

THE EVOLUTION OF THE TRADITIONS ON THE FĀṬIMID GENEALOGY AS REFLECTED IN TWO DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF *AT-TARĀTĪB AS-SAB‘A*

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The treatise known by the title *at-Tarātīb as-sab‘a*, which may have originally been part of a longer work, was – to the best of our knowledge – written in Syrian Ismā‘īlī circles, describing the history of the Ismā‘īlī hidden Imāms, the ancestors of the later Fāṭimid imām-caliphs.¹ According to the bibliographies of Ismā‘īlī literature, its author was probably Muḥammad ibn al-Faḍl ibn ‘Alī al-Bazā‘ī, a nearly unknown individual of the Ismā‘īlī mission (*da‘wa*). He appears to have been a contemporary chronicler of the Fāṭimid state founded in 297/909, and probably also of earlier events within the secret mission. Unfortunately, nothing else is known about his life and works.²

The reason that made this short treatise the focus of our earlier study (Hajnal 2001) is that it provides a brief yet remarkable insight into the early period of the Ismā‘īlī movement, in particular into the history of the hidden Imāms. However, its statements sometimes contradict Ismā‘īlī and other Muslim sources already familiar to scholars, which have so far informed the complex and contradictory views of scholarly research on the subject of Fāṭimid genealogy.

Since then, we have come across a later, but complete version of *at-Tarātīb as-sab‘a* among the writings of Abū Firās al-Maynaqī (d. 937/1530), a Syrian chief missionary of the post-Alamūt period. Published by ‘Arif Tāmir, this text includes a passage on the history of the hidden Imāms, which is quite significant for our study, given that its contents almost completely correspond to the statements al-Bazā‘ī made almost six centuries earlier (al-Maynaqī, *Tarātīb* 49–53).

All we know about Abū Firās al-Maynaqī’s career is that he was active in Syria during the leadership of the 31st Muḥammad-šāhī Nizārī Imām, Ṭāhir Šāh al-Ḥusaynī (d. 956/1549), as the chief missionary (*dā‘ī akbar*) of the Nizārī community around the settlement of al-Maynaqa. Traditions mention his historical encounter with the Ottoman Sultan Selim I (918–926/1512–1520) in Hama, Syria, after the

¹ al-Bazā‘ī, *Tarātīb*. The two editions contain a collection of historical sources on the early Ismā‘īlī (Qarmaṭī) movement.

² See Ivanow 1963: 173; Poonawala 1977: 297; Cf. Zakkār 1980: 38–39, 1987: I, 164.

Ottoman victory in the battle of Marğ Dābiq over the Mamluk armies (al-Maynaqī, *Tarātib*, Intr., 15–16).

The prolific author's works mainly concern theology and are listed in the bibliographies of Ismā'īlī literature,³ which, however, do not mention the variant of *Risālat at-tarātib as-sab'a*.

Comparing the text to the narrative attributed to al-Bazā'ī reveals a considerable degree of correspondence. Nevertheless, one may also note differences and alterations in the text of al-Maynaqī on the ancestors of the Fāṭimid imām-caliphs, some details that are worthy of comparison with the earlier account and other sources on the subject, and of examination in the context of the Fāṭimid genealogical traditions. This may help refine our knowledge of the subject, and perhaps alter our assessment of the events of the relevant historical period, and also change our views on the underlying motives of the tradition in question.

1 Historical background

The beginnings of the Ismā'īlī movement can be traced back to the controversies surrounding the succession of the sixth Šī'ī Imām, Ğa'far aš-Šādiq (d. 148/765), which ultimately led to the separation of proto-Ismā'īlī groups.

However, we have little knowledge of the history of the early Ismā'īlīs until the unified movement appeared around the middle of the 3rd/9th century. By that time, they already formed a well-organised and centralised revolutionary movement with a well-developed doctrinal system. The leading figures of the movement, however, were unknown. The first stage in their history is known as 'the period of concealment' (*dawr as-satr*), in which the Imāms were forced to hide from their opponents.⁴

Ğa'far aš-Šādiq's grandson, Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, was recognised by the early Ismā'īlīs as 'God's rightly-guided Imām' (al-Mahdī), whose advent is imminent (al-Qā'im). According to their beliefs at that time, he was hiding and would return in the near future to restore truth on Earth and initiate the final, seventh period of human history, as envisioned in the elaborate cyclical worldview of the early Ismā'īlīs.⁵

The Ismā'īliyya appeared as a religious, political, and ideological movement, whose leaders claimed descent from the Prophet Muḥammad's daughter, Fāṭima, and nephew, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. The mission's aim was to overthrow the 'Abbāsid dynasty and restore the power of the 'Alids.

³ Poonawala 1977: 294–295; Daftary, 2004: 106. Cf. al-Maynaqī, *Šāfiya*, Intr., 13–19.

⁴ Halm (1988: 194) argues that the movement went through several crises in its history, and, while its original tenet involved the idea of concealment (*gayba*), it later vacillated between recognising a present, corporeal Imām or the early notion of the absent, hidden Imām.

⁵ an-Nawbaḥṭī, *Firaq aš-šī'a* 62.8–11. Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn, *Zahr* 206.21–207. 8. See also Daftary 1990: 104–106, 136–143.

Regarding the origins of the Ismāʿīlī Imāms, the pedigree accepted in their traditions is the one that was proclaimed by the Fāṭimids at the time of the caliph al-ʿAzīz (365/975–386/996). According to this view, the first seven Imāms were the Prophet’s early descendants, through his grandson al-Ḥusayn and great-grandson Ġaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq, the last one among them was Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl (d. around 184/800), the real ‘Mahdī’ figure of the early Ismāʿīlīs. Before the establishment of the Fāṭimid dynasty, he was expected to return, and after a schism in the movement in 286/889, the ‘renegade’ Qarmaṭīs rejected the imām-caliphs who appeared as the head of the community, and continued hoping for the Mahdī’s return (Appendix, Chart 1).

With the establishment of the Fāṭimid state, however, the early teachings on the expected arrival of the Mahdī were radically changed; even their revised genealogy, publicised within the milieu of their adherents at that time, revealed strikingly new information. The ideology of the movement, which promised its followers to overthrow the existing religio-political system and create a new, ideal order, was now transformed into the official doctrine of a new statehood. The concept of the rightly guided Savior (Mahdī/Qāʿim) was replaced by that of ‘the theocratic dynasty’ (*dawlat ad-dīn*), originating from the Prophet’s family. As a result of these changes, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl, the awaited Mahdī, lost his eschatological role, while the early leaders of the movement seem to have lost their status as descendants of Ismāʿīl.⁶

Later on, however, the Fāṭimid caliphs would again regard Ismāʿīl as their ancestor and trace their family back to him. According to the Ismāʿīlī traditions accepted in this form, the founder of the mission (*daʿwa*) was the son of Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl, the eighth Imām ʿAbdallāh al-Akbar. He was followed by the trustees or hidden Imāms, who, during the early period of the mission, organised the movement and directed its secret propaganda from Salamiyya in Syria. After the establishment of their state, a series of Fāṭimid imām-caliphs followed the 11th Imām (Halm 2003: 159).

2 The claim of the ʿAlid lineage and the skeptics

The claim of the Fāṭimid caliphs that they were descendants of the Prophet’s House (*ahl al-bayt*) and therefore entitled to the Imāmate has been questioned early on by medieval authors and later by modern scholarly research too. The matter remains subject to divergent opinions and debates.

Many scholars affirm that the lineage of the founder of the Fāṭimid dynasty, ʿAbdallāh (or ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdī (297/909–322/934), goes back to the ʿAlid family. In essence, this view was derived from the Ismāʿīlī writings of various periods, which naturally support this genealogy. Nonetheless, this claim has been questioned early on by medieval authors and later by modern scholars. Many scholars

⁶ Madelung 1961: 59–60; cf. Hamdani and de Blois 1982: 186.

argue that, having no genuine link to the Imām ‘Alī and his offspring, the Fāṭimids were, in fact, adventurers in the guise of Imāms who wanted to overthrow the ‘Abbāsīd state. This seems to have been a predominant view, based on a substantial amount of evidence and on reasonable arguments, and also supported by modern historical research (‘Inān 1959: 48).

Through slander and fictional accounts, anti-Ismā‘īlī authors created the so-called ‘black legend’ of Ismā‘īlīs in the 4th/10th century. In this view, the Ismā‘īliyya was presented as an anti-Islamic ideology invented by non-‘Alid swindlers, such as ‘Abdallāh ibn Maymūn al-Qaddāh, so as to destroy the Muslim state from within (Daftary 1990: 106, 109).

The oldest recorded narrative, which proposes such a non-‘Alid origin for the Fāṭimids and identifies ‘Abdallāh ibn Maymūn al-Qaddāh as their ancestor, comes from Ibn Rizām, a polemicist from al-Kūfa, who wrote it as part of his anti-Ismā‘īlī treatise (*radd*). It probably dates from the late 4th/10th century, from the reign of the Fāṭimid caliph, al-‘Azīz. The original work has been lost but parts of it have been preserved by other authors, in particular Ibn an-Nadīm (d. 364/995) and al-Maqrīzī (d. 648/1442).⁷

As recorded by Ibn an-Nadīm, Ibn Rizām says that ‘Abdallāh, the founder of the mission, and his father, Maymūn al-Qaddāh, who originally lived near the city al-Ahwāz in Ḥūzistān and to whom the group known Maymūniyya was related, were Bardesanes (*dayṣāniyyūn*).⁸ ‘Abdallāh moved to live in ‘Askar Mukram, but then, finding little welcome there, soon fled to al-Baṣra to dwell among the descendants of the Hāšimīd ‘Aqīl ibn Abī Ṭālib. Facing harassment there too, he fled to Salamīyya near Ḥimṣ, Syria, where he purchased an estate. He dispatched propagandists to the Sawād of al-Kūfa, and assigned one of his sons to at-Ṭāliqān, from where he kept in touch with the followers in ‘Irāq.

