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THE BEGINNINGS OF
THE ISMĀ'ĪLĪ DA'WA
IN NORTHERN INDIA

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Beginnings

About the end of the 3rd/9th Century, even before the Fāṭimid Caliphate was established on the North African soil, the Fāṭimid mission was at work in many countries, and India was no exception. On this point we have the evidence of the learned Qāḍī an-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) chief Qāḍī of the Fāṭimid Caliph Mu'izz (d. 365/976), who states that in 270/883 the Yamanite Dā'i Abul-Qāsim b. Ḥawshab Maṣūr al-Yaman sent his nephew al-Haytham as *dā'i* (missionary) to Sind and that the *Da'wa* (mission) spread to Hind.¹ We also have Rashīd ad-dīn's account of Fāṭimid missionaries in India during the period prior to the Fāṭimid conquest of North Africa, i.e. during the period of *satr*. A marginal note² in Juwaynī corroborates the same account.³

Having made a beginning in Sind, the *Da'wa* continued to grow and gradually permeated other areas, such as Multān, Gujrāt and the Punjāb and by the time of the Fāṭimid Caliph Mu'izz, it had quite a large following. This is recorded by the same Qāḍī an-Nu'mān⁴ and corroborated by his contemporary Ibn Ḥawqal,⁵ who informs us that the authority of the Fāṭimid Caliph was recognised in Baluchistān. Elliot and Dawson say: "One of the Balūch clans, indeed still preserves the memory of its heresy, or that of its progenitor, in retaining its present title of *Qarmaḥī*."⁶

- (1) *Ifṣiṭāh*, ff. 18-19. This account is copied verbatim in Dā'i Idris's *Uyūn*, VI, f. 38.
- (2) Excerpts from Rashīd ad-dīn in R. Levy: *Isma'ili Doctrines in the Jāmi' at-Tawārīkh* etc., *J.R.A.S.* (1930), pp. 516, 518, 522.
- (3) *Ta'rikh Jahān Gushāi*, *G.M.S.* (1937), vol. III, pp. 248-249 (being marginal note to p. 154, l. 8).
- (4) *Ifṣiṭāh*, f. 18.
- (5) *Masālik*, ed. Kramers, vol. II, p. 410, ll. 7-12 (also see foot-notes). Cf. De Goeje: *Mémoires sur les Carmathes*, note on p. 196.
- (6) *History of India*, I App. p. 492.

The well-known historian al-Birūnī (first half of the 5th/11th century) states⁷ that one Jalam b. Shaybān, the leader of the Qarmaṭians⁸, attacked Multān, then a small independent principality,⁹ destroyed its famous idol *Aditya* (Sun God),¹⁰ venerated by both the Hindu inhabitants and its Arab Prince, and razed a mosque erected in the Umayyad times and built a new one on the same site. This story is repeated in detail by the Yamanite Ismā'īlī historian Dā'ī Idrīs (d. 872 H.), who writes¹¹ that in the time of Imām Mu'izz, a dā'ī was sent to Sind who converted many Magians (Majūs) but allowed them to continue with some of their non-Islāmic beliefs and customs.¹² He was replaced by another dā'ī, Jalam (Ḥilm) b. Shaybān.¹³ The

