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Author(s): Paul E. Walker and Paul Walker

Source: *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, Vol. 32 (1995), pp. 239-264

Published by: American Research Center in Egypt

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40000841>

Accessed: 21/05/2009 00:16

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Succession to Rule in the Shiite Caliphate¹

PAUL E. WALKER

Fatimid Succession: Theoretical Considerations

Over forty years ago, S. M. Stern published two important studies of succession problems in the Fatimid state. He covered on those occasions issues related, first, to the Nizāri-Mustaʿli split that resulted, in 487/1094, in a conflict over legitimacy which continues even now and, second, to the obscure events that led, in 524/1130, to the Ṭayyibi/Hāfiẓi division in the Ismaili legacy and eventually to the termination of the dynasty itself. Both articles were fine examples of Stern's careful scholarship; they have continued not only to be the most useful analyses of these problems, but to retain great value despite the lapse of time.² There were, however, all along, issues in the general matter of succession to a rule based on the Ismaili form of Shiism that Stern did not take up in these particular articles. In addition, since his writing, sources have appeared which he either did not consider or were simply unavailable to him. Chief among the latter is the complete text of al-Maqrizī's *Ittiʿāz al-ḥunafāʾ*,³ which is this late Mamluk historian's own quite interesting and valuable history of the Fatimids.⁴

¹ Fred Donner and Paula Sanders were kind enough to offer detailed comments on an earlier draft of this paper and I wish to recognize here their help and advice.

² "The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Āmir (al-Hidāya al-Āmiriyya)—its Date and its Purpose," *JRAS* 1950, 20–31 [reprinted in *History and Culture in the Medieval Muslim World*, Variorum Reprints, 1984, No. X] and "The Succession to the Fatimid Imam al-Āmir, the Claims of the Later Fatimids to the Imamate, and the Rise of Ṭayyibi Ismailism," *Oriens* 4 (1951): 193–255 [reprinted as No. XI in the same Variorum volume].

³ Ṭaqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Maqrizī (d. 845/1442), *Ittiʿāz al-ḥunafāʾ bi-akhbār al-aʿimma al-fāṭimiyyīn al-khulafāʾ*, vol. 1, edited by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (Cairo, 1967), vols. 2 and 3, edited by Muḥammad Ḥilmī Muḥammad Aḥmad (Cairo,

With the work of al-Maqrizī now readily accessible, moreover, not only do we have a better command of the facts—or, at the least, a fuller record of the facts—concerning various cases of succession, disputed and otherwise, but we have a real opportunity, as well, to evaluate al-Maqrizī's handling of them as an historian. Judgments of this kind were far more difficult, for example, when based solely on his topical encyclopedia, the *Khīṭaṭ*,⁴ which previously was the only account by al-Maqrizī available for most periods of Fatimid rule.⁵ However, this must for the moment remain a secondary goal as our main focus here will be the general problem of Ismaili succession in theory and practice.

It is true, moreover, despite Stern's acknowledged grasp of Ismaili doctrine and sources, that neither of the studies in question was intended by him as a complete presentation on the theme of succession. His first article was primarily about a later, after-the-fact, Mustaʿli (Āmiri) document that was itself clearly both apologetic and polemical: it was issued by the reigning government in Cairo to denounce its Nizāri opponents.⁶ Stern was able to prove its date and probably its authorship, and this was his principal aim. Only incidentally did he recount the details leading to the Nizāri/Mustaʿli dispute. In the second article he explored in greater depth the confusion surrounding the death of al-Āmir,

1971, 1973. On al-Maqrizī, see the article by F. Rosenthal in *EI* 2.

⁴ *Al-Mawāʿiẓ waʾl-iʿtibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ waʾl-āthār* (Bulak edition reprinted Beirut, 1970).

⁵ Earlier published versions of the *Ittiʿāz* made available solely the first portion of it.

⁶ This is the *al-Hidāya al-Āmiriyya*, edited along with its appendix called *Īqāʿ ṣawāʿiq al-irghām* by A. A. A. Fyzee, (Islamic Research Association, No. 7) Calcutta, 1938, on which, in addition to the article of Stern cited here, the comments below.

the succession of al-Ḥāfiẓ, and the secession of the Ṭayyibī Ismailis of Yemen from the Egyptian *daʿwa*. In both cases, however, if we are to achieve a thorough explanation of the critical events, we require a complete review of Ismaili theory of the doctrine of the imamate, insofar as it can be ascertained, particularly with regard to the designation of a new imam by the previous one.

Although some medieval and some modern historians treat the Fatimid rulers as members of a dynasty in the same category as the Umayyads and the Abbasids, a Shiʿite understanding of the imamate, and especially the Ismaili version of it, raises the succession problem well above nearly all contemporary situations that might have occurred in rival forms of rule. From their own perspective, and that of their loyal followers, the Fatimids governed as God's sole, infallible representatives; and they could, accordingly, lay claims to complete sacred, as well as secular, powers and prerogatives. Most importantly, the Ismaili Shiʿa accepted the Fatimid caliphs on this basis.

The theory of succession accepted by the Ismailis derives from the very root of Shiism. In contrast to Sunnis, who recognize a principle of "election," the Shiʿa, by and large, allow only "designation" (*naṣṣ*). For them the prophet literally "designated" ʿAlī as his sole successor. This distinction between election and designation is well known in heresiographical discussions.⁷ As the party of designation, the Shiʿa, however, also disagreed among themselves, falling roughly into three camps. The Zaydis maintain that the prophet's designation of ʿAlī carried, in one fashion or another, to Ḥasan and Ḥusayn but not beyond the Prophet's two grandsons. Additional imams will, nevertheless, arise from the progeny of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn but they will not be known by an exact designation on the part either of the previous imams or of the prophet. The Twelver Shiʿa, once the twelfth imam had come into existence and had commenced his

rule, began to insist that all twelve of the imams were, in fact, "designated" in advance by the prophet himself.⁸ Thus, ultimately, neither the Zaydi nor the Twelver Shiʿa held to a doctrine of continuing designation. By contrast, however, the Ismailis, unlike the other Shiʿa, assert that each imam in turn must designate his own successor. This latter concept of *naṣṣ*, which once lay at the heart of all Shiism, eventually faded in importance except in the single case of the Ismailis for whom the doctrine of continuing designation preserved its critical religious meaning and significance. It became, however, also a source of troublesome anxiety with the advent of actual, physical government and the temporal progress of a real dynasty that was genealogically quite fallible even while theoretically incapable of barrenness, or of erroneous inheritance, or any other sign of failure.

As the possessor of God-given infallibility (*ʿiṣma*), the Shiʿite imam cannot and does not make a mistake. For him to do so is the equivalent of God Himself being wrong and in error. Therefore, where the doctrine of *naṣṣ* continues to apply, the older imam must unerringly choose his successor by a formal act of designation, but at the same time that designation will carry with it the awesome fullness that God Himself conveys in any decision He might choose to make. Needless to say, human frailty hardly tolerates such august responsibility.

The trial case for the Shiʿa in all periods that were to follow was that of the Imam Jaʿfar al-Šādiq who, by most reports, publicly designated his second son Ismāʿīl as the person to succeed him. This fact was accepted as the formal act of *naṣṣ* required by Shiʿite theory and was therefore a designation by an infallible imam of the new imam who would inherit the full powers of the imamate. Ismāʿīl was thus not only Jaʿfar's choice but was God's choice as well. However, to the extreme chagrin of Jaʿfar's numerous, deeply committed followers, Ismāʿīl died before his father. The consequences of this natural but seemingly unforeseen event were, understandably, disastrous. Could it have been that Jaʿfar

⁷ See, for example, Nashwān b. Saʿīd al-Ḥimyarī (d. 547/1178), *al-Ḥūr al-ʿin* (Cairo, 1948), 150f, but many others could be cited as well. On the various forms of both theory and practice, in general, see Emile Tyan, *Institutions du droit public musulman*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1954 and 1956).

⁸ On this development, see E. Kohlberg, "From Imamiyya to Ithna-ʿashariyya," *BSOAS* 39 (1976): 521–34.

was not infallible after all? Or (what amounts almost to the same thing) that he was not the true imam?⁹

The split of the Shi'a into Imamīs (later Twelvers) and Ismailīs is but one result of this unwelcome and traumatic incident. But the very origin of the Ismailīs belongs to this difficult period and to the uncertainty it engendered. That Ja'far's choice of Ismā'il had been a mistake could not be admitted by his Shi'a under any circumstances, although as long as the father lived there was hope of an explanation and a correction to this perception of error. Apparently, though, Ja'far did not appoint another in place of Ismā'il and the theoretical argument by which he might have done so is, generally speaking, missing. Imāmi writers like al-Nawbakhtī admitted as much even a hundred years after the fact.¹⁰ The Shi'a were adept, however, at theological adjustments; the catastrophic trauma of Ja'far's selection of Ismā'il was eventually lessened by one of several different explanations. God, some argued, could change His mind.¹¹ The Imāmis eventually settled on another son, Mūsā, as imam and they provided what was, to them, adequate documentation of the propriety of Mūsā's elevation. By contrast a few holdouts insisted that Ja'far himself was not yet dead; rather he was still alive and in occultation.¹² Yet another group—those who formed the main party of what became the Ismailīs—refused either of these possibilities (and others that were proposed at the time) and claimed instead that the designation of Ismā'il was not only sound, no matter the early death of Ismā'il, but, because Ja'far's choice was correct, the succession necessarily moved thereafter beyond Ismā'il to his own son Muḥammad. Mu-

hammad b. Ismā'il was, in fact, the ancestor of the later Fatimids.¹³

Nevertheless, among the Ismailīs the specter of a properly designated successor predeceasing the imam who had made the designation continued to haunt all future situations. This background was perfectly well remembered by the Fatimids and by their Ismaili followers. The case of Ja'far and of Ismā'il, after all, had determined the subsequent identity of the *Ismā'īliyya* (even if this name is not that which the true Ismailīs used for themselves).¹⁴ What is not quite as clear is whether non-Ismailīs perceived (or could have perceived) a similar set of problems in the various cases of succession that arose later. It would be important to ascertain here, for example, if al-Maqrizī from his quite late medieval vantage point realized the full ramifications of the Ismaili doctrine of *naṣṣ*.¹⁵

Within the Fatimid empire many ordinary citizens recognized the Fatimid rulers only in the manner that they would have for any other dynasty. This often involved political allegiance alone without any acknowledgement of religious import in the caliphate. Also, in many other instances, this act of obedience combined a political with only a quasi-religious acceptance that

⁹ Needless to say the numerous possible explanations of what transpired each come with sectarian implications. A full catalog of the results of this incident would require many pages. What follows covers only some of the major positions and only insofar as they help explicate the understanding of later succession problems.

¹⁰ Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Kitāb firaq al-shi'a*, edited by H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931).

¹¹ This is one application of the concept of *badā'*, God's change of mind. On this see the article "badā'" in the *EI* 2 (by Goldziher and Tritton), and M. J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufid* (Beirut, 1978), 329–39.

¹² A sect known in the heresiographies as the *Nāṣiyya*.

¹³ This is not an appropriate place to review the vast literature about the origins of the Fatimids. The essential references are contained in F. Daftary's *The Ismā'ilīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990). For the present purpose, however, it may be useful to note a later Fatimid polemic that was appended to the *Hidāya* and called *iqā' sawā'iq al-irghām*, p. 35, which makes a point of insisting on this fact. This is a point made as well in Abū'l-Fawāris's *al-Risāla fi'l-imāma* (ed. S. N. Makarem, Delmar, NY, Caravan Books, 1977), a treatise by a prominent *dā'i* at the time of al-Ḥākim, Arabic text, pp. 35–37.

¹⁴ Although in late Fatimid polemics such as the *iqā'*, mentioned in the last note, p. 29, there is a stress on what it means to say of oneself "I am an Ismā'īlī" (*anā rajul ismā'īlī*). Notice also that the writer of this pamphlet specifically states that it is because "the *naṣṣ* which was given for Ismā'il cannot be abrogated in favor of Mūsā," 35–36.

¹⁵ I am fairly certain that he fully understood, but the most striking evidence occurs in a report about the caliph al-Āmir's extreme regret and concern at having erroneously appointed the Christian monk (*al-rāhib*), known as Abū Najāḥ b. Fanā, who had unjustly taxed his subjects. *Itti'āz*, pp. 125–27, especially p. 127 where it states explicitly that "the precondition of being the imam is to be infallible" (*wa sharṭ al-imām an yakūn ma'ṣūman*).

stopped well short of full Ismaili membership. The Fatimids were treated by the majority of their subjects as members of the *ashrāf* whose claim to political legitimacy was similar and perhaps no better than that of the Abbasids. In this context the complex doctrine of *naṣṣ* held little meaning; and that was true for most of the population of the Fatimid empire. However, the real Ismailis, the true *awliyāʾ* ("saints," as they were known in the Fatimid state), were, in contrast, deeply concerned about this very problem. The *daʿwa* that the Ismailis had built upon the absolutism of their imam depended on an uninterrupted, lineal descent of imam after imam; each one must be properly chosen and designated by his predecessor. Where for the average observer the issues at play passed without extravagant expectations, to the Ismailis, the events in each case of succession required a precise ritual that invoked a sacred, religious stipulation and resulted in ordination of a new master of the temporal world.

However, what that ritual included and who was in a position to observe it is hard to determine now because so few individuals were involved—and especially few are those whose observations or involvement was subsequently passed on to our surviving historical sources. In fact much of our evidence is self-contradictory, perhaps even deliberately so, since it reflects either the views of an uninformed outsider or the selective recollection and reconstruction by a later Ismaili apologist attempting to support one side against another. We are left, therefore, with arguments that seek to prove one claim and destroy the opposition. Beyond this, the policy of designation, by necessity, had to be pursued with utmost caution and circumspection, lest the unfortunate case of Ismāʿīl be repeated. In several instances later writers, in fact, argue that the observable events were mere smoke screens or false leads designed either to hide the truth or to placate the weakminded and unwary.¹⁶

One general rule, nonetheless, seems certain. The goal of each imam in regard to succession was to provide what we would consider a "revo-

cable" *naṣṣ*, that is, a designation as firm as possible but yet, to the end of that imam's reign, not final in its theological significance.¹⁷ In practice that meant choosing a son to be groomed for succession whose actual designation was provisionally known only to a trusted third party who was sworn to secrecy. If the imam himself meantime should die, that provisional designation immediately went into effect and became absolute. In the rare event that the designee should die first, the secret of the provision in his favor could be quietly nullified and another chosen in his place. There were thus two stipulations in Fatimid policy: one to provide at all times for succession even under the requirement imposed by the doctrine of *naṣṣ*; and yet never to allow such decisions to become irrevocable should the heir die prematurely.