When ‘Abdallāh died, his son, Muḥammad, succeeded him, and, upon the latter’s death, a disagreement arose among his missionaries and the members of their community (*ahl niḥla*). Some thought that his brother, Aḥmad ibn ‘Abdallāh, should be the successor, while others favoured the latter’s son, also called Aḥmad and known by the nickname Abū š-Šala‘ (or Abū š-Šalaḡlaḡ), after whom Sa‘īd ibn al-Ḥusayn took over the mission, whose father had died while his grandfather was still alive. Ibn Rizām points out that after leaving al-Baṣra, ‘Abdallāh and his son continued to press the claim that they descended from ‘Aqīl ibn Abī Ṭālib and had this genealogy confirmed at al-Baṣra.

Then Sa‘īd ibn al-Ḥusayn went to Egypt, claiming to be a descendant of ‘Alī and Fāṭīma, by the name ‘Abdallāh (‘Ubaydallāh), but had to flee from the ‘Abbāsīd

⁷ Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 238–239; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz* I, 22–29, *idem*. *Ḥiṭaṭ* I, 248, *idem*. *Muqaffā* 75–81.

⁸ Bar Dayṣān (d. 222 AD), a Syriac Gnostic in Edessa (ar-Ruhā’), who preached Manichean views.

authorities to the Mağrib. As his claim of descent from the 'Alid lineage was not accepted there, he introduced a young man whom he asserted to be a descendant of the hidden (al-Maktūm) Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl. This was al-Ḥasan Abū l-Qāsim, following in his footsteps as an imām-caliph, under the name al-Qā'im (Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 238–239).

Another early work questioning the 'Alid descent of the Fātimids is a refutation by the Damascene *ṣarīf*, Aḥū Muḥsin Abū l-Ḥasan Muḥammad ibn 'Alī (d. 375/985) (al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz* I, 17–29). This work too has been lost, but 'Abd al-Qādir al-Bağdādī (d. 429/1037), Ibn ad-Dawādārī (d. 713/1313), an-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) and al-Maqrīzī have preserved details of it, the latter also mentioning that the source upon which Aḥū Muḥsin relied upon was Ibn Rizām.⁹

According to Daftary, recent research has shown that, despite its hostile sentiment and false accusations, the account of Ibn Rizām and Aḥū Muḥsin, sheds light on important details regarding the early Ismā'īliyya (Daftary 1990: 111).

It is noteworthy that the Qaddāhid genealogy postulated by those who refused the 'Alid descent of the Fātimids is essentially the same as the accepted Ismā'īlī lineage of 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī's ancestors. The only difference is that it considers them to be the descendants of Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ and not Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl.¹⁰

Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn (d. 872/1468), the Ṭayyibī chief missionary (*dā'ī muṭlaq*) and historian, mentions a letter (*siğill*) from the fourth Fātimid caliph al-Mu'izz to a missionary in Sind, denying his descent from Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ and confirming the 'Alid origin of the Fātimids.¹¹ In this letter, the caliph says that his true ancestor was 'Abdallāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, sometimes called Ibn al-Maymūn ('fortunate') or Ibn an-Naqība ('one with happy disposition') (Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn, *Uyūn* (ed. Ġālib) V, 161). This term was also used in reference to Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, expressing the high position he occupied within the Ismā'īlī mission. (This is why the sixth Imām, Ismā'īl ibn Ḡa'far, was called al-Mubārak.) This statement by the imām-caliph is the earliest text that rejects of the Qaddāhid legend.

The caliph also mentions that, in order to protect the Imāms, the missionaries sometimes used pseudonyms when referring to them. That is why 'Abdallāh, the son and heir of Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, came to be called Ibn Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ, while the Imāms following 'Abdallāh used similar names, which thus became a source of misunderstanding and confusion.¹² Similarly, the Fātimid scholar al-Qāḍī an-

⁹ See an-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXVIII, 42–44; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz* VI, 6–21; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz* I, 22.

¹⁰ The sequence of 'hidden' Imāms, according to Ibn Rizām, were 'Abdallāh, Muḥammad, Aḥmad [Abū š-Šalağlağ] (Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 238), while according to Aḥū Muḥsin, 'Abdallāh, Aḥmad, Muḥammad [Abū š-Šalağlağ] (Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz* 17–19).

¹¹ See Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn, *Uyūn* (ed. Ġālib) V, 160–162; Cf. Ivanow 1940: 74–76; Stern 1955: 11–13 and 26–27.

¹² Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn, *Uyūn* (ed. Ġālib) IV, 393.23–394.3, V, 161. 13–14, *idem*. *Zahr* 209. 1–6. See also 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī, *Kitāb* 9.16–10.11.

Nu‘mān (d. 363/974), also recorded a conversation between the caliph al-Mu‘izz and the emissaries of his missionary, confirming the content of the above-mentioned letter.¹³ According to this, the Fāṭimid caliph also emphasised that the name ‘Abdallāh ibn Maymūn al-Qaddāh stood for the hidden Imām, ‘Abdallāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, while the names al-Maymūn and al-Qādiḥ were commonly used pseudonyms of the real Imāms (Stern 1955: 18–22).

The refutation of the ‘Alid descent of the Fāṭimids not only occupies a considerable place in the books of heresiographers, but was also capitalised on by the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs, who published it when the Fāṭimids enjoyed success and thus damaged their reputation within the Muslim world. The questioning of the Fāṭimids’ ‘Alid descent later gained an official, political aspect as the growing influence of Fāṭimids in ‘Irāq became threatening.

During this period, the second half of the 4th/10th century, two major events occurred that affected the Ismā‘īlī movement: the Fāṭimid power was consolidated in Egypt, and the forces of the Qarmaṭīs in Baḥrayn who rejected the Fāṭimid Imāms as leaders of the Ismā‘īlī community appeared in Syria and thus threatened Egypt as well. Meanwhile, in the Muslim world, a violent dispute arose concerning the origin of the Fāṭimids, happily utilised by the ‘Abbāsīds to question the descent of the Fāṭimids and the legitimacy of their rule and thereby discredit their dynasty.

In 402/1011, during the reign of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Qādir (381/991–422/1031), the court in Baghdad issued an official manifesto (*maḥḍar*) and distributed it throughout the empire. The document refuted the ‘Alid descent of Fāṭimid caliphs and stated that they had originated from Maymūn bar Dayṣān, and thus were Bardesanes, unbelievers and freethinkers (*kuffār zanādiqa*) and godless heretics (*fussāq malāḥida*) who curse the prophets and claim divine status. It is noteworthy, though, that the announcement does not mention Maymūn al-Qaddāh or his son, ‘Abdallāh. The Baghdad manifesto was signed by a number of the most prominent Sunnī jurists and scholars, famous *ṣarīfs* and Šī‘ī scholars.¹⁴ The document was published in the time of the sixth Fāṭimid caliph, al-Ḥākim (386/966–411/1021), whose reign and extreme behaviour as a ruler provided ample evidence for such accusations.

Then, in 444/1052, a new manifesto was published in Baghdad, essentially reiterating the earlier slanders and adding the statement that the Fāṭimids were of Jewish or Mazdakite origin. Although both documents were motivated by the tensions of a contemporary political strife within the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty, and some sentiments that the Šī‘ī caliphate threatened their secular and spiritual power, yet they were signed

¹³ See al-Qādi an-Nu‘mān, *Maḡālis* 371–378. Cf. Stern 1955: 15–17, Arabic text: 28–33.

¹⁴ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Muntaẓam* VII, 255; Ibn al-Aṭīr, *Kāmil* IX, 236; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz* VI, 17. Among the signatories there were also the *ṣarīfs* al-Murtaḍā and ar-Raḍī, and the Šī‘ī scholar aš-Šayḥ al-Mufīd. Cf. Inān 1959: 55–56. See also Jiwa 2017.

by significant scholars at the time, including Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), Abū Ḥāmid al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 406/1015), and Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Qudūrī (d. 482/1089).¹⁵

The Qaddāhid legend was eventually refuted by W. Ivanow, who denies allegations of heresy concerning ‘Abdallāh ibn Maymūn al-Qaddāh, and demonstrates that Maymūn and his son ‘Abdallāh had nothing to do with the Ismā‘īliyya (Ivanow 1957: 75–76, 170–174). These two Imāmī traditionalist (*rāwī*) lived in Mecca in the first half of the 2nd/8th century and were adherents of the Imāms Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ġa‘far aṣ-Ṣādiq. ‘Abdallāh ibn Maymūn was thus wrongly identified with ‘Abdallāh al-Akbar, founder of the Ismā‘īliyya who lived almost a hundred years later. In addition, Ivanow denies that either Maymūn or his son ‘Abdallāh had been chosen as depositary (*mustawda‘*) of the Imām and would have taken over his activities in his absence or when he was hindered, as this system was not yet current at that time, related views becoming known only in the 4th/10th century.¹⁶

Daftary notes that the idea of the Qaddāhid descent of the Fāṭimids may have been formed within Ismā‘īlī circles under the influence of dissident Qarmaṭīs. They would have affirmed that the leadership of the Ismā‘īlī movement slipped into the hands of ‘Abdallāh ibn Maymūn al-Qaddāh and his descendants, only to be later reclaimed by the Fāṭimid caliphs.¹⁷

3 The evolution of the Ismā‘īlī tradition of the Fāṭimids’ descent

According to the sources, the Fāṭimid caliphs rarely declared their descent, and neither did their adherents (*awliyā‘*), because mentioning the hidden Imāms was a forbidden and harmful act, while “concealment” (*satr*) was considered to be a command from God just like the period of “manifestation” (*zuhūr*). Thus the existence of the hidden Imāms, who created a gap in the genealogy of Fāṭimids, was unknown, to the extent that even their names were not mentioned.¹⁸

According to a Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlī tradition written by Idrīs ‘Imād ad-Dīn at the end of the 9th/15th century, ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī was preceded by a series of hidden

¹⁵ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Muntaẓam* VIII, 154–155; Ibn al-Aṭīr, *Kāmil* IX, 591; see Jiwa 2017.

