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Sijilmásiyah and Tafiilet

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the elevation of 22,000 feet was reached, he began to feel discomfort from reduced pressure; but he had provided for this contingency by taking up with him a large steel cylinder of compressed oxygen fitted with a tube for breathing through, and thus he was able to rise without serious discomfort until the altitude of 31,300 feet, which was reached at 12.49. The sky was clear and of a pale blue; the temperature had fallen to -54° Fahr. Descending slowly, he reached the ground safely in three hours. His experience seems to show that with suitable precautions higher ascents may safely be made, and the use of compressed oxygen in mountaineering above 20,000 feet suggests itself as a possible aid to alpinists.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Sijilmásiyah and Tafilet.

MR. WALTER B. HARRIS, in his paper "A Journey to Tafilet," in the current number of the *Geographical Journal*, gives some very interesting particulars respecting ancient Sijilmásiyah (which he writes "Sijilmassa") and its ruins, which he visited; and he supposes that that must have been the former name by which Tafilet was known. He says (p. 334): "It is in the district of Wad Ifi that the ruins of the city of Sijilmassa are situated. . . . The place must at one time have been a very large city, though but little remains now but crumbling ruins, with a mosque and minaret in tolerable repair, and a half-ruined bridge over the Wad Ziz. . . . Although the name Sijilmassa is used, the common term for the ruins is Medinat el-Aamra. . . . The date of the founding of Sijilmassa is difficult to gather, for, probably long before the town was built, there was a Berber colony there; but the period of its destruction is better known," etc.

I have quite recently met with much information respecting this very ancient place—the name of which, as I have written it, is, in the original Arabic

سِجْلَمَاسِيَه—in writing an account of the rise of the Ubaidian, or Isma'ilian, or Fatimite dynasty of Misriyah, or Egypt, which first rose to power there, and from which dynasty the present Agha Khan of Bombay, the head of the sect of "Khojas," as they are "popularly" designated, claims to be a lineal descendant.

Sijilmásiyah is mentioned in the Arabic work entitled the 'Masalik wa Mamalik,' and in the 'Geography' of Ibn Haukal, and lies about 200 miles a little to the east of south from عَاصِرَة, Fás (which Europeans, who take such strange liberties with foreign names, call *Fez*). These works state that from Kairwan to Sijilmásiyah is, by way of the desert, a journey of nearly fifty *marhalah* or days' journey, and that from Tahut to Sijilmásiyah is fifteen *marhalah*. When these works were written, Fás (Fez) had not yet fallen into the hands of the Isma'ilian, and Al-Káhirah (vul. "Cairo") had not yet been founded.

The events of the rise of this dynasty and sect show that Sijilmásiyah is a very ancient place, and is said to have been founded by the Romans. It is stated, according to several Oriental authorities, that Ubaid-ullah, Abu 'Ali, son of Muhammad, son of Abd-ullah, son of Abu-l-Kasim, son of Muhammad, son of Isma'il (after whom the dynasty took its name), eldest son of the Imam, Ja'far-us-Sadik, and who was held, by his followers and supporters, to be the only legal and rightful successor to the Imam-ship, and which the sect still hold, rose to power here; that he was referred to by Muhammad in the Kur'an; and it is from

No. II.—AUGUST, 1895.]

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a descendant of his that the promised "Mahdi" and "Imam," the Director and Guide—a pretender or two to which offices we have had lately—is to spring.

This Ubaid-ullah-al-Mahdi, the first of them who attained unto sovereign power, was born in 266 H. (879-80 A.D.), but some say in 259 H. (872 A.D.). On Sunday, the 7th of Zi-Hijjah, 296 H. (September, 909 A.D.), with the aid and support of Abd-ullah, the Sufi, he broke out at Sijilmásiyah against the governor of that territory on the part of the Abbasi Khalifahs of Baghdad, overcame him, and brought the territories of Afrikah and Kairwan under his sway; and on Friday, 8th of Rabi'-ul-Awwal, 297 H. (November, 910 A.D.), he was saluted as Khalifah.

Another account of his rise is, that when Ubaid-ullah-al-Mahdi reached Sijilmásiyah, the news thereof was brought to Malik Shai'a, the last of the Maliks of the Bani Badr, and Ubaid-ullah was seized by some of the people and brought before him. They said, "This is the person to acknowledge allegiance to whom Abu 'Abd-ullah-al-Shaba'i has been exhorting the people of Afrikah." On this, that Malik had Ubaid-ullah-al-Mahdi put in durance. Abd-ullah-al-Shaba'i, his advocate, hearing of this, assembled a great number of people together in order to free him by force, and moved to Sijilmásiyah accordingly. Malik Shai'a, hearing of their intention, put Ubaid-ullah-al-Mahdi to death in prison, left his body there, and fled the city. When Abu 'Abd-ullah and his followers reached it, Abu 'Abd-ullah proceeded to the prison, and found Ubaid-ullah-al-Mahdi dead. Some of the latter's companions were present there, and Abu 'Abd-ullah, out of fear lest his design should fail, brought one of them forward, and said to his followers, "This is the Mahdi;" for if he had not done so, and his adherents who had been gathered together to free him had found that the Mahdi had been killed, his scheme would have collapsed. The public prayers were accordingly read for him from the pulpits of Sijilmásiyah, Kairwan, and Rakakah on Friday, the 21st of Rabi'-ul-Akhir, 296 H. (December, 909 A.D.).

