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THE ORGANIZATION OF THE FATIMID PROPAGANDA

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1. THE DĀ'Ī AND THE CAUSES OF HIS SUCCESSES.

The Bāṭinī (i.e. Ismaili) *dā'ī* already at an early date becomes a prominent figure in the annals of Islam.¹ As elusive and omnipresent as the 'Scarlet Pimpernel', as malicious, ruthlessly cruel, and unscrupulous in farfetched diabolical schemes as the leader of a criminal gang in any detective best seller, as superhumanly clever, brave, persevering, and daring as any detective hero of the best American cinema film,—the *dā'ī* appears as the chief 'villain of the plot', responsible for many failures and defeats which the corrupt and incapable Abbasid administration had to suffer. He was at the bottom of every political murder, of every uprising, every manifestation of popular discontent, as seen through official eyes, discussed in bazar rumours, and recorded by the authors of many historical works, who surrounded him with a halo of mystery, romance, and, above all, of the fame of extraordinary organizing talent. And such is the power of 'wide publicity', of advertisement, that by the mere fact of the continuous repetition this obviously exaggerated and mythical figure has for ever acquired

¹ It would be interesting if students of the history of Islam could definitely ascertain the first date at which this term is used. It would also be interesting to find out in how far the same term *dā'ī* was applied to the propagandists of other Shi'ite sects, especially the Ithna-'ashari. As is known, the Zaydis freely used it. In the case of the Ismailis a great deal of confusion is inevitable due to their being always mixed up in the non-sectarian annals with the Qarmatians.

historic reality, completely obscuring the real Ismaili propagandist and teacher. Even now, with more developed sense of proportion and critical methods of research, this fictitious figure is often taken as true and real. Such eminent Orientalists as the late Prof. de Goeje and E. G. Browne may serve as good examples: they apparently accepted the story, and unreservedly believed in it.¹

The difficulty of verifying this traditional version arises from the complete absence of impartial records, and also the great scarcity of information coming from the sectarian sources which, although not impartial, can to some extent help us to check the facts. Such information is only available about very few *dā'īs*: the one who laid the foundation of the Fatimid empire, Abū 'Abdi'l-lāh ash-Shi'ī, about Rāshidu'd-din Sinān, and,—very little,—about the Maṣūru'l-Yaman, or Hasan b. aṣ-Ṣabbāḥ. These, of course, were extraordinary men, giants as compared with the ordinary, rank and file, *dā'ī*. They appear first of all as born leaders, talented generals, men of iron will, of unflinching devotion and high religious enthusiasm, and yet broadminded, with plenty of common-sense, and strong creative intellect. They apparently had nothing in common with the 'classic' figure of the *dā'ī*, as it appears in general literature,²—a lurking preacher of sedition, atheism and looseness. We can firmly believe that these outstanding men did not represent a class entirely different from the ordinary *dā'ī*. It only was that their towering personalities presented on a gigantic scale the features which certainly existed, although on a much smaller scale, in the character of every one of their subordinates and less outstanding colleagues.

But if we disbelieve legend, and 'uncrown' the romantic figure of the *dā'ī*, we have to seek elsewhere for a reliable explanation for the indubitable historical fact of his extraordinary successes, almost bordering upon the miraculous. The immense success of the Ismaili propaganda, from the Atlantic to innermost Asia, is a fact which is beyond dispute. The solution of this problem obviously lies in the psychology of the masses under the Omayyad, and later on the Abbasid rule. Continuous unrest, economical distress, and dissatisfaction with the conditions of life, laid enormous stress on the possibilities which in popular ideas would be offered by the theocratical organization of the state, on the lines of the Shi'ite ideal. This explains the astounding number of almost completely hopeless Shi'ite risings all over the Islamic world, which was full of Messianistic expectations, longing for the ruler, Imam, 'who will fill the earth with justice and equity just as much as it is filled with injustice and oppression of one by the other'.

