very different turn had the redoubtable Assassins made common cause with the Fatimids of Egypt, instead of seizing every opportunity to harm them.

The dispute between the two parties turned mainly on al-Mustansir's last will—as according to Ismaili dogma succession to the throne was regulated by the *nass*, the nomination by the preceding Imam. The modern historian can find his way but with difficulty between the contending claims of the rival factions. It seems, however, hard to avoid the suspicion that, whatever the wishes of the late Caliph might have been, the swift action taken by al-Afdal, on the morning following al-Mustansir's death, had its decisive share in putting al-Musta'li on the throne.²

For understanding the development of the schism, a full acquaintance with the different views held by the contending parties is more important than the elucidation of the historical truth. Our knowledge has hitherto been based solely on the meagre remarks made by Orthodox historians, in whose opinion the quarrels of these two parties, neither of them better than abominable heretics, were not of much consequence. Now, thanks to the publications of W. Ivanow,³ we have some of the treatises of the Nizāri branch, in

¹ For a general outline of the historical facts see *Enc. of Islam*, s.v. Nizār and Musta'li (H. A. R. Gibb); Wiet, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscr. Arab., Égypte*, ii, 155-6.—There are some excellent remarks on the historical significance of the Nizāri Schism by B. Lewis, in his review of Fyzee's edition of the *Hidāya*, *BSOR*, x, 255-7.

² Lewis is equally of the opinion that al-Musta'li's accession was mainly due to a *coup d'état*.

³ In the series of the Islamic Research Association; see also the analysis of the *Rauḍat al-taslim* in *JRASQ* 1931, p. 527 ff. It is much to be desired that the last named work should be fully published. In general, the Nizāri books are in need of further study.

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which we can study the views of that sect. About ten years ago there was also published an official document giving a formal account of the attitude of the Musta'lian government of Egypt, the other side in the dispute, towards the questions concerning the succession of al-Mustanşir. It is not proposed here to enter into the merits of the Nizāri-Musta'lian schisma and its historical significance, but to make a contribution to the study of the problem by shedding light on the incidents that gave rise to the Fatimid document mentioned.

The Islamic Research Association, which had already rendered a great service to Ismaili studies by publishing the above-mentioned texts emanating from the Nizāri branch of the Ismailia, has also included among its publications "*al-Hidāyatu'l Āmiriyya*, an epistle of the tenth Fatimid Caliph al-Āmir bi-aḥkāmi'llāh", edited by Asaf A. A. Fyzee.¹ The editor has correctly stated the character of this document: it "undoubtedly belongs to the type of official instructive correspondence of the Caliphs which is known by the name of *siḡill*, or epistle. By such epistles Fatimid Imams used to guide their followers in religious matters, especially in various situations of emergency" (Introduction, p. 3). It is, in fact, nothing else than a pastoral letter of the Caliph al-Āmir (the son of al-Musta'li), written some twenty years after the schism and containing an official refutation of the rival claims of his late uncle Nizār, upheld by the Assassins of Persia and Syria. Owing to its early date and some of the evidence contained in it, the document forms a precious addition to our knowledge of the first stages of the Nizāri-Musta'lian controversy.

As we have to deal with a state paper, we may look for some concrete event that caused its publication. Its polemical tone and the allusions to evidence given by different witnesses, etc., make clear that it was meant to express the government's views in an

¹ Islamic Research Association Series, no. 7, Oxford University Press, 1938. It was W. Ivanow who first drew attention to the treatise (see *A Guide to Ismaili Literature*, p. 50, No. 173). The occasion is taken to propose a few corrections to the text. On p. 22, l. 9, the correct reading is probably that quoted in the footnote: *يبقى مع النص*; p. 36, l. 2, *ساع* instead of *شاع* and *الظامرون* instead of *الظامرون*. On p. 37, ll. 6, 7, 12, *ابشلوم* should be *ابشلوم* and on p. 16, l. 7, *رجيعون* should be *رجيعون*; *ربيعون* ib., l. 8, should be *ربيعون*. The same strangely mutilated forms of the well known Biblical names Rehoboam, Jeroboam, and Absalom return in the Index, too (p. 20: Bari'un and Rajiun, sons of Solomon, and Aishalom (?) son of David, the latter even getting a question mark).

actual dispute. Its editor was quite right in trying to establish, by considerations of this kind (and also by the help of chronological data contained in the Epistle), the occasion for the document (Intr., pp. 3-4). But the clues at his disposal were so meagre that he could not get farther than tentative conjectures.

