The Study of the Performance of the First Ismaili State in Yemen

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ABSTRACT

Ismaili Yemeni state emerged about the year 290 AH by two Ismaili demanders called Ali ibn Fadl and Ibn Haushab. The demanders were sent to Yemen in the year 268 AH and their duty was to pave the way for appearance of Promised Mahdi believed by Ismailis. The two soon gained fans and power and created their own local government. The schism occurred in the movement in the year 286 AH led to the emergence of Qarmatian movement which also affected Yemen. Soon Ali ibn Fadl who had relatively higher political and military success in Yemen avoided Obedience from the leaders of the Ismaili religion. He also called on Yemen's supervisor Ibn Haushab. Ibn Fadl was in charge of much guilt which there was doubt the authenticity of some of them. He was killed by the conspiracy. Ibn Haushab died before him. Ibn Fadl was suppressed after the local government. Ibn Haushab government remained, but was suffering from internal disputes and finally the leaders converted into Sunni religion and the Ismailis began to crackdown.

INTRODUCTION

In the third century AH, the Abbasid caliphate was weak because of various reasons and Islamic provinces moved toward autonomy. Yemen was one of these lands. Yemen witnessed emerging of many states in the third century AH.

Due to the weakness of Abbasids in this century religions which were often suppressed by the Abbasid Caliphate, operated again and walked toward gaining political power. Ismailism and Zaidism were two Shiite sects which flourished in such a situation. Both religions founded states in this territory in the third century AH. In Yemen, both religions fought with Sunnies and with each other. In Yemen the hostility between these two Shiite sect was more than the hostility of every each one with the Sunnies.

Yemen in the third century AH

Yemen's territory as part of the Islamic Caliphate in the third century AH was not isolated from the aftermath of the Abbasid Caliphate weakness. Abbasid governors in this century failed to have the effective exercise of power over this land and independent and semi-independent states soon emerged in this territory. Yemen was mountainous and far from the caliphate center, so the caliphs had problems in governing this territory.

The caliphs’ weakness led large Yemeni tribes, such as the Himyarite to claim authority and establish a state. Manakhi was one of these states founded by Himyar tribe ruling from 214 to 292 AH. Mozaikharah was the capital city of this state.

Manakhi was a local state of Yemen; but Yufirid state which was also formed by Himyar tribe ruled over the major part of the Yemen territory. It accepted the nominally suzerainty of Abbasid Caliphate. Yufirid peak of power was during the reign of As'ad ibn Ibrahim (279-333 AH). Yufirid state held power in regions such as Sana'a and Janad from 247 to 393 AH.

Ziyadid dynasty emerged by non-Yemeni factors. Muhammad ibn Ziyad was sent to Yemen in the year 203 AH by caliph al-Ma'mun and won control over Tihamah lowland in western part of Yemen, in the shores of Red Sea. He established the city of Zabid as his capital. Ziyadids soon established a semi-autonomous
government and tried to embellish Zabid. Zabid became important in their life. Ziyadids accepted the nominally suzerainty of Abbasid Caliphate. This state weakened in the late third century AH and although it held power in the fourth century AH it lost its initial power, authority and influence. In the late fourth century AH the mamluks (slaves) took control of this state. The last Ziyadid ruler was killed with them. (409 AH.)

In the region of Sa’d in the year 284 AH the Zaydi Imamate state was formed by Imam al-Hadi ilal Haqq Yahya the descendant of Imam Hassan (AS). He was invited to Yemen by a group of Khawlan tribe (the Khawlan of Sa’d in northern Yemen). He formed a major government in Sa’d. He was the founder of the Zaydi Imamate. This state had its own ups and downs too, and after several interruptions lasted until the late 14th century AH. In fact, many of the Yemeni tribes were bowed to Shi’ism. There were Shia fans among the great tribes such as Hamadan and Khawlan. These trends provided the chance for Zaidi and Ismaili sects to act in Yemen. Imamia sect also have followers in Yemen.

Yemen’s Zaidi and Ismaili states founded in the third century and vied with each other.

