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The Fatimids

*Select Papers on Their Governing Institutions,
Social and Cultural Organization,
Religious Appeal, and Rivalries*



Paul E. Walker

BRILL

The Fatimids

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Contents

List of Abbreviations VIII

Introduction 1

PART 1

Institutions of Government

- 1 The Role of the Imam-caliph as Depicted in Official Treatises and Documents 11
- 2 Was the Fatimid *Amīr al-Juyūsh* in fact a *Wazīr*? 46
- 3 The Relationship between Chief *Qāḍī* and Chief *Dāī* 56
- 4 The Responsibilities of Political Office in a Shī'ī Caliphate and the Delineation of Public Duties 77
- 5 Kutāma, Kalbids and Other Westerners: The *Maghāriba* in Cairo 95
- 6 Egyptian Popular Festivals 107
- 7 Alexandria as an Entrepôt in the East-West Exchange of Islamic Scholarship 124
- 8 Royal Libraries and the Production of Texts 140

PART 2

Society and Culture

- 9 Social Elites at the Court 155
- 10 The Caliph al-'Azīz and His Daughter Sitt Al-Mulk: A Case of Delayed but Eventual Succession to Rule by a Woman 175

- 11 Intellectual Currents and Traditions 189
- 12 Literary Culture 206
- 13 The Pitti Palace Rock Crystal Ewer and the Sordid Story of How and Why It Came to Exist 219
- 14 Al-Ḥākim and the *Dhimīs* 228

PART 3

Religious Appeal

- 15 The Doctrine of *Taʿwīl* in Fatimid Ismaili Texts 247
- 16 To What Degree Was Classical Ismaili Esotericism Based on Reason as Opposed to Authority? 260
- 17 Techniques for Guarding and Restricting Esoteric Knowledge in the Ismaili *daʿwa* 273
- 18 Science in the Service of the Fatimids and Their *Daʿwa* 285
- 19 An Ismaili Answer to the Problem of Worshipping the Unknowable, Neoplatonic God 300

PART 4

Rivalries

- 20 Ismaili Polemics Against their Opponents 317
- 21 Islamic Ritual Preaching (*Khuṭbas*) in a Contested Arena: Shīʿīs and Sunnīs, Fatimids and Abbasids 338
- 22 Portrayals of the Umayyads in Official Pronouncements and in *Daʿwa* Literature 364

- 23 Conflict with the Ibāḍīs and the Ibāḍī Version of the Imamate in
North Africa and in the East 377
- 24 The Abbasid-Fatimid Rivalry for Control of the Holy Cities and the
Hijāzī Response 389
- Bibliography of Works Cited in the Text or Notes 407
- Index 421

Abbreviations

<i>AI</i>	<i>Annales islamologiques</i>
<i>BIE</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>EI2</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam, second edition</i>
<i>EI3</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam, third edition</i>
<i>IJMES</i>	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal asiatique</i>
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

Introduction

The Fatimids rose to political dominion in North Africa in 909 after a long period of clandestine activity in various regions of the Islamic world. They formally proclaimed their caliphate in the first days of 910. The new caliph, al-Mahdi, was already imam of the Shīʿī Ismailis but, until then, he had not actually ruled a politically defined territory. However, he and his successors thereafter were both imams in the religious sense and also rulers of an empire that grew from its original base in what is now Tunisia, Algeria and Sicily. In 969, having subdued nearly all of North Africa, the Fatimids added Egypt, much of Syria, and the holy cities of Arabia to their growing empire. They founded the city of Cairo as their new headquarters and proceeded to complete their long sought goal of supplanting the Abbasid caliphate. Over the next two centuries the fortunes of the Fatimid dynasty gradually waned, although they once briefly controlled Baghdad, the capital of their rivals, in the middle of the eleventh century. Nonetheless, their decline was both prolonged and slow. When the European crusaders captured Jerusalem in 1099, they took the city from these same Fatimids. Later, as the Latin crusader states became involved in Egypt under Amalric, the government there was still Fatimid. Only in 1171, did the most famous Muslim opponent of the crusaders, Saladin, who was then *wazīr* to the last of the Fatimid imam-caliphs, finally abolish the dynasty.

1 Empire and Dynasty

Typically, in the study of a single Islamic empire, ‘dynasty’ and ‘empire’ more or less go together, beginning and ending with the same event, the two terms and what they signify almost interchangeable. With the Fatimids the situation is both, in a sense, the same and yet, also in another way, vastly different. ‘Dynasty’ might refer to the run of caliphs who ruled the physical domain, its political territory. However, as Ismaili imams, whose claim to allegiance of their adherents is and was decidedly religious, a matter of faith and ultimately salvation, the line of successors—in a sense the ‘dynasty’—began long before the empire came into existence, in fact going back to the Prophet Muḥammad and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, whose descendants provided those who would later claim to be caliphs, as well as imams. Thus factors arising from this dual role make the investigation of the Fatimids quite unlike most other empires and dynasties. Although it is often possible to raise and treat a given problem or aspect of the Fatimid experience without explicit reference to the religious dimension,

it is useful to always remain aware of it, and it is often essential to the full analysis of a given issue. Nonetheless difficulties of a kind peculiar to the history of this period and its rule seem endemic to our field. Our subject matter is not quite the same and the demands of our kind of investigations require a different background and approach than many other areas—dynasties and empire—in the history of Islam. The Ismaili Shiism of the Fatimids sets them apart, and they cannot be completely understood without full attention to this aspect. The dynasty in this case began well prior to the empire and outlasted it. Its remains in fact still exist in the modern world, thereby according the study of it a concern to a substantial population of Muslims worldwide. Throughout the volume that follows here, this double focus on both religion and politics plays an essential part and therefore constitutes its major theme, one that serves to tie the whole together.

2 Recent Contributions of Mine and Others

Exactly twenty years ago I published a work called *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and Its Sources*.¹ In it I provided an assessment of previous and current scholarship on the topic, along with an extensive and detailed list of historical sources and modern studies. Part of my aim in doing so was to encourage further investigations in the hope that our subject might eventually attract a solid, sustained collection of scholars dedicated to it. Whether that book itself contributed significantly, we can now two decades later claim substantial advancement in our field, both in critical new editions of essential textual sources and in a multitude of studies. While my current project with the present volume does not aim or hope to achieve some similar goal—at least not a full new accounting of scholarship added in these past couple of decades—it, at a minimum, ought to recognize a few major contributions that have impressed me (and many others). But I will limit them to those largest in scale.

By 2002 Heinz Halm, in many ways the dean of Fatimid studies, had a long list of important articles and monographs to which he had begun to add his ultimately monumental three-volume history of the dynasty. It started with his *Das Reich des Mahdi. Der Aufstieg der Fatimiden (875–973)*, (München, 1991), for which we were lucky enough to have an English translation courtesy of Michael Bonner (and Brill): *The Empire of the Mahdi. The Rise of the Fatimids* (Leiden, 1996). A second volume, *Die Kalifen von Kairo: Die Fatimiden in*

1 London: I. B. Tauris; and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2002. Persian trans., Tehran, 2005.

Ägypten 973–1074 (Munich, 2003) appeared soon after. And finally, the completion: *Kalifen und Assassinen: Ägypten und der vordere Orient zur Zeit der ersten Kreuzzüge* (Munich, 2014). Sadly neither is as yet available in translation.

All along we badly needed one volume in English that could serve as a class text for a college course on the Fatimids. In my case I often resorted to assembling a collection of articles, mine and others, but it was never quite satisfactory as the coverage was almost necessarily hit and miss, thus lacking continuity. Michael Brett, however, has given us something much better: his 2017, *The Fatimid Empire* (Edinburgh).²

Various aspects of the whole Fatimid experience often require, however, separate treatment. One that might serve as a model is Jonathan M. Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt* (New Haven, Yale U Press, 2007). Another, which we could well take as a stand-in representative of the best of the extremely important and still growing tradition of Genizah studies, which itself has a long history in our field and which, as these two works show, continues, are Marina Rustow's 2008 book, *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (Ithaca, Cornell U Press) and, more recently, her 2020, *The Lost Archive: Traces of a Caliphate in a Cairo Synagogue* (Princeton, Princeton U Press). This latter work makes a massive contribution, not just to Genizah studies where it began, but most especially to our understanding and appreciation of Fatimid statecraft, its bureaucracy, chancery, system of record keeping and archives, diplomatics, petitions and more, the evidence for which, although mostly now lost, nevertheless still exists in an almost astonishing number of examples a great many of which appear, reproduced and studied, in this very volume.

3 Newly Edited and/or Translated Sources

A key step in the way forward involves the creation of carefully produced and critically edited editions of our sources, many long in need of better versions, both the text itself and the apparatus. Indexing has often been missing and is now fairly standard. Translations also help immensely both to provide explanation of the material and to make our subject accessible to a wider audience. Here below I list those that have appeared between 2002 and 2022. We must note the considerably important contribution to this effort of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London: eleven of the nineteen items listed have come from projects commissioned and published under its auspices.

² See my review in *al-'Usūr al-Wuṣṭā*, 26 (2018): 164–66.

- 2002–04. al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* (*al-maʿrūf biʿl-mawāʿiz waʿl-iʿtibār biʿdhikr al-khiṭaṭ waʿl-āthār*), ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid, 5 vols, (London, al-Furqān).
2006. Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa*, trans. Hamid Haji in *Founding the Fatimid State: The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire* (London, I.B. Tauris).
2007. *Rasāʾil al-ḥikma* [Druse sacred writings], nos. 1–40; *Les Épîtres sacrées des Druzes: Rasāʾil al-Ḥikma*, vols. 1 et 2, introduction, édition critique et traduction annotée des traits attribuées à Ḥamza b. ʿAlī et Ismāʿīl at-Tamīmī, by Daniel De Smet, Leuven, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 168 (Peeters).
2007. Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, *Master of the Age: An Islamic Treatise on the Necessity of the Imamate*, with a critical edition of the Arabic text of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī's *al-Maṣābiḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma* (*Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate*), full translation, introduction and notes by Paul E. Walker. (London, I.B. Tauris).
2009. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Naysābūrī, *Ithbāt al-imāma*, ed. and trans. by Arzina Lalani, as *Degrees of Excellence: A Fatimid Treatise on Leadership in Islam*. (London, I.B. Tauris).
2010. Tāqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz al-ḥunafāʾ*, ed. A. F. Sayyid (Damascus, Institute of Ismaili Studies).
2011. *Kitāb al-Rusūm waʿl-izdiwāj waʿl-tartīb* (*Book of Norms, Pairedness and Ranking*), in “The *Kitāb al-Izdiwāj* attributed to ʿAbdān,” (an edition of the Arabic with complete translation and introduction by Madelung and Walker) in Omar Ali de Unzaga, ed., *Fortress of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*. (London), pp. 103–166.
2011. Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Maqālīd al-malakūtiyya*, ed. I. Poonawala, (Tūnis, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī).
2011. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Naysābūrī, *A Code of Conduct: the Mūjaza al-kāfiya of al-Naysābūrī*, critical edition of the Arabic and complete English trans. with notes and introduction by Verena Klemm and Paul Walker. (London, I.B. Tauris).
2012. Nāṣir b. Khusraw, *Kitāb Jāmiʿ al-ḥikmatayn*, trans. by Eric Ormsby as *Between Reason and Revelation: Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*. (London).
2012. Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī: The Proofs of Prophecy*, trans. Tarif Khalidi. (Provo, Utah).
2012. al-Jawdhārī, Maṣṣūr al-ʿAzīzī, *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*, ed. and trans. Hamid Haji, as *Inside the Immaculate Portal* (London, I.B. Tauris).
2013. al-Qudāʾī, *The Sayings, Sermons and Teachings of ʿAlī*, trans. Tahera Qutbuddin, as *A Treasury of Virtues*. (New York, NYU press).

2013. al-Manṣūr bi'llāh, *Ithbāt al-imāma*, ed. and trans. Sami Makarem, as *The Shī'ī Imamate: A Fatimid Interpretation* (London, I.B. Tauris).
- 2007–2014. Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, *Uyūn al-akhbār wa funūn al-āthār*, ed. in 7 volumes by Ahmad Chleilat, Mahmoud Fakhoury, Yousef S. Fattoum and Ayman Fu'ad Sayyid (Damascus).
2014. *An Eleventh-Century Egyptian Guide to the Universe: The Book of Curiosities*, ed. with annotated trans. by Emilie Savage-Smith and Yossef Rapoport (Leiden, Brill).
2015. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib*, trans. Devin Stewart as *Disagreements of the Jurists: A Manual of Islamic Legal Theory* (New York, NYU Press).
2016. Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, critical edition of the Arabic text by Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker, Intellectual Heritage of Islamic Civilization, Series 1, (Tehran).
2021. *Affirming the Imamate: Early Fatimid Teachings in the Islamic West, An Arabic critical edition and English translation of works attributed to Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī and His Brother Abu'l-'Abbās* ed. and trans. by W. Madelung and Paul Walker (London, I.B. Tauris and Bloomsbury).

My own contributions have of course continued throughout the same period, in articles and papers, including those selected for the present volume. The latter is in part a supplement to a previous collection: *Fatimid History and Ismaili Doctrine* (Ashgate Variorum, 2008). Two more are monographs, both from 2009, a biography of a single caliph entitled *Caliph of Cairo: al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, 996–1021* (Cairo, AUC Press, 2009), and a history of the Fatimid royal *khuṭba* with full edition and translation of all that survive: *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs: Festival Sermons of the Ismaili Imams* (London, I.B. Tauris and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2009).

4 A New Collection of Studies

For this new collection I gathered together twenty-four papers originally published in a wide variety of journals and books between 2006 and 2021³ by institutions or academic publishers located in thirteen different countries from

3 The original of one pre-dated this period but the version included here was republished in a revised (updated) form in 2013. Another has yet to appear in print although long slated for inclusion in the proceedings of a conference held in 2016.

Toronto to Cairo, Chicago to Moscow. The focus for the whole is the Fatimids, their governing institutions, social and cultural organization, religious appeal, and rivalries. Grouped into four parts, each covers successively, first, various facets of governing, broadly conceived, both offices of the state and also products of government. The former category includes studies of the imamate in theory and practice, the wazirate, judiciary and *da'wa* and the general delineation of public duties under Fatimid rule. The latter covers the army, public festivals, sponsorship of various kinds of scholarship and/or teaching, and libraries and the production of books.

A second part deals with social elites including women, intellectual life, particularly the Ismaili contribution to the development of a Shī'ī tradition of high-level scholarship, but, also, to the broader literary culture under the Fatimids. Here, too, I have included a notable—although ultimately bizarre and quite untypical—contribution to artistic production. Finally, I offer a study and analysis of one incident of the persecution of the 'Protected Peoples' (i.e. Dhimmīs).

Part Three concerns an aspect of Fatimid rule that is uniquely associated with its Shiism: the religious appeal, its *da'wa*. Its activities required a bureau of government but also a highly developed set of doctrines, some openly proclaimed but most kept guarded in secrecy. Access was restricted, and its esoteric teachings, based on a special theory of interpretation (*ta'wīl*), protected by an oath of covenant and payments of dues. Though long hidden from the outside world, we now know a great deal about what the *da'wa* taught and advocated. Here I provide two key examples, one concerning the hard sciences and another featuring a classical Ismaili form of apophatic theology using a system of double negations.

Part Four consists of five studies of the way the Fatimids dealt with rivals, of both the political and the religious kind. Much of the animosity emanating from the Islamic world all around them resulted in a long tradition of polemical refutation and condemnation by Sunni opponents and others. Many details of this effort are reasonably well known and far too often have in the past dominated both medieval and modern scholarship. Less well known is the other side: the Fatimid response. But in this case I show clearly that there was an equally vigorous tradition of an Ismaili defense and of its own written attacks on, among others, the Umayyads of Spain, Ibāḍīs in North Africa, and Abbasids in the east. The polemical rhetoric in this fight was decidedly two-sided as these studies indicate and the many examples I have included reveal.

To make the present volume more readily accessible to the non-specialist, I have re-edited the whole to form a single presentation by standardizing terms

and transliterations, references in the notes, and providing a master bibliography and index. Each of the many publishers who issued the original versions of these papers applied its own standards and editorial rules, including punctuation, spelling, and other aspects of style. I have attempted to bring some consistent order and systematic treatment throughout, thus modifying the text where necessary or useful, although the changes in nearly all cases remain faithful to the original purpose of the paper in question.⁴

4 One issue I need note concerns the updating of references to the older and newer editions of Maqrīzī's *Khiṭaṭ* and his *Itti'āz al-ḥunafā'*. The 2010 edition of the latter by Ayman Fuad Sayyid represents a substantial improvement over the 1967–1973 Cairo edition by al-Shayyāl and Muḥammad Aḥmad. However, prior to its appearance and to an unfortunate extent afterward, most scholars used the former exclusively. The Damascus publication fell victim to the civil war there and was slow to reach a wider audience. (Its reissue in Cairo in 2016 has helped spread its use.) In the case of the *Khiṭaṭ* the situation was significantly better, the London edition being relatively easy to find and consult. Still, some of us had long depended on the Bulaq printing and so some references to it remain.

PART 1

Institutions of Government



The Role of the Imam-caliph as Depicted in Official Treatises and Documents

1 Background

Whereas, after the first four *Rāshidūn* caliphs, the Sunnīs became less and less concerned with the personal qualifications of the imam, who he was and how he was chosen, the Shī'a never escaped having to decide such matters.¹ Devotion to the Imam is a religious obligation; as a consequence, determining who he is constitutes a central tenet of faith. Commencing with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and then his sons, questions of succession were always critical, and the death of an imam seemed almost inevitably to produce controversy and disagreement about the continuing line of the imamate. The term 'Ismaili' in fact denotes an answer to one such dispute: the problem of who was the imam after Ja'far al-Šādiq. But, if this difficulty was inherent to early Shiism, it was even more momentous for pre-Fatimid Ismailis and the first generations of Fatimid imam-caliphs. And the problems connected to it, although they eventually abated, were not easily resolved either then or now. Modern scholarship may have even made the situation less clear. Fatimid pronouncements regarding pre-Fatimid imams are not necessarily better; they are instead often obscure and hint at a baffling array of seemingly irresolvable doctrines.

There were three facets to the question. One concerns the issue of who was an imam and what was his status. Here, for example, arises the dilemma of whether 'Alī was an imam, as some held, or of a higher rank and thus not counted as one of the imams. Was Ḥasan an imam? Was he perhaps a 'trustee' (*mustawda'*) imam until Ḥusayn took over as the 'permanent' (*mustaqarr*) imam? A similar question applies to other, later cases, as, for example, that of Ismā'īl b. Ja'far and his son Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. Most significantly, who exactly were the imams, if there were any, after this Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, and how are they related to al-Mahdī, the first of the Fatimid caliphs? And problems of this type are numerous in the earliest literature.

¹ Originally published in a slightly modified version as "The Role of the Imam-caliph as Depicted in Official Treatises and Documents Issued by the Fatimids," chapter 15 in F. Daftary and G. Miskinzoda, eds, *The Study of Shi'i Islam* (London, 2014), pp. 411–432.

A second subject involves determining the status and person of the *mahdī-qā'im*, the messiah, who, according to many, will close out the era of Islam's prophet and usher in a form of paradise without law. The earliest Ismaili doctrine held that he was (is) Muḥammad b. Ismā'il b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. But, if so, how to admit that there are to be more imams after him, as, for example, the Fatimid imam-caliphs? How are the two related?

A third area, the theory of the imamate and the general conditions for it, is, by comparison, simpler. Overall, the first two sets of questions, and others associated with them, seem to dominate Ismaili doctrine in the pre-Fatimid period and the era of the first four caliphs, that is, through to the end of al-Mu'izz's reign. Subsequently, the issue of who had been an imam and exactly what the line of descent was became much less urgent and the doctrine of the *mahdī-qā'im* also receded into the background, his advent in any form having been delayed far into the future. Nevertheless, while the earlier issues remained uppermost, disputes among the various Ismaili factions were so serious as to lead to irreconcilable splintering. One major result had the Qarmatians in the east break with the Fatimids, leaving two Ismaili groups, one opposed to the other on these very issues.

The investigation of the split in this case and others and to the problem of the genealogy of the Fatimid imams drew the attention of scholars long ago, some of whom then and later proposed solutions based on the pronouncements found in various sources, of both a hostile and a sympathetic kind. All in all, the Arabic materials are fairly voluminous. No one had managed to survey more than a limited portion of them until Wilferd Madelung published in 1961 his definitive study of the subject: "Das Imamate in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre" (*Der Islam* 37 [1961]: 43–135).² For it he examined not only the range of modern scholarship, from the writings of the early 19th century orientalist A. I. Silvestre de Sacy to Zāhid 'Alī's Urdu *Hamārē Ismā'īlī madhhab*, which contained information about a number of unpublished early works not available elsewhere, but also a fairly complete list of Fatimid Ismaili sources, many in manuscript, a feat quite difficult to achieve at the time (there was no Institute of Ismaili Studies back then). It was a *tour de force* when it was written and, in many ways, remains so today.

Most fortunately, long ago Farhad Daftary paid close attention to Madelung's work and as a result most of the information gathered by him—and there is a

2 Now available in an English translation by Patricia Crone in *Shii Studies Review* 2 (2018): 62–155.

lot of it—reappears nicely summarized in *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their history and doctrines*, which came out over thirty years afterward in 1993 (and now in a second edition). Heinz Halm likewise drew on it for several sections of his *Das Reich des Mahdi*.

Issues associated with the problem of connecting the Fatimid imam-caliphs to a line of imams running back to Jaʿfar or determining who is, was, or will be the *mahdī-qāʾim* never entirely disappeared, as Madelung has shown. Odd versions might pop up or reappear in unlikely places. However, the basic scholarship on this aspect of the topic already exists. It is possible to revisit it, and even to add some additional notes, but it seems more productive to investigate the imamate in the Fatimid period from a slightly different angle, concentrating on the theory and doctrine as expressed formally in works composed at that time specifically on the imamate, in public pronouncements such as *khutba* sermons, letters and decrees, and in other official and semi-official pronouncements. To this we can add some additional material from poetry—specifically panegyrics devoted to the imams and the imamate. Another area to explore involves polemical and apologetic exchanges with political or religious opponents and detractors. Much, if not most, of all this material denotes the theory and practice of the Ismaili regime as it was expressed by and under the Fatimid caliphs. A major question to investigate involves the status, religious and political, of the imam and how his authority informs the government over which he rules. How did the imamate operate both in theory and in practice? In what manner is the imam's status conveyed to the empire he governs, to the citizens of that state and the ranks of officials between him at the top and the others below? A particularly interesting sub-question involves his relationship, as imam, to those in his realm who were not Ismailis. For most of the period the majority of his subjects did not recognize his imamate in religious terms, although most acknowledged his right to rule. A substantial portion of them were Sunnīs; others were not even Muslim. How did he deal with the latter group (Jews and Christians), and attract and hold their loyalty?

2 Fatimid Period Ismaili Works Devoted to the Imamate

There are four treatises specifically on the imamate now available. Others once existed—one by Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān—but apparently they have not survived. Still, these four are a prime place to start.

The oldest is the caliph al-Manṣūr's *Tathbūt al-imāma* ("Confirming the Imamate"). That it is by the imam himself makes it unusually high in obvious

authority. Unfortunately, the work itself has not been published as yet,³ although Madelung offered a preliminary study of it in an article entitled “A Treatise on the Imamate of the Fatimid Caliph al-Manṣūr bi-Allāh.”⁴ Here is how Madelung describes this work:

The book is addressed to an unnamed questioner, evidently a follower, who asked the author about the establishment of proof for the imam-ate of the Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and his title to it. Al-Manṣūr promises to provide cogent proof and asks the questioner to rely on it in rational investigation before looking into the historical reports (*riwāyāt*) of the various parties who affirm the inevitable need of the people for an imam. Throughout his discussion, it is evident that al-Manṣūr, in agreement with the general Shiite position, saw the imam-ate as a primary necessity of reason.

The three additional of the four treatises on the imam-ate belong to the era of al-Ḥākim. One of them does not actually claim the title but seems to be properly labeled, as its editor and translator has done, *al-Risāla fi-l-imāma* (“Letter on the Imam-ate”).⁵ It was composed by the *dā’ī* Abu’l-Fawāris Aḥmad b. Ya’qūb in answer to questions put to him dealing with the following topics: the necessity for the institution of the imam-ate; refutation of the idea that the Qur’an, the Traditions and the Sharī’a can substitute for the imam; reasons why the imam must be installed by divine appointment rather than elected by the community; proofs for the validity of divine appointment; disparity among people necessitates divine appointment; reasons why the imam after the Prophet could only be ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib; reasons behind ‘Alī’s refraining from claiming his right to the imam-ate; why it is not possible to have more than one imam at the same time; why it is not permissible that the imam-ate be transferred from ‘Alī’s descendants; the institution of the imam-ate is God’s will; reasons for the impossibility of the rightful imam not to have an heir; the possibility of the imam’s being a minor; the reason why Muḥammad b. Ismā’il was the rightful imam rather than Mūsā b. Ja’far; how allegiance to a concealed imam

3 Sami Makarrem worked on an edition and translation for the Institute of Ismaili Studies. See now *The Shi’i Imam-ate: Tathbīt al-imāma attributed to the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mansur*, Arabic Critical Edition and Eng. trans. Sami Makarrem (I. B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013).

4 In Chase F. Robinson, ed., *Texts, Documents and Artefacts* (Lieden, 2003), pp. 69–77.

5 *The Political Doctrine of the Ismā’īlīs: the Imam-ate*, Arabic text (pp. 1–41, Arabic section) and Eng. trans. (pp. 21–51) by Sami Nasib Makarem (Delmar, NY, 1977).

is justified; why the names of the concealed imams were kept secret; and how a rightful imam can be distinguished from a pretender.

The remaining two are by the well-known *dāʿīs* al-Kirmānī and al-Naysābūrī and both were written in the later years of al-Ḥākim. The one by al-Kirmānī is slighter earlier. It was addressed obliquely to the Buyid *wazīr* of Baghdad and is therefore a public work intended for a general Shīʿī audience.⁶ The author called it *al-Maṣābīḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma* (*Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate.*) In general the proofs in this work are often quite philosophical and thus fairly dense. The book is not easy reading. Nonetheless its point is clear and an outline of its chapters reveals the flow of al-Kirmānī's general argument.

Part one: Proof of the Premises.

1. Introduction to the book with an explanation as to the reason that calls for setting out the premises at the beginning and how they are to be ordered.
2. Proof of the Maker.
3. Of the soul and that it is an everlasting, living substance without knowledge at the beginning of its existence.
4. Of the form of the divine regime, which is the recompense, and that its abode is not this world.
5. Of the necessity of the laws and regulations, which consist of actions.
6. Of the necessity of interpretation, which consists of knowledge.
7. Of the prophetic office and its necessity.

Part two: Proof of the Imamate and Its Necessity.

1. Proof of the imamate and its necessity.
2. Of the necessity of the imam's infallibility.
3. Proof that it is not valid for the community to elect the imam.
4. That the true imamate exists by the designation of God, and by the choice of the Apostle.
5. That, following the Prophet, may God bless him and his family, the imam-ate went to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, rather than anyone else.
6. That, after the designation had progressed to Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Šādiq, the imamate went to Ismā'īl and to his progeny, to the exclusion of his brothers.

6 *Master of the Age: An Islamic Treatise on the Necessity of the Imamate*, with a critical edition of the Arabic text of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī's *al-Maṣābīḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma* (*Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate*), full translation, introduction and notes by Paul E Walker (London, I. B. Tauris, 2007).

7. The necessity of the imamate of the Master of the Age, the Imam al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh, Commander of the Faithful, and that obedience to him is incumbent on any and all factions.

Al-Kirmānī's part one concerns the Prophet's role but the second focuses specifically on the imamate. Note the themes of 1) and 2): respectively the necessity of the imamate and of the imam's infallibility. From his stipulations in these chapters we can extract a few main points that help explain his concept of the imam's role.