In practice this rule meant that often one prince was clearly favored and was therefore the obvious choice to succeed, but the formal act of designation waited until the previous imam had actually died (or was, perhaps, only at death's door). The explicit *naṣṣ* was then frequently conveyed by testament, which is to say, as a bequest,¹⁸ and was usually passed on by a third party subsequent to the exact moment of death.

A Paradigm: The Succession to al-Qāʾim

Having extrapolated this procedure as the governing paradigm, however, it is ironic that the

¹⁷ It is worth recognizing that in general Islamic theory the designation (*bayʿa*) cannot be revoked by the person making the designation but only renounced by the designee. See Tyan, I, 275–79. Shiʿite theory is more complex in that ideally once a formal designation is made the *naṣṣ* cannot be undone by either party. It is not really a contract between human parties but is rather a divine choice, a contract only between God and his imam on earth. The abrogation of a *naṣṣ* is theoretically utterly impossible and hence a "revocable" *naṣṣ* is a contradiction in terms, except, however, if the earlier *naṣṣ* was, for whatever reason, incomplete or not definitive. Despite this contradiction, therefore, revocation and abrogation become, nonetheless, almost of necessity, major themes is what follows here.

¹⁸ On the concept of bequest (*al-waṣīyya*) in this context, see the comments of Stern, "Epistle," 21, and Paula Sanders, "Claiming the Past: Ghadīr Khumm and the rise of Ḥāfīzi Historiography in Late Fatimid Egypt," *Studia Islamica* 75 (1992): 81–104, p. 93, in reference to the *Hidāya*. Abūʿl-Fawāris makes the same point. On the Sunni practice of employing written bequests, see Tyan, I, pp. 265–67 and 271ff.

¹⁶ For an example of the latter argument, see below the various discussions in the later polemics about the meaning of the caliph al-Ḥākim's appointment of his cousin ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. Ilyās as successor.

first case of succession among the Fatimids—that of al-Qāʾim—is an obvious exception. The second of the Fatimid imam/caliphs was publicly recognized as early as 299/912,¹⁹ long before al-Mahdi's death in 322/934. Al-Qāʾim had, moreover, been intimately associated with his father's career, traveling with him throughout the arduous flight from Salamiya to Sijilmasa and sharing confinement in the latter city until they were liberated by Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Shiʿī and the Kutāma tribesmen. That the future al-Qāʾim was thus destined to succeed was not in question.²⁰ But the actual formal declaration which was made relatively early in al-Mahdi's reign was open to the same danger as proved fatal in the cases of Ismāʿīl. The answer as to why provisions of another kind were not followed must depend, in this instance, on factors that forced al-Mahdi to override a policy of caution.

Of greater urgency in the early years of Fatimid government was the very concept of dynasty and of continuity in the face of previous expectations, among many Ismailis (and the Shiʿa at large), of a single messianic achievement by the Mahdi alone. Various interpretations then actively promoted by Eastern Ismailis and their *daʿwas* also focused on the role of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl who was, according to them, the Messiah whose advent would signal the end of history.²¹ The claim of al-Mahdi, the first Fatimid “conqueror of cities”²² denied the

very doctrinal basis of this other notion of messiahship. The designation of al-Qāʾim, whatever the risk, was important in establishing the principle of succession in and of itself. The role of the Fatimid imams, according to the newly revealed teaching, needed to be understood in terms of collective goals: they (plural)—a line of imams—will establish justice and rid the world of inequity.

The meaning of the early elevation of al-Qāʾim, however, despite its most likely motivation, became almost immediately a matter of contention. Those who rejected al-Mahdi's claim to the imamate for himself, also denied the imamate of his son, although as time wore on, there was a tendency to accept al-Qāʾim, and hence his successors, while even so, curiously, not allowing al-Mahdi's own legitimacy. Al-Mahdi, for these people, was of a different lineage than al-Qāʾim. This and other understandings of al-Qāʾim's succession belie a far more complex problem than one of simple designation because it involves issues connected with the many controversies surrounding Fatimid genealogy—a matter beyond the scope of the present inquiry.²³ It is likely that both this issue and the early designation of al-Qāʾim, therefore, have little or no bearing on the problem of Fatimid succession in any subsequent case.²⁴

But, if al-Qāʾim's designation was anomalous, that of his successor the future al-Manṣūr appears to be paradigmatic. In fact the evidence that comes to us in the latter case is, quite possibly, better and more revealing than any other. The most informative report concerning the selection of al-Manṣūr comes from a senior trusted Ismaili servant, usually known simply as Ustādh Jawdhar. His dictated memoirs are a rich source of data on the inner workings of Fatimid administration in the North African period where Jawdhar often held fairly high responsibility and was himself personally intimate with the caliphs.²⁵ Jawdhar says that when it was time to perform the burial rites for the deceased

¹⁹ W. Madelung, “Das imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre,” *Der Islam* 37 (1961), 66. Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān reports in his *Iftitāh al-daʿwa* (ed. Wadād al-Qaḍī [Beirut, 1970], 273) on the designation of al-Qāʾim as *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn* that, *ʿahada [al-mahdī] ilā ibnihi Muḥammad abī al-qāsim al-qāʾim . . . wa ajrā amr kutubihī bismihi wa sammāhu walī ʿahd al-muslimīn*. Madelung noted that this event in 299/912 was associated closely with the execution of Abū ʿAbdallāh. Cf. *Ittiʿāz*, I, 68.

²⁰ See, however, also H. Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi: Der Aufstieg der Fatimiden* (Munich, C. H. Beck, 1991) 246–49, for a discussion of the threat of another possible outcome.

²¹ Much of the *daʿwa* at that time still expected the reappearance of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl and therefore tended to deny al-Mahdi's claim either in part or altogether.

²² This is a phrase that appears, for example, in Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī's *Sullam al-najāt* as a way of specifying the Fatimid caliphs (ed. M. A. Alibhai in “Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī and *Kitāb Sullam al-Najāt*: A Study in Islamic Neoplatonism,” Harvard University Ph.D. dissertation, 1983, p. 84 of the Arabic text.

²³ For a full discussion of these issues, see Madelung's “Das Imamat,” 65–86.

²⁴ For a full analysis of its actual meaning, see W. Madelung, “Das Imamat,” 65–86, and F. Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, 128–29.

²⁵ *Sirat al-ustādh jawdhar*, recorded by Abū ʿAlī Manṣūr al-ʿAzīzi al-Jawdhari, edited by Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn and

al-Mahdī—an act done quite privately and away from public scrutiny—al-Qāʾim, who was at that moment about to inter the corpse, interrupted the process to announce that he must first appoint a *ḥujja* of his own. The implied symbolism is that al-Qāʾim could not formally commence his reign as imam, which would begin at the moment of burial, until he had taken care to designate, however provisionally, his own successor. As a second step, also, he revealed this designation—that of his son Nizār—to Jawdhar, accompanied by a solemn oath of secrecy which, Jawdhar claims, was to last seven years. By this deed Jawdhar had himself been appointed, according to his own account, the *mustawda*^c of the *naṣṣ* for the future imam.²⁶

There is no reason to doubt the essential elements of this report. It is true that a similar story appears in Qāḍi al-Nuʿmān's record of his conversations with the various Fatimid imams that he himself worked with and for.²⁷ In the latter version it is al-Manṣūr, the caliph, who attests to a private designation in his favor by his father at the time of al-Mahdī's funeral.²⁸ Some modern observers have remarked on this duplication and the occurrence of two such incidents for the same succession, each claiming a unique and privileged sharing of the fact in question with the imam; and they suggest that it must mean that one report is false and the other true. That is to say, either Jawdhar is truthful and Qāḍi al-Nuʿmān not, or vice versa.²⁹ But such a judgment is not necessary since both could equally well be quite accurate. Al-Qāʾim communicated his decision independently to both subjects. Jawdhar's function was to insure a reliable, uncontested transition; Nizār was, however, privy from the beginning to his father's intention. It is

likely, moreover, that neither one knew of the other's awareness of the same fact. For al-Qāʾim to have admitted to Nizār that he was already chosen, did, on the other hand, prevent his father from easily altering his designation thereafter should he, in the (perhaps) unlikely event, wish to replace him with another son for whatever reason. It would be much simpler to deal with Jawdhar, a mere servant, if Nizār should die prematurely.

The story told by Jawdhar contains two key terms that, so far as I know, appear in no other context where they have exactly the same meaning. They are *ḥujja* and *mustawda*^c.³⁰ However, both words play significant roles in other Shiite contexts, including particularly Ismaili (and non-Ismaili) discussions of the Ismaili imamate. For the Twelver (Ithna ʿasharī) Shiʿa, *ḥujja* always refers to the imam. The imam is God's *ḥujja* (proof, assurance) in the terrestrial realm. Among the Ismailis in the Period of Concealment, i.e., prior to the advent of open rule, the term was applied to the head of the sect, who was or was not also thought to be the imam, depending on which portion of the *daʿwa* was involved. Many clearly understood the *ḥujja* simply to be the acting leader of a *daʿwa* on behalf of an imam (Muḥammad b. Ismāʿil) who was then in occultation. Later, *ḥujja* was the name for the rank of the twelve chiefs of the regional *daʿwas*, implying that there were twelve *ḥujjas* in all, all distinctly subordinate to the reigning imam/caliph. Jawdhar's use of the term, however, does not match these others. Al-Qāʾim, therefore, indicates in this context another sense for it; and quite possibly he shows, in the use of this term, a broader understanding of his responsibility and duty as imam. Significantly, if the imam should die without an heir, that fact itself carries an extremely awkward consequence. The earth, according to Shiite theory, can never be without an imam—a *ḥujja*, in the sense of God's "assurance" to humankind. Should an imam die without male issue (or with male issue who are not themselves designated for succession), there is no convenient avenue for remedy in either theory or prac-

Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī Shaʿīra (Cairo, 1954). French translation, *Vie de l'Ustadh Jawdhar*, by M. Canard (Alger, 1958). For the general question of succession, Canard offers important comments in his introduction. See pp. 21–22.

²⁶ *Sirat al-ustādh Jawdhar*, 39–40; trans. 53–56.

²⁷ *Kitāb al-majālis waʿl-musāyara*, edited by al-Ḥabīb al-Faqī, Ibrāhīm Shabbūh, and Muḥammad al-Yaʿlawī (Tunis, 1978).

²⁸ *Al-Majālis*, 137 and 447–49. Cf. p. 220.

²⁹ See the comments of the editors respectively of *Sirat al-ustadh Jawdhar*, 40, n. 28; of *al-Majālis*, 448, n. 4; and of M. Canard, trans. of the *Sirat al-ustādh*, 56, n. 40.

³⁰ On both see the useful comments of M. Canard given in the notes to his translation, 52, n. 32, and 53, n. 35. See also Madelung, "Das Imamāt," 63, no. 117 and F. Dachraoui, *Le Califat Fatimide au Maghreb* (Tunis, 1981), 292–98.

tice. A brother does not inherit under these conditions as might be possible in ordinary dynasty succession (nor does an undesignated son). Rather, lack of issue nullifies the very imamate of the individual who does not produce a successor. An imam's failure to pass on the sacred office as he must from father to son automatically forces the adherents of that imam to retrace his lineage back one step or more and retroactively follow another line to the true, present imam. Al-Qā'im by referring to his son as his *hujja* thus specifies that the son is, in fact, the validation the father's imamate.

The second term, *mustawda*^c, has a curious and controversial history in medieval and modern accounts of the Fatimids.³¹ A number of Ismaili-related sources suggest that some of the imams, especially in the Period of Concealment, were temporary holders of the imamate by "deposition" (*mustawda*^c). This depository function did not, according to this theory, indicate the true imamate; the same person could not be both *mustawda*^c imam and "veritable" imam—some writers employ the term *mustaqarr* for the latter. There is no doubt that certain Shi'a groups spoke about a *mustawda*^c imamate; one striking example were those few who claimed that 'Alī was himself not actually an imam, that he was instead a *mustawda*^c, and that his role was merely to hold the actual imamate in trust for the grandsons of the prophet.³² Another version of a *mustawda*^c imam exists in the mind of some Ismaili authorities and others who derive their conception of this doctrine from similar sources. For them there were originally two lineages, both holders of the imamate, one non-'Alīid (or possibly non-*Ismā'ili*—that is, not descents of Ja'far's son *Ismā'il*) and the other properly *Ismā'ili*.³³ Again this idea is not pertinent in

regard to Jawdhar, who was not, in any sense, considered even for a moment the imam. Quite the contrary, Jawdhar as *mustawda*^c makes sense of this term in a way that the other suggested meanings do not. The trust Jawdhar bore was to convey the *naṣṣ* to its intended recipient if and when it might be necessary for him to do so. His function was much more like that of the executor in the case of a bequest.³⁴

Although Jawdhar insisted that the period of his secrecy was to be only seven years and that he was faithful in this obligation, that does not also mean that, on his own, he could or did announce publicly what he knew at the close of such a period. There is no record, in any event, of his having done so. Instead, it is obvious that no public disclosure took place, despite the seven year restriction having expired, until al-Qā'im lay dying twelve years hence at the end of his reign. Only then did a formal rite of designation occur. In front of al-Qā'im, the *naṣṣ* was finally and definitively given in favor of Nizār, who was to assume his full responsibilities as imam with the title al-Manṣūr, barely a month thereafter.³⁵

A Designation Twice Altered: The Succession to al-Mu'izz

The preceding case of succession was, however, hardly problematic.³⁶ The first instance of

such as that cited by Bernard Lewis in his *Origins of Ismailism* (Cambridge, 1940), 72–73. Also Daftary, *The Ismā'ilis*, 104–5, 115, 349.

³⁴ Abu'l-Fawāris, a *dā'i* writing during the later reign of al-Ḥākim, drew almost the exact analogy at work here. He compares the *mustawda*^c who acts as *kafil* (guardian) of an infant heir in a legal bequest to the situation of the person who preserves the inherited knowledge requisite in the imamate until an imam who comes to the position in infancy reaches maturity. See his *al-Risāla fi'l-imāma*, Arabic text, 35.

³⁵ Our sources are not entirely clear as to the exact timing. See Canard's n. 38, p. 55 and n. 40, p. 56. Dachraoui, *Le Califat Fatimide au Maghreb*, 186, uses the date 7 Ramadan 334. On the ceremony see the *Sirat al-ustādh*, trans. p. 139.

