



## HADITH III. IN ISMA'ILISM

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### HADITH

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Isma'ilis had neither a Hadith collection of their own nor a distinct Isma'ili law before the establishment of the Fatimid dynasty in North Africa in 297/909. As Isma'ili law began taking definite shape under the patronage of the Fatimid caliphs, the need for a separate collection of clearly defined legal traditions became urgent; especially since by this time Hadith had come to be recognized, both by Sunnis and Shi'ites alike, as second only to the Qur'an in authority. It was Qāzi No'mān (d. 363/974) who undertook the task at the suggestion of the first Fatimid caliph Mahdi (297-322/909-34), while he was still exclusively at the service of the caliph. In the introduction to his *Ketāb al-eqteṣār* (p. 9), No'mān states that he had embarked on the collection of traditions transmitted from the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) dealing with customary practices, legal provisions and precepts, and formal legal opinions on what is lawful and unlawful, by scrutinizing the sources accessible to him by way of *samā'* (direct oral transmission from a shaikh or an Imam), *ejāza* (license to transmit from a shaikh), *monā-wala* (a copy of the shaikh's traditions handed over to a student with *ejāza*), or *ṣaḥīfa* (book). He further states that he had selected only the well-known and authentic traditions described as *mašhur* (with more than two transmitters; considered by some as equivalent to *motawāter*, with many transmitters, all known to be reliable), *ma'ruf* (acceptable but weak and confirmed by another weak tradition), and *ma'tur* (handed down from generation to generation). Most of the material that



he had consulted was not in classified form (*ḡayr moṣannaḡ*); he therefore had arranged the traditions into appropriate chapters and sections according to categories of religious law, indicating the points on which the narrators agreed and disagreed, and denoting with evidence and proofs what was firmly established doctrine of the *ahl al-bayt* in respect to those categories. This work, entitled *Ketāb al-izāḡ* “The Book of Elucidation,” was apparently a voluminous composition, comprising some 3,000 folios (*waraqa*) or about 220 chapters (*ketāb*). In it No'mān cited the entire chain of transmission for each tradition, recalling several relevant traditions on each legal matter. Unfortunately, however, except for a small fragment from the chapter on ritual prayer, the entire work is lost. Wilferd Madelung has analyzed the extant fragment and identified twenty books listed in it by No'mān as sources (Madelung, pp. 33-40). With the exception of part of *al-Kotob al-ja'fariya*, none of these works is extant. The surviving section, although comparatively small given the massive size of the original work, arguably provides valuable information about earlier collections of Shi'ite legal Hadith that have not survived the vicissitudes of time.

The crowning achievement of No'mān's long and arduous efforts in collecting legal traditions came when he was commissioned by the fourth Fatimid caliph Mo'ezz le-Din-Allāh to compile his most famous work, *Da'ā'em al-Eslām* “The Pillars of Islam,” under the caliph's close supervision (Poonawala, 1996, pp. 126-30). As it was proclaimed the official code of the Fatimid state, authority for the traditions in the *Da'ā'em* was confined to Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādeq for the simple reason that Ja'far and the Imams preceding him were accepted as trustworthy sources by both the Sunnis and Shi'ites. Although the *Da'ā'em* is a book of law, it is at the same time a collection of Isma'ili traditions considered as authentic, and arranged according to the subject matter of *feqh* (jurisprudence) in the style of Imam Mālek's *al-Mowaṭṭa'* and Kolayni's *al-Kāfi fi 'elm al-din*. It is divided into two volumes, the first dealing with *'ebādāt* (worship) and the second with *mo'āmalāt* (worldly affairs and business transactions). It is considered by the Mosta'li-Ṭayyebis as the greatest authority on Isma'ili law, and has remained to the present time a source of supreme authority in legal matters. It is important to note that the *Da'ā'em* contains in total approximately five hundred traditions from the Prophet, a very small number compared to Sunni works.