An imam is charged with warning the people of his time and admonishing them, announcing glad tidings, news of God's reward, and cautioning them against His punishment. (p. 78)

God imposed on the believers three acts of obedience in one verse, each linked to the others. No one can accept the first without the second or the second without the third. "Oh, you who believe obey God and obey the messenger and those in authority among you" [Q4: 59]. It is necessary therefore that there exist for the community someone who is rightly the subject of their obedience, and they are to follow his command in regard to God and the religion of God. (p. 77)

It is essential that there be an imam for every age in whose name God summons his people; "The day we shall summon all peoples with their imams" [Q17: 71]. (p. 77)

It was necessary to put in the place of the Messenger someone to whom to refer those issues of religion about which there were differences. After the Prophet, someone must issue rulings in matters about which the people differ. That someone is the imam. (p. 76)

If all the meanings contained in one phrase are reasonable, wisdom requires that there be someone who teaches its people what is right to prevent anyone singling out one meaning rather than another. If the intended meaning adduced from one phrase is a single meaning or perhaps two, wisdom requires that there exist in the community a person who teaches them the intended aim. ... If the meanings that are adduced from the outward sense are all erroneous and what is intended by the phrase is not that meaning, but rather the word or phrase has the function of metaphor and symbol, wisdom requires there to be in the community someone who explains what those metaphors and similes refer to. Thus, if there are these three possibilities in this case and all three require that there be someone in the community to guide and to teach, the guide and the teacher in the imam. (p. 73)

What the Prophet brought can be added to or subtracted from, and it is likewise possible to alter his regulations and pronouncements and thus to introduce deviation in them. Therefore there must be a person put in charge of these matters who guards them and prevents additions, subtractions, or alterations. (p. 71)

Someone has to take up the Prophet's role in conveying the wisdom and protection he established, and to arrange the perpetual designation of another when the time of that person's passing approaches. (p. 71)

Characteristics of the imam that make necessary his having infallibility: If it were possible that he were not infallible, the community might proceed along a path contrary to that of the Prophet. That deviation would lead to injustice and would encourage people to break away and secede from the community. (p. 79)

The argument put forth by al-Kirmānī in the treatise uses the qualifications of an imam—what he stands for and what he does—to establish who is and who is not qualified for the imamate. Chief among the required traits of the imam is lineal descent from the Prophet and from 'Alī and the explicit designation of the preceding imam, but there are other characteristics at play. Here is one description of them from this work:

The person who preserves the Book and the law with its regulations, who summons to Islam and to them both and who defends it both by exhortation and intimidation, who prays with the people, teaches them the waymarkers of their religion, extracts them from issues about which they differ and which are referred to him, who adjudicates according to what God revealed, who seeks from God forgiveness for he who seeks forgiveness from him, who purifies them, who applies to them the corporal punishments, who responds concerning questions put to him, who conveys what the messenger has said in its true form, who takes from them what is due to God and expends it as it should be, who occupies the place of the Prophet among the community in accord with his command based on the designating of the person who assumes his place. That person is the imam. (p. 117)

It should be noted that here al-Kirmānī intends this statement as a description of the imamate generally; it is not specifically Shī'ī. However, it is also not prescriptive except in that it suggests how failing to exemplify any of the traits on the list disqualifies a claimant who is deficient in that manner from the

imamate. In the same treatise al-Kirmānī devotes considerable space to the demerits of pretenders, both in the past and in his own time.

Al-Naysābūrī's *Ithbāt al-imāma* ("Proof of the Imamate")⁷ is less easy to summarize, in part because it is more of a celebration of the imamate for an audience of devoted adherents, even though he, like the others, intends it as a 'proof'. Nonetheless, early in it he states his purpose as follows:

Many works on the proof of the imamate by the masters in the *da'wa* employ inferences from and quotations of the Qur'anic verses that are well accepted as having been revealed in the matter of imamate and the imams. Reports have also been related concerning it from the Prophet. Those who came before have left nothing in this regard for those who come later and there is not much benefit in simply repeating the same concepts using different words. Our intention is rather to compose a treatise on the proof of the imamate based on adducing evidence and drawing inferences from the natural world and social and political regulations, and as well on the basis of intellect, necessity, innate disposition and character, from the consensus of the adherents of each of the religious communities, and from the philosophers and mathematicians.⁸

Al-Naysābūrī, who wrote within the safety and security of the Fatimid empire, proves the imamate to those who are already loyal Ismailis. His treatise has the air of celebration of existing fact; it is replete with comparisons that are rhetorically evocative rather than statements of an argument. According to his treatise, the imam is the best of creatures and the ultimate end of the created world; he is the best of human beings, God's shadow on earth, the sun, gold, the brain and head of the world. His position is that of the universal intellect (*al-'aql al-kullī*) in its realm; the imam is the universal intellect of this world. He is the speaking-prophet (*nāṭiq*) and the messiah of his time.

Nevertheless, it is essential to read what he has to say about the imamate in general. Here is an example:

⁷ Arabic text and Eng. trans. by Arzina Lalani, *Degrees of Excellence: A Fatimid Treatise on Leadership in Islam* (London, 2010). For analysis of doctrines in these two works, see my article entitled "In Praise of al-Ḥākim': Greek Elements in Ismaili Writings on the Imamate" in Emma Gannagé, et al, eds. *The Greek Strand in Islamic Political Thought: Proceedings of the Conference at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, 16–27 June 2003* (special issue of *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, vol. 57 (2004), pp. 367–392 reprinted in *Fatimid History and Ismaili Doctrine* (Ashgate, Variorum, 2008).

⁸ Lalani, ed., Arabic pp. 4–5, trans. p. 34.

The imamate is the pivot of religion and its foundation. Around it revolve all religious and worldly affairs and the welfare of the next life and this. By means of it the dealings of the servants and the well-being of the land maintain their proper order. By means of it the reward in the abode to come arrives. Through it one attains knowledge of the absolute unity (of God) and of the revealed message based on proofs, demonstrations, and irrefutable evidence; and therein one reaches an understanding of the law and its foundation, and of the interpretation thereof and its explanation.⁹

At no time or season can the world be without an imam whereas the Prophet lives at one time and not another. ... [But] the affirmation of the imamate is an affirmation of prophecy, God called the imam an apostle when He said ... to Abraham: "Verily I am making you an imam for the people."¹⁰

The imam occupies the place of the messenger in his own time and era. ... An imam exists in the world at all times; at no time is it lacking one. The imam upholds the law and maintains its veracity as we have said. What has now become clear and is thus firmly established is that religion revolves around the imam and that, except by depending on the acts of the imam with respect to the law of the prophet in his era, no one has a connection to that prophet or to his position and to his law in such a manner that its validity has undergone no change or alternation in any way. No one apprehends the true reality of the law and its interpretation or meaning except through him.¹¹

For most of his treatise al-Naysābūrī adheres to an argument based on the notion of 'disparity' (*tafāwut*) and differences of merit (*tafāḍul*). He expresses this principle as follows:

We say that the existence of disparity (*tafāwut*) and differences of merit (*tafāḍul*) in all things that comprise the root principles, the natural kingdoms, and the branches thereof is the most solid evidence and firmest argument in proof of the imamate and of the imams. God created things so as to be disparate and of different merit with respect to genus and species. Then He created in each genus and species an ultimate limit, the

9 Lalani, Arabic, p. 32, trans. in Walker, 'In Praise of al-Ḥakīm', pp. 379–80.

10 Arabic, pp. 32–33, Walker, p. 380.

11 Arabic, pp. 34, Walker, p. 380.

highest degree, the end, the most excellent no other of that genus or species can attain. ¹²

At this point we will mention the disparity and differences of merit in each principle and kingdom of nature and show that for each genus and species its ultimate limit and highest degree points to the imam in every time and period. ¹³

But other examples that are equally relevant in this context follow:

[T]he imam is the ultimate of man, his highest degree, his consummation and perfection. The affairs of men are put in order by the imam. Just as the usefulness of all that precedes men reverts to men, so the usefulness of all men reverts to the imam. From them man learns the virtues and sciences. From them they acquire discernment and perspicacity. Through them is the betterment of their dealings in religious and worldly matters, and their salvation. By them are they led to acknowledge the Maker and admit to the necessity of thankfulness to the Benefactor and how to display that thanks. Through them they learn about the messenger and the kind of obedience due him.¹⁴

[T]he imam becomes the essence (*mukhkh*) of the whole universe. Thereupon the refinements of the spirit of reason and pure thought and the entirety of the intelligible spirit unite in him, along with the whole of the spirit of holiness (*rūh al-quds*) of which humans possess only a tiny portion, not great, except what they obtain from the imam and his favor to those on whom he chooses to bestow it.¹⁵

No human can remove himself from the rule of the imam and his control in the same way that no animal can escape the control of humans. Those wild beasts having no benefit or merit that do evade the control of men are by the judgment of reason and the law to be killed, destroyed and annihilated precisely because they are not servile to men nor under his control and direction. Similarly whoever refuses to obey the imam and thus behaves like a wild beast is the same as a harmful beast whose killing, destruction and annihilation has become permissible in accord

¹² Lalani, Arabic, pp. 9–10, her trans. p. 38.

¹³ Arabic, pp. 41, Walker, p. 381.

¹⁴ Walker, p. 383.

¹⁵ Arabic, p. 33, Walker, p. 384.

with the determination in law, reason, nature and social order (*siyāsa*) of his having rebelled against the rule (*mulk*) of the imam.¹⁶

He is the leader of the world and the governor (*sā'is*) of it. It has become clear that leadership (*rī'āsa*) and rulership (*siyāsa*) are required of necessity by nature, creation, natural character, innate disposition. A person who denies the law and religion, cannot deny, either in reason or in actuality, that the world has a governor (*sā'is*), a leader (*ra'is*) and a ruler (*mudabbir*), since it is required by necessity. Based on the evidence from creation and the natures we have already cited, it follows necessarily also that he must be the most excellent of all, the noblest of them, most perfect, most knowledgeable and most pure, and that the foremost leader (*muqaddim*) is the imam in all things and he is the ruler and the head.¹⁷

The perfection of mankind was due to his being the final natural kingdom of the world. He received all of what the rest had and also added some things that no other kingdom had a share in. The imams gain from all the excellences possessed by humans and are, in being human, also at the ultimate, the highest degree and the most pure of them. Yet it is possible as well for them to receive something not within the power of humans. Moreover the benefit of all that precedes reverts to them. For that reason the Commander of the Faithful combines the excellences of those who went before. Their benefit and knowledge reverts to him and in fact he exceeds double that. The power of the Prophet and his excellence was due to the combination in him of the excellences of those who preceded in the passing of the ages, and in all of their knowledge. There is in him also what he added himself. In a similar way the Commander of the Faithful combines the excellences of all those prophets, imams and sages who preceded in the passing of the ages and his adding over and above that things they were unable to do. If he had not attained this position the wisdom in their attainments would remain imperfect. The sum of all the worlds—the spiritual, the physical, and the legal—is today the Commander of the Faithful and it is for his sake that they were created.¹⁸

In summary, al-Naysābūrī has just claimed for al-Ḥākim the following: man is the best of creatures and end of the world; the imam is the best of men and the best is naturally perforce the ruler and leader of them. As the holder of

¹⁶ pp. 43–4, Walker, p. 384.

¹⁷ Walker, p. 385.

¹⁸ Arabic, pp. 105–07, cf. Lalani, trans. pp. 85–86.

power, the imam is God's shadow on the earth. He is the sun that illuminates the hearts of God's friends. The imam occupies the place that corresponds to that of the universal intellect or logos in its realm. He is the complete and ultimate sage; the brain of the world in its entirety, its head.

There are additional useful comments by the same authority in another of his works: the *Mūjaza*,¹⁹ a treatise on the proper comportment of the *dā'īs*. Since this latter work focuses more narrowly on the *da'wa* and its activities, its aim is less theoretical. In many ways we may take what it says as a practical guide to the operations of the Ismaili religious establishment. Some examples of how it speaks about the imam and his relationship to the agents who support him follow:

He who exaggerates in regard to God's saints and turns away from their *sunna* and from the path of the imams with respect to the *da'wa*, that person's appeal is not true and it is not permitted to learn from him. It is as God says: "We made them imams to lead by Our command and We inspired them to do righteous deeds, to maintain prayer, and pay the alms tax; they were worshippers of Us" [Q 21:73]. Thus does God make clear that they guide the people to the truth and summon them to the exalted God; and they do good deeds by the command of he who, over them, has command. (p. 39)

Someone might say here that he who knows all is the imam but we say that the imam does not combine it all completely but rather, most certainly, the root principles behind it. If consulted, he refers the derived problem to its fundamentals. He compares it to its root and refers it to the source of religion to ascertain if it agrees with the source of religion and of nature, otherwise he rejects it by the force of truth and reveals its falsehood. (pp. 44–45)

The *dā'ī* must see to the affairs of the *da'wa* and its proper administration, thereby relieving the Imam of that obligation, for the Imam has appointed him to manage the *da'wa* and maintain the welfare of the various regions. When he manages these affairs properly, arranging them as they should be, he settles matters by the order of the Imam for these matters belong solely to God and to His representative and it is not for anyone to speak ill of him. (p. 71)

19 See *A Code of Conduct: the Mūjaza al-kāfiya of al-Naysābūrī*, critical edition of the Arabic and complete English trans. with notes and introduction by Verena Klemm and Paul E Walker. (London, I. B. Tauris, 2011).

The *dā'ī* must constantly entreat the believers to obey the Imam and love him, appeal for him, dedicating their wealth and souls to his cause, and in pleasing him and obeying him, and undertaking holy war with him if he so orders them. The *dā'ī* should make clear to them that God is pleased by his being pleased and obeying Him means obeying him; their salvation lies in obeying and in pleasing him. Also he will make clear that there is no obligation of any kind on the Imam. What is bestowed on the people by the Imam in the way of worldly goods and knowledge, he does as a favor and a kindness and what he holds back he does so justly. (p. 73)

The *dā'ī* will urge them to be pleased and content with the actions of the Imam, and with his orders, prohibitions, and rulings. They will not object to any part of that but rather know that all of it is in conformity with a vast wisdom. If they do not comprehend that at the time, they will come to understand the wisdom in it later. Because they understand that the Imam is the wisest man in his time, it is essential that they know that all he does is done wisely, even though they may not perceive exactly how it is wise. It is like that with the actions of the Imam. (pp. 73–74)

A *dā'ī* should know that the kingdom is the protector of the faith; the kingdom of the Imam is built on religion. If the affairs of both the religion and the *da'wa* are in proper order and well maintained, the kingdom will run properly and without disorder. All of the populace will be servants of the Imam, whether in his presence or in other regions; they become like his army, supporters, and well-wishers, none able to betray or rebel against him, because all the people become his adversaries, his enemies, and opponents if there are defects in the religion and the *dā'ī* is unable or is remiss in dealing with the governing of the religion and managing it because he is himself ignorant, impious, or incompetent and unsound and untrustworthy, and he will ruin the beliefs of the believers. They will apostatize and chaos will reign. They will fall into the hands of the Materialist or the Agnostics and Libertarians. They will become skeptical of religion and sick at heart, falling into antagonism, quarreling, fighting and treating each other treacherously, lying to one another in disloyalty and greed, and usurping the rights of others, some of them against the rest. Thus harm comes to both the religion and the kingdom, the provinces fall into ruin, and the people become enemies of one another. Security, decency, piety, life, honor, and chivalry cease. The people revert to their animal natures, becoming like savage beasts, some attacking others. The heart of the Imam is preoccupied with what then happens to his community. He becomes impatient with them and, despairing of them and of the faith and those who adhere to it, he turns away and becomes

angry with them. The evil misfortune of rebellion and the wrath of the imam will hit them, his mercy having disappeared. Yet each day they increase their corruption and thus add to the chastisement in store for them. That becomes like the corruption that we are seeing at the present moment. We ask God for mercy and compassion, and that He grant us repentance and a return to obedience both to Him and to His representative, and bring an end to actions like these and remorse on our part for what we did earlier, along with the rectification of intention, resolve and the return to obedience. Perhaps God will incline the heart of the Imam to feel compassion for his servants, restore them and show mercy to them by having each *dāʿī* fulfill the stipulations of the rightly guiding *daʿwa*, may the peace of God be upon its masters, and that he forgive us for what we did before which required this punishment by locking the door to repentance. May he seek forgiveness for us so that God Himself forgives us. It is as God says: “If, when they were unjust to themselves, they had come to you so as to ask forgiveness of God, and the messenger had asked forgiveness for them, then they would have found God most forgiving and merciful” [Q4:64] (pp. 74–75).

In terms of degree of authority, nothing can be higher than the words of an imam. That would apply also to sermons (*khutbas*) composed by an imam, and perhaps other documents directly approved by an imam. Therefore the treatise by al-Manṣūr cited above has obvious weight; those by *dāʿīs* less so. Still, the latter three works on the imamate, cited above, likely expressed official doctrine even if we do not have explicit proof. For them to have been preserved by later Fatimid authorities may alone indicate approval.²⁰

It is amply clear, however, that these authors are not advisors to the caliph. What they write is in no way a mirror for the prince. And neither would even remotely have hoped to play that role. For them, in describing what an imam does, and what his subjects might expect that he would do, is almost precisely what the Muslims understand as the function of the Prophet in his capacity as the divinely appointed leader of its community. The current Fatimid imam-caliph occupies the place of the Prophet (except in regard to receiving revelations). What the imam does is what he should do and only he, among

20 Of the other such material attributed to imams, there is the by now famous letter of al-Mahdī to his followers in the Yemen, recorded from memory by Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman and a letter to Shaybān, a *dāʿī* in India, by al-Muʿizz. There may be more. Al-Manṣūr wrote a testament (*waṣīyya*) to his successor that has not been explored although the Institute possibly holds a manuscript copy.

all humans, knows exactly what that is. Ordinary humans cannot comment critically on his actions any more than they can on those of God. Like the acts of the Divine, they are simply not subject to human scrutiny, and they may be thus occasionally quite as unintelligible and perplexing as are the mysteries of many of God's ways.

Such restrictions do not, however, prevent these authors from boasting about what the imams do and have done. But, lauding the Commander of the Believer's commanding of the good and forbidding of the wrong, his charity and justice, is not prescriptive in any sense. There is no obligation involved. Such praise is simply a record from the perspective of the caliph's subjects of what good they have received from him and his actions, or what traits they happen to observe in him.

3 Additional Works by Members of the *da'wa* That Touch upon the Subject of the Imamate

From the growing list of works by the leading members of the Fatimid era *da'wa* recovered in the last decades, many also contain potentially important passages concerning the imamate. The following represent important examples:

From Ibn al-Haytham's *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*²¹ selected comments on the imams and the imamate follow:

[Ibn al-Haytham] said: 'Since we all were in agreement about the Prophet, it is necessary for us to seek the Imam after the Prophet in the origins of that particular prophet and we seek information about the Imam from the Prophet's place, and in his offspring, among his descendants, the closest of the people to him, and those of greatest benefit. If the people had wanted to make such a deduction, God, the Most High, would have guided them. Yet the Prophet set forth, indicated, and coined examples and then even declared outright, explained explicitly, and spoke plainly. However, the community gave the lie to the legatee, discredited the Prophet, and aspired to assume leadership over the people of the source of divine inspiration. Thus, after his death they fled away from nearness to God's Apostle. (p. 83)

He said: 'And what is the sign of the imamate?'

21 Ed. and trans. W. Madelung and P. E. Walker in *The Advent of the Fatimids*. (London, 2000).

I said: 'For each Imam there is a sign through which he makes clear his veracity and the falseness of any one else who claims it. God, the Mighty and Glorious, does not bestow His signs on those who lie. Moreover, it is indispensable for each Imam to have a miracle, and knowledge is the best of all miracles, in the same way that the Qur'an is the most wondrous of miracles and the most miraculous of signs. Zayd used to say, "He who wants to wage holy war should join me and he who wants knowledge should go to the son of my brother," meaning Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq. The Prophet fed a whole group of people from food that would not have satisfied even one person. He called a tree to himself and it advanced to him. Water flowed suddenly from between his fingers; the moon split for him; and other examples of miracles which could not have come from anyone but God.' (p. 89)

Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-islām (Pillars of Islam)*.²² (see below)

Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb al-himma fī ādāb atbā' al-a'imma*.²³ (*Book of Resolution with Respect to the Comportment of the Followers of the Imams*) (see below)

Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb al-majālis wa'l-musāyārāt*.²⁴

Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār fī faḍā'il al-a'imma al-āthār*.²⁵ (*Explanation of the Reports about the Excellences of the Past Imams*)

al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat Ustādh Jawdhar*.²⁶

al-Kirmānī, various titles other than his *Maṣābiḥ*, but particularly *Ma'āṣim al-hudā* (on the superiority of 'Alī over the Ṣaḥāba), *al-Risāla al-wā'iẓa* (against the proto-Druze), *al-Kāfiyya* (refutation of the Zaydi imam).

al-Majālis al-mustanṣiriyya.

al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Majālis* (at least those volumes that have been published).

Of those listed²⁷ above two (at least) by Qāḍī al-Nu'mān are essential to any discussion of the imam's authority and status. His *Pillars of Islam* contains over

22 Ed. A. A. A. Fyzee. Cairo, 1951–61; Eng. trans. by Fyzee and Ismail Poonawala, *The Pillars of Islam*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2002 & 2004).

23 Ed. M. Kāmil Ḥusayn (Cairo, 1948).

24 Ed. al-Ḥabīb al-Faḥī, Ibrāhīm Shabbūh, and Muḥammad al-Ya'lāwī. (Tunis, 1978).

25 3 vols. (Beirut, 1994).

26 Arabic text ed. M. K. Ḥusayn and M. 'Abd al-Hādī Sha'ira, (Cairo, 1954); French trans. M. Canard, *Vie de l'ustadh Jawdhar*, (Alger, 1958).

27 This list might easily be expanded. I have not included the works of al-Sijistānī and Nāṣir b. Khusraw, and there are other treatises from the *da'wa*, both by named authors and anonymous. To search it all for comments about the imamate would take time and effort, well beyond the current project. It is true that much was already done by Madelung, and

a hundred pages (pp. 19–122 of the translation) on the duty of allegiance to the imams (the “Book of *Walāya*”). There the author assembles all the hadith related from earlier imams about adherence to the imamate beginning with that of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. In it he also castigates and refutes by name many of the Islamic groups that opposed the Fatimids. Many Sunnīs, for example, claim that there is no distinction between ordinary members of the community and the House of the Prophet with respect to religious authority.

[The Imam] Ja’far b. Muḥammad said: “You must understand that none from among the earlier communities in times gone by, nor from among bygone generations, nor any community of which we have report is more iniquitous than this community [of ours]. This is because they assert that there is no distinction between them and the members of the Household of the Prophet and that the latter have no priority over them. He then who makes such an assertion has surely magnified falsehood against God and has perpetrated great slander and manifest sin. By this assertion he removes himself from the protection of Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad until such time as he repents and returns to the true faith by acknowledging the priority of he upon whom God has bestowed it from among the members of the House of prophethood, the abode of mercy, the source of knowledge, the People of the Reminder, who are frequently visited by the angels. He then who asserts that there is no priority pertaining to the one so denoted by these attributes removes himself from the protection in this world and the hereafter. (pp. 41–42).

If you maintain that the right of judgment and the authority as to that matter rest with some as distinguished from others, then tell us, with corroboration from the Book or the *sunna* or the consensus [of the community], who is thus distinguished in preference to others? They will never find the answer to that. If it is the people themselves who appoint the imam, then the imam derives his authority from their authority. Thus he does not possess any authority until they invest him with it. They, the people, then, are in effect the ‘imams’ according to the plain meaning of this [assertion], while he (the imam) is one among their officials. They therefore have the power to dismiss him, as the Murji’a have maintained. The unsoundness of this assertion is so obvious as to preclude the need for a refutation with [irrefutable] proof. (p. 52)

more recently Daftary, but there is more. However, it appears better for the present to concentrate on several from this list that are already reasonably well known and accessible.

The imams of right guidance are only creatures of God, and chosen servants from among His servants. God has enjoined obedience to each one of the them on the people of his particular age together with the obligation to submit to his authority, established them as the guides of His creation and beacons of mankind towards Him. In His Book He has associated the obedience due them with that due Him and that due His messenger since they [the imams] are His proofs to His creation and His representatives (*khulafa'*) on earth. They are not, as has been asserted by the misguided fabricators of lies, deities and gods with no higher authority above them, nor are they prophets sent by God. No revelation comes to them, as was the case with the prophets. They have no knowledge of the invisible (*ghayb*), which God kept imperceptible to His creation. No prophet was granted knowledge of the unseen except what He allowed him to have, and it is not as alleged by the slanderers and those who fabricate lies and ascribe them to the imams [that they have knowledge of the *ghayb*] and thereby invalidate [the rightful] claims [of the imams]. God is exalted above all. He has declared His friends to be free from the contentions of the heretics and the lies of the misguided disbelievers and fabricators of falsehood. (pp. 59–60)

God says, *Ask the people of the Remembrance if you know not*, and He says, *Are those who know equal with those who know not? But only men of understanding will pay heed*, and He says, *But it is clear revelations in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge*, and He says, *Allah will exalt those who believe among you, and those who have knowledge, to high ranks*. Earlier we have already made it clear that the intended reference in the foregoing and other such verses in the Book of God is to the pure imams from the House of the Messenger of God. It is they, therefore, who are the 'possessors of knowledge'; it is to them that God has entrusted it and to whom He has given preference through this trust, conferring upon them the light of knowledge as their special distinction. He has appointed them its custodians, its treasurers, and its protectors and its conveyors. [With regard to the question of knowledge and its acquisition] God has restricted the community to application to the imams and has charged them concerning matters they do not know to refer the questions to the imams. God has thereby elevated the standing of their supporters by virtue of their allegiance to them and has honored them in that they acquire their knowledge from them and in their submission to their authority and the profession of their faith and demonstration of their piety through their obedience to the imams. (p. 98)

It is the knowledge derived from the imams of the House of the Prophet Muḥammad which alone should be accepted, studied and handed down, and not what is derived from the so-called learned among the commonalty. The latter are the distorters and innovators who have treated their religion as a plaything and have been deluded by the temptations of this world. They thus became satisfied to let the worldly plane and its few ephemeral pleasures rule over them. As a result of this, they occupied positions that were not theirs and drank from sources to which they were not entitled. They contested the rights of the rightful owners and scorned to approach them, as they had been commanded by God, about what they did not know. [They scorned] to listen to their [the imam's] injunctions and obey [their command]. On the contrary, they propounded religion on the basis of their own subjective opinions and traced back such doctrines according to their use of deductive reasoning. The ignorant among the community and the rabble followed them and blindly imitated their innovations with the idea of attaining, after them, the position of leadership they had attained. The deeper their leaders sank into ignorance the more their followers considered this as a mark of distinction. (p. 104)

We have discussed already the confession of the commonalty to their ignorance and wandering in error, as well as the prohibition from following them [in their claims] and acquiring knowledge from them. [We have also demonstrated] that their tenets are based on the exercise of their own subjective opinion and deduction by analogy, which are not drawn from the Book or the *sunna*, or from an authentic tradition from the Messenger of God, or derived from an imam from the progeny of the Messenger of God, obedience to whom is compulsory. We have furnished an account of the imams of the progeny of the Prophet Muḥammad and of the way in which God has constrained us to obey them, to acquire knowledge from them, and to submit to their behest; we have also shown what obligations were imposed on their own behalf by the imams. Let this suffice as a proof and guidance. (p. 122)

Another treatise on the list, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Book of Resolution with Respect to the Comportment of the Followers of the Imams*, is especially important for the concept of authority and the imamate.²⁸ Here below is its table of contents, which helps indicate what topics it covers.

²⁸ The existing translation by Jawad Muscati is incomplete and the Arabic is rendered there so loosely as often to distort the meaning considerably.

1. It is essential for the followers of the imams to acknowledge unwavering allegiance and loyalty to them and accept and obey their leadership.
2. Loving them is also required.
3. Faithfully conveying all trusts to the imams by following their counsel requires avoiding any breach of such trust or deceiving them.
4. Respecting the imams by confessing to their august and exalted authority.
5. The command to fulfill the covenant of the imams and their stewardship and what of it belongs to them.
6. The followers of the imams are required to inform them about their own selves, their issues, and to seek forgiveness for these.
7. Restrictions on those in the *da'wa* of the imam in regard to matters that are reported to them; they inform him without taking up the issue or speaking about something not permitted to them.
8. Having patience for the agents of the imams and being thankful for what great benefit befalls them.
9. The wealth of the male and female believers the true imams will necessarily take.
10. Every faithful believer must submit all matters to the imams.
11. On fearing the imams and being wary of their punishments or the loss of status with them.
12. It is necessary to hold in high esteem those appointed by the imams and to love them, and to express animosity to their enemies, break off relationships and detest such people.
13. Submitting to the imams and avoiding objections in dealing with those the imams associate with.
14. The command to attend to all that the imams approve and to prohibit doing what they oppose.
15. The followers of the imams are forbidden envy, injustice, greed, malice and evil thoughts.
16. The order to the followers of the imams to observe humility toward God the exalted and toward the imams and to eschew pride and disdain, and to bestow the truth on those to whom it belongs.
17. The followers of the imams are commanded to be merciful and forgiving, dignified and calm.
18. The adherents of the imams must, among themselves, maintain mutual affection, interconnections, friendship, and reciprocal generosity.
19. It is essential for those the imams will see in person to be properly adorned and to display their favors before them.
20. The proper protocol for saluting the imams and speaking in front of them.
21. Standing before the imam, may God bless them, and sitting during their sessions of court, and conversing in front of them.

