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University of Melbourne

The Qarmatian Da'wah and Grievance: An Overview

A Thesis Presented by

Lincoln Plummer

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Thesis Declaration

I declare that:

1. I have read and understood the Faculty of Arts “Revised Draft Policy on Plagiarism”.
2. The thesis comprises only my own work, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text of the thesis to all other material used.
3. The length of the thesis is 15,000 words (for 50 point theses) or 12,000 words (for 37.5 point theses), including footnotes, but excluding appendices, acknowledgments, synopsis, table of contents and list of illustrations.
4. The estimated length of the thesis (according to criteria in 3 above) is 15,000 words.

Signed:

Name of Student: Lincoln Plummer

Date: 1/06/2022

Acknowledgements

To my parents, all my teachers and all those who ensured that I became more than my childhood prognosis, a child who would never speak a word in his life to an honour's student. To my friend Hussain, who first inspired my passion for Islamic studies and the deep history of Shi'ism and its promise of a better world, and to my supervisor Muhammad Kamal, whose sense of humour and deep knowledge kept that passion alive throughout my undergraduate degree, and whose supervision made this thesis possible. Finally, to my friend Ben Shamieh, whose company kept me sane during this pandemic, and taught me that I could be as much of a teacher as I am a student.

Introduction

1.1: Overview

No revolution, rebellion or uprising has been started by those who looked at the world and did not wish to change it. Throughout history, rabblers and revolutionaries alike have found their most fertile ground amongst the discontent, the disenfranchised, the dispossessed and the disillusioned. From its inception, Shi'ite Islam has planted its flag as the Islam of the have-nots and sought to rally support from those who had felt wronged by the world around them, using the rallying cries of the alleged usurpation of Ali ibn Abi Talib by Abu Bakr, the death of Ali's son Hussain at Karbala in 680 and the mistreatment of the *ahl al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet Muhammad and Ali) by the Sunni authorities in order to draw the support of the proverbial underclasses of Muslim society. In the history of Shi'ite Islam, we find a notable example of this tendency to rally the aggrieved in the Qarmatian movement. Doctrinally a hodgepodge mix of Isma'ili Shi'ism, Zoroastrian cosmology and Christian ideas of the *Logos*, Qarmatianism promised a cycle of renewal at the end of the last of seven eras in the Persian tradition and shared property amongst its followers. Nevertheless, the Qarmatian movement found adherents from Syria to Iraq, Bahrain to Iran and even as far-flung as Multan and Sindh in what is now Pakistan.¹

At one point in time, both the Abbasid Sunni caliphs and Shi'ite Fatimid caliphs paid tribute to a Qarmatian polity in Bahrain,² and the sect cemented itself in infamy when its adherents

¹ Samuel Miklos Stern, 'Isma'ili Propaganda and Fatimid Rule in Sind', *Islamic Culture* XXIII (1949), <http://www.ismaili.net/Source/1244.html>.

² Farhad Daftary, 'CARMATIANS', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, 1990), <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/carmatians-ismailis>.

sacked Mecca in 930. It is this ability to leave such an outsized mark on the history of the Islamic world in spite of the esoteric and fragmented nature of the movement that makes the Qarmatians such a unique presence in the historical record and leads to the question of whether Qarmatian beliefs diffused into future *ghulat* practice, or whether the material conditions that allowed Qarmatianism to flourish changed enough to render the missionary work of its adherents no longer effective. This thesis is going to address the following questions;

1. How did Qarmatianism play to the local grievances and beliefs of local populations in order to gain broad support?
2. Did Qarmatian missionaries build on existing Isma'ili missionary networks or pioneer their own, and how did Fatimid Isma'ili missionary networks adapt in response to this?
3. To what extent did Qarmatianism shape the religious practices of its adherents as opposed to being shaped by their pre-existing beliefs?

1.2: Objectives:

In addressing the first question of this thesis, how missionaries working under the auspices of the Qarmatian *da'wah* exploited local grievances in order to draw followers to the movement, this thesis must identify and examine potential grievances from location to location and community to community. The objective will be to draw a clear link between specific grievances communities had with the Abbasid or local governance, and the missionary work of those *da'is* we can safely label as Qarmatian.

This leads onto the second question, as to whether Qarmatianism took root in existing Isma'ili communities or whether it was preached in the areas where Isma'ilism had yet to

take hold. Sources often make note of communities, leaders and missionaries converting from orthodox Isma'ilism to Qarmatianism and vice versa; Hamdan Qarmat, the supposed namesake of Qarmatianism, was himself said to have converted to orthodox Isma'ilism in the final years of his life and vehemently opposed the faith he once preached.³ Thus, it is pertinent to explore to what extent the Qarmatians took advantage of captive audiences in the form of recent Isma'ili converts in order to radicalise them to the more extreme views of their sect.

Finally, in order to address the question of whether Qarmatianism influenced local belief or was influenced by it, this thesis will explore the religious demography of regions where the sect took root, how the faith was preached in these areas, and how it was practiced after the conversion of local populations. Attention will be paid to common elements across broad geographic areas, as well as local elements that stand out to a particular extent.

1.3: Scope:

Discussing the scope of the Qarmatian movement specifically will be relatively simple; it only existed as a relevant force in the Islamic world from around the late 9th century to the early 11th century, taking root mostly in Syria, Iraq and Bahrain, broadly coinciding with what is known as the 'Shi'a Century'.⁴ In order to fully examine the scope of the questions however, this thesis will need to explore the surrounding Isma'ili *da'wah* that the Qarmatian movement accompanied. As a result, the scope of this essay will need to cover both the background of Shi'ite Islam and Isma'ili Shiism along with the history of the Isma'ili *da'wah* where it coincided with the spread of Qarmatianism insofar as they can be considered two

³ Farhad Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd edition (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 120

⁴ Marilyn Waldman, 'Islamic World - The Būyid Dynasty', *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed 11 September 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islamic-world>.

separate movements, because, as mentioned prior, what constituted Isma'ili orthodoxy was very elastic, which consequently aided the spread of Qarmatianism.

Attention will mostly be paid to missionary movements in Iraq, Syria and Bahrain, with some cursory examination of movements in other regions. Discussion of topics such as the military activities of the Qarmatians; their clashes with Abbasid forces in Syria, their assaults on cities in southern Iraq such as Basra, and the 930 sack of Mecca, fall outside the scope of the questions and thus will be kept to a minimum, only being discussed insofar as they pertain to Qarmatian belief. Discussions on the beliefs espoused by the Qarmatians will also be largely restricted to those that pertain to the day-to-day concerns of its followers, rather than more metaphysical questions of theology; exceptions will be made for beliefs co-opted from other religions for the purpose of missionary activity.

1.4: Limitations:

Despite being a prolific movement in terms of missionary activity, the Qarmatians left little in the way of written doctrine. This can be drawn up to the esoteric nature of the movement and of Isma'ili Shiism more broadly; traditional Muslim beliefs were often couched in metaphysical doctrines such as Neoplatonism in order to create an intellectual appeal, and obscurantism was frequently employed in the religious hierarchy of Isma'ili movements, meaning that if any written doctrine does exist, it is usually difficult both to access and interpret. A far more material reason for the scarcity of information is the fact that these movements by-and-large consisted of small cells operating outside of the auspices of both orthodox governance and orthodox religion; as M. A. Shaban puts it, "...these movements were active over eleven centuries ago under circumstances where their survival, let alone their success, ultimately depended on the maintenance of absolute

secrecy at the incubatory stage.”⁵ In reference to the Qarmatians of Bahrain specifically, Abdullah Richard Lux notes in his foreword to Mai Mohammad Al Khalifa’s *The Qarmatians: From Concept to State* that “researching the Qarmatians... entails situating them about a ‘hollow centre’ in the annals... [an empty space] that resulted in significant part from deliberate and methodical efforts to expunge every trace of them.”⁶

As a result, much of the primary written material that will be consulted for the purpose of this thesis comes from non-Qarmatian sources, up to and including works that are deliberately polemic in nature. The content of these sources will be critically appraised but owing to the limited resources available from Qarmatian sources proper, discerning authentic beliefs from sensationalist accusations will be a pertinent albeit difficult task. Additionally, much of the information available on Isma’ili Shiism is predominantly available in Arabic, German and French, with English-language Isma’ili studies being a relatively recent field. My fluency as a scholar is restricted solely to English and to a lesser extent German. Consequently, this thesis will be dealing with a relatively small pool of easily examinable sources relative to the actual amount of information available on the subject; occasional consultation of foreign-language sources will be made.

1.5: Methodology:

The methodology of the research conducted for this thesis will be entirely qualitative, with textual analysis forming the bulk of the research. The primary sources consulted are contemporary accounts made of Qarmatian missionary activity along with a select few Qarmatian texts; Abbasid-era chronicles such as al-Tabari’s *History of Prophets and Kings*

⁵ M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation: AD 750–1055*, vol. 2, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). 128

⁶ Mai Mohammed Al Khalifa, *The Qarmatians: From Concept to State*, trans. Abdullah Richard Lux (Muharraq, Bahrain: Shaikh Ebrahim Bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa Center for Culture and Research, 2019). 11

will be important in charting the broad arc of the Qarmatian movement, and works focussing on Islamic doctrine across sects such as al-Nawbakhti's *Kitab Firaq al-Shia* will allow the opportunity to compare Qarmatian beliefs with other contemporary Isma'ili and *ghulat* sects. Secondary texts will be mostly those dealing with Isma'ili movements such as the works of Farhad Daftary and Wilferd Madelung, since these texts tend to devote some attention to the Qarmatian movement; one particularly important work will be Kathryn Babayan's *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs*, as it is a work specifically in the field of *ghulat* studies, a field without much representation in English-language literature. Bahraini scholar Mai Mohammed Al Khalifa has written an extensive treatment on the Qarmatians, *The Qarmatians: From Concept to State*, with a prominent focus on how they conceptualised their ideology, though most of the text focuses largely on the historical context surrounding the movement in larger polities such as the Abbasid and Fatimid caliphates.

1.6: Key Terminology:

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND DATES:

There are multiple and conflicting methods when it comes to transliterating languages written using the Arabic writing system, in the case of this essay, Arabic and Persian.

Following the example of works such as Hugh Kennedy's *The Caliphate*, Chase Robinson's *Islamic Civilization in Thirty Lives* and Farhad Daftary's *A History of Shi'i Islam*, I have opted to use a simplified method of transliteration, similar to the one adopted in the third edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* as per Farhad Daftary. The *hamza* will be indicated when necessary, but additional diacritics and distinctions between long and short vowels will not. Dates will be given in the Gregorian calendar as opposed to the Hijri calendar.

As a work in the field of Islamic studies, especially given its focus on *ghulat* studies, this thesis will use several pieces of Arabic and Persian terminology, often with multiple or obscure meanings. Below is a glossary that will define the terms as used in this thesis.

Alid: This term refers to figures or families who, authentically or otherwise, claimed descent from Ali ibn Abi Talib, usually through the line of one of his two sons, Hassan or Husayn.

Proto-Shi'ite grievance movements typically mobilised behind these claimants.

Batinyya: *Batinyya*, from *batin* ('inner'), refers to the belief that in addition to the literal, or *zahir* ('outer') meaning of texts such as the Qur'an, there exists an esoteric 'inner' meaning, often only understandable by the Alid imams and their close associates. *Batinyya* was often associated with antinomianism, the belief that certain conditions made Islamic law null and void, as their 'inner' meanings being revealed meant that the 'outer' practice of them was no longer necessary.

Da'wah: From the Arabic word meaning 'to invite in', *da'wah* in this thesis refers to Muslim missionary activity in a formal context, especially as practiced by the Isma'ili, who had a large network of missionaries with a concrete hierarchy. A related term is *da'i*, one who makes *da'wah*; in plainer language, a missionary.

Fatimid: The historiographical name used to refer to the Isma'ili dynasty that ruled North Africa and Egypt in the 10th and 11th centuries. In this essay, it will also be used to refer to Isma'ili missionaries that recognised the claim of Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi Billah to the imamate.

