The Textual Document of Regency

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The regency between the Ima`m Reza, peace be on him, and al-Ma'mu`n was not confined to speech; rather it was written on an official document signed by the Ima`m Reza(A.S.) and al-Ma'mu`n, witnessed by high-ranking statesmen, and transmitted by a group of historical sources. Ibn al-Jawzi came to know of the document and said:

"My uncle bought it (the document) for two hundred dinars and brought it to Sayf al-Dawla Sadaqa b. Mansu`r, and there were in it scripts of a group of writers such as 'Abd Allah b. al-'Abba`s and the Moroccan Minister (al-Wazïr al-Maghribi)." Similarly, 'Ali b. Isa al-Arbali came to know of it and has mentioned its text in his book entitled Kashf al-Ghumma, and that was in the year 670 A. H. 2 I (i.e. the author) will narrate its text as follows:

"In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, "This letter has been written by the servant of Allah (i.e. al-Ma'mu`n) b. Ha`ru`n al-Rashï~d, the Commander of the faithful, to 'Ali b. Musa b. Ja'far.

"Now then: So surely, Allah, the Great and Almighty, has chosen Islam as religion and chosen from among his servants messengers showing the way to Him and guiding to Him, the first of them gives good news of the last of them and the last of them testifies the first of them, until the Prophethood of Allah reached Mohammed, may Allah bless him and his family, after a cessation of the (mission of the) apostles, extinction of knowledge, a cessation of revelation, and approach to the Hour.

So Allah has ended the prophets through him, made him a witness to them, and dominator over them, and He sent down to him His Holy Book falsehood shall not come to it from before it nor from behind it, a revelation from the Wise, the Praised One through which He has made lawful and unlawful, promised and threatened, cautioned and warned; through which He has ordered and prohibited, that the firm argument over His creatures may be His, that he who would be perish might perish by clear proof, and he who would live might live by clear proof, and most surely Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

"So he (the Prophet) delivered on behalf of Allah His message and summoned (men) to His path through what He had ordered him of wisdom, good exhortation, reasoning in the best way, then through jihad and hardness, until Allah took him to Himself and chose for him that which is with Him.

So when the Prophethood came to an end, and Allah ended through Mohammed, may Allah

bless him and his family, the revelation and the message, He has made the religion continue and regulated the authority of the Muslims through the caliphate, its completion and exaltedness, and undertaking it with respect to Allah through obedience through which the duties and punishments imposed by Allah, Islamic laws are carried out, and jihad is waged against His enemy.

"So it is obligatory on the vicegerents of Allah to obey Him concerning what He has entrusted to them and attracted their attention regarding His religion and His servants, and it is obligatory on the Muslims to obey their caliphs and to help them in establishing the right and justice of Allah, the security of the way, sparing blood, settling hostility, and reuniting; otherwise, the cord of the Muslims disorders; they become disordered; their beliefs become different; their religion is defeated; their enemy becomes powerful; they are different in opinion; and they lose this world and the next.

"So it is incumbent upon him whom Allah has appointed as a vicegerent on His earth and entrusted him with His creatures to do his best for Allah, to prefer that in which there is the good pleasure of Allah and obedience to him, to follow that for which Allah will make him stand and about which He will question him, to rule with the truth and do with justice in what Allah has placed him and vested him with, for Allah, the Great and Almighty, says to His prophet Dawud:

O Da`wud, surely We have made you a ruler in the land; so judge between men with justice and do not follow desire, lest it should lead you astray from the path of Allah; (as for) those who go astray from the path of Allah, they shall surely have a severe punishment because they forget the day of reckoning. And (for) Allah, the Great and Almighty, said: So by your Lord, We shall ask them all about what they were doing. And (for) we have heard that 'Umar b. al-Khatta`b said: "If a goat got lost on the bank of the Euphrates, I would fear that Allah would ask me about it.'

"By Allah, surely the one who will be asked about his own soul and informed of his work regarding what is between him and Allah will be brought before a great affair and tremendous danger; therefore, just imagine how much more is (the situation) of him who is responsible for taking care of a community? And reliance is on Allah; to Him is the flight, desire for success and protection, directing and guiding to that through which argument is established, good pleasure and mercy from Allah are won.