22. The protocol for traveling with the imams, may God bless them, and what is required of those accompanying them.
23. Attending the repast of the imams, may God bless them.
24. The comportment of the household of the imams and what is necessary that they adopt themselves in relationship to them.
25. The protocol for seeking a need from the imams.
26. The prohibition of objecting to an action of the imams and the command to perform on their behalf by accepting the charge of those charged with matters of protection by behaving justly among those of the community under that person's supervision.

4 The *Majālis* Literature

From the preceding group, three represent a special type of source that offers us a glimpse inside the *da'wa* and its recurring sessions of teaching and exhortation. In addition the earliest, the *Majālis* of Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, in contrast to the later two, features the involvement of the Imam, as he sat for his followers in a kind of court. While we assume that the Imam approved the lectures, we do not necessarily have proof in all cases. Those of al-Nu'mān are therefore particularly important since his record the direct involvement of his Imam and a fair amount of what he reports concerns in one way or another the general subject of the imamate. In fact it seems that he composed this work precisely to illustrate how and in what manner the imam governs his community.

5 Poetry

No survey of this topic is complete without taking note of the poetry produced under the Fatimids, much of which consists of laudatory verse in praise of the imams. Some of it, such as in the North African phase, was composed by non-Ismailis, or, as with the famous Ibn al-Hānī', of uncertain affiliation. A substantial amount, however, is by major figures including Tamīm b. al-Mu'izz (the caliph's oldest son), al-Mu'ayyad and Nāṣir b. Khusraw where what they say ought to be accepted as quasi-official (with allowance for the role of poetic license). As but one example Tahera Qutbuddin, in her expert study of al-Mu'ayyad's work,²⁹ offers a substantial chapter (pp. 143–218) devoted to the appropriate theme: "Praise of the Imam." There she presents both the Arabic

29 *Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Da'wa Poetry: A Case of Commitment in Classical Arabic Literature* (Brill, 2005).

text and a full English translation of the material along with detailed analysis. In many ways it constitutes a fine model for what else might be attempted with other Fatimid era poets.³⁰

The themes she develops in that section cover the imam's descent from the Prophet and his legatee ('Alī) in uninterrupted succession (*tasalsul*) and designation (*naṣṣ*); the imam's servitude to and representation of God; his attributes and functions; his role in relation to the prophets and his similarity to Jesus; Qur'anic praise of the imam; the imam's titles; the regard and acts mandatory upon mankind vis-à-vis the imam; the condition of the imam's followers and enemies in this world and the hereafter; yearning for homeland and the imam as consolation; imam as the true beloved; old age and youth with the imam as refuge in the hereafter; censure of Fate and the imam as protection against its vicissitudes; blessings and prayers for the imam. It is thus obvious that the poetry of al-Mu'ayyad is a rich mine of material concerning the imamate.

6 Polemics with Adversaries and Apologies

Once there existed a considerable literature of polemic and apology.³¹ Fatimid authors composed refutations of a full range of their opponents, and the other side did likewise. Much of this material involves an argument about the imamate and the status of one caliphate over the other. As an example from a relatively short period during the reign of al-Ḥākim, we hear of anti-Ismaili works by the following: one by the famous Malikī-Ash'arite jurist and theologian, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī called *Kashf al-asrār wa hatk al-astār*. Another theologian, the Mu'tazilī 'Alī b. Sa'īd al-Iṣṭakhṛī wrote a refutation and condemnation of Fatimid doctrine.³² The Zaydī Abu'l-Qāsim al-Bustī and his imam Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Mu'ayyad bi-allāh Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn b. Hārūn, who resided in the Caspian region, did likewise. Neither al-Bāqillānī's work, nor that of al-Iṣṭakhṛī appears to have survived, but major portions of al-Bustī's *Kashf al-asrār wa naqd al-afkār* are available.³³ The Zaydī imam's treatise against the Fatimids was answered by al-Kirmānī in a work he called *al-Risāla al-kāfiya*

30 It is important to recognize here the many studies of Pieter Smoor, one of which is especially pertinent: "Wine, Love and Praise for the Fāṭimid Imāms: The Enlightened of God," *ZDMG* 142 (1992): 90–104.

31 To be extra clear the latter term means "something said or written in defense or justification of what appears to others to be wrong or of what may be liable to disapprobation."

32 Al-Iṣṭakhṛī died in 404/1013–14 and therefore his anti-Fatimid work likely dates to the period 402–04.

33 Ed. 'Adil Sālim al-'Abd al-Jādir in his *al-Isma'īliyyūn* (no. 2) (Kuwayt, 2002).

fi'l-radd 'alā al-Hārūnī al-Ḥusaynī al-Zaydī and that we have, though not what it responded to.³⁴

Al-Kirmānī composed other refutations, among them one directed at the famous physician Abū Bakr al-Rāzī—his *al-Aqwāl al-dhahabiyya*—against the latter's *al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī*. Similarly, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, according to Poonawala's *Biobibliography*, composed refutations of the Khawārij, a Shāfi'ī scholar named Ibn Surayj, al-Shāfi'ī himself, Ibn Qutayba, Mālik, Abū Ḥanīfa, and more. It is likely that these examples represent only the tip of an iceberg. Unfortunately, as yet we have recovered only a few of them. And of course the issues of contention are not all about the imamate in any case.³⁵

7 The Imam's Sermons (*khuṭbas*)

Festival sermons, those given by the imam-caliph on the annual 'īds, the feast of fastbreaking and the feast of sacrifice, and those for Fridays of Ramaḍān, are ideal for documenting the public attitude of the imams who gave them. To a certain extent those given in their names by preachers (*khaṭībs*) of lesser ranks ought to supply useful information as well. Unfortunately, we possess only a tiny few of either kind.³⁶ What remains is to extract from them a sense of what the imams were saying specifically about the imamate. Here are some of the specific concerns voiced in these sermons and, in the following select quotations from them, we find references to the imamate, its supporters and its enemies. This material begins to tell us first what the imams actually said to their subjects and it thus reveals secondarily a little about what, in the context of a public forum, they felt the need to relate to those who followed them.

The Fatimid caliphs obviously always guarded carefully what they said, but perhaps no more so than on the occasions of the *khuṭbas* just described, when they spoke before an audience that may well have included a vast array of their subjects, representing many different religious inclinations—Sunnīs and Shī'īs of various kinds—and also a variety of ranks: men of the elites from both the military and the bureaucracy, merchants, religious scholars, and the common folk among them. They knew well that the audience for these *khuṭbas* likely

34 Ed. by Muṣṭafā Ghālib as part of his *Majmū'at rasā'il al-Kirmānī* (Beirut, 1983).

35 Specifically on the subject of Ismaili polemics against opponents see chapter twenty of the present volume.

36 I have published the Arabic text and a translation of all those we have, plus a survey of the historical materials about them: *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs: Festival Sermons of the Ismaili Imams*. (London, 2008).

consisted both of their most loyal subjects and at the same time others less attached, possibly some who harbored grave doubts about them, even hostility.

[In the original full version of this paper, I included substantial extracts from the caliphal sermons and much of that same material appears later in this volume in Part Four, chapters on polemics, ritual preaching (i.e. the *khutbas*), and conflict with rivals. For the present chapter I've included here a small sample to indicate its importance for the delineation of an imam's role.]

Khutbas from North Africa feature a direct appeal by name to the Kutāma. The first instance is particularly striking. It occurs in the *khutba* read to the army during Abū Yazīd's siege of al-Mahdiyya in Rajab 333 (March 945). In the name of al-Qā'im, the judge al-Marwadhī praises the Kutāma, whose forefathers had performed so gloriously on behalf of the Fatimid imamate. "You were the cache where God placed this Muḥammadan, Fatimid, mahdist right [to the imamate] until He caused it to triumph". "You are," it goes on to say, "like the apostles of Jesus and the Anṣār of Muḥammad."

To bear witness or testify that Muḥammad was the prophet and messenger of God is a standard feature of the Fatimid *khutba* in general. Muḥammad is the "grandfather", e.g. of the current caliph, or, as it most often appears, as "our grandfather", as in the invocation of God's blessings on "our grandfather" (*jaddīnā*). The meaning, of course, is ancestor or forefather, but it carries a special connotation in conjunction with references to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who is always called "our father" (*abūnā, abīnā*).

References and characterizations of 'Alī are particularly important as a sign of the ancestral lineage of the Fatimids and of the Shī'ī assertion of legitimacy for its imamate. 'Alī bears the title Commander of the Believers, which, for the Shī'a, applies to him alone among the companions of the Prophet since they do not recognize any of the others as valid successors to the imamate. In his position as heir to the Prophet, both physically and spiritually, he carries also the title of Legatee (in Arabic *waṣī*). He was, moreover, in the same position as had been Aaron with respect to his brother Moses. The Prophet had stated, according to a hadith of special importance to the Shī'a, that, "'Alī is to me as Aaron was to Moses."

Here follow some examples from the *khutbas*:

'Alī, the Commander of the Believers and master of the legatees and best of Muslims.³⁷

and bless the first to respond to him [i.e. the Prophet], 'Alī, the Commander of the Believers and Lord of the Legatees, the establisher of

37 *Khutba* of al-Manṣūr on the *īd al-aḍḥā* in the year 335 (no. 6).

excellence and mercy, the pillar of knowledge and wisdom, the root of the noble and righteous tree generated from the sacred and pure trunk. And [blessings be] on his successors, the lofty branches of that same tree, and on what comes from it: the fruit that grows there.³⁸

God bless our grandfather, Muḥammad, the guide to the shining path, and our father, the Commander of the Believers, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, his brother and son of his paternal uncle, whom he sanctioned for the position of executor, and the chaste imams among the descendants of both, the clear evident proofs of God to His creatures.³⁹

O God, bless Your servant and Your messenger with a perpetually perfect blessing, increase him with an honor to his honor and a nobility to his nobility. Bless also all of the Companions of the Cloak (*aṣḥāb al-kisā’*), the pure ones, the immaculates: ‘Alī, the Commander of the Believers, Fāṭima the radiant, mistress of the women of the two worlds, and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the two most noble and most righteous, and [bless] the rightly guided imams among the progeny of al-Ḥusayn, the luminaries of guidance, the full moons of the darkness, the masters of mankind, friends of the Most Merciful, the proofs of times, and pillars of the faith.⁴⁰

I testify that Muḥammad is His chosen servant, and His approved messenger, His confidant for what He reveals, the deliverer from error and destruction, may God bless him and his revered family, the rightly guided ones, the imams of righteous guidance: ‘Alī, the Commander of the Believers and master of the legatees and best of Muslims; Fāṭima, the radiant, mistress of the women of the two worlds; and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the two lords of the youth among the people of paradise; and the imams from the progeny of al-Ḥusayn, the chaste ones, the remainder of the messenger of God and his fruit, his two heirs, his proof to the servants, the mountains of religion, lords of the believers and saints of the worlds.⁴¹

In Fatimid era *khuṭbas* both Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are cited as imams and members of the five Companions of the Cloak, although they make quite clear that the imamate continued after them solely among the descendants of Ḥusayn.

38 Qirwāsh's *khuṭba* (no. 11).

39 Qirwāsh's *khuṭba* (no. 11).

40 From the *khuṭba* by al-Manṣūr on the *ʿid al-fiṭr* 335 (no. 5).

41 *Khuṭba* of al-Manṣūr on the *ʿid al-adḥā* in the year 335 (no. 6).

al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the two most noble and most righteous, and [bless] the rightly guided imams among the progeny of al-Ḥusayn, the luminaries of guidance, the full moons of the darkness, the masters of mankind, friends of the Most Merciful, the proofs of times, and pillars of the faith.⁴²

[Bless] al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn two imams of the community and shining lights of the sphere of religion and its perfection in assemblies and festivals.⁴³

It was evidently customary practice to cite each of the preceding imams by name back from the current caliph to al-Mahdī. Ibn al-Ṭuwayr near the end of the dynasty suggests as much. In one of the two *khutbas* of al-Āmir, this caliph lists all of those who came before him from al-Mahdī through al-Mustaʿlī, his own father. All those to the reign of al-Ḥākim are named likewise in the *khutba* of Qirwāsh. Since the full name of each caliph contained the word Allāh, as in al-Manṣūr bi-Naṣr Allāh or al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, in the sermon where the name appears as part of a request addressed directly to God for Him to bless each of the imams so named, the proper form requires a personal pronoun, thus al-Manṣūr bi-Naṣrika (“The One who is victorious through Your support”, rather than “The One who is victorious through the support of God”) or al-Ḥākim bi-Amrika (“The Ruler by Your Command” rather than “The Ruler by the Command of God”).

Two of our surviving *khutbas* announce formally the death of the previous imam. It was Fatimid policy to delay such revelations until the situation on the ground was calm and stable. In the first instance al-Manṣūr in fact waited for his sermon on the festival of fast-breaking in 336, almost two full years after the loss of his father, although by then surely everyone knew. It may therefore be significant that he speaks of having lost both his father and his grandfather.

May the peace of God and His blessings, benedictions, salutations, and charity (*zakiyyāt*) be on you both, O Commanders of the believers, O you two caliphs of the Lord of the universe, O you two sons of the mahdists's guidance, O father, O grandfather, O sons of Muḥammad, the messenger of God! ... He imposed on me in losing you both, patience. ... the misfortune and flow of tears over me, O father, O Muḥammad, O Abu'l-Qāsim, O mountain, O what longing, O what agony!

42 From the *khutba* by al-Manṣūr on the *ʿīd al-ḥijr* 335 (no. 5).

43 *Khutba* of al-Āmir (no. 13).

I am not in doubt as to the choice of God for you and His transporting you to the abode of His favor and residence of His mercy, which provides accommodations for Muḥammad, His messenger, your grandfather, as well as the Commander of the believers, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, your father, and Fāṭima, the radiant virgin, your mother, and your pure righteous mahdist forefathers. But the grief of the grief-stricken is a spur to sorrows, causing tears in the eyes.

In a second case al-Mu‘izz revealed his father’s death in the first and only full *khutba* we have from him.

O God, single out the excellent imam, ... Abu’l-Ṭāhir al-Manṣūr bika, ... he whom You have made us miserable by his loss and left us alone after him. You have separated us from him and made us grieve.

Truly the distress and severe agony due to you O my father, O master, O Ismā‘īl, O Abu’l-Ṭāhir, O sea of the knowledge of the chaste imams, of mahdist guidance, O remnant of the sons of the messenger and sons of the legatee and the immaculate lady, O imam of the community and key of the door to mercy, O lamp of right guidance, sun of mankind, he who casts light in the deep darkness, O he whom God made special by swift favors, painful for us by God who are afflicted by you. The misfortune is great; because of losing you consolation does not exist; and tongues fail in enumerating your excellences or counting your virtues. So, by Him who singled you out with His mark of honor and presented you with the abundance of His gifts, ennobled you with the parentage of His messenger, were it not for what You inspire in me because of him and confirm for me as to upholding the truth of God and defending the community of your forefather, the messenger of God, rescuing them from the flood of ignorance, the sea of error, abysses of disorder, and the wreckage of misfortunes, ... if it were not for that I would strike my face as a traveler in the land, loathing a place of rest, being content with a bag full of provisions, so that death should quickly take me to you, and thereby to gain for me nearness to you and the mercy of your Lord.

But instead I ponder, observe and govern. I see for me no other way except patience and consideration, and that I claim your position and acquire your nobility, and so I endure. My Lord makes me patient and so I am patient. Conviction overcomes me and so I forbear.

Another *khutba* speaks more explicitly about the duties and rights of the imamate:

God said: "O you who believe, obey God and obey the messenger and those with authority among you" [4: 59]. Thus He makes obedience a duty, attaching it to obedience to the regulators of His affairs. They are the ones who uphold, on behalf of God, His truth and those who summon to him whoever desires to obey Him. He singled them out by the imamate, which is the highest of the ranks below prophecy. He prescribed for the servants rights due them and ordered them to fulfill these. He stipulated that they are connected to obeying him, doubling their reward on the measure of how well they follow those whose authority is ordained. The imam has not the option to reduce the rights of his flock, nor is the flock to decrease the rights of their imam. Among the rights of the flock against their imam is the maintaining of the Book of God and the Sunna of His Prophet, may God bless him and his family, and restitution from those who treat them unjustly for those so treated, and from the powerful among them for the weak, from the noble of them for the lowly, investigating their manner of life and the differing conditions of it, looking solicitously upon his dependents in his efforts, watching over them with his eye. For He, great and glorious is He, concerning what He praised of the character of His Prophet and His messenger said: "There has come to you a messenger from among yourselves; a sorrow that befalls you grieves him; he is anxious concerning you; with the believers he is kind and compassionate" [9:128]. When he does that, the flock should revere him, honor him and extend assistance to him, standing prepared and ready, on behalf of what is right according to the book of God and the Sunna of His Prophet, may God bless him and his family.⁴⁴

8 Imperial Letters and Decrees

Of literally thousands upon thousands of official decrees and letters issued by the imam in the Fatimid period, or those assigned by him to act in his name, we now have access to perhaps 300, nearly all copies of the original preserved in later histories and chancery collections. There are examples of many different types: edicts and legislations of new regulations, letters of appointment to office, letters of explanation, commemorations of ritual events and ceremonies, celebrations of one sort or another. All potentially contain phrases, or

44 *Khuṭba* of al-Qā'im 302 (no. 1).

even a whole paragraph, about the imam and his authority.⁴⁵ From one source or another, we have the complete text of at least five appointments to the office of *wazīr*, and one each for that of chief *qāḍī*, head of the *maẓālim* (grievances) court, the *naqīb al-ashrāf* (head of the Aliid nobility), *amīr* (leader) of the *ḥajj*, *amīr* of the *jihād*, teacher in a *madrasa*, and a few others. There are two examples or more for the *ḥisba* (market supervision). Quite importantly, we have also two for the chief *dāʿī*. For the offices respectively of chief *qāḍī* and chief *dāʿī* there exist only one example each: al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. al-Nuʿmān as judge in 389/999 and al-Muʿayyad as *dāʿī* in 450/1058. But for al-Muʿayyad we have a second appointment or recall to the same position and the text of that decree is also preserved. The *maẓālim* is represented by one for Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān from 343/954–5 and another for Ruzzik b. Talaʿī during the wazirate of his father.

One valid test for those that are truly Fatimid is the presence in the text of a phrase asking for God's blessings (or the addressee's praise) to be on "the Messenger of God, **our grandfather** (*jaddīnā*) ... and on [ʿAlī] **our father** (*abīnā*)". The issuing person is, of course, the Fatimid caliph and normally a decree of appointment supposes that it is he who speaks and who creates the commission (the *ʾahd* involved). Only a Fatimid could refer to Muḥammad as his "grandfather" (forefather, progenitor) and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib as his "father", as is fairly standard in Fatimid decrees almost across the board.

The Fatimids in North Africa had appointed no *wazīrs* and the notion of delegating that level of authority to a subordinate seemed not to have existed. But with al-Jarjārāʾī the situation had changed radically. But his decree (dated 418/1028) states quite clearly that *wazīrs* are not and do not diminish the status of the caliph-imam. One decree that lacks a name of the appointee carefully explains that it is God and God alone who requires no *wazīr*. But humans do. If anyone, they say, could not have needed a *wazīr*, it would have been Moses. Nonetheless, it was he who asked God to appoint him a *wazīr*, Aaron, his brother (per Qurʾanic report). Muḥammad's *wazīr* was ʿAlī. Thus two of the greatest prophets, men of the highest capacities and each exempt from even the possibility of error, found it useful to have a *wazīr*. Though Aaron and ʿAlī were ideal *wazīrs*, the decree goes on to cite Joseph as the true model. His shepherding of the public welfare on behalf of pharaoh, especially of financial matters, is what the caliph expects of his new *wazīr*.

45 For a forthcoming article (now published and included as chapter four here below) entitled "The Responsibilities of Political Office in a Shīʿī Caliphate and the Delineation of Public Duties under the Fatimids," I investigated the topic of public duty as it was explained in the diploma of investiture.

From the decree appointing Qāḍī al-Nu'mān over the *mazālim* courts (343/954) we have the following:

The Commander of the Believers having observed your piety, fidelity to the faith, uprightness and commendable manner and being satisfied with the discharge of your judicial duties [in previous appointments], he now invests you with the absolute authority to look into the *mazālim*.

Having also taken note of your true loyalty to the imams and your upholding of justice in your decisions, and having seen what tests and trials have revealed about you ... the Commander of the Believers thinks it proper, in order to strengthen, buttress, reinforce and augment this appointment, to issue a public decree addressed to you so that the hopes of any who seek justice from you may be encouraged and those against whom your judgments might go will be filled with fear. The schemes of those who want to contravene justice by avoiding you and resorting to others may be frustrated.

From the decree issued to al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, recalling him to the position of chief *dā'i* in 454/1062:

You took charge of the rightly guiding *da'wa*, healing souls with your healing discourse, the star of inner perception shining bright from the rising point of your tongue. You furnished proof of what is with us, the People of the House of Prophecy, of the honor of knowledge, and you expounded upon our being the interpreters of God's hidden secret. You "proclaimed among the people the pilgrimage" to our *da'wa*, "they come walking and riding on every lean mount," (Qur'an 22: 27). You snared each fleeing heart with the net of belief.⁴⁶

Note in such state decrees of appointment how it remains important to cite the appointee's service to the imam, to the *da'wa* in his favor, and, in turn, his high regard for the recipient, who, among other roles, teaches the people about the imam's being the interpreter of "God's hidden secret."

From a decree of investiture for the chief justice (al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. al-Nu'mān, in 389/999), we have evidence that offers a unique opportunity to read the exact language used by the Fatimids to express the imam's policy in making this appointment (or any other appointment for that matter): what did the caliph expect of his chief justice and precisely what duties does the

⁴⁶ Trans. Qutbuddin, *al-Mu'ayyad*, pp. 384–85.

document specify for this office. Though drafted in the chancery, it states the policy of the ruler. Here are the main points of the text.⁴⁷

This is what the servant of God and His agent al-Manṣūr Abū 'Alī al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allah, Commander of the Believers, entrusts to the Qāḍī Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. al-Nu'mān in appointing him to act as presiding judge over Cairo the Victorious, and Fustat, Alexandria and its dependencies, the Holy Cities [Mecca and Madina], may God the exalted protect them both, the military districts of Syria, and the governorates of the Maghrib, along with [responsibility for] those mounting the pulpits, the leaders of the congregational mosques and those assigned to look after them, and those who call to prayer, the rest of those who operate in these and others of the mosques. He is to supervise all matters pertaining to their welfare and he is to oversee the mint and the weighing of gold and silver. This is in addition to what the Commander of the Believers may employ him to do or not do, have in mind for him or propose to him, in following his examples or his being brought to a certain choice based on what is widely accepted and current among all the people of distinction in the state. ... There is no success except through God, the Patron of the Commander of the Believer, He on whom both he and the rest of the Muslims rely for the good things in what matters of theirs that God appoints and assigns to him.

[The caliph] orders him to arrange his sitting for judgment in places near the vicinities of the litigants, to remove barriers and open his doors to them, to make his court session agreeable to all, to divide between them his phrases proportionately, not to favor in that a powerful man because of his power nor to ruin in that a weak man because of his weakness, but rather lean to the truth and incline in its direction, upholding thus the truth always and maintain the balanced scale.

[The caliph] commands him to take great care in supervising the notary witnesses who fall under him and who affect deeply the implementing of judgments and extracting of decisions. Try to see into their conditions with appropriate perception, apprehending their private affairs with sufficient realization. He should ask about their religious schools, investigating their private and public lives, affairs that are open and those keep secret. Those of them he finds are just and of good faith,

47 Taken from Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī šinā'at al-inshā'* (Cairo, 1912–1938), 10: 384–88.

upright and self-respecting, intent on the truth, bearing witness to what is right, of good character, a manner near to perfection, he will retain.

[The caliph] orders him to act in accord with the standard set for him by the Commander of the Believers in regard to those in charge of the funds of orphans and of bequests, those persons who are defective in the mind, those unable to handle their own funds. He is to proceed in a way that these matters will be in conformity with what pleases God and His agent, protecting them and preserving through those trustworthy persons assigned over them.

[The caliph] orders him to supervise the imams of the congregational mosques and the administrators of them, the preachers in them, those who give the call to prayer, and the rest of those involved in serving it. His supervision will not permit faults to enter any thing pertaining thereto: from the cleaning of its courtyard and open spaces, replacing its mats that are used at appropriate times, furnishing them with lamps at times that need them, announcing prayers at the hour for them, and the *iqāma* at the times for it, having them fulfill the duty of *rak'as* and prostrations, along with observing the stipulations and measures for them without innovation or anything in them left out. "Most certainly prayers are for the believers at times fixed" [Q 4: 103].

[The caliph] commands him to watch over the mint and the weighing of gold and silver by means of trustworthy persons who guard both from every sort of adulteration. Those who work in either will not have the means to introduce into the operation any manner of debasement; because it is through cash and coin that tenements, estates and goods are obtained, slaves purchased, marriages contracted, claims paid. The introduction of deception and the entry of anything like it is injurious to the religion and causes harm to the Muslims. The Commander of the Believers declares to God that he is innocent of both.

This is what the Commander of the Believers has commissioned. Fulfill his commission, being led by his guidance, directed by his direction.

The responsibilities of all who occupy lesser ranks, in direct contrast with that of the imam, are not exempt from human inquiry and from the expectations of the governing authority. But the interplay between the exalted concept of rule by a divinely sanctioned imam, whose knowledge of right and wrong depends on God alone, who infallibly determines what can and cannot, should and should not, be done, and the actions proper to those he appoints to serve him as intermediaries between himself and his subjects, is not quite the same as it would have been under the Abbasids. The Fatimids claim infallible,

divinely protected authority; no power is above them save that of God Himself. There is no consensus of Muslims to which they themselves adhere. Those the Fatimids appoint to office are beholden to them and not to an abstract notion of Islamic doctrine derived from the collective determinations of the scholars, as among Sunnīs.

Nearly all Fatimid decrees of this type contain statements about duties in a general manner. They are thus common to the work of almost any office. It would be rare not to find some version of the command to “order the good and prohibit the bad”, to fear God and rely on Him, or to treat the rich the same as the poor, the powerful as if they were weak, the weak as if they were powerful, elites like the masses, masses like the elites. All *qādīs*—presumably all—were carefully admonished to deal with the funds of orphans in a proper manner (ie., returning it to them in a timely fashion).⁴⁸ The clerks in the chancery merely had to invent slightly different ways of saying it for each subsequent occasion. But provisions of this kind are a generic component of such decrees and do not express a Fatimid trait or condition any more than the decrees issued by another dynasty. And for that reason this material is of much less interest.

In fact other portions of these decrees, not directly related to the statement of duties, have more interest. Normally they commence with a section praising God, followed by a paragraph invoking His blessings on the Prophet, on ‘Alī and the imams, and then a statement about the Commander of the Believers, who is the caliph-imam of the present, the one who issues the decree. The balance of the text covers the specifics of the position in question, the qualification of the person being appointed to it, and finally instructions on how to perform the job properly, i.e., the duties entailed in it. For a governor of Alexandria, for example, there will be fulsome praise of the city and its importance. Most decrees laud the appointee by stating that the Commander of the Believers considered all his men and found that only he—the new office holder—had all the qualifications required. One qualification, curiously, cited specifically and quite often, is having come from a noble lineage. High lineage seems to be especially important for holding public responsibility (lineage was, after all, the key to Fatimid legitimacy itself). The section containing Instructions might have both those specific to the position and others that are more generally true of public office.