¹ E. G. Browne's views are summed up in his well-known *Literary History of Persia* (Vol. I, pp. 391–415), where he endorses the similar views of de Goeje and Dozy (p. 394 sq.).

² So E. G. Browne visualized him from his observations of the Bahā'ī missionaries whom he met with in Persia. Cf. his *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. I, p. 410.

It seems quite obvious therefore that the supernatural success of the *dā'īs* is nothing but illusion, the same aberration of the vision as the rapid movement of the landscape seen from the window of a rapidly moving train: not that the *dā'īs* were seducing the masses, but the masses were waiting for someone to organize the movement which already was widespread and general, and only required co-ordination of effort and linking together of the isolated groups.

We know quite well the peculiar mentality of the decaying and no longer popular régimes everywhere: to the last moment, when they are overthrown, and even after this, their heads and supporters can never understand and realize their own failure. They would continually and blindly believe that their subjects love, even worship them; that they are only too willing to sacrifice everything to please them. That their administration, even if not perfect, nevertheless is all that is wanted. And that if there are signs of discontent and opposition, this is the work of the enemies of the state, spies, conspirators, of those who sow sedition and trouble, seducing the poor simple people who otherwise would never be able to feel discontent, or complain on anything, without the incitement of such villains. No, they would be only too glad to obey their government, and believe in God according to the rules prescribed by the religion, approved and recommended by the state. How many terrible catastrophes and explosions, accompanied by enormous sufferings of millions, would have been avoided in history by timely realization, and doing the needful, on the part of those concerned. But usually all their energies become devoted to the extermination of the 'mischief mongers', while very little is done to alter the conditions of the masses in such a way as to paralyse the effect of the mischief makers from inside.

The Abbasids were no exception to this rule,—which perhaps is the only rule that knows no exceptions generally,—and persecuted all sorts of sectarians, especially the Shi'ites, attributing to them all kinds of fantastic schemes to uproot Islam and turn the people to atheism, or to the ancient religion of the Persians.¹ But this only could drive the popular discontent under ground, making

¹ Tremendous amount of speculation is found in the different works of some Orientalists about the 'typically Persian' nature of Ismailism, of its 'Persian' mentality, dogmas, etc. All this completely defies my comprehension. The exoteric doctrine of Ismailism is the strictest form of Islam, while its esoteric system is entirely built up from *Greek* elements. Surely, Islam itself, in its most orthodox form, contains many Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and other elements; and they are not a wit more prominent in Ismailism, as it was under the Fatimids. The aberration of judgment is obviously based on the fact that before genuine Ismaili literature became accessible, the information offered by the anti-Ismaili authors was extremely misleading. It completely distorted the picture by withholding all mention of what Ismailism had in common with other Islamic schools, and by laying absurdly exaggerated stress on the few ill-understood, or deliberately perverted tenets calculated to serve as food for accusations.

it still more dangerous and subversive, because it not only remains beyond the control, but also out of the vision of the officials, and thus may at any time strike an unexpected blow.

With the ground prepared in this way, the Fatimid propaganda was able to achieve its wonderful successes mainly through one of its most peculiar features,—the complete decentralization of its agents. From the original Ismaili document, which is summarized in this paper, and which dates from the period at which the power of the Fatimids attained its culminating point, we can see how carefully the candidates for the post of *dā'ī* were selected, how high standard of ability was expected from them, and how difficult was it to satisfy the demands. The responsibilities of the *dā'ī* were tremendous, and the candidate had to possess exceptional talents to be fit for the duty. But once he was appointed, he was given full authority. It is really astonishing to see how independent was he expected to be in his work: the *dā'ī* was not encouraged to bother the Imam and the central government with trivial and routine matters. He had to use his own discretion, conforming with the general tendency and spirit of his mission. 'Just as when the husband deposits his sperm into the womb of his wife, and she conceives, he does not interfere with the development of the embryo, etc., but merely feeds and protects his wife, so the Imam, having sent his *dā'ī* to a certain community, does not interfere with his work, and only gives general directions and guidance to his people.' And the *dā'ī* takes the whole responsibility upon himself. 'If God asks the Imam to account for the welfare of the community, the Imam refers Him to the *dā'ī* in charge, who takes upon himself the whole responsibility for this.'