It seems, however, that a piece of information given by a thirteenth-century Egyptian chronicler may not only give a full explanation of the origin of the *Hidāya* but also establish its exact date and even the identity of the secretary who drew it up in the chambers of the Fatimid Chancery.

II

Ibn al-Muyassar, in his chronicle *Akḥbār Miṣr*, the surviving fragments of which have been published by Henri Massé under the title of *Annales d'Egypte*,¹ has preserved the memory of a remarkable episode, passed over in silence by other historians.² It is very probable that the account originated with an almost contemporary annalist, Ibn al-Ma'mūn (d. 588/1192), the son of the vizier who played such a prominent role in the events mentioned by the narrative, and that it was incorporated by Ibn al-Muyassar in his work.

In the chapter relating the events of A.H. 518 (= A.D. 1124) the chronicler mentions the death of al-Ḥasan b. al-Ṣabbāḥ which occurred in that year. He gives a rather extensive account of the relations which existed during the reign of the Caliph al-Āmir (495/1101-524/1130) between the Fatimid Caliphate and the dissident sect of the Assassins.³ He describes the police measures taken by the Fatimid vizier al-Ma'mūn to prevent the infiltration into Egypt of Assassin spies and *fidā'īs*. Having dealt successfully with the external enemies of the state, al-Ma'mūn did not miss the opportunity to give a hint to his master that there existed some persons in his very palace whose loyalty towards the *régime* seemed rather equivocal—alluding thereby to the Caliph's aunt, the full

¹ Publications de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo, 1919. For all questions concerning this book, the highly important review of G. Wiet: *Journal Asiatique*, 111ème série, t. xviii (1921), p. 65-125 should be consulted. It was Wiet who made the suggestion to regard Ibn al-Ma'mūn as the source of Ibn al-Muyassar for the account of the assembly (loc. cit., pp. 85-6).

² Wiet (p. 91) finds it "inexplicable" that in the *Khitaṭ* of al-Maqrizī no mention should be made of the declaration of the sister of Nizār.

³ pp. 66-9.

sister of the late pretender Nizār, and her two sons. On hearing of these insinuations the princess hurried to profess her loyalty and expressed a wish that an opportunity might be given her to show publicly her support of the reigning line of the dynasty. Her request was granted and a meeting was convened, to be attended by the high functionaries of the state. Ibn al-Muyassar (that is to say, his source) gives a detailed account of the public demonstration held in the month of Shawwāl, A.H. 516 (A.D. 1122). Among other dignitaries, secular and religious, the assembly was attended by Abu-l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Abī Usāma the secretary (*kātib al-dast*),¹ Walī al-daula Abu-l-barakāt b. 'Abd al-Ḥaqq, the chief *dā'i*,² Abū Muḥammad b. Ādam, the head of the academy (*dār al-'ilm*) in Cairo, Abu-l-Thurayya b. Mukhtār, and Abu-l-Fakhr, the foremost canonical lawyers of the Ismailia, the sharīf Ibn 'Uqail, the chief kadi, the royal princes, etc. The meeting was apparently opened by the reading of a declaration drafted by the theologians of the court.

"They argued as follows:—

"1. Al-Mustansir bestowed upon al-Musta'li the title of 'The Crown Prince of the Believers'.³ By this title he has singled him out and given him a special position—as the possession of the title Crown-prince of the *Believers* includes also the right to the title Crown-prince of the *Moslems*; for every 'believer' is *eo ipso* a 'Moslem', but not vice versa.⁴ Al-Mustansir gave this title to al-Musta'li on the occasion of the latter's marriage with the daughter of Amīr al-Juyūsh Badr.

