



## ZEKRAWAYH B. MEHRAWAYH

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**ZEKRAWAYH B. MEHRAWAYH** (actually: Zakaroya b. Mehroya; b. unknown; d. Wādi Dī Qār, 294/907), one of the first *Ismaʿili* missionaries (*dāʿī*) in Iraq. He came from the village of Maysāniya near the town Ṣawʿar on the Ḥadd canal, southwest of Kufa, four miles to the west of *Qādesiya*, on the western edge of the Mesopotamian cultivated “black land” (*sawād*). His father, Mehrawayh, had been one of the first followers of the *dāʿī* ʿAbdān, the brother-in-law of Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ, the leader of the *Qarmati* movement around Kufa and an early convert to *Ismaʿilism*. ʿAbdān had appointed the young Zekawayh as *dāʿī* of his home district of Ṣaylaḥin, where he had success in proselytizing the Bedouin clan of Tamim, of the tribe of Kolayb. Probably on the order of the supreme chief of the *Ismaʿili* movement, who at that time lived clandestinely in Salamiya in Syria, Zekrawayh, in the year 286/899, arranged for the assassination of his master ʿAbdān, in order to get the leadership of the Iraqi *Ismaʿili* communities into his own hands. But, unmasked as the instigator of the murder, he was forced to flee for his life from the seekers of vengeance and to remain underground for a year; then, in the year 287/900, he resurfaced and “tried to lead astray those Bedouin of the Asad, Ṭayyeʿ, Tamim, and other tribes who lived (as nomads) in the neighborhood of Kufa, proselytizing among them for his doctrine” (Ṭabari, iii, IV, p. 2217).

His efforts among the Bedouins having failed, Zekrawayh looked for a new field of his mission. He himself remained in his hiding place in Iraq and in 288/901 sent his son Ḥosayn into the Samāwa desert in Syria to the great tribal confederation of the Kalb, who controlled the Syrian desert between Kufa and



Damascus via Palmyra, transporting couriers and commercial wares on their dromedaries. Ḥosayn b. Zekrawayh was successful in proselytizing two clans, the Banu'l-'Ollays and the Banu'l-Aşbağ, making propaganda for an imam from among the descendants of Moḥammad b. Esmā'il b. [Ja'far al-Şādeq](#) (Ebn al-Dawādāri, VI, p. 68). This "imam" evidently was the subsequent first [Fatemid](#) caliph al-Mahdi, then living in Salamiya, on whose behalf Zekrawayh and his sons were acting. In the autumn of 289/902, Zekrawayh sent a nephew and then his second son Yaḥyā into the Palmyrene. The latter gained great prestige among the Bedouins, who called him the shaikh and "the man with the she-camel" (*şāḥeb al-nāqa*), because he rode an unbridled she-camel, which was guided only by God's decree. His followers called themselves "Fatemids" (Fāṭemiyun or Fawāṭem; Ṭabari, iii, IV, p. 2219; Nowayri, XXV, p. 247; Ebn al-Dawādāri, VI, p. 68).

The activities of Zekrawayh's sons, Yaḥyā Şāḥeb-al-Nāqa and Ḥosayn Şāḥeb al-Şāma (also called Şāḥeb-al-Kāl, the man with the birthmark) in Syria during the years 288-90/901-3 without doubt were in conformity with the intentions of their father, who again had hid himself, but they seem to have acted without and even against the orders from the Isma'ili headquarters in Salamiya. They evidently tried to accelerate the appearance of the promised Mahdi (see [ISLAM IN IRAN vi. THE CONCEPT OF MAHDI IN SUNNI ISLAM](#)), and, thinking that they were acting in accordance with the Mahdi's intentions, they hoped to lead him in triumph into Damascus, thereby giving the signal for a general uprising against the [caliphate](#) of Baghdad. But the precipitate enterprise failed; Yaḥyā was killed by an arrow (290/903) during his siege of Damascus (December 902-July 903). His brother, who conquered Ḥāma, Ḥems, Ma'arrat al-No'mān, and Afāmiya in the Orontes valley and Ba'albak, now had the Mahdi's rule proclaimed, mentioning the Fatemid al-Mahdi, namely, 'Abd-Allāh al-Mahdi, in the Friday prayer and placing it on the coinage, but in vain he implored him (who had fled to Ramla in Palestine) to manifest himself (Nisāburi, p. 102). On 6 Moḥarram 291/29 November 903, the Bedouin bands of the Şāḥeb-al-Şāma Ḥosayn were defeated by the Abbasid minister (*kāteb divān al-jayš*) Moḥammad b. Solaymān near the village of Tamna', east of Ma'arrat al-No'mān; in Rabi' I 291/February 904, Ḥosayn, the Man with the Birthmark (Şāḥeb-al-Kāl), and more than 300 of his followers were executed in Baghdad (Ṭabari, III, pp. 2237-43). For 'Abd-Allāh al-Mahdi, the Fatemid al-Mahdi, the outcome of the venture proved to be disastrous; he had to flee clandestinely with his family from Palestine, first to Egypt and then to the distant Mağreb. The later Fatemid sources therefore disavow the venture of



the sons of Zekrawayh as a treacherous rebellion (Daftary, pp. 123-28).

As for Zekrawayh himself, the ruin of his sons seems not to have discouraged him. In 293/906 one of his missionaries, Abu Ġānem Naṣr, with a band of Kalbite Bedouins, looted Boṣrā, Der'a, the villages of the Ḥowrān, and Tiberias (Ṭabariya) and in vain menaced Damascus and Hit on the Euphrates. On 10 ḡu'l-Ḥejja 293/2 October 906, 800 Fatemid horsemen fell upon the Kufans, who had just returned from the feast of the sacrifice outside the city, and looted them, but were not able to conquer the city (Ṭabari, III, pp. 2260-64). Now Zekrawayh, after seven years of concealment, came out of his hiding-place in his home town Ṣaw'ar and took the lead of his followers, who in mid-October won a brilliant victory over the Abbasid troops sent from Baghdad. He then lurked in ambush, some 25 km south of Qādesiya, waiting for the pilgrim caravans returning from Mecca. After having looted the second of the three caravans, on 22 Rabi' I 294/10 January 907, Zekrawayh's bands were overcome and scattered by government troops near the oasis of Fayd (in present-day northern Saudi Arabia). Zekrawayh was fatally wounded. With his death the Fatemid *da'wa* among the Bedouin tribes of the Syrian desert came to an end, but in Iraq the rumor still lingered for some time that Zekrawayh was not dead and that soon he would reappear. The interrogation of his brother-in-law provided the Baghdad authorities (and the chronicler Ṭabari) with their first reliable information concerning the clandestine Isma'ili *da'wa* organization (Ṭabari, iii, IV, pp. 2277-78).

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