¹⁶ Halm 1988: 196, note. 9, suggests that the reason for the confusion may be the fact that the Ismā‘īlīs were at one time called al-Maymūniyya. The name al-Maymūn (‘happy’) was borne by Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, who was expected by the Maymūniyya group as Mahdī.

¹⁷ Daftary 1990: 113. This idea later appears in medieval sources as well as in modern academic research. See Lewis 1942: 54–67, 71–73; Cf. Ḥasan and Ṣaraf 1947: 47–91, 143–169; Ġālīb 1964: 348–352; Naššār 1977: II, 279.

¹⁸ This view is expressed by a tradition attributed to Ġa‘far aṣ-Ṣādiq: “Caution (*taqiyya*) is [the essence] of my faith and the religion of my fathers. He who is not careful, has no faith”; ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī, *Kitāb* 9.8–9. See also Ivanow 1942: 128, 130, 141, 142.

Imāms, but the Ismā‘īlī sources refrain from mentioning their real names.¹⁹ The Fāṭimid caliphs did not attempt to counteract the accusation that their opponents had directed at them, nor did they respond to them, insisting that no official genealogy of their origin should be disclosed. They did so on the grounds of a principle well known in Šī‘ī circles that asserts: “one ought not to reveal those who have been hid by God” (‘*adam kašf ulā’ika alladīna satarahum Allāh*).²⁰ Consequently, most of the accounts on the hidden Imāms have survived from a later period, for instance in the writings of missionaries such as al-Ḥaṭṭāb al-Hamdānī (d. 533/1138), Idrīs ‘Imād ad-Dīn (d. 872/1486), and al-Ḥasan al-Bharūgī (d. 939/1533), who were active in remote regions in India, Fārs and Yemen. The fact that these works are predominantly very late manuscripts may have contributed to the uncertain, contradictory messages they contain.

The late Ismā‘īlī and the Ṭayyibī authors who came after the Fāṭimid period mention the three hidden Imāms as ‘Abdallāh – Aḥmad – al-Ḥusayn. The Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs also recognise the three hidden Imāms but give them different names.²¹

We can highlight three reports on the Fāṭimids’ genealogy, representing different stages in the evolution of their accepted traditions. The earliest one that names all three hidden Imams is the *Istitār al-imām*, composed by Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm an-Nīsābūrī during the reign of the caliph al-‘Azīz. This early official version, endorsed by the Fāṭimids, is a short treatise on the history of the Ismā‘īlī movement up to the time of ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī, including the story of the hidden Imāms. It describes that ‘Abdallāh al-Akbar, the founder of the Ismā‘īlī mission, moved from Ahwāz to Salamiyya. The author also states that two sons, Aḥmad and Ibrāhīm, were born to Imām ‘Abdallāh al-Akbar in Salamiyya. The Imāmate was then inherited by Aḥmad. Aḥmad also had a son, the later Imām al-Ḥusayn, who was the father of al-Mahdī and had another son as well, called Sa‘īd al-Ḥayr. Al-Ḥusayn died early, and as his death approached, he put his own brother, Sa‘īd al-Ḥayr, in charge of his position,

¹⁹ Idrīs ‘Imād ad-Dīn, *‘Uyūn* (ed. M. Gālib) IV, 393.23–24.3, (ed. M. aṣ-Ṣāgarḡī) IV, 563.13–16: “*wa-kānat ad-du‘āt ayyām al-a‘imma al-mastūrīn munḍu istitār al-imām Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl yusammūnahum bi-ḡayr asmā’ihim, wa-yaḥṭalifūna fī l-asmā’ ihfā’an li-‘amr Allāh, wa-satran li-awliyā’ihi li-tagallub al-aḍḍād, wa-quwwat ahl al-‘inād, wa-li-ḍālīka waqa’a l-iḥṭilāf fī l-a‘imma al-mastūrīn [...]*”.

²⁰ Ivanow 1942:28, Cf. Sayyid 1992: 32.

²¹ The Syrian Ismā‘īlī author, Abū l-Ma‘ālī (d. 497–8/1103–5), similarly to the Fāṭimid and Ṭayyibī authors, gives the names ‘Abdallāh, Aḥmad, and al-Ḥusayn (*Risāla* 107). The Iranian Nizārī *dā‘ī*, Abū Ishāq Quhistānī (d. after 904/1498), mentions all the three imāms as Aḥmad (*Ḥaḡf bāb* 23). Another Persian Nizārī *dā‘ī*, Ḥayrḥwāh-i Harātī, (d. after 960/1553), enlists the names Aḥmad ar-Raḡī, Muḥammad al-Wafī, and Muḥammad at-Taḡī (*Kalām-i pūr* 50). The 10th/16th century Indian Ṭayyibī Ismā‘īlī *dā‘ī*, al-Bharūgī, mentions the names ‘Abdallāh, Aḥmad at-Taḡī, al-Ḥusayn az-Zakī (*Azhār* 335.15–336.3). The officially accepted version by the Qāsim-šāhī Nizārīs is ‘Abdallāh ar-Raḡī, Aḥmad al-Wafī, and Muḥammad at-Taḡī, was first mentioned by Sayyid Imām Šāh (d. 919/1513), see Hamdani and de Blois 1982: 205, note 86.

because his son al-Mahdī was still a child. His uncle, however, usurped the Imāmate from al-Mahdī. He had ten sons, whom he appointed as his successors one after another, but all of them died, because the Imāmate can only belong to the man who has the right to it. Regretful, his uncle would later return the Imāmate to al-Mahdī.²²

The *Letter to the [Ismāʿīlī] community in Yemen (Kitāb ilā nāḥiya bi-l-Yaman)* written by the first Fāṭimid Imām ʿAbdallāh (or ʿUbaydallāh) al-Mahdī is also considered to be an early document of the Fāṭimid genealogy. In this letter the Imām provides information on his ancestors. This statement was recorded one generation later by Ğaʿfar ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. after 365/975) on the basis of recollections (al-Hamdani 1958: 9–14). However, this explanation of the descent of the Fāṭimid caliphs has led to one of the most serious complications that is still present.

The letter states that Ğaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq left behind four sons: ʿAbdallāh [al-Afṭaḥ], Ismāʿīl [al-Mubārak], Mūsā [al-Kāzim] and Muḥammad [ad-Dībāğ]. The legitimate heir (*ṣāhib al-ḥaqq*) to the Imāmate among them was ʿAbdallāh al-Afṭaḥ.²³ The author also asserts that, when the Imāms from among the progeny of Ğaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq decided to reorganise the “mission of truth” (*daʿwat al-ḥaqq*), they were extremely cautious and wary of being pursued by the ʿAbbāsids. Therefore, they assumed pseudonyms different from their real names, while for missionary purposes they assigned their real names to officials having the rank of trustee (*ḥuğğā*). Hence they called themselves Mubārak (‘blessed’), Maymūn (‘fortunate’), and Saʿīd (‘happy’), on account of the good omen associated with these names.²⁴

In this letter, ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī also states that his ancestor was Ğaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq’s eldest son and Ismāʿīl’s brother, ʿAbdallāh al-Afṭaḥ (d. 149/766). It is ʿAbdallāh al-Afṭaḥ, and not Ismāʿīl, that was appointed as his legal heir (ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī, *Kitāb* 9–11).

Regarding the Imāmate, ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī further states that the mission would allude to ʿAbdallāh when using the name Ismāʿīl, and their propaganda maintained that the Mahdī was named Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl, for he was called Muḥammad and was the offspring of ʿAbdallāh, also called Ismāʿīl. When an Imām took his office, he would be called Muḥammad, and in the propaganda on behalf of the Mahdī the reference would be Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl. What was meant by Ismāʿīl was in fact ʿAbdallāh. And what was meant by Muḥammad was each one who served as Imām in his own age, until the time when “the master of the manifestation” (*ṣāhib*

²² an-Nīsābūrī, *Istitār* (ed. Ivanow) 95.16–96.3, (ed. Zakkār) 116.13–117.4; Hamdani and de Blois (1982: 194) assume that this report already bears some of the signs of rearranging the Ismāʿīlī genealogy following ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī’s appearance.

²³ ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī, *Kitāb* 9.12: “*wa-kāna ṣāhib al-ḥaqq minhum ʿAbdallāh [al-Afṭaḥ] ibn Ğaʿfar [aṣ-Ṣādiq]*”.

²⁴ ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī, *Kitāb* 9.15–10.2: “*fa-lammā arāda l-aʿimma min wuld Ğaʿfar [aṣ-Ṣādiq] iḥyāʾ daʿwat al-ḥaqq ḥāfū min niḥāq al-munāfiqīn, fa-tasammaw bi-ğayr asmāʾ ihim, fa-ğaʿalū asmāʾ ahum li-d-daʿwati fī maqām al-ḥuğğāğ, wa-tasammaw bi-Mubārak wa-Maymūn wa-Saʿīd li-l-faʿl al-ḥasan fī ḥāqīhi l-asmāʾ i.*”

aẓ-zuhūr) would appear, who would in fact be called Muḥammad when the obligatory caution (*taqiyya*) ceased. In the spirit of the principle of *taqiyya*, by concealing the names of the Imāms, a series of hidden Imāms (*al-a'imma al-masturūn*) was created.

According to 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī, the Imām first was the son of Ğa'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, 'Abdallāh [al-Aftaḥ], then 'Abdallāh's son, Muḥammad [al-Mubārak/al-Maktūm], then Muḥammad's son 'Abdallāh [ad-Raḍī/al-Maymūn], then 'Abdallāh's son, Aḥmad [al-Wafī], and then Ahmad's son, Muḥammad [al-Ḥabīb] (!). However each of them was referred to as Muhammad except for 'Abdallāh [al-Aftaḥ], because the latter was called Ismā'īl. Then the author specifies his own descent as follows:

“The current holder of the office, (*al-walī al-ān*), – that is himself – ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (!) ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Abdallāh [II] ibn [Muḥammad] ibn 'Abdallāh ibn Ğa'far [aṣ-Ṣādiq] ibn Muḥammad [al-Bāqir] ibn 'Alī [Zayn al-Ābidīn] ibn al-Ḥusayn [aṣ-Ṣahīd] ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib” ('Abdallāh al-Mahdī, *Kitāb* 10–12).

