

PREFACE

This work is primarily offered as a contribution to the history of medieval Egypt in the high middle ages, tenth-twelfth centuries. But the history of Fatimid Egypt is a chapter of Mediterranean history as well as a chapter of Shī'ī-Sunnī rivalry.

The work is divided into three parts. The first deals with the Fatimid rule in Egypt and is cast in the form of a narrative interrupted by several topical discourses. Chapter four examines the structure and characteristic socio-economic traits of the ruling circles: the royal family, the administrators, the slaves and the eunuchs of the ruler.

The second part is devoted to the military history of the Fatimid period. Military affairs are frequently referred to in the sources; our knowledge of this field is thus superior to that of many others. The focus on military history is not, however, dictated merely by the availability of sources. Military history, with its social and economic implications, is vital for an understanding of medieval Islamic society. Military history can serve as a prism through which essential issues of medieval Islamic history can be examined. Among these are the political relationships between army and regime, the degree of dependence of Islamic societies on slave armies, and economic issues such as the spread of military *iqtā'* and its consequences.

The third and final part examines the internal policies of the Fatimid regime. Medieval Islamic historiography is a product of urban milieu and thus has a marked urban bias. The rural world is obliterated. The focus of this part is on the urban society of the capital which was the largest and the most significant in the country. Its study is justified on its own merits.

In the course of my research for this book I incurred debts of gratitude to many libraries. I would like to thank the librarians and staff of the following institutions: the British Library, London, the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, Cambridge University Library, the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Leiden University Library, Haifa University Library and the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem.

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