- (7) *India* (ed. Sachau) text p. 56; trans. pp. 116-117. Also see Defremery: *Histoire des Ismailies de la Perse*, J.A. VIII (1856), p. 381; Reinaud: *Fragments Arabes et Persans relatifs à l'Inde*, II, J.A. 1844, pp. 283-84, note 2.
- (8) The word "Qarmaṭian" is here applied to the Ismā'īlīs of the official Fāṭimid Da'wa and not to the dissident Da'wa of Syria or Baḥrayn, as is evident from the corroborating story of Dā'ī Idrīs given below, as well as Muqaddasī's statement mentioned later in this article.
- (9) Belonging to the Arab dynasty of Banū Sāma. Read below.
- (10) This famous idol is mentioned by many writers like Abū Zayd Ḥasan Sirānī (264 H.), Ibn Rusta (290 H.), Mas'ūdī (303 H.), Ibn Muḥalhil (331 H.), Istakhrī (340 H.), Ibn Ḥawqal (367 H.), Muqaddasī (375 H.), Biḥūnī (432 H.) and Qazwīnī, who gives the detailed story of its destruction.
- (11) *Uyūn al-Akḥbār* VI, ff. 100-117. Dā'ī Idrīs writes on the authority of a book by Qāḍī'n-Nu'mān (d. 363 H.) of which the name is not mentioned. The account does not occur in the *Iftitāḥ* and I have not been able to see the relevant volume of *Sharḥ al-Akḥbār*. Probably the reference is to the Qāḍī's *Majālis*.
- (12) In a recent article: *Heterodox Ismā'īlism at the time of al-Mu'izz* (B.S.O.A.S. XVII/1), S.M. Stern has edited extracts from Qāḍī'n Nu'mān's *al-Majālis wa'l-Muwāḥarāt* and has deduced the following conclusions therefrom: about 347 H. a Fāṭimid dā'ī whose name is not known had converted in Multān many from the *majūs* and had written to Caliph Mu'izz about it. The Caliph did not like the *majūs* retaining their old views and thought the dā'ī heretical and disloyal for holding the view that the Fāṭimids were of Qaddāhid origin or that they were 'Alids, but followed an interregnum of Qaddāhids who led the Ismā'īlīs during the period of *satr*. The Caliph in his reply diplomatically showed approval of the dā'ī, but secretly plotted for his removal, and Ḥilm b. Shaybān was instructed to carry out the plot. But probably in 348 H. a riding accident in which the dā'ī was killed made further action unnecessary.
- (13) Jalam b. Shaybān's conflict with his predecessor is given in detail in *Uyūn* VI, f. 100 seq. Idrīs calls him Ḥilm.

Caliph sent a letter of instruction to him in Ramaḍān 354 H.¹⁴ This dā'ī put to death the ruler of Sind, destroyed a temple, and in its place built a mosque.¹⁵

The Arab kingdoms of Multan and Mansurah in Sind

Since the Arab conquest of Sind by their young and intrepid leader Muḥammad b. Qāsim during the time of the Umayyad Caliph Walīd the Arab Muslim power was firmly established in this Indian province. In 258/871 the 'Abbāsīd Caliph Mu'tamid practically handed over the province to the famous Ṣaffārid leader Ya'qūb b. Layth, who was considerably responsible for the spread of Shi'ism in Sind. On the latter's death in 265/878 the Muslim territories in Sind were divided between two independent chiefs, those of Multān and Manṣūrah (Bahmanābād).¹⁶

a) MULTAN

In Multān, one Asad Qarashī of the Arab tribe of Banū Sāma established an independent principality. He ruled from 279 to 290 H. Mas'ūdī mentions his son Abu'l-Lubāb Manba's rule in 303 H. Iṣṭakhri and Ibn Hawqal also mention Banū Sāma as rulers of Multān, but do not give the names of individual rulers. We also learn from them that the Ismā'īlī Da'wa had become very active in Multān. Dā'ī Idrīs gives the date 354 H. as about the time when the dā'ī Jalam (Ḥilm) b. Shaybān defeated the last Arab Prince of Banū Sāma, then ruling Multān.

When Muqaddasī came to Multān in 375 H., he found an Ismā'īlī ruler governing the town. His name is not given, but the above discussion proves that he was Jalam b. Shaybān. During Muqaddasī's visit the idol *Aditya* was still there. Dā'ī Jalam, therefore, must have destroyed it about 376 H., presumably the last year of his life and rule. Muqaddasī writes: "The people of Multān are Shi'a... In Multān, the *Khuṭba* is read in the name of the Fāṭimid Caliph of Egypt and the place is

(14) Full text of the letter is reproduced in *op. cit.* ff. 114-117. Also see S.M. Stern: *Ismā'īlī Propaganda and the Fāṭimid Rule in Sind*, art. I.C. Oct. 1949, pp. 298-307 and for a full translation, S.M. Stern: *Heterodox Ismā'īlism at the time of al-Mu'izz*, *B.S.O.A.S.*, XVII/1.

(15) *Uyūn* VI, f. 117.

(16) *Advanced History of India* by Majumdar, Raychaudhari and Datta (London 1953), p. 275.

Ismā'ili rule in Multān 354 H to 401 H.

1) Jalam b. Shaybān

2) Shaykh Ḥamīd

3) Abul Futūḥ Dā'ūd b. Naṣr

Persecution of thousands of Isma'ilis in Multan
by Mahmūd Ghaznawid in 401 H ?