"2. They also claimed that it was a falsehood to assert that at

¹ This official, a native of Aleppo (d. 522), is also mentioned in the list of al-Āmir's high officials (Ibn al-Muyassar, pp. 61, 74); cf. also al-Maqrizī, *Khiṭaṭ* ii, 291, and W. Björkman, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Staatskanzlei*, p. 64. About his title (*kātib al-dast*), borne by the head of the chancery, cf. al-Qalqashandī, i, 103, iii, 490, *Khiṭaṭ*, ii, 244.

² See the list just mentioned (p. 61), and cf. Wiet, p. 110.

³ Instead of *مولی عهد* we must read: *مولی عهد*.

⁴ The argument—fully developed in the corresponding passage of the *Hidāya*, to be quoted later—implies that al-Mustansir's heir, al-Musta'li, bore the title *calī 'ahd al-mu'minīn*, while the other sons of the Caliph had conferred upon them that of *w. 'a. al-muslimīn*, the usual title of the crown-prince. I can quote no other evidence in support of the first assertion; the second one is, however, fully borne out by a passage in the proclamation of al-Ḥāfiz, *Subḥ al-a'shā*, ix, 295. The higher value attributed to *mu'min*, as against *muslim*, is based, on one hand, on a well-known dogmatic distinction, on the other, on the Ismaili practice which designed the members of the sect *al-mu'minūn*, distinguishing them from the general body of Moslems.

one time the coinage was issued in the name of Nizār. This assertion had been made by certain Nizāris who held that the 'pointed' dinars bore his name. In truth, this type of dinar dates back to the reign of al-'Azīz.¹ But even if we admitted the claim it would prove nothing: al-Ḥākim, too, substituted the name of a cousin of his for his own name on one of his coins—but this did not mean that the cousin acquired any rights to the Imamate.² The vizier al-Yāzūrī, too, once obtained from his master al-Mustansir the privilege of putting his name on coins followed by the inscription: *minted under the rule of the dynasty of Yāsīn (= the prophet Mohammed), possessors of salvation, in the year so-and-so*.³ In fact, dinars were minted bearing this inscription for about a month—till al-Mustansir ordered that the practice be discontinued and the mention of it be struck out of the annals.

"3. They also pointed out that when al-Mustansir, at a perilous juncture of his reign, sent his sons to the army, he took care to make the following arrangement: Abū 'Abdallāh was to go to Acre to the army commanded by Amīr al-Juyūsh; Abu-l-Qāsim (father of al-Ḥāfiz, subsequently Caliph) to Ascalon; and Nizār to the port of Damietta: the higher the rank of each son, the nearer to the capital was he to be stationed. And on this occasion al-Musta'li was not even allowed to quit the palace.⁴

¹ The dispute was made possible by the fact that the Caliph al-'Azīz, too, had the proper name of Nizār. As a matter of fact, *dīnār manqūṭ* probably means the gold dinar of al-'Azīz, which has in its centre a "pellet within a circle" (S. Lane-Poole *Catalogue of Oriental Coins in the B.M.*, vol. iv, Coinage of the Fatimids, etc., p. 14). The partisans of Nizār seem to have paid little heed to the fact that on the coinage the name Nizār is clearly qualified by the title "al-Imām al-'Azīz billāh"!

² There are, in fact, coins from the reign of al-Ḥākim which bear the name of 'Abd al-Raḥīm besides the Caliph's name: Lane-Poole, *op. cit.*, p. 26. The argument of the theologians is, of course, misleading: al-Ḥākim did, in fact appoint 'Abd al-Raḥīm as his heir. In the text of Ibn al-Muyassar read *ليس بام* instead of *ليس بایام*.

³ Read with Wiet (p. 111): *آل یاسین*. This is the reading in the passage Ibn Muyassar, p. 9, where there is a more detailed account of this coinage. Lane-Poole (*A History of Egypt*, 2nd ed., p. 142) remarks: "Suyūṭī says he (the vizier al-Yāzūrī, 442–450) was allowed for a month to add his own name to that of the Caliph on the coinage, but there is no numismatic confirmation."

⁴ Ergo, al-Musta'li was the favourite son of the Imam. The allusion is most probably to the Syrian campaign of 482 (1089). At that time al-Musta'li was 15 Nizār 45 years old—which would explain the above facts in a more natural way than does the casuistic argumentation of the theologians. (If one of the earlier campaigns of 471 (1078) or 478 (1085) was meant, this would be true to an even greater degree.)