³⁶ In fact we should recognize a certain amount of hagiographic reconstruction in Fatimid accounts which tend to do away with all problems and possible conflict from earlier periods. Al-Maqrizi, for example, quotes from Ibn Zūlāq a story about a family gathering in which al-Mahdi recognizes the presence in the room of himself, al-Qā'im, al-Manṣūr, and the infant al-Mu'izz and remarks how wonderful it is to have four imams together at the same time. See the *Iti'āz*, I, 134–35.

³¹ Canard, 21, reviews much of the appropriate material on the use of this term.

³² This is the doctrine of a Shiite sect known as the Khashabiyya, followers of Ṣurkhab al-Ṭabari, a subsect of the Zaydiyya. On them see my "An Ismā'ili Version of the Here-siography of the Seventy-two Erring Sects," forthcoming in F. Daftary, ed. *Studies in Ismā'ili Thought and Doctrine* (Cambridge University Press).

³³ See, for example, the explanation of Abbas Hamdani and F. de Blois in their study, "A Re-Examination of al-Mahdi's Letter to the Yemenites on the Genealogy of the Fatimid Caliphs," *JRAS* (1983), 173–207. Cf. other material

potential difficulty, especially of the kind outlined earlier, developed in the reign of al-Mu^ʿizz. Again, an incident related by Ustādh Jawdhar helps explain an otherwise obscure matter.³⁷ Al-Mu^ʿizz had four sons: Tamīm, ʿAbdallāh, Nizār, and ʿAqil. Tamīm was the eldest and at some point, possibly because of his seniority, was considered the likely heir.³⁸ Whether he was ever actually favored, his fall from grace occurred early and for reasons only hinted at in our sources, which are unforthcoming in this regard. Relatively late in his reign, almost certainly between 358 and 361, al-Mu^ʿizz, as al-Qāʾim before him, confided in Jawdhar the designation of the second son ʿAbdallāh with a similar pledge of secrecy. Shortly thereafter—perhaps seven months, as Jawdhar says—al-Mu^ʿizz took several others into the same confidence, but all, like Jawdhar, sworn to secrecy.³⁹

Soon, however an incident took place that sorely tested Jawdhar's ability to maintain the secret. He was fond of proclaiming out loud, even in the presence of the imam, that one is obligated to give obeisance to God, to the imam, and *to that one of his sons who has been selected as heir designate*. All others in the imam's family are due only the love that one gives one's own kinfolk and nothing more. The test came on an occasion during which Jawdhar had, of necessity, to approach the four sons of al-Mu^ʿizz in a public ceremony and offer formal salutations. The audience fully expected Jawdhar to begin with Tamīm, the oldest son. Instead, overcome by what he knew incontestably to be the actual state of affairs, he went straight to ʿAbdallāh, kissed the ground before him and then his stirrup. ʿAbdallāh, according to our report, was so shocked by what happened that he fell off his horse. Others were deeply scandalized by the affront. However, al-Mu^ʿizz, once he learned of the incident, was only bemused and apparently commented that Jawdhar had always seemed "inspired."⁴⁰

³⁷ *Sirat al-ustādh*, 139–40; trans. 213–16.

³⁸ See the *Ittiʿāz*, I, 235, for evidence that he was once given the designation *walī ʿahd*.

³⁹ Trans., 213. See especially Canard's note no. 467.

⁴⁰ *Lam yazal jawdhar muwaffaqan mudh kāna*, *ibid.*, 139; trans. 215.

What makes this event most interesting to us is that this same ʿAbdallāh, whom we know was al-Mu^ʿizz's choice for succession—a fact attested so graphically by Jawdhar's public *faux pas* and by his own account of the incident—died in Egypt in 364 while his father was still alive. The situation of Ismāʿil and Jaʿfar was, therefore, about to be repeated almost exactly; so much so, in fact, that Marius Canard, who made a fine French translation of Jawdhar's memoirs and who, more than anyone else, has considered this event closely, noted that a succession from ʿAbdallāh—i.e., ʿAbdallāh's own son—ought to have been expected despite his early death.⁴¹ That, however, presupposes a true, formal recognition of ʿAbdallāh and a *naṣṣ* properly and unreservedly given.⁴² That requirement Jawdhar could not fulfill on his own no matter what he did as long as the imamate remained in the hands of al-Mu^ʿizz, who was himself not disturbed, it seems, by the premature disclosure of his intention on the part of an old family servant. Al-Mu^ʿizz could and did replace ʿAbdallāh with Nizār, who, though surprised and perhaps unprepared, subsequently received the proper designation and succeeded as al-ʿAzīz.⁴³

⁴¹ Translation of *Sirat al-ustādh*, 213, n. 467.

⁴² On the other hand, the provisional designation of ʿAbdallāh as the prince of choice must have become well known. Al-Mu^ʿizz apparently was not reticent to accord ʿAbdallāh public favor as if he would succeed. See the *Ittiʿāz*, I, 135, 137 (ʿAbdallāh to begin attending the imam's council), 202–24 (ʿAbdallāh's command of Fatimid armies against the Qarmatians), 208 (his victory celebrated), and finally 217–18 (ʿAbdallāh falls ill and dies; a large funeral held with elaborate mourning).

⁴³ *Ittiʿāz*, I, 232, citing information from Ibn Zūlāq. But see especially 236–37 for confirmation of the date of the designation and *bayʿa* in 365. Al-Maqrizi includes there pp. 236–37 a story from Ibn Muḥadhdhab, who reports directly from the imam al-ʿAzīz, concerning an event that took place after arriving in Egypt in which al-Mu^ʿizz singled him out from among his brothers for eventual succession. There was thus obviously a tendency from early times to recast the "history" of the designation in the subsequent period so that any hint of previous error, doubt or hesitation would be erased. This report explains, in effect, that al-ʿAzīz was his father's ultimate choice all along. Note also how this case is handled in the polemical *iqāʿ*, p. 36. There is a short note on Ibn al-Muḥadhdhab in A. F. Sayyid's article "Lumières nouvelles sur quelques sources de l'histoire fatimide en Egypte," (*Annales islamologiques* 13 [1977]: 1–41); pp. 7–8.

Al-Ḥākim's Designations of Cousins

The next case that requires comment is also the most unusual. Al-Ḥākim followed his father al-ʿAzīz easily and, though the new imam was but eleven years old at the time, the carefully planned succession caused no difficulty. What came later is another matter. Al-Ḥākim was, by all admissions, a person little given to the ordinary and commonplace, even in the observance of the expected trappings of royal ceremony. His outlandish alteration of normal rules of behavior created consternation throughout his empire and, most decidedly, within the Ismaili *daʿwa*. One change of this kind was his totally unexpected and unexplained appointment, late in his reign, of a cousin, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, as the *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn*, the “Heir Designate of the Muslims.”⁴⁴ Al-Ḥākim by then had two sons and the birth in each case was publicly proclaimed in ceremonies marked by the performance of the *ʿaqīqa* by the leading member of the *ashrāf* accompanied by important officials of high rank.⁴⁵ The second of these sons, moreover, possessed apparently some extra claim on the succession, perhaps because of his mother’s lineage or status. He—the future al-Ẓāhir—was adopted,

⁴⁴ The use of the title *walī ʿahd*, *walī al-ʿahd*, *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn*, and *walī ʿahd al-muʾminīn* actually indicates the “holder of a contract of homage or fealty (from the Muslims, or from the Believers)”. It was the standard designation for the heir to whom often the oath of allegiance (the *bayʿa*) had been given in advance of succession as in the earliest and most famous case of Yazid b. Muʿāwiya. On this in general see Tyan, especially vol. 1, 279–86. In Fatimid usage the idea of contract hardly fits since neither is there a “contract of allegiance” (an *ʿahd*) nor an “oath of allegiance” (a *bayʿa*), both of which imply “election” to office, but instead a unilateral designation (a *naṣṣ*). An Ismaili does not “choose” to give homage to the new imam since in no sense is the matter up to the individual. Still, the Fatimids obviously preserved the older, non-Shiite forms which may have been kept expressly for their non-Ismaili subjects. Even so one must wonder exactly what these titles and the protocol that went with them meant in terms of Ismaili doctrine. Are they, for example, merely outward, i.e., *ẓāhiri*, conventions that may or may not convey the inner reality, the *bāṭin*?

⁴⁵ The first of these sons, al-Ḥārith Abuʾl-Ashbāl, was born on the 9th of Rabiʿ al-awwal 395 and the formal celebrations were held on at least the following four days. See *Ittiʿāz*, II, 55. ʿAlī Abuʾl-Ḥasan, the future al-Ẓāhir was born in Ramaḍān of the same year and given similar attention. See *Ittiʿāz*, II, 58.

in any case, at some point in these confused events by al-Ḥākim’s powerful older sister Sitt al-Mulk.⁴⁶ Since he had a normal avenue of succession, it is tempting to regard al-Ḥākim’s peculiar designation of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm as a tactical ruse. The caliph is known to have tired of his public duties and of the intensely troublesome role in which they involved him. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm was thus, in this view, to be a kind of shadow caliph, or rather, a symbolic stand-in who could assume the ceremonial function of the true imam but not the actual, i.e., veritable, position that is implied by sacred designation. However, the heir in this case was widely proclaimed the chosen successor; coins were, for example, minted with his name.⁴⁷ Far away in the North African dependency of the empire, the ruler there, Badīs Abū Manād,⁴⁸ is reported to have reacted to the designation with considerable bewilderment. “Why would he do this and ignore his own son?” he is said to have remarked.⁴⁹ Surely, therefore, many accepted the choice of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, albeit per force, as a true and final action in the matter.

Al-Ḥākim, however, not content with one designation, soon made another that was even more baffling than the first. The second choice fell on another cousin, al-ʿAbbās b. Shuʿayb, who was given the title *walī ʿahd al-muʾminīn*, “Heir designate of the Believers.”⁵⁰ In Ismaili

⁴⁶ Yahyā b. Saʿīd al-Antākī, *Tārīkh* (ed. L. Cheiko, B. Carra de Vaux, and H. Zayyat, Beirut, 1909), 207 and 235. Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira fī ḥulā ʿadrat al-qāhira* (ed. H. Naṣṣār, Cairo, 1970), 63–64, gives a detailed formulation of the designation which included reference to ʿAbd al-Raḥīm in the *duʿā* as holder of “my *ʿahd* and that of the Muslims,” the “*khalīfa* after me” like Aaron was to Moscs (i.e., cousin to cousin). See also Abuʾl-Fawāris, Arabic, p. 12. Cf. Yaacov Lev, *State & Society in Fatimid Egypt* (Leiden, Brill, 1991), 34–36.

⁴⁷ On the designation of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. Ilyās, see the *Ittiʿāz*, II, 100–101, 103, 110, and Yahyā, *Tārīkh*, 205–8.

⁴⁸ Badīs b. al-Manṣūr b. Yūsuf b. Bulukkin b. Manād, the 3rd Zirid ruler of North Africa, who died in 406/1016.

⁴⁹ See Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 64 and 74. In the *Ittiʿāz*, II, 100–101, the matter of advertising the nomination of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm is put quite explicitly: an announcement was to be read from all minbars in the empire. Badīs is said to have remarked, “If it were not that the imam does not interfere in administration, I would have written to him [urging him] not transfer this status from his son to the family of his uncle.”

⁵⁰ Yahyā, *Tārīkh*, 219–20.

thinking, and indeed that of many Muslims, the “believers” (*muʿminūn*) form a more exclusive and more important segment of Islamic society than Muslims simply. For Ismailis the “believers” are themselves—that is, the Ismailis—as opposed to the majority who are mere “muslims.” Thus Ibn Shuʿayb’s title is better than the one of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, if in fact a judgment of this kind is relevant. Those who were to become the Druze recognized this distinction and saw, nevertheless, that the facts were the opposite of reality. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm remained, apparently, the favorite of al-Ḥākim. That this is accurate is confirmed by events during the actual succession following al-Ḥākim’s mysterious disappearance. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm had been sent to Damascus as its governor just before; he was recalled and done away with, most likely to snuff out any chance that some had been fooled into thinking that his designation was the real one.⁵¹ Ibn Shuʿayb, by contrast, was allowed to live out his natural life, even though, when he eventually died a few years later, the historians freely recorded his having once held the claim to be heir to the throne.⁵²

But what of the actual succession to al-Ḥākim? There is not much to be said, unfortunately, because, although the sudden disappearance of the imam might raise interesting questions on a theoretical level, the installation of al-Ẓāhir, though very young and not known to have been

publicly designated, caused little stir, if any.⁵³ Sitt al-Mulk was, following the realization that al-Ḥākim would not return, immediately in complete charge. She, in fact, ruled the state and empire from that point until her own death.⁵⁴ With no problem that we can perceive, she raised her nephew to the imamate. Quite possibly she could, even rightly, claim this prerogative as the *mustawdaʿ*—a position she may have assumed, whether anyone else knew it or not, and which hardly anyone could contest, given both her accumulated hold on power and her undeniable seniority in the caliphal family.⁵⁵

Schismatic Succession: al-Mustanṣir and His Sons

If al-Ẓāhir’s succession occurred in strange circumstances, that of his only surviving son, al-Mustanṣir, passed without incident; and the latter commenced, in 427/1035 or 1036, a reign that may well be the longest of any medieval Muslim ruler, lasting until 487/1094. Until the end of al-Mustanṣir’s rule, therefore, despite the possibility of the problems we have noticed, particularly in the succession to al-Muʿizz and to al-Ḥākim, the Fatimids had enjoyed by then at least 184 years in power without a serious fight over succession—and this achievement happened despite the peculiarly demanding requirement of infallible designation at each turn. The next case was, however, to be utterly different and to result in a momentous split that brought two factions into being, each at war with the other. It is a split, moreover, that never healed and is one that remains in effect even today, nearly a thousand years later.

Ironically, the genesis of the trouble in the succession to al-Mustanṣir may be due to the

⁵¹ On the death of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, see *Ittiʿāz*, II, 116. The editor in note 2 on that page gives another account from Abūʾl-Maḥāsīn Ibn Taghri Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk miṣr waʾl-qāhira*, IV, 193–94. Cf. Lev, *State & Society*, 35.

