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‘al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah’

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Al-Hakim’s early career

Abu ‘Ali Mansur, the sixth Fatimid caliph and 16th Ismaili *imam* (r. 386-411/996-1021). Born in 375/985, Abu ‘Ali Mansur succeeded his father ‘Aziz (r. 365-86/975-96) at the age of 11 on 28 Ramadan 386/14 October 996 with the caliphal title of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah. The first Fatimid ruler to have been born in Egypt, Hakim had been proclaimed as heir-apparent (*wali al-‘ahd*) in 383/993 on the death of his elder (and sole) brother Muhammad.

Arguably the most controversial member of the Fatimid dynasty, Hakim confronted numerous difficulties and uprisings during his relatively long reign. While he did not lose any important territories in North Africa, the Ismaili communities there were massacred by Sunni mobs led by their influential Maliki jurists. Relations between the Fatimids and the Qarmatiyya of Bahrain also remained hostile. On the other hand, Hakim’s Syrian policy was successful as he managed to extend Fatimid hegemony to the emirate of Aleppo. Above all, the persistent rivalries between the various factions of the Fatimid armies, especially the Berbers and the Turks, overshadowed the other problems of Hakim’s caliphate.

Initially, Barjawan, his *wasita* (the equivalent of a vizier, as intermediary between ruler and subjects) acted as the virtual head of the Fatimid state. However, after the latter’s removal in 390/1000, Hakim held the reins of power in his own hands limiting the authority and terms of office of his *wasitas* and viziers, of whom there were more than 15 during the remaining 20 years of his caliphate.

The Fatimid Ismaili da‘wa

Hakim maintained a keen interest in the organisation and operation of the Fatimid Ismaili *da‘wa* centred in Cairo. Under his reign it was systematically intensified outside the Fatimid dominions especially in Iraq and Persia. In Iraq, the *da‘is* now concentrated their efforts on a number of local amirs and influential tribal chiefs with whose support they aimed



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to uproot the ‘Abbasids. Foremost among the Fatimid *da‘is* of this period operating in the eastern provinces was Hamid al-Din Kirmani, the most accomplished Ismaili theologian-philosopher of the entire Fatimid period. The activities of Kirmani and other *da‘is* soon led to concrete results in Iraq: in 401/1010 Qirwas b. al-Muqallad the Shi‘i ‘Uqaylid ruler of Mosul, Kufa and other towns acknowledged the suzerainty of Hakim, and similarly ‘Ali b. al-Asadi, chief of the Banu Asad, declared his loyalty in Hilla and other districts under his control.

The ‘Baghdad Manifesto’

Others followed suit. Alarmed by these developments, the ‘Abbasid caliph Qadir adopted retaliatory measures to check the spread of Ismailism within the very seat of his realm. In particular, in 402/1011 he assembled a number of Sunni and Twelver Imami Shi‘i scholars at his court and commanded them to declare in a written document that Hakim and his predecessors lacked genuine Fatimid ‘Alid ancestry. This so-called ‘Baghdad manifesto’ was read out in Friday mosques throughout the ‘Abbasid domains. Qadir also commissioned several refutations of Ismaili doctrines, including that written by the Mu‘tazili ‘Ali b. Sa‘id al-Istakri (d. 404/1013).

Dar al-‘ilm

In the area of education and learning, one of Hakim’s most important contributions was the founding in 395/1005 of the *Dar al-‘ilm* (House of Knowledge), sometimes also called *Dar al-hikma* (Maqrizi, 1853-54, 1995; Halm, 1997, pp. 71-78). A wide range of subjects ranging from the Qur’an and hadith to philosophy and astronomy were taught at the *Dar al-‘ilm*, which was equipped with a vast library. Access to education was made available to the public and many Fatimid *da‘is* received at least part of their training in this major institution of learning which served the Ismaili *da‘wa* (mission) until the downfall of the Fatimid dynasty.

‘Sessions of Wisdom’

Hakim made the education of the Ismailis and the Fatimid *da‘is* a priority; in his time various study sessions (*majalis*) were established in Cairo where he also completed the construction of the Friday mosque that still bears his name. Hakim provided financial support and endowments



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for these educational activities. The private ‘wisdom sessions’ (*majalis al-hikma*) devoted to esoteric Ismaili doctrines and reserved exclusively for initiates, now became organised so as to be accessible to different categories of participants. Hakim himself often attended these sessions which were held at the Fatimid palace.

The Druze Movement

Hakim’s reign witnessed the genesis of what was to become known as the Druze religion. From around 408/1017 a number of *da’is* who had come to Cairo from Persia and Central Asia, prominent amongst whom were Hasan Akram, Hamza b. ‘Ali and Muhammad Darzi (Darazi), propagated new doctrines attributing divinity to Hakim, effectively founding a new religious movement which proclaimed the end of the era of Islam. This Druze movement (later named after Darzi) was the cause of much unrest during the closing years of Hakim’s caliphate. Contrary to the claims of later Sunni authors however, there is no evidence to suggest that Hakim himself encouraged them. In fact, the leadership of the *da’wa* organisation was categorically opposed to this movement and the chief *da’i* Khatkin al-Dhayf invited Kirmani to Cairo to refute officially their doctrines on theological grounds. Kirmani wrote several works to that effect which were successful in checking the further spread of such doctrines within the inner circles of the *da’wa*.

Uncovering the Historical Hakim

Hakim also concerned himself with the moral standards of his subjects; many of his numerous edicts (*sijillat*) preserved in later sources are of an ethico-social nature. He was also prepared to mete out severe punishment to high officials of the state who were found guilty of malpractice. Antaki and the Sunni historiographers have generally painted a highly distorted and fanciful image of this caliph-*imam*, portraying him as a person of unbalanced character with strange and erratic habits including the persecution of non-Muslims. However, modern scholarship is beginning to produce a different account on the basis of Hakim’s own edicts and the circumstances of his reign. As a result, Hakim is emerging as a tactful leader who was popular with his subjects.

The Disappearance of al-Hakim



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In the final years of his reign, Hakim displayed a growing inclination toward asceticism and withdrew for meditation regularly. On the night of 27 Shawwal 411/13 February 1021, Hakim left for one of his nocturnal outings to the Muqattam hills outside of Cairo, but never returned. A futile search was conducted for the 36 year old caliph-*imam*; only his riding donkey and his bloodstained garments were found. The mystery of Hakim's disappearance was never solved.

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