Ghulat: From the Arabic word meaning 'to exaggerate', *ghulat* specifically refers to Shi'ite sects that ascribe divine characteristics to the personage of Ali ibn Abi Talib, such as the

Alawites, who believe that God inhabited the body of Ali. In this thesis, *ghulat* will be used more broadly to refer to Shi'ite sects that fall outside of the general mainstream sects of Imami Twelverism, Isma'ilism and Zaydi Shi'ism, usually due to the aforementioned exaggeration of the divinity of Ali.

Grievance: 'Grievance' in this essay will be used mainly to refer to an opposition to an established status-quo, such as opposition to religious orthodoxy, lack of representation in governance or a perceived deficiency in local conditions.

Mahdi: Meaning 'the guided [one]', the Mahdi is a messianic figure in Islamic eschatology, who in both mainstream Sunni and Shi'ite thought is prophesised to return to the world from Heaven alongside Jesus Christ and usher in an age of equality and universal practice of Islam across the entire world. The majority of Muslims believe the Mahdi will be a descendant of Muhammad but differ on who exactly he will be. Most Sunnis believe the Mahdi is not yet born. Twelver Shi'ites, who make up most of the Shi'ite population believe that the Mahdi is the twelfth Imam, currently in occultation but destined to return. Within the scope of this essay, various Isma'ili sects held differing beliefs on who the Mahdi would be, but a common thread was their imminence; the return of the Mahdi was both inevitable and close at hand.

Mazdaean: An umbrella term that will be used to describe Zoroastrian religions (religions that believe in Ahura Mazda as their supreme deity), including orthodox Zoroastrianism (*Mazdayasna*), Mazdakism and syncretic religions such as Khurramism.

Rashidun: Meaning 'rightly guided', this term refers to the first four caliphs in the Sunni tradition (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali), whose rule preceded the later dynastic rule of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates.

A NOTE ON 'SUNNISM' AND 'SHI'ISM':

One of the major issues with terminology in early Islamic studies is that what scholars and laypersons alike define as 'Sunni' and 'Shi'ite' did not exist as they are defined now within the Muslim community during the period encompassing the scope of this essay.⁷ The term 'Sunni' came into use around the 9th century,⁸ but 'Sunnism proper' could be said to have come into being with the formalisation of the four major *madhabs* and the three major theological schools (Ash'ari, Athari and Maturidi), which had only occurred around the 11th century. Meanwhile, while the term *shi'atu Ali* ('partisans of Ali') has existed to describe followers of Ali and his claim to leadership over the *ummah* since the lifetime of the Prophet, 'Shi'ism' was far less defined prior to the early modern era, defined mainly by reverence for the family of the Prophet through the line of Ali and Fatima, and opposition to the dominant 'Sunni' government.⁹ Some scholars argue that Shi'ism proper only began to exist under the auspices of the Safavid dynasty of 15th century Iran, who embarked on a totalising program of conversion in Iran that clearly defined them apart from their 'Sunni' neighbours.¹⁰

In spite of this, the division between the two sects has not always been clear-cut. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, sixth Imam of the Twelver and Isma'ili Shi'i lineages, is also a key scholar in Sunni theology, and institutions such as Sufi *tariqas* incorporated aspects such as esotericism, the distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' knowledge of the Qur'an, and

⁷ Aaron W. Hughes, *Muslim Identities: An Introduction to Islam* (Columbia University Press, 2013). 115

⁸ Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Civilization in Thirty Lives: The First 1,000 Years*, 1st edition (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016). 32

⁹ Farhad Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam* (London: New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014). 28

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 82-83

adoration of Ali into their practice while remaining broadly Sunni.¹¹ Similarly, partisans of Alid dynasts would oftentimes rise up against caliphal authority, demanding a change in leadership without any major doctrinal differences with said leadership, with theological chasms opening up between Sunnism and Shi'ism far later in history; to this day, Zaydi Shi'ism, one of the earliest branches of Shi'ism to form into a cohesive belief system, has far more in common with Sunni theology than Twelver Shi'ism or Isma'ilism.¹² The practices referred to in this thesis would more accurately be described as 'proto-Sunni' and 'proto-Shi'ite', but Sunni and Shi'ite will be used in place of these terms for ease of reading.

1.7: Thesis Outline:

This thesis includes the following chapters;

Chapter 1: Introduction:

The introduction to this thesis covers the various foundational elements of the text; an overview of the field of Shi'i studies the text is based within, a statement of the questions surrounding the Qarmatian *da'wah* it wishes to answer, the methodology of the research and the scope and limitations of that methodology, and a definition of key terminology.

Chapter 2: Literature review:

This thesis begins with a literature review, which discusses the primary sources, their purpose and their limitations, before moving onto the secondary sources, focussing primarily on the two categories of primary sources: specialised literature in the field of Qarmatian, *ghulat*, Isma'ili and Shi'ite studies, and more general works discussing the

¹¹ Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, 'Devotion to the Prophet and His Family in Egyptian Sufism', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 4 (1992): 615–37.

¹² Wilferd Madelung, 'Zaydī Attitudes to Sufism', *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, 1 January 1999, 124–44, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004452725_010.

Abbasid period. The review tackles issues such as the relatively small body of specialised literature, the issue of bias in general histories, and the relative recency of the field of Isma'ili and *ghulat* studies in general.

Chapter 3:

The main body of the text begins with a discussion of the history of Shi'ite Islam more broadly with a focus on the history of grievance when it came to the division of land and wealth; events such as the subjugation of the *ansar* by the *muhajirun* during the events at the *saqifah* and the sidelining of Ali and his partisans, the concentration of power under Uthman and the failure of Ali's attempts to prevent the concentration of privilege in the *Rashidun* period. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which Ali attempted to rally the concerns of aggrieved parties, with the ultimate finding being that, rather than Ali rallying a coalition behind him, multiple parties instead chose to rally around Ali, who as a result was unable to effectively manage the various conflicting interests of the partisans who had chosen him as a figurehead for their varied concerns.

Chapter 4:

This section begins by discussing the origins of the Isma'ili movement, Isma'ili missionary efforts and the beginning of a distinct network of Qarmatian missionaries. The thesis then moves onto discussing how Qarmatian communities responded to grievances against orthodox Islamic governance on the local level across various regions, specifically Iraq, Syria and Bahrain, and to what extent this level of doctrinal flexibility was unique to the movement, discussing aspects such as the targets of Qarmatian efforts to proselytise, demands made by these communities to existing governments, and how Qarmatian *da'is* reorganised these communities. Throughout this analysis, the division of land and wealth

and the reaction of those outside of the systems of power that distributed these resources are centred, and the case is argued that grievances towards land and wealth inequality, rather than theological concerns over succession to the Prophet or leadership over Islam, was the driving factor behind Shi'ite and later Qarmatian success in the endeavour of proselytising.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The thesis concludes with the argument that, rather than being crushed militarily as is presented in standard narratives, the Qarmatian movement instead disappeared because it forced competing movements to in a sense become Qarmatian, as the mainline Fatimid movement incorporated Qarmatian beliefs and practices into their own *da'wah* and Twelver Shi'ite movements became more politically active. Finally, it presents the argument that by spreading *batinyya*, millenarianism and antinomian ideology among the north of Iran, it laid the groundwork for the rise of the Turkmen Qizilbash and the establishment of Iran as the major global standard-bearer of Shi'ism.

Chapter 2: Literature review:

2.1: Primary Sources

For a great deal of time, literature on the Qarmatian movement remained largely restricted to mentions in much broader histories, such as al-Tabari's *History of Prophets and Kings*. These histories would discuss the rise of movement, their military ventures and assaults on the *Hajj* and their eventual defeat, but little attention was given to the doctrine of the movement or to who it appealed to. As seen in the title of al-Tabari's seminal work, history in the time of the Qarmatians was that of prophets and kings, and as such, a rebel movement was afforded little attention apart from which it threatened the established status quo. Instead, a major primary source of understanding Qarmatian practice and missionary activity will be travel narratives; the works of writers whose focus was traversing the known world and writing their experiences of places and people they encountered along the way. In this regard, we are fortunate that the Islamic world had both a rich tradition of letters and a shared tradition of bureaucracy and a unified identity under the auspices of the *ummah* that, during an era that Chase F. Robinson refers to as the 'Islamic Commonwealth',¹³ allowed prospective travellers to journey from the Maghreb to Sindh more or less unimpeded.¹⁴ As a result, there are several accounts of travellers, both Sunni and Shi'ite, who have provided accounts of their time among Qarmatian communities. Often, these accounts were made to inform. Just as often, however, these accounts were

¹³ Robinson, *Islamic Civilization in Thirty Lives*. 66-71

¹⁴ Hugh Kennedy, *The Caliphate*, 1st edition (London: Penguin Press, 2016). 133

designed to titillate and outrage, especially among sources hostile to Qarmatianism and more broadly Isma'ilism or Shi'ism.

This is especially true of the aforementioned histories of authors such as al-Tabari and Mas'udi, who were writing chronicles of dynasties often commissioned and patronised by said dynasts. As a result, these writings would serve largely to uphold the legitimacy of these dynastic programs, giving little attention to or hostile coverage of movements which attempted to undermine or challenge them. These chronicles also make extensive use of *isnad*, chains of narration that, ideally, ultimately lead back to the first point of contact with a given piece of information. The rise of Hamdan Qarmat in Kufa, for instance, is reported to al-Tabari by “[a colleague] – someone who was in the presence of Muhammad ibn Dawud ibn al-Jarrah,” going on to further source the information by stating that al-Jarrah had heard it via “some Qarmatians [who he had interrogated] about Zakarawayh (a prominent Qarmatian *da'i*).” From these anonymous prisoners, one, named only as “an old man... [who said he was] Zakarawayh’s brother-in-law” was cited as the original source of the story.¹⁵ While the *isnad* system provides an ultimate source for every one of the narrations it is attached to, it presents the issue of information often only being linked to one source, and if the chronicler fails to critically interrogate this source, as is done via biographical evaluation in *hadith* studies, the modern scholar must often base their study entirely on hearsay, especially problematic given the lack of information on Qarmatians written by Qarmatians themselves. In this case, preference will be given to the accounts of non-Isma'ili Shi'ites,

¹⁵ Philip M. Fields, trans., *The 'Abbasid Recovery*, vol. 37, *The History of Al-Tabari* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987). 172

such as al-Nawbakhti's *Kitab Firaq al-Shia*, over Sunnis, as their accounts are usually far less polemic in nature.

2.2: Secondary Sources

2.2.1: Specialist texts:

As a result of the lack of reliable primary sources on the Qarmatians, the secondary sources are similarly restricting; for the most part, the Qarmatians are reduced to a factor in Abbasid decline, a consequence of traditional historiographies of the Islamic world that chart the course of history through dynasties and kingdoms rather than movements and social changes. Fortunately, Qarmatianism as a movement was intrinsically linked to the broader Isma'ili movement which saw a surge in the 10th century, which in contrast to Qarmatianism proper has a wealth of information compiled via secondary sources. The works of Shi'ite specialist scholars such as Farhad Daftary's *A History of Shi'i Islam* and *Mediaeval Isma'ili Doctrine: History & Thought*, and Wilferd Madelung's various essays in books such as the aforementioned *Mediaeval Isma'ili Doctrine* in particular will form the backbone of the literature consulted in compiling a general background on the Isma'ili milieu from which the movement emerged, and the types of grievances that the Qarmatians took advantage of in order to form communities of opposition. Importantly, this essay will primarily rely on secondary sources that primarily cite traditional Islamic accounts of events such as the succession to Muhammad, rather than revisionist histories; this is because in the case of studying grievance, how a community *believe* history happened can be just as important as how it *actually* happened.

