

HUIJATUL IMAM

MAULATUNA HURRATUL MALIKA ARWA BINTE AHMAD ^{RA}URUS 22ND SHABAAN, DHI JIBLA- YEMEN

The Lady Queen Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika Arwa binte Ahmad RA was the third and last Sulayhid ruler of Yemen. She was an extraordinarily strong, intelligent and accomplished woman – a fact remarkable in itself in a culture where women were not known for education or independence – and her political acumen and command earned her the name of ‘*al-Bilqis al-Sughra*’ (the younger Bilqis; Bilqis was the legendary (Biblical) queen of Sheba). Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika was nominated to the *rutba* of *hujjat* (the only known woman to have occupied this rank besides Maulatuna Fatema) and made overall head of the Dawat in Yemen by Imam al-Mustansir Billah. After the *shahadat* of Imam al-Amir bi-Ahkamillah, and at his command, it was Maulatuna Hurrat al-Malika who instituted the silsila of Duat Mutlaqeen of the Dawat us-Satr; she is therefore known as the honorary ‘mother’ of the Duat Mutlaqeen.

Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika was born in the year 440H. She was of the Sulayhid family. Her father Ahmad b. Mohammad b. Qasim al-Sulayhi, who had once visited the Imam in Cairo as an ambassador of Sayyidna Ali b. Muhammad al-Sulayhi RA (Fatimid Dai and founder of the Sulayhid kingdom in Yemen), died when Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika was a child. Her mother Radah bt. al-Faari’ b. Musa al-Sulayhi remarried; Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika was then brought up by Sayyidna Ali b. Muhammad's wife Asma bt. Shihab, a wise and cultured woman who assisted her husband even in matters of state. It is reported that Sayyidna Ali b. Muhammad used to tell his wife to take good care of her and honour her, for she was the future “the custodian of our children, and the guardian of our ‘matter’ (the Sulayhid kingdom and the Dawat) ..” Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika is said to have had a dream as a child, that she was sweeping the palace of the Imam; Asma bt. Shihab told her that the dream signified that she would one day be of great service to the Imam.

Maulatuna Hurrat al-Malika was married in 458H. to the son of Sayyidna Ali b. Muhammad al-Sulayhi, al-Malik al-Mukarram Ahmad, who succeeded his father following the latter’s assassination by political enemies in 459/1067. She had four children by him, two sons and two daughters. A few years into his reign, al-Malik al-Mukarram contracted a debilitating illness/ partial paralysis, and it was his wife al-Hurra al-Malika who virtually ruled the kingdom in her invalid husband's name for more than ten years before his death in 477/1084. Al-Hurra al-Malika then ruled as Regent for her young son Abd al-Mustansir Ali. Then, when the latter too died – her youngest son had already passed away – she became sole ruler of the Sulayhid kingdom. Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika, a woman of vast general knowledge and extremely well informed about the conditions of her subjects, was a capable and worthy ruler; as she was a woman, military and executive powers were assigned to others, under her supervision.

Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika enjoyed a lofty, esteemed and assured status with the Fatimid Imams. Official Fatimid letters or sijills sent to her begin with her several titles, “to the most content lady (assayyida ar-radiyya), the pure, matchless in this time, queen of the chieftains of Yemen, pillar of Islam, most favoured (khaalisa) of the Imam, treasure of the faith, pillar of the faithful, refuge of the adherents [of the Dawat], protector of the seekers of right-guidance, the friend of the Commander of the Faithful, nurturer of his fortunate and blessed followers – may Allah prolong her dominance and prosperity, and grant her the best of succour and aid.” Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika was

reputedly beautiful, tall and robust, with a fair and rosy complexion and a resonant voice. She was virtuous and educated, possessed of a keen memory and a sharp analytical mind. Sayyidna Idris RA says (in his book *'Uyun al-Akhbar*), "She was a woman of eminence, of piety, devoutness, virtue and nobility, perfection, intellect, ibadat and ilm... She was worthy of precedence over many virtuous and meritorious men. Mustansir Imam SA sent eminent *hudood* to teach her ilm of Dawat, and eventually raised her to the rank of *hujjat*." Her knowledge of Dawat ilm was formidable, and she used to give sabaqs to the *hudood* of the Dawat from behind a curtain.

Upon the demise of Imam Mustansir SA in 487/1094, his successor Imam Musta'li SA was challenged by his elder brother Nizar. Almost the entire Eastern (Persian) Ismaili community seceded from the official Dawat in support of Nizar, but the loyalty of al-Hurra al-Malika and the Yemeni Dawat to Musta'li Imam SA was never for a moment in doubt. As a direct result, the community in India, under the supervision of the Yemeni Dawat, too remained loyal to Imam Musta'li SA. Among the many Fatimid documents and letters transcribed in Sayyidna Idris's *'Uyun al-Akhbar* is one conveying Mustansir Imam's SA selection of Mustali Imam SA as his successor, possibly one of the primary reasons for the Yemenis' unquestioning acceptance.

Mulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika continued to hold an extremely favoured position with Imam Musta'li SA and then Imam al-Amir, both of whom continued to take enormous interest in and keep abreast of all developments in Yemen. There was a constant stream of letters, messengers and gifts between Cairo and Yemen. Among these was the *sijill al-bisharat*, 'the letter of glad tidings' sent to Mulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika, informing her of the birth of Imam Amir's SA son Tayyib Imam SA and his nomination as heir. When Imam Amir SA sent an old frayed handkerchief as *tashreef* to the Queen instead of the usual grand articles, she understood at once what the Imam wished to convey: that his demise was near. Upon learning of Imam Amir's SA assassination in Zilqada 526H, Mulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika immediately proclaimed the Dawat in the name of Imam Tayyib SA. In Cairo, Imam Amir's SA cousin Abd al-Majid initially took the throne as *wali 'ahd al-muslimeen*, Regent in the name of the infant Imam Tayyib SA.

Soon after, following certain disastrous developments in Egypt, Imam Tayyib SA was taken into concealment, "*satr*", as instructed by Imam Amir SA. Abd al-Majid now claimed the Imamate and the Caliphate for himself, with the title 'al-Hafiz li-Deen Allah'. When communications from Abd al-Majid, signed initially 'from *wali 'ahd al-muslimin*', changed to 'from *amir al-mu'minin*' ('Commander of the Believers', i.e. Imam), the Queen unequivocally rejected his claims and denounced him as an impostor; the incident is described vividly: "I am the daughter of Ahmad! [today as yesterday he cannot hope to fool *me*?], she exclaimed, "yesterday he was *wali 'ahd al-muslimin* and today *amir al-mu'minin*! He has trespassed on that which is not his territory, and claimed a position which he is far beneath." Abd al-Majid made every effort to elicit recognition from the Sulayhid queen, but she remained firm in her allegiance to Imam Tayyib SA. Along with Sayyidna Yahya b. Lamak b. Malik, she appointed Sayyidna Dhu'ayb as the first Dai Mutlaq of the Tayyibi Dawat. Without regard for the considerable economic and political benefits of alliance, she severed all ties with Egypt and the Fatimid Tayyibi Dawat became independent in Yemen.

The Dawat in Yemen had split into two rival factions: the Tayyibi and the Majidi. There is enough evidence to infer that the confrontation and conflict between the Majidis and the Tayyibis was vocal, heated, bitter, and wide-ranging. Verbal and literary 'weapons' were used in full measure in the battle of polemics, but neither side apparently resorted to arms. The earliest Tayyibi leaders, Mulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika and the Dai Mutlaq Sayyidna Dhu'ayb b. Musa RA, aided by the Mazoon Sultan al-Khattab RA and the Mukasir (later Dai Mutlaq) Sayyidna Ibrahim b. al-Husayn al-Hamidi RA vigorously defended the right of Imam Tayyib SA, and took on the monumental task of

ordering and consolidating the organization of the Dawat al-Satr. Al-Hurra al-Malika exerted her considerable prestige and political influence to secure the allegiance of the Yemeni Ismailis and chieftains; she also wrote to the Amir of Mecca, Fulayta b. Hashim, in an attempt to persuade him to withdraw his allegiance from Abd al-Majid. She had spent her entire life in devotion to the cause of the Dawat; while there are not many particulars available about the last years of her life, it is certain that that was her priority for the eight years she lived after the *satr*; she spared no effort to demonstrate the fraudulence of Abd al-Majid's claims, and to establish, strengthen and guide the Tayyibi Dawat.

A year or so before her death, al-Hurra al-Malika made a *wasiyyat* bequeathing a large part of her personal jewelry to Imam Tayyib SA. The text of this will, transcribed in its entirety by Sayyidna Idris RA from the original document, is contained in the '*Uyun* 7. A Sulayhid chieftain named Ahmad b. Abi al-Husayn was charged with delivering the jewelry to the very doors of the Imam himself and obtaining a signature for the receipt; Sayyidna Idris writes that after al-Hurra al-Malika's death he fulfilled this obligation. This report indicates that at least for a few years following the *satr* the whereabouts of the 'concealed' Imam Tayyib SA were known to Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika.

Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika continued as the leader of the Tayyibi Dawat until her death, on 22 Sha'ban 532/5 May 1138. She was 92 years old. She was buried in a chamber attached to her masjid in Dhi Jibla, capital of the Sulayhid kingdom. The Sulayhid kingdom had started declining in extent and power by the end of the 5th Hijri century, until eventually only the region around Dhi Jibla remained under direct Sulayhid rule; notwithstanding this fact, the Queen herself remained prestigious enough to command a great deal of loyalty and even military support, even from chieftains ostensibly on the Majidi side. The Sulayhid kingdom disintegrated completely after al-Hurra al-Malika's demise. The Tayyibi Dawat al-Satr, on the other hand, was so well entrenched that it survived for hundreds of years, and endures to this day.

The Mazoon Sayyidna al-Khattab b. al-Hasan RA says in his elegy on Maulatuna al-Hurra al-Malika: *They are ignorant, those who said that you have died...your radiance and grace continues to flow towards us.*

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