Ismaili missionaries in Yemen:

Shiism had roots in Yemen. Perhaps this is one of the main reasons that Isma’ilia has done the propaganda in Yemen. Ismailis tried sending missionaries to different parts of Yemen to seek the followers and supporters. The main missionaries in Yemen were, Ali ibn-Fadl and ibn Haushab. Their mission was initially hidden in Yemen. Ahmad ibn Abdullah ibn Khuleh was the first Ismaili missionary in Yemen. He was in Adanla’a. Yufirid government of Yemen finally identified and arrested him and ibn Khuleh died in prison. Adanla’a was located in Hajjah region. In the third century AH, Adanla’a was thickly populated by the Shiites of Yemen. Ismaili leaders were familiar with the situation in Yemen and so suggested their missionary Ibn Haushab to go to Adanla’a.

The beginning of Ibn Haushab mission in Yemen

He was Hassan ibn Faraj ibn Haushab ibn Zadan. He was from Kufa and it is said that he was a descendant of Aqeel ibn Abi Talib. In the beginning, he was a Twelver Shi’a. He was known as Abu al-Qasim and later Ibn Haushab and he was given the title (epipheta) Mansur al-Yaman. When he got familiar with Ismaili missionaries in Kufa, he converted to this religion. Many Yemeni writers claim that Ibn Haushab visited a man by the name of Mimon Qaddah and accepted his religion, Ismailism. (al-Hammadi al Yamani is among them. He claims that Mimon Qaddah was an enemy of Islam and founded Ismailism to destroy Islam. Of course, this man lived a century earlier, in the second century AH, and was not associated with Ibn Haushab and the Ismailis. What is accurate is that Ibn Haushab converted to Ismailism by one of Kufa missionaries, but it was likely that he met Hussein ibn Ahmad ibn Abdullah the leader of Isma’ilia da’wa at the time.

The beginning of Ibn Fadl mission in Yemen:

Unlike Ibn Haushab, Ali Ibn Fadl was from Yemen and he was from the Himyar tribe. He was also called Khanfiri because he was from Khanfri in Abyan area in the south of Yemen. He was also known as Jayshani because he was also attributed to there. In the beginning he was a follower of Twelver Shiism. In his youth, he went on pilgrimage to Karbala and Imam Hussain ibn Ali (AS) shrine. There he became acquainted with Isma’ili da’wah. Some said that he got familiar with the religion in Yemen and missionaries recognized him.

As Hammadi has quoted, during a pilgrimage to the shrine of Imam Hussain (AS), Ali Ibn Fadl showed intense emotions. It seems that one of the Ismaili missionaries met him in the shrine and spoke with him. Ibn Fadl was affected by this missionary and was converted to the Ismaili sect to invite for the Hidden Imam Mahdi.

A person who in more Yemeni sources was mentioned as the Imam of the Ismaili and was possibly Hussein ibn Ahmad ibn Abdullah the leader of Ismailis at that time made Ibn al-Fadl familiar with Ibn Haushab. He said that they had to go to Yemen and provide the situation for the emergence of the Imam Mahdi since the Ismaili leader believed in Yemen as the place of his appearance.

The two men were ordered about the method of preaching the Ismaili faith. it was said to Ibn Hovshb: “go to Adanla’a, ... our mission appears from there and our government will be in the ascendant from there and our missionaries separate there. He also was ordered to follow the principles of camouflage and interpretation.

Ibn Fadl was ordered to respect Ibn Haushab “because this man is source of knowledge” and he was ordered to accept what Ibn Haushab orders since “he is wiser than you.”

Two missionaries in Yemen:

Ibn Haushab and Ali Ibn Fadl reached Yemen in 268 AH and separated there. Ibn Haushab went to Adanla’a and Ali Ibn Fadl went to south of Yemen. Ibn Haushab went to Adanla’a in a caravan as a Sunni Scholar. Adanla’a was the center of the advertising for Ahmad Ibn Khuleh and the field was ready for his advertisement. He got married with the daughter of Ahmad Ibn Abdullah Khali. Ibn Khuleh died in the prison of Yufirids.
Good speech and knowledge of Ibn Haushab and good relationship with people made people to gather around him and he quickly rose to fame and people of regions such as La`a, Eghyan, Hajjah, Azzan and Boldan al-ayaz in west mountains of Yemen came to him.

The internal conflicts in the Yufirid house since 270 AH provided him a unique opportunity to preach and advertise and since no one bothered him he consolidated his position and ordered the people to pay Zakat (a kind of charitable giving. It was, obligatory for everyone to pay one tenth of his wealth to Ibn Haushab.). So he gained economic power.

