



‘ABDALLĀH B. MAYMŪN AL- QADDĀḤ

‘ABDALLĀH B. MAYMŪN AL-QADDĀḤ, legendary founder of the Qarmatian-Isma‘ili doctrine and alleged forefather of the Fatimid dynasty. He is featured in an account dating back to an early 4th/10th century author, Ebn Rezām, which was disseminated by opponents of the Isma‘ilis. This account was the source upon which Aḳū Moḥsen, a *šarīf* of Damascus, drew for his widely circulated polemic against the Isma‘ilis (mid-4th/10th century); parts of it survive as lengthy quotations in Maqrīzī, Ebn al-Davādārī, Ebn Šaddād (in Ebn al-Aṭīr) and Nowayrī (see bibliog.). According to this tradition the father of ‘Abdallāh, Maymūn Qaddāḥ (allegedly the “ophthalmologist” but in reality doubtless a “maker of arrow shafts”) was a dualist and Bardesanite from Qūraj al-‘Abbās in Kūzestān; he was said to have followed the teaching of the Shi‘ite arch-heretic Abu’l-Ḳaṭṭāb. His son ‘Abdallāh is held to have been the real founder of the Qarmatian doctrine; according to Aḳū Moḥsen, this consisted in arousing the curiosity of its adepts through mysterious intimations and promises and in leading them through nine stages of initiation to the highest degree of knowledge, that is, godlessness and unbelief. An allegedly Isma‘ili text, *Ketāb al-balāḡ al-akbar* (also *Ketāb al-sīāsa* and other titles), “Book of supreme initiation,” from which Aḳū Moḥsen quotes long passages, depicted in detail the stages of this initiation into atheism. According to Aḳū Moḥsen’s polemic, ‘Abdallāh was the forefather of the Fatimid dynasty. He had to flee from ‘Askar Mokram in Kūzestān, where for a time he had been living and preaching in (the quarter of?) Sābāṭ Abī Nūḥ, because of the wrath of the



Shi‘ites and Mu‘tazilites; accompanied by his *dā‘ī*, al-Ḥosayn al-Ahvāzī, he moved to Baṣra. Since he made himself out to be a descendant of ‘Aqīl b. Abū Ṭāleb, he found hospitality with the clients of his alleged kinsfolk. After once more taking to flight, he and Ḥosayn Ahvāzī eventually reached Salamīya in Syria; this now became the center of Isma‘ili propaganda. When ‘Abdallāh died, he was succeeded as head of the sect by his son Aḥmad, then by the latter’s sons Ḥosayn and Moḥammad; these were in turn followed by Ḥosayn’s son Sa‘īd, who became the first Fatimid caliph in North Africa under the name of ‘Obaydallāh al-Mahdī.

The main features of Aḳū Moḥsen’s account are unfounded. As early as 1874 St. Guyard refuted the accusation of atheism, of which he found no evidence in the original Isma‘ili texts that he published; he suggested instead that ‘Abdallāh had taught philosophical ideas of Greek origin (*Fragments*, 1874). B. Lewis and W. Ivanow located the personalities of Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ and ‘Abdallāh in their correct historical context; Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ was one of the Mecca disciples of the fifth imam, Moḥammad al-Bāqer; his son ‘Abdallāh handed on utterances of the sixth imam, Ja‘far al-Ṣādeq (d. 148/765). Thus they are known to Twelver Shi‘ite tradition (Kaššī, *Rejāl*, ed. Sayyed Aḥmad al-Ḥosaynī, Karbalā, 1963, pp. 212 and 332; Naḯāšī, *Rejāl*, Bombay, 1317/1899, p. 148; Ṭūsī, *Fehrest*, ed. M. Ṣādeq, Naḯaf, 1356/1937, p. 129). Whereas Lewis continued to maintain that both men had played a leading part in the extreme Shi‘ism of the 2nd/8th century which had given rise to the Esmā‘īliya (*Origins*, 1940), Ivanow refuted the legend completely (*The Alleged Founder*, 1946) and denied that there was any connection between these adherents of the Twelver Shi‘ism in the early 2nd/8th century and the Isma‘ili movement of the late 3rd/9th century. S. M. Stern, on the other hand, deemed it possible that descendants of the historical Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ (“Ḳaddāḥids”) might have figured in the Isma‘ili mission which got under way about 260/872. The real intention behind the account of Ebn Rezām and Aḳū Moḥsen was to discredit the whole Isma‘ili movement. While its alleged atheism was easily discounted by reference to original texts, the other charge, that the Fatimids in reality stemmed from heretics of dubious origins, could not be dismissed so readily. This accusation was directed not so much against the Isma‘ilis as against the Fatimid dynasty; it seems to derive from certain Qarmatian groups who refused to acknowledge the imamate of the Fatimids and clung to their belief in the coming of the mahdi Moḥammad b. Esmā‘īl b. Ja‘far al-Ṣādeq.