⁵² On his appointment, see Yaḥyā of Antioch, *Tārīkh*, 219–20. His death notice is in the *Ittiʿāz*, II, 173, in the entry for the year 415 (13 Shawwāl) and it says explicitly “The amir Abū Ḥāshim al-ʿAbbās b. Shuʿayb b. Daʿūd b. ʿAbdal-lāh al-Mahdi who had been the *walī ʿahd al-muʿminin*.” The corresponding passage in al-Musabbīḥi, *al-Juzʾ al-arbaʿūn min akhbār miṣr*, edited by A. F. Sayyid and Th. Bianquis (Cairo, 1978), 105, is slightly corrupt: for Saʿid, read Shuʿayb (as in the index). Al-Musabbīḥi also calls him *walī ʿahd amir al-Muʿminin* in this context which clouds the issue somewhat. See as well *Ittiʿāz*, II, 183–84, where al-Maqrīzī remarks that at the beginning of al-Ẓāhir’s reign the affairs of the nation were in the hands of his aunt and that “it was she who made sure the caliphate came to him instead of to the *walī ʿahd* Abū Ḥāshim al-ʿAbbās.” Ibn Shuʿayb was subsequently forced to pledge allegiance to al-Ẓāhir with a sword hanging over him.

⁵³ The theoretical basis for either of al-Ḥākim’s designations and how those claims might have played out or the reasoning behind al-Ẓāhir’s eventual succession in their stead is not discussed as such in our sources for the year in question. However, the situation of 411 was not forgotten but rather suppressed. Over a century later it reappears in the polemical rhetoric employed in another case which the protagonists at that later time thought analogous and thus explainable by these earlier events.

⁵⁴ *Ittiʿāz*, II, 124 and particularly 174 where al-Maqrīzī provides her obituary.

⁵⁵ Yaḥyā, *Tārīkh*, 235. On her dealings with the two former holders of the *walī ʿahd*, see the *Ittiʿāz*, II, 183–34.

length of the reign which allowed for an unusually fertile production of potential heirs and yet, at the same time, demanded a clear, though perhaps changing, policy in regard to the choice of a successor over an uncommonly long period. Where no son or only one must have caused anxiety, al-Mustanşir had too many. Where a short reign did not occasion a reason for a new selection of an heir, the length of this rule took the fortunes of the Fatimids from the peak of their achievement to the lowest levels of weakness and finally once again to the summits of power. What actual effect these changes had on the problem of succession, we can only guess; but it is fair to suspect, at the least, that the varying fortunes of the dynasty entered al-Mustanşir's thoughts in this regard.

As is well known, when al-Mustanşir died, his following immediately fell into two camps, one in support of the new caliph al-Musta'li, and the other aligned with Nizār who refused to acknowledge his brother's elevation and went into rebellion. The names of both brothers also serve to indicate the resulting sects—the Musta'li Ismailis and the Nizāri Ismailis—that derive each from the parties to these original events.

Although Stern and others have tried to make sense of how the split came about, many questions remain. Various kinds of new information provide, if not answers that will ultimately aid either of these parties or contribute a definitive resolution of the issues, at least more concrete, clearer explanations for a number of facts. The account of al-Maqrizi—that is, the account(s) he chose to give in his *Itti'āz*—is especially useful in this regard. Significantly, al-Maqrizi does not support either the Nizāri or the Musta'li version exclusively; instead he presents a far more complex picture than the one traditionally given by either of these factions or, in fact, by modern historians who have written about this incident.

An interesting place to begin our investigation of this case, however, is not with the events leading to the fateful twenty-four hours surrounding the death of al-Mustanşir, but with the equally curious question of who were the sons of al-Mustanşir and how many? Inadvertently, al-Maqrizi provides an unusual kind of evidence in this matter. When Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn brought a formal end to Fatimid rule in 567/1171, he ordered all

available members of the former ruling family arrested and incarcerated in the Dār al-Muza'ffar, males and females to be kept separated. Obviously the females needed to be imprisoned for some months only. The males, however, were held until death. In the year 608/1211, the sixty-three individuals that remained were transferred to the citadel. Of these but forty were living in 623/1226 when an interested party decided to make an inventory of them. Al-Maqrizī provides us that list and it gives the names of the surviving Fatimids with full genealogy back to al-Mustanşir.⁵⁶ Using it, one can obtain the beginnings of a family tree for, at least, a portion of the later Fatimids. No such record is complete, however, but it does prove to us that al-Mustanşir had a great many sons.⁵⁷

More information exists about his sons also in the narrative of the *Itti'āz* and, importantly, in an independent source, the *Sijillāt* of al-Mustanşir. A collection of these imperial announcements—some that had been addressed to the Ṣulayḥids in the Yemen—survives and has been published.⁵⁸ At least three of the *Sijillāt* in this collection have as their principal purpose the announcement of the birth to al-Mustanşir of a son.⁵⁹ Therefore, all in all, there exists more information about the sons of al-Mustanşir than has heretofore been taken into account with regard to the succession problem.⁶⁰ My investigation of all this evidence suggests, in fact, that al-Mustanşir had at the minimum seventeen sons whose names we can recover.⁶¹

⁵⁶ *Itti'āz*, III, 347–48.

⁵⁷ It does not give a record of those who died without issue, or of those who left Egypt, or in one way or another did not get included in this highly unusual survey of survivors.

⁵⁸ *Al-Sijillāt al-mustanşiriyya*, edited by 'Abd al-Mun'im Mājid (Cairo, 1954). On this collection see the preliminary study by H. Hamdani, "The Letters of Al-Mustanşir bi'llah," *BSOAS* 7 (1933–35): 307–24.

⁵⁹ No. 6 in the collection announces the birth on the 14th of Ṣafar 452 of Abu'l-Qāsim Aḥmad; no. 8 a son named al-Muḥsin Abu'l-Faḍl; and no. 11 a son named al-Ḥasan Abū Muḥammad.

⁶⁰ Yet another case is mentioned by Nāṣir-i Khusraw in his *Safarnāma*—a son's birth was celebrated in 439, ed. M. Ghanizada, Berlin, Kaviyani (1922), 77; trans. Thackston, 55.

⁶¹ It is, of course, difficult to separate in this information one son from another if there exists only a *kunya* or only an *ism*, as happens not infrequently. Most certainly several sons of al-Mustanşir, for example, used the same *kunya*.

One leading question about them is who was the oldest. The record on this is not quite clear but the choice is between Nizār and another son, ʿAbdallāh, with it likely to be the former, as often supposed. In the document Stern analyzed, Nizār's sister recalls that the mothers respectively of Nizār and of ʿAbdallāh were caught quarreling about which of their sons would succeed. This incident surely reflects an internal disagreement that may well mirror the problem of who was eldest or most senior in some other way. One of the *Sijillāt* contains an assertion that Nizār is the eldest, but several other records seem to specify that ʿAbdallāh was the oldest (or perhaps only the highest in seniority or rank) of al-Mustanʿir's sons.⁶²

It is quite possible therefore that both Nizār, who was born, we know, in 437/1045, and ʿAbdallāh, each from a different mother, were born at approximately the same period. A disagreement about their claims might be due to status of the mother as well as an exact precedence in time of birth. The mother may have played a role in determining Fatimid succession since chronological seniority and primogeniture was not an essential factor. Her social rank and status could, therefore, count if the reigning imam/caliph wished to accord her or her son special recognition. But about this we have no other information. Al-Mustanʿir's own mother was, for a time, a de facto regent but, since he was an only son, her status can have had little to do with his succession, her power accruing to her from her son and after the fact. There is, nonetheless, no doubt that many did regard ʿAbdallāh as senior and some of these people assumed a claim to the imamate on his behalf, perhaps accordingly.

It is thus also evident that al-Mustanʿir had a presumptive heir (possibly more than one) from

the year 437/1045. Since he began his imamate at the age of five in 427/1035, ten years had passed and he was then only fifteen years old. Those ten years, however, must have been anxious times for the true believers as they waited for the birth of a possible successor. Their relief at having ʿAbdallāh and Nizār would have understandably brought a certain attachment to either or both of these princes.⁶³

In the ensuing years a number of other sons enter the record. A most curious and perhaps significant example was announced in rather extravagant language in the year 452/1060 in a *sijill* to the Yemen. That year a son named Abu'l-Qāsim Aḥmad was born. The *sijill* uses the occasion to note the great auspiciousness of this event and the similarity of the child's name to that of the prophet, and it even quotes the Quranic passage about "Aḥmad."⁶⁴ Yet, although it cannot be accepted, later authorities attempted to equate this Aḥmad with the future al-Mustaʿli, who, however, was born later in 467/1074 or possibly 468.

A highly significant piece of evidence about this early period of al-Mustanʿir's rule and his attention to the succession occurs in al-Maqrizi's account of the terrible troubles (al-Maqrizi calls it the *fitna* or the *ayyām al-shidda*)⁶⁵ that began in 454/1062 and were to last until the coming of Badr al-Jamālī twelve years later. During this period the economy of Egypt collapsed, the government was progressively impoverished, and the various military units revolted over lack of pay and took to rampages and independent actions that eventually severed most of the country from Cairo. Al-Mustanʿir saw his power reduced almost to nothing.⁶⁶ About 461/1068, in the depths of despair and uncertainty, the caliph be-

⁶² See *Ittiʿāz*, III, 11, 87; Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Ibn Muyassar (d. 677/1278), *al-Muntaqā min akhbār miṣr*, edited A. F. Sayyid (Cairo, IFAO, 1981), 101; *sijills* nos. 35 and 43 from the *Sijillāt* (both of the year 489 and both explicitly state that Nizār is the oldest in "years" [*huwa al-akh al-akbar sinnan*]). But, although the first born was a presumptive heir until others came along, the oldest son does not possess automatic rights. A. F. Sayyid, *al-Dawla al-fāṭimiyya fī miṣr* (Cairo, 1992), 154, for example, as is the case with many other modern scholars, is wrong to describe Nizār as *ṣāhib al-ḥaqq al-sharʿī* ("holder of the legal right") on this basis alone.

⁶³ On the status of ʿAbdallāh see below. Note also that he is likely the same as the Abū ʿAbdallāh who appears in a few citations as the *walī al-ʿahd*. For example, Ibn Muyassar, 97, mentions that a house near the Faṭḥ al-khalīj was owned or built by this prince who was *walī al-ʿahd*.

⁶⁴ See *sijill* no. 6 of the collection. The Quranic passages are 61:6, where Jesus is said to have told the Jews that he brought good tidings of a messenger to come named Aḥmad, and 21:73, which says rather directly "We made them imams (*aʿimma*) who lead by our order."

⁶⁵ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 137.

⁶⁶ See, for example, *Ittiʿāz*, II, 306–7.

gan to send his family to safer territory. In one notable incident, he dispatched his sons—we should probably presume that the sons mentioned have critical importance—away from the capital in an effort to scatter them as a caution against a coup to end the dynasty altogether.

Al-Maqrizī reports this incident carefully and places it in 461.⁶⁷ Al-Mustanṣir, he says, sent ʿAbdallāh,⁶⁸ along with a son named Abū ʿAlī, to Badr al-Jamālī, then at Acre. He dispatched another son, Abūʾl-Qāsim Muḥammad, the father of the future caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ, to Ascalon by way of Damietta. No son remained with al-Mustanṣir in Cairo except Abūʾl-Qāsim Aḥmad, who was obviously the son born in 452 and announced in the *siḡill* mentioned above. Nizār, whose usual *kunya* was Abūʾl-Manṣūr, is not included in al-Maqrizī's text at this point; but it is highly unlikely that he was not involved in this move since the later versions of the same story indicate that he was. When this incident later became a source of polemical strategy, the reports claimed that al-Mustanṣir's policy was to "send the highest (in this regard) to the most important (post)."⁶⁹ Those who supported the caliphate of al-Mustaʿlī wanted to claim that the most important post is the one nearest to the imam himself. However, it makes more sense the other way around. Aḥmad was then nine years old and, in any case, is not the future al-Mustaʿlī. Instead ʿAbdallāh was surely the son that al-Mustanṣir was most concerned to protect and that was why he was sent to Badr al-Jamālī. Exactly where Nizār fits in this scheme may be impossible to determine with precision.⁷⁰

Within five years, however, Badr had been invited to Cairo and had begun to restore order in Egypt. Nevertheless some of the sons of al-

Mustanṣir remained abroad. In Ascalon a wife of Abūʾl-Qāsim Muḥammad gave birth to ʿAbd al-Majid (al-Ḥāfiẓ) only in 467 or 468.⁷¹ At nearly the same time—467 or 468—yet another son was born to al-Mustanṣir and given the name Abūʾl-Qāsim Aḥmad. Does this second application of the name imply that the former Abūʾl-Qāsim Aḥmad had meanwhile died? Such must be the case.⁷² A portion of a *siḡill* concerning the second Aḥmad's birth that was sent to the Yemen survives in Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn's *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*.⁷³ It is highly curious that this *siḡill* does not appear with the others of the collection called *al-Siḡillāt al-Mustanṣiriyya*. However, not only does Idrīs date this *siḡill* and therefore the birth of this Aḥmad to the period in question, but al-Maqrizī and other historians are quite specific about al-Mustaʿlī's age at death in 495/1101—he was twenty-seven years, one month and 29 days old.⁷⁴ There is little chance of a mistake, therefore, and it now appears even more likely that the future al-Mustaʿlī was the youngest of al-Mustanṣir's sons. He was, moreover and perhaps most importantly, the only one born (and raised) under the dictatorship of Badr.

The twenty odd years of Badr al-Jamālī's wazirate, during which he assumed total control of the Fatimid government, were altogether a period of prosperity and well being. The caliph, whose fortunes were nearly eclipsed immediately prior to Badr's advent, was apparently deeply appreciative of Badr's strong rule; at least that is the undeniable message in *siḡill* after *siḡill* sent to the Yemen over the course of these years. Badr restored the financial base of the imam's position by ensuring conditions that allowed Ismaili organizations to function and for the regular fees (*najwā* and *ṣiḡra*, for

⁶⁷ *Ittiʿāz*, II, 298. Without this account Stern obviously had trouble finding a proper year in which to locate this event. See his "Epistle," 24, n. 4. The other citations of this fact come from much later. See Ibn Muyassar, 100, and *Ittiʿāz*, III, 84; but both these references are also clouded by the polemical intent of the report in question.

⁶⁸ Or Abū ʿAbdallāh.

⁶⁹ *Sayyara al-aʿlā ilā al-aʿlā*.

⁷⁰ In the later use of this fact for polemical purposes (see the *Ittiʿāz*, III, 84–85) ʿAbdallāh is said to have gone to Acre, Abū ʿAlī and Abūʾl-Qāsim to Ascalon, and Nizār to Damietta. Cf. Ibn Muyassar, 100.

⁷¹ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 137.