"4. After the death of al-Mustansir Nizār swore allegiance to al-Musta'li."

The chronicler continues his narrative of the assembly: "On this there ensued a discussion. Now, during the whole meeting Nizār's sister was in a small chamber adjoining the great hall of the palace (where the assembly was being held). Near the screen separating the chamber from the hall were standing her brothers and cousins and the chief eunuchs. When this (discussion) occurred, al-Ma'mūn rose from his seat and approached the screen. He asked formally: Who is behind the screen? The Princess's brothers and cousins testified that there was no other than the Princess herself. When, in this way, her identity was established to the satisfaction of those present, she made the following declaration:—

"I beg you all to bear witness and tell the whole Moslem world of my declaration that my full-brother Nizār had no rights to the Imamate; and that I have abjured his claims, denied their validity, and cursed everybody who admits them.

"I learned from my mother that, when once, during the rise of the Nile, al-Mustansir sent her, with the mother of my brother 'Abdallāh, to the villas known by the name of al-Ḥaulā and al-Rabāb,¹ they quarrelled about the rights of their sons. Al-Mustansir called both of them before him and rebuked them, saying: Neither of your sons shall be the ruler—the rightful heir will be known in due time.²

"I was also present at the sick-bed of al-Mustansir during his last illness. He had al-Musta'li called to him, took him into his bed, kissed his forehead and had a long conversation with him in private, in the course of which both were seen weeping. On the day, in the evening of which my father was to die, he called for my aunt, the daughter of (the late Caliph) al-Zāhir, and spoke to her for a long time in private. The conversation finished, he stretched out his hand towards her and kissed her. He then required from her a public oath. Al-Mustansir died in the same night. In the morning,

¹ Cf. al-Maqrizi, ii, 333 (quoted by Wiet, p. 111).

² This is the probable meaning of the phrase: *صاحبه مروق*. A similar—legendary—answer of al-Mustansir is quoted in a work of the later Ismaili literature, the *Majālis al-naskh wal-bayān* of 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walid (d. 612/1215): Ibn Šabbāh asked al-Mustansir about his successor. The latter answered evasively, promising that he would let him know in its due course. And this was—the author adds—before al-Musta'li was born. (See W. Ivanow, *Kalāmī Pir*, p. xx, n. 1.)

al-Afdal, with the *dā'i*, the emirs, and some troops, called on my aunt and stood at the outer side of the curtain. Al-Afdal then took a seat while all the others remained standing. He began by tendering his condolences, and continued: 'Tell me, my Lady, whom did the deceased Caliph appoint as his successor?' She answered: 'He has, under oath, deposited the Imamate in my hands and willed that his son Abu-l-Qāsim Aḥmad be the Caliph.' My aunt then swore allegiance to him (i.e. al-Musta'li) and was followed by al-Musta'li's elder brother 'Abdallāh. Al-Afdal ordered Nizār, too, to swear allegiance, which he did. Thereupon al-Afdal had Nizār taken into custody and put him in a place not fitting to his rank. Then al-Afdal ordered the *dā'i* to pronounce the oath of loyalty and to administer the oath to the freedmen of the palace and the eunuchs. On the intervention of my aunt, the custody of Nizār was lifted later, but not before al-Afdal had used hard words towards Nizār. By God, my brother Nizār did not go to Alexandria, to the governor of that city, Nāṣir al-Dīn Aftekin, to seek the Imamate or claim it by right—he wanted the dismissal of al-Afdal and vengeance for the injuries al-Afdal had caused him. May God curse everybody who dares to explain his intentions in another way."

"That is the end of the princess's statement; whereupon the assembly thanked her for her words. Al-Ma'mūn ordered Ibn al-Šayrafī, the secretary, to draw up a proclamation (*siyill*), to be read from the chair in the mosques of Miṣr. The assembly was then dissolved."