4

administered by his orders. Gifts are regularly sent from here to Egypt.¹⁷

Farishṭa¹⁸ says that the next ruler of Multān was Shaykh Ḥamīd, another Ismā'īlī dā'ī, and probably the son¹⁹ of Jalam b. Shaybān, who ruled up to 387 H.²⁰ The Ghaznawid Amīr Sabuktāgīn invaded Multān in 381 H., but later made a truce with Shaykh Ḥamīd, as Ismā'īlī Multān served as a buffer state between the rising Turkish power of Ghazna and the old Hindu rulers — the Imperial Pratihāras of Kanauj.

Sabuktāgīn's successor, the famous Maḥmūd of Ghazna, was temperamentally averse to compromise and a sworn enemy of Ismā'īlism. He broke the truce by invading Multān in 396 H. At this time, the Ismā'īlī dā'ī Abul-Futūḥ Dā'ūd b. Naṣr, the grandson of Shaykh Ḥamīd, was ruling Multān. Tiring of the seven days siege of the town laid by Maḥmūd, Abul-Futūḥ agreed to pay tribute to the Sulṭān and Maḥmūd returned to Ghazna. Returning in 401 H., the Ghaznawid finally annexed Multān, took Abul-Futūḥ prisoner and massacred many Ismā'īlīs. Abul-Futūḥ died in a prison in Ghazna.²¹

So came to an end the Ismā'īlī rule in Multān. It had lasted from 354 H.²² to 401 H. — about half a century. The Dā'īs of Multān constituted a dynasty of three rulers and were of Arab race.²³ They

(17) *Aḥsan al-Taqāsim* (Leiden ed.), p. 481.

(18) *Tārīkh Farishṭa* (Nawal Kishor ed.), I, pp. 17-18.

(19) In the learned opinion of Mawlānā Sulaymān Nadvī: *Arab-o-Hind ke Ta'alluqāt* (Allahabad, 1930) p. 326.

(20) The year of the Ghaznawid Sabuktāgīn's death. Farishṭa (*ibid*) considers Shaykh Ḥamīd contemporary to Sabuktāgīn.

(21) Gardizī (d. 441 H.): *Zayn* (1928 - Berlin ed.), pp. 67-69. Farishṭa gives another version. While Gardizī is silent about the race of Ismā'īlī ruler, Farishṭa considers him to be of Pathan origin. They differ also on the route of Maḥmūd's invasion. Again Farishṭa makes Abul-Futūḥ run away with his treasures to Ceylon.

As Mawlānā Sulaymān Nadvī points out (*op. cit.*, pp. 321-322) Gardizī's account is to be preferred, because he was contemporary to the events described, and lived and wrote in the Ghaznawid capital itself. Farishṭa not only wrote much later, but had a tendency to melodramatic inaccuracy.

(22) Although the conversion of Multān's *majūs* to Ismā'īlism took place in 347 H., Ismā'īlīs did not become rulers of the city until 354 H., when dā'ī Jalam b. Shaybān overthrew the Banū Sāma prince.

(23) S. Nadvī (*op. cit.* pp. 327-329) considers the Ismā'īlī rulers as pure Arabs on the evidence of early Arab geographers and the very nature of their names, and rejects the fantastic theory of Farishṭa that they belonged to the Pathan Lodhi family.

were under the direct control of the Fāṭimids as is evidenced by the correspondence between Caliph Mu'izz and Jalam b. Shaybān reproduced by Idris in *'Uyūn al-Akḥbār* and in Muqaddasī's statement given above. Sunnī historians inaccurately refer to the community as "Qarmaṭians" of Multān, since they belonged to the official Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī Da'wa.

Muqaddasī who came to Multān during its Ismā'īlī regime has given the following picture of its social life : "Multān is smaller than Maṣūrah in size, but has a larger population. Fruits are not found in plenty; yet they are sold cheaper ... Like Sirāf, Multān has wooden homes. There is no bad conduct and drunkenness here, and people convicted of these crimes are punished by death or by some heavy sentence. Business is fair and honest. Travellers are looked after well. Most of the inhabitants are Arabs. They live by a river. The place abounds in vegetation and wealth. Trade flourishes here. Good manners and good living are noticed everywhere. The Government is just. Women of the town are modestly dressed with no make-up and hardly found talking to anyone in the streets. The water is healthy and the standard of living high. There is happiness, well-being and culture here. Persian is understood. Profits of business are high. People are healthy, but the town is not clean. Houses are small. The climate is warm and arid. The people are of darkish complexion... In Multān, the coin is minted on the style of the Fāṭimid Egyptian coin, but Qanharī coins are commonly used."²⁴