⁷² Jamāl al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Zāfir, *Akhbār al-duwal al-munqaṭiʿa*, ed. André Ferré (Cairo, IFAO, 1972), 77, in listing the sons of al-Mustanṣir begins with Abūʾl-Qāsim Aḥmad *al-Asghar* which could well refer to Abūʾl-Qāsim Aḥmad "the Younger" rather than the "youngest" (of the sons altogether).

⁷³ The text of this *siḡill* was printed by Husayn Hamdani in his *al-Ṣulayḥiyyūn waʾl-ḥarakat al-fāṭimiyya fiʾl-yaman* (Cairo, 1955), 319–20.

⁷⁴ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 27. There is, nevertheless, some disagreement about the exact year of his birth but only whether it took place in 467 or 468. It cannot have been as early as 452.

example) to be collected and dispatched safely to headquarters.⁷⁵ Without these dues the caliphate would surely have floundered and, even if it had survived, it would have done so as a helpless pawn in the hands of others. It is customary to disparage the role of Badr, especially in regard to the religious mission of the Fatimids as Shiite imams, but that attitude does not necessarily reflect historical reality nor the evidence that remains from his period. In addition once the Nizārī/Mustaʿlī split occurred, the dictatorship of Badr and his son al-Afḍal were blamed by the losing faction for a whole range of evils.

Nevertheless, it is also true that no era of Fatimid government is as poorly documented as the years between 466 and 487. Despite Badr's major achievements in building a unified imperial city out of Cairo and Fustat and in setting Egypt on a course that continued long after him, the sources for his years are deplorably non-existent. Four years, for example, are completely unrecorded in the surviving annals.⁷⁶ Nothing is known for certain about how Badr may have affected the Ismaili *daʿwa* of which he was titular head as *dāʿī al-duʿāt*.⁷⁷ What policy he might have contrived as to the terms of the eventual succession is likewise obscure. And in the end he died seven months before al-Mustaʿlī, leaving thereby, presumably, some leeway for the caliph to escape from whatever policy Badr might have planned to bring about.

The succession to Badr, therefore, arrived chronologically prior to that of al-Mustaʿlī. It was, moreover, far from easy and, although after some serious dissension, Badr's son al-Afḍal gained his father's power and prerogatives, the latter's position was less than firmly secured in the beginning.⁷⁸ It is in this context that

al-Mustaʿlī agreed to a marriage of his youngest son, Abu'l-Qāsim Aḥmad, to al-Afḍal's sister. However, the actual motive of either the caliph or al-Afḍal can only be surmised and whether or not this marriage reliably indicates the choice of this son for succession is doubtful. In any event, although a contract of marriage was written according to later (after the fact of the succession itself) documents, the union was not fully consummated prior to the death of al-Mustaʿlī.⁷⁹ Thirty years later polemical sources gave great importance to a marriage banquet held at the time of the marriage at which the caliph supposedly seated the future al-Mustaʿlī on his right hand and the rest of his sons on his left. The same source insists that Abu'l-Qāsim Aḥmad was accorded the title *walī ʿahd al-muʾminīn* on this occasion and that this clearly established his precedence over the brothers—Nizār and ʿAbdallah—who were both (at one time or another) *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn*.⁸⁰ It should be noted, however, that the seating plan fits the purpose of the event which is a marriage of the son on the right and that both of the titles used here had been considerably debased by al-Ḥākim when he applied them to al-ʿAbbās b. Shuʿayb and ʿAbd al-Raḥīm respectively, seemingly without consequence for the eventual succession.

Not long after, the caliph took sick with the illness that brought about his death, which occurred during the first part of the night of Thursday, the 18th of Dhū'l-Ijja 487 (=Wednesday, December 27, 1094).⁸¹ What information we have about this fateful night comes from the same polemics as cited above. However, having taken note of that fact, it is nevertheless interesting that the persons said to have been present included not only Abu'l-Qāsim Aḥmad, who was given a final interview with his dying father, but a sister of the aged caliph, a daughter of al-Zāhir. This sister may well have acted as *mustawdaʿ*. What was al-Afḍal's exact role? Did he actively prevent the contact of the father with his other sons? His unwanted and unwelcome presence is naturally assumed by

⁷⁵ *Al-Sijillāt al-mustaʿlīyya*, examples: nos. 23, 36, and 57.

⁷⁶ One four year period between 473–476 lacks all documentation in the Egyptian sources and, except for a few items mentioned in surviving *sijills* from the Yemeni collection, there is simply little or no information about them. Moreover, many of the other years of Badr's reign are hardly better.

⁷⁷ Technically Muʿayyid fi'l-Din al-Shirāzī may have remained *dāʿī al-duʿāt* until his death in 470/1077 and only thereafter did Badr assume this title.

⁷⁸ On this succession see *Ittiʿāz*, II, 331–32.

⁷⁹ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 28. See also *Ittiʿāz*, III, 85 and Ibn Muvassar, 102.

⁸⁰ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 85; Ibn Muvassar, 102; Stern, "Epistle," 23, 27; and *Hidāya*, 13.

⁸¹ Fyzee, "Introduction" to *Hidāya*, 1.

those parties who deny the outcome in the subsequent succession fight.

Whatever al-Afḍal's presumed role during the night, what he actually did following al-Mustanṣir's death is known, although the precise chronology of these events is subject to some disagreement and possible controversy. Here al-Maqrīzī reveals himself, not merely as the preserver of facts derived from now lost chronicles, but as a careful historian with a critical eye.⁸² According to him, when al-Afḍal learned of al-Mustanṣir's death, he went with Abu'l-Qāsim Aḥmad to the palace and to the throne room and seated him on the caliphate throne with the regnal name al-Mustaʿlī. Thereupon, with himself seated in the position of wazīr, he summoned the other sons, namely Nizār, ʿAbdallāh and Ismāʿīl. As these three—we must assume that, since these are the only sons mentioned at this point, they each had special importance—entered the room, they were immediately aware of the rank of their youngest brother as implied in the seating arrangement. Al-Afḍal announced the succession of al-Mustaʿlī, claiming it as the final decision of the deceased imam, and he ordered the brothers to kiss the ground and pledge allegiance. All three refused and each one firmly insisted that he could not do so because their father had named him to succeed. Note particularly that al-Maqrīzī reports that there were three separate sons who each claimed the succession, not just Nizār or ʿAbdallāh, and not counting Aḥmad (al-Mustaʿlī). This is to say, that at the moment when al-Afḍal first announced the succession of al-Mustaʿlī, three other sons held, by their own belief, a valid right to the office of imam.⁸³

In the ensuing confusion, al-Afḍal was evidently caught off guard. Of the three dissenting brothers, Nizār was most adamant, strongly insisting that he possessed a perfect claim and that, in fact, he had a written document from his

father clearly bestowing the imamate on himself.⁸⁴ Before anyone could stop him he rushed out from this gathering with the announced intention of retrieving the document in question.

If al-Afḍal had really planned this event as a coup in which he would install al-Mustaʿlī against the well recognized wishes of the dead caliph and his sons, al-Maqrīzī's account hardly confirms or corroborates such an interpretation. Rather it appears as if al-Afḍal was caught unprepared, quite possibly because he was naively presuming that the last minute designation of Aḥmad by al-Mustanṣir as he lay dying was in and of itself the ultimate word, and could not conceivably be countermanded by any of the other sons. But, as it was, Nizār got away without declaring his allegiance⁸⁵ and, instead of going after the promised document, fled immediately from Cairo to Alexandria where he knew he had support. The other two brothers, still holding out, went off to a nearby mosque. Al-Afḍal, now alerted to his mistake, immediately dispatched his own men both to bring back Nizār (too late) and to watch over ʿAbdallāh and Ismāʿīl most carefully.

That others, as well, were not privy to any fixed or final determination in the succession is proven by yet another report given by al-Maqrīzī. As al-Afḍal began, probably the same day, to assemble his personal forces along with the elements of the palace that were beholden to him or his father or to al-Mustaʿlī, the senior *dāʿī*—that is, the highest authority in the Ismaili *daʿwa*, if al-Afḍal's own nominal title of *dāʿī al-duʿāt* is disregarded—proclaimed, when he learned of al-Mustanṣir's passing, ʿAbdallāh the new imam, with the regnal name al-Muwaffaq.⁸⁶ Does this act indicate that the local *daʿwa* organization had reason to expect that

⁸² The details that follow here come from the *Ittiʿāz*. Some portions of al-Maqrīzī's narrative reconstruction appear as well in Ibn Muyassar but not all.

⁸³ Ironically, Abu'l-Fawāris, an Ismaili authority cited earlier, had discussed such a situation as is implied here if, in fact, this designation was truly unknown or in real doubt. He, however, was most probably thinking of the situation of the succession to Jaʿfar al-Šādiq.

⁸⁴ The existence of a written designation was also used later by the supporters of Nizār as an argument on his behalf. The *Hidāya* discounts this claim, not by denying its existence, but by stating that written documents are not used by the *ahl al-bayt* in such matters.

⁸⁵ Of course, the Mustaʿlī faction later insisted that he had sworn allegiance, but that is doubtful. See *Ittiʿāz*, III, 11, where Nizār declares, "Any oath I would give is nullified by the [fact of] his being younger than I and [by the existence] of a document [*khaṭṭ*] written by my father that is in my possession appointing me his heir [*walī ʿahdihī*]."

⁸⁶ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 13.

ʿAbdallāh's designation would hold good? Al-Maqrizī suggests that the *dāʿis* were in doubt among themselves, even though the particular *dāʿi* in question, by name Barakāt, who was the *Amīn al-duʿāt*, chose the risky course of backing ʿAbdallāh.

Soon, however, al-Afḍal put an end to the growing uncertainty. He had Barakāt arrested and eventually executed. A grand assembly was convened in short order and all were commanded to obey the new imam and caliph, al-Mustaʿli, which all quickly and unanimously did. Al-Afḍal orchestrated this second ceremony meticulously, taking the *bayʿa* to al-Mustaʿli first from the *qāḍi al-quḍāt* and then moving down the ranks.⁸⁷ Finally, the two brothers, who had waited until then in the mosque under guard, were brought back, this time to face a fait accompli and this time to swear loyalty and accede to their brother's rule without evident hesitation; under the circumstances, there was little else they could have done.⁸⁸

Nizārī Claims

In the aftermath of al-Mustaʿli's succession and the victory of al-Afḍal in his campaign to suppress the revolt of Nizār, few signs of the complex struggle for the imamate remained other than the continuation of Nizārī Ismailism as the principal opposition. As time went on the sole concerns of the Mustaʿli Ismailis were Nizārī claims and vice versa. The candidacy of ʿAbdallāh, about which we can discern something, and of Ismāʿil, about which we are entirely ignorant, disappeared when they both pledged to obey al-Mustaʿli. Understandably, then, the focus of all sources that derive from later periods concentrate on Nizār and the outcome of his rebellion, or that of his adherents, especially during the remaining years of Fatimid rule in Egypt. While Nizār's case may well represent a valid understanding of where the

succession should have gone according to al-Mustaʿli's true wishes, that it was picked up by not only Nizār's sons in North Africa and some partisans in the Yemen, but most importantly by Ḥasan b. Šabbāḥ in Iran, meant that it did not die out. Instead it became, almost at once, a virulently implacable enemy of the ruling faction in Egypt and its dependencies; it set in motion armed rebellions, spread propaganda against the *daʿwa* for al-Mustaʿli, and soon enough let loose a network of assassins bent on revenge. Any source that reflects in any way the later stages of the controversy is bound to be tainted by this concern for or against the Nizārī cause to the exclusion of other candidates that might have existed when al-Mustaʿli died. Al-Maqrizī, whose entry on al-Mustaʿli begins with the version outlined above, must have deliberately avoided this trap. In fact he interrupts his account soon enough to comment that some people observe that al-Mustaʿli had already enthroned his son Nizār because he was the eldest of his sons and thus it was he who was given the position of heir apparent. Al-Maqrizī continues thereafter with this second account, which he clearly offers as that of a certain group (*qawm*).

When al-Mustaʿli's death approached, he wanted to secure the *bayʿa* of the notables of the realm in favor of Nizār, but al-Afḍal resisted such a step, holding out until the caliph died. All that, as this version goes, was due to personal animosity between Nizār and al-Afḍal caused by various slights by one to the other in the past. A key moment, however, occurred when the time of pledging drew near and al-Afḍal was forced to campaign actively among the Turkish amirs against Nizār, warning of unwanted consequences for them if Nizār came to power. Al-Afḍal's intrigue apparently worked. The amirs joined him in resisting and only a certain Muḥammad b. Mašāl al-Lukki maintained his loyalty to Nizār—and that because, reports al-Maqrizī, Nizār had promised him the wazirate in place of al-Afḍal.

Here al-Maqrizī resumes what must be his primary narrative of the events, beginning with the second assembly in which ʿAbdallāh and Ismāʿil acceded to the rule of al-Mustaʿli. He continues shortly after that with the story of Nizār's revolt in Alexandria.

⁸⁷ The chief *qāḍi* was al-Muʿayyad bi-naṣr al-imām ʿAlī b. Nāfiʿ b. al-Kuḥḥāl, who was executed shortly after this incident along with the *Amīn al-duʿāt* Barakāt. Does this suggest that he also was reluctant to accept al-Mustaʿli?

⁸⁸ Al-Nuwayri, vol. 28, 245, reports that ʿAbdallāh went to Alexandria with Nizār. If he ever did so, it must have happened at a later time.

In that city Nizār was well received; not only al-Lukkī but the governor, Naṣr al-Dawla Aftakin al-Turkī, the Qāḍī Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ʿAmmār, and the inhabitants embraced his cause. Al-Afḍal was quite alarmed and immediately set out for Alexandria with troops. Nizār and Aftakin, however, intercepted him on the outskirts of the city where the two sides fought several skirmishes that resulted in the defeat of al-Afḍal, who was thereafter in retreat toward Cairo. The Nizārī camp was able to raid the countryside at will.

This first encounter took place in Muḥarram of 488 and it was not until later that same year, following careful preparations that included winning over many of Nizār's tribal allies with gifts and other inducements, that al-Afḍal could muster enough force to defeat Nizār and drive him back into Alexandria, which was thereupon invested and bombarded. As the situation inside deteriorated towards the month of Dhu'l-Qa'da (i.e., some eleven months after the death of al-Mustaʿli), Ibn Maṣāl al-Lukkī fled, carrying away his not inconsiderable fortune which had previously supported the rebels.⁸⁹ Aftakin and Nizār, fearing for the welfare of those around them, sought a guarantee of safety. It was granted but both leaders were arrested and sent to Cairo. There, according to al-Maqrizī, who again reports in the voice of a third party, "he surrendered Nizār to a member of the palace entourage of al-Mustaʿli and the latter built around him walls and [in there] he died."⁹⁰ Another account, also given by al-Maqrizī, states that Nizār was killed in Alexandria but al-Maqrizī says that the first version is much more likely.