After that, he took the fortress of Athr Muharram or Eyn Muharram according to an agreement with Bani Arji (they were among the kings of Hamdan tribe) and established his stronghold and treasury there. This fortress and the Maswar region were located in the north western part of Yemen (Maswar became the stronghold of Ibn Haushab state.). Since then, his invitation`s tendency became more clear and it was known that he is inviting for the promised Mahdi whom Ismailis of the third century AH were awaiting for him. He defeated some of the local lords. He declared that his victories are attributed to his invitations for Mahdi. He expected the arrival of Mahdi from Yemen.

He got some victories in Shavor, Shibam and Kowkaban. His victories caused the leaders of Ismaili dawah to give him the epiphet Mansur al-Yaman and he was responsible for dispatching the missionaries. He dispatched his nephew called Ibn Heytham as the missionary of Sindh. Ibn Haushab sent Abu Muhammad Abdullah ibn Abbas ash-Shavori as the missionary of Egypt. He also dispatched some missionaries to Yamamah, Bahrain and Maghreb. (Abu Abdullah al-Shi`i the Ismaili missionary of Maghreb served an apprenticeship in Yemen in close relationship with Ibn Haushab.)

The second missionary of Yemen, Ali ibn Fadl went to Abyan. At the beginning he built a mosque on a mountain and isolated from people. He spent his time in prayer and other acts of worship. As Hammadi has stated he was fasting during the days and was praying at nights. People were interested in this pious man and they did so, Ibn Fadl went among them. Gradually more and more people accepted his invitation. Then Ibn Fadl sought material power and armed his followers. He established a martial fortress.

He asked his followers to fight with the sinners. His power raised in a short time. In the beginning he attacked Ibn Abi Ala` ruler of Lahij and Abyan in south Yemen and allied with Jaafar ibn Ahmad al-Manakhi against Ibn Abi Ala` and the two allies defeated him. But the alliance didn`t last a long time and they began to fight against each other. In 292 AH, Ibn Fadl defeated and killed al-Manakhi.

The victories gave him power and he stated Mozaikharah as his capital city. Ibn Fadl took Sana`a in Muharram 293 AD. Asa`d ibn Ibrahim from Yufirid house was the ruler of Sana`a at that time. The conquest of Sana`a was a great success and Ismaili leaders got happy. This victory was very valuable and consolidated the Ismaili position in Yemen. Of course, Ibn Fadl behavior changed, too.

In fact, Ibn Fadl who once was always praying, became cruel and showed violent behavior and had a lot of wars in Yemen. It has been said that he sacked Sana`a and killed people in the captured city and it is said that he gradually violated Islamic law (Shari`ah). Soon he quarreled his colleague Ibn Haushab who was the main missionary of Yemen. Many of the historians believe that his initial worships and prayers were plans for tricking people.

The conflict of two missionaries:

After conquering Sana`a, two missionaries met in Shibam. At this time, some conflicts emerged. Yemeni authors wrote that in this meeting, Ali ibn Fadl respected Ibn Haushab and called him a sword of his swords. However, Ibn Haushab was worried about his behaviour since he saw some fearless acts of him. In an interpretation, it has been said that Ibn Haushab called Ibn Fadl as mutinous.

In the year 299 AH Ali ibn Fadl dominance was secured in Sana`a and As`ad ibn Ibrahim settled his disputes with him and they compromised on the acceptance of As`ad to rule as a subject of Ibn Fadl in Sana`a and no longer mention the Abbasid caliph`s name in the Friday Khutbah. This success made Ali ibn Fadl more powerful. He was no longer obedient to Ibn Haushab. Also he had no obligation to follow Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi Billah the Ismaili imam and Fatimid caliph (Ubayd Allah supported by missionary Abu Abdullah al-Shi`i founded the Fatimid caliphate in Ifriqya in the year 297 AH. In 299 AH, he publicized his rebellion against al-Mahdi and also wanted Ibn Haushab to obey him.

It is well known that Ibn Haushab asked him to avoid this behavior. Ibn Haushab remembered his promises and covenants with Ismaili leader. He wrote to Ibn Fadl that: “How can we mutiny against someone whom everything we have is attributed to his blessings” and Ibn Fadl answered: “ this world is a sheep; everyone who takes it, would devours it”. Ibn Fadl wanted Ibn Haushab to obey him and threatened him to be ready for war if he did not obey him. So, the fight between the two missionaries started and Ibn Fadl attacked Ibn Haushab and defeated him in Shibam and surrounded him for 8 months but Ibn Haushab did not surrender. Finally, Ibn
Haushab sent one of his sons as the hostage to Ibn Fadl and the later ends the encirclement. Ali ibn Fadl freed the hostage after a year and sent him back to his father respectfully.