Maḥmūd's Wazīr, Hasnak, was put to death by Mas'ūd upon the charge of being an Ismā'īlī. The 'Abbāsīd Caliph had previously asked Maḥmūd to punish Hasnak for having received a robe of honour (*khil'a*) from the Fāṭimid Caliph, but Maḥmūd replied that he had no grounds for suspicion. When Maḥmūd died and Hasnak's enemy came to throne, the 'Abbāsīd Caliph's animosity was soon appeased.²⁵

The persecution of the Ismā'īlīs by Maḥmūd is attested to by the theologian al-Baḡhdādī (d. 429/1037), who says that the Ismā'īlīs of Multān were massacred in thousands by Maḥmūd.²⁶

Ismā'īlism survived in Multān despite Maḥmūd's vigorous assaults,

(24) Muqaddasī: *op. cit.*, pp. 481-482.

(25) Bayhaqī (cl. 370/1077): *Ta'rikh as-Subaktagin* (Tehran ed. 1327 H.), pp. 183-187; translated by Elliot and Dawson, *History of India*, vol II, pp. 93-100.

(26) *Farq* (Cairo ed.), pp. 277; cf. B. Lewis: *Ismā'īlī Note*, art. *B.S.O.A.S.*, XII, 1948, p. 600.

for in 571/1175, according to al-Juzjānī (d. 650 H.), Sulṭān Mu'izz ad-dīn Ghorī once again "delivered Multān from the hands of the Qarmaṭians".²⁷ The same author informs us that later, in 634/1236, during the reign of Raḍiyya Sulṭāna, the Ismā'īlis from all parts of the Indian sub-continent, particularly Gujarāt, Sind, Dihli (Dehli) and the banks of the Jamna and Ganges, assembled in large numbers and, with arms, under the leadership of one Nūr Turk, attacked the Jāmi' Masjid of the Capital. They were, however, defeated by the "Mus-salmans".²⁸

b) MANSURAH

Having collected above the references that are available about the Ismā'īli connections with Multān, we return to an earlier period to review the Ismā'īli influence in Manṣūrah.

Manṣūrah was built by 'Amr, the son of Muḥammad b. Qāsim, during Umayyad times between the years 110 and 120 H. as a safe refuge for the Arab community in Sind. According to Balādhuri,²⁹ 'Amr b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim wrested Bahmanābād (also known as Brahmanābād) from its governor, al-Ḥakam, and at a distance of two farasangs from it founded the Arab town of Manṣūrah. Later Manṣūrah also came to be known as Bahmanābād,³⁰ This is corroborated by Iṣṭakhrī³¹ and Ibn Ḥawqal³². It was situated on the banks of the Indus River, according to the excavations made by the Department of Antiquities during the years 1920-22, on the present site of Dhalor, 8 miles South-east of Shahdādpūr, eastwards along the canal of Jamdas. The author of *Mujmal at-Tawārikh*³³ places Bahmanābād in the District of Budhia in Sind and states that the Persian King Bahman Ardeshir built it when he conquered this territory. Due to its good geographical position, Manṣūrah attained the

(27) *Tabaqāt-i-Nāṣiri*, (Calcutta ed. 1864), pp. 116 and 189; trans. Elliot & Dawson, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

(28) *Ibid* (trans.), pp. 335, 336; cf. Defremery, *op. cit.*, pp. 383-384.

(29) *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, p. 444.

(30) *Op. cit.*, p. 439.

(31) p. 172.

(32) p. 226.

(33) ed. Tchrān, pp. 117-118.

status of a capital for the Arab community of Sind.³⁴

Here one 'Amr b. 'Abd al-'Aziz founded the Arab dynasty of Habbāri Qurayshids in 240 H. during the reign of the 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Mutawakkil. When the 'Abbāsīd Caliph Mu'tamid gave over Sind to the Ṣaffāriid Ya'qūb b. Layth, the Habbāri dynasty became independent. It was a Sunnī dynasty and as such had maintained an 'Abbāsīd *Khuṭba* and owed a nominal allegiance to the 'Abbāsīd Caliphs. Under this dynasty large numbers of 'Alids settled in the country and attained for themselves considerable importance.³⁵ By the time of Ibn Ḥawqal and Muqaddasī, Manṣūrah had grown to be a large state comprising most of the Sind territory and included in it a number of important towns such as Daybul. Muqaddasī calls Manṣūrah the Capital of Sind.³⁶