One of the most helpful texts in elucidating the mindsets and structures of *ghulat* systems of belief will be Kathryn Babayan's *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of*

Early Modern Iran. While the focus of Babayan's work is local, focussing primarily on Iran and Iranians, it is a comprehensive work in the relatively undeveloped field of *ghulat* studies, and while it does contain cursory references to the Qarmatians, the real value of the text lies in its more broad assessment of the state of the Islamic and Persian worlds in the 9th and 10th centuries, especially its discussion of issues such as Persian aggrievement following the Arab conquest of Iran and syncretic religious movements. A book dedicated to the Qarmatians, *The Qarmatians: From Concept to State*, will be frequently consulted owing to it being an up-to-date local history written by a Bahraini academic, but owing to the author Mai Bint Mohammed Al Khalifa's proximity to Bahraini state power as a minister in the kingdom's government, this source will be approached with a critical appraisal to ensure that the information is accurate, rather than potential propaganda.

In the introduction of *A History of Shi'i Islam*, Farhad Daftary discusses the history of Shi'ite and more specifically Isma'ili studies, and draws attention to the issue of the 'Isma'ili black legend', a view of Isma'ilis in medieval and early modern historiography informed by the experience of the European Crusaders, who had little interaction with Isma'ilis apart from conflicts over strongholds in Syria and lurid tales from Sunni propagandists of drugged-out murderers who would commit suicide in the service of their mysterious leader, the "Old Man of the Mountain". The Nizari Isma'ilis, the primary Shi'ite sect that the Europeans encountered, were referred to as the Assassins, which came to be a disparaging term in European languages referring to professional killers. This word itself derived from *hashshashin*, an Arabic term with a different but likewise derogatory meaning, implying that the mysticism and devotion seen in Nizari communities was a result of the consumption of *hashish*, cannabis. While the work of Orientalist scholars such as Wladimir Ivanow has since allowed scholars access to an abundance of primary sources written by the Isma'ilis, the

field of Isma'ili studies is still in its infancy when compared to the general state of Islamic studies, and as such, this essay will be relying on a relatively small field of recent scholarship by a select group of specialised academics.¹⁶ Information on the Isma'ilis do appear in non-specialised texts in the field of Islamic studies, but it will be pertinent to attempt to disentangle authentic fact from the aforementioned 'black legend' that affected much of early scholarship.

2.2.2: General texts:

In order to construct an image of the status-quo which Qarmatians fielded their grievances against, this essay will mainly use general histories of the Abbasid period; for information needed to construct a background on some elements explored in the text outside of this period, I have primarily consulted *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* and *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, the latter of which has also proven helpful in exploring relating to the Qarmatians proper. Two of Hugh Kennedy's works, the introductory *The Caliphate* and the more comprehensive *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphates*, will serve to provide the primary background of the Abbasid caliphate in the 9th and 10th centuries. The value of *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphates* is that it expressly focuses on social and economic processes as opposed to "ephemeral rulers and pointless battles,"¹⁷ which will be invaluable in forming an image of conditions in the Abbasid period. In this regard, M. A. Shaban's two-volume *Islamic History: A New Interpretation* will be equally valuable with its focus on economic structures in the Islamic world, as well as its discussion of the economic status of areas within the Isma'ili *da'wah*, which will serve as a vital foundation for a fuller treatment of the subject.

¹⁶ Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam*. 5-21

¹⁷ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, 3rd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2015). Blurb

It is also pertinent to note that the Qarmatian uprising did not occur in a vacuum; the Abbasid dynasty itself was catapulted into power by a protest movement that drew upon local grievances, especially those of Alid sympathisers and Persians, two groups that later formed a prominent nucleus for Qarmatian communities, and while the Qarmatian *da'wah* spread throughout the Persian Gulf, other movements and events shook the foundations of Abbasid power, such as the Zanj Rebellion in Iraq, warbands of Kharijite bandits in the highlands of Sistan and Afghanistan,¹⁸ and the revolts of ambitious regional figures such as the Tulunids and the Saffarids. The upheaval caused by these intersecting events itself created fertile ground for recruitment for groups such as the Qarmatians, so literature on them will be especially useful.

¹⁸ C. E. Bosworth, 'KHARIJITES IN PERSIA', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, July 2009), <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/kharijites-in-persia>.

Chapter 3. Shi'ite Politics of Grievance in the *Rashidun* Period

3.1: The *Saqifah* and the beginning of grievance in Shi'ism

In his essay *Red Shi'ism and Black Shi'ism*, Iranian sociologist and Shi'ite philosopher Ali Shariati characterises Sunni Islam as “the government’s Islam”. Under this definition, Shi'ism becomes the Islam of those opposed to despots and tyrants, the Islam of the disenfranchised and the dispossessed; in Shariati’s words, “Shi'ites turn their backs on the opulent mosques and magnificent palaces of the caliphs of Islam and turn to the lonely, mud house of Fatima.”¹⁹ The precedent for this is drawn from the earliest years of Islam; after the Hijra to Medina, the Muslim community coalesced into two distinct units. The *ansar* (helpers), were the Medinan natives who tended to support the Prophet Muhammad and his family, especially Ali, having invited them to Yathrib-Medina to escape persecution in Mecca. In contrast, the Meccans who had followed Muhammad to Medina, while by all accounts faithful Muslims, also retained their tribal loyalties within the broader Quraysh network, and soon coalesced into their own distinct faction, the *muhajirun*.²⁰ To offer a class-based analysis, the *ansar* were by and large peasants who worked the land for a living, part of the broader Arabian tribal networks but lacking in prestige. In contrast, the *muhajirun* were almost all Qurayshi nobility, wealthy from the profitable caravan trade and

¹⁹ Ali Shariati, ‘Red Shi'ism: The Religion of Martyrdom, Black Shi'ism: The Religion of Mourning’, Dr. Ali Shariati, accessed 18 May 2021, <http://www.shariati.com/english/redblack.html>. This quote itself is a reference to an infamous account in Shi'ite historiography which alleges that Umar, in an attempt to secure Ali's loyalty to Abu Bakr, beat a pregnant Fatima to the point of miscarriage as she blocked off the entrance to the home she and Ali lived in.

²⁰ Kennedy, *The Caliphate*. 6

well connected due to their business links. In the final years of the Prophet's life, a third faction, the Meccans who had converted to Islam following Muhammad's return to the city, became part of the political network of the *ummah*, though they mostly threw their lot in with the *muhajirun* owing to their existing links through the Quraysh clan.²¹

During the lifetime of the Prophet, these factions were distinct but not at odds; one of the aspects of the early *ummah* that made Muhammad so successful was his ability to utilise Arab networks of tribal loyalty such as trade and marriage to create a community combining disparate elements in loyalty to him and the broader Islamic project, even as he implored Muslims to rise above said tribalism in his recitation of the Qur'an and various *hadiths*.²² In addition, he also took more direct conciliatory measures, such as appointing a brother from among the *ansar* for each of the *muhajirun*.²³ After the death of the Prophet, these tribal networks of loyalty fragmented, and factionalism became a defining factor in the early stages of the post-prophetic *ummah*. This is observable in the Riddah Wars, which saw various chiefs and tribes across Arabia refusing to give their allegiance or pay *zakat* to the new caliph in the aftermath of Muhammad's death, stating that their loyalty was to Muhammad, not to Islam.²⁴ The Riddah wars followed on from the events of the *saqifah* ('portico') in Medina, which saw a far more impactful split in the *ummah*.

In the aftermath of the death of the Prophet, three distinct factions emerged in the resulting debate over leadership of the *ummah*, although only two were present for the events of the *saqifah*. The absent faction, that of Ali, Fatima and Ali's supporters, were

²¹ Elias Shoufani, *Al-Riddah and the Muslim Conquest of Arabia* (University of Toronto Press, 1973). 51

²² See Sahih Muslim 1850, Sunan Abi Dawud 5121

²³ Robert M. Gleave, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 1 December 2008), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/ali-b-abi-talib-COM_26324.

²⁴ Kennedy, *The Caliphate*. 14

preparing the body of Muhammad at the time, though Ali personally believed he was the rightful successor of the Prophet after the event at Ghadir Khumm, at which Muhammad declared that “He of whom I am the *mawla*, of him Ali is also the *mawla*” and made it known in his own time.²⁵ The other two factions, who were party to the debate at the *saqifah*, were the *ansar* and the *muhajirun*. The *ansar* believed in a pluralistic model of leadership; assuming the *muhajirun* wanted to return to the newly liberated Mecca, they were free to elect a leader amongst themselves to govern the affairs of Mecca, and the Medinans would be afforded the right to elect their own representative to govern their affairs. The *muhajirun*, however, believed that loyalty sworn to Muhammad meant loyalty sworn to the broader Islamic mission, that this mission was to encompass an *ummah* that had one ruler alone, and that the sole ruler ought to be from the Quraysh; Umar stated that “Two [swords] cannot be accommodated in one sheath.”²⁶; Abu Bakr claimed that “the Arabs will not recognize the rule of anyone but this tribe of Quraysh, [as] they are the most [noble] of the Arabs in lineage and abode.”²⁷

After establishing this criteria, Abu Bakr cited Umar and Abu Ubaidah as potential claimants; Umar initially deferred to Abu Ubaidah, owing to his resentment of the newly-Islamised Meccan aristocracy who by-and-large threw their lot in with Abu Bakr.²⁸ Nevertheless, the traditional Islamic accounts present them as arriving together at the *saqifah* to prevent the *ansar* from splitting the Muslim community, with more critical accounts accusing this triumvirate of outright collusion.²⁹ After a period of argument that reportedly went

²⁵ Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam*. 26

²⁶ Ismail K. Poonawala, trans., *The Last Years of the Prophet*, vol. 9, *The History of Al-Tabari* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). 194

²⁷ Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 31

²⁸ Shoufani, *Al-Riddah and the Muslim Conquest of Arabia*. 56

²⁹ *ibid.*, 53

throughout the night and into the next day, Umar eventually swore allegiance to Abu Bakr as leader, with Abu Ubaidah joining him shortly after. After the *muhajirun* elected a leader from amongst themselves, the *ansar* were obliged to accept Abu Bakr and swear loyalty to him; Umar supposedly beat them into acquiescence.³⁰

3.2: The early *Rashidun* period

With the *ansar's* dream of an *amir* for each portion of the Muslim community destroyed at the *saqifah*, they began to throw their support behind a more viable candidate who nevertheless reflected a similar grievance towards the events that had transpired at the *saqifah*, Ali. The 'party of Ali', which initially comprised a small group of Ali, his family, a few close friends and more religiously-minded groups such as the *qurra* (reciters of the Qur'an based largely in Kufa, who tended to support the family of the Prophet), soon grew to include a sizeable portion of the *ansar*,³¹ and the political program expressed by Ali soon grew to include not only his grievances about being passed over for leadership in favour of traditional Qurayshi interests, but also justice for those who fell outside of the Meccan tribal aristocracy.³² This grievance encompassed both social and material concerns; while the *ansar* and the Banu Hashim, the clan of Ali and Muhammad, would have both been displeased with being passed over for leadership in favour of established Qurayshi interests, what would have been far more pressing of a concern to them was their economic welfare.

In the Prophet's lifetime, Qurayshi elements, including Meccans who had only recently converted to Islam, had managed to consistently outmanoeuvre the *ansar* in influencing the Prophet, which was especially apparent in the issue of *ghanim* ('war booty'). The Prophet's

³⁰ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*. 31

³¹ Kennedy, *The Caliphate*. 7

³² Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam*. 29

tendency to negotiate rather than wage war with the Meccans as Islamic victory became all but certain angered many of the *ansar*, who wished to both settle their grudges with and plunder the wealth of the Quraysh. When plunder was made, however, it inevitably found its way into the hands of the Quraysh who had joined the Medinan community, with *ansar* chiefs often receiving none, as seen in the case of the Hunayni booty.³³

This status as second-class Muslims continued into and worsened under the post-Prophetic era; many among the later Meccan converts, having fought with the *ansar* in the early days of Islam and subsequently having lost family and wealth to them, were still resentful, and used their newfound power under the caliphates of pro-Meccan caliphs such as Abu Bakr and Uthman to further sideline the *ansar*. One of Abu Bakr's generals, Amr ibn al-As, is quoted as saying that "[The *ansar*] are not equal to the *muhajirun*; Sa'd [ibn Ubadah, the *ansar*'s first proposed candidate for caliph] is not equal to Abu Bakr, and Medina is not equal to Mecca. [The *ansar*] fought us [Meccans] in the past and achieved supremacy over us at the beginning; but if we fight them today, we will achieve supremacy over them in the end." Ali in particular was incensed by this proclamation, cursing that "[Amr] has done wrong by God and His Prophet," and that "He who loves God and His Prophet loves the *ansar*."³⁴ In this episode, we see a clear gulf beginning to emerge between the Quraysh and the *ansar*, and that Ali, in spite of his status as a member of the *muhajirun*, came down firmly on the side of the *ansar*. With their firm control of the early-post Prophetic state, the Qurayshi faction worked to sideline both.