Ğa'far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman, who preserved the letter of 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī in his work, *Kitāb farā'id wa-ḥudūd ad-dīn*, refers to the third hidden Imām, Aḥmad's son, Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb, who appointed the son of his brother al-Ḥusayn, 'Alī (or Sa'īd) as his successor. He bestowed all his authority upon him, in accordance with God's choice.²⁵ Then the propaganda was carried out for a while on behalf of his nephew, 'Alī (or Sa'īd) ibn al-Ḥusayn. When the 'manifestation' (*zuhūr*) took place, 'Alī (or Sa'īd) appeared in public, made his rank (*maqāmahu*) known and revealed his real name, 'Abdallāh. His son, Abū l-Qāsim, named Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh, came and appeared with him in public. “Thus was verified the prediction (*iš'āra*) concerning the Qā'im, the Mahdī [that] he is Abū l-Qāsim Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh, 'the awaited Imām' (*al-imām al-muntaẓar*)” ('Abdallāh al-Mahdī, *Kitāb* 11–12).

According to the letter of 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī, the line of the hidden Imāms is as follows: 'Abdallāh ar-Raḍī, Aḥmad [al-Wafī], and Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb. In his writing, three points are especially notable: [1] He confirms the fact that Ğa'far aṣ-Ṣādiq has appointed 'Abdallāh al-Aftaḥ, not Ismā'īl, as his successor. [2] 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī belonged to the Prophet's House, and came from the Prophet's family, and was an esoteric nephew of the man [Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb] who at that time inherited the Imāmate. [3] 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī ['Alī/Sa'īd] may have been a depositary Imām

²⁵ 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī, *Kitāb* 11.6–7, 12.2–3: “*tumma awṣā Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ilā ibn aḥīhi, wa-a' ṭāhu bi-ḥtiyār Allāh amra-hu kullahu, wa-tasammā Sa'īd ibn al-Ḥusayn [...] wa-smuhu aẓ-zāhir 'Abdallāh ibn Muḥammad li-'annahu ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad fī l-bājin*”. Hamdani and de Blois (1988: 182–185), believe that Muḥammad (al-Ḥabīb), 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī's father in an esoteric sense, was not a descendant of 'Abdallāh al-Aftaḥ as was 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī himself, but might have been the great-grandson of Ismā'īl al-Mubārak and thus the line of the 'hidden' Imāms as declared by 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī, comes from two parallel lineages from Ğa'far aṣ-Ṣādiq. See also Sayyid 1992: 37.

(*imām mustawda*) of his son, al-Qā'im [Abū l-Qāsim Muḥammad], with whom the period of actual 'manifestation' (*dawr az-ẓuhūr*) began, as he was the Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh to whom the mission referred, and by whom the obligatory caution (*taqiyya*) would cease.²⁶

The later official Fāṭimid genealogy named Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl's son, 'Abdallāh, as the ancestor of the Fāṭimids. According to the Ṭayyibī chief missionary and historian in Yemen, Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn, the first hidden Imām was Muḥammad al-Maktūm's son 'Abdallāh ar-Raḍī, succeeded by Aḥmad at-Taḳī – who moved to Salamiyya –, al-Ḥusayn az-Zakī, and 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī. The author also mentions that an uncle, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad [Sa'īd al-Ḥayr] tried to usurp the imāmate from his nephew.²⁷ However, in his official account of the life of the founder of the Fāṭimid dynasty, the same author reports that 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī, when still a minor, was taken by his father al-Ḥusayn from 'Askar Mukram to Salamiyya, and from that time he was raised by his uncle Abū 'Alī al-Ḥakīm, also known as Muḥammad Abū š-Šalaḡlaḡ or Sa'īd al-Ḥayr. Then 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī married the daughter of his uncle, who gave birth to his son al-Qā'im.²⁸ Thus, according to Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn, the three hidden Imāms were 'Abdallāh ar-Raḍī [al-Akbar], Aḥmad at-Taḳī [al-Wafī], and al-Ḥusayn az-Zakī.

As noted above with regard to the ancestors of 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī, the Qaddāhid genealogy is essentially the same as that of the official Ismā'īlī family tree, with the only difference that they are considered descendants of Maymūn al-Qaddāh, and not Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl. However, both genealogies differ from the one that was written by 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī in his letter.²⁹

In the light of these sources, we observe that there is a contradiction between the official Fāṭimid genealogy and the reports of their opponents. The latter group associate the Fāṭimids with Maymūn al-Qaddāh and his son. It should also be noted that the different lineages based on the late Fāṭimid traditions further complicate the issue. Another problem is that, in the Ismā'īlī sources, the sequence of Imāms preceding 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī and the names of the hidden Imāms may differ from account to account. Furthermore, doubts arise regarding the family relationship among

²⁶ 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī, *Kitāb* 11–12. See also Sayyid 1992: 37.

²⁷ Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn, *Uyūn* IV, 356, 366, 394, 402–403, *idem. Zahr* 208, 211–212, 216.

²⁸ Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn, *Uyūn* V, 89. The author apparently tells contradictory traditions about the uncle of 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī. See also Hamdani and de Blois 1982: 190.

²⁹ The family tree portrayed by Ibn Ḥaldūn and al-Maqrīzī also differs from these. According to them, there was a line of Imāms after Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl (al-Maktūm): Ḡafar al-Muṣaddiq, Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb, and 'Ubaydallāh al-Mahdī (Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Ibar* III, 360.12–13, al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭat* II, 175.15–17, al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā* 55.13–14). Hamdani and de Blois (1982: 195, note 110) suggest that this particular genealogy would have spread during the reign of al-Qā'im (322–334/934–946) in the Maḡrib, and may have been one of the stages in the rearrangements of the Fāṭimid genealogy.

‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī, Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb [Abū š-Šalaḡlaḡ], and the second Fāṭimid caliph, Muḥammad al-Qā’im (Canard 1965).

Hamdani and de Blois (1983: 193) point out that one of the noteworthy features of Ismā’īlī writings is the way in which old and apparently already abandoned teachings, ideas ‘in fossilised’ form reappear in later works, where they are inextricably linked with ‘official’ teachings that have since replaced them.³⁰

Madelung demonstrates that ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī’s claim to the Imāmate was based on his spiritual descent from Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, as attested in his letter (‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī, Kitāb, 11.6–9, 12.2–3). But according to the strict Ismā’īlī teachings on the inheritance of Imāmate, this was not possible, not even the inheritance of his son Abū l-Qāsim, because the Imāmate could only pass from father to son and not to a daughter (i.e. al-Qā’im’s mother).³¹ Subsequent official reports on the early history of the Fāṭimids suggest that the caliphs purposefully rearranged their family tree, during which ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī’s father, al-Husayn ibn Aḥmad, was elevated to the status of a legitimate Imām while his brother, Muḥammad Abū š-Šalaḡlaḡ was demoted, stigmatised and denigrated as a ‘usurper’.³²

Halm also states that the family tree of the Fāṭimids has been smoothed out over time, and al-Mahdī’s uncle and predecessor Muḥammad Abū š-Šalaḡlaḡ fell into oblivion. However, al-Mahdī’s father al-Husayn, who had never been in that position, then came to be mentioned as a legitimate Imām (Halm, 2003: 159). Hamdani and de Blois argue that the transformation of the ideological characteristics of the Ismā’īlī movement progressed in parallel with the changes in its religious and genealogical justification, while the leadership of the community has shifted from one branch of the family to another in the House of the Prophet (Hamdani and de Blois 1983: 186–189).

4 The Fāṭimid genealogical tradition in the mirror of two versions of *at-Tarāṭīb as-sab‘a*

According to the text attributed to al-Bazā’ī (*Tarāṭīb* 137.9, 13–14), the hidden (al-Maktūm) Imām Muḥammad ibn Ismā’īl was succeeded by his son, Aḥmad ar-Raḡī, who was the *first* among the hidden Imāms (*al-a’imma al-mastūrūn*). He himself hid behind a personality he used cautiously to obscure his own. His ‘veil’ (*hiḡāb*)

³⁰ This statement is corroborated by the contradictory statements of ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī, see Idrīs ‘Imād ad-Dīn, *Uyūn* IV, 356, 366, 394, 402–403, *idem. Tārīḡ* 143, 144, *idem. Zahr* 208, 211–212, 216.

³¹ This is emphasised by a tradition attributed to Ğa’far aš-Šādiq, *Uyūn al-aḡbār* V, 160. 23–24: “*al-imāma fī l-aqḡb taḡrī fī wāḡidin ‘an wāḡidin, lā tarḡi ‘u l-qahqarā wa-lā ta’ūdu ilā l-warā’.*”

³² Madelung 1961:73 sqq. Cf. an-Nīsābūrī, *Istīṭār* (ed. Ivanow) Arabic text: 95.19–96.3, (ed. Zakkār) 116.15–117.4, ‘Idrīs ‘Imād ad-Dīn, *Uyūn* (ed. Ġālib) IV, 402.18–403.4.

or *alter ego*, behind whom he concealed himself and to whom he entrusted his position, was Maymūn al-Qaddāh,³³ who was instructed by the Imām to make people swear allegiance to himself. He acted as instructed by the Imām, exercising his authority up to the time when Aḥmad was about to die. Upon Aḥmad's death the Imāmate was inherited by his son, Muḥammad. The Imām then ordered 'Abdallāh, the son of Maymūn al-Qaddāh, to act as his 'veil' and to take over his role (*an yaqūma maqāmahu*) (al-Bazā'ī, *Tarātib* 138.6–7). He did not cease to exercise control by appointment from the Imām until his death. Thereupon the Imāmate was handed over to his son Aḥmad, who died early, but before his death he ordered his unnamed brother³⁴ to substitute for his son, thereby concealing his son Muḥammad [!] al-Mahdī. Thus the uncle of al-Mahdī was only a temporary rather than a permanent successor of the late Imām (*ḥalīfatu l-imām mustawda 'an lā mustaqarran*). Muḥammad al-Mahdī assumed the duties of the Imām, whereas his paternal uncle acted as a temporary successor (*qāma 'ammuhu bi-l-ḥilāfa*) (al-Bazā'ī, *Tarātib* 137.15–138.16).