48 That this provision is a standard feature of appointment decrees for the judiciary surely indicates that violations of the judge’s responsibilities in this area were not infrequent. In fact we have several cases of Fatimid judges who fell victim to their own venality with respect to the funds of orphans.

Nevertheless, on the matter of the imamate and the overriding authority of that rank, there was little or no compromise. The one area of greatest contrast between Fatimid and non-Fatimid delineations of public duty is the appeal in the latter to observe and adhere to the prevailing consensus of the Islamic scholarly community, in other words, to follow the lead of illustrious predecessors.⁴⁹ That provision is absent from Fatimid documents which focus exclusively on the guidance of the imam. Thus the major difference and what distinguishes Fatimid doctrine from that of its rivals is its insistence on the pure and unshared authority of the living imam—an authority that is comprehensive for all aspects of Islamic law and practice, in fact for government and governing in every respect.

But such a position is less explicit in the evidence than it might have been. Having no wish to aggravate the situation with highly charged rhetoric, the Fatimids preferred a quieter approach, one that befitted a diverse population where the point was made by omitting a doctrine favored elsewhere, the net effect which served, even so, to strengthen the authority and sole discretion of the imam. By not admitting any other, none could be cited or appealed to. An official within such an administration had no choice but to acknowledge the caliph's authority. Public responsibility involved less a duty to the community, either as an abstraction or as an actual society of citizens, than to the imam-caliph who was its supreme head and its highest embodiment. The actions of a public official should reflect those of its leader, his wishes, and his alone.

It is therefore obvious that Fatimid era authorities expressed a fairly clear and consistent doctrine concerning the imamate and the ultimate authority it entailed. Although certain works by figures in the pre-Fatimid and early *da'wa* indicate differences and elements of confusion, that is less and less common in official pronouncements once the state had come into existence. Moreover, there is no lack of material from this later period (i.e. 910 to 1171) and nearly every document or writing from then offers confirmation of that fact. Therefore the information available is correspondingly large—even immense—and only a portion of this has been discussed above. I doubt that collecting it all, assuming it were even possible, would add either extra clarity or much that might

49 A good example of the Abbasid (or other Sunnī) type is the commission (*'ahd*) composed by Ibn 'Abbād in the name of Mu'ayyad al-Dawla appointing 'Abd al-Jabbār *qāḍī al-quḍāt* of Rayy in 367/977, which explicitly cites the *ijmā'* (consensus) and "the statements of the famous predecessors and well-regarded scholars of the community" as guides to the law as material on which the judge should rely (*Rasā'il*, pp. 35–36).

be new. Better to concentrate on works of major importance and items that are not now readily accessible. Thus while there is more to be done, material to study and analyze, and aspects of the concept of authority still to investigate, we know at this point a great deal about the rule of the imams during the Fatimid empire both in theory and, most especially, in practice.

Was the Fatimid *Amīr al-Juyūsh* in fact a *Wazīr*?

From¹ the coming to Egypt of Badr al-Jamālī² until the very end of the Fatimid state, the functioning head of government was, except for a few minor breaks in continuity, an *amīr al-juyūsh* (Commander of Armed Forces). These men wielded all but absolute power over both the military and the civilian bureaucracy. Traditionally, the holders of this office, however, are referred to as “*wazīrs*” although none of them were “men of the pen” and thus hardly fit the classical mold of earlier Fatimid and non-Fatimid or even contemporary *wazīrs* in other regions of the Islamic world. Al-Maqrīzī, perhaps our best source, notes this discrepancy. The term “*wazīr*” seemed to have fallen out of use in this one period. And yet he also remarks that all of these “men of the sword” were nevertheless regarded as *wazīrs*, that title now having an informal rather than formal implication.

It is thus partly a matter of designation and titulary, not merely of either theory or practice. Prior to Badr al-Jamālī use of the title “*wazīr*” is well attested in the inscriptions on the *ṭirāz*, which was under the control of the *wazīr* (as opposed to coinage which belonged to the *qāḍī*), and most importantly in the decrees (*sjillāt*) of appointment to the office. The text of the decree elevating al-Jarjarāī to the wazirate in 418/1027 exists. It is a major piece of evidence for defining the Fatimid (or any other) wazirate. The language in it is precise and it provides the full rationale for this institution. The evidence from the

1 This is a slightly altered version of the paper “Was the Fatimid *Amīr al-Juyūsh* in fact a *Wazīr*?” originally published in F. Daftary and Sh. Jiwa, eds, *The Fatimid Caliphate: Diversity of Traditions* (London, I. B. Tauris, 2018), pp. 80–93.

2 The importance of this event for the progress of Fatimid history has been noted and discussed by several modern authorities, among them particularly Michael Brett, “Badr al-Gamālī and the Fatimid Renaissance,” in U. Vermeulen and J. Van Steenberghe, eds, *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, IV (Leuven, 2005), pp. 61–78, with citations to the author’s previous studies as well; Johannes den Heijer, “Le vizir fatimide Badr al-Gamālī (466/1074–487/1094) et la nouvelle muraille du Caire: quelques remarques préliminaires,” in U. Vermeulen and K. D’Hulstter, eds, *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, V (Leuven, 2007), pp. 91–107, also with citations of earlier studies by the author; and most especially Heinz Halm, “Badr al-Gamālī—Wesir oder Militardiktator?,” in the same volume of *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, pp. 121–27, which addresses directly many of the concerns explored in this paper. Now see also Halm’s *Kalifen und Assassinen: Egypten und der vordere Orient zur Zeit der ersten Kreuzzüge* (Munich, 2014), pp. 17–28, 35–37.

later period is much less clear in regard to use and definition of this term in this latter context. Still it is common to speak here of “*wazīrs* of the sword” or, even less appropriately, to apply to this situation al-Māwardī’s two classes of *wazīr*, *tafwīdī* and *tanfidhī*, although he had died before it came into being and had never observed a case like this, which was, when it happened, unprecedented. The last century of Fatimid rule was organized on a principle—a new institution—not like any other previous to it, and it therefore represents a unique development in the history of the Islamic wazirate.

In 466/1074 the caliph al-Mustanṣir summoned Badr al-Jamālī, the commander of the Fatimid armies in Syria, to Egypt, in effect to rescue him and the dynasty from almost certain imminent collapse and extinction.³ The invitation went out secretly but with the highest state authority behind it. Badr, a former *mamlūk* and ethnically Armenian, who had been purchased in his youth for thirteen dinars,⁴ was then at the height of a long military career in service to the Fatimids. At that time he was stationed at Acre. He understood the difficult situation in Cairo quite well and replied that he would come only on the condition that he be granted permission to bring with him an army. There were at that point no reliable troops in Egypt. The caliph responded affirmatively.

To avoid a protracted well-observed march overland, Badr decided to risk an unprecedented mid-winter crossing from Acre by sea. For forty days he loaded one hundred ships⁵ with troops and equipment and transported them successfully to Egypt, landing safely at Damietta. No one could remember that having been done before. Once in the country, he marched on Cairo, which he entered soon thereafter, welcomed by the local elite who knew little of why he had come. But not long after, he invited many of them to a day of festivities capped by a banquet at which he carefully staged the execution of his guests one by one, carried out on his orders by his own men, who in turn each inherited the possessions and position of the man he had personally killed. All potential local opposition gone, Badr was then accorded the powers of the *wazīr*, his rank, at least, now being obvious to all.

3 There are various sources for the advent of Badr in Egypt. See especially Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*, ed. M. al-Yaʿlāwī, 8 vols (Beirut, 1991) (bio. of Badr); the same author’s, *Ittīʾāz al-hunafāʾ bi-akhbār al-aʾimma al-fāṭimīyyīn al-khulafāʾ*, vol. 2, ed. Muḥammad Ḥilmī Muḥammad Aḥmad (Cairo, 1971); Ibn Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Akhbār Miṣr*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid (Cairo, 1981); and Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, *Mirʾat al-zamān fī taʾrīkh al-aʾyān: al-Ḥawādith al-khāṣṣa bi-taʾrīkh al-Salājiqa bayna al-sanawāt 1056–1086*, ed. Ali Sevim (Ankara, 1968). The *Mirʾat al-zamān* has a different perspective and thus different information.

4 Information from Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar wa jāmiʿ al-ghurar*, part six, *al-Durra al-muḍīyya fī akhbār al-dawla al-fāṭimīyya*, ed. S. al-Munajjid (Cairo, 1961), 6: 372.

5 The number of ships is important because it is our only gauge of how large a force he brought from Syria.

Next Badr took his army back into the eastern Delta to confront the Lawāta tribesmen who completely dominated that region except for major towns. The newly arrived Syrians decimated the Lawāta, killing a great many including all of the leaders. Once the eastern Delta was put in proper order, Badr turned to the west, attacking renegade forces and finally capturing Alexandria. Following that victory he moved into Upper Egypt and routed a combined army of Arab Bedouin and Sudanese, the latter all former regulars in the Fatimid army but now independent supporters of various warlords. As in the previous instances, Badr's troops annihilated this opposition, in effect cleaning out of Egypt all resistance to the central government, up to and including Aswan, where Badr dedicated a new mosque in the name of victory (*naṣr*). About this time he received word that, at long last the Saljuks, who had threatened for two decades to conquer Egypt, had in fact invaded the country and were now moving through the Delta menacing Cairo. Instead of panic the Fatimid commander slowly marched back, passing the capital en route, and finally coming face to face with the Saljuk force. By then he had gathered as many as thirty thousand troops. The Saljuk army was much smaller and it, like all the others, was soon destroyed utterly, leaving only a handful to flee individually back toward Palestine.⁶ The Saljuks never invaded Egypt again. Badr's hold on the land was total and secure throughout. The Fatimid dynasty had been given a new lease on life.

The purpose of recounting in such detail the events associated with Badr al-Jamālī's advent in Egypt is to show, as clearly as possible, the role in it of the military, that is, of his own militia, the one he brought with him from Syria, and of his personal command of it and its actions. Without it and his direct involvement in its operations, he could not have accomplished what he did. That he should be known above all as the *Amīr* al-Juyūsh, the "Commander of the Armed Forces" is absolutely appropriate. Yet, once in power in Egypt, he, and all those who were to occupy the office he held, are said to be "*wazīrs*," although most certainly Badr was not and had never been a bureaucrat. He was simply not from the clerical or the scholarly class. Therefore it is necessary to ask what, or where, was the precedent for a *wazīr* of this new type, if it in fact existed at all.⁷ What did it mean to call Badr a *wazīr*, especially since he was never to use that title and was thus not formally entitled "*Wazīr*"?

6 There are at least two accounts of this battle, one in Ibn Muyassar and Maqrīzī and the other in Sibṭ (*Mir'at al-zamān*, pp. 182–85).

7 Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* (*al-ma'rūf bi'l-mawā'iz wa'l-i'tibār bi'dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa'l-āthār* (Bulaq edition) 1: 440, calls it "*wazīr sayf*" and remarks "no one preceded him in [having] that [kind of] office (*wa lam yataqaddamhu fī dhalika aḥadun*).

It may be useful to stress the point again that Badr al-Jamālī came to the wazirate from the military, not merely by moving laterally from one office to another, but by in effect ordering his own troops to seize control. And he remained in power on the strength of that same force. Is there a similar prior case among, say, the Abbasids?

Some background and context may be helpful here. Stepping back from 466/1074 to the watershed year of 450/1058–9, the *wazīr* in Egypt at its beginning was al-Yāzūrī on behalf of the same Fatimid caliph al-Mustanṣir. In Baghdad the *wazīr* was Ibn al-Muslima, acting for the Abbasid caliph; the Saljuk grand sultan Tughril Beg had his own *wazīr*, al-Kundurī; and about that time, the future Saljuk sultan Alp Arslan began to rule Naysabur (in the name of his father), yet even then his *wazīr* was the later famous Nizām al-Mulk. All four *wazīrs* were bureaucrats, strictly men of the pen. Note also that the two Saljuks each had their own *wazīrs*, as was fairly common for both the Saljuks and the Buyids before them. There is no precedent in such examples of a “military *wazīr*,” or a *wazīr* of the sword, if that is the proper way to characterize the institution that Badr seems to have created.

For the Fatimids much earlier, there were no *wazīrs* under the first four caliphs in any sense. All of these caliphs ruled so personally and directly, the delegation of substantial amounts of authority by them to underlings was relatively rare. The first true *wazīr* was Ya‘qūb Ibn Killis, who was appointed to the office by al-‘Azīz in 368/979. With minor interruptions, once elevated to that rank, he remained *wazīr* from then until his death in 380/991. However, little primary evidence exists from his period: no documents, no inscriptions. Confirmation of his title—that he in fact was *wazīr* in name—comes from the *tirāz*. Coinage under the Fatimids was the domain of the *qāḍī*, not the *wazīr* (although only the name of the caliph appeared on it). But *tirāz*, following a practice that goes back to the Abbasids, belonged to the *wazīr* and typically his name and titles were included in the inscription embroidered on each piece. Fortunately, we have examples bearing the name and title “*wazīr*” for Ibn Killis.⁸

Ibn Killis was a man of many talents but they are all those of either a scholar or a bureaucrat.⁹ After him, however, the Fatimid caliphs appoint no more *wazīrs* for the next thirty-eight years. Both al-‘Azīz and his son al-Ḥākim

8 Examples in the *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, ed. Ét. Combe, J. Sauvaget, G. Wiet, et al. (Cairo, 1933–). Hereafter RCEA.

9 Note the possibility that he planned to create a personal militia, the *wazīriyya*. See Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids: The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Tenth Century CE* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 343.

preferred a lesser office, weaker and more malleable, that of *wāsita*, a kind of quasi-wazirial “intermediary.”¹⁰ In the distinction between the *wizāra* and the *wasāṭa*, we may have some indication of how the Fatimids viewed the former. To be *wazīr* was obviously of greater significance; that rank was higher and carried more responsibility and independence. As long as the caliph preserved a direct interest in the daily management of his empire, there were no *wazīrs*.

The next case is that of al-Jarjarāʾī, who became *wazīr* in 418/1027 after more than a quarter century of working his way up through the bureaucracy. With al-Jarjarāʾī, moreover, not only do we have *tirāḡ* that boldly proclaims him the “Illustrious *Wazīr*” (*al-Wazīr al-Ajall*), but also the text of the imperial decree appointing him to the office survives.¹¹ That text is extremely important. It defines for us quite explicitly what the term “*wazīr*” meant to the Fatimids and what they expected of those who rose to this exalted office.

Although composed in the chancery, by yet another bureaucrat (the head of the *Dīwān al-Inshāʾ*),¹² it surely reflects the attitude of the ruling authority and of the dynasty as a whole. In character with the Shiism of the government, it remarks first that ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the ancestor of the caliph himself, was the *wazīr* of the Prophet.¹³ It likewise cites the Qurʾanic proof-text for the term: Moses’s request of God to appoint for him a *wazīr*, that person to be his own brother Aaron.¹⁴ Yet, as obvious and as necessary as both citations appear in this situation—the brother connection of Aaron to Moses is parallel to that of

10 Also called the *sifāra* (*saḡīr*). Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fi funūn al-adab: al-Juzʾ al-thāmin waʾl-ʾishrūn*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn and Muḥammad Ḥilmī Muḥammad Aḥmad (Cairo, 1992) reports the appointment of one of these men in the year 401 using both: *taqlīduhu biʾl-sifāra waʾl-wasāṭa bayn al-nās wa bayn al-Ḥākīm wa tafwīḍuʾl-umūr ilayhi* (28: 189). Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʾshā*, says about the *wizāra*: “Know that the *wizāra* in the Fatimid state was at times held by the lords of the sword (*arbāb al-suyūf*) and at others by the lords of the pen (*arbāb al-aqlām*) and in either of these two cases it was often so exalted a rank as to be a *wizāra* of delegation (*wizāra tafwīḍ*), equivalent to the *sultān* in the present, or close to it. In such cases it was called the *wizāra*, but when it was not so important and thus below that rank it was termed the *wasāṭa*” (10: 478–79).

11 In Ibn al-Qalānīsī, *Dhayl taʾrīkh Dimashq*, ed. H. F. Amedroz (Leiden and Beirut, 1908), pp. 80–83. See also Shayyāl, *Majmūʿat al-wathāʾiq al-fāṭimiyya/Corpus Documentorum Fatimicorum* (Cairo, 1958) and appendix 2 to Ayman Fuad Sayyid’s edition of al-Ṣayrafi’s *al-Ishāra ilā man nāla al-wizāra* (Cairo, 1990), pp. 113–18.

12 It was drafted by Walīʾ-Dawla Abū ʿAlī b. Khayrān, the supervisor of the chancery.

13 According to the boilerplate text for the appointment of a *wazīr*, which is found in ʿAlī b. Khalaf’s *Mawādd al-bayān*, a manual for the use of clerks in the Fatimid chancery, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib was the quintessential *wazīr*, “*akmal al-wuzarāʾ*,” the most perfect of *wazīrs*. Published in Shayyāl, *Wathāʾiq*, document no. 11.

14 Q 20: 25–34. The use of the term in Q 25: 35 is not cited in the *sijill*.

Muḥammad and ‘Alī¹⁵—neither quite applies to al-Jarjarā’ī, who in contrast to ‘Alī, was not of the same lineage and could in no way be expected to succeed to the caliphate. Ironically the notion implied in this designation—for the recipient eventually to take over and rule in place of the caliph—was not acted upon for another century and a half when Saladin replaced those he had previously served as *wazīr* by becoming the sultan.

A better Qur’anic precedent—one also prominent in the text of this same *sijill*—is that of Joseph, who said to Pharaoh, “Put me in charge of the storehouses of the land, for I am a guardian with great knowledge.”¹⁶ Clearly, for the Fatimid rulers, Joseph represented the ideal *wazīr*, the management of money and resources being uppermost in their minds.¹⁷

Although these cases—Ibn Killis, al-Jarjarā’ī, and al-Yāzūrī—illustrate and define the Fatimid wazirate quite well, they do not provide a precedent for that of Badr al-Jamālī, who, in contrast to them, did not come to the office from the bureaucracy. He is thus not a “Joseph.” But there are additional issues to consider in his case. One is that, unlike them, he was not given the title “*wazīr*” and may never have used it. Instead, he was the *amīr al-juyūsh*, a title held by him and all those who came after him. None of them were formally entitled “*wazīr*”, again unlike all the earlier examples. Are we therefore to conclude that the term *wazīr* in itself denotes a man of the pen, a bureaucrat, and *amīr al-juyūsh*, a new office, is a kind of military “wazirate” but without the name?¹⁸

Here problems arise. For one, the title *amīr al-juyūsh* belonged to Badr **prior to his arrival in Egypt**. It seems to have been used for and by the chief commander of the Fatimid armies in Syria. Others before Badr had the same title.¹⁹ And, in any case, he was known in what may be contemporary accounts as *Amīr al-juyūsh* Badr, not Badr, the *amīr al-juyūsh*.²⁰ Moreover, his personal

15 For the Shī’a Muḥammad said that ‘Alī was to him like was Aaron was to Moses.

16 Q 12: 55.

17 Jarjarā’ī is particularly interesting in yet another regard. Years before his appointment as *wazīr* both his hands had been cut off on the order of al-Ḥākim who had charged him with gross malfeasance. Accordingly as *wazīr* he could himself wield neither pen nor sword.

18 In his *Khīṭaṭ* (Bulaq 1:440), Maqrīzī explains, from the advent of Badr al-Jamālī, “the wazirate from then onward became a wazirate of delegation (*tafwīḍ*) and one called those who held the office *Amīr al-juyūsh*. The term *wazīr* ceased to be used (*baṭala ismu’l-wizāra*).”

19 Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, (Bulaq) 1:440, in his discussion of Badr’s own title, says that it had been used by the Fatimids for their governor of Damascus. Manjūtakīn was *amīr al-juyūsh*; see Thierry Bianquis, *Damas et la Syrie sous la domination fatimide (359–468/969–1076)*, 2 vols. (Damas, 1986 and 1989), pp. 188 and 193. Anūshtakīn al-Dizbarī also; see Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa’l-Qāhira* (Cairo, 1929–49; Cairo, 1963–71), 4: 252.

20 By Maqrīzī and Sibṭ.

militia bore the name “al-Juyūshiyya” and his *mamlūk* commanders were called al-Juyūshī²¹ (similar to his having the name al-Jamālī, meaning the *mamlūk* of Jamāl, his original owner). The oratory on the Muqatṭam is known locally as al-Guyūshī; the area of his residence in Cairo is still referred to as that of Mirgūsh.

Even though subsequent holders of his rank all inherited his full list of titles including *amīr al-juyūsh*—the last of them, Saladin, was still the *amīr al-juyūsh*—each derived his basic claim to power from the militia he commanded and that force changed names accordingly. The Juyūshiyya became the Afḍaliyya when al-Afḍal, the son of Badr, assumed command of it. The militia of Asad al-Dīn Shīrkūh was the Asadiyya until inherited by Saladin.

However, in order to follow the progression of the Fatimid wazirate in a technical sense—that is, of precise titulature and contemporary real-time usage—we require more than anecdotal evidence. But that is difficult to find. Later chroniclers obviously had a tendency to read what was true in their own time into the earlier situation. Unfortunately, for the era of Badr, which is so crucial for the transition to the period of military *wazīrs*, little exists. We know, for example, that a decree of appointment was issued for him and that it granted him control over all affairs of the government “all except the throne of the caliph himself” (*mā warā’ sarīr khilāfatihī*)—a standard phrase thereafter.²² But, not having the whole text, we do not know what it said about the wazirate.²³ We also do not have such evidence as *tirāz*, although again we know it existed. Two surviving examples from Badr’s years are too fragmentary to yield a useful text.²⁴

Ironically, however, in a major contrast with earlier periods of Fatimid rule, where few if any inscriptions remain and there are no records of what they said, for Badr we have twenty, a large number by any standard in view of how little information exists for those years in any other form. These building inscriptions, coupled with references to Badr in a series of letters sent by

21 Badr’s governor of Syria in 486 was Munīr al-Dawla al-Juyūshī (*Itti’āz*, 1971 ed., 2:328n; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī’l-ta’rīkh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg (Leiden, 1867; reprinted Beirut, 1965–67), 10: 77; Nāṣir (Naṣr) al-Dawla al-Juyūshī was sent to Syria with an army in 470 (*Itti’āz*, 2:319) and 482 (*Itti’āz*, 2:326); the *Muqaffā*, 399, and Sibṭ (p. 200) must refer to the same man as Naṣr Aftikīn (in Damascus, 470). Another appears on an inscription (*RCEA*, year 473, p. 210) as Abū Manṣūr Sārtakīn al-Juyūshī.

22 It is used not only in later official proclamations but in the contemporary letters of the caliph to the Yemen, one of which says in part “*wa qalladahu mā warā’ al-khilāfa min al-da’wa al-hādhiyya wa maṣāliḥ al-umma*,” *Sijillāt al-mustanṣiriyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mun’im Mājid (Cairo, 1954), *sijill*, no. 34 (partial trans. by M. Brett in the article cited above).

23 Phrases from it are given in the *Khiṭaṭ* (Bulaq 1: 440).

24 Reported in the *RCEA*.

the caliph al-Mustanşir to his *da'wa* in the Yemen,²⁵ allow us, at least, to chart the use of formal titles in his case. We can see, for example, that Badr was not accorded titles denoting authority over the judiciary and the Ismaili *da'wa* until 470/1077 (in all likelihood because of the approaching death in that year of al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, the highly respected, long-time head of the *da'wa*). Still none of these inscriptions, which nevertheless give the full titles of Badr, mentions the wazirate or refers to him as *wazīr*.²⁶

What then is the actual evidence for regarding these *amīrs* as *wazīrs*, as is done regularly in both medieval and modern accounts of them? Al-Maqrīzī, for example, refers to them as "*wazīr*[s] of the sword" and he remarks in typical fashion: "The *wazīr* of the sword from the era of *Amīr al-Juyūsh* Badr until the end of the dynasty, had become the *sulṭān* of Egypt, the real holder of power. ..." ²⁷ His point about their being the sultan of Egypt seems to make good sense; their powers were certainly as formidable as those of either the Buyids or Saljuks. Why were they not called *sulṭāns*? Curiously, the same caliph who invited Badr al-Jamālī to take charge of the government had, at an earlier time, granted the title "*sulṭān*" to his vassal in the Yemen, 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣulayḥī.²⁸ But in Egypt it never happened.

Here Maqrīzī's comments seem especially apropos. He explains:²⁹

The rank of *wazīr* in the time of the Fatimid caliphs was of the highest and most exalted up to the era of *Amīr al-Juyūsh* Badr al-Jamālī. When the above mentioned *Amīr al-Juyūsh* came from Acre to the country of Egypt, at the invitation of the caliph al-Mustanşir bi'llāh in the year 467[1074–1075], al-Mustanşir appointed Badr over all of his affairs and delegated to him the administration of everything save his own throne. The caliph depended on him in the slightest of matters as well as the most important and charged him with overseeing the grandest and the

25 *Sijillāt al-mustanşiriyya*.

26 On the inscriptions in Cairo, see now Ayman Fuad Sayyid, *La Capitale de l'Égypte jusqu'à l'époque fatimide (al-Qâhira et al-Fustât)—Essai de reconstitution topographique* (Beirut and Stuttgart, 1998), pp. 365–453 (chapter on Badr's building activities). But note also the studies of G. Wiet, "Une nouvelle inscription fatimide au Caire," *JA* (1961): 13–20; "Nouvelles inscriptions fatimides," *BIE* 24 (1941/42): 145–158 (a list of all of them appears on pp. 154–55).

27 *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 305.

28 Idris 'Imād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, (vol. 7, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid), 7: 22. Note the confirmation of such a title (*Sulṭān Amīr al-Mu'minīn*) in the *Sijillāt al-Mustanşiriyya*, for example, nos. 14 and 16 (pp. 58 and 66).

29 The following passage comes from the *musawwada* of the *Khiṭaṭ* (ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid, p. 258).

least of them. Thus his wazirate became a wazirate of delegation (*wizārat tafwīḍ*). The name for the holder of the wazirate thereby ceased at that time to be “wazīr.” He was called instead the *amīr al-juyūsh* and he became the *sultān* of Egypt. And the rest of the *wazīrs* thereafter were in the same position until the dynasty itself disappeared.

From the list of more than a dozen military *wazīrs* over the last century of Fatimid rule, four only—Ṭalāʿī b. Ruzzīk, Shāwar, Asad al-Dīn Shīrkūh and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Jūsuf (Saladin)—are the subject of a *ṣijill* of appointment the text of which has been preserved for us. On that basis and other evidence (e.g. inscriptions), it is perfectly possible to trace the history of the titles used by each in succession.³⁰ Ṭalāʿī, for example, was the Illustrious Lord, Virtuous King, Aid to the Imams, Dispeller of Affliction, *Amīr al-Juyūsh*, Sword of Islam, The Succor of Mankind, Guarantor of the Judges of Muslims, Guide of the Missionary of the Believers (*al-Sayyid al-ajall al-Malik al-ṣāliḥ Nāṣir al-aʿimma Kāshif al-ghumma Amīr al-juyūsh Sayf al-islām Ghiyāth al-anām Kāfil qaḍāt al-muslimīn Hādī duʿāt al-muʾminīn*). Several are titles added since the time of Badr,³¹ the most significant apparently being “Malik”, though precisely what extra meaning it might have is not clear. And, even so, the title “wazīr” is not in evidence at any point.

The internal wording of these *ṣijills* offers some help but is nevertheless not perfectly straightforward. There are phrases such as “he [the caliph] entrusts you with his wazirate” (*fa qalladaka min wizāratihī*).

Ultimately much more telling than this sort of indirect reference is a declaration in a slightly different kind of document, one easily missed by looking only at inscriptions or the formal text of the *ṣijills* that were composed by the chancery. The other is what is called in Arabic a *tawqīʿ*, a signature. The decree of appointment was the formal document issued in the name of the caliph but, although worded as if he had written it, it was not actually by him. To add authenticity the caliph would append to it his own “signature”, a second text written in his own hand on the cover or overleaf (outer side?)—in Arabic the *ṭurra*. For Ṭalāʿī and the *ṣijill* issued for him in Rabīʿ 11 549 by al-Fāʿiz, we have the latter text and it states, as explicitly as one could want, that the caliph addresses it to his *wazīr*—i.e. Ṭalāʿī. It begins “For our *wazīr*” (*li-wazīrinā*) and ends “May God ... never cease to favor the days he spends in our wazirate.”³² In this particular case the caliph was only five years old; obviously he possessed

30 On the successive additions to the title, see Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 1, 440. Also Shayyāl.