Ubaid-ullah-al-Mahdi is said to have brought Andalus (Andalusia) and most of the territories of the Maghrib under his sway, and that subsequently his *Khadim*, or domestic, the Ka'id, Johar, "subdued all the tracts as far west as the sea, Ukyanus (Oceanus), and the Paradise Islands, which are the extremity of the inhabited world, and from which philosophers commence the division or computation of the different climes."

It was this same Ubaid-ullah-al-Mahdi who, in Zi-Ka'dah, 303 H. (June, 916 A.D.), began to build a strong fortress and sanctuary in the neighbourhood of Kairwan—a distance of two days' journey—on the coast of the Mediterranean, and completed it in Shawwal, 308 H. (March, 921 A.D.), and there he died and was buried, on the 15th of Rabi'-ul-Awwal, 322 H. (March, 934 A.D.). His son, Al-Ka'im Bi-Amar-ullah, Abu-l-Kasim, Ahmad, who succeeded him, named the place Mahdiyyah, after his father, the substantial ruins of which still remain. It was Ubaid-ullah-al-Mahdi's grandson, Al-Mu'azz Li-Din-ullah, Abu Tammim, Sa'd, who founded the city Al-Kahirah, or Misr-i-Jaddid (which Europeans vitiate into "Cairo"), and he was the first Isma'ilian Khalifah of the land of Misriyah, or Egypt.

From what I have before stated, it appears that Sijilmásiyah was a well-known city, and the seat of government of those parts from ancient times, and had been founded many centuries, probably, before Al-Mahdi's rise. It was known even then—and is still known, from what Mr. Harris says—as the "Madinat-ul-'Amirah" (not "Aamra," however, as he writes: the word is **فاس**), signifying "the royal or imperial city."

Sijilmásiyah was known to the old writers and travellers. Marmol states that *Sejelmesse* is the name of a province as well as of a town or city. "The province

is about 40 leagues long, and is inhabited by *Barbars* (vul. 'Berbers'). The town seems to have been built by a Roman captain that conquered all *Numidia* as far as *Messa*, and for that reason was christened, '*Sigillum Messa*,' i.e. 'The seat of his Conquest.' . . . It lies south of the *Atlas* range of mountains; and the *wādi Ziz* or river *Ziz*, which is a great river, and springs from the same mountains, passes from thence to the neighbourhood of *Garciluyn*, in the kingdom of *Fus* (*Fez*), traverses the territories of *Quenena*, *Matagara*, *Reteb*, and *Segelmesse*, after which it enters the *sahara*, or desert."

John Leo says, "The town of *Segelmesse* stood upon a plain near the river *Ziz*, and was surrounded with stately high walls. It had good buildings, magnificent temples and colleges, and a great many conduits for the river water. The air of the place is very moist in winter, but otherwise it is temperate and wholesome enough. *Tufilat*, famous for its dates, lies on the south-west side of this province."

From what I have mentioned above respecting Ubaid-ullah-al-Mahdi, it will be understood why Sijilmásiyah is still a place so venerated, and why on the two great 'īds or feasts of the Musalman year, such concourses of people assemble there to say their prayers at the *Musalla*, near the mosque. The word (not "msala") means "a place of prayer," and also "a carpet to pray on."

Should Mr. Harris visit that part again, he might chance to find inscriptions among the ruins.

H. G. RAVERTY, Major.

March 30, 1895.

MEETINGS OF THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, SESSION 1894-1895.

Fourteenth Ordinary Meeting, June 24, 1895.—W. T. BLANFORD, Esq.,
LL.D., F.R.S., ETC., Vice-President, in the chair.

ELECTIONS.—*Admiral Henry Boys; Right Rev. Bishop George W. Hamilton Knight Bruce (late Bishop of Mashonaland); Lieut. George S. Q. Carr, R.N., C.M.G.; Walter D. Cronin; Arthur Fisher; Malcolm A. C. Fraser; William Oswald Gilchrist; Franklin R. Kendall; Henry Kitching; Dr. Percy George McReddie; Major Alexander McD. Moore (Royal Irish Fusiliers); Thomas Pink; Major Hugh Montgomerie Sinclair, R.E.; Edward Stapleton; Dr. W. Stirling.*

The Paper read was:—

"The Sierra Madre of Mexico." By O. H. Howarth.

Special Meeting, July 1, 1895.—Sir G. D. TAUBMAN GOLDIE, K.C.M.G.,
Vice-President, in the Chair.

ELECTIONS.—*Rev. Jacob Benjamin Anaman; S. L. Hinde; J. T. S. Jones; Thomas Henry Willis; Samuel Zivemer.*

The Paper read was:—

"A Recent Expedition to Borgu, on the Niger." By Captain F. D. Lugard,
D.S.O., C.B.