Al-Bazā'ī adds that this temporary successor, who had ten sons, grew ambitious and decided to grab the leadership (*tama 'a fī l-amr*) and to pass it on later to one of his sons, dispossessing his nephew. However, the successive deaths of his sons prevented him from doing so. Finally, he returned the authority to its rightful possessor (*ilā mustahiqqihī*) Muḥammad al-Mahdī, who, after the death of his unnamed uncle, entrusted his brother, 'Abdallāh, with the duty of depositary (*mustawda*) Imām (al-Bazā'ī, *Tarātib* 138.17–139.2).

From al-Bazā'ī's statements we also learn that Muḥammad al-Mahdī before his death handed over the Imamate to his son al-Qā'im, while his brother 'Abdallāh ('Ubaydallāh) was ordered to substitute for him (*an yaqūma maqāmahu*), act on his behalf (*yanūba manābahu*), take his name (*yatasammā bi-smihī*), pretend to be the same person (*wa-yan 'atu nafsahu bi-na 'ihī*), and adopt al-Qā'im as his own son (*yansibuhu waladahu*), in order to strengthen the latter's authority (*kaymā ta'lū kalimatuhu*) and stabilise his mission, for he (al-Mahdī) should be the 'master of the unveiling' (*ṣāḥib al-kašf*) who would accomplish the manifestation, bring salvation (*'alā yadihi yakūnu z-zuhūr wa-l-faraġ*), and make the esoteric meanings of religion revealed (*wa-burūz kulli amrin min ad-dīn mastūr*) (al-Bazā'ī, *Tarātib* 139.8–13). The manifestation had begun earlier, during the Imāmate of Muḥammad al-Mahdī, but had been interrupted by his sudden death (*Ibid.* 139.6–8).

According to al-Bazā'ī, the usual sequence of three hidden Imāms after Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl is as follows: Aḥmad ar-Raḍī, Muḥammad, and Aḥmad. The content

³³ al-Bazā'ī, *Tarātib* 137.16-138.2: "*Fa-qāma Aḥmad bi-l-imāma wa-kāna ḥiġābuhu llaḍī ḥtaġaba bihi wa-satruhu llaḍī satarahu wa-'aqāma maqāmahu, Maymūn al-Qaddāh*".

³⁴ The anonymous brother of Imām Aḥmad is elsewhere referred to as Muḥammad, or Sa'īd al-Ḥayr, or Abū š-Šalaġlaġ; an-Nīsābūrī, *Istitār*, ed. Ivanow 1936: 95.19, ed. Zakkār 116.17; 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī, *Kitāb* 10–11; Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn, *Uyūn* IV, 402, 404; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz* VI, 19, 21; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti 'āz* I, 26.

of the excerpt of *at-Tarātīb* written by him is essentially the same as the one provided by other Ismā‘īlī sources. Al-Bazā‘ī’s above account is also comparable with the narratives reported by an-Nīsābūrī,³⁵ al-Qāḍī an-Nu‘mān,³⁶ as well as in a letter (*siġill*) by the fourth Fāṭimid caliph al-Mu‘izz.³⁷

In al-Bazā‘ī’s report, the uncle with many sons who usurped the Imāmate from al-Mahdī remains anonymous, and is referred to as a depositary Imām. It is evident that the anonymous “usurper” mentioned by him and in the caliph al-Mu‘izz’s letter, in the *Šarḥ al-aḥbār* and in the *Istitār al-imām* as well as in the Ismā‘īlī writings as Sa‘īd al-Ḥayr later on, is the same person, namely the paternal uncle of ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī, Muḥammad Abū š-Šalaġlaġ, or Imām al-Ḥabīb, who is designated as permanent (*mustaqarr*) Imām in the *Letter to the community in Yemen* by ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī and in the earlier Ismā‘īlī sources. Discussing the activities of the trustee (*ḥuġġa*), Ġafar ibn Maṣṣūr al-Yaman says in his *Kitāb al-Kašf* that in the time of the third hidden Imām Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad [*sic!*] he initially withheld his identity from the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) by way of precaution (*li-t-taqiyya*) and surrendered himself to the position of trustee. Whenever referring to the Imām, he would actually mean himself.³⁸

Interestingly enough we are dealing with exactly the same account in four sources, confirming that his uncle seized the Imāmate from al-Mahdī, an allegation supported by the quotation of the same two lines from a poem.³⁹

According to Hamdani and de Blois, the official version of the history of the dynasty emerging through the rearrangement of the family tree, Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb, or Abū š-Šalaġlaġ, was replaced as the legitimate Imām by his brother, al-Ḥusayn, while the former was relegated to the position of depositary or temporary Imām so that the post should go strictly from father to son as officially required (Hamdani and de Blois 1983: 188–189).

Compared to the other Ismā‘īlī sources, a major difference in al-Bazā‘ī’s report is that he names the real al-Mahdī Muḥammad, as opposed to the generally accepted name Sa‘īd/‘Abdallāh (or ‘Ubaydallāh). He further states that with the termination of his unnamed uncle’s service as trustee, his brother ‘Abdallāh, was to fulfil the

³⁵ an-Nīsābūrī, *Istitār*, ed. Ivanow 1936: 95.20–96.1; ed. Zakkār, 116.17–117.1.

³⁶ al-Qāḍī an-Nu‘mān, *Aḥbār* III, 384–385. See also Ivanow 1942: 15.

³⁷ al-Qāḍī an-Nu‘mān, *Maġālis* 375–378. See also Stern 1955: 10–33.

³⁸ See Ġa‘far ibn Maṣṣūr, *Kašf* 98.1–4; see also ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī, *Kitāb* 10.15.

³⁹ The text of this passage is worded as follows (al-Bazā‘ī, *Tarātīb* 139. 3–4):

“*Allāh a ‘īāk allatī lā fawqahā / lammā arādū man ‘ahā wa-‘awqahā*
‘anka wa-ya ‘bā Allāhu illā sawqahā / ilayka ḥattā ṭawwaqaka fī ṭawqihā.”

“God has given you something beyond which there is nothing

when [some people] wanted to block and obstruct

[your path] to it. Yet God would not give [the leadership] to anyone

but you, and he will decorate you with its necklace!”

obligations incumbent upon the Mahdī during the manifestation (*kašf*) (al-Bazā'ī, *Tarātīb* 138.14–16, 139.15).

Al-Bazā'ī's work seemingly contradicts the majority of Ismā'īlī sources. While recording al-Mahdī's name as Muḥammad, the author also describes him as the permanent Imām, and 'Abdallāh as a depositary. In the case of the anonymous uncle and the brother doubts arise concerning the depositaries to whom he otherwise attributes an 'Alid descent (*Tarātīb* 138.2, 138.7).

His report ends by saying that the Imām who went to Siġilmāsa was the real Muḥammad al-Mahdī while the person who later appeared in al-Mahdiyya was, in fact, his brother and depositary, 'Abdallāh. As a temporary successor and deputy (*ḥalīfa*) or depositary (*mustawda*) Imām and master of the manifestation (*ṣāhib al-kašf*), he followed the instructions of the permanent (*mustaqarr*) Imām Muḥammad al-Mahdī, adopting the name (*laqab*) al-Mahdī and proclaiming himself Imām and ruler (Appendix, Chart 2).⁴⁰

Al-Bazā'ī also concludes that the change of the personality of al-Mahdī in the meantime did not escape the attention of Abū l-'Abbās, the brother of the North African missionary Abū 'Abdallāh aš-Šī'ī, as he personally knew al-Qā'im's father, the true al-Mahdī. When he recognised this fact, he confided his doubts to his brother and urged him to confront him. Soon thereafter they both rejected the depositary Imām, who then put an untimely end to their earthly careers.⁴¹

Al-Maynaqī reports that Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl concealed himself behind an *alter ego* (*satara 'alā nafsihi bi-ḥiġāb*). When Muḥammad felt his death approaching, he gave the leadership to his son, 'Abdallāh ar-Raḍī, the *second* of the hidden Imāms (*ṭānī l-a'imma al-mastūrīn*). 'Abdallāh ar-Raḍī took the position of Imām, but one of the trustees (*ḥuġaġ*) served as his veil (*ḥiġāb*) behind which he hid. The Imām commanded him to make the devotees to swear an oath on his own name, i.e. 'Abdallāh. And he did what the Imām ordered him to do, exercising power until the Imām died. When 'Abdallāh felt that his death was imminent, he called for his son, Aḥmad al-Wafī, and handed the Imāmate over to him (al-Maynaqī, *Tarātīb* 51.15–21).

Imām Aḥmad al-Wafī also took up the position of Imām, but a trustee named Aḥmad covered him (*iḥtaġaba*), having been instructed by the Imām 'Abdallāh to replace his son (*an yaqūma maqāmahu*) and to make the devotees swear an oath on

⁴⁰ al-Bazā'ī, *Tarātīb* 140.13–141.1: “*kāna [Muḥammad] al-Mahdī Abū l-Qā'im, al-muntaqal ilā Siġilmāsa, wa-kāna ['Abdallāh] al-Mahdī, ṣāhib al-kašf huwa l-mawlūd bi-Salamīyya al-muntaqal bi-l-Mahdiyya*”.