The results of this policy we can see from history: decentralization, coupled with the selection of the right type of men,—the virtue of princes, which the earlier Fatimids possessed, especially the great statesmen like Mahdī, Qā'im, and Mu'izz,—helped to build a great empire. It seems that the increase of centralization always indicates a certain distrust of rulers in their subjects. It is a fact that the most unpopular or even hated régimes always are the most centralized,—we have an ample opportunity to see this now for ourselves. And if the supreme ruler, especially semi-Divine, as the Ismaili Imam, instead of keeping himself far above the squabbles of his subjects, and the imperfect working of the administrative machine, himself takes up the drudgery of practical government, making himself directly responsible for all its wrongs,—as the last Fatimid caliph-Imam al-Āmir bi'l-lāh did,—then the play is finished, and the curtain falls. What invariably happens, is rapid decay, and final rot. This is why the Musta'lian community could survive the catastrophe only in remote Yaman, under the rule of an autonomous *dā'ī*.

Such were the two important causes which contributed to the success of the Fatimid propaganda, helping it to achieve its almost miraculous results. Instead of the ridiculous and childish pictures

drawn by the authors of the anti-Ismaili camp, we can easily visualize a far more convincing state of affairs. Suffering population, longing for peace, a change towards more normal and human conditions, dreaming about the righteous ruler from the house of the Prophet, receives the *dā'ī*, a specially selected and trained man of outstanding abilities, strong character, an enthusiast in his devotion, ambitious, hard working, a man of wide education, of broad vision, acute and shrewd. It is difficult to believe the stories that such a man would drop from the sky. Surely, the ground was always prepared for him, in some way or other. And when he gets into a commanding position, and really knows his people, helping them, ruling them justly, etc., his success, and the success of his mission, are sure. This is apparently the typical course of the *dā'ī's* career; from such individual local successes, under the able supervision of a born ruler, the Fatimid empire was built.

2. THE DOGMA OF THE *ḤUDŪDU'D-DĪN*.

As mentioned above, Ismaili literature contains very few materials which would permit us to form an idea about the organization of the propaganda under the Fatimids. This is particularly sad, because rarely any Ismaili dogmatical or esoteric work omits to deal with a peculiar abstract theory of priesthood and its hierarchy, *ḥudūdu'd-dīn*, which was evolved and emphasized by the doctrine of Ismailism.

As is known, the Sunnite majority in Islam has at a fairly early date adopted the belief that the Prophet left for the guidance of his newly founded religious community the Coran (which was at that time not yet collected and codified), and his own example (which was only known in full to very few among his closest associates). The Shi'ites (and especially, later on, the Ismailis), tried to preserve the original theoretical system of the Islam state, as it was under the Prophet himself. In his absence they accepted as the supreme secular and religious head of Islam his lineal descendant,¹ the Imam, who was believed to be the repository of special and higher religious knowledge, which was his exclusive hereditary property, bequeathed by the Prophet to his, the Imam's, progenitor, 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib; the latter was the closest associate, cousin, and son-in-law of the Founder of Islam, who treated him as his brother. This knowledge, both exoteric and esoteric, made the Imam the only person fully competent to interpret, explain, and apply the doctrine of the Coran and religious institutions to the requirements of daily life, in a correct way.