31 Badr was *al-Sayyid al-ajall Amīr al-juyūsh Sayf al-islām Nāṣir al-imām Kāfil qaḍāt al-muslimīn Hādī duʿāt al-muʾminīn*.

32 Shayyāl, *Wathāʾiq*, no. 17, p. 351; Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1973), 3:218.

nonetheless at that tender age a rare precociousness that allowed him to fulfill his duties as imam. Another such *tawqīʿ*, one appended to the *siḡill* appointing Asad al-Dīn Shīrkūh, reads in part, “No other *wazīr* has had a commission (*ʿahd*) like this one [for you].”

The *siḡill* appointing Saladin *amīr al-juyūsh/wazīr*, the last of its kind, contains a pointed reference to the first of them all, Badr al-Jamālī, and also to his son, al-Afḍal, with the wish that he may be “more excellent” (*afḍal*) than even al-Afḍal.³³

Some conclusions are in order. Al-Maqrīzī is quite likely right that the formal use of the term *wazīr* as a title of office ceased for the last century of Fatimid government. Apparently, it was understood as most properly signifying bureaucratic functions as performed previously by the men of the pen. The new “wazirate”, which combined both clerical and military command—a wazirate of both the pen and the sword in one person—required a designation that would distinguish it from all earlier examples, both under the Fatimids and any other Muslim dynasty. But, for perhaps similar reasons, the notion of the sultanate, as in the cases of either the Buyids or the Saljuks, had to be avoided. To have called Badr al-Jamālī *sulṭān* would have invited direct comparison between him and the Saljuk ruler whose independence from the Abbasid caliph was well known. The solution, however, was odd: not according Badr any meaningful title but rather, less formally, still granting him all the accouterments of the wazirate without the title. I suspect Badr himself did not care; the power he gained was as near to absolute as it could be. He himself was ruthless; the niceties of protocol meant little; all those who crossed him and happened to fall into his hands died. Future *wazīrs* of his type were not so secure but the powerful precedent he had set remained unchanged to the end.³⁴

33 Items for further consideration as evidence of the less formal concept of *wazīr* in this late period are the residences, which were called the *dār al-wizāra*, and of uniforms and clothing, such as the attire of a *wazīr* discussed by Maqrīzī in his *Khiṭaṭ*, (Bulaq) 1:440, with many details and comments such as those by Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn in his *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, p. 178, where he says “and bestowed him with the collar of the *wazīr*” *wa ṭawwaqahu ṭawqaʾl-wuzarāʾ*.

34 Halm’s suggestion in the article noted earlier that Badr in fact initiated a type of rule that continued in Egypt through Saladin and on into the subsequent reigns up to the end of the Mamluk sultanate has some serious merit, although it does not explain why there was no formal recognition of the new order, as would, for example, have been accorded by the application to him of the title “Sulṭān.” Den Heijer makes an interesting case for Badr as the champion of a Fatimid caliphate experiencing a renewal of life. Badr may thus have preferred, or at least been satisfied, with the role of rescuer and reviver of an esteemed dynasty rather than the founder of a new form of rule.

The Relationship between Chief *Qāḍī* and Chief *Dāʿī*

In¹ his various descriptions of the ranks in Fatimid administration, al-Maqrīzī noted the special importance of two in particular, the offices respectively of chief *qāḍī* and of chief *dāʿī*.² Under this dynasty these were two of the highest positions: the chief justice, termed the judge of judges (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*), was outranked only by the Imam and the *wazīr*. The head *dāʿī*, the *dāʿī al-duʿāt*, followed immediately below. Al-Maqrīzī, who is often our best source for information about the Fatimids, also observed that he knew of no other Islamic government for which the *daʿwa* continued after the founding of the state. Thus, in contrast to the judiciary, it and the office of its chief administrator formed an institution unique to their rule. He gave it special attention accordingly; it was for him a *khiṭṭa* (an office or institution of government)³ and deserved a chapter in his famous topography of Egypt, the *Khiṭaṭ*.⁴ Although the judiciary and the *daʿwa* were both responsible for aspects of religious policy and its implementation, the purpose of the latter was always apparently separate and distinct. The *daʿwa* served primarily as both a proselytizing mission seeking converts to the Ismaili cause and as a tool of instruction for those who were already adherents of it. In this capacity it was in place and active until the close of the dynasty. Therefore the head of the *daʿwa* remained a major office, continuing to the end only slightly less in rank than that of the chief *qāḍī*.

The holders of these ranks dressed alike in their official attire and in many respects had similar prerogatives. One difference was that, in processions, the chief *qāḍī* did not have the right to drums and bugles; only when the same man occupied both offices together—that is, when he was simultaneously *qāḍī al-quḍāt* and *dāʿī al-duʿāt*—was he heralded in this manner. But not infrequently one person did in fact hold both positions jointly, raising thereby the interesting question of why they were not simply combined. At

1 Originally published as “The Relationship between Chief *Qāḍī* and Chief *Dāʿī* under the Fatimids” in G. Kraemer and S. Schmidtke, eds. *Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies* (Leiden, Brill, 2006), pp. 70–94.

2 See, among others, his comments near the end of his history of the Fatimids, *Ittīʿāz al-ḥunafāʾ*, (Cairo, 1967–1973), 3:336–7; Ayman Fuad Sayyid, ed. (Damascus, 2010), 3:400–02.

3 Also vocalized *khiṭṭa*. Its more common meaning is ‘district’ or ‘piece of real estate’.

4 *Khiṭaṭ*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid, 2:308–20.

other times, however, the separation of the two allowed for the appointment of a non-Ismaili to the supreme judicial office. Presumably the chief *dā'ī* was always an Ismaili;⁵ not so the chief justice. Representatives of other (Sunnī) *madhhabs* were at several periods heads of the Fatimid legal system, which is in itself a curious development for a dynasty committed by its very being to Ismaili Shī'ism and presumably a law based strictly on its doctrines.

Thus there are in this situation a number of interesting problems that concern religious authority in this one state. Two parallel institutions functioned here as the guardians of religion in the public sphere: one acting as the official organ of the Ismaili imamate and its imam, the Fatimid caliph; the other dispensing justice and insuring the observance of Islamic law.⁶ The latter function included the supervision of mosques and those assigned to officiate in them, the regulation of prayers and prayer times and other quite specifically religious activities. Religion and religious policy does not constitute in this case a dividing line between the two.

But why was the *da'wa* lower in rank than justice? Exactly how was the administration of the law kept distinct from the appeal and instruction provided by the *da'wa*? A full answer is not readily apparent. The Fatimids left no literature that deals explicitly with the subject. Even assuming that their policy was both coherent and everywhere the same, which is certainly not the case, we need to investigate it using the circumstantial evidence supplied by actual events and the details of individual appointment to each of these offices over the entire course of their reign, thereby inductively adducing what was likely the operative rationale behind it. Such a method has the advantage of indicating both how each of these institutions functioned as well as generating a history of them and their interaction over time.

1 The Earliest Phase in the Maghrib

Fortunately, an important text recently brought to light—the memoirs of the early *dā'ī* Ibn al-Haytham—contains an eyewitness account of the selection

5 The curious case of al-Yāzūrī may have been the one exception, on which see below.

6 It is important to note here that the dispensing of justice is a function of the imamate and that *qāḍīs* under the Fatimids are not in any real sense independent of the *imām*. Ultimately the *imām* has the last and final word and his interpretation of what the law is applies to all his subjects, Ismaili, non-Ismaili and non-Muslim alike. In practice, however, the *qāḍī* had considerable power over individual cases.

of the very first Fatimid *qāḍī*.⁷ Not long after Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī’s victory over the Aghlabids in 296/909—an event that allowed the foundation of the Fatimid state—the inhabitants of Qayrawān sent word to the great *dā‘ī*, who was then in the administrative capital of Raqqāda, that they wanted him to appoint a *qāḍī* over them.⁸ Abū ‘Abd Allāh without much thought simply asked one of the new converts from Qayrawān then present in his entourage to accept the responsibility. That first choice was the eyewitness whose memoir later recalled the moment. At that time, however, he was still in his early twenties, hardly old enough for such a major position. He suggested instead the senior scholar among the local Shī‘īs, a man named Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Marwadhī,⁹ who also happened to be the father of his best friend. Abū ‘Abd Allāh quickly agreed but cautioned al-Marwadhī not to use his new position to take revenge for former mistreatments and repression of himself and the other Shī‘īs. The *dā‘ī* knew quite well how the local Shī‘īs had suffered at the hands of the Sunnīs, and he also must have known something of the recent history of infighting between the local Hanafīs and the Mālikīs, which had often erupted in connection with one side or the other gaining control of the *qāḍī*ship in Qayrawān.¹⁰

The first protest against the appointment of al-Marwadhī came, however, not from Sunnīs but from a leading *amīr* of the Kutāma Berbers, himself a loyal ally and Ismaili supporter of the *dā‘ī*. He is reported to have insisted that a *qāḍī* was not needed; he noted that the Prophet had himself appointed none. But Abū ‘Abd Allāh answered: “What is it to us if we name a sweeper for every pile of garbage?”¹¹ The *amīr*’s protest suggests that the Ismaili community as then constituted had no *qāḍīs*, and that it was not in need of one. Surely that does not also mean that the Ismailis observed no laws. Though frequently accused of antinomian tendencies, the Fatimids were if anything stricter in their observance than others. Rather, the *amīr* seems to have been hinting that

7 The *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, Arabic text, in *Advent of the Fatimids*, Arabic, pp. 64–65, English, pp. 116–17.

8 Ibn al-Haytham reports specifically that the people of Qayrawān expressed the need for someone to supervise their markets and scales. See *Advent of the Fatimids*, Arabic, 64, English, 117.

9 Or alternately al-Marwarūdhī. For more details about him and citations of other sources, see *Advent of the Fatimids*, p. 86 note 24, and also Madelung, “The Religious Policy of the Fatimids toward their Sunnī Subjects in the Maghrib,” in *L’Égypte fatimide. Son art et son histoire*, ed. Marianne Barrucand, (Paris, 1999), pp. 99, 1001.

10 On this appointment as well as the background to the fighting among the adherents of these *madhhabs*, see the introduction and notes for *Advent of the Fatimids*.

11 “Mā ‘alaynā min hādihā naj‘alu li-kulli mazbalatin kannāsan,” Madelung and Walker, *Advent of the Fatimids*, Arabic, 64, English, 117.

he expected all would become Ismaili and that it was not the business of the new government to regulate the affairs of those who remained outside its fold.

Al-Marwadhī, however, duly took charge of his new office. Based on his recent conversion and acceptance of the Ismaili *da'wa*, he was also technically himself a *dā'ī*, though hardly trained as such. His administration of the law depended instead on a knowledge of Shī'ī jurisprudence gained prior to direct contact with any of the Ismailis. Nevertheless, he acted swiftly to impose Shī'ī law and practice and to forbid the study and application of any other. Hanafī and Mālikī law were no longer valid; scholars of either were deprived of their previous occupations; and their lawbooks were rendered useless, of so little value, comments Ibn al-Haytham, that they were used thereafter in pharmacies for paper to wrap remedies or were exported to countries such as Spain where such law remained in effect.¹²

The Fatimids obviously approved of this policy since they kept al-Marwadhī and his harsh, intolerant regime in place for over six years, from his initial appointment in 296/909 until 303/915, when he finally fell from favor and was put in prison where he subsequently died, possibly under torture.¹¹ Despite his ignominious end, his case proves that, in the beginning, the Fatimids hoped to impose Shiism broadly in their domain with little or no place for the Islam of groups that opposed their interpretation of it. Thus the function of the *da'wa* and of the *qāḍī* would be closely linked and overlapping. One incident, however, reveals another dimension to this problem. At one point al-Marwadhī punished two members of the *da'wa* for some infraction of the law and for that he was sharply rebuked. He was told that matters relating to the conduct of the *dā'īs* were outside his jurisdiction.

Already, it seems, the *da'wa* was to remain independent, its members not subject to the *qāḍī*'s justice. Here then are the beginnings of a policy. On the one hand, the Fatimids came to understand that their rule over a significant population of non-Ismailis required a system of justice run by the traditional *qāḍī* of a type by then common throughout the Islamic world and, on the other, that the Ismaili community, in so far as it was separate, needed its own religious institution, in this case the *da'wa*. The necessity of the latter was not reduced or eliminated by the creation of the state and its Ismaili caliphate, but rather persisted as long as the Ismailis constituted a minority. Had they achieved clear overwhelming numerical superiority, as had happened strictly among the Kutāma Berbers under Abū 'Abd Allāh prior to the victory over the Aghlabids, the situation might have been different.

12 Madelung and Walker, *Advent of the Fatimids*, Arabic, 118, English, 166.

With respect to the appointment of a judge in Qayrawān, the original policy of maintaining a firm Shīʿī-Ismaili control continued after al-Marwadhī, though subsequent *qāḍīs* were less prone to apply the harshest of measures. A relative unknown, Muḥammad b. Maḥfūz al-Qamūdī, followed al-Marwadhī and after him came Ishāq b. Abī'l-Minhāl, a former Hanafī now converted to Ismailism. He, like most of the local Ḥanafīs, preferred to join rather than resist the new regime. Mālikī sources claim that it was easy for Ḥanafīs to become Ismaili because they were already quite loose in their interpretation of Islam. Prior to the advent of the Fatimids these two *madhhabs* engaged in constant infighting, the Ḥanafīs generally supported by the pro-ʿAbbāsīd Aghlabid court, the Mālikīs tending to favor the rival Umayyads in Spain. Afterward the Mālikīs went into retreat and the Ḥanafīs converted in such numbers as to eliminate their school in the Maghrib altogether.

Briefly in 311–12/923–24 Ibn Abī'l-Minhāl lost his position to an Ismaili Muḥammad b. ʿImrān al-Nafṭī, the latter, in contrast to the former, was noted for his severity against the Mālikīs. But al-Nafṭī died soon after and Ibn Abī'l-Minhāl resumed the position,¹³ which he held until his own death over two decades later. His successor, Aḥmad b. Baḥr b. ʿAlī,¹⁴ in office from 333/944–45, had the misfortune of being an Ismaili *qāḍī* in Qayrawān when it was captured by the Khārijite rebel Abū Yazīd. Initially the North African Mālikīs welcomed Abū Yazīd's rebellion despite their own all-too-obvious religious incompatibility with the Khārijites. They were even more opposed to the Shīʿī Fatimids.

Their leader during this interlude, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd, was of course Mālikī, in keeping with the predominance of this *madhhab* among the general population.¹⁵ With the restoration of Fatimid rule under the new imam, al-Manṣūr, Fatimid recognition of that fact also brought a quiet change in policy reflecting this same reality.¹⁶ With some difficulty the government sought and found a Mālikī willing to accept an appointment to the post of *qāḍī*

13 Heinz Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi: Der Aufstieg der Fatimiden* (Munich, 1991), English trans. M. Bonner, *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids* (Leiden, 1996), p. 221, trans., p. 246. Hereafter *Empire*.

14 His full name was Aḥmad b. Baḥr b. ʿAlī. b. Ṣāliḥ b. Akhī Karam; ʿImād al-Dīn Idrīs, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, ed. Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī as *Tārīkh al-khulafāʾ al-Fāṭimīyyīn bi-l-Maghrib. Al-Qism al-khāṣṣ min Kitāb ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, (Beirut 1985) 269–77; Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī, *Kitāb al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa-l-Maghrib* 1–2, eds. George S. Colin and Evariste Lévi-Provençal as *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord et de l'Espagne Musulmane intitulée Kitāb al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, (Leiden 1948–51), 1: 190, 205.

15 Halm, *Empire*, pp. 280–81, trans., p. 315.

16 Madelung, "Treatise on the Imamate," pp. 69–70.

under the Fatimids. Both sides thus compromised. The new *qāḍī*, a man of advanced age, stipulated among other matters that he not be forced to accept presents of money or the *qāḍī*'s traditional grey mule, both of which he felt would make him too beholden to the government and thus threaten his independence. He preferred not to have his new position exploited by public ceremony. In any case he lived next door to the mosque where he was to hold court and had thus no need of a mount to ride through town.¹⁷ There were to be no drums and bugles for this judge.

Once established by al-Manṣūr, this new order seems to have remained in place. Henceforth the *qāḍīs* of Qayrawān were Mālikī. Still, all along there were other cities where the policy was different. From the beginning those with a predominant Ismaili population, such as the new capital al-Mahdiyya, starting with its occupation in 308/921, had an Ismaili *qāḍī*, one not subject to the jurisdiction of Qayrawān. The same was true even earlier of Raqqāda.¹⁸ Under the Aghlabids their administrative enclave at Raqqāda, though close to Qayrawān, often had its own *qāḍī*. And the other major cities had their own as well. The judge in Qayrawān could claim greater prestige but he was not himself in control of the others. For the Maghribī period there was thus nothing fully equivalent to the office of *qāḍī al-quḍāt* as it developed later in Egypt. But, even so, there are clear indications that the title was in use. One source reported rather specifically that al-Marwadhī had been granted the authority to appoint some judges and justices (*al-quḍāt wa-l-ḥukkām*) in other parts of the country and that he was allowed to state in his letters and decrees his name with the title *qāḍī al-quḍāt*.¹⁹ The application and function of that title in that situation, however, appears to have been limited and there is a possibility that more than one judge used that title at the same time.²⁰

17 On him see Halm, *Empire*, p. 281, trans., p. 315. There is a biographical entry for him in Abū Bakr al-Mālikī, *Kitāb Riyāḍ al-nuḥūs fī ṭabaqāt 'ulamā' al-Qayrawān wa Ifriqiyya*, ed. Bashīr al-Bakkūsh, (Beirut 1981–84), vol. 2 (#242), pp. 357–61.

18 The first Ismaili *qāḍī* in Raqqāda, and perhaps Tripoli and al-Mahdiyya, was apparently a Kutāma Berber shaykh, Aflah b. Hārūn al-'Ibānī, much admired by Ibn al-Haytham. See Madelung and Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids*, Arabic, 123–24, English, 168–71, especially note 181. See also the comments of Farhat Dachraoui, *le Califat fatimide au Maghreb (296–862H/909–978Jc)*. *Histoire politique et institutions*, (Tunis 1981), pp. 405–6, 408.

19 Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb Iftitāḥ al-da'wa*, ed. Farhat Dachraoui, (Tunis 1975), p. 247 (para. no. 223).

20 On this possibility see the discussion by Dachraoui in chapter four of the second part of his *Califat fatimide*, pp. 397–422, especially pp. 40–47.

2 Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān: Was He Ever Qāḍī al-Quḍāt?

With respect to holding supreme authority over the whole of the judiciary in this early period, the one possible exception may be that of Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, the most famous of all Fatimid jurists. Unfortunately, the evidence in his case is ambiguous. As with al-Mahdiyya, the judge of al-Manṣūriyya, the new capital constructed by al-Manṣūr beginning at the time of his victory over Abū Yazīd, was to be Ismaili. Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān had been, through the period of the revolt of Abū Yazīd and the years thereafter, the judge of (western) Tripoli. Near the beginning of the year 340/951, al-Manṣūr summoned him to take charge in Manṣūriyya, replacing Zurāra b. Aḥmad who himself had only recently succeeded (in 339/950–51) ‘Alī b. Abī Shu‘ayb (or Abī Sufyān). Zurāra, then over ninety, was sent to al-Mahdiyya instead.²¹ Al-Nu‘mān describes his own assumption of the post in one of his works. There he implies that he was granted at the time jurisdiction over Qayrawān and other cities as well.²² But such a result seems unlikely.²³ In yet another of his books he includes the text of his appointment to the court of grievances, the *maẓālīm*, in 343/954 by the caliph al-Mu‘izz.²⁴ That decree, which, with respect to *maẓālīm* cases, clearly establishes his authority over all other jurisdictions, suggests that his own prior office was previously not considered superior to that of the *qāḍīs* in the other major cities.²⁵ And, as important as the *maẓālīm* was as a kind of appeals court,

21 Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, 2:173. This information comes from the biography there of the caliph al-Manṣūr. See also Dachraoui, *Califat fatimide*, 408.

22 Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Kitāb al-Majālis wa-l-musāyarāt*, eds. al-Ḥabīb al-Faqhī, Ibrāhīm Shabbūh and Muḥammad al-Ya‘lāwī, (Tunis 1978), 348 (paragraph no. 181), trans. by Halm, *Empire*, pp. 302–4, trans., 340–41.

23 Madelung, “Treatise on the Imamate,” p. 69, and idem, “Religious Policy of the Fatimids,” 103.

24 Given in his *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib*, ed. Sham‘ūn T. Lokhandwalla, (Simla 1972), Arabic, pp. 19–22; ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib, (Beirut 1393/1973), pp. 46–51; English trans. Lokhandwalla, pp. 52–58 and Ismail Poonawala, introduction to his (and Asaf A.A. Fyzee’s) translation of volume 1, *The Pillars of Islam. Volume 1: Acts of Devotion and Religious Observances*, (New Delhi 2002), pp. xxviii–xxix.

25 This decree says about al-Nu‘mān that the caliph “is satisfied with the discharge of your judicial duties in al-Manṣūriyya and its districts ...” i.e. in al-Nu‘mān’s previous jurisdiction. It continues, “Let your authority [now] prevail ... in every case wherein the *maẓālīm* complaints are brought to you ... Let no judge of al-Mahdiyya or Qayrawān appertain to himself any appeal from the Bedouins ... The Commander of the Faithful has empowered every justice to look into the judicial matters of the city and its environs wherein he has been assigned. He should not transgress beyond the bounds of his jurisdiction (p. xxix).” A most interesting provision in it states clearly that other judges “cannot entertain [matters] related to the friends (*awlīyā’* = Ismailis, members of the *da‘wa*) of the Commander of the Faithful, or the [different] classes of his bondsmen, or any of the soldiery stationed

it did not confer on Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān the rank of *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt*. When he finally departed the Maghrib for Egypt in 363/973 with al-Muʿizz, he was only the *qāḍī* of the army, as he was to remain until his death later that year.

In the eighth/fifteenth century history of the Ismaili imams, the *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, by the *dāʿī* Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's stature has grown much higher.²⁶ There he is said to have been given control over both the judiciary and the *daʿwa* and that for the whole of the Fatimid empire.²⁷ Although al-Nuʿmān was certainly a *dāʿī*, in addition to a *qāḍī*, and although he performed some of the functions of the *daʿwa*, such as reading weekly lessons to the faithful, he was not in charge of the *daʿwa*. Similarly, despite his high standing with al-Muʿizz and his enormous prowess as a legal scholar whose works constitute the very foundation of Ismaili law, there is little or no evidence of his role in appointing judges and, beyond the *maẓālim*, in regulating their activities.

3 The Daʿwa in the Maghrib

The *daʿwa* as a formal institution remains a mystery for much of this same period. Great numbers of *dāʿīs* appear to have operated both within the empire and abroad. We have the names of some of them. But the head of the *daʿwa* was not a *dāʿī al-duʿāt*, or at the least such a term is not in evidence. Rather he was the *bāb al-abwāb*.²⁸ Are we then to assume the two terms refer to the same or similar office? For the earliest years the most reliable report cites as the *Bāb* a shadowy figure named Abū ʿAlī, about whom Ibn Ḥawqal, who was personally acquainted with the man's son, adds that he had once long before gone by the name Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ²⁹—the famous leader of the Qarmaṭians during their earliest revolts in Iraq. This Abū ʿAlī died in 321/933 near the end of the reign of al-Mahdī and his son succeeded as the *Bāb*, a rank he held thereafter until the time of the caliph al-ʿAzīz. Nevertheless, it is hard to see how either the father

in the capital." All such matters go (now?) to al-Nuʿmān; they cannot be taken before any other judge.

26 Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, ed. Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī.

27 Edition Yaʿlāwī, pp. 490 and 493.

28 Like *dāʿī al-duʿāt*, the term *bāb al-abwāb* does not translate readily into English, but literally it means door of doors or gate of gates. The *Bāb* is thus the 'door' or 'gate' to the *imam*.

29 Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-ard* 1–2, ed. J.H. Kramers, (Leiden 1938–39), p. 96; French trans. Gaston Wiet as *Configuration de la terre* 12, (Paris 1964), p. 94.

or son actually ran the *da'wa*.³⁰ Possibly the rank of *Bāb* was more spiritual than practical, a religious office without an administrative responsibility.

4 The Later Phase in Egypt: The Judiciary

The evident confusion about a hierarchy of judges for North Africa and Sicily in the earlier period likely reflects the problem of which city a given source considers. Qayrawān was previously the leading city of the Maghrib and thus its *qāḍī* was most important. With the creation of, first, al-Mahdiyya and then al-Manṣūriyya, Qayrawān no longer could as easily make that claim. Sources that cite the *qāḍī* of al-Manṣūriyya as superior to the rest and list only the holder of that position as the presiding judge may indicate no more than that, his title notwithstanding. In the later Egyptian phase the situation would change, resulting in the elevation of the chief *qāḍī* to a position of true supremacy over all others.

Still, initially, following the conquest, the Fatimids elected to retain the *qāḍī* of Fustāṭ in place and recognize him as the judicial authority in Egypt. He was Abū Ṭāhir al-Dhuhli, a Mālikī. Although confirmed in office by the Fatimid general Jawhar, he was “ordered to rule according to the doctrine of the *ahl al-bayt* in matters of inheritance, divorce and the new moon.”³¹ In other words, as in the Maghrib, even non-Ismaili judges had to accept certain points of Ismaili law, an accommodation more difficult for some than others.³² Presumably by this time Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's formulation of that law as conveyed in his *Da'ā'im al-Islām* had become widely available and thus readily accessible even to non-Ismaili jurists.

30 Here it is especially important to see Wilferd Madelung, “Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ and the Dā'ī Abū 'Alī,” in *Proceedings of the 17th Congress of the UEA* [Union Européenne des arabisants et islamisants], eds. Wilferd Madelung et al., (St. Petersburg, 1997), pp. 115–24.

31 This information comes initially from the contemporary Egyptian historian Ibn Zūlāq as found now in Ibn Ḥajar's *Raf' al-iṣr 'an quḍāt Miṣr*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar, (Cairo 1418/1998), p. 328 (bio. no. 171, pp. 325–30); French trans. of this biography by Mathieu Tillier in *Vies des cadis de Miṣr (237/851366/976). Extrait du Raf' al-iṣr 'an quḍāt Miṣr d'Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī*, (Cairo 2002), pp. 173–82.

32 A judge in Barqa once ruled against a man who subsequently complained that he had not followed the *madhhab* of the *ahl al-bayt*, to which charge the judge reportedly replied, “I would not rule according to their *madhhab* even if I were held by the hand.” The authorities then brought him to Qayrawān, fastened his hand to a heavy plank and left him there to die. See Maqrizi, *Muqaffā*, biography of al-Manṣūr, no. 780, vol. 7, pp. 175–76.

There were, however, also restrictions on al-Dhuhli's jurisdiction in other ways. From al-Mu'izz's arrival in Egypt, the *maẓālim* was given to another judge, 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī Thawbān who had come with him.³³ Moreover, following the death of Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, his son 'Alī b. al-Nu'mān began to supervise the judiciary, as if he and al-Dhuhli held a joint appointment. The notary witnesses, for example, were under 'Alī, not al-Dhuhli. In 365/975 the new caliph al-'Azīz added control of the mint and the mosques of Fuṣṭāṭ and Cairo. Finally, because a paralysis in his side weakened al-Dhuhli, the caliph removed him from office, turning over full and sole responsibility for it to 'Alī in 366/976.³⁴

According to Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's history of the judges of Egypt, 'Alī b. al-Nu'mān was the first person in the Fatimid domain to have the title *qāḍī al-quḍāt*, because the decree (*sijill*) of his appointment to office specified that all districts were under his control.³⁵ The office of chief judge in the sense implied by the title *qāḍī al-quḍāt* or judge of judges suggests that the holder of it has the power to appoint subordinate judges. Both the term and that function were known elsewhere and much earlier. Already by the end of the second/eighth century such a position existed under the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. The first *qāḍī al-quḍāt* was Abū Ya'qūb b. Ya'qūb (d. 182/798 or 183/799). The title itself had a pre-Islamic Sassanian counterpart: *mobed mobedan*.³⁶ One report mentions that 'Alī b. al-Nu'mān sent his own brother as his delegate to deal with Tinnīs, Damietta, al-Farama and other towns. The brother went to these places, arranged for a subordinate in each, and came back.³⁷ Nevertheless, the full extent of 'Alī's authority is not clear. The *wazīr* Ibn Killis, who both lectured on legal doctrine and composed a manual of it, perhaps out of a nascent sense of competition, appears, for example, to have supported a possible rival in Ibn Abī'l-Minhāl.³⁸ The latter had been the *qāḍī* of al-Manṣūriyya following the departure of the court. Later he asked to be

33 Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf' al-iṣr*, bio. no. 94, pp. 199–200.