In 375 H. when Muqaddasī came to Manṣūrah, the town was under Sunnī rule. Ibn Khaldūn says that the town was taken by Maḥmūd of Ghazna in 416 H. from the Habbārids.³⁷ But Ibn al-Aṭīr points out that when Maḥmūd of Ghazna was returning from his conquest of Somnāth, he came to Manṣūrah and took it from a prince who had renounced Islam.³⁸ The name of the Habbārid prince, as given by the contemporary poet Farrukhī in one of his poems³⁹ is *Khafif*, who is not to be confused with a later Sūmra ruler of that name. We can therefore deduce that the last rulers of the Sunnī Habbāri dynasty had given up orthodox Islam, and espoused Ismā'īlism⁴⁰ sometime between 375 H. and 416 H. We have already noted above that a large 'Alid community was settled in Manṣūrah; that Ismā'īli Da'wa was widespread throughout Sind. It is likely that Manṣūrah became the centre of Ismā'īli activity. And about the time when they were ousted by Maḥmūd of Ghazna from Multān in 401 H. they may have concentrated in Manṣūrah due to its geographical position well suited for defence. They may have brought all their influence to bear on the

(34) The above facts are ably established on the critical analysis of Arab geographies by N.A. Baloch : *Chach-Nāma* (Sindhi trans. 1954), note on pp. 397-400. For the coins and clay medallions of the Arab governors of Manṣūrah see Thomas Princep's *Essays* and Cousen's *Antiquities of Sind*.

(35) Mas'ūdī: *Murūj*, vol. I, p. 377.

(36) Muqaddasī, *op. cit.*, p. 479.

(37) *Ta'rikh* (Egyptian ed.), vol. II, p. 327.

(38) *Kamil* (Leiden ed. Tornberg), vol. IX, p. 243.

(39) Nāzīm: *Maḥmūd of Ghazna*, p. 120.

(40) Accepting Ismā'īlism would, in the opinion of Ibn al-Aṭīr, be "renouncing Islam".

last Habbārid rulers and converted them to Ismā'ilism. Habbārids were after all as much in danger of Maḥmūd's invasion as the Ismā'ilis.

Thus like Multān, Maṣūrah became an Ismā'īlī kingdom soon to be wiped out by the sworn enemy of Ismā'ilism, Maḥmūd of Ghazna. According to the above argument, the Ismā'īlī rule in Maṣūrah lasted from 401 H. to 416 H. — that is, for 15 years. Ismā'ilism, however, did not die. It remained a force and grew stronger, for it was accepted and patronised by yet another dynasty — that of the Sūmras.

The Sūmras

Sind was entirely conquered by Maḥmūd (d. 421 H.) and included in his Ghaznawid Empire. It remained so during the time of his son Mas'ūd and his son 'Abd ar-Rashīd (d. 444 H.). But now the Ghaznawids had become weak. Delhi and its environs were taken from them by the Ghorīs, and Sind became independent of them under the Sūmras.

In 425/1033, the famous Druze leader al-Muqtana wrote a letter to one *Shaykh* Sūmar Rājībal asking him to espouse the Druze cause.⁴¹ Mīr Ma'šūm⁴² tells us that in the time of 'Abd ar-Rashīd b. Sulṭān Mas'ūd, about the year 443/1051, the men of the Sūmra tribe revolted from the rule of the Ghaznī, and placed on the throne of Sind a man named Sūmra. It seems that this Sūmra is the same person as our *Shaykh* Sūmar Rājībal, for it is obvious from Muqtana's letter that the *Shaykh* had a large following, which fact may have induced him to revolt and set up a separate kingdom.

The Sūmras were a local Sindhi Hindu tribe who had been converted to Islām right from the time of the first Arab conquest⁴³ and had considerably intermarried with the Arab settlers; with the result that their names are mixed Arab-Hindu. Even after conversion they had retained many of their old Hindu customs, like having their meals exclusively among themselves and not with any outsider.⁴⁴ They had marriage-relations with big local Arab landowners and had thus acquired great influence and power.⁴⁵ They lived on the banks of the

(41) Muqtana: *Risālat al-Hind* (British Museum, Arabic Ms. Add. 11561), f. 36; cf. B. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 600.

(42) *Ta'rikh-i-Sind* (Bombay ed. 1938), p. 60.

(43) Ibn Baṭūṭa: *Travels* (Egyptian ed.), vol. II, pp. 4-6.

(44) *Ibid.*

(45) *Ta'rikh-i-Sind* by Mīr Ma'šūm (extract Elliot's *Hist.*, vol. I, p. 215).