Thus the Imam not only had to inherit the Prophet's secular functions, as the head of the state, but also his most important

¹ Through his daughter Fātima, as is well-known. Although the Fatimids emphasized this point, many Shi'ite sects endowed 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib with much greater religious importance, so that they even followed the line of his descendants who were the children of 'Ali by his other wife, Ḥanafiyya.

religious function, the preaching of the Divine Revelation. For this reason the idea of religious teaching and preaching always was so strong in Ismailism that it outweighed many other sides in its system. Before the political successes of Ismailism detracted the attention of its enemies from its religious doctrine, the Ismailis usually were referred to under the name of the *Ta'limiyya*, i.e. 'the sect of teaching', *ta'lim*. And later on they themselves adopted the term *da'wat*, 'call', i.e. preaching, as the description of their religion.

The Imam, the theocratical ruler of Islam, and its Great Pontiff, supreme religious authority, as he should be, obviously could not impart his precious and all important knowledge to all his subjects personally. Therefore a new institution was brought into existence which was unknown to the earliest patriarchal phase of Islam,—the institute of priests, as intermediaries between the Imam and his subjects, and his accredited agents.

It is quite possible that this new development (as it can be traced in the earliest available sources), started from the same idea as in all other Islamic schools, i.e. from the functions of a religious teacher, '*ālim*'; he, being versed in the difficult knowledge of the proscriptions of the religion and law, acted as the leader of congregational prayers, a teacher, and a judge. With gradual differentiation of the society and the advance of civilization, obviously more complex system became necessary, with an elaborate hierarchy of ranks, special duties assigned to each, etc.

But the most important difference which was introduced by Ismailism, as compared with Sunnism, was the idea of the *priest*, in approximately the same sense as it is in Christianity and some other religions.¹ As is known, Muslim *mulla* cannot be called a priest, in the real sense of the word, because he is not *ordained*. He acquires his position by virtue of his own learning, talents, piety, and by the consent of the congregation. This applies even to the great doctors, supreme authorities in legal matters, the *imāms* in the Sunnite sense. All of them are merely specialists or experts in religious matters, just as there are expert medical men, engineers, astronomers, etc.

The Ismaili *dā'ī*, i.e. accredited agent of the Imam, *is ordained*. In addition to the position of ordinary Islamic *mulla*, he has spiritual authority, commission, received either directly from the source of the religious authority, the Imam, or indirectly, through those who themselves received it from him, together with the right of transferring it to others. The sacrament which he is commissioned to perform is not only teaching, i.e. distributing the sacred wisdom of the Imams, but also accepting, on their behalf, the oath of allegiance of the followers.

¹ The author of *al-Mūjizatu'l-Kāfiya*, as may be seen further on, plainly compares the Ismaili *dā'ī* with the priests in the three main religions known to him,—Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian, although it is not clear to what extent he realizes the implications of such comparison.

This is quite different from the state of things in Sunnism, although it cannot be regarded as a heretical practice, *bid'a*, for the simple reason that it is respected and sanctified by Sunnism in its Sufic form. As many other ideas and institutions, this one has a complete parallel in the Sufic theory of the 'chains' of permissions, by which accredited spiritual teachers, *murshids*, receive their authority ultimately from the Prophet himself, through a long succession of similar commissioned priests. Just as the Sufic *murshid* without a genuine *ijāza*, *khirqa*, or other certificate of his commission, is an impostor, however pious and learned he may really be,¹ so the *dā'ī* is a *dā'ī* only in so far as he is commissioned by the Imam, in whose name he accepts the oath of allegiance from his converts.

The importance of this institution was apparently appreciated from the outset, in the conditions which accompanied the earliest history of the Ismaili movement. Not only did it permit of the unification and standardization of the dogmatical and other sides of the religion, but also provided a kind of an automatically working mechanism of propaganda, which could function even in the absence of the visible head, the Imam, who often had to live in the strictest disguise, being known only to a few amongst the most trusted devotees. This is why no effort was spared by the Ismaili dogmatists to build a sound foundation for this new institution, both from the arguments derived from the *zāhīr*, i.e. the Coran and tradition, by the selection of appropriate quotations, etc., and in the *bā'īn*, or the symbolical and abstract theory of the religion, by philosophical speculations. Everything was mobilized for this purpose, and the tradition was established of attaching enormous importance to the theory.