⁴¹ al-Bazā'ī, *Tarātīb* 141.1–8; Halm (1988: 209) points out that the fact that 'Abdallāh ['Ubaydallāh] al-Mahdī was unable to produce the divine signs as expected led to doubts among his followers, which soon escalated into open rebellion. He could only suppress it by killing two leaders of the movement.

his own name. He then exercised the power until Imām Aḥmad felt his death approaching. He then passed the Imāmate on to his son al-Ḥusayn and commanded him to do as his ancestors had done (al-Maynaqī, *Tarātib* 52.1–4).

In this way, Imām al-Ḥusayn was hiding behind a trustee from the Prophet's House (*ahl al-bayt*). When al-Ḥusayn felt his death approaching, he appointed (*awṣā*) his son 'Alī (al-Mu'ill) as his heir, entitled to the Imāmate, but the latter died young. Then the son of the departed, that is al-Ḥusayn's grandson al-Qā'im, was appointed as heir to the Imāmate and instructed to hide behind the personality of one of his uncles. His paternal uncle Sa'īd al-Ḥayr acted in his place and took (*tasallama*) the Imāmate from him. This made him famous and he was called al-Mahdī. He issued an order for the 'manifestation' (*zuhūr*). When in his turn Sa'īd al-Ḥayr felt his death approaching, he called for his adopted son al-Qā'im and passed the Imāmate on to him. With the manifestation (*zuhūr*) of salvation (*faraġ*), of complete generosity (*ġūd kullī*) and of divine emanation (*fayḍ ilāhī*), the period of 'concealment' (*satr*) and of depositary Imāms came to an end.⁴²

Sa'īd al-Ḥayr could spread propaganda in his own name and he widened the mission. He was the 'long-awaited' (*maqṣūd*) Imām by whom salvation (*faraġ*) was brought and all hidden matters of religion were revealed (*wa-burūz kulli amrin min ad-dīn mastūr*). Through his missionaries the mission appeared in Yemen as well as in the West (al-Maġrib). He made his claim for the Imāmate and power (*wa-aḫhara imāmatahu wa-mulkahu*) public, and acted in this position until his death, whereupon he handed over the power to his rightful possessor (*sallama l-amr ilā ṣāhibihi*) al-Qā'im.⁴³

Similar to al-Bazā'ī, al-Maynaqī states that during the period of al-Mahdī, Abū l-'Abbās, the brother of the chief missionary in the West 'Abdallāh aš-Šī'ī, rejected the former's claim of the Imāmate and raised doubts about al-Mahdī's identity. He then notes that the case of Abū 'Abdallāh aš-Šī'ī and his brother Abū l-'Abbās (i.e. their rebellion) is well known, but there is controversy (*inna l-ḥilāf fihi*) concerning the manifestation (*zuhūr*) of the Mahdī (al-Maynaqī, *Tarātib* 52.20–53.4).

According to al-Maynaqī, the hidden Imāms after Ismā'īl's son Muḥammad [al-Maktūm] were as follows: 'Abdallāh ar-Raḍī, Aḥmad al-Wafī, and al-Ḥusayn [az-Zakī]. His report differs from that of al-Bazā'ī in that he completely omits the story

⁴² al-Maynaqī, *Tarātib* 52.4–11. According to other sources, 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī used the name Sa'īd, while the name Sa'īd al-Ḥayr might have been used by his uncle, Muḥammad Abū š-Šalaġlaġ.

⁴³ al-Maynaqī, *Tarātib* 52.11–20. The original passage is somewhat obscure because on the one hand it does not disclose who was in charge of the propaganda at that time, but the context suggests that it could only be Sa'īd al-Ḥayr. On the other hand, during the transfer of power, the name of the third Fāṭimid caliph al-Manṣūr appears, although the testimony of events well known from most of the Ismā'īlī sources make it likely that only the name of Sa'īd's adopted son, al-Qā'im, can be included. Incidentally, the relevant passage from al-Bazā'ī *Tarātib* (*Aḥbār*) 139.8–13, *Tarātib* (*Ĝāmi*) 290.9–14, also confirms this assumption.

of the anonymous uncle (al-Bazā'ī, *Tarātib* 116.17–117.4). In his report, the uncle, Sa'īd al-Ḥayr, who was entrusted by the Imām 'Alī al-Mu'ill with the duties of guardian for his son al-Qā'im, was no other than 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī (Appendix, Chart 3).⁴⁴ He also includes a certain 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn in the series of hidden Imāms, whose alleged status is unrecorded in the majority of Ismā'īlī sources. Al-Maynaqī also reports that al-Qā'im was not the son of Sa'īd al-Ḥayr ['Abdallāh al-Mahdī] but a descendant of 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Abdallāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, who died soon after he entrusted one of his uncles, Sa'īd al-Ḥayr, with raising his son al-Qā'im.

A closely comparable account appears in the work of al-Ḥaṭṭāb ibn al-Ḥasan al-Hamdānī (d. 533/1138), a Ṭayyibī Musta'īlī *dā'ī* in Yemen. This work, the *Gāyat al-mawālīd*, was written a few years after the murder (524/1130) of the Fātimid imām-caliph al-Āmir. The author explains that Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl was one of the Imāms in the 'period of concealment' (*satr*). The Imāmate continued after him among his descendants, passing from father to son, and thus after the Imāms 'Abdallāh and Aḥmad it was transferred to 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn. The latter sent missionaries, including Ibn Ḥawšab to Yemen and Abū 'Abdallāh aš-Šī'ī to the Maḡrib. With the growing success of the mission in Yemen and the Maḡrib, Imām 'Alī set out to the Maḡrib where he declared the manifestation (*aẓhara l-ḡayba*), appointing (*istaḥlafa*) his trustee, Sa'īd, also known by the surname (*laqab*) al-Mahdī, as his deputy (*ḥalīfa*). Towards the end of his life, al-Mahdī handed over the deposit (*wadī'a*), i.e. the leadership, to its permanent owner (*mustaqarrihā*), Muḥammad al-Qā'im, the son of Imām 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn. This man took over the Imāmate, which thereupon continued among his descendants (*ft' aqbihi*) (al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Gāyat al-mawālīd* 35–39).

Similar to al-Maynaqī, we discover in al-Ḥaṭṭāb's writing the name 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn, inserted into the usual sequence of hidden Imāms. In his narrative he also expresses the view that Abū l-Qāsim al-Qā'im is not the son of Sa'īd ['Abdallāh], but a descendant of Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl (*Ibid.*).

Al-Ḥaṭṭāb may have drawn inspiration from an older source in which Abū l-Qāsim al-Qā'im was referred to as Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn, without realising that the name 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn referred to 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī.⁴⁵ That is why he could have come to the false conclusion that 'Alī and Sa'īd ('Abdallāh al-Mahdī) were two different persons. Closely comparable is the relevant passage in al-Maynaqī's account, virtually reflecting, if not directly adopting, al-Ḥaṭṭāb's mistake.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ al-Maynaqī, *Tarātib* 52.6–7: "wa-amarahu [al-imām] an yaḥtaḡiba [ibnuhu] bi-aḥad a māmihi, fa-qāma Sa'īd al-Ḥayr, wa-tasallama l-imāma, wa-ištahara bihā, wa-tasammā al-Mahdī".

⁴⁵ It is known from other sources that 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn was the original name of 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī, see Madelung, 1961: 77.

⁴⁶ See al-Maynaqī, *Tarātib* 52.6–7. Cf. al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Gāyat al-mawālīd* 37.2–4.

Three centuries after al-Ḥaṭṭāb, Idrīs ʿImād ad-Dīn wrote the official version of the early history of the Fāṭimid caliphs. In this exoteric work al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad, al-Mahdī and al-Qāʿim are named as Imāms of the same lineage.⁴⁷ In his esoteric work, however, he sought to make his statements conform to the ones contained in al-Ḥaṭṭāb's work, which results in irresolvable contradictions in his writing. Thus his statement regarding the Imām who died during his journey to the Maḡrib, and whose name he does not identify, indicates the influence of al-Ḥaṭṭāb's work, as the Imām in the official version, al-Ḥusayn, whose name Idrīs ʿImād ad-Dīn does not mention, died earlier. Just like al-Ḥaṭṭāb, Idrīs ʿImād ad-Dīn writes in his account that the Imām entrusted Saʿīd al-Ḥayr with the custody of his son before his death. Yet in his version Saʿīd al-Ḥayr is the brother of the Imām, which again corresponds to the official Fāṭimid version.⁴⁸

It thus seems that some of the late Ismāʿīlī, as well as several anti-Ismāʿīlī, authors question the father-and-son relationship between ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī and al-Qāʿim, attributing a Qaddāhid origin to the former, while still accepting the ʿAlid lineage of the latter.⁴⁹ As demonstrated by Madelung, these arguments seem to go back to the statements put forward in the *Ġāyat al-mawālīd* (Madelung 1961: 73–80).

5 Conclusion

Regarding the two versions of *at-Tarātib as-sabʿa* recorded several centuries apart, we must emphasise that we sought to identify similarities and differences between the two narratives as well as the ways in which they relate to relevant reports from other sources and fit into the traditions on the hidden Imāms. Both versions were presumably created at a time when, due to the activities of the Imāms acting as heads of the community (*aʿimma ḥāḍirūn*), the ideas of the early Ismāʿīliyya, including views on the community's leadership and the teachings of the hidden Imāms, underwent changes. Indeed, a major turning point in this process was the change made in the doctrinal field and in its genealogical justification, as stated in ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī's *Letter to the community in Yemen*, as was the later change introduced by his descendants by officially re-fashioning the lineage of Ismāʿīl and making the new version part of their propaganda from the time of the caliph al-ʿAzīz.⁵⁰

These genealogical changes were noted even by the Andalusī scholar, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064):

“The descendants of ʿAbdallāh [al-Aḫṭāḥ], now rulers of Egypt, would at the beginning of their rule refer to ʿAbdallāh ibn Ḡaʿfar ibn Muḥammad [...]. But when it became evident to them that this ʿAbdallāh only had a girl called

⁴⁷ Idrīs ʿImād ad-Dīn, *Uyūn* (ed. Ġālib) V, 4–19. See also Madelung 1961: 78.