³³ Shoufani, *Al-Riddah and the Muslim Conquest of Arabia*. 51

³⁴ *ibid.*, 59-60

After the appointment of Abu Bakr as leader of the *ummah*, Ali initially refused to pledge his allegiance, only giving it after the death of his wife Fatima, allegedly in the aftermath of an assault by Umar; her dying wish was that Abu Bakr and Umar be barred from attending her funeral.³⁵ The Prophet's clan of Banu Hashim, which Ali was now the leader of, had become marginalised as the *ansar* had been in the wake of the Qurayshi ascendancy; the right to the *khums* (one fifth of war booty) reserved for the Prophet in his lifetime was not afforded to his descendants, their various property incomes were withheld from them and their inheritance from the Prophet was contested by various other financial interests; at the time of her death, Fatima had been attempting to assert her claim over Muhammad's property, which Abu Bakr insisted belonged to him.³⁶

While Ali largely withdrew from politics during the caliphates of Abu Bakr and Umar, his supporters in the *ansar* continued to support his cause, often lamenting in poetry that they had attempted to advance their own cause instead of championing his, to the detriment of them both; Madelung posits that if the *ansar* had thrown their lot in with Ali at the *saqifah*, he would have most likely secured the succession to the caliphate, which the *ansar* may have been aware of in their own time, as evidenced by multiple pieces of lamentary poetry from the era.³⁷ During the reign of Umar, he did express the opinion that the *diwan* (treasury) of the caliphate ought to be distributed evenly amongst all Muslims, without holding any in reserve;³⁸ in contrast, Umar inaugurated a system of a reserve treasury and a

³⁵ Hassan Abbas, *The Prophet's Heir: The Life of Ali Ibn Abi Talib*, 1st edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021). 103

³⁶ Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam*. 27

³⁷ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*. 35-40

³⁸ L. Veccia Vaglieri, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 24 April 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ali-b-abi-talib-COM_0046.

wage stipend system (*ata*) that was used to discriminate against Meccans, whom Umar had a long-standing personal antipathy towards.³⁹

In spite of this, however, Madelung makes the argument that the Islamic polity under Umar remained a communal one, with conquests being divided by fifths equally among the Muslims involved and the Prophet, caliph or imam as opposed to the dynastic model of control over economic production as seen in later caliphates.⁴⁰ Shaban's assessment is in concordance, noting that the Meccan elites continually expanding fortunes were in spite of Umar's efforts, not because of them, noting that Umar had demanded that governors surrender half their wealth to the public treasury on retirement and personally inspected the streets of Medina and parts of Syria to ensure justice was being done.⁴¹ As such, while Ali and his partisans had disputes with the government of Umar, the equal distribution of land ensured that these disputes remained at a simmer, rather than becoming existential issues for the caliphate.

3.3: Utman's caliphate and the genesis of land inequality in the Islamic world

With the caliphate of Uthman, however, the division between the Qurayshi 'elite' and the dispossessed among the Muslim world grew ever larger. This division between haves and have-nots begun from the outset, as the council convened to appoint a successor to Umar in the wake of the assassination of Umar by a Persian slave in 644 was one of six Qurayshi Meccans; Medina and the *ansar* had once again been systemically excluded from the levers of power. Both Ali and Uthman were offered the role of leader on the condition that they exercised it lightly; the specific request was that they follow the precedent of the previous

³⁹ Shoufani, *Al-Riddah and the Muslim Conquest of Arabia*. 56

⁴⁰ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*. 84

⁴¹ M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History, A New Interpretation: AD 600-750*, vol. 1, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971). 60

two caliphs rather than exercising their own judgement when the situation called for it.⁴² Ali refused on the grounds that he would not be afforded power to enact more serious social change; Uthman, the more conservative candidate, was happy to rule over the status quo.⁴³

The caliphate of Umar saw massive expansion into non-Arab lands, such as the Byzantine Levant, the Maghreb and Persia, the conquest of the latter concluding under Uthman; as more and more non-Arabs and non-Muslims joined the growing *Rashidun* polity, power continued to coalesce into the hands of a small clique of largely Umayyad leaders, owing to Uthman's own Umayyad affiliation. Charges of nepotism soon became inescapable, Iraq, whose garrison towns had become strongholds of discontented non-Qurayshis known as the *muqatila* ('warriors'),⁴⁴ faced a key issue when it came to the distribution of land; while the cities were populated largely by soldiers who were responsible for pushing the borders of Islam outwards, the *sawad* (the 'black soil', the fertile lands of rural Iraq surrounding major population centre) were largely the property of a few wealthy landowners; the native 'Nabataean' peasantry of the *sawad* were even worse off than the citizenry of the garrison towns, as they were legally allowed to be sold into slavery by their Arab Muslim neighbours.⁴⁵ Thus, Iraq was said to have become the "Garden of Quraysh" (other sources also refer to it as "The Garden of the Umayyads"),⁴⁶ owing to its agricultural riches being funnelled largely into the hands of landowners and governors appointed by Uthman from within his inner circle; Sa'id ibn al-As, governor of Kufa and cousin of Uthman, even boasted of Iraq as such.⁴⁷ These problems were exacerbated by the problem of immigration; in spite

⁴² Abbas, *The Prophet's Heir*. 116-117

⁴³ Shaban, *Islamic History, A New Interpretation: AD 600-750*. 61-63

⁴⁴ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*. 83

⁴⁵ Husam Quam El-Samarraie, 'Agriculture in Iraq During The 3rd Century, A.H.' (Doctoral Thesis, London, University of London, 1970). 85

⁴⁶ Abbas, *The Prophet's Heir*. 119

⁴⁷ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*. 84

of the existing issues with the division of land and resources, the *Rashidun* caliphs saw fit to let immigration into the province largely unchecked. In contrast, Syria, the seat of Umayyad power, remained off-limits to immigration, officially due to its status as a 'march' border province against the Byzantine empire.⁴⁸

As Abu Bakr had claimed that the Quraysh were uniquely qualified to lead the Arabs and subsequently the Muslims, Uthman believed that the Umayyads were uniquely qualified to lead the Quraysh, and he consistently defended his familial patronage by arguing that love of family fell within the bounds of Islam. In one account given in the , after having been asked why he did not continue the meritocratic policies of his predecessors, he stated that "Abu Bakr and Umar sought reward in the hereafter by withholding from their kin, and I seek reward by giving to my kin."⁴⁹ Even the conquests of the *Rashidun*, which had initially proven to be a blessing in staving off discontent as loot was doled out amongst the broader population, eventually became a liability as they stalled, with the smaller portions of loot being distributed to ever smaller portions of the population within the Umayyad network of tribal loyalties.⁵⁰

Initially, Ali continued his quietist attitude that he had maintained under Abu Bakr and Umar, but as Uthman's program of distributing what was previously public property to his family and supporters, Ali soon became a more vocal critic of Uthman's government, launching a public protest in the mosque of Medina and warning that if Uthman continued to distribute the wealth of the community arbitrarily, he would be stopped by force. Just as Uthman used his power to lavish and empower his allies, he was equally willing to use it to

⁴⁸ Shaban, *Islamic History, A New Interpretation: AD 600-750*. 74

⁴⁹ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*. 81

⁵⁰ Kennedy, *The Caliphate*. 25

punish and sideline his detractors, and he chose to respond to Ali's protest by having his subordinates beat Ammar ibn Yasir, a close ally of Ali who had joined his protest. The division of land and wealth was also used punitively, as in the case of Aisha, who saw her pension reduced as a result of her criticising Uthman.⁵¹

Another major rift occurred around 647, when Uthman chose to exile Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, a prominent recusant and critic of the elite of Uthman's caliphate, from Medina to Damascus, after al-Ghifari had criticised the distribution of war booty amongst Uthman's allies.⁵² While in Damascus, he railed against the excesses of the ruling class and thus incurred the wrath of Muawiya, governor of Syria, kinsman of Uthman and future caliph, who then had him exiled back to Medina.⁵³ Finally, Uthman, who grew increasingly frustrated with Abu Dharr's criticism of his rule and his partisanship of Ali and after allegedly trying and failing to bribe him, saw fit to exile Abu Dharr and his family to a small desert town on the edge of Madina, forbidding anyone from speaking with him.⁵⁴ Ali chose to defy this ruling, meeting with Abu Dharr and sending him off from Medina, which caused a dispute with Uthman; Abu Dharr ultimately perished in the desert in 652.⁵⁵

In the final few years of Uthman's caliphate, Ali's prediction about the failure to address grievance leading to the use of force became a reality; whether Ali supported the increasing violence of Uthman's opposition is questionable, but it is certain that Ali was many of these protestors' preferred candidate for caliph.⁵⁶ In 655, a group of *qurra* blocked the

⁵¹ Abbas, *The Prophet's Heir*. 120

⁵² Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj Al-Balāgha*, vol. 8. 256-258

⁵³ J. Robson, 'Abū Ḍharr', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 24 April 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/abu-dharr-SIM_0173.

⁵⁴ Yasin T. Al-Jibouri, *Nahjul-Balagha: Path of Eloquence* (Author House, 2013). 518

⁵⁵ Robson, 'Abū Ḍharr'. *Encyclopedia of Islam*

⁵⁶ Veccia Vaglieri, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib'. *Encyclopedia of Islam*

aforementioned Sai'd ibn al-As from entering Kufa, and demanded that Uthman appoint their own choice, a man by the name of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, as the new governor.⁵⁷ Across other provinces such as Egypt, similar conflicts over the distribution of land and wealth flared up throughout the newly established empire, and a general feeling of resentment towards Syrian and Umayyad hegemony prevailed among many of the sectors that made up the primary base of the proto-Shi'ite movement. Eventually, disaffected Egyptians and Iraqis marched on Medina and murdered Uthman in 656.⁵⁸

3.4: Ali's caliphate, the failure of land reform and the rise of dynastic politics

With the killing of Uthman, the Islamic world fell into disarray, as while Umar had been assassinated by a single Persian slave fulfilling a personal grudge, the proverbial 'lone wolf' of modern terrorist attacks, Uthman had been killed by a coordinated group of agitators with clear political grievances and a *raison d'être* beyond a simple killing; by all accounts they had planned to acclaim Ali as their leader, and according to some more conspiratorial accounts, he had conspired with them to have Uthman at the very most deposed, in spite of reports of his efforts to deescalate both Uthman and the protestors from violence.⁵⁹ In some accounts, Ali is slow to accept the role of caliph on account of fearing to appear complicit; in others, he rushes to the role to ensure that Talha ibn Ubayd Allah, a rival claimant and prominent member of the *muhajirun* did not usurp it; in either narrative, he does not occupy the role without immediately facing opposition from a triumvirate representing the last gasp of *muhajirun* hegemony, that of the aforementioned Talha, his

⁵⁷ Shaban, *Islamic History, A New Interpretation: AD 600-750*. 68

⁵⁸ Kennedy, *The Caliphate*. 25

⁵⁹ Veccia Vaglieri, "Alī b. Abī Ṭālib". *Encyclopedia of Islam*

associate al-Zubayr and Ali's long-time rival Aisha bint Abu Bakr, daughter of the first caliph.⁶⁰

These tensions soon flared up to the point where Ali soon met the three on the battlefield in December 656 in what is known as the Battle of the Camel. The triumvirate opposing Ali was initially joined by a host of pro-Umayyad rebels led by Uthman's son Aban ibn Uthman; this support vanished after much of the Umayyad partisans realised that the goal of the uprising was to install either Talha or al-Zubayr to the position of caliph rather than one of their own.⁶¹ The remainder were defeated in the matter of a few hours, with Talha and al-Zubayr killed and Aisha forced into obscurity.⁶² Having dispatched this early opposition, the rest of Ali's reign was occupied with the twin issues of reforming the society he saw as going awry, and dealing with those who wished to see Uthman's murder avenged, and more pressingly, saw Ali as culpable.