From what apparently was the earliest scheme: Imam—*dā'ī*—ordinary initiated follower,—the theory grew into a complex, mystic and philosophic, symbolical system, based on the fundamental 'rhythm of the universe', observed in some coincidences of different numbers, their mystical values, etc. Childish as these speculations may appear to modern man, they appealed to the mentality of the time; profound mysteries were sincerely sought in them; and it is such material that constitutes the greatest secrets of the ancient Ismaili wisdom which was so zealously guarded from the profane eye.

There is, however, nothing original in these speculations, as all of them are derived from different mystical theories of Neo-Pythagoreans, from Neo-Platonism, and Plotinian philosophy, just as in the case of Sufic speculations, based on imperfect knowledge of the original systems, and their arbitrary amalgamation. As the matter of the most fundamental importance in the religious life,

¹ Obvious autodidact and self-made *murshids* had to declare that they had received their *khirqa* either from Khidr, or from a certain famous saint during their sleep, in a dream. This sort of pious fraud was apparently condoned by the public at the period of the gradual decline of Sufism, but was impossible during its flourishing early phase.

the hierarchy of the *ḥudūdu'd-dīn* had to be based on the same scheme as the physical universe, and the world of the spirit. The process of perfecting these parallels, and making them convincing to the student, chiefly occupied the philosophic thought of the sect ever since the philosophical interpretation of Islam was introduced.

The original simple and natural scheme was tremendously complicated. The hierarchy of the *ḥudūdu'd-dīn* had to comprise everything in the religious sphere. It begins with God, followed by the Prophet (*Nāṭiq*), *Asās* (or *Sāmit*, or *Waṣī*), *Imām*, and a large set of different ranks of *dā'is*: *bāb*, *ḥujjat*,¹ three kinds of *dā'is* in the narrower sense, two ranks of *ma'dhūn*, *mukāsir*, and *mustajīb*, each rank being treated as a 'cosmic category',—contrary to the practice, in which all these dignitaries more or less regularly were called *dā'is*. Such an elaborate scheme was required to bring the hierarchy into agreement with the Ptolemaic system of the universe which was universally accepted at the time. As is known, it taught that around the earth there are several concentric transparent spheres, each rotating under its own laws. The fixed stars, the sun and moon, and different planets were affixed to these, and moved together with the spheres. According to pre-Islamic speculations, the forces which produce the rotation of the spheres were associated with the different emanations of the Divine Source of Being. In these abstruse speculations the highest sphere was associated with God Himself, the next with the 'Logical Principle of the Universe', which is usually in a vague way called 'Universal Reason', and so on. Speculations with all these cosmic entities appeared as convincing and plausible to the people a thousand years ago as similar speculations about electrons, protons, neutrons, etc., appear to us now. Therefore it was 'quite scientifically' proved that the religious sphere, and its organization, fully coincides in its structure with the cosmos and the world of the Divine Spirit, *al-ḥudūdu's-samāwiyya* (or *aṭ-ṭabī'iyya*), and *al-ḥudūdu'l-'ulwiyya* (or *ar-rūḥāniyya*).

Such speculations again do not form an exclusive feature of Ismailism. Apparently there was a wide psychological demand for them, so that they even found their way, in a simplified form, into folklore, and became a part of the popular superstition of the Muslim masses, as the belief in *chihil-tan*, or the *rijālu'l-ghayb*, *abdāls*, etc. This theory of the invisible holy ascetics who tour the world, and guard its religious purity, is also built in the form of a hierarchy, which strikingly reminds the Ismaili scheme of the *ḥudūdu'd-dīn*.