"And the best of the community in reflecting on his own soul and the loyalist of them to Allah regarding His religion and His servants from among His creatures on His earth is he who works according to obedience to Allah, His Book, and the Sunna (practices) of His Prophet,

may Allah bless him and his family, during the period of his days and after it, strains his own opinion regarding him to whom he has entrusted his reign, whom he has chosen for the Ima`mate over the Muslims and taking care of them after him, and appoints for them him who is a great figure and a place of flight in order to bring them into harmony, to reunite them, to spare their blood, to give them security, with Allah's permission, from their division, their being corrupt by enmity, and their difference, and to raise the insinuation and trickery of Satan from them.

For Allah, the Great and Almighty, has regarded regency after the caliphate as part of completing and perfecting Islam, exalting and setting right its followers, and He has inspired succession in His vicegerents through His emphasizing on him whom they choose for Him after them, who through whom blessing is great and well-being is inclusive, and Allah, through that, has invalidated the deception of men of dissension, hostility, slander, difference, and any lying in wait for discord.

"He (al-Ma'mu`n) has been the Commander of the faithful since the caliphate reached him, so he has tried its ugly taste, its burdensome undertaking, its hard provisions, clinging to obedience to Allah which is obligatory on him who undertakes it (the caliphate), and fear of Him concerning what He has burdened with it. So he has tired his body, kept his eye awake, elaborated his thinking on that through which the religion is glorified, the polytheists are suppressed, the community is set right, justice is spread, the Book and the Sunna are established; and he has deprived himself of ease, gentleness, and happy life.

He is aware of that about which Allah will ask him; he likes to meet Allah while he is loyal to Him regarding His religion, His servants, choosing for succession after him and taking care of the community the best one (of men) in religion, piety, and knowledge, and the most hoped of them for assuming the command and right of Allah, whispering (to Him) through seeking refuge (in Him) concerning that,

asking Him for inspiration in which there is His good pleasure and obedience to Him by day and night, reflecting on seeking and requesting him through the members of his household from among the children of 'Abd Allah b. al-'Abba`s and 'Ali b. Abu` Ta`lib, confining himself to his knowledge of him whose condition and doctrine he has come to know, sparing no effort and power to ask about him whose affair is unknown to him, till he examined their affairs through knowledge, tried their stories through seeing, regarded their conditions as innocent through observing, and discovered that which is with them through questioning. "So his (al-Ma'mun's) choosing him (al-Reza`) was after asking Allah for the best and exerting himself in accomplishing His right toward His servants and His earth concerning the two houses in

general. That is because he (al-Ma'mun) has seen his (the Ima`m's) brilliant excellence, his plain knowledge, his manifest piety, his pure asceticism, his renouncing the world, and his being safe from the people. He has clearly come to know that reports, tongues, and words have unanimously agreed upon him.

Besides, he still knows his excellence when young and adult, hence he has appointed him as his successor after him, having confidence in asking Allah for the best regarding that, for Allah has come to know that his act is as preferring for him and the religion, taking care of Islam and the Muslims, seeking safety, and establishing argument and salvation on the day when men will stand for the Lord of the worlds.

"The Commander of the faithful had summoned his sons, the members of his house, his personal entourage (khassa), his commanders, and his servants, and they with pleasure have pledged allegiance (to al-Reza). They are aware of that the Commander of the faithful has preferred the obedience to Allah to his own desire regarding his children and other than them from among those who are more interlaced than him in womb relationships and closer (than him) in kinship.

"He (al-Ma'mun) has named him al-Reza` (consent), for the Commander of the faithful is satisfied with him; therefore, O group of the household of the Commander of the faithful and those who are in the guarded city from among his commanders, his soldiers, and the Muslims in general, pledge allegiance to the Commander of the faithful and after him to al-Reza`, 'Ali b. Mu`sa` in His name, His blessing, His good decree for His religion, and His servants, with a pledge of allegiance for which you stretch out your hands and at which you are delighted. You are aware of what the Commander of the faithful has intended through it (the pledge of allegiance), preferring through it the obedience to Allah, taking care of himself and you, giving thanks to Allah for what He has inspired in the Commander of the faithful through it regarding accomplishing His right in taking care of you, his clinging to directing you and setting you right, hoping for the advantage of that through reuniting you, sparing your blood, bringing you together, closing your frontiers, strengthening your religion, defeating your enemy, setting right your affairs; and hasten to obedience to Allah and to the Commander of the faithful, for it is security; if you hurry to him and praise Allah for him, you will know that good luck is through him, Allah willing."