Another of No'mān's major works is a collection of non-legal traditions which he compiled during the reign of Mo'ezz le-Din-Allāh, titled *Ṣarḡ al-akbār fi*



*faẓā'el al-a'emma al-aṭhār* “Explication of traditions about the excellent qualities of the pure Imams.” It contains approximately 1,460 traditions, all of which, according to the author, are well known and authentic (described as *mašhur*, *ma'ruḥ*, *ma'tur*, *ṣaḥiḥ*, and *tābet*) and are related both by Sunnis (*al-āmm*) and Shi'ites (*al-kāṣṣ*) alike. Like his previous work the *Da'ā'em*, it was revised and approved by the caliph. The traditions are arranged topically and the chain of authorities is kept to the bare minimum. Two-thirds of the work deals with the *faẓā'el* of Iman 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb, making it one of the most detailed and comprehensive accounts of the Shi'ite case for 'Ali, and related issues. The rest of the work enumerates the *faẓā'el* of the *ahl al-bayt*, Ẹadija bt. Ẹowayled, Ja'far b. Abi Ṭāleb, Ḥamza b. 'Abd-al-Moṭṭaleb and the early Imams up to Ja'far al-Ṣādeq, and it concludes with the traditions concerning the rise of the Fatimid Caliph/Imam Mahdi from the West (i.e., North Africa). The traditions are culled from a wide variety of Hadith, *maḡāzi*, and *siar* works. Some of the sources mentioned by No'mān are: Ebn Eṣḡāq (d. 150/767), *al-Maḡāzi*, *al-Sira*; Wāqedi (d. 207/822), [*al-Maḡāzi*]; Ṭabari (d. 310/923), *Ketāb dakara fiḥe faẓā'el'Ali* [*Faẓā'el 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb* or *Ketāb Ġadir Ẹomm*], of which more than forty pages are cited (Rosenthal, pp. 91-93); Moḡammad b. 'Abd-Allāḡ Eskāfi (d. 240/854), *Fi tafẓil 'Ali 'alā sā'er al-ṣaḡāba* [*Ketāb al-maḡālāt fi tafẓil 'Ali* or *Ketāb faẓā'el 'Ali*] (“ISKĀFĪ, ABŪ DJA'FAR” in *EI2* IV, pp. 126-27); Zobayr b. Bakkār (d. 256/870), [*Nasab Qorayṣ* or *Ketāb al-mofāḡarāt*] (Sezgin, I, pp. 317-18); Moḡammad b. Salām Kufi (fl., second half of the 2nd/8th century); Yaḡyā b. Salām [Ṭaymi Baṣri] (d. 200/815), *al-Tafsir* (Sezgin, I, pp. 39, 47). The importance of this work lies in the fact that most of the sources used by No'mān are no longer extant. Another work by No'mān titled *Ketāb al-manāqeb le-ahl bayt rasul Allāḡ al-nojabā' wa'l-maṭāleb le-bani Omayya al-lo'anā'* “The Book of the excellent qualities of the noble family of the Prophet and the unworthy qualities of the damned house of Omayya,” is interspersed with traditions.

There is no reference in No'mān's works to any of the six Sunni canonical Hadith collections. This suggests that, at the time when No'mān was writing, these collections had probably not yet gained wide currency and acceptance. Also questions connected with the reliability of the Hadiths as well as criteria for their acceptance had not been finally settled. After No'mān's works no further Hadith collection of significance was compiled by Isma'ilis. Excessive emphasis on the *bāṭeni* (esoteric) sciences, identified with the *'olum ahl al-bayt* (sciences derived from the Prophet's family), as opposed to the *ẓāheri* sciences (exoteric, especially Hadith and jurisprudence) probably accounts for this lack



of interest. Hadith was not a crucial ingredient of religious learning among the Isma'ilis and consequently it never assumed much importance in their later history. It may be said that Isma'ili Hadith-collection began with No'mān under special circumstances dictated by the needs of the emerging Fatimid state, and also ended with him.

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