The relative ease with which Ali staved off this threat to his authority, contrasted with the crisis that would define the rest of his reign, is a clear demonstration that while the rule of Abu Bakr and Umar may have seen the *muhajirun* given major privileges relative to the rest of the Islamic population, they paled in comparison to how Uthman had empowered the Banu Umayya. The general scholarly consensus is that Ali's support came primarily from those who had been sidelined during the preceeding caliphates, principally the *qurra* of Kufa, the *ansar* of Medina, the tribes that had initially sided against Abu Bakr in the *Ridda* wars, and the *muqatila*, a faction sometimes collectively known as the *Shi'at Ali* (Party of Ali) or *Ahl al-Iraq* (People of Iraq), in contrast to the main threat to Ali's rule, Syrian governor

⁶⁰ Gleave, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib'. Encyclopedia of Islam

⁶¹ Khalil Athamina, 'Abān b. 'Uthmān b. 'Affān', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 1 December 2007), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/aban-b-uthman-b-affan-SIM_0240.

⁶² Kennedy, *The Caliphate*. 31

Muawiya's *Shi'at Muawiya* or *Ahl al-Sham* (People of Syria).⁶³ Daftary argues that Ali was essentially powerless in the face of provincial opposition;⁶⁴ Shaban offers the more charitable position that he managed some success despite it, while maintaining that the disparate coalition he had brought together out of a shared opposition to Uthman may have had just as much of a detrimental effect in the long term;⁶⁵ even in the end, however, he describes Ali's caliphate as a "pathetic failure."⁶⁶

During Ali's term as caliph, the main administrative concern was breaking up the clusters of privilege that had formed throughout the Islamic world under the previous three governments of Abu Bakr, Umar and especially Uthman. Part of this was certainly religiously motivated; by all accounts, Ali was a dedicated Muslim who often advocated for governance in accordance with Islamic precepts where his predecessors instead opted to hew to pre-Islamic principles or more *realpolitik* inflected decisions. During the reign of Uthman, he demanded that Uthman's brother Al-Walid ibn Uqba, whom Uthman had appointed to the governorship of Kufa, be punished for drinking via lashing as mandated in Islamic law, and he allegedly inflicted the whipping himself.⁶⁷ This puritanical approach afforded him much support among those who had converted to Islam out of a genuine sense of belief; however, for those who converted in the face of Muhammad's victory over Mecca, Ali's insistence that religious belief ought to trump tribal prestige was a source of resentment.

In a far more contentious instance of this insistence, a notable episode during the opening year of the caliphate of Uthman saw a dispute over the punishment of Ubayd Allah ibn

⁶³ Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam*. 31

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 30

⁶⁵ Shaban, *Islamic History, A New Interpretation: AD 600-750*. 72-73

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 178

⁶⁷ Veccia Vaglieri, "Alī b. Abī Ṭālib". *Encyclopedia of Islam*

Umar, Umar's son. In the aftermath of his father's assassination, Ubayd Allah had sought to inflict revenge on Abu Lu'lu'a Firuz, the slave who had killed his father; as Firuz had killed himself immediately after killing Umar, Ubayd Allah instead killed al-Hurmuzan, a Persian convert to Islam who had counselled Umar on Persian affairs, along with a Christian by the name of Jufayna and Firuz's daughter, and had allegedly expressed a desire to kill all the non-Arabs he could find in Medina. While most of the Muslim community believed that Ubayd Allah had committed murder, not a rightful revenge killing, Uthman chose to pardon him and resettle him in Syria in exchange for blood money, a decision Ali had found especially contentious, promising to revoke Uthman's pardon if he had the authority to do so.⁶⁸ True to his word, one of his first acts as caliph once he was established in Kufa was to revoke Ubayd Allah's pardon, which in principle meant Ali was now obligated to kill him, to which Ubayd Allah responded by fleeing to Syria; Ali's opponents finding refuge in this province would be a recurring theme that would end up proving destructive for his authority.⁶⁹

Outside of these religious motivations, Ali had more pressing material reasons for pursuing a system of government that appealed to the disaffected, as they had been the primary faction to shore up his shaky claim to power. In terms of economic policy, Ali attempted to govern in a manner he felt was in accordance with both the core message of Islam and the manner in which Muhammad governed Medina; this happened to appeal to those who had felt marginalised by the more patronage-inflected policies of Ali's predecessors.⁷⁰ This meritocratic ideal was often far more based on services to Islam rather than political and

⁶⁸ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*. 69-70

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 209

⁷⁰ Shaban, *Islamic History, A New Interpretation: AD 600-750*. 72-73

administrative ability, but regardless, measures such as opening the treasuries of Medina, Kufa and Basra and distributing their wealth afforded him a certain level of support among the depressed classes writ large.⁷¹

More ambitious policies, however, were set to inevitably cause conflict even among Ali's own supporters. Ali had made it known that he wished to break the monopoly of the 'Garden of Quraysh', distributing the lands of the Iraqi *sawad* more equitably.⁷² Different groups had different understandings of what this meant, and these interpretations were bound to conflict; while the *qurra'*, who had controlled most of the *sawad* prior to Uthman's parcelling out of privileges to his supporters, believed that Ali would simply reconfirm their prior privileges, the *muqatila* believed that Ali would redistribute the land in an equitable way that would inevitably benefit them through their sheer force of numbers. In contrast to Ali's patchwork coalition, Muawiya's was a well-organised army united behind simple objectives; receiving justice for the murder of Uthman, and protecting their entrenched privileges from Ali's 'rabble'. When the two eventually met on the battlefield at Siffin, the conflict simmered at a low level for months, where the Battle of the Camel had taken hours. Both sides skirmished with small parties of warriors, until eventually both sides agreed to arbitration; while Muawiya's faction appointed the prominent Qurayshi Amr ibn al-As as their representative, Ali's coalition ultimately ended up settling on the *qurra's* choice of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, against the wishes of Ali. Amr entered with a key set of demands on behalf of his coalition, while Abu Musa attempted to extract privileges for the *qurra'*; when this failed, the *qurra'* abandoned Ali. When this failed, they abandoned Ali, becoming the first

⁷¹ Veccia Vaglieri, "Alī b. Abī Ṭālib". Encyclopedia of Islam

⁷² *ibid.*

generation of Kharijites.⁷³ This dissident faction, who would ultimately assassinate Ali in 661, believed that any Muslim, regardless of origin, was qualified via sufficient piety to the office of caliph; they also believed that any non-pious Muslim was a *takfiri*, worthy of death.⁷⁴

While the Kharijite model, with its emphasis on meritocracy and equality may have hypothetically been more appealing than Shi'ism to a broader swathe of the Islamic underclass, a combination of self-destructive sectarianism and an insular mindset constantly directed into violent hostility meant that the Kharijites typically only thrived in the fringes of Islamic society; the arid highlands of Iran, the deserts of the Arabian peninsula and the mountains of North Africa.⁷⁵ Patricia Crone relays an anecdote demonstrating how the restrictive legalism of the movement could often become paralytic:

*“When Nadja ibn Amir, founder of the Najdiya group of Kharijites, did various things of which his followers disapproved they demanded that he repent, which he did. But then a group of them regretted having asked him to repent and told him: “We were wrong to ask you to repent for you are an imam. We have repented of it so now you should repent of your repentance and demand that those who asked you to repent should repent of having done so. If you don’t, we will separate from you.” So he went out and announced to the people that he repented of his repentance. His followers then began to quarrel among themselves.”*⁷⁶

⁷³ Shaban, *Islamic History, A New Interpretation: AD 600-750*. 72

⁷⁴ Kennedy, *The Caliphate*. 38-43

⁷⁵ Shaban, *Islamic History, A New Interpretation: AD 600-750*. 76-77

⁷⁶ Kennedy, *The Caliphate*. 40

To bring up a point in advance to demonstrate a contrast between the failure of the Kharijites to secure wider support when compared to the Qarmatians, a key point of Qarmatian and more broadly *ghulat* theology was antinomianism, or the suspension of key precepts of Islamic law. Sunni opponents claimed that this dispensation was due to licentiousness and loose morals;⁷⁷ these groups stated instead that the *batin* (inner truth) for why these laws had to be followed had been revealed, and as such, they no longer applied, as those with said inner knowledge could now act in the spirit of said laws as opposed to the letter of them.⁷⁸ In contrast to the stifling legalism of the Kharijites, antinomianism provides an attractive model of living, especially for populations such as the Christian Nabataeans of Iraq and the Persians of Iran, who had been previously unaccustomed to living under the strictures of Islamic law.

The conflict between Shi'ism and Kharijite beliefs ultimately mattered little; both factions had been completely outmanoeuvred by the proto-Sunni elite. After promising the caliphate to Ali's son Hasan ibn Ali after his death, Muawiya reneged on the promise and appointed his son Yazid as his heir instead.⁷⁹ Yazid proceeded to slaughter Husayn ibn Ali, Ali's other son and the last Shi'i claimant to seriously attempt to undermine their rule at Karbala in 680. While a group of regretful supporters of Husayn went on to start a revolt known as the *tawwabin*, seeking to atone for not sufficiently supporting Husayn in his time of need through direct action, they were quickly crushed by the Umayyad army.⁸⁰ With this, the Shi'a movement ceased to be politically active, as it was under Ali and his sons, and

⁷⁷ Wilferd Madelung and Heinz Halm, 'Ḥamdān Qarmat', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 1 September 2016), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/hamdan-qarmat-COM_30252.

⁷⁸ Paul E. Walker, 'Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 1 July 2021), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/muhammad-b-ismail-COM_36626.

⁷⁹ Wilferd Madelung, 'ḤOSAYN B. 'ALI i. LIFE AND SIGNIFICANCE IN SHI'ISM', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (New York: Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, 2012), <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hosayn-b-ali-i>.