These details seem relevant here because a major question in the case of the Nizārī claim is to what extent a sizable segment of the Ismaili community expected his succession and how certain they were of it. One answer is that, despite later attempts to attribute Nizār's motives in revolting solely to hatred of al-Afḍal, there are still undeniable signs of a Nizārī faction that arose too quickly to be merely a manifestation

of that hatred. A prime example is the adherence of Ḥasan b. al-Ṣabbāḥ and the Persian *daʿwas* to Nizār. Al-Maqrizī notes in his comments on the death of Nizār that the Ismailis of both Persia and Syria accepted his imamate and claimed that al-Mustaʿli had, in fact, made the designation in his favor. Al-Mustaʿli had, after all, told Ḥasan b. al-Ṣabbāḥ that Nizār would be his successor.⁹¹

There is a further curious bit of information. Al-Maqrizī tells a story about al-Afḍal's mother who, while her son was away fighting the forces of Nizār, was in the habit of circulating about Cairo inquiring in disguise for signs of loyalty or lack thereof to her son. Two examples are given in this story of persons—one "a fanatic Ismaili" (*kāna ismāʿīliyyan mutaghāliyan*) and the other "a Nizari" (*kāna nizārīyyan*)—who cursed al-Afḍal and praised his opponent.⁹² It is possible to interpret this incident as merely being anti-al-Afḍal but it appears equally likely to indicate serious support for Nizār among the Ismaili population of Cairo.

Whatever the actual feelings of Egyptian Ismailis, Nizār's capture brought an end outwardly to the resistance in that country. Several members of the caliphal family, however, fled to the far West, among them specifically three of Nizār's brothers, Muḥammad, Ismāʿīl, and Ṭāhir, and a son of his named al-Ḥusayn.⁹³ It appears probable, moreover, that this Ismāʿīl is the same as the brother who was forced to recognize al-Mustaʿli at the second assembly arranged by al-Afḍal.⁹⁴

Thus a small coterie of dissidents and Nizārī supporters gathered somewhere in the West (the Maghrib) waiting for an opportunity to reassert their claim(s) to the imamate. In 526 a son of Nizār, Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥusayn, the one who had fled Egypt in 488, now ended his concealment by gathering a sizable force and setting out for Egypt. The ruler of that time, al-Ḥāfiẓ, managed to subvert the leaders of al-Ḥusayn's army and when it arrived within reach,

⁹¹ Admitted as much by al-Maqrizī, *Ittiʿāz*, III, 15.

⁹² *Ittiʿāz*, III, 15–16.

⁹³ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 15.

⁹⁴ The Muḥammad mentioned here as having fled to the West may be Abū'l-Qāsim Muḥammad, the father of the future al-Ḥāfiẓ.

⁸⁹ Ibn Maṣāl, in fact, saved himself; and his son, Abū'l-Faṭḥ Sālim, later became the wazīr at the end of al-Ḥāfiẓ's reign and the beginning of that of al-Ẓāfir.

⁹⁰ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 14.

had him arrested and killed, whereupon his troops disbanded.⁹⁵

The pitiful end of this al-Ḥusayn was, however, not the final attempt of these Western Nizāris to make good on their claim to the imamate. In 543 another army appeared from out of the Maghrib led this time by a man who, according to al-Maqrīzī's entry, merely *claimed* to be a son of Nizār. His fate at the hands of al-Ḥāfiz, after an early success, was almost exactly that of al-Ḥusayn in the earlier incident.⁹⁶ Yet again in 556 (according to al-Maqrīzī) or 557 (according to others), during the reign of al-ʿĀḍid, Muḥammad, the son of Ḥusayn, again approached Egypt from the West and made an appeal for support. He put together a large group of followers, assumed the name al-Mustanṣir, and resolved to move to take Cairo. Ibn Ruzzik, the wazir, however, easily duped him into thinking that he would personally raise the *daʿwa* in his favor and, by such false promises of favor, lured Muḥammad to his tent where he was arrested. Thereafter he was transported to Cairo and killed.⁹⁷

There is yet another bit of evidence about Nizārī pretenders. When the great wazir al-Maʿmūn fell from grace, one crime charged against him was having sent instructions to a loyal amir in the Yemen, Najib al-Dawla, (or of having sent the amir himself to Yemen) to strike coins there in the name of al-Imām al-Mukhtār Muḥammad b. Nizār.⁹⁸ This information in al-Maqrīzī's history does not say more about this Muḥammad but presumably he is yet another of Nizār's sons. The date of this event is too early for him to be the grandson just mentioned. Both Muḥammad and al-Ḥusayn would have been contemporary pretenders, but possibly one operating from the Maghrib and the other from the Yemen (or somewhere else in the East).

⁹⁵ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 147.

⁹⁶ See *Ittiʿāz*, III, 186, which likely follows Ibn al-Muyassar (p. 139). There is another account in Ibn al-Qalānisi, p. 302. The similarity of the two cases of 526 and 543 might be mistaken as one and the same but al-Maqrīzī reports them separately.

⁹⁷ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 246.

⁹⁸ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 110.

The Counterpolemic of the Mustaʿlis

None of the various attempts to assert Nizārī legitimacy compare, of course, with the effort of Ḥasan b. Ṣabbāḥ from his headquarters in Alamut. As early as 515 agents acting on behalf of the eastern Nizāris infiltrated Egypt and murdered al-Afḍal. Evidently the partisans of this branch in the recent schism remained fairly numerous in the capital; and, even with the increased awareness of the threat they posed to al-Āmir—son and successor of al-Mustaʿli—and to his new wazir, al-Maʿmūn, that led directly to heightened security, the Cairene establishment grew extremely apprehensive from the top down. Al-Maʿmūn undertook unprecedented measures to prevent further infiltration and to uncover any and all latent or hidden sympathy for Nizār or those upholding his claim to the imamate (and that of his successors).

The details of the new anti-Nizārī security arrangements that began in 516 have been adequately reviewed by Stern in the first of the two articles cited at the beginning of this paper. The principal event of that year for our purposes was an assembly of the court—mainly, but not exclusively, of Ismaili officials and royal family members—to hear arguments against the propaganda of the Nizāris and to witness the public testimony of Nizār's own full sister denying all claims on his behalf and supporting the final designation of al-Mustaʿli as the true imam. Based in part on this event, al-Ṣayrafī, the chief spokesperson of the government, issued the now famous *al-Hidāya al-Āmiriyya* (or at least a version of it) which is a prime document in the defense of al-Mustaʿli's (and, accordingly, al-Āmir's) case for succession. There are thus two slightly different pieces of evidence involved, a record of this assembly itself and the *Hidāya*, both highly partisan and tendentious, and neither therefore without suspicion of polemical intent. Still this episode is instructive and must be looked at carefully.

Stern has, however, done most of what can be done with this material. He did not have al-Maqrīzī's version, it is true, but though there are a few slight additions and changes in the material of the *Ittiʿāz*, it contains much of the same information and, in at least one case, quotes

Stern's main source, Ibn Muyassar, outright. One notable change is in al-Maqrizi's re-ordering of the story and placing it in the entry for 516 instead of 518. Ibn Muyassar had included his account of the same event with his notice of the death of Ḥasan b. Šabbāḥ in 518.

Even with Stern's achievement, there are a few comments that seem necessary. On the occasion of the meeting to discuss the evidence against Nizār, three arguments were mentioned. The first concerned the rank of the "Heir Designate of the Believers" (*walī ʿahd al-muʿminīn*) versus "Heir Designate of the Muslims" (*walī ʿahd al-muslimīn*). Claiming that the former is superior to the latter, al-Mustaʿlī's followers thought his right to the imamate fully given when, by their report, he was granted this designation upon contracting his marriage to al-Afdal's sister. Significantly, although much was made of the case of al-Ḥākim and his designation of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm as *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn*, both in the public assembly and in the *Hidāya* (about which more below), nowhere do the partisans remember that al-ʿAbbās b. Shuʿayb was given the title *walī ʿahd al-muʿminīn* by the same al-Ḥākim. A second argument about coinage is hardly worth a comment except that it indicates the Nizārī camp's similar lack of historical knowledge.⁹⁹ Either that or a similar careless resort to unfounded polemics. A further error appears in the claim that when forced to send his sons away from Cairo for safety, al-Mustanʿir kept the future al-Mustaʿlī with him. Al-Maqrizi repeats the argument where it occurs in his sources for the assembly in question, although he rightly entered the appropriate information much earlier in his account of the year 461 where it originally belonged. He does not indicate, however, in either place that the Abuʿl-Qāsim Aḥmad, mentioned as staying in Cairo in 461, cannot be the same as the one who succeeded as al-Mustaʿlī.

The ultimate purpose of this assembly was to have Nizār's own full sister denounce him and his followers, which she did, quite possibly under threat of her life and that of her sons.

Among the points she is said to have made, several are interesting. First she confirms the rivalry between Nizār and ʿAbdallāh (specifically in her case between their mothers). Second she provides a possibly important account of the role of al-Mustanʿir's own sister, the daughter of al-Zāhir, in the transfer of the designation. She remembered that the sister, her aunt, was called in the night of al-Mustanʿir's death and given a private audience with the imam. Later when asked who held the right of succession, she reported, "It is a trust that he charged me to execute and he instructed me that the caliph (*khalīfa*) following him is to be his son Abuʿl-Qasim Aḥmad."¹⁰⁰ Whether this report, coming as it does years after the fact and only under the circumstances mentioned, is to be trusted, it does fit well with the concept of a *mustawdaʿ* used to convey the *naṣṣ* at the final moment of the previous imam's natural life.

The *Hidāya*, in fact, makes most of the argument that the only valid designation will occur at the time of death, *fī waqt inṣifālihi wa daqīqat intiqālihi* ("at the time of his passing and the moment of his death").¹⁰¹ Such a claim appears far more sound on the surface than any other since the main Nizārī argument relies simply on an earlier designation of Nizār, which a death-bed designation would nullify. The *Hidāya* also seeks to use the designation of ʿAbdallāh against Nizār in that it weakens just this claim of earlier designation. According to the *Hidāya*, ʿAbdallāh was nominated *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn* later than Nizār and thus replaced him, as in fact, by this line of argument, did Abuʿl-Qāsim Aḥmad eventually replace them both. What gives Nizār precedence over ʿAbdallāh? it asks. But the *Hidāya* strangely insists that the designation of either Nizār or ʿAbdallāh served only to calm the fears of al-Mustanʿir's anxious, weak-minded followers who needed some assurance that an heir was available, although all along the imam knew that a son would be born later who would become the true imam. The document then cites the case of al-Ḥākim, who, it says, named ʿAbd al-Raḥīm his successor under similar circumstances

⁹⁹ Stern, "Succession," 23–24. The argument concerns a deliberate attempt to claim that the name Nizār on an older Fatimid coin is that of the Nizār here whereas, in fact, it referred to al-ʿAziz whose name also happened to be Nizār.

¹⁰⁰ *Ittiʿāz*, 86–87; quoted from Ibn Muyassar.

¹⁰¹ *Hidāya*, 6. Stern notes a similar phrasing in a half dozen places throughout the treatise. See p. 29 of his article.

since at the time he had no son. Again the facts of history are distorted: al-Ḥākim's sons were widely recognized and the anomalous promotion of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm over his own son was perfectly well understood at the time.

Other curiosities in the *Hidāya* appear less interesting unless we imagine the opposing argument that must lie behind them. One is a denial that a written document appointing Nizār as successor can have any validity. The *ahl al-bayt*, says the *Hidāya*, do not employ writing in their activities and transactions. Another assertion is that, if the designation of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar was sound, as being an "*Ismāʿīlī*" automatically implies, then the designation of Nizār must be correct as well. These two points, although quickly rejected by the *Hidāya*, must have formed a part of the Nizārī arsenal of polemical counterargument.

It is odd that the *Hidāya*, as well as the public assembly just discussed, mix weak with strong arguments and thereby dilute the best claim for al-Āmir's father accordingly, as if the proponents of this position expected few to recognize the truth. Perhaps by the time of these events, almost twenty years after the succession in question, careful knowledgeable debate no longer mattered since the sides had long been separated by bitter antagonism and hostility.

An Unresolved Succession: The Death of al-Āmir

Only eight years later, moreover, the Nizārīs managed to assassinate al-Āmir himself. Fear of exactly that eventuality apparently began to prey upon the caliph's mind and there is some evidence that he acted in a way and said things that might indicate psychotic depression engendered by apprehension of a violent death.¹⁰² Still his own succession was finally assured ap-

¹⁰² His close associates claimed that just prior to his death he said in reference to himself, *al-maskīn al-maqtūl bi-l-sikkīn* ("the poor fellow who will be killed by a dagger"). See *Ittiʿāz*, III, 137, and the full analysis of this same story that Stern ("Succession," 202–3) assembled from other sources. Note as a possible additional confirmation of the imam's mental state, the report Stern related from Yemeni Ṭayyibī sources (pp. 199 and "Appendix I," 232–33) about how the *dāʿīs* in regular attendance on al-Āmir found his remarks most often unintelligible.

parently by the birth in the third month of 524 of a son who was proudly proclaimed as heir with the name Abuʿl-Qāsim al-Ṭayyib. Al-Āmir had been caliph approximately twenty-nine of his thirty-four years and, his having produced no male child until then, must have strained his credibility as the proper imam considerably, especially in view of constant Nizārī propaganda in opposition to this very claim. It would seem from the single Egyptian source we possess that all efforts were made to advertise the birth of al-Ṭayyib,¹⁰³ but that is, in itself, not much different than in numerous previous cases for other rulers and their male offspring in this dynasty. The *siḥill*s extant for al-Mustaṣṣir, for example, indicate a similar rejoicing and display of pride at each birth of a son.¹⁰⁴ Yet the sons so mentioned did not necessarily succeed, nor were they considered leading candidates. However, surely as the only son of al-Āmir, al-Ṭayyib was fully presumed to have the appropriate designation, at least for the moment. The news was, as usual, conveyed to the Yemen and there accepted as a blessed acknowledgment of the new imam to be.¹⁰⁵

Eight months later on the 4th of Dhuʿl-Qaʿda, al-Āmir was murdered and his reign brought unexpectedly to a sudden end.¹⁰⁶ In the confusion that followed, a party of the palace led by Buzghash and Hizār al-Mulūk,¹⁰⁷ two intimate servants of the deceased, announced a bizarre

¹⁰³ Stern first brought this report to public attention in modern times. It comes to us from Ibn Muyassar and also appears in al-Maqrīzī's *Ittiʿāz* although it is likely only one and the same account (which would be the lost chronicle of Ibn al-Muḥannak).