The reasons of conflict of the two missionaries:
Their quarrel and conflict had some reasons:
- Some historians see Ali ibn Fadl as somebody who wanted independence and was high-flying. In their point of view he looked for unity of Yemen under his state and ending the local political entities and religious struggles.
- Ismailis were divided in the year 286 AH and among them emerged a group called Qarmatians who rebelled against Imam Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi. Ibn Fadl tended to this movement.
- Firouze one of the mutinous servants of Imam Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi went to Yemen and encouraged Ibn Fadl against Imam.
- Some authors have written that Ibn Fadl wanted to have a revolution and free the farmers from the lords. Ibn Haushab and many of the other aristocrats of Yemen disagreed with him.

The end of the first Ismaili state in Yemen:
Conflict and fight of two missionaries caused the weakness of Ismailism in Yemen. Ibn Haushab stayed in Maswar after the war and made his best to insure the survival of the first Ismaili State in Yemen. He passed away in 302 AH. Some authors wrote that he was alive until 331 or 332 AH, so he lived a long life. But Ibn Fadl died in 303 AH in a questionable way.

After the death of Ibn Fadl, his son Alfa’fa’ ascended the throne. He was not strong and the events were not in favour of Ibn Fadl state. As’ad ibn Ibrahim the protégée of Ibn Fdl in Sana’a used the disability of alfa’fa’ and people’s and authorities dissatisfaction of Ibn Fadl government and internal strife among the Ismailis in Yemen. He became independent and then attacked the Mozaiharah seat of Ibn Fadl state with the support of those tribes who gathered around him. He besieged Mozaiharah for one year and finally conquered it in Rajab 304 AH and destroyed the state of Ibn Fadl. After this event, Zaidi Imam an-Nasir Ahmad ibn Yahya the son and the second successor of Imam al-Hadi ilal Haqq Yahya fought with Ismailis of Maswar (the state of Ibn Haushab) and defeated the Ismailis of Maswar decisively in the battle of Nughash in 307 AH.

Furthermore, after Ibn Haushab death, a succession crisis occurred in Maswar. The Fatimid caliph appointed Abdullah ibn Abbas ash-Shavori the previous missionary of Egypt as the new Ismaili missionary of Yemen and ruler of Maswar and this angered Hasan the son of Ibn Haushab, who considered himself more suitable to this position. Hasan assassinated ash-Shavori in a suitable moment and ascended the throne. He soon declared his conversion to the Sunni sect of Islam among the heads of tribes. It was said that people were happy with the conversion and respected him.

Hasan suppressed the Ismailis and began to write letters to the Abbasid Caliph. He himself was assassinated in a conspiracy and then Ibrahim ibn Abdulhamid al-Himyari who has been called Ibrahim at-Tebaii took the power. He also converted to Sunni denomination and suppressed Ismailis. So, Ismailis in Yemen changed into small groups living in secret and some emmigrated from Yemen. Abdullah ibn Abbas ash-Shavori was the lord of Maswar and the missionary of Fatimid caliphs. After him, other Ismaili missionaries acted secretly in Yemen. Their lives was put in danger if their identity was revealed. Finally, in 439 AH, Ali ibn Muhammad as-Sulayhi emerged and the hiding period of Ismailis in Yemen (this hiding period occurred after the collapse of their first state).

Conclusion:
The state of Ismailis in Yemen emerged as the result of the activities if two missionaries: Ibn Haushab and Ali ibn Fadl; but they soon entered in a period of strife. The conflicts inside the Ismaili denomination, the ambitions of Ibn Fadl and dissatisfaction about al-Mahdi behavior created this condition. The first state of Ismailis in Yemen after two missionaries declined very quickly and the local authorities took power again and revived. So, the Ismaili movement in Yemen at the time of two missionaries did not consolidate and did not take root. The local states that replaced the first Ismaili state suppressed this sect and prevented their revival for a century. The cruelties of Ibn Fadl and the hatred of the Qarmatian deeds in the Islamic world created an atmosphere in which the suppression of Ismailis in 4th century AH Yemen became possible. However, the events of the fifth century AH showed that Ismailis still had some influence and power in Yemen and this influence although limited helped them to found a great state such as-as-Slayhid dynasty.

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