Rarely a dogmatic or esoteric work in Ismailism omits this important subject. But apparently without a single exception these speculations are only speculations, abstruse and foggy, having

¹ I preserve this Persian way of pronunciation of this word, and *da'wat* instead of the Arabic *ḥujja* and *da'wa*, which are somewhat unfamiliar to readers in India and in Persia.

not the slightest connection with real life and real organization of the priestly apparatus of the Fatimids. Therefore, although it is impossible to pass over in silence such important and fundamental doctrine, directly connected with the organization of the *dā'īs* under the Fatimids, we are not in the least benefited by it in our efforts to reconstruct this detail of the history of Ismailism.

3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE ORGANIZATION.

For the reasons mentioned above nothing but rare allusions in different works can be used for forming an idea about the *dā'ī*. Fortunately, there are in Ismaili literature a few works which, dealing with the ideal virtues of the ideal *dā'ī*, permit us to read between the lines something about the real conditions.

One of the greatest difficulties of this difficult subject is the great confusion in terms, used both in Ismaili and non-Ismaili works. The term *dā'ī* apparently came into general use as late as about the end of the IIIrd/IXth century, the period of the great expansion of the Fatimid propaganda. It means 'one who calls' (to the true religion, or to the true sovereign of the Muslim state, etc.). Apparently before this, when the functions of the Ismaili priests were more those of teachers rather than propagandists, they most probably were known under the name of '*ālim*, teacher, also used in other sects of Islam. Such terms as *hijāb* (Plural *hujub*), *naqīb*, etc., were also met with in the accounts of the real or supposed to be Qarmatians, and preserved at a much later period in the works of the Druzes, of Syrian Nizāris, etc. The term *hijāb* most probably disappeared under the Fatimids when it was no longer required. At the earlier periods the term was applied to a specially reliable and devoted head priest, directing propaganda in a certain province, who, for the purpose of 'screening' the Imam, who always lived under threat from the vigorously searching Abbasid agents, would assume the title of the Imam and his name, to receive, on the latter's behalf, the oath of allegiance of the followers, while the real Imam would live in strict disguise, known only to the trusted few. With the installation of the Fatimids on the throne of their empire such necessity disappeared.

It is possible that the *hijāb* roughly corresponded with the *bāb*, or the *dā'ī-in-chief* of the Fatimid period. But it is not quite clear who the *naqīb* was,—was he the same as the *hujjat*, or the *bāb*? Or all three were the same?

In any case there is no doubt that the term *dā'ī* during the Fatimid period meant priests in general, particularly 'commissioned' ranks in the religious hierarchy.¹ The author of *al-Mūjizatu'l-*

¹ As may be seen further on, from the summary of *al-Mūjizatu'l-Kāfiya*, the idea of the 'commission', in its real sense, could apply only to the *dā'īs* occupying an independent position, residents in different smaller or larger dioceses. The lower ranks were simply employees in the *da'wa* service; in case of dissatisfaction with their work they could be dismissed by the *dā'ī*.

Kāfiya (see further on) plainly says in his discussions of the duties of the *dā'i* that these apply not only to the *dā'i* in the narrower, technical sense, but also to every rank in the hierarchy, 'because every rank acts as a *dā'i* with regard to the rank immediately below him'. In quotations from the books of different authors who are well-known as the possessors of high ranks, of *hujjat*, etc., they are very often referred to simply as *sayyid-nā ad-dā'i qaddasa'l-lāh sirra-hu*. The term of *dā'i* is applied to the religious heads of huge provinces,—as the great Abū 'Abdi'l-lāh ash-Shi'i, the founder of the Fatimid empire,—as equally to quite petty priests.

It is difficult to follow the evolution of the hierarchy. It appears that such terms as *hujjat* and *bāb* were introduced only at a fairly late period. Was there only one *bāb*, a sort of 'minister for religion' at the court of the Fatimids, or were there several *bābs*? Anyhow, in the honorific titles of some saints there appears the expression *bābu'l-abwāb*; this, however, apparently was not an official title.