In the chronicle of Ibn al-Muyassar there follows information on the later history of the Nizāri branch of the Ismailia, especially the Assassins of Syria. These notices, which contain no new or important information, do not, of course, come from the contemporary authority to whom we owe the narrative about the meeting. But it may be assumed that in the following lines it is once again the same source that is quoted (p. 68, l. 22):—

"When the assembly was dissolved,¹ al-Ma'mūn ordered Ibn al-Šayrafī to write a long letter to Ibn al-Šabbāh, in which he admonished him to return to the truth and to cease upholding the Imamate of Nizār, making use of some of the arguments just

¹ These words (*ولما انفض المجلس*) seem to resume the last words of the account of the assembly (*وانفض المجلس*)—a fact which apparently corroborates our analysis of the sources.

mentioned." It was then that news of the renewed intensity of Assassin subversive activities reached the court in Cairo; so a friendly approach to Ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ was, evidently, judged untimely and, instead, the severe measures against Assassin agents, mentioned above, were again adopted.

III

A comparison of the arguments of the official proclamation and of the Princess's deposition with the main points of the *Hidāya*, will show that there must exist a close relation between the *Hidāya* and the proceedings of the assembly.

(a) The first argument brought up in the assembly—that the title of the Crown Prince of the Believers was bestowed on al-Musta'li, while his brothers were granted only that of the Crown Prince of the Moslems—is found also in the *Hidāya* (p. 18, ll. 14–15):—

"He (al-Musta'li) received the title of the Crown Prince of the Believers, while they (Nizār and 'Abdallāh) were merely called the Crown Princes of the Moslems."

Instead of a brief statement that al-Musta'li's title was bestowed upon him on his marriage, the *Hidāya* contains an extensive account of the event (p. 13, ll. 1–10):—

"When he (al-Musta'li) was married to the daughter of Amīr al-Juyūsh and the ceremony of the wedding was being held, (al-Mustanṣir) seated him on his right hand, and placed all his other sons on his left. On that day he named him Crown Prince of the Believers, while no higher title was bestowed upon his other sons 'Abdallāh and Nizār than that of Crown Princes of the Moslems. Now between these two titles there is a manifest difference which cannot be denied except by envious and rebellious persons. (Al-Mustanṣir) did not even content himself with this: he reiterated the nomination in several passages of the marriage contract (*kitāb al-ṣadāq*),¹ putting his sign manual over the words in question with his own blessed hand: *Correct, thanks to God, the Lord of creatures*. He had also some of the most trustworthy men sign as witnesses, many of whom are still alive. The document, too, is in our possession to this day."

¹ No actual book of this title must be sought for—as the editor seems to do (Intr. p. 17).

(b) The second and the third point of the declaration are missing in the *Hidāya*; the fourth (that Nizār himself recognized the Imamate of his brother al-Musta'li) does, in fact, recur there (p. 22, ll. 11–14):—

"The fact that after the decease of al-Mustanṣir Nizār and 'Abdallāh paid homage to al-Musta'li, will leave our adversaries speechless. 'Abdallāh and his other brothers remained loyal to the end, but Nizār, full of envy, broke his word and left the town the same night and acted as he did."

(c) A proof that the closest connection exists between the *Hidāya* and the assembly, is the reference in the former to the role played by the Princess, the sister of Nizār, which once again accurately tallies with the report of Ibn al-Muyassar on her testimony (p. 14, ll. 6–15):—

"A few days ago (!) the sister of Nizār had acknowledged this (viz. the truth of al-Musta'li's claims) before witnesses and of her own will. . . . She swore before all present that our Lord al-Mustanṣir billāh, the Commander of the Faithful, had on several occasions, expressly stated to her that our Lord the Imam al-Musta'li billāh was to be the ruler after his death and the heir to his rank of Imam. She also mentioned that his brother Nizār knew very well—and even admitted to others—that by his revolt he was disobeying God and that it was sheer envy which urged him to go to such lengths. She further said that on the day of al-Musta'li's wedding to the daughter of Amīr al-Juyūsh, Nizār called on her and said: 'It is only to-day that I have lost all hope of the Imamate. Our Lord al-Mustanṣir billāh has designated my brother Aḥmad "Crown Prince of the Faithful" and has seated him on his right hand, and put me and my other brothers on his left.' She then abjured the Imamate of her brother Nizār and pronounced the curse against everybody who admitted it as valid, either publicly or privately."