New light is thrown on the problem by the letter which the first Fatimid,



‘Obaydallāh al-Mahdī, sent to the Yemeni Isma‘ilis, disclosing the secrets of his origin (published in Hamdani, *Genealogy*). There it is stated that the “hidden imams” bore pseudonyms such as Mobārak (“the blessed one”), Maymūn (“the fortunate one”) and Sa‘īd (“the blissful one”). Apparently these are names for the mahdi; “Mobārak” was the sobriquet of Esmā‘il b. Ja‘far (cf. Ivanow, *Alleged Founder*, p. 111; Madelung, “Imamat,” p. 46; Sejestānī, *Eṭbāt al-nobūwāt*, ed. ‘A. Tāmer, Beirut, 1966, p. 190); and according to numerous Isma‘ili and non-Isma‘ili sources, “Sa‘īd” was ‘Obaydallāh’s pseudonym prior to his advent in North Africa. The mystery of the Maymūn legend can be solved if one assumes that “Maymūn” was the mahdi name of the Moḥammad b. Esmā‘il originally awaited by the Isma‘ilis. Ivanow already guessed as much (*Alleged Founder*, p. 110f.) on the basis of a letter from the Fatimid al-Mo‘ezz, where the latter’s forebear ‘Abdallāh is described as son of the *maymūn al-naqība*, “son of the one divinely blessed with success in affairs” (i.e., of Moḥammad b. Esmā‘il). This is consistent with the information in Ebn ‘Enaba’s *‘Omdat al-ṭāleb* that Moḥammad b. Esmā‘il was the imam of that Maymūniya sect, which Ebn Rezām and Aḳū Moḥsen claim was founded by Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ (Ivanow, *Alleged Founder*, p. 106). In reality therefore “Maymūniya” must have been merely another name for the Esmā‘īliya itself. In this sense ‘Abdallāh, the great-grandfather of ‘Obaydallāh, was indeed, as his descendants maintained, “the son of the Maymūn;” it was not surprising that, by accident or design, he was confused with the traditionist of the 2nd/8th century. The rest of the story—‘Abdallāh’s journeying from Kūzestān to Syria—is possibly quite authentic; the Fatimid genealogy from ‘Abdallāh to ‘Obaydallāh which is given in Aḳū Moḥsen tallies with that in ‘Obaydallāh’s letter. There remains some doubt about ‘Abdallāh’s ‘Alid blood. Later Isma‘ili and Druze authors aver that, during the “hidden” period, Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ received the imamate in trust (*vadī‘a*) from the ‘Alids and bequeathed it to his own descendants down to ‘Obaydallāh; only with the latter’s ostensible son, Abu’l-Qāsem al-Qā‘em, did the imamate pass back from the Qaddahids to a genuine ‘Alid. Though this version has been accepted by certain modern authors (Ḥasan/Šaraf, *al-Mo‘ezz le-dīn Allāh*, pp. 13, 140; Lewis, *Origins*, p. 44), it seems just as fictitious as the identity of the Fatimid ancestor ‘Abdallāh. This invention made it possible for the Qarmatian groups who were skeptical of ‘Obaydallāh’s ‘Alid origins to acknowledge the later Fatimids as ‘Alid imams (Madelung, “Imamat,” pp. 73-80).



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