¹⁰⁴ For an example of the opposite, i.e., elaborate mourning at the death of a son (in this case the three year old son of al-Zāhir), see al-Musabbīḥī, 104–5.

¹⁰⁵ The *siḥill* announcing this fact is preserved in the history of Najm al-Dīn ʿUmara, *Yaman: Its Early Medieval History*, ed. and trans. H. C. Kay (London, 1892), Arabic text, 100–102; trans. 135–36. Although ʿUmara states unequivocally that al-Āmir had given the *naṣṣ* in favor of al-Ṭayyib (*bi-naṣṣ ʿalayhi bi-l-imāma*;) according to this *siḥill*, the text of the proclamation itself is far less explicit about any such a "designation."

¹⁰⁶ One bit of information that several writers thought remarkable was that al-Āmir was the tenth of the Fatimid caliphs and also the tenth in direct lineage succession—a fact they found unusual. See the *Ittiʿāz*, III, 133.

¹⁰⁷ There seems to be no exact consensus on the spelling of these two names. Stern used Hazārmard and Bargash

final declaration of the previous imam in which he had, in effect, designated as the new imam a fetus then carried by one of his concubines.¹⁰⁸ He had also appointed his cousin ʿAbd al-Majīd as regent in the interim between his death, of which he possessed foreknowledge, and the infant's full succession.¹⁰⁹ ʿAbd al-Majīd, whether in on this scheme or genuinely believing it, accepted and then proceeded to implement al-ʿAmir's wishes. al-Ṭayyib was ignored as if he was no longer alive or had ceased to be designated in view of the new arrangement.

These few facts are only the opening scenes of a complex drama that played out swiftly with scarcely enough space between major events for either the historians closer to them or for us to keep a proper perspective. The end result, however, left the Fatimid imamte divided once again, this time between those who never wavered in their support of the mysterious child, al-Ṭayyib, and those who acquiesced in the dubious and after the fact claims of this same ʿAbd al-Majīd who later announced that he—and not either al-Ṭayyib or the unconfirmed fetus of the concubine—was the imam and caliph of al-Ḥāfiẓ.

Stern, in the second of his two articles, was the first to begin to make sense of the Ṭayyibi/Ḥāfiẓi split and, most importantly, to gather the evidence from various sources for, first, the details of the transition from al-ʿAmir to al-Ḥāfiẓ, second, the later Ḥāfiẓi explanation of how ʿAbd al-Majīd could receive the imamte from his cousin, and, third, what happened to the Ismaili *daʿwa* in the Yemen as a direct result of these events in Cairo. Since his work the text of al-Maqrīzī's *Ittiʿāz* has allowed some further

clarification, though the whole remains, as it probably always will, murky at best.¹¹⁰

Oddly, the various proponents of a new rule against that of al-Ṭayyib needed only to prove that the child was dead, which they apparently could not do. The main portion of the Ismailis in the Yemen accepted the last formal designation that they had received as fixed and final, a *truṇ naṣṣ*, conclusively confirmed by the imam's own subsequent death. They noted as well that al-Ṭayyib was the twenty-first imam, the conclusion of three sets of seven, and therefore well situated for a new period of occultation.¹¹¹ In their view, al-Ṭayyib had gone into hiding and out of ordinary contact with his followers. Nevertheless the imamte continued and even now there is an imam in al-Ṭayyib's line although, understandably, the details of further successions are unknown.

By contrast, the survival of the Cairo imamte was then and is now subject to external scrutiny and the story of how it continued is of some interest. Again it was Stern who first provided a

¹¹⁰ As the likely sequence it seems probable that, although al-Ṭayyib did indeed exist, he did not survive. When therefore al-ʿAmir died suddenly, no heir could be found. Buzghash and Hizār al-Mulūk made the best of a bad situation knowing full well that in Shiʿa dogma an imam must be present and that a line without issue is itself invalid. The story of a pregnant consort of al-ʿAmir was a means of buying time. That is shown by al-Ḥāfiẓ's immediate assumption of regnal titles even though pretending to be only a regent. The revolt of Kutayfāt was an unanticipated calamity but one that arose from personal motives in him and in the army and not religious or dynastic interests. However, having set aside al-Ḥāfiẓ and assumed power, Kutayfāt attempted to locate another properly qualified Fatimid which to him meant a son of al-ʿAmir. A search of the palace turned up no heir; no sons could be found, neither al-Ṭayyib nor the issue of the pregnant female. At that point he declared in favor of the Awaited Imam, now aiming his propaganda and his own claim of legitimacy at the Twelver Shiʿa of whom there seemed to have been a sufficient number in Egypt at that time. Without true understanding of his new policy, however, he began to reject from public activities not only Ismaili formulae and rites but also general Shiite usage as in the call to prayer. This clumsiness in religious policy coupled with his antagonizing of the palace guard eventually brought his downfall and the restoration of al-Ḥāfiẓ, who thereafter moved to claim the imamte for himself in his own right.

¹¹¹ On the reaction of the Yemeni *daʿwa* and the subsequent development of Ṭayyibi doctrine, see Stern's study. Note especially p. 200 for the declaration about al-Ṭayyib as the seventh.

("Succession," 202–4; *Fatimid Decrees* [London, Faber and Faber, 1964], 42); Sanders, 84, Buzghash and Hizār al-Mulūk. In the *Ittiʿāz*, III, 137, for example, the latter's name is Hizār al-Mulūk Jawāmad, styled also al-Afḍal

¹⁰⁸ I am not quite sure of the woman's exact status. Al-Maqrīzī refers to her as *al-jiḥa al-fulāniyya* (*Ittiʿāz*, III, 137). Ibn Muyassar calls her *nisāʾ al-ʿAmir*. For complete citations to other sources for this incident, see A. F. Sayyid's notes to his edition of Ibn Muyassar, 113, n. 288. See also *Ittiʿāz*, III, 152, for one account providing an extension to the story of both mother and her male child.

¹⁰⁹ Said to have, in part, occurred to al-ʿAmir in a dream.

scholarly analysis of the issues. More recently Paula Sanders has carefully reviewed the evidence and especially the arguments put forth in Ḥāfizi propaganda.

A preliminary question, even here, goes back to the problem of the child al-Ṭayyib. When al-Amir was killed, did any of those who assumed command ever claim to act on his behalf? If not why not?¹¹² The story that al-Āmir himself revoked the *naṣṣ* in favor of an unborn son is on the surface crazy and hardly credible, unless it is true.¹¹³ What makes a judgment impossible is that within hours of the declaration of ʿAbd al-Majid as regent, but more particularly of Hizār al-Mulūk as his wazīr, the troops announced their preference for Abū ʿAlī, son of al-Afḍal, known as Kutayfāt, as wazīr instead. Al-Maqrizī, who provides a full description of these events, says that Buzghash and Hizār al-Mulūk went to ʿAbd al-Majid and told him of the imam’s last instructions and that the formal ceremony installing him as the regent and Hizār al-Mulūk as his wazīr took place the same day, the 4th, a Tuesday. Although al-Maqrizī reports that ʿAbd al-Majid was merely the regent, he nevertheless reports that he used the throne name al-Ḥāfiẓ li-dīn Allāh even at this time.¹¹⁴ The revolt on behalf of Kutayfāt commenced almost immediately and soon resulted in the deposition of Hizār al-Mulūk, who was thereafter murdered in secret, and the elevation of Kutayfāt on the following

day (Wednesday, the 5th). Kutayfāt, whose own motivation included revenge against the Fatimids for the killing of his brothers and the confiscation of his father’s and grandfather’s property, quickly turned on al-Ḥāfiẓ and put him in prison. One source we have for this says it took place on Thursday the 16th but that appears, at least in al-Maqrizī’s account, to be a mistake for Thursday the 6th—in other words, the day after Kutayfāt’s elevation.¹¹⁵ None of these critical steps, therefore, lasted more than a day each; al-Ḥāfiẓ’s first stay in power was no more than two days.¹¹⁶

Among the questions left unanswered is the exact status of ʿAbd al-Majid according to the

¹¹² It is Ibn Muyassar (p. 113) who reports quite explicitly that al-Ḥāfiẓ hid (or ignored) the matter of al-Ṭayyib. Al-Maqrizī chose not to include this fact in his version. That al-Ḥāfiẓ ever acted on behalf of al-Ṭayyib instead of the unborn child, as claimed in Ṭayyibi doctrine which may have been official in the Yemen commencing with news of the murder of al-Āmir, seems unlikely to have been the case in Egypt. See Stern, “Succession,” 203, n. 1. Cf. 204, n. 2. This view need not deny that some Ismailis in Cairo continued also to remain loyal to al-Ṭayyib like their associates in the Yemen.

¹¹³ That the imamate might devolve upon a fetus as yet unborn seems to have been quite acceptable in Ismaili theory. See Qāḍi al-Nuʿmān, *al-Majālis*, 521, for the argument that age is of no account in the succession, and Abūʿl-Fawāris, 34–36, about the more extreme case of the unborn child.

¹¹⁴ Al-Maqrizī (*Ittiʿāz*, III, 137) says that he was installed as *kafīl* (guardian or regent) but with the regnal title. Ibn Muyassar (p. 113) reports that the people gave a *bayʿa* to the Amir ʿAbd al-Majid as *walī ʿahd* until the exact condition of the woman (wife, *nisāʾ*) of al-Āmir—i.e., whether she carried a male child or not—was known.

¹¹⁵ Notice Stern’s problem with the dating here (“Succession,” 204, n. 1). See, in addition, the comments of A. F. Sayyid in n. 390, p. 113 of his edition of Ibn Muyassar. Our sources for the sequence of dates from the assassination of al-Āmir to Kutayfāt’s proclamation of Twelver Shiism do not agree at all. Ibn Muyassar reports that Kutayfāt was elevated on “Monday (others say Thursday) the 16th of Dhūʿl-Qaʿda. Then he ordered the arrest of Abūʿl-Maymūn [i.e., ʿAbd al-Majid] on the morning after his *bayʿa* and instituted the *daʿwa* for the Awaited Imam.” Ibn Zāfir, p. 94, has a similar entry which, however, seems more clearly to make this *bayʿa* that of the army to Kutayfāt. Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, ed. M. M. Amin and M. H. M. Ahmad, vol. 28 (Cairo, 1992), 296, provides yet another version of what is probably the same entry. He reports that Kutayfāt was appointed on Thursday the 6th. Ibn Muyassar’s source (Ibn al-Muḥannak?) and that of al-Maqrizī—also probably the same source—must have contained the faulty date “16th” rather than “6th.” However, the 6th was a Thursday according to al-Maqrizī’s information. The phrase “morning after his *bayʿa*” must also indicate the day immediately subsequent to his appointment as wazīr on the 5th, which al-Maqrizī’s source indicates was a Wednesday. The day al-Āmir was murdered is given as the 4th, a Tuesday. Except for this mistake, which can now be corrected to read the “6th,” al-Maqrizī’s account appears to be the most careful and accurate. But two alternate readings might be constructed from other sources which state that al-Āmir was killed on Tuesday the 2nd. If so then the 16th is also a Tuesday and might well be the correct day on which Kutayfāt instigated the *daʿwa* for the Twelfth Imam. Yet another possibility is that al-Āmir was killed on Tuesday the 14th as claimed in yet one more source. I am more inclined to accept al-Maqrizī’s dates with an allowance that Kutayfāt’s arrest of al-Ḥāfiẓ occurred on the 6th but his shift cancelling the Ismaili *daʿwa* came later on the 16th, which may help explain some of the problems in his and the other accounts.

¹¹⁶ Although it seems likely that, at first, Kutayfāt preserved the formality that he was merely the wazīr of al-Ḥāfiẓ, who was the *walī ʿahd al-muslimin*, even while the latter was actually under arrest.

proclamation of the initial public announcements. Why, for example, did he assume a throne name, viz. al-Ḥāfiẓ li-Dīn Allāh, if he was only regent?¹¹⁷ Or is it likely that he understood himself as *mustawda*^c for the imamate? If so, was it conceived as a substitute imamate, perhaps, and thus quite different in significance than the earlier notion of *mustawda*^c (as in the case of Uṣṭādh Jawdhār)? The seating of al-Ḥāfiẓ implied his role as caliph, as did his appointment of a wazīr. These matters then raise the question of whether Kutayfāt ever acted as wazīr for al-Ḥāfiẓ and, if so, for how long?¹¹⁸ Also, did Kutayfāt at any time attempt to locate a child of al-ʿĀmir (al-Ṭayyib or the fetus to be born?) in order to perpetuate the Fatimid imamate? Some evidence points in this direction. Whatever the truth of these matters, however, Kutayfāt ultimately simply abolished the *daʿwa* of the Fatimids and substituted that of the Hidden Imam of the Twelver Shīʿa, which in effect meant a total alteration of the principle on which this government was based.¹¹⁹ About this there can be little doubt. Al-Maqrizī, among others, preserves the public prayer that Kutayfāt instituted for himself, and examples of his coinage named the Awaited Imam (*al-imām al-muntaẓar*) exist.¹²⁰ Most indicative, however, is information that Kutayfāt eliminated all refer-

ences to Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq by which he obviously intended to deny the very foundation of the Ismaili imamate. Still it is reasonable to suppose that he took this drastic measure only after ascertaining that no legitimate Fatimid successor remained because the last true imam had died without designating an heir. A last step was to remove the name of al-Ḥāfiẓ from the Friday *khutba*. The Fatimid line was thus closed and its very propriety was rendered suspect as a result.

Kutayfāt's triumph, however, was itself short lived. In his zeal to restore the rights of his family, he bore down hard on vested interests among the palace guards, who finally found the means to assassinate him after a lapse of little more than a year. Al-Maqrizī adds to this a note that the final turning point was Kutayfāt's canceling use of the Shiite formula "Come to the best of works; Muḥammad and ʿAlī are the best of men" in the call to prayer. These measures along with elimination of the names of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar and al-Ḥāfiẓ, reports al-Maqrizī, finally caused the revolt against him.

At that point there was no hope of finding a direct heir of al-ʿĀmir; al-Ṭayyib had vanished and the unborn child apparently was not a male (or did not and had never existed). The loyal palace contingent resorted to the imprisoned al-Ḥāfiẓ, who was brought back once again as "regent" or "heir apparent" (*walī ʿahd al-muslimīn*), the latter title appearing on coins from 526, the year of his liberation. That al-Ḥāfiẓ could be regent only and yet *walī ʿahd* is itself strange. Why was he the "heir" from the beginning if he could merely claim to be a regent acting for the true heir? Does this title indicate that another plan was in the works?