This document has ended and was dated on Monday on the eighth of the month of Ramada`n, in the year 201 A. H. Al-Ma'mu`n asked Ima`m al-Reza`, peace be on him, to write the document of regency with his own sacred hand, and he, peace be on him, wrote the following:

"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, praise belongs to Allah, the Doer

of what He intends, there is no repeller of His decision; nor is there any repeller of His decree, who knows the stealthy looks and that which the breasts conceal, and His blessings be upon His Prophet, the last of the prophets, and his family, the good, the Pure.

"I say, and I am 'Ali b. Mu`sa` b. Ja'far, that the Commander of the faithful, may Allah support him with rightness and give him success for right guidance, has come to know of our right of which other than him has failed to know, so he has tightened the womb links which have been cut, made safe the souls which have become frightened; rather he has enlivened them while they were already destroyed, made them rich while they were poor, seeking the good pleasure of the Lord of the world, wanting no reward from other than Him, and Allah will reward the grateful and He does not waste the reward of the doers of good.

"And that he has entrusted his regency and the great authority to me if I remain (alive) after him, so he who unties the knot of the command of Allah through tying it and breaks a handle whose fastening is more lovable to Allah, then surely Allah will make lawful his sacredness if he through that reproaches the Ima`m and violates the sacredness of Islam, according to this the former (i.e. Ima`m 'Ali) did, was patient toward the random matters, and did not object the resolutions, for he feared that the religion would be scattered, the cord of the Muslims would be disordered, the affairs of the pre-Islamic paganism age was close (to him), an opportunity might be seized, and calamity might quickly be created.

"And I have appointed Allah (as witness) over my own soul if He makes me take care of the authority over the Muslims and vests me with His vicegerency to work among them (men) in general and the children of al-'Abba`s b. 'Abd al-Muttalib in particular, through obedience to Him and to His Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, that I will not shed forbidden blood; nor will I make lawful pudenda nor property except that which is shed by the punishments prescribed by Allah and made lawful by the religious duties issued from Him, and that I will do my best and power to choose the most qualified persons, and through that I have placed against my own soul a certain promise about which Allah will ask me, for He, the Great and Almighty, says: And fulfill the promise; surely (every) promise shall be questioned about.

"And if I originated or changed or altered, I would be worthy of being changed and liable to severe punishment, and I seek refuge in Allah from His wrath, desire for success in obeying Him, coming between me and disobeying Him, (giving) well-being to me and to the Muslims.

"Al-jami'a and al-jafr indicate the opposite of that, and I do not know what will be down toward me and you, surely the judgment is Allah's; He relates the truth and He is the best of the deciders, but I have obeyed the order of the Commander of the faithful, preferred his good pleasure, and Allah protects me and him; I have called Allah to bear witness to my own soul

through that, and Allah is enough for a witness.

"I have written (the document of regency) in my own handwriting in the presence of the Commander of the faithful, may Allah prolong his life, al-Fadl b. Sahl, Sahl b. al-Fadl, Yahya` b. Akkthem, Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir, and Hamma`d b. al-Nu'ma`n, in the month of Ramada`n, in the year 201 (A. H.)."

Al-Fadl b. Sahl, the minister of al-Ma'mu`n, wrote the following:

"The Commander of the faithful, may Allah prolong his life, has decreed reading the meaning of this letter outwardly and inwardly in the Holy Shrine of our master, Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, between the theological center (rouda) and the Pulpit in the presence of the elite from among the Banu` Ha`shim, the rest of the friends and the soldiers, and he asks Allah to make the Commander of the faithful and all Muslims know through it the argument over all Muslims and to invalidate the vague errors which have hindered the viewpoints of the ignorant: On no account will Allah leave the believers in the condition which you are in."

Al-Fadl b. Sahl wrote (this document) in the appointed date.

Yahya` b. Akkthem has written the following: "Yahya` b. Akkthem has testified to the content of this page outwardly and inwardly, and he has written in his own handwriting the (appointed) date."

Hamma`d b. al-Nu'ma`n has written the following: "Hamma`d b. al-Nu'ma`n has testified to the content (of this document) outwardly and inwardly." Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir has written the following: "Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir has testified to the like of that and written in his own handwriting the (appointed) date."

It is necessary for us to pause in order to consider the document of al-Ma'mu`n, what Ima`m al-Reza`, peace be on him, has written, and what al-Fadl b. Sahl has testified, and that is as follows:

The Contents of the Document of Regency

The document of regency signed by al-Ma'mu`n and Imam al-Reza`, peace be on him, contains the following:

Firstly, praising Islam and Allah's great Book, which is a perfect system and an inclusive institution for making man happy and righteous. Secondly, lauding the great Prophet, the greatest summoner to Allah, hoister of torch of monotheism and intellectual renaissance on earth. Thirdly, clarifying the succession after the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, for through it the religion is established, the authority over the Muslims is regulated, and it is the shadow of Allah on earth.