⁸⁰ Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam*. 33

retreated into the realm of religion, with followers seeking the guidance of Alid imams who otherwise remained demure to Umayyad and later non-Shi'ite governance.⁸¹ Occasionally, Alid dynasts and their partisans would attempt to challenge Sunni rule, as the Zaydi imams and Kaysanites had. However, Muawiya's family, the Umayyads, would continue to rule over a united Islamic polity for the next century.⁸²

The Umayyads would continue their project of centralising power over the 8th century, but several of their policies, especially the police of *mawla*, in which non-Arabs would be attached to Arab tribes as subordinate 'clients', proved to be deeply unpopular with the non-Arabs who soon greatly outnumbered the Arab elite; in some cases, converts to Islam were taxed as if they had never converted at all.⁸³ Popular support rallied around a group known as the Abbasids, who claimed descent from the Prophet's uncle Abbas, and promised to bring about the equality of Muslims and restore Alid dignity. In 750, this movement overthrew the Umayyads, initially centring themselves in Kufa, a hotbed of Shi'ism; in fact, they had managed to gain a large amount of support from an endorsement, authentic or otherwise, from the leader of the Hashimiyya, one of the wings of the radical Shi'ite movement known as the Kaysanites, who at the time were largely based in Kufa.⁸⁴

Soon however, the Abbasids purged themselves of Shi'ite elements, most notably in their execution of their most well-known general Abu Muslim, who had become a rallying point of both pro-Persian and pro-Alid sentiment. A notable example of this occurs in the eponymous epic poem *Abu Muslimnameh*, in which Abu Tahir Tusi's Abu Muslim receives aid from Zoroastrians and expresses overlapping senses of tragedy in the Iranian

⁸¹ Khalifa, *The Qarmatians: From Concept to State*. 182

⁸² Shaban, *Islamic History, A New Interpretation: AD 600-750*. 78

⁸³ Kennedy, *The Caliphate*. 75

⁸⁴ Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam*. 38

consciousness; for those still Zoroastrian, it was the triumph of Islam over their religion; for Shi'ites, it was the death of Husayn at Karabla. In the minds of Persian converts to Islam, the two overlapped and blurred together, especially in the personage of Shahrbanu, the daughter of the last Shah of Iran and wife of Husayn, whose death at Karbala inexorably tied Mazdaean-Persian and Shi'ite narratives of oppression together.⁸⁵

While the Abbasids resolved the longstanding tensions between non-Arab *mawla*, especially Persian populations, they failed to provide any restitution to the descendants of Ali and their partisans, who they saw as a direct threat to their legitimacy. With Shi'ite hopes for any substantial change brought up by the Abbasid revolution and consequently crushed, Shi'ite movements once again began to organise politically, with a fresh of grievances against Abbasid authority. In time, these movements organised *da'wah*, missionary efforts coordinated to gain widespread support. From here, the makings of an organised movement took shape.

⁸⁵ Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2003). 136

Chapter 4. The Qarmatian *Da'wah*: Aims, Methods and Influences

4.1: Early Isma'ilism

Isma'ilism, as with many Shi'ite movements, split off from the Twelver line of imams on the succession of Ja'far al-Sadiq, the sixth imam of the traditional Twelver lineage. During his life, Ja'far had apparently appointed his son, Isma'il ibn Ja'far, as the successor to his imamate, via his *nass*.⁸⁶ However, Isma'il passed away before his father, and according to the Twelver account, the line of succession thus passed to Musa al-Kazim, Ja'far's younger son; Twelvers explain this apparent contradiction of God appointing an imam only for them to prematurely die prior to claiming the title through the principle of *bada'*, in which God can 'change his mind' on matters not known by ordinary humans.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, two separate schools of thought known as 'Isma'ilism' emerged. One claimed that Isma'il had not in fact died, but instead was in hiding or occultation; this group was referred to as the 'pure Isma'ilis' by al-Nawbakhti, and they further believed that Isma'il would return as the prophesised *imam* on the day of judgement.⁸⁸ Another group, who al-Nawbakhti refers as the Mubarakhiyya after their chief al-Mubarak, accepted the death of Isma'il, but believed that, instead of the imamate passing from Isma'il to Musa as it had from Hasan to Husayn, it was passed to Isma'il's son Muhammad ibn Isma'il, whose

⁸⁶ Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam*. 106

⁸⁷ Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (SUNY Press, 1981). 153

⁸⁸ al-Hasan ibn Musa al-Nawbakhti, *Shi'a Sects: (Kitab Firqat Al-Shi'a)*, trans. Abbas Kadhimi (ICAS Press, 2007). 123

descendants were at that point, according to the Isma'ili missionaries, in hiding.⁸⁹ The modern Nizari sect traces its roots to this lineage. Representatives of the hidden lineage of Isma'ili imams eventually emerged in the city of Salamiyah in Syria, where they began to operate a sophisticated network of missionaries, the Isma'ili *da'wah*, in order to collect funds on behalf of their imam and spread the Isma'ili movement, especially among disaffected Twelver Shi'ites unhappy with the political quietism of their sect.⁹⁰ From this lineage, the Qarmatian movement would also arise.

4.2: Early Qarmatianism: The Initial Split between *Dawlat* and *Daw'ah*

Out of the initial Isma'ili movement based in Salamiyah, a distinct current, initially led by *da'i* Hamdan Qarmat and his close aide Abdan ibn al-Rabit, began to emerge, which in 899 would split off from the primary 'Fatimid' *da'wah* after refusing the authority of the first Fatimid caliph Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi Billah,⁹¹ and take on the position that the line of imams ended with Muhammad ibn Isma'il, who was also the final prophet, the *Mahdi*, and *al-Qa'im*, a messianic figure destined to restore the family of the Prophet to their rightful position. They further believed that Ali ibn Abi Talib had taken on Muhammad's prophethood after the events of Ghadir Khumm via the aforementioned principle of *bada'*, and that prophethood had returned to Earth via the personage of Muhammad ibn Isma'il, the final prophet in a chain of seven, who was in the land of the Romans and imminently about to return.⁹²

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 124

⁹⁰ Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam*. 110

⁹¹ Heinz Halm, 'Al-Jannābī, Abū Sa'īd', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 1 March 2018), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/al-jannabi-abu-said-COM_32748.

⁹² al-Nawbakhti, *Shi'a Sects*. 127

Hamdan Qarmat was one of the earliest Isma'ili missionaries, so many subsequent Isma'ili movements were labelled as Qarmatian by non-Shi'ites; however, the difference between Qarmatian and 'Qarmatian' movements can be made by examining whether a given community repudiated the claim of Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi Billah.⁹³ Within this network of opposition, however, several fractional sects existed, and it should be noted that discussions of individual Qarmatian movements do not necessarily reflect standardised practice. Indeed, Shaban notes that this was both a blessing and a curse for Shi'ite movements, as while this sectarianism often precluded any sort of real cooperation between the various strains of Shi'ism, it allowed movements to emerge that were tailored for the regions they proselytised within, allowing for a dynamic approach to dealing with regional issues.⁹⁴ This also meant that missionaries were free to tailor the message of their movement to the prior religious convictions and concerns of their regional audiences.⁹⁵

The most notable aspect of the Qarmatian current is its open political activism and efforts to not only reorganise communities upon egalitarian lines, but to petition existing leadership structures under Abbasid governance to address community grievances alongside actions hostile to the state such as caravan raids and skirmishes with caliphal armies, even making rapprochement with existing authorities when the opportunity arose; this was especially apparent in the periods of détente in the Jannabid period of Bahraini Qarmatianism. If we are to view the Qarmatians in modern terms, as Tim Mackintosh-Smith does when he refers to them as the "loony left of the Isma'ilis",⁹⁶ there were periods when the Qarmatians were

⁹³ Wilferd Madelung, 'Ḳarmaṭī', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 24 April 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/karmati-COM_0451.

⁹⁴ Shaban, *Islamic History*. 129

⁹⁵ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 3rd edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). 89

⁹⁶ Tim Mackintosh-Smith, *Arabs: A 3,000-Year History of Peoples, Tribes and Empires*, 1st edition (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 2019). 310

seeking reform, not revolution, a fact often overshadowed by the extreme actions taken by the Bahraini sect under the leadership of the Jannabids, such as their raids on Iraq, assaults on overland *hajj* pilgrimage routes, and eventual assault on Mecca in 930.

While conventional Isma'ili *da'is* would spread the word of the Imam of the Time and collect taxes and tribute in their name in order to facilitate their inevitable ascension to leadership, *da'is* operating under the Qarmatian model would instead reorganise communities from their foundation, instituting measures such as communal property, financial aid and a system of rapprochement between heterogenous settled populations and Bedouin nomads.⁹⁷ The actual theological gap between the Fatimid Isma'ilis and the Qarmatians also demonstrates the difference between the priorities of the two movements; while the lineage that followed the living imams focused on paving the way for them to take temporal power, the Qarmatians, whose imam was a distant figure either in hiding or occultation, focused on paving the way for a utopia in which their imam could take power. Daftary discusses this period as one of *dawla* (dynasty) and *da'wah*; as the mainline Fatimids established their realm in North Africa, their focus moved from aggressive missionary activity to a more internal 'state-building' project, and the empowerment of the *dawla*. In the case of the Qarmatians, the focus was primarily on *da'wah*, bringing the message to as many receptive populations as possible.⁹⁸

4.3: Qarmat and Abdan in Iraq: Christianity and Communalism

Qarmat's own origins give an indication as to who the Qarmatian message appealed to; in some accounts, he is described as an 'Aramean' or 'Nabataean', terms which were

⁹⁷ Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*. 245-248

⁹⁸ Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*. 141

interchangeable in the Abbasid era of chronicling, usually referring to the native inhabitants of southern Iraq, who had largely followed Syriac Christianity prior to Arab conquest.⁹⁹ In other reports, he is an Iranian.¹⁰⁰ Regardless, he was an outsider to the dominant Arab ruling class, and his missionary program was aimed at mobilising those outside of that class accordingly.¹⁰¹ While Shi'ism had deep roots in Iraq, especially in Kufa, the provisional capital of Ali's caliphate, Qarmat worked to proselytise his message among the poor indigenous inhabitants of the south of Iraq, whose presence preceded the arrival of Islam, and indeed whose lives had in some cases had been made worse by it, as seen in the aforementioned ruling of Umar that Muslims were entitled to sell their Nabataean neighbours as slaves in times of financial hardship.

In the account of al-Tabari, we see a missionary effort whose theology was tailored for a Christian audience, lending credence to a Nabataean origin for Qarmat. In Tabari's chronicle of Qarmat's initial organisation of his *da'wah*, he quotes Hamdan as saying to his twelve delegates that "[they were] like the apostles of Jesus, son of Mary." Phillip M. Fields, translator of Tabari, notes that an Islamic model for a system of twelve deputies existed in the account of Muhammad, who sent twelve people ahead of him on his *hijra* to Medina; furthermore, the Qur'an spoke of the twelve heads of the Banu Israel, making Qarmat's choice to consciously evoke a Christian model far more indicative of a conscious effort to appeal to a Christian audience.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Wilferd Madelung, 'ḤAMDĀN QARMAṬ', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, 6 March 2012), <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hamdan-qarmat->.

¹⁰⁰ Mackintosh-Smith, *Arabs*. 309

¹⁰¹ Jon Armajani, *Dynamic Islam: Liberal Muslim Perspectives in a Transnational Age* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004). 67

¹⁰² Fields, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 37 The 'Abbasid Recovery*. 171

Other Isma'ili missionaries also operated within this Christian framework within the Iraqi *sawad*; to quote another report relayed by al-Tabari, a missionary by the name of al-Faraj ibn Uthman claimed to be acting in the name of "the Messiah, who is Jesus, who is the Word, who is the Mahdi, who is Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, who is Gabriel" and that al-Faraj was reportedly named by this Messiah as "...the envoy, ...the evidence, ...the she-camel, ...the beast of burden, ...the Holy Spirit [and] John, son of Zachariah (John the Baptist)."¹⁰³ In a devotional prayer relayed by al-Faraj, which al-Tabari describes as a *sura*, the term used for a chapter of the Qur'an, God is further referred to as the *Logos* (the Word), which was a key concept in both Christianity and Gnosticism.¹⁰⁴

While communicating with prospective converts in the religious vocabulary they had been accustomed to prior to Muslim conquest may have been somewhat effective, what was perhaps far more effective was the manner in which Qarmatian missionaries worked to assuage the material concerns of prospective converts. The rise of Qarmatianism in Iraq coincided with the final years of the Zanj rebellion (869-883), a civil war involving African slaves (*zanj*) and disaffected labourers in the south of Iraq that saw enormous damage to both agricultural and urban infrastructure and casualties reported to have been between 1.5 million (Al-Husri, al-Suyuti) to 2.5 million (Ibn Al-Taqtāqi) in ranging accounts by various chroniclers.¹⁰⁵ The Zanj rebellion was led by a man named Ali ibn Muhammad, who, while

¹⁰³ Wilferd Madelung, 'The Fatimids and the Qarmaṭīs of Baḥrayn', in *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary, 1st edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). 25-27. The various appellations al-Faraj gives to himself are all significant within Islamic and more broadly Abrahamic theology as prefiguring the emergence of prophets (the Holy Spirit with Moses, John the Baptist with Jesus, etc.)

