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Wilferd Madelung

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Hamdan Qarmat b. al-As'at (d. 321 AH / 933 CE), was an Ismaili *da'i* and founder of the Ismaili movement in Iraq. He came from a village in the *tassuj* of Badaqla, east of Kufa, and is described as working as a carter when he was converted by the Ismaili *da'i* Husayn Ahwazi sometime between the years 260/873-74 and 264/877-78. The name Qarmat is variously explained as having been derived from Nabataean "Karmita" (red-eyed), or as meaning short in stature, short-legged. After the death or departure of Ahwazi, he became the organiser of the Ismaili movement in the Sawad (a district in the countryside surrounding Kufa) and soon took up residence in the town of Kalwada south of Baghdad. His partner and chief propagandist was his brother-in-law 'Abdan. Besides appointing the *da'is* throughout the districts of the Sawad, Hamdan and 'Abdan also trained *da'is* for missions abroad. Thus they sent Abu Sa'id Jannabi first to the coastal regions of Fars and later to Bahrain, and Ibn Hawsab and 'Ali b. al-Fazl to the Yemen. Later Hamdan sent 'Abu Abd-Allah al-Shi'i to the Yemen for training, from where he proceeded to the Maghrib. There he converted the Kutama Berbers to the Ismaili cause. According to 'Abd al-Qahir Baghdadi (p. 267), al-Ma'mun, the *da'i* of Fars, was a brother of Hamdan.

In accordance with the leadership of the Ismaili community in Salamiya in Syria, Hamdan and 'Abdan summoned people to the imamate of Muhammad b. Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq and predicted the latter's early advent as the Mahdi. Once 'Abd-Allah ('Ubayd-Allah), later the Fatimid caliph al-Mahdi, succeeded to the leadership at around 286/899, an ideological schism occurred within the movement. Once 'Abd-Allah claimed the imamate for himself, affirming that the name of Muhammad b. Isma'il had been used merely as a cover for the concealed imams, Hamdan and 'Abdan suspended their missionary activity. Soon afterwards Hamdan disappeared from Kalwada, while 'Abdan was murdered. The main account, which can be traced back to anti-Fatimid Iraqi sources, reports nothing about Hamdan Qarmat after his disappearance. However, according to Ibn Hawqal (p. 96), Hamdan Qarmat was the former name of the Fatimid *da'i* Abu 'Ali Hasan b. Ahmad. Since Ibn Hawqal was a Fatimid sympathiser and intimately acquainted with Abu 'Ali's son, Abu'l-Hasan, his information may well be reliable. If that is the case, Hamdan left Kalwada in order to rejoin the service of the Fatimid imam 'Abd-Allah. He was given a new identity as the *da'i* Abu 'Ali, with a pedigree going back to Muslim b. 'Aqil b. Abi Talib, and was sent to Fustat in Egypt in order to renew his ties with those of his *da'is* who remained loyal to the Fatimid cause. While he was unable to regain the allegiance of most of the *da'is* in Iraq, who remained faithful to the teaching and memory of 'Abdan, and of Abu Sa'id Jannabi in Bahrain, he restored his control over Ibn Hawsab in the Yemen and Abu 'Abd-Allah al-Shi'i in the Maghrib, and acted as an intermediary between them and the imam in Salamiya. When the Imam and his household spent a year in Fustat in 291-92/904-5, on their way to the Maghrib, Abu 'Ali took charge of their safe lodging.

After the imam's triumphant accession to his reign in Raqqada, Abu 'Ali visited him to pay his respects. Mahdi now sent him to Anatolia with the mission of spreading Islam and the teaching of the imams. However, he was denounced before the Byzantine emperor and imprisoned for five years. After his release, he rejoined the Imam al-Mahdi in the Maghrib. The latter had turned the direction of the da'wa over to his son and heir apparent Abu'l-Qasim al-Qa'im, who employed Abu 'Ali as chief *da'i* with the title *bab al-abwab* and commissioned him to compose books for it. In a work entitled *Ummahat al-Islam*, he refuted the philosophers and asserted the primacy of the principle of *ta'wil*, esoteric interpretation, in Ismaili religious teaching. This was evidently aimed at the philosophical speculation put forward in the works of 'Abdan and his followers as well as the Neoplatonic thought



propounded by the Transoxanian *da'i* Muhammad b. Ahmad Nasafi. In the service of the Fatimids, Abu 'Ali, formerly Hamdan Qarmat, was thus countering the teaching of the anti-Fatimid eastern Ismailis who were commonly called Qaramita after him because of his former teaching in Iraq. Abu 'Ali died on 14 Rabi' I 321/14 March 933 and was buried with full honours. His son Abu'l-Hasan Mohammad was appointed chief *da'i* in his place and put in charge of the public treasury. He served the first four Fatimid caliphs. Abu 'Ali's grandson, Hasan, became an informant of the Egyptian chronicler Mohammad b. 'Ubayd-Allah Musabbihi.

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