Fourth, it is obligatory on the Muslims to obey the caliphs, for disobedience to them causes

disadvantages to Islamic world. Fifth, the caliphs undertake important responsibilities of which are preferring obedience to Allah to all things, ruling over men with fairness and justice, and other important responsibilities which the document has inclusively shown.

Sixth, among the most important responsibilities of the caliphs is that they designate successors after them, that the designation should be based on perfect choice and exact test regarding him whom they appoint after them, and that the choice should not be subject to partiality and desires, for such an action leads the community to disadvantages.

Seventh, al-Ma'mu`n did his best to choose the successor after him, so he did not find in the 'Abba`sid and the 'Alawide families anyone more meritorious than Ima`m al-Reza`, peace be on him, because he had noble qualities of which are the following:

A. Brilliant excellence,

B. Useful knowledge,

C. Pure asceticism in the world,

D. And refraining from all things made unlawful by Allah, the Most High.

It is these noble qualities which urged al-Ma'mu`n to elect the Ima`m and to nominate him for regency after him.

The Contents of what the Ima`m has written

As for the contents of what Ima`m al-Reza`, peace be on him, has written concerning regency, they are as follows:

Firstly, praising al-Ma'mu`n's relationships with the 'Alawides, for he refreshed them through such relationships after they had faced tyranny and oppression through the 'Abba`sid rulers, who spared no effort to eliminate the 'Alawides from the face of earth; it is worth mentioning that the 'Abba`sids buried the 'Alawides while they were alive, killed them everywhere, threw their babies into the Tigris, and wreaked other tragedies upon them.

Secondly, through these word of him, "if he through that reproaches the Ima`m," Ima`m al-Reza`, peace be on him, referred to his grandfather, Ima`m 'Ali, the Commander of the faithful, the gate of the city of the knowledge of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, and the pioneer of his wisdom, whom the people removed from his office which the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family,

entrusted to him on the Day of Ghadïr Khum, and accordingly the community suffered from terrible kinds of tragedies and calamities, for the caliphate was undertaken by some criminals such as Mu'a`wiya, Yazid, al-Walï~d, al-Mansu`r, and other than them from among the Ima`ms of oppression and tyranny who spared no effort to oppress the people and to force them to yield to what they hated.

Similarly, through these words of him, "and was patient toward the random matters," he referred to the words of 'Umar b. al-Khatta`b, who described the pledge of allegiance to Abu` Bakr as, "a random matter (falta) from whose evil Allah has protected the Muslims." So Ima`m 'Ali, the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, was patient toward this random matter, which he has mentioned in his saying: "and there is pricking (qadha) in the eye and suffocation (of mortification) in the throat."

That is because he feared that the word of Islam would collapse, and the unity of the Muslims would crack, for the Muslims were still close to the pre-Islamic paganism age, and the enemy forces lied in wait for attacking Islam if any division occurred in it; therefore, it is this matter which prompted Ima`m 'Ali, the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, to be patient toward those who took his legacy.

Thirdly, the Ima`m promised before Allah and the Muslims that he would rule the Muslims with a policy based on pure justice, that he would return to the people the practices of his grandfather the greatest Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, and that he would choose for the organ of government qualified and righteous persons who feared Allah, the Exalted, and sought the next world. If the Ima`m had undertaken the caliphate over the Muslims, he would have achieved all these great goals.

Fourth, the Ima`m, peace be on him, predicted that he would not assume the caliphate; nor would the community lead a life of ease and comfort during his rule, for he had read al-jami'a and al-jafr, which were among the deposits of the Prophethood, in which was the knowledge of what was and what would be until the Day of Resurrection, which showed that he would not undertake the caliphate, and that al-Ma'mu`n would deceive him through regency.

The Contents of al-Fadl's writing

As for what al-Fadl b. Sahl wrote in the document of regency, it refers to that al-Ma'mu`n ordered this document to be read in the mosque of the Prophet between the theological center and the Pulpit, and in the presence of the Hashimite notables, the armed forces, and the rest of the people, for reading the document in such a place would emphasize regency and disprove the views of the ignorant and of the partial. These are some contents of the document and its supplements. They are plain; there is no confusion or ambiguity in them.