¹⁰⁴ Fields, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 37 The 'Abbasid Recovery*. 174

¹⁰⁵ Robert McKinney, *The Case of Rhyme Versus Reason: Ibn Al-Rūmī And His Poetics in Context* (Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2004). 468-469

mainly choosing to garner support among the *zanj* by invoking Kharijite ideas of equality of races and believers, also attempted to draw Shi'i support by claiming Alid descent.¹⁰⁶

According to al-Tabari, who had heard from a colleague who had spoken to the brother-in-law of the soon to be discussed *da'i* Zakarawayh, Qarmat had actually arranged a meeting with Ali ibn Muhammad, the purpose of which was to create an alliance of their two movements against the Abbasids, with Qarmat apparently promising "one hundred thousand swords" to aid the Zanj war effort.¹⁰⁷ Al-Tabari relays that negotiations broke down due to a difference in religious belief, with Qarmat being the one to refuse the alliance; Daftary believes that instead it was more likely that Ali ibn Muhammad, at the height of his own power, had refused the alliance, not wanting to have to accommodate an alternative belief system into his own.¹⁰⁸

The Qarmatians nevertheless took much inspiration from the Zanj in terms of organisation; one of the key successes of the Zanj movement was their use of fortifications to lock down key waterways and urban centres.¹⁰⁹ Shaban posits that the Qarmatians were directly inspired by Zanj successes when Qarmat organised the construction of a *dar al-hijra*, a place of refuge in Kufa from which the Qarmatian missionary effort was directed in opposition to the Fatimid network in Salamiyah.¹¹⁰ The Zanj rebellion also gave the Qarmatians both a cause to derive support from, that of providing for the needy in the wake of the destruction wrought by the rebellion, and the freedom to do so outside of the bounds of Abbasid control, as the Abbasids had failed to effectively re-establish control outside of their capital

¹⁰⁶ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*, trans. Léon King (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011). 33-41

¹⁰⁷ Fields, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 37 The 'Abbasid Recovery*. 175

¹⁰⁸ Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*. 108

¹⁰⁹ Shaban, *Islamic History*. 101

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, 170

after the twin crises of the Zanj rebellion and the Anarchy at Samarra (861-870), a court conflict which saw the Abbasid leadership effectively become hostages of their Turkic slave soldiers.

In the aftermath of this rebellion, the Qarmatians created a system of missionary work that meant that if they could not win the hearts or minds of the Iraqi peasantry, they could at least win their stomachs. A key precept was the reorganisation of communities along egalitarian lines; according to the account of one traveller, Thabit ibn Sinan, who had supposedly visited the Qarmatian community of Kufa,

"[The missionary imposed] the duty of ulfa (union). This duty consisted of assembling all their goods in one place and enjoying them in common without any one retaining any personal property which might give him an advantage over the others. He assured them that they did not need to keep any property because all the land belonged to them and to no one else.

'That,' he told them, 'is the test by which you are proved so that we may know how you will behave.' He urged them to buy and prepare arms.... The missionaries appointed in each village a trustworthy man to assemble all that the people of the village owned... He clothed the naked and met all their needs, leaving no poor man among them, nor any needy and infirm. Every man worked with diligence and emulation at his task in order to deserve high rank by the benefit he brought. The woman brought what she earned by weaving, the child brought his wages for scaring away birds. Nobody among them owned anything beyond his sword and his arms. When he had established all this and when every one had agreed to conform to it, he ordered the missionaries to assemble all the women on a certain night so

that they might mix indiscriminately with all the men. This, he said, was true mutual friendship and brotherhood."¹¹¹

The allegations of communism of women are a lurid tale, no doubt invented to shock and provoke Thabit's orthodox Sunni audience and are at odds with later accounts of the Qarmatians that indicate that, rather than sexual libertinism, they mostly remained monogamous, at odds with the polygamous standard throughout the rest of the Islamic world.¹¹² Furthermore, women played a prominent role in the Isma'ili and especially the Qarmatian *da'wah* in Iraq; while equally subject to the *qutra* tax of one *dirham* imposed on male Qarmatians, they were equally afforded the right to communal property that tax offered. Furthermore, Al-Tabari makes note of an episode in which a sympathetic maidservant rescued Qarmat from being imprisoned by a landlord who attempted to stop Qarmat from preaching to his labourers.¹¹³ The accounts of communal property and equal division of labour are in harmony with accounts of other Qarmatian and Isma'ili movements, along with older movements outside of the Islamic tradition such as Mazdakism, a Zoroastrian splinter sect that advocated communal property as a means of salvation that had influenced the earlier Persian Khurramite movement.¹¹⁴

4.4: Zakarawayh in Syria and the Bedouin: An Alternative Oppositional Movement

While Qarmat and Abdan worked with the peasantry of Iraq, whose interests were intrinsically tied to the land, another Qarmatian *da'i*, Zakarawayh ibn Mihrawayh (whose given name is often misread as Zikrawayh in many modern texts) was appointed leader of

¹¹¹ Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). 118

¹¹² Fadi Fahes, 'Social Utopia in Tenth Century Islam: The Qarmatian Experiment' (Master's Thesis, California State University Dominguez Hills, 2018). 44

¹¹³ Delia Cortese and Simonetta Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006). 25-26

¹¹⁴ Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*. 203

the Syrian *da'wah* by Abdan.¹¹⁵ Initially, the triumvirate of Hamdan, Abdan and Zakarawayh were three of the most successful missionaries in service of the incipient Isma'ili movement based in Salamiyah; however, in 899, after Qarmat and Abdan chose to split from the Fatimid *da'wah*, Zakarawayh killed Abdan, probably on the orders of the leadership in Salamiyah. Zakarawayh then initially attempted to take control of Abdan's community in Kufa.¹¹⁶ However, owing to Abdan's enormous popularity among converts there even after his murder, Zakarawayh struggled to establish himself.¹¹⁷ Zakarawayh instead chose to take his missionary efforts to Syria, where, like Hamdan and Abdan, he soon split off from Salamiyah;¹¹⁸ while he had made himself an enemy of Qarmat, his movement was nevertheless subsequently described as 'Qarmatian'.¹¹⁹

What is noticeable in Syria is how a Qarmatian movement did not draw upon existing pro-Shi'ite and pro-Alid communities for sources of support, but rather worked to exploit the grievances of groups that had previously found little to support in Shi'ite doctrine, or in the case of the Banu Kalb, had been partisans of the Umayyads, a stridently anti-Shi'ite dynasty.¹²⁰ After the rise of the Abbasids and their Iraqi capital of Baghdad, those who had been privileged members of the Umayyads' *Ahl al-Shams* found themselves disenfranchised, as the military of the Abbasids turned from the Syrian Arabs and their quarrelling *junds* to imported Turkish slave-soldiers.¹²¹ Kennedy sums this shift up by stating that from "the

¹¹⁵ Heinz Halm, 'Zakarawayh b. Mihrawayh', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 24 April 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/zakarawayh-b-mihrawayh-SIM_8092.

¹¹⁶ Heinz Halm, 'ZEKRAWAYH B. MEHRAWAYH', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, 2015), <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/zekrawayh-mehrawayh>.

¹¹⁷ Wilferd Madelung, 'ABDĀN B. AL-RABĪT', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, 15 July 2011), <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/abdan-b-al-rabit-early-ismaili-missionary-dai>.

¹¹⁸ Halm, 'ZEKRAWAYH B. MEHRAWAYH'. *Iranica*

¹¹⁹ Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*. 123

¹²⁰ J. W. Fück and A. A. Dixon, 'Kalb b. Wabara', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 24 April 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/kalb-b-wabara-COM_0426.

¹²¹ Kennedy, *The Caliphate*. 113

dominant Arab race, they became, once again, as they had been before the coming of Islam, the ignorant, uncouth, despised outsiders.”¹²²

The Bedouin had always chafed under the taxes imposed by Islam, the tithe and the *zakat*,¹²³ but under Umayyad rule, they had been afforded relative relief from taxation when compared to the wider population, especially more onerous taxes such as the continuous levying of the *jizya* even after conversion.¹²⁴ In addition, the conquests that had provided the Bedouin a consistent supply of booty under the earlier caliphates had come to a halt under the Abbasids, who were far too occupied with internal instability to push the frontiers of Islam outward,¹²⁵ meaning that for many Bedouin, the only source of consistent revenue was in escorting *hajj* pilgrim caravans across the desert, which only a few tribes were afforded the right to do.¹²⁶

Considering this, Zakarawayh's appeal to the Bedouin of Syria becomes apparent. Rather than promising them salvation in a religious vocabulary familiar to them, or an equality they had been denied under foreign rulers, he instead promised a renewed prosperity for the Bedouin of Syria, especially to the Banu Kalb; they would be powerful as they had been under the Umayyads, and now that they were the 'true' Muslims, they were free to plunder as they had during the periods of pre-Islamic *Jahiliya* and early Islamic conquests, an appeal that transcended sectarian boundaries like Sunnism and Shi'ism. In Zakarawayh's Qarmatianism, we see none of the appeals to community and equality that defined the Iraqi and Bahraini models; instead, this was a sect that promised plunder and little else.

¹²² Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*. 245

¹²³ Tamara Sonn, *Interpreting Islam: Bandali Jawzi's Islamic Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). 144

¹²⁴ Fahes, 'Social Utopia in Tenth Century Islam: The Qarmatian Experiment'. 6-7

¹²⁵ Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*. 245-246

¹²⁶ Beatrice Forbes Manz, *Nomads in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). 64

In spite of this select appeal, the Qarmatians of Syria saw success in their own way; while the uprisings of Iraqi Qarmatians against Abbasid governance amounted to little more than jacqueries,¹²⁷ the Qarmatian movement in Syria was consistently able to rout disorganised Abbasid armies and put settled populations to the sword, without ever ruling over the lands they plundered.¹²⁸ This reticence to conquer and administrate instead of plunder meant that, in spite of their military successes, Syrian Qarmatianism never truly evolved beyond the level of banditry. As such, when the Abbasids were able to organise a sufficient military response to the movement, it was quickly crushed, with Zakarawayh's sons first being defeated in 903 and 904 and Zakarawayh himself falling soon afterwards in 907; his movement did not survive his death.¹²⁹

4.5: The Jannabids in Bahrain: Baharna and Bedouin

While 'Bahrain' in the modern vernacular refers to the Bahrain archipelago, also known as al-Awal, historically, Bahrain was the term used to describe the strip of land in Eastern Arabia from Basra to the Strait of Hormuz, roughly corresponding to the modern borders of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the littoral of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province; this is the Bahrain that will be discussed in this chapter.¹³⁰ Like Iraq, this region had a historically sedentary population that was largely Christian, though along with agriculture, fishing and pearl diving made up a sizeable portion of the region's population.¹³¹ This population was heterogenous relative to the rest of the Arabian peninsula, consisting of an indigenous population of probable Akkadian descent known as the Baharna (this population, like that of Southern

¹²⁷ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*. 89

¹²⁸ Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*. 247

¹²⁹ Halm, 'ZEKRAWAYH B. MEHRAWAYH'. *Iranica*

¹³⁰ G. Rentz and W. E. Mulligan, 'Al-Baḥrayn', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 24 April 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-bahrayn-COM_0089.