⁴⁸ Idrīs ʿImād ad-Dīn, *Zahr* 18.4–17. See also Madelung 1961: 78.

⁴⁹ See Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 238.21–25.

⁵⁰ See Madelung 1961: 59, 100–101.

Fāṭima as a descendant, they abandoned [this claim], and again derived themselves from Ismā‘īl ibn Ğa‘far ibn Muḥammad” (Ibn Ḥazm, *Ġamhara* 59. 12–15).

As indicated by the series of traditions recorded in the two versions of *at-Tarātib as-sab‘a*, both were composed at times when the accepted traditions on the hidden Imāms of the Ismā‘īlī lineage had already been officially restored. This is indicated by the series of the hidden Imāms published in the works of al-Bazā‘ī⁵¹ and al-Maynaqī;⁵² even though they recorded different names for the hidden Imāms, the third real hidden Imām, Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb, is equally omitted from their genealogies. Nonetheless, and despite the apparent similarity in the vast majority of their writings, the two authors might have received differing information on related traditions regarding certain aspects and therefore provided different interpretations.

In al-Bazā‘ī’s writing, the story of the Qaddāḥid trustees shows close resemblance to the other existing texts, the complete version of which was later recorded by Idrīs ‘Imād ad-Dīn in his *Zahr al-ma‘ānī*. The essence of these traditions is that Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ was portrayed as the guardian (*walī*) and protector (*kafīl*) of Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl in the time of Ğa‘far aṣ-Ṣādiq. After that, his son, ‘Abdallāh ibn Maymūn, held this position by ‘Abdallāh ibn Muḥammad’s side, and later also became the trustee of his son Aḥmad.⁵³ Thus this account reflects the influence of Sunnī or Qarmaṭī traditions regarding the disputable relationship between Maymūn, his son ‘Abdallāh, and the Ismā‘īlī Imāms. Similarly, al-Bazā‘ī attributes a Qaddāḥid origin to the trustees of the hidden Imāms ‘Abdallāh ar-Raḍī and Muḥammad al-Mahdī (al-Bazā‘ī, *Tarātib* 138.2, 138.7). Al-Maynaqī’s narrative, however, completely omits the Qaddāḥid trustees. Even though the trustees played a decisive role alongside the Imāms in his report, he claims that they were mostly from the ‘Alid family (al-Maynaqī, *Tarātib* 51.18, 52.1–7).

As the Fāṭimid caliph al-Mu‘izz stated in a letter, under extraordinary circumstances (*‘inda d-ḍarūra*) God may temporarily hand over the Imāmate to a member of the Prophet’s House who is not a lineal successor, that is to say, a man who does not follow his predecessor according to the father-to-son principle (*min ḡayri l-a‘qābi l-muttaṣila*) but only as a depositary, not a permanent, Imām (*mustawda ‘an ‘indahum ḡayra mustaqarrin fḥim*) (al-Qāḍī an-Nu‘mān, *Maḡālis* 376.7–9). However contradictory the sources might be, they unanimously show that the leadership of the Ismā‘īlī movement was divided between several members of the ‘Alid family, which then served as a foundation, upon which the mission (*da‘wa*) could strongly build on. Ibn Rizām mentions that in 261/874–5 ‘Abdallāh ibn Maymūn (‘Abdallāh al-Akbar) ordered one of his sons to go to aṭ-Ṭāliqān and stay in contact from there

⁵¹ The usual sequence after Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl is Aḥmad ar-Raḍī, Muḥammad, and Aḥmad.

⁵² The usual sequence after Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl [al-Maktūm] is ‘Abdallāh ar-Raḍī, Aḥmad al-Wafī, and al-Ḥusayn [az-Zakī].

⁵³ Idrīs ‘Imād ad-Dīn, *Zahr* 201.12–15, 208.22, 212.1–2.

with the Ismā'īlī mission (*da'wa*) in the Sawād. He then states that thanks to the sons of 'Abdallāh, Ismā'īlī propaganda spread throughout the region (Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 238.). According to Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn, the spirit of family cooperation was already perceptible when 'Abdallāh al-Akbar instructed his brother al-Ḥusayn to act on his behalf regarding the affairs of the mission (*da'wa*). He even remarks that this authorisation, which must have been given among a relatively small group of adherents, eventually led to serious disagreements regarding the personality of the real *Imām*.⁵⁴

Identifying which branch, which member of the 'Alid family, where, when, and in what capacity, participated in the close cooperation within the family, or asserting with certainty that the mission's leadership in the Prophet's House (*ahl al-bayt*) had shifted from one branch of the family to another, are tasks that seem quite impossible for the moment. All the more so because the Šī'ī principle of *taqīyya* was enforced very strictly regarding not only the person of the Imāms but the high ranking officials of the movement as well.

According to both versions of *at-Tarātib as-sab'a*, the man who brought an end to the period of the hidden Imāms and their trustees (*ḥuḡaḡ*), the master of the revelation (*ṣāḥib al-kašf*), the performer of the manifestation (*zuhūr*), the long-awaited Imām (*imām maqšūd*), who came to act as head of community (*imām ḥādīr*), the one who proclaimed himself the ruling Imām and openly claimed power, was 'Abdallāh ('Ubaydallāh al-Mahdī). In al-Bazā'ī's report, after the death of the mysterious legitimate Imām Muḥammad al-Mahdī, 'Abdallāh/'Ubaydallāh al-Mahdī, being his brother, replaced him, and being the paternal uncle of his son al-Qā'im, acted as his temporary successor and deputy (*bi l-ḥilāfa wa-n-niyāba*). In al-Maynaqī's narrative, however, he was appointed by the similarly mysterious fourth hidden Imām 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn as one of his son's uncles, temporarily took over the Imāmate as Sa'īd al-Ḥayr, and acted on behalf of his son al-Qā'im. However, both versions agree that throughout his office he faithfully performed all duties of service and temporary assignments (*al-ḥidma wa-l-ḥilāfa*) with which he was entrusted and gave back the supreme authority to its legitimate holder (*sallama l-amra li-ṣāḥibi l-amri*), the person lawfully entitled to it (*ilā mustahiqqihī*), the true Imām (*al-imām al-ḥaqīqī*) al-Qā'im [Abū l-Qāsim Muḥammad].⁵⁵

We are completely in agreement with Halm's assertion that the doubts about the 'Alid origin of Ismā'īlīs should be taken seriously. The contemporaries of the Fāṭimids unanimously disputed their descent from Ġa'far aṣ-Šādiq and also rejected

⁵⁴ See Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn, *Uyūn* IV, 363.14–364.5. There are reports about the emergence of a close relative of Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb (Abū š-Šalaḡlaḡ) from aṭ-Ṭāliqān (or one of 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī's brothers), who, after the split of the movement, appeared among the separated Ismā'īlī communities and then among the Syrian rebels. Cf. an-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXV, 230.18–22; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz ad-durar*, VI, 69.2; an-Nīsābūrī, *Istīṭār* 97.20–23, ed. Zakkār, 119.14–17

⁵⁵ al-Bazā'ī 139.16–140.12, al-Maynaqī, 52.11–20.

their genealogy that was traced back to the ‘Prophet’s House’ (*ahl al-bayt*). The position of ‘spokesman’ or ‘headman’ (*naqīb*) of the ‘Alids was instituted precisely to fulfil the responsibility of preserving the ‘Alid pedigree. Thus, it would be hardly possible to consider a true ‘Alid as an impostor. Although the political claims to power of the real ‘Alids were frequently questioned by their opponents, the authenticity of their genealogy was never doubted (Halm 2003: 158–160).

The *ṣarīf* Aḥū Muḥsin Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī in Damascus, a descendant of Imām Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, made a polemical treatise in 374/985 that would be frequently quoted later on, in which he dismissed the claims that there was any relation between the Fāṭimids and his family.⁵⁶ However, even the reports of opponents and outsiders note the remarkable fact, also confirmed by the Ismā‘īlī sources, that the founder of the mission, ‘Abdallāh al-Akbar, sought refuge with the family of the Hāšimid ‘Aqīl ibn Abī Ṭālib and settled down among his descendants for some time. After leaving the city, he and his sons continued to claim that they were descendants of ‘Aqīl ibn Abī Ṭālib, and this genealogy was confirmed in al-Baṣra.⁵⁷

In sum, we can also add that an essential insight relevant for our study as well is articulated by Hamdani and de Blois, who propose that the contradictory reports on the history of the Fāṭimids’ ancestors, the hidden Imāms, cannot simply be a collection of fantasy or deceit. One does indeed observe the way old and abandoned views tend to emerge in later works, along with the official teachings that have replaced them, and the way concepts tend to evolve over time, a process motivated at times by political and religious factors that leaves its mark on the material (Hamdani and de Blois 1983: 193, 201).

⁵⁶ His writing is preserved in Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz* VI, 17–20, 65–66.

⁵⁷ Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 238.17–18, 26–27; an-Nīsābūrī (*Istīṭār*, ed. Ivanow 96.18, ed. Zakkār 118.1) records that ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī, who left the Maḡrib, was called by the rebellious Syrian Qarmaṭīs the son of the man of Baṣra (*ibn al-baṣrī*). Halm (1988: 97, 1991: 19–23) emphasises the importance of references in the sources regarding of this kinship and supports the very possibility of the ‘Aqīlid descent.