34 On 'Alī's career as well as those of the rest of his clan, see the pioneering study by Richard Gottheil, "A Distinguished Family of Fatimide Cadis (al-Nu'mān) in the Tenth Century," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 27 (1906), pp. 217–96.

35 Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf' al-iṣr*, bio. no. 147, p. 283.

36 See Emile Tyan, *Histoire de l'organisation judiciaire en pays d'Islam*, (Leiden, 1960), pp. 128–29.

37 Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf' al-iṣr*, p. 283.

38 On the role of Ibn Killis here, see Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf' al-iṣr*, pp. 283 and 425, and Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids*, pp. 369–78, with more details on the activities of the Nu'mān clan.

allowed to come to Egypt, a request ultimately granted by the caliph al-ʿAzīz in 368/979. Once there he was given the *maẓālim*.³⁹

With the death in 374/984 of ʿAlī b. al-Nuʿmān, his brother Muḥammad moved into the same position.⁴⁰ The latter's diploma of investiture appointed him to the regions of Miṣr, Alexandria, the Ḥaramayn (Mecca and Madina), and the military districts (*junds*) of Syria.⁴¹ Despite the obvious degree of authority accorded him, it is still not certain that Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmān was formally granted the title *qāḍī al-quḍāt*. That honor appears to have waited for his successor, al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, the grandson of al-Nuʿmān, who became chief judge upon the death of his uncle in 389/999.

For the appointment of al-Ḥusayn, Qalqashandī preserves the entire text of the decree of investiture,⁴² thus allowing for greater certainty about exactly what responsibilities his position included. He was to supervise the judges assigned to the regions of Egypt—specifically Cairo, Fuṣṭāṭ, Alexandria and other districts—plus the Ḥaramayn, the *junds* of Syria and the various districts of the Maghrib, in a word the whole of the Fatimid empire. Sicily is not mentioned but may have been at the time subsumed under the designation “Maghrib” (*aʿmāl al-Maghrib*). In addition to the judiciary proper, he would control the mint (*dār al-ḍarb*),⁴³ standardized measures (*miʿyār*) and affairs of both congregational and regular mosques (*amr al-jawāmiʿ waʿl-masājid*). Al-Maqrīzī's *Ittiʿāz*⁴⁴ provides important supplemental information about the persons al-Ḥusayn selected for many of the positions subordinate to his authority: for Fuṣṭāṭ; or for Cairo, which was given to Mālik b. Saʿīd al-Fāriqī; or those to hear cases should he himself be absent, one among them being Ibn Abī'l-ʿAwwām; various clerks; the overseer of the mint; and more.⁴⁵ Two

39 Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1:247; idem, *Muqaffā*, bio. no. 630. The latter contains quite useful information on the appointment of judges in the Maghrib during and after the transfer of the court to Egypt.

40 Ibn Ḥajar, *Rafʿ al-iṣr*, bio. no. 221, pp. 422–26.

41 On the appointment by the Fatimids of judges in Syria, see in general, Bianquis, *Damas et la Syrie sous la domination fatimide*, pp. 339–49; Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1: 217.

42 Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 10: 384–88.

43 Cf. the Buyid ʿahd appointing ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *qāḍī al-quḍāt* of Rayy, Qazwin, Qumm and other cities, which also specifies that he look after the mint and weights and measures, in *Rasāʾil al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād*, ed. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAzzām and Shawqī Ḍayf, (Cairo 1966). Suggested by Michael Bates.

44 Cairo, 1971 ed., 2: 23.

45 Maqrīzī reports in his *Muqaffā* (bio. no. 1253) that al-Ḥusayn had his own brother Abu'l-Mundhir al-Nuʿmān supervise the mint and the weights and measures and that the brother was also his deputy for judicial matters in Alexandria and its dependencies.

of these men, al-Fāriqī and Ibn Abī'l-ʿAwwām, later rose themselves to become the *qāḍī al-quḍāt*.

5 The *Dā'ī al-du'āt*

Al-Maqrīzī also appears to claim that this same al-Ḥusayn was the first to hold the title *dā'ī al-du'āt* in addition and that possibly by same decree (*sijill*).⁴⁶ If, by this title, he refers to the preparing and reading of weekly homilies to the Ismaili community, that was done as well by his predecessors back to al-Nu'mān himself. What may be different is the added responsibility of directing the *da'wa* in general, both within the empire and abroad. But about that our information is scant. Presumably al-Ḥasan, the son of Abū 'Alī, had died by this time; and it appears quite reasonable to assume that one of these chief *qāḍīs* succeeded him as chief *dā'ī*. From al-Ḥusayn onward, however, it is clear; the two offices were held by the same person for the next sixteen years.

With the fall of al-Ḥusayn in 394/1004 (he was executed and his corpse burned in 395/1004),⁴⁷ his first cousin and long-time rival 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān rose to the position, only to lose it himself in 398/1008 (he was put to death three years later). His successor was the same Mālik b. Sa'īd al-Fāriqī, who had been the *qāḍī* of Cairo under his predecessors. The first from outside the clan of al-Nu'mān, Mālik was a favorite of the caliph and was extremely active in pursuit of his duties both as chief judge and as head of the *da'wa*. He increased, for example, the number of weekly sessions of instruction in Ismaili doctrine (the *majlīs al-ḥikma*) to five. But he, too, like his three predecessors, eventually ran afoul of the imam, al-Ḥākim, and was himself put to death in 405/1014 for reasons that are nowhere clearly explained.⁴⁸

With this event, this series of joint appointments to the judiciary and the *da'wa* ended. As natural as it had been for the same person to function in both capacities, it is not certain that there ever was a policy of combining them. After a brief hiatus in late 405/1014, al-Ḥākim soon decided to accept the suggestion

46 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 49–50. Cf. Bianquis, *Damas et la Syrie*, p. 273.

47 Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 28: 180.

48 The cause is reported to have been Mālik's visits to the house of Sitt al-Mulk, al-Ḥākim's sister, complicity with whom the imām regarded as treason in some manner. On Mālik b. Sa'īd and his family in general, see the study (with more details) by Walker, "Another Family of Fatimid Chief Qāḍīs. The al-Fāriqīs," *Journal of Druse Studies* 1 i (2000), pp. 49–69. Add to the information given there, the killing by al-Ḥākim, in 391, of his tutor Sa'īd b. Sa'īd al-Fāriqī, the brother of Mālik; Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971) 2: 42.

of one of his trusted advisors and appointed Aḥmad Ibn Abi'l-ʿAwwām to the position of *qāḍī al-quḍāt*.⁴⁹ Neither the advisor nor Ibn Abi'l-ʿAwwām were Ismaili, a fact that did not preclude the one from offering advice nor the other from assuming the supreme judicial office. The latter had already served in subordinate legal positions for many years. His general qualifications were never in doubt. But, as a Ḥanafī,⁵⁰ he obviously could not direct the Ismaili *daʿwa*. For his role as judge, by contrast, the government needed only to stipulate that he rule in accord with Ismaili doctrine when and where it applied. Four experts were to sit in his court for consultation in such cases. Otherwise his appointment as outlined in the summary of his decree is much the same as his recent predecessors.⁵¹ Like them he controlled the mint, for example, prayer times and the *khutba* (the Friday sermon); like them he was to administer the judiciary of all the regions of the empire (including by name Sicily), with one curious exception: Palestine, which was, for reasons not known, given to another judge and thereby specifically excluded.

Having taken care of the judiciary, al-Ḥākim turned to the *daʿwa*, the direction of which he had let lapse. His choice here was a prominent agent of his, Khatkīn al-Ḍayf, a member, it seems, of a corps of *adyāf* who served possibly as a kind of paramilitary.⁵² Khatkīn's previous career⁵³—he was twice Fatimid governor of Damascus, for example—did not fit that of most *dāʿīs*. He was neither a preacher nor a teacher. His two predecessors had composed a great number of their own weekly lectures and for both men the Druze sacred writings, the *Rasāʾil al-Ḥikma*, actually cite specific numbered examples, thereby indicating apparently that collections of their writings were in circulation.⁵⁴

49 An exact date is given by Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 28: 202.

50 He was not a Ḥanbalī, as claimed by Ibn Ḥajar (and repeated by many including myself in earlier writings). The editor of the 1998 edition of the *Rafʿ al-īshr* has corrected the text (see p. 71, n. 2) on the basis of additional information. Maqrīzī set the record straight in his *Muqaffā*, bio. no. 584, pp. 603–4. For the details and other sources on this problem see Gary Leiser, “Ḥanbalism in Egypt before the Mamlūks,” *Studia Islamica* 54 (1981), pp. 159–60. It is also of interest that this man's nephew, who was likewise Ḥanafī, later became *qāḍī al-quḍāt* in 453–54 (Ibn Ḥajar, *Rafʿ al-īshr*, p. 75), where it specifies that he was given in addition to the judiciary the *maẓālim*, the mint, prayers, the *khutba*, and pious foundations (*aḥbās*).

51 Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, bio. no. 584.

52 On the *adyāf* see Walker, “The Ismaili *Daʿwa* in the Reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Ḥākim,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 30 (1993), pp. 161–82, 168–70.

53 On the career of Khatkin see Walker, “*Daʿwa*,” p. 170.

54 For ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, see *Rasāʾil al-ḥikma*, Beirut 1984, no. 70 (p. 605), citing his 117 and 129th *majlis*, and no. 74 (pp. 670 and 674), citing his 110th, 125th and 126th *majlis*. For al-Fāriqī, see *Rasāʾil*, no. 42 (p. 331), citing the 144th, no. 69 (p. 589), citing his 140th, and no. 74 (p. 669), citing his 7th *majlis*.

From the period of Khatkīn's supervision of the *da'wa*, we have as well a number of important works by the great dāʿī Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, who spent time in Egypt at this juncture, quite likely at the invitation of Khatkīn, the support of whom Kirmānī credits. But, despite not composing or perhaps not even reading his own writings in the weekly sessions, Khatkīn was clearly the dāʿī *al-du'āt*. It was he who ran the affairs of the *da'wa*. And Khatkīn was evidently quite effective. Beginning in 408/1017–18 or slightly before, the *da'wa* had to confront a series of challenges to its authority raised by the leaders of various groups that later became the Druze. For a while the threat was serious but the *da'wa* survived this rebellion against its control eventually. Khatkīn must have played a major part. Two of the five arch-villains in the Druze hierarchy are Khatkīn, as the dāʿī *al-du'āt*, and Ibn Abī'l-ʿAwwām,⁵⁵ as the qāḍī *al-quḍāt*, both of whom were responsible in part for the suppression of the earliest Druze and their prophet and messiah Ḥamza b. ʿAlī. Druze doctrine thus confirms Khatkīn's role.

At the moment of al-Ḥākim's disappearance in 411/1021, both men continued to hold office, Ibn Abī'l-ʿAwwām in fact until his death in 418/1027. The fate of Khatkīn is less certain. However, in 414/1023–24, Qāsim b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, great grandson of Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, took charge of the *da'wa*⁵⁶ and that implies that Khatkīn was no longer around. In 418/1027 Qāsim added to his responsibilities the judiciary, although barely a year later he was removed from it (but not also from the *da'wa*).⁵⁷ Qāsim by several accounts had little talent and gained his high positions almost exclusively because of his distinguished forebears. Still he managed to hang on to the leadership of the *da'wa* without interruption until 441/1049, some twenty-seven years in all. Moreover, the judiciary eventually came back to him as well. In between it belonged to ʿAbd al-Ḥākim b. Saʿīd al-Fāriqī, a brother of Mālik. Like the clan of al-Nuʿmān, the al-Fāriqīs themselves constituted a family of qāḍīs, four more of whom were to occupy the post of qāḍī *al-quḍāt* in the period from 450/1058 to 466/1074.⁵⁸ ʿAbd al-Ḥākim fell prey to his own venality in regard to the inheritance of an orphan girl in

55 Druze references to the qāḍī Ibn Abī'l-ʿAwwām occur in *Rasā'il* in nos. 9 (p. 79) and 18 (p. 197).

56 The date is supplied by Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar wa jāmi' al-ghurar. Al-Juz' al-sādis, al-Durra al-muḍīyya fī akhbār al-dawla al-fāṭimiyya*, ed. Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, (Cairo 1380/1961), 6: 317; Heinz Halm, "Der Tod Ḥamzas, des Begründers der drusischen Religion," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras 11*, eds. U. Vermeulen and D. de Smet, (Louvain 1998), pp. 105–13, p. 109.

57 After precisely one year, two months, and twenty days according to Ibn Ḥajar (*Raf' al-iṣr*, p. 308), bio. no. 163, pp. 307–8.

58 For details—full names and dates with a genealogical chart—see the study of the al-Fāriqīs by Walker.

his charge; he was accordingly removed from office when that scandal became public in 427/1036.⁵⁹

The role of whole families in the judiciary is notable especially over the first century of Fatimid rule from Egypt, less so for the *da'wa* although that impression may stem from the lack of sufficient evidence in the latter case. The involvement of Qādī al-Nu'mān's many descendants is only the most obvious example. That of the al-Fāriqīs is another. And their grip on various offices extended to many regional and subordinate positions that are less apparent in the surviving historical record than that of the chief *qādīs*. As but one example in the year 414/1023, Mālik's son Abu'l-Faraj was appointed *qādī* of the eastern Nile Delta city of Tinnīs.⁶⁰ Nor is this period likely to have been exceptional in this regard. Evidence from the Maghrib and from much later in Egypt suggest that various members of the same family frequently held posts in the judiciary either from one generation to the next or simultaneously.⁶¹

6 Al-Yāzūrī and al-Mu'ayyad

The next major event in the evolution of these two offices was the acquisition of both by al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Yāzūrī in 441/1050, replacing Qāsim. Al-Yāzūrī commenced his phenomenal rise to power as an overseer of the queen mother's estates. From there he obtained appointments as chief justice and chief *dā'ī* and finally slightly later as *wazīr*. He was the first to hold all three simultaneously. No *wazīr* before him, including the quite powerful figures Ibn Killis and al-Jarjarā'ī, had control of either judiciary or *da'wa*. Yet it is unlikely that one person could manage what until then had been three separate portfolios, each with its own bureaucracy and various lesser offices. Certainly, then, al-Yāzūrī, whose exact qualifications for either the judiciary or the *da'wa* remain in doubt—was he even actually Ismaili?—had to delegate day to day authority to others.⁶² For the *da'wa* he often turned to al-Mu'ayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, a multitallented *dā'ī* recently arrived from Iran, who would ultimately succeed his boss as *dā'ī al-du'āt* in 450/1059 after a lengthy period of subordinate service.

59 See also the entry on him in Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf' al-īṣr*, bio. no. 101, pp. 208–9.

60 Musabbihī, *Akhbār Miṣr*, pt. 1, eds. Ayman Fuad Sayyid and Thierry Bianquis, (Cairo, 1978), p. 3 (f. 132b).

61 Much more work needs to be done to collect all the available data which, however, certainly exists, most notably but not exclusively in Ibn Ḥajar's *Raf' al-īṣr*.

62 There is a biography of him in Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf' al-īṣr*, bio. no. 54, pp. 129–34; also another fairly long in al-Maqrīzī's *Muqaffā*, vol. 3, pp. 366–408 (no. 1188).

Al-Yāzūrī's direction of the three branches of government was, in general, highly successful, a high-water mark of Fatimid achievement. The triumphal capture of Baghdad by al-Basāsīrī in 450/1058 on behalf of the Fatimids was a part of his program. Al-Mu'ayyad had played a major role in the endeavor, acting for al-Yāzūrī. But the *wazīr* did not survive the internal attacks against him. He succumbed to them in 450/1058 and was executed that same year, his fall leading to one of the most chaotic periods in Fatimid history. From 450/1058 until the advent of Badr al-Jamālī in 466/1074, the government moved from one crisis to the next. One scholar estimates that during those years there were fifty-four different appointments to the wazirate and forty-two to the office of chief *qāḍī*.⁶³ Many involved the reappointment at various times of the same man: Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥākim al-Fāriqī, on four separate occasions; 'Abd al-Ḥākim b. Wahb al-Malījī, at least eight times.⁶⁴ Only the *da'wa* remained under relatively stable direction; al-Mu'ayyad, once in office, suffered less. He lost his position in 454/1062,⁶⁵ perhaps another time, but otherwise continued throughout as head of the *da'wa*.

Most significantly, for al-Mu'ayyad's appointment to lead the *da'wa* in 450/1059, we have the text of the decree issued on the occasion. It appears to be the only example of its kind to reach us. It reviews carefully the new *dāʿī al-du'āt*'s background and previous service and it provides, as well, some sense of what were the duties of the office. Another, also preserved, applies to his reinstatement following a brief demotion and exile in 454/1062.⁶⁶

63 Ayman Fuad Sayyid in his introduction to his edition of Ibn al-Ṭuwayr's *Nuzhat al-muqlatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn*, (Beirut/Stuttgart, 1992), p. *70.

64 On al-Malījī, see Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf' al-īṣr*, bio. no. 102, pp. 209–10, and Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār Miṣr*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid as *al-Muntaqā min akhbār Miṣr*, (Cairo 1981), p. 18. One report about him states specifically that in 453/1061, for his second appointment, he was also given the *maẓālīm* and all the other functions appurtenant to the judiciary, namely prayer, the *khuṭba*, and all else, *except the da'wa*. In fact, although this man was an Ismaili, I have found no evidence that he was ever given the *da'wa*. On him see al-Maqrīzī, *Ittī'āz* (Cairo, 1971) 2: 251, 261, 262, 264, 268, 270, 271, 274, 276. His son later became a judge under al-Musta'li; see *Ittī'āz*, (Cairo, 1973) 3: 28; Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf' al-īṣr*, p. 364.

65 For this interval we have a record of appointment to the *da'wa* of one of the al-Fāriqīs. As well al-Ḥasan b. Majallī b. Asad b. Abī Kudayna al-Murādi, who was appointed *qāḍī* on several occasions, the first of which occurred in 455/1063, is noted as holding simultaneously, however briefly, the wazirate, the judiciary and the *da'wa* in 464/1071 (Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf' al-īṣr*, bio. no. 56, p. 136; Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 38). If so it would constitute at least the second time that al-Mu'ayyad lost it.

66 The Arabic texts of these two *ṣijills* are preserved in volume seven of 'Imād al-Dīn Idrīs' *Uyūn al-akhbār*, ed. by Ayman Fuad Sayyid in *The Fatimids and their Successors in Yaman*, pp. 76–82. Bazat-Tahera Qutbuddin included both as an appendix to her earlier study of al-Mu'ayyad's poetry entitled *Al-Mu'ayyad fī al-Dīn al-Shirāzī. Founder of a New Tradition*

7 Badr al-Jamālī and the Era of Military Wazīrs

The coming of Badr al-Jamālī in 466/1074 altered permanently the structure of the Fatimid state. Although he himself was to hold a position of supreme authority, a virtual dictator, his rank remained that of a *wazīr*, and he was always theoretically subservient to the imam-caliph. In actuality he and those who occupied the same office over the next century were formally titled *amīr al-juyūsh*, “Commander of the Armies.” The term *wazīr* fell out of favor and remained thereafter an informal designation. But, with respect to the two offices under discussion here, the *amīr al-juyūsh* simply subsumed them as part of his overall authority. The exact steps in this process are, however, not quite clear. As long as al-Muʿayyad was alive and able to function as chief of the *daʿwa*, Badr did not claim control of that position. Nevertheless, one report indicates that already in 466/1074, he took over the judiciary, appointing on his own behalf a *qāḍī alquḍāt*, who, despite the title, was beholden to Badr directly.⁶⁷ Four years later, al-Muʿayyad died. Until shortly before his death, inscriptions and other evidence show that Badr did not have a title that gave him control of the *daʿwa*. Only when al-Muʿayyad’s approaching death was obvious did Badr add the titles Guarantor of the Judges of Muslims and Guide of the Missionaries of the Believers (*kāfil quḍāt al-muslimīn* and *hādī duʿāt al-muʿminīn*), thereby asserting his own direct authority over both the judiciary and the *daʿwa*.⁶⁸ The exact meaning of either title, however, remains uncertain, as does its function. Nevertheless, henceforth, these two offices were under the control of the *amīr al-juyūsh*, who had thus from then onward apparently taken full charge of them both.

of *Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry*, PhD dissertation, Harvard University, (Cambridge, Mass. 1999). There she provides a translation and a photographic facsimile of a ms. that was not consulted by Sayyid. Other mss. are available as well. From them it is clear that Sayyid misread the date of the second of the two in Idrīs’s work (p. 82 of the Arabic) as 455. The correct date is 450. Thus, as they appear in this text, what Idrīs presents as the “second” appointment (pp. 79–82) is actually the first and what he puts first (pp. 77–79) is in fact the second from 454 when al-Muʿayyad was recalled from a short exile and reappointed *dāʿī al-duʿāt*.

67 That man was Abū Yaʿlā Ḥamza b. al-Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad al-ʿIrqī, see Ibn Ḥajar, *Rafʿ al-īṣr*, bio. no. 67, pp. 146–48. On the name see the editor’s notes. Maqrīzī’s *Ittiʿāz* (Cairo, 1971) 2: 313) mistakenly gives his *nisba* as al-Fāriqī. See Ayman Fuad Sayyid, edition of Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 40; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, p. 400. Maqrīzī provides a bio. of this man’s son, *Muqaffā*, no. 2173.

68 On the timing of his use of these titles, see Ayman Fuad Sayyid, edition of Ibn al-Ṭuwayr’s *Nuzhat*, introduction pp. 46–47. Badr did not have them prior to 30 Dhu’l-Qaʿda 470/June 1078; al-Muʿayyad died in Shawwāl/May.

Note, however, that the various *amīrs* of this highest rank—the *amīr al-juyūsh*—although most often possessing in practice complete dictatorial powers, nonetheless did not themselves claim the titles *qāḍī al-quḍāt* or *dāʿī al-duʿāt*. Later medieval writers might informally state that these military *wazīrs* were one or the other or both, but the exact title of the *amīr al-juyūsh* in this regard refers to him as *kāfil* “guarantor” and as *hādī* “guide”, terms that place him above but not necessarily directly in either the judiciary or the *daʿwa*. He would accordingly govern the affairs of both by assigning subordinates to the task. Thus the old office of *qāḍī al-quḍāt* and *dāʿī al-duʿāt* were not done away with simply by the advent of military control. Eventually, if not immediately, they reemerged or, perhaps, simply continued without the same degree of independence and thus public notice.

The reign of Badr al-Jamālī, which proved critical for the continuity of the Fatimid state, is so poorly documented by surviving evidence or historical reporting that we cannot verify exactly what happened to the positions of chief *qāḍī* and chief *dāʿī* after 470/1078 (the death of al-Muʿayyad). From then until 487/1094, the end of Badr’s rule, we have no names for the post of *dāʿī* and only a few for *qāḍī*. The situation is hardly better for the reign of the caliphs al-Mustaʿlī and the first two decades under al-Āmir, when, as the *amīr al-juyūsh*, Badr’s son, al-Afḍal, exercised the same iron-fisted control over the government as had the father. But, with the murder of al-Afḍal in 515/1121, a semblance of the old order returned. Likewise, information from the chronicles begins to flow again. Does that indicate that we simply lack the evidence we need from the previous forty-five years (470/1078–515/1121)? And that, if it were available, we could readily account for the continuity of the two offices and explain how both functioned over the intervening period? At the moment we have no way to tell.

Nonetheless, from 515/1121 until the final collapse of the Fatimid dynasty in 567/1171, the list of holders of both ranks is reasonably complete.⁶⁹ Six individuals in that period also occupied both positions at one time or another. Four of them received an appointment to the two offices in combination, notably Abu l-Thurayyā Najm b. Jaʿfar, from 526/1132 to 528/1134, Ismāʿīl b. Salāma al-Juljūlī,⁷⁰ from 534/1140 to 543/1148, Hibat Allāh b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Kāmil, from 549/1154 to 559/1163, and al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAlī b. Salāma, who was known as Ibn al-ʿŪris, in 559/1163. Several returned to the post of chief *qāḍī* at least once. The

69 On the *daʿwa* in this matter see Ayman Fuad Sayyid, introduction, Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, *Nuzhat*, pp. 75–78.

70 His biography in Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, vol. 2, no. 745; Ibn Ḥajar, *Rafʿ al-iṣr*, bio. no. 38, pp. 84–86.

chief *dāʿī* from 517/1123 to 525/1131 served briefly as *qāḍī* the following year (in 526/1132). Al-Juljūli was already chief *dāʿī* when he was given the judiciary and he continued as such after he lost it. At the very end, two men in particular were locked in an intense rivalry for these positions: Ibn ʿAbd al-Qawī b. al-Jalīs and al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Salāma (Ibn al-ʿŪrīs). If one was appointed to one of the posts the other would conspire either for the other office or to unseat his opponent. They each held one of the positions at the end. Two years later, in 569/1174, both were arrested by Saladin (Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn), the new Ayyubid ruler, for complicity in an attempt to restore the Fatimids. He ordered them both to be hung, crucified, and, in response to their long-standing personal quarrels, buried together in the same grave.⁷¹

The responsibilities of both offices, as revealed by various reports from the period, indicate that it had not changed in any significant way if at all. The chief *qāḍī* continued to control the mint, for example, a fact of great interest and some amazement to later Ayyubid and Mamluk era historians. They were favorably impressed by the stability of Fatimid coinage and credited the role of the *qāḍī* in keeping it so.⁷² Other Islamic governments, especially later, did not turn over to the *qāḍī* this kind of authority. For the *daʿwa* we have a description by the contemporary Ibn al-Ṭuwayr of the duties of the chief *dāʿī*, of his drafting the weekly lecture on doctrine, producing a neat copy for the caliph's signature, and his reading of the lesson to an audience of Ismaili faithful who came forward afterward to be touched on the head by that same signature.⁷³ What Ibn al-Ṭuwayr reports about this aspect of the *daʿwa* in late Fatimid times matches more or less an account of similar sessions from well over a century earlier as reported by al-Musabbiḥī from the reign of al-Ḥākim.⁷⁴

71 See their biographies in Ibn Ḥajar, *Rafʿ al-īṣr*: on Ibn al-ʿŪrīs, biography no. 53, pp. 128–29; on Ibn al-Jalīs, biography no. 100, pp. 206–7.

72 Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 3: 461–2 and note; 10: 384–88; Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 23, 106; *Khiṭaṭ, musawwada*, pp. 278–9 (a section specifically devoted to “mentioning those who were appointed to supervise the mint in the days of the Fatimid caliphs”). Cf. Tyan, *Histoire*, pp. 410–12. A judge, Abuʾl-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf, who was appointed *qāḍī al-quḍāt* by the *wazīr* al-Maʾmūn in 516/1123, is specifically granted in his decree of investiture authority over the judiciary plus prayer, the *khuṭba*, the bureau for pious foundations, and the mint. See Ayman Fuad Sayyid, notes to his edition of Ibn Muyassar's *Akhbār Miṣr*.

73 For a translation of this passage see Walker, “Fatimid Institutions of Learning,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 34 (1997), p. 185 n. 27.

74 Both reports appear together in Maqrīzī's *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 305–8. For more details see Walker, “Fatimid Institutions of Learning,” pp. 182–86.

8 Conclusions

A comparison of the form and function of these two positions over the final decades of Fatimid rule with an earlier period under the same dynasty in Egypt suggests little or no fundamental changes over the intervening years. Given the general decline of their power and the occurrence of two major schisms in the Ismaili movement as a whole, the continuation of both up to the fall of the Fatimid dynasty is remarkable. The *da'wa*, though administering to a shrinking congregation, apparently fulfilled its purpose to the very end. The *dā'ī al-du'āt* continued to have high rank in the state, only slightly less than that of the chief *qāḍī*. Yet looking for a similar position in the North African phase of Fatimid government much earlier reveals an important contrast. Until the caliphate moved to Egypt, there had been no office of precisely the same kind. In the Maghrib, although the title itself had been used, there had existed no judge of judges as a super *qāḍī* with authority over all the others in the realm. Despite his great prestige and closeness to the caliphs, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān never held such a lofty position. He was the chief judge in respect to the Ismaili community there, but only for the Ismailis. The Mālikīs in particular, who constituted the majority, had their own *qāḍīs*.