There can be little doubt that this quotation of the Princess's words, pronounced "a few days ago" and "of her own will and before witnesses", refers to her declaration before the assembly of the year A.H. 516, reported in the chronicle of Ibn al-Muyassar. The main points of that declaration are more or less exactly recorded in the *Hidāya*.

By the statement of al-Mustanṣir to the Princess (that al-Musta'li was to inherit the throne), nothing else can be meant than the story of the quarrel of al-Mustanṣir's two wives, combined with the other

story of the dying Caliph's last secret conversation with his sister; by these stories the Princess, in fact, learned—if only indirectly—of al-Mustanşir's intentions. The statement attributed to the Princess in the *Hidāya*, that Nizār was conscious of having no right to the throne, corresponds to her story, as reported by the chronicler, about Nizār's behaviour during and after al-Afdal's *coup d'état*.

Yet another point in the declaration of the Princess recurs also in the *Hidāya*—although it is not expressly quoted on the Princess's authority and there is a curious discrepancy between the two versions. The chronicler gives an account of the quarrel between the two wives of al-Mustanşir, the mothers of 'Abdallāh and Nizār. It is not easy to explain how the *Hidāya* names as participants in the dispute not the mothers of the princes, but the princes themselves (p. 13, ll. 10–14):—

“When 'Abdallāh and Nizār quarrelled about the Imamate in his (al-Mustanşir's) presence, he said to them: Do not quarrel. Neither of you will be the ruler; the true ruler is *here*—pointing with his hands towards his blessed loins. At that time al-Musta'li was not yet conceived. The incident did not happen in private, but before several witnesses.”

The testimony of the Princess, as quoted in the *Hidāya*, does not contain Ibn al-Muyassar's story of al-Mustanşir's naming al-Musta'li as his successor on his death-bed. But in other passages of the *Hidāya* the last will of the Caliph, made immediately before his death, is frequently mentioned. The principle of the “nomination at the moment of death” (*naṣṣ fī daqīqati-l-intiqāl*), cancelling all previous arrangements, is a main argument in the *Hidāya*. It is reiterated in almost half a score of passages (p. 8, l. 3; p. 10, l. 2; p. 16, l. 2; p. 18, l. 15; p. 22, l. 10; p. 24, l. 11; and especially p. 13, l. 14–p. 14, l. 6; and p. 22, l. 15–p. 23, l. 3).

Finally, it may be recalled that the incident of the Princess cursing everybody who admitted the legality of Nizār's claims also occurs in both versions.

IV

These parallel passages make it evident that the *Hidāya* was issued to give publicity to the meeting of Shawwāl, that great demonstration of the legality of the Musta'lian dynasty. The sentence already quoted: “A few days ago the sister of Nizār acknowledged before witnesses, etc.,” proves that the *Hidāya* was

published immediately after the assembly. It may well be that it is precisely the *Hidāya* to which the chronicler alludes at the end of his account: “Al-Ma'mūn then ordered Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, the secretary, to draw up a proclamation (*siyill*), to be read from the chairs in the whole of Egypt.” The editor of the *Hidāya*, who, as already mentioned, quite correctly recognized it as a *siyill*, is also fully justified in remarking that “to attribute the authorship of this Epistle directly to the Caliph al-Āmir would, in all probability, be a mistake . . . Most probably, like all the *siyills*, it was compiled by his secretaries” (Intr., p. 3). It was then Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, at that time already known as the author of a handbook for secretaries and certainly one of the more important members of the chancery, who was the author of the *Hidāya*.¹

One can argue, however, that the *Hidāya* is too long for a letter destined to be read from the pulpit; so it is possible that the *Hidāya* represents a longer version of the letter mentioned in the chronicle and was meant to be read in the “public lectures” (*majālis*) of the sect.

The date Shawwāl A.H. 516, assumed for the compilation of the *Hidāya*, tallies very well with the conclusions which can be drawn from an appendix to it entitled *Iqā' ṣawā'iq al-irghām*.