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APPENDIX

Chart 1.
The traditional family-tree of the Ismā'īlī Imāms

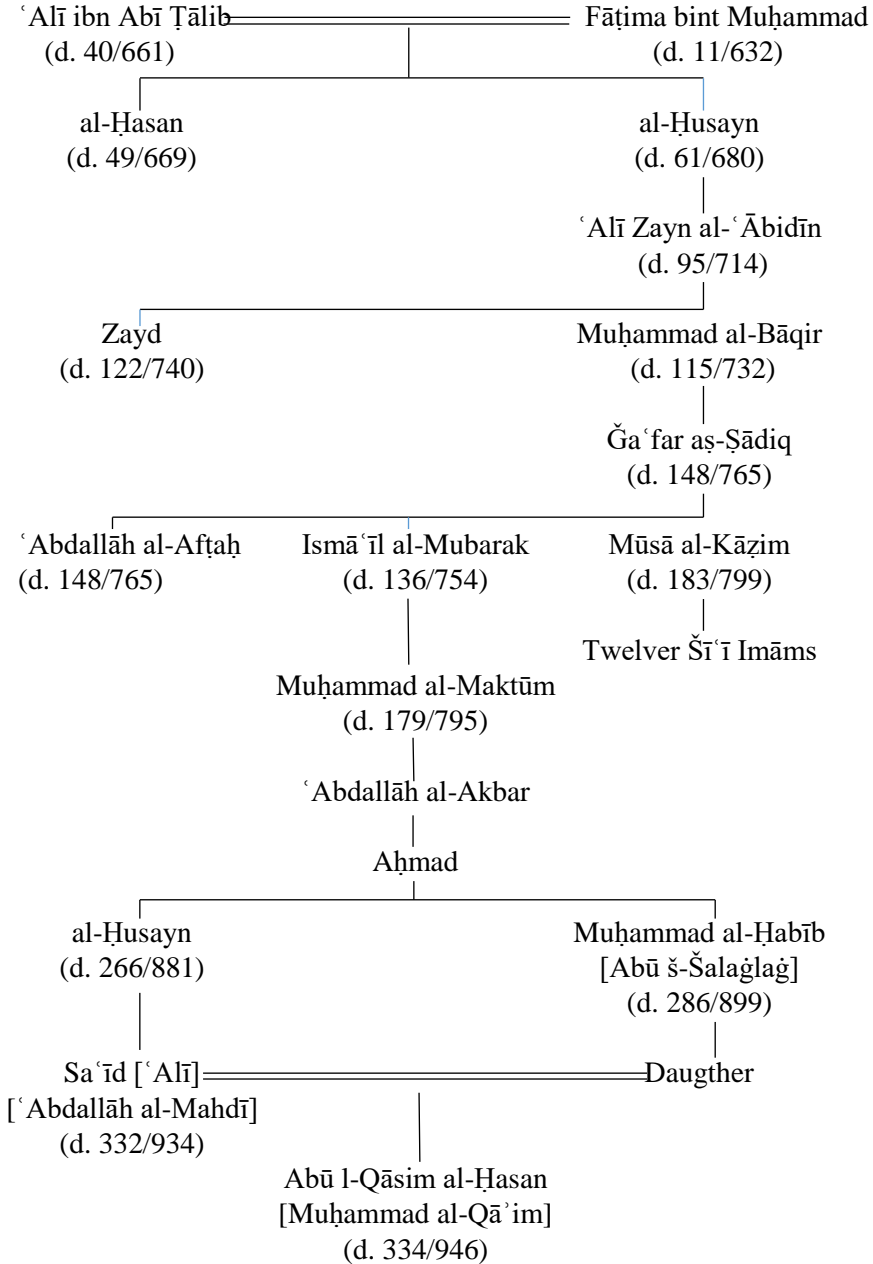
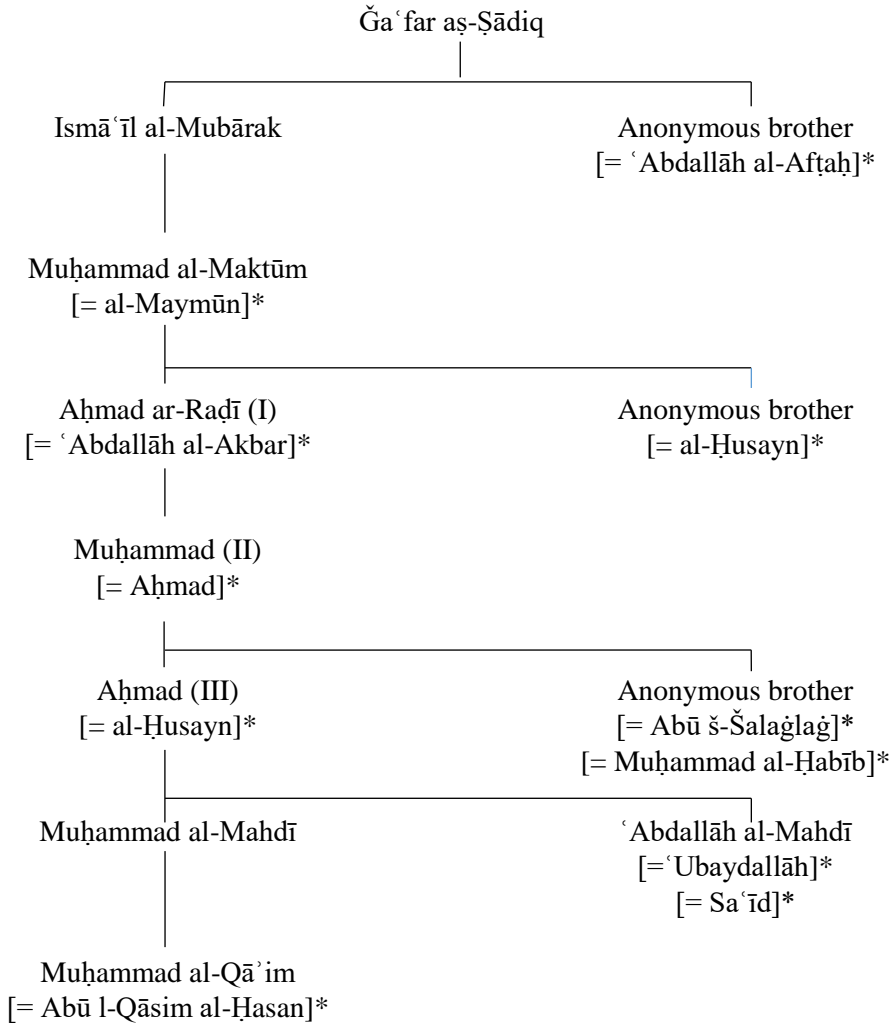
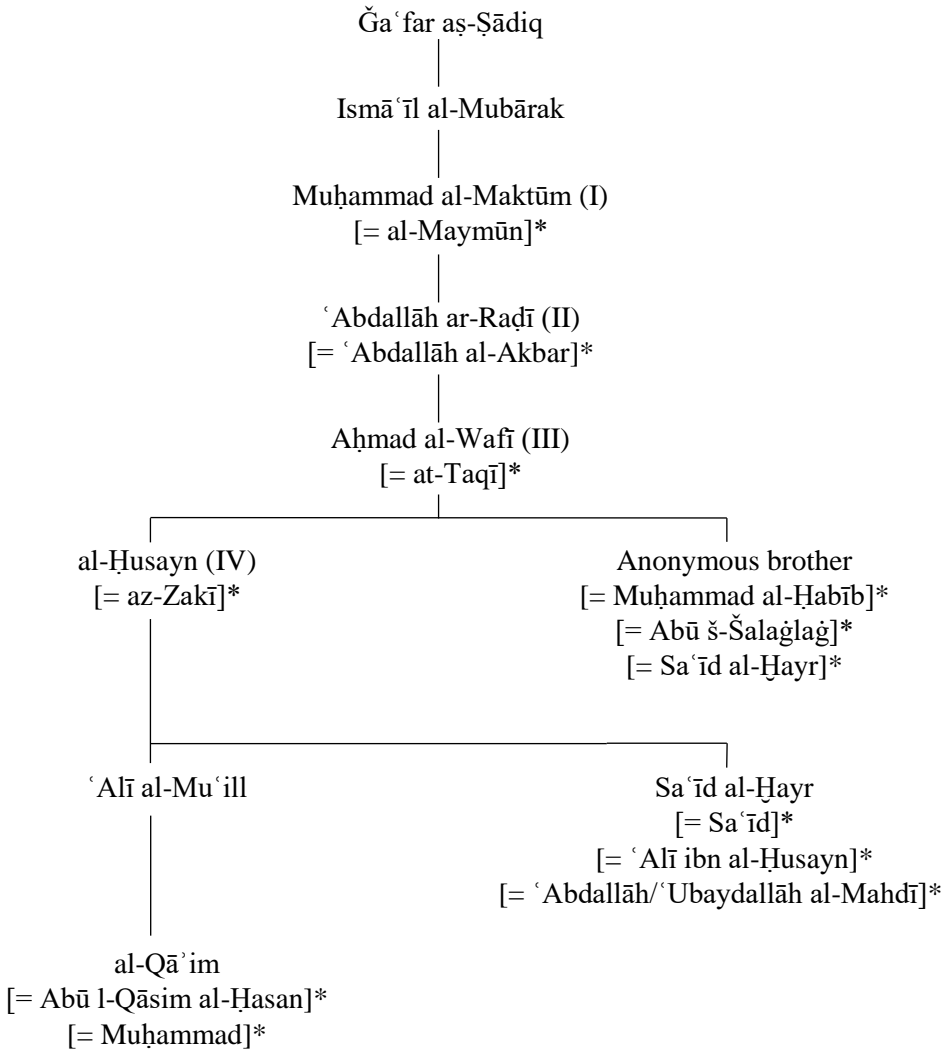


Chart 2.
The family-tree of the Ismā'īlī hidden Imāms
according to the *Kitāb at-tarātīb as-sab'a* of al-Bazā'ī



* Same person as recorded in other sources.

Chart 3.
The family-tree of the Ismā‘īlī hidden Imāms
according to the *Risālat at-tarātīb as-sab‘a* of al-Maynaqī



* Same person as recorded in other sources.