On the question of who, aside from the imam, controlled the *da'wa*, the matter is not as clear. If it was the *bāb al-abwāb*, an obscure office that may have been more of a spiritual rank than a government office, it remains hard to follow its development into the later position of *dā'ī al-du'āt*, if that is what happened. Most likely, the post of chief *dā'ī*, in the sense of an administrative wing of the central government, began as an imitation of that of chief *qāḍī* when he became the *qāḍī al-quḍāt* in the full sense. It was thus no accident that the first holders of such an office, the sons and grandsons of al-Nu'mān, were also chief *qāḍīs*. However, for that to have happened, the wide net of the *da'wa* in territories far beyond the Fatimid empire, which had until then been tightly organized on a principle of a hierarchy of ranks and gradations of authority, would have had to become subservient to a bureau of the state. Given its previous importance as the engine of the movement, both before the establishment of the state and presumably afterward, that it came to have a status less than that of either *qāḍī* or *wazīr* is therefore curious. One possible answer derives from the Ismaili concept of "muslim" (*muslim*) and "believer" (*mu'min*). Muslims are all members of the Islamic community; believers are only that portion of it that accept the authority of 'Alī as the sole legitimate successor to the Prophet and of his descendants, the imams of the Fatimid-Ismaili line. In Badr al-Jamālī's titles *kāfil quḍāt al-muslimīn* and *hādī du'āt al-mu'minīn*, the same distinction is made. Judges hold authority over Muslims, all Muslims,

the broader and more inclusive category, while *dā'īs* administer to the needs of the community of true believers, a much smaller but more select group within the larger body of Islam. Strictly from the viewpoint of a believer, the chief *dā'ī* is more important than the chief *qāḍī*; quite possibly in this respect he holds higher authority, even with regard to questions involving the application of law. But, for the common citizen of the Fatimid empire, non-Muslims and especially non-Ismaili Muslims, the *qāḍī* remained, in part because of the greater numbers of those who required what he provided, more important. Most inhabitants of the realm never accepted the *da'wa* and they had no dealings with the *dā'ī*.

A second answer, one not necessarily incompatible with the first, is that the office of *dā'ī al-du'āt* is not the same as that of *bāb al-abwāb* and that therefore they are not to be confused or confounded. This explanation is that of the modern Ismailis, particularly of the Ṭayyibīs, who insist that the *bāb* was all along the spiritual director of the *da'wa*, acting for the *imām* and holding a status second only to him.⁷⁵ Al-Mu'ayyad holds an exalted position as a kind of patron saint among Ṭayyibī Ismailis, and is considered by them to have been both. He was the *bāb*, spiritual head of the *da'wa*, and at the same time *dā'ī al-du'āt*. Not so someone like al-Yāzūrī, who was, according to this view, never the *bāb*. Admittedly, the evidence for the activities of the *da'wa* is harder to come by than for the judiciary and thus many questions about it remain unanswered. Nevertheless, as useful as this distinction might be in explaining certain discrepancies, much of the data does not support it. More likely it constitutes a later doctrinal readjustment designed to ensure the highest possible status for the supreme *dā'ī* during the absence of the *imām*, as occurred for the Ṭayyibīs after their imam al-Ṭayyib (and his line) had disappeared.⁷⁶

75 Reiterated by University of Chicago colleague Bazat-Tahera Qutbuddin in private conversations. She is currently gathering the evidence for this view as expressed in the earliest of the Ṭayyibī writings in the Yemen, which thus trace it back at least to the immediate post-Fatimid period.

76 Further on this topic a fairly recent publication by Yaacov Lev, *The Administration of Justice in Medieval Egypt: from the seventh to the twelfth century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020) in a chapter ("Ismā'īlī Rulers and the Judicial System," pp. 111–57) devoted specifically to the Fatimids, while covering some of the same ground, also includes a different perspective in part by focusing on the administration of justice itself rather than the *da'wa*. Moreover, although he has used many of the same sources, others appear in his analysis and the themes he highlights occasionally differ. Two examples worth noticing are the role of violence in the early period and what he calls "Ismā'īlization" later in Egypt.

The Responsibilities of Political Office in a Shī'ī Caliphate and the Delineation of Public Duties

The Fatimids rose to political dominion in North Africa in 909.¹ The new caliph, al-Mahdī, was already imam of the Shī'ī followers but, until then, he had not actually ruled a politically defined territory. However, he and his successors thereafter were both imams in the religious sense and also rulers of an empire that grew from its original base in what is now Tunisia, Algeria and Sicily. In 969, the Fatimids added Egypt, much of Syria, and the holy cities of Arabia to their growing empire. As imams of the Ismailis, the Fatimids controlled a network of missions (*da'was*) that reached deep into areas dominated by their opponents and, as caliphs, they governed a populace that comprised a substantial majority who were not and never became Ismailis. Most of them were Sunnīs. Fatimid caliphs therefore played two roles. On the one hand, they were the leaders of the various Muslim communities within their realm; on the other, they were imams of a religious movement, the Ismailis, a sub-branch of the Shī'a. A Shī'ī imam is the infallible, divinely chosen guardian of those who adhere to his cause. His word is absolute; the devotion of his followers is total and unconditional. In theory he is the single agent of God on earth. As rulers of a varied population, however, it was essential for the Fatimids to communicate, not merely with Ismailis, but with the rest as well. The pertinent question here then is how this dynasty articulated a principle of public duty that recognized the august supremacy of the imam and yet assured the loyalty of all the citizens of the state, most especially those individuals appointed to administer the offices of government.

1 The Concept of Public Duty

Public duty means in this instance the duties of a political office, or such offices that serve a public function, (or a position with responsibilities for the welfare

1 Originally published, slightly modified, as "The Responsibilities of Political Office in a Shī'ī Caliphate and the Delineation of Public Duties under the Fatimids" in Asma Afsaruddin, ed., *Islam, the State, and Political Authority: Medieval Issues and Modern Concerns* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011), pp. 93–110.

of a significant body of others) in a general sense, that which is required by the holding of such a position, and the moral obligation to do or not to do something bound up with such responsibility. From the classical Islamic world at the time of the Fatimid dynasty (10th to 12th century), there exist many different works that attempt to delineate the requirements involved in public office, most notably that of *wazīr* and *qāḍī*, but also, among the Sunnīs, some concerning the caliphate itself. Examples would include al-Māwardī's justly famous *Kitāb al-Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya* (*Book of the Ordinances of Government*),² the many treatises on the *adab al-qāḍī* (the judge's comportment) and Nizām al-Mulk's *Sīyāsat-nāma* (*Book of Government*),³ which is of the mirror for princes variety. There are other examples and types. One more rarely used source for understanding the obligation involved in public responsibilities is the decree of appointment commonly issued to the new appointee at the time of induction into office. Examples for various regions of the Islamic world are not rare or particularly hard to find. Typically, copies of them survive incorporated into the corpus of work by the author of the decree in question, as, for example, those by al-Ṣāḥib Ibn 'Abbād from the 4th/10th century preserved in his collected *Rasā'il* (letters),⁴ or in works (manuals) of chancery practice composed by various authors.⁵

The Fatimid case is largely the same except with one notable and highly important exception. Whereas Sunnī authorities might write about the requirements and obligation of the caliph and the caliphate, the Shī'ī imamate of the Fatimid ruler was not open to comments of this kind. An Abbasid caliph could be removed from office, and replaced. Not so the Fatimid caliph. In 381/991, for example, the Buyid *amīr* Bahā' al-Dawla deposed the caliph al-Ṭā'i' and substituted al-Qādir. Moreover, Sunnī theory tolerates, under certain circumstances, rebellion against an irreligious or unjust caliph. For the Ismaili Shī'a, the community has no say whatsoever in determining who is imam, nor can it sit in judgment on the actions of the person who holds that office. The Fatimid caliph is ruler by virtue of lineage and having been explicitly designated by his

2 On al-Māwardī and his *al-Aḥkām* much has been written. See "al-Mawardi" by C. Brockelmann in the *EI2*. For a recent English translation, see that by Wafaa H. Wahba, *The Ordinances of Government* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1996).

3 Ed. by C. Schefer (Paris, 1891); Eng. trans. H. Darke (London, 1978). See also "Nizam al-Mulk" by H. Bowen and C. E. Bosworth in the *EI2*.

4 Ibn 'Abbād, *Rasā'il*, ed. Shawqi Dayf and 'Abd al-Wahhab 'Azzam (Cairo, 1947).

5 On the classical Islamic chancery and its practice, see the following: Walther Björkman, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Staatskanzlei im islamischen Ägypten* (Hamburg, 1928); Björkman, "Diplomatic, i. Classical Arabic," *EI2*; H. L. Gottschalk, "Diwān, ii. Egypt," *EI2*; H. R. Roemer, "Insha'," *EI2*.

predecessor in a line running back to the Prophet. He is God's choice, and not the people's.

Fatimid writings on the subject of the imamate are not plentiful but there are several as mentioned and cited above in the chapter on the imamate. Two of those discussed previously are al-Kirmānī's⁶ *Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate* and al-Naysabūrī's *Proof of the Imamate*.⁷ It is amply clear from each, however, that these authors are not advisors to the caliph. What they write is in no way a mirror for the prince. And neither would even remotely have hoped to play that role. For them, describing what an imam does and what his subjects might expect him to do merely suggests what role he might play. The current Fatimid imam-caliph occupies the place of the Prophet as the divinely appointed leader of the community, what the Muslims understand as the function of the Prophet. He occupies the place of the Prophet (except in regard to receiving revelations). Only he, among all human beings, knows what he should do, what his exact role is. Ordinary humans have no say. They cannot comment critically on his actions any more than they can on those of God. Like acts of the divine, they are simply not subject to human scrutiny, and they may thus be occasionally quite as unintelligible and perplexing as are the mysteries of God's ways.

Such restrictions do not prevent these authors, however, from boasting about what the imams do and have done, but lauding the Commander of the Believer's commanding of the good and forbidding of the wrong, his charity and justice, is not prescriptive in any sense. There is no obligation involved. Such praise is simply a record from the perspective of the caliph's subject of what good they have received from him and his actions, or what traits they happen to observe in him.

The responsibilities of all who occupy lesser ranks, by contrast, are not exempt from human inquiry and from the expectations of the governing authority. But the interplay between the exalted concept of rule by a divinely sanctioned imam, whose knowledge of right and wrong depends on God alone, who infallibly determines what can and cannot, should and should not,

6 On this important Ismaili *dāʿī*, whose career ran from about 399 to 411/1021, see, as an introduction, my *Ḥamīd al-dīn al-Kirmānī*.

7 On these two treatises see now my article, "In Praise of al-Ḥākim': Greek Elements in Ismaili Writings on the Imamate" in Emma Gannagé, et al eds. *The Greek Strand in Islamic Political Thought: Proceedings of the Conference at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton*, 16–27 June 2003 (special issue of *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, vol. 57 (5004), pp. 367–392. We have a new edition of the *Ithbāt al-imāma* of al-Naysābūrī with a complete translation by Lalani in *Degrees of Excellence*. I prepared a new edition of the Arabic of al-Kirmānī's *Maṣābiḥ*.

be done, and the actions proper to those he appoints to serve him as intermediaries between himself and his subjects, is not quite the same as it would have been under the Abbasids. The Fatimids claim infallible, divinely protected authority; no power is above them save that of God Himself. There is no consensus of Muslims to which they themselves adhere. Those the Fatimids appoint to office are beholden to them and not to an abstract notion of Islamic doctrine derived from the collective determinations of the scholars, as among Sunnīs. The problem then is exactly how this difference is set out, and in what manner it might affect the government (or the theory of government) at large under these conditions. What is the duty of a public office under this version of the Shīʿī caliphate?

2 Works on Public Duty Within the Domain of the Fatimids

For the Fatimids we have several kinds or classes of documentation that might help to solve this problem. Two of the most important are, first, a version of the famous “commission” (*‘ahd*) of ‘Alī, as found in Qāḍī al-Nu‘man’s 4th/10th century manual of Ismaili legal materials, *The Pillars of Islam* (*Da‘ā’im al-Islām*) in its chapter on *jihād*.⁸ His text is like but not the same as the other version of the same *‘ahd* now found in the *Nahj al-balāgha* (*The Path of Eloquence*), which was compiled in Baghdad by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī a half-century later.⁹ Secondly, we have a treatise known as the *Sufficiently Concise Summation of the Rules for the Comportment of the Ranks and the Requirements for the Rightly Guiding Da‘wa* (*al-Mūjaza al-kāfiya fī adab martaba wa shurūt al-da‘wa al-hādīya*),¹⁰ by the same *dā’ī* al-Naysabūrī from the time of al-Ḥākim mentioned already.¹¹

8 Arabic text, Qāḍī al-Nu‘man, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, vol. 1, ed. A. A. Fyzee (Cairo, 1963), pp. 350–68; translation Fyzee and I. Poonawala, *The Pillars of Islam*, vol. 1, (New Delhi, Oxford Un. Press, 2002), pp. 436–56.

9 On this relationship and on many other details concerning this text (including references to older studies of it), see Wadad Qāḍī, “An Early Fatimid Political Document,” *Studia Islamica* 48 (1978): 71–108.

10 This treatise is preserved in a late Yemeni Ismaili work by Ḥātim b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmidī called “A Gift for Hearts and Good Cheer for Those in Distress” (*Tuḥfat al-qulūb wa furjat al-makrūb*). An edition of the whole of this work by Abbas Hamdani with summary translation was published by the Institute of Ismaili Studies and I. B. Tauris. The same publishers will issue separately another edition of al-Naysābūrī’s treatise by Verena Klemm, with a complete translation by me. Both items are now published and available. For details see the bibliography.

11 In addition there is also from the late period a mirror for prince, the *Sirāj al-mulūk*, by the Andalusian scholar, transplanted to Egypt, al-Ṭurṭūshī. This last work, as one might

3 Al-Naysabūrī's Account of the Duties of the *dāʿī*

Al-Naysabūrī's work, as interesting as it is, may provide limited information since it purports to apply to the activities of the *daʿwa* and its *dāʿīs* only. For most of its history and in the majority of places it functioned, the Ismaili *daʿwa* operated in secrecy. Outside of Fatimid territory, it constituted an opposition movement and its aim was the overthrow of the ruling power. However, it is also true that the *daʿwa* had a state function under the Fatimids and a *dāʿī* could therefore be considered, in such a situation, a public (as opposed to private) agent of the government. The chief *dāʿī*, the *dāʿī al-duʿāt*, held a rank high enough in the state to put him third (or fourth if one counts the caliph) behind the *wazīr* (if there was one) and the chief judge, the *qāḍī al-quḍāt*.¹² Moreover, al-Naysabūrī's account of the *dāʿīs* duties—his responsibilities to his public—is remarkably complete down to fairly mundane details, some elements of which suggest a broader application.¹³

At one point he comments, for example:

The *daʿwa* is a difficult matter and its qualifications are many, including all that God has stipulated in the Qurʾān to describe a believer as well as what the imams have specified in their books concerning the faithful. These things are required also of the *dāʿī*. He should have even more of these excellences and they should be more evident in him. If they do not exist in the believer, his belief is nevertheless possible, but it is not acceptable that they do not exist in the *dāʿī*. ... The qualifications for the *daʿwa* are based on three things: on knowledge, on God-fearing piety, and on governance.

Knowledge and God-fearing piety are private traits that do not necessarily involve governmental functions; governance is, however, by its very nature a

expect, is, however, quite Sunnī. Though it was dedicated to the Fatimid *wazīr* al-Batāʾihī, it holds true to the non-Ismaili doctrines of its Maliki author and cannot serve (and most likely was not intended) to define or directly influence Fatimid policy.

12 On the relationship between the *qāḍī* and the *dāʿī*, see my study "The Relationship between Chief *Qāḍī* and Chief *Dāʿī* under the Fatimids" in G. Kraemer and S. Schmidtke, eds. *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 70–94. Now included in this volume; see chapter three above.

13 The passages that follow are from my translation. The work itself is not divided into sections. Now published as *A Code of Conduct: the Mūjaza al-kāfiya of al-Naysābūrī*, critical edition of the Arabic and complete English trans. with notes and introduction by Verena Klemm and P.E. Walker. (London, I. B. Tauris, 2011).

public activity. In that governance is central to the duties of a *dāʿī*, his duties are therefore clearly public.

Al-Naysābūrī next offers a full accounting of these same three areas. In doing so he offers a statement defining more specifically his notion of governance.

In regard to governance, it has three grades: the governance of the individual, governance of the household, and governance of the community. It is necessary for the *dāʿī* firstly to govern his own self, provide for the welfare of his soul, control it and preclude it from having any of the vices and any and all bad habits of character, keep it from reprehensible desire for things that are illicit, bear itself in conformity with the virtuous, fulfilling required duties and established regulations. He will censure himself sincerely if he behaves badly, along with regret, reproach and repentance, and he will reward himself if he is good with delight, praise and the urging of more fine actions and the acquisition of knowledge. ... He who succeeds in governing his own self is fit and able to govern others. It is said: Do what is beneficial to yourself and the people will follow you.

Governance of the household is the governing by a man of his own family and retainers, controlling them, teaching and educating them, instilling the virtues in them and preventing vices, rewarding those that are good, punishing those who are bad. ... He who succeeds in governing himself and his family is fit to have charge of governing the rest of the people in matters of faith and he who cannot govern himself and his family is not fit to be a *dāʿī*.

Governance of the community involves supporting the administration of the person who leads them in matters of the welfare of this life and of their salvation, who instills in them proper respect for the national law, keeps them from reprehensible and illicit actions, promotes the virtues, rewards those who do good and punishes those who do evil, who maintains for them the benefits of religion. A person who is not good at the governance of the individual, the family and the community is not fit for the *daʿwa*. The *dāʿī* must educate the *dāʿī* below him in knowledge, test and try him and arrange his affairs, punish and reward him, each according to his rank. ... He offers to each his sincere counsel, a good forecast, and preservation of the welfare of all of them in truth, justice and fairness. A person lacking these three forms of governance cannot be a *dāʿī*.

The *daʿwa*, as envisioned here, involves a public responsibility that might well apply in the case of almost any government office. The language used by al-Naysābūrī in this instance could easily have appeared in a description of the

duties of, say, a *qāḍī*, a *wazīr*, or a *muḥtasib* (market inspector) or almost any other public office.

While the stipulation that the *dāʿī* must master the three degrees of governance is fairly general, al-Naysabūrī also adds a long list of more specific requirements. The following items provide a few examples:

A *dāʿī* should possess all of the virtues that are found separately among the rest of the people. He requires therefore the excellences of the specialists in legal reasoning because he himself must be a jurist in both the external and internal aspects of it. He must have the virtues of a judge because he is, in fact, a judge both according to the external and the internal; he needs patience, knowledge, perseverance, soundness of opinion, skill, integrity, fortitude, and other characteristics that apply to judges. There should be in him the qualities of those who administer the government, among the virtues of which is courage, generosity, skill in management, prudence, political aptitude, and cultural refinements. He is the prince of religion and of its adherents.

Here next is the rule for appointing those subordinate to the *dāʿī* himself:

A *dāʿī* is not allowed to make appointments to the *daʿwa* to fulfill some service or satisfy a claim of favor, or for affection, relationship, friendship, intercession, or concern, or for some gain, or to avoid some harm, or out of shame, modesty or fear. All of those things lead away from religion, from justice, from security and from good will toward God and the Messenger. ... It is related how the king of the Byzantines once wrote to Nawshirwan, "What keeps your government is such good order that it has no defect?" He replied: "I appoint only the qualified, not for attention; I punish for a crime, not out of anger; I give when it is deserved, not because of love; and I fulfill both promise and threat."

The advice offered here might, again, apply broadly, not merely to the *daʿwa*.

The role of the imam, who occupies the first rank in the hierarchy and who is the ultimate source of all earthly authority, comes up in the following manner. His position is, after all, critical in Shīʿī government. That is reflected clearly in these passages:

The *dāʿī* must see to the affairs of the *daʿwa* and its proper administration, thereby relieving the Imam of that obligation, for the Imam has appointed him to manage the *daʿwa* and maintain the welfare of the

various regions. When he manages properly these affairs, arranging them as they should be, he settles matters by the order of the Imam for these matters belong solely to God and to His representative and it is not for anyone to speak ill of him.

When necessary the *dāʿī* should spend of the personal funds that have been granted him by the Commander of the Believers on matters connected to the benefit of the *daʿwa* which are not in doubt and are of such a kind that it is not possible to take the matter to the government and make a request for it, since not to do so at the moment, would bring harm upon the *daʿwa*. It may take too long to refer the matter to the Imam. If he waits, it might cause irreparable damage. ... The *dāʿī* is responsible for the management of all the business of the *daʿwa*, its administration and that of the various provinces and the organization of the *daʿwa*. It is responsibility of the Imam to provide him with knowledge and funds. Thus the *dāʿī* is responsible for its repair and the amelioration of all corruption, trouble, the perversion of doctrine, doubt about religion, going astray, insurrection, and rebellion that happens in the *daʿwa*. If he fails in that out of willfulness, or lack of effort on his part, carelessness, inattentiveness, or incapacity, he is the one who is accountable for that and for the consequences of it. When God questions the Imam about things connected to the affairs of his community and his safeguarding and care for them, the Imam will ask him for he put that on his neck. He is the one answerable for it and it was up to him to arrange matters in that regard. If he was unable, it was up to him to make his inability known to the Imam and to beg forgiveness for that so that he could appoint someone else to take care of it.

Material of this type in al-Naysābūrī's treatise amply illustrates what was expected of the *dāʿīs* individually and, more particularly for the present purpose, collectively. The concept of duty is obvious; it was an inherent feature of the position. However, we would ultimately find it hard to assess the real authority of these and the many other statements and conditions laid down in al-Naysābūrī's work and how his words might have actually functioned within the *daʿwa*, let alone determine their standing outside. Could its stipulations, for example, have applied to all holders of an office under the imam's rule? Or could they have applied merely to those within the *daʿwa*? If not, do we nevertheless need to wonder if the treatise itself did, possibly, circulate widely. Could an office-holder who was not a member of the Ismaili *daʿwa* have read it? We know only that al-Naysābūrī was fairly important and that his writings (particularly this one) were, in later times, held in high esteem by the Ismaili

community. Surely, if it was available to the citizens of the Fatimid realm (a not unreasonable assumption), it might well have served as a primer on the duties of public office quite beyond the *daʿwa* for which it was written.

4 The *ʾahd* of ʿAlī as a Statement of Public Duties

The *ʾahd* of ʿAlī was, according to the *Nahj al-Balāgha*, his commission to Malik al-Ashtar when the latter was appointed governor of Egypt and is thus a set of prescriptions for the duties of an early regional administrator, albeit in this case a major one. Qāḍī al-Nuʿman's Fatimid version makes no mention of Malik or of Egypt. It says, moreover, that, although it comes from ʿAlī, and rests on his authority in the first instance, ʿAlī himself traced it one step higher, that is, to the Prophet himself. It could therefore be seen as the Prophet's commission to ʿAlī (prior to ʿAlī's having succeeded and become at that later point an imam-caliph in his own right). Given then its supreme authority, whether from the Prophet or from ʿAlī, it might well have served as the quintessential statement of the duties inherent in public office.¹⁴

The kind of rhetoric in this *ʾahd* that concerns public duty is illustrated by the following sample phrases: "Recollect your former state. ... Begin by giving good counsel to your conscience, pertaining to you own self. Fear God. ... Do not allow your station in life to lead you astray from the path of moderation in desiring a rank that is not yours by right. ... Let not the favors bestowed on you by God make you too proud to exalt Him as He deserves. ... Never allow any of God's bounties to embolden you to think that He has freed you from any of your own obligatory duties, or to think that you have acquired the right to be relieved of your most arduous responsibilities. ... Have God's favors to you so emboldened you that you now invite His wrath? ... Remember death. ... Know that people judge your administration exactly as you judge those that held a similar office before you. ... Let your most cherished and profitable treasure be the abundance of good deeds. ... Be merciful. ... Incline your heart to show clemency, affection, sympathy, and beneficence to your subjects."

There is much more in the text of the same type of pious advice, most of it aimed generally and valid for almost any holder of a public responsibility.

14 It could not have been, as some have argued, a mirror for a prince if by that is meant the Fatimid caliph. It is not directed at the imam but at his subordinate. That this version differs from that in the *Nahj al-balāgha* also does not mean that one is necessarily earlier or that one was composed by another author. Both may have been separately transmitted versions of a hadith that related a similar, though not precisely identical, text.

Platitudes of this type are common in the literature of princely advice. They hardly serve to set this apart from countless others. Some passages, however, are more specifically concerned with the technique of governing, as in specifically administering to what it delineates as the five separate classes of subjects: 1) soldiers and the army; 2) the governor's aides, the secretaries and judges; 3) taxpayers and land owners; 4) merchants and artisans; and 5) the masses. Each of these has its own section. A good example is the following passage about judges:

Appoint such a man to administer justice. Then increase your support of his work and decisions, and remunerate him generously to make him free of the temptation to decrease his wants from the people. Given him a station in life so elevated as to be beyond the jealousy of others. ...Thus he will not show favor to a litigant hoping for a profit from him.

But, again, little of this material is especially interesting or noteworthy in the present context except, possibly, a provision concerning the differing of judges:

Judges differ among themselves only when they rely exclusively on their own opinions as distinct from that of the Imam. So, where judges differ among themselves, they should not decide the case, nor persist in their differences, but submitting the question to the Imam for a decision, since all controversial matters among men should be referred to the Imam.

The role of the imam in this context, though clear enough in this statement, seems out of place in the context of an *'ahd* issued by the Prophet (or 'Alī, for that matter). But its importance to the Fatimids is obvious. Here, then, is direct evidence of how this commission, in this form, attempts to preserve the supremacy of the imamate, which, as would be expected under the Fatimids, is above the rank of the person to whom the document is addressed. The holder of the commission is told explicitly to pass the dispute between two judges up to the imam, not presumably to himself. Although less clear in this text than in that of al-Naysabūrī, the intention of the commission and the primary duty of the one appointed by it is to implement the rule of the imam. He is the ultimate arbiter in all matters. And, as in the time of 'Alī's imamate, he is present and available. That condition was true of the Fatimid ruler. It was thus possible to appeal any and all issues to him. Where the Sunnī authorities might appeal to a consensus of those most knowledgeable in Islamic doctrine and law, the Shī'īs simply follow the decree of their imam and that exclusively.

While much of the kind of rhetoric in this commission appears in many other, later examples of commissions and decrees of appointment, a specific connection is not yet clear between it and them and needs investigation. Surely, however, later chancery clerks had read this most original of Islamic *ʾahds*. Presumably it was available widely and was thus readily accessible. Any analysis of later Fatimid appointment decrees must keep this possibility in mind.

5 Fatimid Appointment Decrees and Commissions

Various descriptions of Fatimid administration, such as those by al-Maqrīzī, both in his *Khiṭaṭ*¹⁵ and at the end of his history of the dynasty, the *Ittiʿāz al-ḥunafāʾ*, comments about it by al-Qalqashandī here and there in his *Ṣubḥ al-aʾshā fi šināʿat al-inshāʾ*, and in works on the *dīwāns* (bureaus) by, among others, Ibn Mammatī,¹⁶ provide important information about the nature of the offices of government but not necessarily a concept of public duty. As elsewhere in the Islamic world, a source that is often better and more useful is the decree of appointment that was typically issued when a new person assumed a particular position. It normally stated formally what was expected, what qualifications were required and what duties the office entailed. Would only that we still possessed a complete set of these diplomas of investiture, both over the entire course of this rule as well as for all positions under it at any given moment. Unfortunately, however, only a rare few of them survive, none an original but rather copies incorporated after the fact in works by later historians or in the manuals of chancery practice. Still, the situation is not so hopeless as to suggest ignoring such documents because the evidence they provide can be especially useful. From one source or another, we have the complete text of at least five Fatimid appointments to the office of *wazīr*, and one each for that of chief *qāḍī*, head of the *maẓālīm* (grievances) court, the *naqīb al-ashrāf* (head of the Aliid nobility), *amīr* (leader) of the *ḥajj*, *amīr* of the *jihād*, teacher in a *madrasa*, and a few others. There are two examples or more for the *ḥisba* (market supervision). Quite importantly, we have also two for the chief *dāʿī*. While these texts are too few to provide much data for a history of any given

15 *Khiṭat*. (Bulaq, 1853); new edition by A. F. Sayyid, 5 vols (London, 2002–2004).