There is little doubt that the *hujjat* was the chief *dā'i* in the province or district, a sort of archbishop.¹ But everything beyond this seems doubtful: at the period of great successes of the Fatimid propaganda there were 24 *hujjats*, twelve 'of the day', and twelve 'of the night'.² It is not at all clear what were the differences in their duties. Moreover, there is yet another question. The *hujjat* was supposed to be the spiritual head of a *jazīra*. This expression originally means an island, but it is also applied to large provinces. The traditional geography mentions 'twelve' *jazīras* (although their names vary in different works). It appears that in the Ismaili sense of the Fatimid period this term was applied to what would better be described as 'religious colony', i.e. Ismaili community in a country which politically was not under the Fatimid sovereignty. Thus there were 12 *jazā'ir*; at the head of each stood a *hujjat*. But I so far have never been able to find the names of these *jazīras*. Apparently they did not coincide with the geographical *jazīras*, and all were lying outside of the political boundaries of the Fatimid empire. The only *jazīra* which is always mentioned by name in Ismaili literature, is the Yaman.³ But, however

¹ It is really remarkable that in a work such as *al-Mūjizat al-Kāfiya*, specially dealing with these matters, there is not a single allusion to the duties of the *hujjat*, or the *dā'i*'s being under his control. The title *da'i'd-du'āt*, now and then met with in some works, apparently was not an official title, and it is difficult to determine whether it was applied to the *hujjat*, or the *bāb*. The latter seems more probable.

² It is generally regarded by the Ismailis at present that the *hujjats* 'of the night' were superior to those 'of the day'. Personally I have not yet found anything about this in the works which I have had occasion to see, and no explanation of the implications of the title.

³ Utilizing historical information about the distribution of the Ismailis, it is possible to think that in addition to the Yaman there were *jazīras* in Khorasan, Mawarannah, Badakhshan, Ray (with Isfahan), Kerman,

strange, its head priest apparently is never called *hujjat*,—from the time of the great founder of the Ismaili community there, in the end of the IIIrd/IXth c., the Manṣūru'l-Yaman, to the post-Fatimid time.

After the *hujjat* in the Fatimid hierarchy follows a set of three different *dā'īs*: the *dā'ī'l-balāgh*, *ad-dā'ī'l-muṭlaq*, *ad-dā'ī'l-maḥṣūr*. It is not at all clear what the differences in their functions were. The second probably connoted what the *dā'ī* should be according to the earliest ideas,—the head of a diocese. The third, obviously, was his deputy or assistant. But it is very difficult to find out what the first was: was he the priest specially in charge of the missionary activities, or had he some other functions?¹ It is also not clear whether all these ranks were functioning not only in the 'religious colonies', but also within the limits of the Fatimid state.

Again there not everything is clear about the lower ranks of the priesthood. Immediately below the *dā'ī* there were: two *ma'dhūns* and *mukāsir*. The *ma'dhūns* (i.e. the licenced ones), were the 'greater' (*akbar*), or *muṭlaq* (absolute), and 'smaller' (*aṣghar*), or *maḥṣūr* (limited).² They, as also *mukāsir* ('one who breaks the arguments of the opponents',—apparently in the disputes), were assistants of the *dā'ī*, in charge of different departments of his administrative machine. And it is interesting that in our principal source of information, *al-Mūjizatu'l-Kāfiya*, referred to above, the expression is often used: the *ma'dhūn* and *mu'min*. Thus obviously the term *mu'min* implies a separate rank of the priesthood. At a later date apparently the term *mu'min* was generally applied to Ismailis as opposed to all other *muslims*. But it is doubtful whether even *mustajīb*, i.e. initiated Ismaili, is here regarded as a *mu'min*.³

Khuzistan, 'Irāq, and India (Sind), i.e. nine altogether, excluding Syria, which for the most part was incorporated into the Fatimid empire. Nothing is known to me about the existence of similar *jazīras* in the Maghrib, or within the limits of the Byzantine empire.