¹³¹ Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for Power: The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2007). 42

Iraq, was referred to as Nabataean in mediaeval chronicles, likewise suggesting a Syriac Christian heritage), a Persian population known as the *Ajami* ('foreigners') and, after the expansion of Islam, Arab Bedouin from the Arabian interior.¹³²

The man chosen for the purpose of spreading the Qarmatian *da'wah* in Bahrain was Abu Sa'id al-Jannabi, who, based on his *nisba*, was most likely a Persian from the town of Jannaba, located in the southwest Persian littoral commonly referred to as Fars.¹³³ Initially working in his hometown as a flour merchant, he then moved to the *sawad* of Kufa, where he married into a prominent Isma'ili family, the Bani al-Qassar, and soon came to work under Abdan, who charged him with the *da'wah* in the southwest of Iran in the 870s.¹³⁴ Soon, however, he was forced to go into hiding, and after returning to Iraq, he was appointed by Hamdan Qarmat as a missionary to Bahrain around the turn of the 10th century, where again he initially worked as a flour merchant before he cemented his position as a member of the local community by arranging a marriage with a daughter of the Ibn Sanbar brothers, a prominent local family; soon after, he was appointed as the community's leader.¹³⁵ After Hamdan Qarmat and Abdan ibn al-Rabit split off from Salamiyah, Jannabi made no secret of his opposition to the Fatimid *da'wah*, using his role as leader of the local community to have Abu Zakariyya, a Fatimid loyalist *da'i*, thrown into prison and executed.¹³⁶

¹³² Clive Holes, *Dialect, Culture, and Society in Eastern Arabia*, vol. 1, 3 vols (Brill, 2001). XXIV-XXV

¹³³ B. Carra de Vaux and M. G. S. Hodgson, 'Al-Djannābī, Abū Sa'īd', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 24 April 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-djannabi-SIM_1997.

¹³⁴ Wilferd Madelung, 'ABŪ SA'ĪD JANNĀBĪ', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, 2011), <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-said-jannabi-hasan-b>.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*. 121

Abu Sa'id's *modus operandi* in establishing his *da'wah* was to work as a grain merchant, building up grassroots support and gaining influence among the local population before establishing himself as a leader. This must have doubtlessly gave him an understanding into the importance of meeting the material needs of a community to win support; grain played a major part in the Qarmatian economy, and from the time of Abu Sa'id, the grain and date fields of Bahrain were owned by the Qarmatian leadership, who would distribute the revenue among the people; additionally, the Qarmatian government maintained publicly-owned grain mills, which would ground and distribute grain for the populace free of charge.¹³⁷ Marriage was also a key tactic in the Qarmatian *da'wah*: Qarmat and Abdan themselves were brothers-in-law, and as Abu Sa'id married a daughter of the Bani Qassar in Kufa and a daughter of the Ibn Sanbar brothers in Bahrain, he likewise offered his daughter to the Bani Zarqan in Bahrain, with Cortese and Calderini drawing a direct comparison between the Qarmatian method of using marriage as a tool of alliance building with Muhammad's own success.¹³⁸

As in Syria, a key aspect of Qarmatian success was the ability of the movement to reconcile the grievances of settled and nomadic population and bind them together as the need arose; the settled population, once Christian, now Shi'ite, felt an acute lack of representation from the Abbasid government, while Bedouin populations were increasingly pushed to the fringes of society as Arab culture grew progressively more sedentary, with grazing land and loot becoming increasingly more scarce.¹³⁹ To the settled populations under Qarmatian influence, the Jannabids promised security, both financial and military;

¹³⁷ Madelung, 'Ḳarmaṭī'. Encyclopedia of Islam

¹³⁸ Cortese and Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam*. 24

¹³⁹ Manz, *Nomads in the Middle East*. 64-65

along with the aforementioned distribution of key resources like grain, taxes were abolished, loans were given at zero interest, and the state provided the tools needed for professional immigrants to immediately start plying their trade upon arriving in Bahrain.¹⁴⁰

In order to ensure the security of their agricultural subjects, the Jannabids in Bahrain took a seemingly harsh stance towards the Bedouin of the Arabian interior. They took control of the lands that Bedouin had traditionally used as summer pastures, organising how and when Bedouin tribes could use this grazing land, and would punish them when they refused to cooperate. This belies the fact that the Jannabids relied heavily on the Bedouin for their military and rewarded them as such; Bahrain's strategic position meant that the Jannabids could hold both the Iraqi and Arabian *hajj* routes ransom, allowing them to extract a protection fee from the Abbasids and then plunder them if said fee was withheld; the Bedouin were the primary benefactors of this protection racket-cum-plunder.¹⁴¹

This willingness to plunder as Zakarawayh had belies an important distinction, in that plunder, rather than the goal of the movement, was simply another revenue stream for the Jannabids to enact their utopian ideal, at least under Abu Sa'id. The Bahraini Qarmatians were equally willing to cooperate with Abbasid authorities to ensure the prosperity of their followers; when Abu Sa'id's son Sa'id took power, he entered negotiations with the Abbasids not only to organise trade between the two polities, but also to organise a subsidy for his followers, whom he stressed the poverty of. This policy was short-lived however, as Sa'id was soon replaced by his more militant brother Abu Tahir; it is under him that the infamous violence of the Bahraini Qarmatians took place, with plunder becoming the

¹⁴⁰ Madelung, 'Qarmatī'. Encyclopedia of Islam

¹⁴¹ Manz, *Nomads in the Middle East*. 64-65

primary income stream as it had been under Zakarawayh in Syria, though as the Qarmatian state fragmented in its later period, even Abu Tahir worked to negotiate with existing Abbasid authority.¹⁴² Ultimately in the Bahraini Qarmatian movement, we see a synthesis of the appeal promised by the Iraqi movement to settled populations and that promised to the Bedouin by the Syrian mission.

¹⁴² Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*. 248-249

Chapter 5. Conclusions: The End of the Qarmatians: Crushed or Co-Opted?

In conventional Islamic scholarship, the typical narrative surrounding the 'end' of the Qarmatians coincides with the emergence of a prominent Twelver Shi'ism after the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam (al-Mahdi) in 941 and the conquest of much of Iran and Iraq by the Twelver Buyid dynasty,¹⁴³ followed by the rise of muscular Sunnism under Turkic dynasties such as the Seljuks.¹⁴⁴ As the conventional record goes, the Qarmatians of Bahrain, beset by internal schisms in the wake of a disastrous shift to anti-Islamic Zoroastrianism under a Persian teenager declared Mahdi by Abu Sa'id's son Abu Tahir,¹⁴⁵ eventually fell in 1077 to the Uyunids, a dynasty that either followed Fatimid Isma'ilism or Twelver Shi'ism. Elsewhere, the rest of the scattered Qarmatian communities were gradually crushed or absorbed by other orthodox sects. By all accounts, the continuity of Qarmatian belief had ended by the 12th century.

When searching "Qarmatians" on a modern search engine, such as Google or Youtube, a great deal of results are conspiratorial allegations of a continuity in belief between the Qarmatians who sacked Mecca and the modern Isma'ilis, or even Shi'ites in general. While these claims, rooted in the paranoid style endemic to modern Islamic sectarianism, are incorrect on a factual level, there is some merit to the argument that Qarmatianism

¹⁴³ Richard N. Frye and Khaled M.G. Keshk, 'Būyids', in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics*, Online Edition (Oxford University Press, 2014), <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t342/e0014>.

¹⁴⁴ Usama ibn Munqidh, *The Book of Contemplation: Islam and the Crusades*, trans. Paul M. Cobb (London: Penguin UK, 2008). 5

¹⁴⁵ Cortese and Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam*. 26

precipitated a broader shift in Shi'ite politics, though perhaps not Shi'ite belief, even if such an influence belies a false continuity. More importantly, Qarmatian efforts to bring non-Muslims into the fold via the tenets of *batinyya* and antinomianism proved foundational in laying the groundwork for the Shi'ism espoused by the Qizilbash, the Turkmen of Iran who the Safavids employed in their conquest of Iran, which led to perhaps the most fundamental shift in Shi'ism in the history of Islam.

One often-discussed precipitating factor of the decline of the Qarmatian movement on a macrolevel was due to Fatimid efforts to actively bring Qarmatian communities back into their sphere of influence via their own *da'wah* network. Demographically, this is supported; the majority of Isma'ilis today follow the line of imams established by the Fatimids, with the only surviving major split between the majority Nizari and the minority Musta'li branch taking place along the Fatimid line decades after the Qarmatians disappeared from the historical record.¹⁴⁶ However, the method in which the Fatimids used to bring dissident communities back into the Isma'ili fold was to an extent capitulate to them; Qarmatian mysticism and Neoplatonism was incorporated into the Fatimid ideology, and efforts were made to win over existing Qarmatian *da'is* rather than to compete with them.¹⁴⁷ As such, while many Qarmatian communities became Fatimid, the Fatimids likewise to an extent became Qarmatian.

Qarmatian belief continued among local populations as well. Even after the conquest of Bahrain in 1077 by the Uyunids, who pledged their loyalty to the Fatimid caliphate in Egypt,¹⁴⁸ traveller and Isma'ili *da'i* Nasir Khusraw reported in that the inhabitants of the

¹⁴⁶ Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam*. 124-125

¹⁴⁷ Daftary, 'QARMATIANS'. *Iranica*

¹⁴⁸ Nakash, *Reaching for Power*. 26

region continued to refer to themselves as Abu Sa'idis.¹⁴⁹ Three centuries later, the renowned traveller ibn Battuta wrote that the inhabitants of Qatif were still *ghulat* Shi'ites, despite various periods of Twelver Shi'ite and Sunni rule. *Ghulat* ideas such as those offered by the Qarmatians also continued to enjoy support in regions such as southern Iraq, birthplace of the Qarmatian movement, well into the 15th century, contemporaneous with the Safavid renaissance of Twelver Shi'ism, as seen with the Musha'sha'iyyah of Khuzestan and southern Iraq.¹⁵⁰

While never as organised as they were in Iraq, Syria or Bahrain, Qarmatian *da'is* also proselytised in the north of Iran and Azerbaijan, the same region that proved to be the heartland of the Safavid movement that ultimately reunified Iran; the *ghulat* nature of the early Safavid movement is discussed in several scholarly accounts,¹⁵¹ though it may more likely have antecedents in a pre-Isma'ili *batinyya* movement known as the *Khattabiyya*,¹⁵² though this movement also fed into the Isma'ili movement that the Qarmatians emerged from.¹⁵³ The fact that Qarmatianism had been syncretic in its various other permutations lends credence to the theory that it was yet another contributing factor to the creation of the Qizilbash milieu.

To answer the three questions posed at the beginning of the essay:

¹⁴⁹ Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*. 111

¹⁵⁰ Paul Luft, 'Musha'sha', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 24 April 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/mushasha-COM_0809.

¹⁵¹ Roger M. Savory and Ahmet T. Karamustafa, 'ESMĀ'ĪL I ŞĀFAWĪ', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, 2012), <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/esmail-i-safawi>.

¹⁵² Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, 'KATĪĀBIYA', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, 2013), <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kattabiya>.

¹⁵³ Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, 'ABU'L-KATĪĀB ASADĪ', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, 2011), <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/abul-kattab-mohammad-b>.

1. The primary driving factor in Qarmatian recruitment was dissatisfaction surrounding the division of land and power in the Muslim world. Its primary successes were in areas that had been historically Shi'ite, such as the south of Iraq, but had been left behind by Shi'ism's retreat into religious matters and political quietism.
2. The Qarmatian missionary effort developed in tandem with the mainline Fatimid movement; the primary *da'is* of the movement emerged from and were trained in the Fatimid centre in Salamiyah, and often *da'is* would drift in between the Fatimid and Qarmatian currents of missionary activity, as seen with Hamdan Qarmat and Zakarawayh ibn Mihrawayh. The Fatimid response was to an extent to capitulate to the Qarmatian's success, adopting Qarmatian beliefs into their own and working with rather than competing with Qarmatian missionaries.
3. The Qarmatian missionary effort was syncretic to the extent where Qarmatian belief and practice depended largely on the religious practice of the population prior to the arrival of Qarmatian missionaries. The key Qarmatian beliefs, which were the imminent arrival of a divine Mahdi in waiting, usually Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *batinyya*, the belief in an esoteric truth behind the exoteric appearance in matters such as the Qur'an, antinomianism, a belief that the laws of Islam were no longer to be followed, and communalism, the sharing of goods and property among the people, were often simply transposed onto existing religions such as Christianity or Zoroastrianism. However, these ideas had a lasting impact on populations even after they had been converted to more orthodox branches of Islam, and in Iran, laid the groundwork for the rise of the Safavid dynasty, though the Safavids would eventually turn to orthodox Twelverism in the service of state-building.

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