Its opening sentences (pp. 27–28)² tell of the uproar at the reading of the *Hidāya* among the Assassins of Damascus. The document is a report of the Fatimid *dā'i* of Damascus on these events and the answer sent to him from Cairo. The *dā'i* tells that one of the “cunning impostors” (i.e. the Nizāri Assassins) read the *Hidāya* and was so impressed by its contents that he found it necessary to forward it to his spiritual head (called in the *dā'i*'s letter: “his

¹ Abu-l-Qāsim 'Alī b. Munjib Ibn al-Ṣayrafī was born in A.H. 463 (A.D. 1071), appointed a secretary in 495 (1101), and died, after service of nearly half a century, in 542 (1147). Of his writings there are known to be extant: (1) *Qānūn Diwān al-Rasā'il*, finished in 497 (1103) and dedicated to al-Afdal (ed. Ali Bahgat, Cairo, 1905); (2) *al-Ishāra ilā man nāla-l-wizāra*, a history of the Fatimid viziers (ed. Ali Mukhlis, in the *Bulletin de l'Institut français du Caire*, 1924). See Brockelmann, *Supplement* i, p. 489–490, and the introductions to the editions of his books named above, where are also printed the *siyills* composed by him, as far as p. 11) to have seen a collection of Ibn al-Ṣayrafī's letters in twenty volumes.—There is question in the chronicle of a second letter drawn up by Ibn al-Ṣayrafī and addressed to Ibn al-Sabbāh; but it is said that it was never dispatched.

² The story of the origin of the *Iqā'* is recapitulated, as the remarks of the Introduction in regard to this (p. 12) are not quite satisfactory.

false idol" (*yāghūt*). The latter wrote his refutation of the *Hidāya* on the blank space at the end of the copy sent to him. The Nizāri then appeared at a meeting of the orthodox Fatimid Ismailis of Damascus and read out his master's refutation. The *dā'i* asks the Caliph for guidance to silence their opponents. The rest of the document contains the answer of the Caliph.

The *dā'i* of Damascus gives the exact date of the meeting¹ attended by the Nizāri as Thursday the 27th of Dhu-l-hijja (omitting, however, the year).² Now, if the *Hidāya* was written at the end of Shawwāl, the two months till the 27th Dhu-l-hijja were just sufficient for the Epistle to reach Damascus, for the Assassin to read it and submit it to his master, and for the latter to compose his refutation and hand it back to his follower.

This curious piece of information sheds light, in a very welcome manner, on the doings of the Ismailis in Damascus, their propaganda conducted in a town which belonged at that time to the sphere of influence of the Abbasid Caliphate, and the mutual agitation of the rival factions of the Nizāris and Musta'lis. The Nizāris, as is well known, were to play a great role in Damascus and its district only a few years later.

In general the public assembly of 516 and the *Hidāya* are invaluable evidence for the paramount role the Nizāri question played in the councils of the Fatimid government under the reign of al-Āmir.

¹ The name for "meeting" is remarkable : قراءة المجلس الشريف (p. 28, l. 6) "the reading of the excellent *majlis*". The meetings of the Ismaili lodges were evidently occupied mainly by the reading of those lectures of which we have some representative samples in the *Majālis* of al-Mu'ayyad, and in the so-called *Majālis Mustanṣiriyya* (the latter published in Cairo, 1946). It is in this way that the word *majlis* "meeting", assumed the meaning "lecture". I shall deal more fully with these matters in a paper on the organization of the Ismaili sect.

² The editor states that during the reign of al-Āmir the 27th Dhu-l-hijja fell on a Thursday in 512 and 520. But, as he rightly points out (Intr., p. 4), owing to the intricacies of the Moslem calendar, still more complicated by the difference of one day or two between the Ismaili and the orthodox Sunni computation, the possibility of some discrepancy between the comparative tables (based on astronomical calculations) and the dates as given by the historians, must always be taken into consideration. The editor, therefore, admits as eligible also the years 515, 517, 518, 523. I am unable to investigate the chronological side of the question, but it seems to me that the evidence in favour of the year 516 is cogent enough to over-rule any possible hesitation caused by the omission of this year from the above list—especially if one bears in mind the editor's words about the possibility of error in these calculations.