¹ It seems that this rank appears only at the latest Fatimid period, and probably was quite an artificial title bestowed upon the more distinguished *dā'īs*.

² This also seems to be a shadowy rank, most probably invented, as that of the *dā'ī'l-balāgh*, to bring the hierarchy to the required mystical number.

³ In this paper I have deliberately avoided the question as to the 'degrees of initiation', so inevitably described in every work dealing with Ismailism. From what I have seen of the genuine Ismaili works, I believe that the idea is simply based on a misunderstanding of the hierarchy of the priests, and that there really never was anything as a division of the Ismailis into strictly defined groups of progressive 'initiation', similar to that of the masons, etc. In reality, most probably, there were groups with different educational qualifications, as in every religious community: uninitiated, initiated, but not learned, well-educated, and experts. Although there are no clear indications, it seems that the title *mu'min*, referred to here, had much to do with this, and perhaps was applied to a *well-educated* (in religious sense) Ismaili, who was not regularly employed in the *da'wat* service, and

As mentioned above, Ismaili literature apparently has not preserved any works specially devoted to the technique of the organisation of the priesthood, and even incidental references seem to be exceedingly rare. Apparently nothing on this point can be found in the great religious encyclopædia of Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī, the exceptionally erudite theologian and philosopher of the beginning of the IVth/Xth century,—his *Kitābu'z-Zīna*.¹ This work apparently was intended for the public at large, and not only for the Ismailis; therefore it avoids such technical matters.

The works of his contemporary, Abū Ya'qūb as-Sijzī (d. in 331/942) usually are intended for the initial education of the members of the community in religious matters, and do not apparently touch on the subject.

Very interesting theoretical speculations on the ideal virtues of the *dā'īs* are contained in the treatise by the famous *qāḍī*, Abū Ḥanīfa an-Nu'mān (d. 363/974),² the author of the great legal code of Ismailism, the *Da'ā'imu'l-Islām*. In his work *Kitābu'l-Himma fī ādāb atbā'i'l-A'imma*,³ he deals, in the first half, with ethics in general, and especially the virtues which are expected from the Ismailis. In the second half of his book he explains the rules of conduct and etiquette prescribed to the followers of the Imams when they come in personal contact with their lords: how to stand before the Imam, how to sit in his presence, how to address him, etc. The last chapter of his book is devoted to the duties of the *dā'īs*: 'How the *dā'īs* of the Imams should act in their preaching in the Imams' favour.' It contains much interesting information, and a great portion of it is summed up further on.

An interesting document, although it does not deal with the organization of the *dā'īs*, may also be referred to in this connection, to serve as an excellent specimen of what was the doctrine preached by the *dā'īs* in reality. It is an epistle to the people of Ray (the ancient Rhagae, near Tehran), by a *dā'ī* Hasan, or Muḥsin, or Muḥassin b. Muḥammad al-Mahīdī (or Mahbudī, etc.),⁴ written at the time of al-'Azīz bi'l-lāh. From the letter itself it appears that the author, coming to Ray for propaganda, was received as a heretic, and narrowly escaped death. His opuscle forms a really classic elementary exposition of Ismailism as it was preached in his time, written with extreme lucidity and conciseness. It is therefore included into his famous chrestomathy of standard Ismaili

had no official rank, although by his educational qualifications he was eligible for a fairly high post.

¹ Cf. W. Ivanow, *Guide to Ismaili Literature*, No. 18. The fact that the work was known to Ibn Nadīm, and is mentioned in his *Fihrist*, may indicate that it was quite popular in his time, and was not, anyhow, kept secret.

² On his biography and works cf. A. A. A. Fyze's article in the *J.R.A.S.*, 1934, pp. 1-32.

³ Cf. W. Ivanow, *Guide*, No. 85. The original text of this work is being prepared for publication by Prof. M. Kāmil Ḥusayn of Cairo. Therefore in the translation given further on the original text is not edited.

⁴ Cf. *Guide*, No. 110.