The situation of al-Ḥāfiẓ being nothing more than regent, whatever his title, could not last, however, unless, like the Yemeni *daʿwa*, Egypt might adopt the imamate of the hidden al-Ṭayyib. An imam must exist by Shīʿa dogma. The solution in Cairo was to proclaim al-Ḥāfiẓ imam in the true sense and to arrange a proper "explanation" of how such a turn of events could have

¹¹⁷ The *Ittiʿāz*, III, 137, says: *fa jalasa al-madhkūr* [ʿAbd al-Majīd] *kāfilan*, i.e., as "regent." The term *kāfil* does mean regent but the title *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn* does so only remotely. In the present context the latter, moreover, could hardly be taken in the sense of regent rather than "Heir Presumptive (or Designate)." Stern in his *Fatimid Decrees* (44 and elsewhere) equates *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn* in the *sijill* he analyzes with "regent," as if there is nothing strange about this usage. Of course, the concept of "regent" instead of "heir" appears to fit the case of al-Ḥāfiẓ in 524, but the document from Sinai proves that al-Ḥāfiẓ called himself *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn* from the first moments of his succession and that fact may well be significant. The same document also uses the term *kāfil* in reference to Kutayfāt (he is *kāfil quḍāt al-muslimīn*).

¹¹⁸ That he did was first established tentatively by Stern ("Succession," 204) and then confirmed by him on the basis of the *sijill* mentioned previously that was issued by Kutayfāt to the monks of Sinai in Dhū'l-Qaʿda of 524. See his *Fatimid Decrees* (document no. 3), 35–45, particularly his comments on p. 43.

¹¹⁹ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 140–41.

¹²⁰ Lists and details were given by Stern, "Succession," 205–6; *Fatimid Decrees*, 43–44; and A. F. Sayyid, *Tārīkh al-madhāhib al-dīniyya fī bilād al-yaman*, 160–65. Ibn Ẓāfir, p. 94, gives the protocol for the public invocation (*khutba*)

following the introduction of the Twelver Shiite *madhhab* (*madhhab al-ithnā ʿashariyya*). Stern, "Succession," 206, n. 1, provides additional information, but note, contrary to Stern, his textual sources were right about Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar.

happened. This eventuality may have been intended from the first; its delay was due to the coup of Kutayfāt. In 526 finally a second ceremony of allegiance (*bayʿa*) was held and thereafter al-Ḥāfiẓ ruled as imam.¹²¹

Ḥāfiẓi Pretensions and the End of the Dynasty

One major point in al-Ḥāfiẓ's favor all along was his seniority in the ruling family.¹²² Born in Ascalon in 467 while his father, Abūʿl-Qāsim Muḥammad b. al-Mustanʿir, was staying there awaiting the restoration of order in Egypt, he was 58 or 59 in 526—the year of his own restoration—and older, we are told, than any of his surviving uncles. But seniority, like primogeniture, was never an essential element in Ismaili succession and could not by itself confer a right to the imamate. Despite his lack of a proper claim, however, al-Ḥāfiẓ and his supporters announced a new policy and proclaimed him imam. He rode in caliphal garb and issued a formal *ṣijill* in which his status was explained as, in fact, quite properly foreseen by his cousin al-ʿAmir, who had designated him as his successor all along.

This *ṣijill*, or at least the version that has come down to us, is relatively simple and straightforward in comparison to the *Hidāya*, even if, like the latter, it is based on a fanciful readjustment of historical reality.¹²³ The Ḥāfiẓi party knew that they had to rely on a cousin-to-cousin transition of the imamate. Muḥammad's designation of ʿAlī was, of course, the main prototype, but the clever propagandists also noted that al-Ḥākim had designated his cousin, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm. Surely there was in these cases material from which to work. It is curious that having settled on ʿAlī's case, the writers of the *ṣijill* insisted, in addition, that it proved the validity of selecting a cousin over an uncle. Perhaps, the ʿAbbasid claim of succession by the uncle prompted this argu-

ment.¹²⁴ If not, was there, in 526, yet another son of al-Mustanʿir who was still living and who might have been a candidate?¹²⁵ Or were they thinking of Nizār?

The story of al-Ḥākim's designation of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm is here twisted to predict a future event. As al-Ḥākim had a son (the future al-Zāhir), his appointment of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, a cousin, had no purpose when it happened long ago. But, as the actions of imams bear hidden, often inscrutable meanings, al-Ḥākim's true intention, as it is now clear, was not other than to signify the future transfer of the imamate from cousin to cousin in the event of an imam having no male issue. Just as Muḥammad had no male heir, so, too, al-ʿAmir; and both, Abū ʿAlī Manṣūr al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh and Abū ʿAlī Manṣūr al-ʿAmir bi-aḥkām Allāh, had almost identical names to prove the connection. A further claim was that al-Mustanʿir had, in fact, designated al-Ḥāfiẓ's father the *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn*, as had al-Ḥākim so named ʿAbd al-Raḥīm. The trouble with this fact is that al-Mustanʿir had several sons, each of whom used the *kunya* Abūʿl-Qāsim, among them al-Ḥāfiẓ's father, Muḥammad, and the two sons named Aḥmad. We cannot therefore verify even if the father was ever accorded the title *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn*. Significantly, he is not included anywhere in the earlier polemical rejection of this rank: for example, in the *Hidāya*, which mentions both Nizār and ʿAbdallāh as *walī ʿahd al-muslimīn* but not Muḥammad. All of these pro-Ḥāfiẓ claims, weak as they are, constitute, in the eyes of the Egyptian Fatimids, the *naṣṣ* for al-Ḥāfiẓ, and it was on this basis that the imamate continued for the next four reigns.

At this point in the progress of Fatimid rule, the flimsiness of its religious claim must have become obvious to all but the most devoted.¹²⁶

¹²¹ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 146. Note specifically that al-Maqrizī calls it a "second *bayʿa*."

¹²² Explicitly noted by al-Maqrizī, *Ittiʿāz*, III, 137.

¹²³ The text of the *ṣijill* is preserved in Abūʿl-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī's *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fi ʿināʿat al-inshāʿ*, IX, 291–97, the most informative analysis of Ḥāfiẓi purposes and propaganda, particularly of this *ṣijill* and the events surrounding it, is the study by Sanders cited earlier.

¹²⁴ The Abbasids, once in power, argued that their legitimacy derived from ʿAbbās, the only surviving uncle, and hence chief legal heir, of the prophet. ʿAbbās's rights were thus easily greater than those of ʿAlī, a cousin. See further Tyan, I, 286–315.

¹²⁵ Al-Maqrizī in his *Ittiʿāz* (III, 179) mentioned a son of al-Mustanʿir called Abūʿl-Ḥusayn—an uncle therefore of al-Ḥāfiẓ—who attempted a coup in 539.

¹²⁶ Al-Maqrizī, for example, states directly in his obituary for al-Ḥāfiẓ that he was raised to power without a designation

The falling away of, first, the Nizāris and then the Ṭayyibis, left behind only a fraction of the original Ismaili sentiment in Egypt. But it is wise not to allot too great an importance to the disaffection of Iran, Syria, and Yemen for the near term. The Fatimids never were leaders in much of the territory they ruled in the absolute Shiite sense except for a small minority of the population, which we can only discern with difficulty and most often cannot discuss accurately because we do not know who and how many were actually Ismaili. A greater number simply accepted the Fatimids on a less demanding basis. Many joined the government in Egypt without worrying about the fine points of designation and infallibility. Nevertheless, it is equally wrong to dismiss the religious claim altogether. As both Stern and Sanders¹²⁷ show, the proclamation of al-Ḥāfiẓ in 526 aimed to establish legitimacy on a Shiite and Ismaili footing and to recapture as much religious and political authority as possible.

Al-Ḥāfiẓ and the later Egyptian Ismailis certainly attempted to preserve religious forms. They continued, for example, to appoint a chief *dāʿī* (a *dāʿī al-duʿāt*) to the end of the rule; and we can confirm the existence of significant numbers of Ḥāfiẓi Ismailis. One treatise—a long didactic poem called *al-Shāfiya*—survives in a Ḥāfiẓi version, a fact which points to the need among this group for religious instruction

in basic doctrine of the same kind as used by Nizāri and Ṭayyibi Ismailis.¹²⁸

However, as much as the Ḥāfiẓi faction might have striven to preserve their Ismaili Shiite imamate by facile propaganda in the earlier crisis, the record of subsequent successions seldom displays the same concern for theoretical validation. In 528, for example, al-Ḥāfiẓ gave the designation (*ʿahd*) to his favorite son, Sulaymān, the eldest of his male children. Two months later Sulaymān was dead and, although the father grieved for his loss, he immediately appointed another son, Ḥaydara, as his *walī ʿahd*.¹²⁹ Infallibility was apparently forgotten. Later that same year under intense pressure from yet another son, Ḥasan, whose disaffection with his own father and brother were, in part, responsible for terrible chaos in the realm, al-Ḥāfiẓ dropped Ḥaydara and recognized Ḥasan as his successor.¹³⁰ When this act did not diminish the troubles, the caliph finally resolved to have Ḥasan poisoned, which he succeeded in doing soon thereafter. Finally at the end of the rule, the imamate was ultimately passed by bequest,¹³¹ not to either of the remaining older sons, but to the youngest,¹³² Abuʿl-Manṣūr Ismāʿīl, who became al-Ẓāfir.

The succession to al-Ẓāfir, moreover, just four and a half years later was accompanied by the callous murder of his two older brothers and a prominent cousin lest they interfere with the elevation of the five year old al-Fāʿiz following the assassination of his father.¹³³ When al-Fāʿiz died at the age of eleven and obviously without issue, the wazīr, Šāliḥ al-Ṭalāʿī b. Ruzzik merely went to the palace and inquired matter-of-factly what

(*fa innahu waliya bi-ghayri ʿahdīn*), *Ittiʿāz*, III, 190. Despite Ḥāfiẓi propaganda, few accepted the arguments in the *siyill* of 526, especially those concerning prior designation.

¹²⁷ Sanders's study ("Claiming the Past") follows Stern in looking seriously at the real basis of the Ḥāfiẓi claim which most authorities on Ismailism have tended to dismiss as worthless and generally ineffectual. Sanders treats Ḥāfiẓi rhetoric as a reasoned, carefully planned effort to assert a valid argument for legitimacy on Ismaili terms—one that began with the proclamation and continued thereafter. What remains to be examined is to what extent such "propaganda" depended solely on paid agents of the *diwān* pandering to their overlords or whether it was genuinely aimed at a public or semi-public audience. Were there in Egypt (or elsewhere) Ismailis for whom the prolongation of the imamate mattered under these conditions? Was, therefore, the argument of the proclamation truly serious and did its proponents really expect the populace to believe that al-ʿAmir had actually designated al-Ḥāfiẓ, his cousin? Given the long history of Shiite rhetorical reconstruction of various previous successions, that question cannot be answered simply.

¹²⁸ See the edition (with English translation) of this work by S. N. Makarem (Beirut, 1966) and the reviews of it by W. Madelung (*ZDMG*, 118 [1968]: 423–24; and *Oriens*, 23–24 [1970–71]: 517–18). In the edition of the same treatise by A. Tamir (Beirut, 1967), the Ḥāfiẓi verses are missing.

¹²⁹ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 149.

¹³⁰ End of Ramaḍān, 528. *Ittiʿāz*, III, 150. Cf. Ibn Saʿīd, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 87.

¹³¹ *Bi-waṣīyyat abihi lahu al-khilāfa*, *Ittiʿāz*, III, 193.

¹³² *Ittiʿāz*, III, 193.

¹³³ Or, alternately, as Usāma b. Munqidh, as eyewitness to these events, reports, the wazīr al-ʿAbbās executed the three on the pretext that they were the ones who had murdered al-Ẓāfir. See his *Kitāb al-iʿtibār*, edited by Philip Hitti (Princeton, 1930), 20–21; English trans. *Memoirs of an Arab-Syrian Gentleman* (Beirut, 1964), 46–47.

sort of family member they had to offer. The parties calmly discussed the possibilities: an older person or a younger? Finally Ibn Ruzzik selected ʿAbdallāh, son of the amir Yūsuf, who was a son of al-Ḥāfiẓ, then eleven years old.¹³⁴ All pretense of divine sanction seems to have been dropped.

A message emerges prominently from the recounting of these incidents precisely by contrasting them with the earlier record of Fatimid succession and its problems. If al-Ḥāfiẓ still understood his Ismaili legacy well enough to insist on an elaborate protocol of investiture and validation, such notions faded as the residual power of the caliphate declined or was increasingly usurped by the wazirs, who, unlike Badr al-Jamālī, observed the formalities of Ismaili rites and rituals less and less—and only at moments of transition or when convenient. Still, there was a remarkable longevity to this decline. A stridently anti-Ismaili hostility that might have snuffed it out sooner is not in evidence. The final three Fatimids were accorded a degree of respect that belies religious disagreement and rejection. Even at the close of the rule, when Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn abolished Fatimid sovereignty, he

did so only when the death of the last caliph al-ʿĀḍid was confirmed. Moreover, he is recorded as explaining to al-ʿĀḍid's son Daʿūd, "I am the agent (*nāʾib*) of your father in the matter of the caliphate and he has not made a bequest that recognizes you as his *walī ʿahd*."¹³⁵ Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn would not continue the Fatimid line, so he says, because there was no designation of a successor, not because, as a devout Sunni, he hated the Shīʿa and their caliphate, though he certainly preferred the ʿAbbasids in their stead. Daʿūd and his family might retain some hope of a restoration,¹³⁶ but, unlike the situation of al-Ḥāfiẓ, which had proven precarious and traumatic enough, this time the strong hand of Sunni rule quickly eliminated most vestiges of Fatimid government and suppressed almost all traces of its few remaining supporters.¹³⁷

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¹³⁵ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 347.

¹³⁶ There were, at the time it was abolished, a great number of Fatimids. As sons of al-ʿĀḍid alone, I can count seventeen possibly eighteen, even though he was barely twenty-one when he died.

¹³⁷ On later pretenders and the survival of small pockets of Ismailis in Egypt, see Stern, "Succession," 211–12, and P. Casanova, "Les derniers Fatimides," *MIFAO* 6 (1897): 415–45.

¹³⁴ *Ittiʿāz*, III, 243.