16 Ibn Mammatī, *Kitāb Qawānīn al-dawāwīn*, ed. A. S. Atiya, (Cairo, 1943); Eng. trans. Richard S. Cooper, "Ibn Mammatī's Rules for the Ministries: Translation with Commentary of the Qawānīn al-Dawānīn." Ph. D. dissertation, University of California (Berkeley, 1973).

office under this dynasty, they nevertheless contain essential material for an analysis of the concept of public duty as it actually applied in real situations.

Thus the recovery of these texts wherever they may survive and then the cataloging of them by type of office and when possible by date is essential.¹⁷ Typically, when an appointment to office was made, the chancery was ordered to compose and execute a document suitable for the purpose at hand. Copies in a large and smaller format were made and they were either distributed to interested parties or were placed in the state archives, mainly the chancery's own archive, but also other bureaus of the government depending on what was appropriate for the particular office in question. Appointments to regional offices, for example governor or *qāḍī* of a district, seaport or town, evidently required that some form of the decree of appointment go with the new appointee to his new location, perhaps simply for an additional public reading of the original copy but possibly more copies of it in the smaller, easier to handle and transport format. But even here, no copies survive as far as we can determine. The Fatimid archives are long gone, unfortunately.

Where copies exist, they come exclusively from secondary contexts, not chancery originals. Some—a small number—were copied by the appointee into a literary work of his. Several more found their way into a historical text, a chronicle such as Ibn al-Qalānisi's history of Damascus.¹⁸ But the majority are now found in the great Mamluk chancery expert al-Qalqashandī's *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, a massive manual for clerks and secretaries in the *Dīwān al-Inshā'* (the chancery). Although he wrote at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th century (it was completed in 815/1412), he knew well the history of Islamic chanceries from the beginning to his time and he provides a thorough account of it, including an impressive array of examples from the earlier periods, among them that of the Fatimids. He notes that the Fatimids were one of the first dynasties of Islam to develop on a major scale the chancery as a key bureau of government.

In fact it is almost certain that all examples of appointment decrees that we have are the product of a chancery, even those that were not included in al-Qalqashandī's collection. In part that may have aided their survival. The prime sources for these decrees were firstly manuals of chancery practice—ones like that of al-Qalqashandī but much earlier—and secondly collections of texts

17 For some previous attempts, see the following studies: Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl, "The Fatimid Documents as a Source for the History of the Fatimids and Their Institutions," *Bull. of the Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University* 8 (1954): 3–12; al-Shayyāl, *Majmū'āt al-wathā'iq al-fāṭimīyya*; S. M. Stern, *Fatimid Decrees: Original Documents from the Fatimid Chancery* (London, 1964).

18 Qalānisi, *Dhayl ta'rikh Dimashq*, ed. H. F. Amedroz (Leiden, 1908).

assembled by their authors who happened to be clerks or supervisors of the chancery. Many of the heads of the Fatimid chancery become famous for their epistolary skills and mastery of diplomatic rhetoric and style. Among the best examples of their art were many decrees of appointment. The most famous was al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil¹⁹ who entered the chancery under the Fatimids and continued after them as chief secretary to the Ayyubid Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. Quite a number of examples come from a manual of chancery practice written by its head, ʿAlī b. Khalaf, in the 430s (1038–48), 440s (1048–58) and possibly later. His *Mawādd al-bayān*²⁰ was a major source of texts for al-Qalqashandī, who refers to it or its author over 150 times in his own *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*. Another important manual of chancery practice under the Fatimids is *al-Qānūn fi dīwān al-rasāʾil* (*The Code of the Chancery*)²¹ by Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, who was head of the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* until his death in 542/1147.

6 The Duties of Public Office²²

Nearly all Fatimid decrees of this type contain statements about duties in a general manner. They are thus common to the work of almost any office. It would be rare not to find some version of the command to “order the good and prohibit the bad”, to fear God and rely on Him, or to treat the rich the same as the poor, the powerful as if they were weak, the weak as if they were powerful, elites like the masses, masses like the elites. All *qāḍīs*—presumably all—were carefully admonished to deal with the funds of orphan in a proper manner (i.e. returning it to them in a timely fashion).²³ The clerks in the chancery merely had to invent slightly different ways of saying it for each subsequent occasion. But provisions of this kind are a generic component of such decrees and do not express a Fatimid trait or condition any more than the decrees issued by another dynasty. For this reason this material is of much less interest.

19 On him see “al-Kāḍī al-Fāḍil” by Brockelmann and Cahen in the *EI2*.

20 What survives of this work has been published several times, ʿAlī Ibn Khalaf, *Mawādd al-bayān*, published in fascimile (Frankfurt, 1986); edition by Ḥātim Ṣāliḥ al-Ḍāmin in *al-Mawrid*, vols 17 (1988)–19 (1990); edition, (Tripoli, Libya, 1984).

21 Abuʾl-Qāsim ʿAlī Ibn al-Sayrafī, *al-Qanūn dīwān al-rasāʾil*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid, (Cairo, 1990); French trans. Massé, “Code de la chancellerie d’état,” *BIFAO* 11 (1914): 65–120.

22 What follows here is provisional in that, for the present, it reflects only a limited sampling of this class of the data.

23 That this provision is a standard feature of appointment decrees for the judiciary surely indicates that violations of the judge’s responsibilities in this area were not infrequent. In fact we have several cases of Fatimid judges who fell victim to their own venality with respect to the funds of orphans.

In fact other portions of these decrees, not directly related to the statement of duties, are more intriguing. Normally they commence with a section praising God, followed by a paragraph invoking His blessings on the Prophet, on 'Alī and the imams, and then a statement about the Commander of the Believers, who is the caliph-imam of the present, the one who issues the decree. The balance of the text covers the specifics of the position in question, the qualification of the person being appointed to it, and finally instructions on how to perform the job properly, i. e., the duties entailed in it. For a governor of Alexandria, for example, there will be fulsome praise of the city and its importance. Most decrees laud the appointee by stating that the Commander of the Believers considered all his men and found that only he—the new office holder—had all the qualifications required. One qualification, curiously, cited specifically and quite often, is having come from a noble lineage. High lineage seems to be especially important for holding public responsibility. (Lineage was after all the key to Fatimid legitimacy itself). The section containing instructions might have both those specific to the position and others that are more generally true of public office.

7 The *wazīr*

The case of the *wazīr* is especially interesting and important since it offers a clear example of the problem of how and under what circumstances the imam might choose to delegate his august authority—even a portion of it—to another person. The act of delegation—the very problem of why it might be necessary—was in part the subject matter of the document itself. The two earliest decrees insist, most significantly, on justifying the office of *wazīr* and explaining the reason and precedent for it. The Fatimids in North Africa had appointed no *wazīrs* and the notion of delegating that level of authority to a subordinate seemed not to have existed. But with al-Jarjārā'ī the situation had changed radically. But his decree (dated 418/1028) states quite clearly that *wazīrs* are not and do not diminish the status of the caliph-imam. The one decree that lacks a name of the appointee carefully explains that it is God and God alone who requires no *wazīr*. But humans do. If any one, they say, could have not needed a *wazīr*, it would have been Moses. Nonetheless, it was he who asked God to appoint him a *wazīr*, Aaron, his brother (per Qur'anic report). Muḥammad's *wazīr* was 'Alī. Thus two of the greatest prophets, men of the highest capacities and each exempt from even the possibility of error, found it useful to have a *wazīr*.

Though Aaron and ʿAlī were ideal *wazīrs*, the decree goes on to cite Joseph as the true model. His shepherding of the public welfare on behalf of pharaoh, especially of financial matters, is what the caliph expects of his new *wazīr*.

8 The *dāʿī*

From the decree appointing al-Muʿayyad to the post of chief *dāʿī* in 450/1058:²⁴

Take charge, with the resolution of someone like you, of what the Commander of the Believers has put you in charge of, someone like you whose resolutions are strong, whose foundation is well established. Dedicate the better part of your heart's devotion to fixing the corruption around it. Know that if you sense a slackening regarding the *sharīʿa* in someone among the Shīʿa, efface his name from the register, cut him off from the *daʿwa*.

Organize the *dāʿīs* in the provinces in a manner to make the ranks of worship flourish and the flower-beds of giving and receiving of knowledge bloom. Appoint the strong, the trustworthy; beware of the weak, the treacherous. Give your attention to an earth that is shrinking from its borders and whose sides encompass desolation. Make them grow with the rain-water of your right guidance.

Submit to the treasury what accumulates with you from the *fiṭr* tax, the alms tax.

Consult the views of the *wazīr* [here follows the name of the specific *wazīr* of the time].

9 The *maẓālim*

From the decree appointing Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān over the *maẓālim* courts (343/954):

The Commander of the Believers having observed your piety, fidelity to the faith, uprightness and commendable manner and being satisfied with the discharge of your judicial duties [in previous appointments], he now invests you with the absolute authority to look into the *maẓālim*.

24 Preserved in Idris ʿImād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 7 ed. A. F. Sayyid (London, 2002), pp. 79–82; see text and translation in Qutbuddin, *al-Shirazi and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry*, pp. 374–81.

Having also taken note of your true loyalty to the imams and your upholding of justice in your decisions, and having seen what tests and trials have revealed about you ... the Commander of the Believers thinks it proper, in order to strengthen, buttress, reinforce and augment this appointment, to issue a public decree addressed to you so that the hopes of any who seek justice from you may be encouraged and those against whom your judgments might go will be filled with fear. The schemes of those who want to contravene justice by avoiding you and resorting to others may be frustrated.²⁵

10 A Professorship in Alexandria

From the permit to teach given to Ibn 'Awf by the *wazīr* Riḍwān b. al-Walakhshī on behalf of the caliph al-Ḥāfiz (ca. 532/1137):

When the Commander of the Believers learned of the distinction of the port of Alexandria ... beyond all other ports. ...and that it contained reciters, legal specialists and those attached to *ribāṭs*, devout people, he ordered the establishment of the Ḥāfiziyya *madrasa* ..., that cash and grain be released from his exchequer to be used for the provisioning of all and each one's needs.

This *madrasa* is for you ... Abū Tahir, because of your effectiveness, your knowledge and ability in *fiqh*. ... The Commander of the Believers has given orders that you teach the science of the law to those who desire to know it. ... His order for the writing of this decree was issued to support you, to strengthen your authority, and elevate your renown.

So be devoutly obedient to God.

Use absolute authority over your students and apportion it among them according to your own judgment; your observations will guide you. Associate with the ones whose manner pleases you and avoid the ones you disapprove of.²⁶

25 Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib*, pp. 47–48; adapted here from Poonawala's translation of this passage in his editor's introduction to *The Pillars of Islam*, vol. 1, p. xxviii.

26 Adapted from the translation by Gary Leiser in "The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisun 495–647/1101–1249," Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1976, pp. 435–38.

These few examples drawn from actual Fatimid commissions illustrate what kinds of information they offer. The addition of yet others here is possible but gains us little. Most are like, and were surely copied from, models of such decrees used earlier and in other parts of the Islamic world. In that respect they suggest a concept of public duty that applied notions common right across the Islamic domain.

11 Conclusion

A review of the evidence supplied by these appointment decrees—those actually issued by the Fatimids—and by al-Naysabūrī's work on the *daʿwa* and the *ʿahd* of ʿAlī provides considerable material of a general kind, in the main consisting of pious admonitions and exhortations, along with a few warnings against evil and corruption. But little of it deals with the particulars of what it may have meant to hold office within the Shīʿī caliphate, as opposed to the holding of such a position in any Islamic government, Shīʿī or otherwise, of the time. In part that would have been expected. Fatimid decrees were nearly all composed by a chancery staffed, except rarely, by non-Ismailis. A few of the better-known supervisors of that bureau were Christian, and many others Sunnī. Its function was, moreover, to give a public voice to the administration and the Fatimids took special care to address their subjects as a whole by avoiding many issues that would have singled out one faction over another, their own included. Most often proclamations by the imams employed a language designed for broad consumption.

Nevertheless, on the matter of the imamate and the overriding authority of that rank, there was little or no compromise. The one area of greatest contrast between Fatimid and non-Fatimid delineations of public duty is the appeal in the latter to observe and adhere to the prevailing consensus of the Islamic scholarly community, in other words, to follow the lead of illustrious predecessors.²⁷ That provision is absent from Fatimid documents which focus exclusively on the guidance of the imam. Thus the major difference and what distinguishes Fatimid doctrine from that of its rivals is its insistence on the pure and unshared authority of the living imam—an authority that is

27 A good example of the Abbasid (or other Sunnī) type is the commission (*ʿahd*) composed by Ibn ʿAbbād in the name of Muʿayyad al-Dawla appointing ʿAbd al-Jabbār *qāḍī al-quḍāt* of Rayy in 367/977, which explicitly cites the *ijmāʿ* (consensus) and “the statements of the famous predecessors and well-regarded scholars of the community” as guides to the law as material on which the judge should rely (*Rasāʾil*, pp. 35–36).

comprehensive for all aspects of Islamic law and practice, in fact for government and governing in every respect.

But such a position is less explicit in the evidence than it might have been. Having no wish to aggravate the situation with highly charged rhetoric, the Fatimids preferred a quieter approach, one that befitted a diverse population where the point was made by omitting a doctrine favored elsewhere, the net effect of which served, even so, to strengthen the authority and sole discretion of the imam. By not admitting any other, none could be cited or appealed to. An official within such an administration had no choice but to acknowledge the caliph's authority. Public responsibility involved less a duty to the community, either as an abstraction or as an actual society of citizens, than to the imam-caliph who was its supreme head and its highest embodiment. The actions of a public official should reflect those of its leader, his wishes, and his alone.

Kutāma, Kalbids and Other Westerners: The *Maghāriba* in Cairo

A key element in any iteration of Fatimid governance involved control and direction of a military force, an army both for defense and offence, the latter as in future aspirations of domination and the extension of the empire, the former in resistance against the encroachment of enemies from which there was a constant threat.¹ But the army was also in general a particular weak point, a feature of its rule never quite secure or dependable. Yet it is also notable that the Fatimids first rose to power on the strength of a loyal Berber tribe quite committed to the Ismaili cause and its imams. Once formed into an army, they proved fairly successful, more so in the west but to an extent also in the east. With the eventual move from the Maghrib eastward, these western Berbers served well, even eagerly in the east. They constituted the backbone of the army during the conquest and long afterward. Still the situation was not without tensions, the understanding of which helps explain Fatimid military strengths and eventual failures. The following chapter looks carefully and in detail at the fate of the *Maghāriba* (Westerners) in Egypt and the east.

When the Fatimid caliph al-ʿAzīz began to sense his own impending death in 386/996, he carefully arranged for the succession of his son al-Ḥākim by entrusting the eleven-year-old boy's fate to two senior figures in the government: the chief judge-chief *dāʿī* Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmān (son of the great Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān) and al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAmmār, a senior commander and scion of the Kalbid family who by then had a long history of important posts under the Fatimids in Sicily and North Africa. The transition went well until the critical moment for the public ceremony of swearing allegiance. A prominent group of Kutāma Berber officers deliberately stayed away. To do so constituted a serious act, a sign of their displeasure, even rebellion. Ibn ʿAmmār taking the lead in an attempt to quell the insurrection, went out to listen to their complaints. They insisted among other issues on the removal of Ibn Nasturius, the head financial

1 A slightly modified version of this paper, "Kutāma, Kalbids and Other Westerners: The *Maghāriba* in Cairo," appeared originally in proceedings of *Convegno Internazionale di Studi I Fatimidi e Il Mediterraneo* (Palermo, 3–6 December 2008). *Alifbā: Studi arabo-islamici e mediterranei* 22 (2008): 45–56.

officer of the state, and that henceforth the person who supervised matters, financial and otherwise, pertaining to themselves should be one of their own.

The threat posed by these renegade troops had its effect. To calm the situation, it was decided that Ibn ‘Ammār should be appointed chief executive to run the government and see to the complaints of the Kutāma.² He in turn readily agreed to their demands, increasing to eight the disbursements made to them in a year, each man to receive eight dinars. In the presence of al-Ḥākim, they were also to be given a bonus that very day of twenty dinars. The funds were brought out and the bonuses given as specified, and in front of the young imam. A possible rebellion on the day that al-Ḥākim’s reign began was thus quickly averted.

The conditions leading to this incident and what came of it were the result of long festering animosities between, on the one hand, the Kutāma and other Westerners (the *Maghāribā*) and, on the other, Turkish and Daylami soldiers who formed an opposing collection of Easterners (the *Mashāriqa*).³ Al-‘Azīz cultivated the latter particularly by importing great numbers and generously providing for them in his army and government. Over the course of his reign, the Kutāma noticed their role in Egypt and Syria shrinking, with a steady loss of power and prestige. The elevation of Ibn ‘Ammār was, in their view, a positive indication that the situation was about to change in their favor once again.

In fact matters began auspiciously. Ibn ‘Ammār was appointed *wāsiṭa* with full honors and then a special title: Amīn al-Dawla. He was the very first Fatimid to have such a title. A decree read out publicly in the central mosque by the chief justice, repeated Ibn ‘Ammār’s title, Amīn al-Dawla, and stipulated that all persons must dismount in his presence, a high honor indeed!

Additional favors were shown the Kutāma; most of their chieftains received gifts of horses as well as money. In the middle of the following month, a ceremony of honor was arranged for Salmān b. Ja‘far b. Falāḥ, the leading Kutāma commander, who was girded with a sword embellished with gold, presented with a horse with a golden saddle, along with four other horses with their equipment, and much fine cloth, all in anticipation of his departure with an army for Syria. Commanders under him were also honored in a similar fashion. Funds and arms in large amounts were assembled to travel with his army. Yet another month later, on the feast of sacrifices, al-Ḥākim rode to the festival square for prayers. He gave the sermon himself. Those who mounted the

2 On Ibn ‘Ammār see in addition to Maqrīzī’s *Itti‘āz al-ḥunafā’* ed. al-Shayyāl and Muḥammad Aḥmad under the years in question, this author’s *Muqaffā*, ed. al-Ya‘lāwī, bio. #1204, 3: 433–41.

3 Michael Brett (*The Rise of the Fatimids*, p. 161) traces the beginning of this rivalry in Egypt back to the year 323/935, i.e. prior to the Fatimid conquest. See also his comments on p. 345.

minbar-pulpit included, most significantly, the *qādī* Muḥammad b. al-Nu‘mān, Barjawān, the palace eunuch in charge of al-Ḥākim, and Ibn ‘Ammār, the three most important officials of the new administration.⁴

In general, however, Ibn ‘Ammār’s policies, although gladly embraced by the Westerners, were shortsighted. He, for example, emptied the royal stables of its horses, bestowing on the Kutāma two thousand five hundred of them. Many more went with a force of Kutāma headed for Syria. He sold so many of the remaining horses, mules, dromedaries, and donkeys that prices fell so far that a female camel sold for six *dinars*, and a donkey that had once fetched fifty now went for four. The Turks and others lost their privileges; the palace staff likewise. There were 10,000 slave girls and eunuchs in the palace. He ordered those that wanted to be sold, sold, and those that asked to be freed, freed, all in an effort to raise funds and curry favor. Many of the Easterners simply left Egypt, either singly or in groups.

As the younger Kutāma were given commissions, they began to play the role of grandees, laying hands on married women in the street, plundering people in the alleyways and elsewhere. Complaints against them multiplied, but no one reined them in. Finally matters reached the point where they attempted to interfere with some of the young Turks with the intention of seizing their clothing. The evilness of this act led to a fight in which one of the Westerners and one of the Turks were killed. Leaders of each side quickly assembled their men, two factions ready to fight. Ibn ‘Ammār backed the Westerners. Each invoked harsh language against the other and the situation only grew worse. A number were killed and others wounded. With the conflict gaining in intensity, Barjawān rode from the palace to mediate, but the Turks meanwhile set out to plunder the house of Ibn ‘Ammār, eventually taking from it more than they had recently lost to the Kutāma.⁵ In the end Ibn ‘Ammār realized that he had been wrong, and that he had lost control of the government in the process. Giving up, he departed Cairo for his home in Fustat. After slightly less than eleven months, his tenure as chief executive was over. A month later al-Ḥākim graciously summoned him back to Cairo and restored many of his privileges—back to the level he had attained in the days of al-‘Azīz—and his house there, but he no longer rode in processions or met with anyone other than his personal servants and he did not govern again.⁶

4 *Ittī‘āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 7.

5 Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 28: 171–72.

6 Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *al-Ishāra ilā man nāla al-wizāra*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid, p. 57, mentions a letter sent to Ibn ‘Ammār’s uncle to explain the errors of the nephew.

The Turks, however, neither forgave nor forgot. Ibn ‘Ammār remained confined to his house in Cairo until three years later when he was at last given permission one day to ride to the palace where he dismounted with all the other people and waited as they did. A group of Turks used this very opportunity to kill him.

Ibn ‘Ammār is often said by later historians—some of whom even knew better—to have been a Kutāma chieftain. He was not, but rather of Arab descent, a member of the old Arab nobility transplanted to North Africa. His family came from the Kalb, a Yemeni tribe. Ibn ‘Ammār’s grandfather had served the first Fatimid caliph and died fighting for him in Sicily. His son Ḥasan became the Fatimid governor of Sicily, the first of the Kalbid *Amūrs*. A second son, ‘Ammār, provided al-Qā’im and then al-Manṣūr with key military support against the rebel Abū Yazīd. He was later, under al-Mu‘izz, commander of a flotilla sent to raid Byzantine territory but drowned tragically returning from it to Sicily when a severe adverse wind trapped and destroyed his entire fleet. Subsequently, the son, Ibn ‘Ammār, accompanied his uncle Ḥasan in 352/962 on a campaign against the Christian held city of Taormina and then the fortress of Rametta in the far northeastern corner of Sicily. Taormina surrendered but Rametta held out. As the siege wore on, Ḥasan left his nephew in charge and returned to his home base. Meanwhile the Byzantines prepared and dispatched a large force, by sea and by land, to relieve Rametta. An army landed at Messina and marched inland. A much smaller force under Ibn ‘Ammār confronted and defeated it decisively. The Byzantine commanding general died in the battle and his army was thoroughly decimated. It was a tremendous victory for the Muslims, much to the credit of Ibn ‘Ammār.⁷

Later Ibn ‘Ammār returned to North Africa and to serve with al-Mu‘izz, eventually playing a part in the conquest and move to Egypt, where he himself remained through the last years of al-Mu‘izz and the whole period of al-‘Azīz. For the dying caliph to have called for him must indicate both the high esteem he had earned from long years of service and the reputation of his military victories won on behalf of the Fatimid dynasty. But it is also likely that Ibn ‘Ammār, like others of his family and some of the Sicilian nobility, had converted to Ismaili Shiism in earnest.⁸ The chief judge, Muḥammad b. al-Nu‘mān, the other man summoned to take responsibility for the succession, was head of the *da‘wa*—the Ismaili appeal—in addition to being chief justice. To entrust the fate of the dynasty to these two, and they are the only ones named in this connection, makes special sense if both were Ismailis. Thus Ibn ‘Ammār began

⁷ Halm, *Empire*, pp. 359–60, trs. 405–06.

⁸ The case is apparently clearest with regard to Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan. See Halm, *Empire*, trs. 405.

his period of regency merely as the trusted confidant, in part the result of his Ismaili devotion, to the dying caliph. As representative of the North African Westerners, he then assumed a greater status, regent not merely for the transition but for the affairs of government at large.

Stressing here this particular series of events and looking at them closely serves to highlight the culmination of a growing antagonism between the Westerners and Easterners under the Fatimids in Egypt. It likewise reveals clear signs of the declining influence of the former group. The brief period of Ibn 'Ammār's ascendancy proved to be both a high point and a confirmation of their eventual loss of status. It also helps to define exactly what the term "*Maghāriba*" meant in this context. Note that the Westerners, among whom Ibn 'Ammār was regarded as its leading member, comprised Arabs as well as Berbers, true Maghribis from Ifrīqiya along with the Ṣiqillīs (and possible Andalusīs)—that is, anyone from west of Egypt. Here we will employ the principle al-Maqrīzī used for his great biographical dictionary the *Muqaffā*. He intended in that work to provide a biographical entry for everyone directly connected to Egypt from the time of the Arab conquest until the year of his birth (776/1374). He included only those that had come to Egypt (with, however, some curious additions: the Fatimid caliph al-Manṣūr was born in the Maghrib and died there; he never visited Egypt; and yet when al-Mu'izz moved to Cairo he brought with him the bodies of his immediate ancestors, among them al-Manṣūr, who thus qualified for an entry in the *Muqaffā*. Similarly, a rebel against the Zīrids who was eventually caught, killed and decapitated, had his head sent on to Egypt by them. He also met the criterion).

The subject of the *Maghāriba* in Cairo, even so restricted, is as vast as it is important. Not nearly enough work has been done on it, although some features are better known than others. The role of the Kutāma in Egypt and Syria, for example, is critical, particular in regard to the military and its success or lack thereof over the first three, four or possibly more decades of Fatimid rule. And yet there exist few, if any, good studies devoted to the subject.⁹

The Kutāma Berbers had supplied the major contingents of the Fatimid army going all the way back to the first rising in the Maghrib. The army of Jawhar that conquered Egypt was largely Berber, mainly Kutāma. In contrast

9 Much material is available, both in the sources and in the writings of Bianquis and Halm and I note here Musa Laqbal's *Dawr Kutāma fī ta'rikh al-khilāfa al-fāṭimiyya mundhu ta'sīsihi ilā muntaṣaf al-qarn al-khāmis al-hijrī* (Algiers, 1979), which is largely devoted to the North African period rather than Egypt. However his chapter four entitled "Kutāma wa'l-nufūdh al-fāṭimī fī Miṣr wa bilād al-Shām mundhu al-fath ilā nihāyat al-qarn al-khāmis al-hijrī" (pp. 457–76) is relevant. The book itself is unfortunately exceedingly hard to find in western libraries. There are only two copies in North America.

to many other Berber groups, moreover, the Kutāma from the earliest days were converts to Ismaili Shiism. They had accepted the Fatimid caliphs with some passion and religious devotion. Their loyalty was unquestioned. But, as the Fatimids had pushed from Egypt, where they encountered little or no resistance, into Syria, their successes were mixed with failures, particularly in any conflict with Turkish soldiers, who proved to be much better trained and equipped. A relatively small force of Turks under the command of Alptakīn in Damascus inflicted a humiliating defeat on the army of Berbers troops led by Jawhar. The Fatimid general then reported to al-ʿAzīz that the Kutāma had been disappointing in the confrontation with these Turks. Thereupon the caliph turned against them and began to create for himself regiments of Turks and other professional soldiers from the east. Unlike the Kutāma who came to the army as ethnic recruits, thus retaining their tribal allegiances, the easterners entered the Fatimid military as individuals, or as small groups, each having accepted the patronage of their employer, in this case the caliph. Their motives were thus more mercenary than religious. But their skill in combat, honed by youthful professional training and advancement in accord with merit, gave them a decided edge over the clan affiliated levees. Over the long course of al-ʿAzīz's reign, the standing of the Kutāma diminished steadily and that of the Turks rose. At the accession of al-Ḥākim, the commander in charge of Fatimid forces in Syria was Manjutakīn, a Turk. There were now many Turks in Egypt, along with other Easterners.

And yet when the Persian traveler and Ismaili *dāʿī* Naṣīr b. Khusraw described the Fatimid army on parade in 439/1047, more than 80 years after the initial conquest, he reported that the Kutāma numbered at least 20,000, a mounted cavalry of considerable size. One major question about them concerns their immediate origin. Were these Kutāma newly recruited from the Maghrib or were they predominantly, or possibly entirely, the offspring of earlier generations that came to Egypt and remained there? Naṣīr comments about the Easterners (*Mashāriqa*, Turks and Persians) that he had observed on the same occasion that they had mostly been born in Egypt, even though they nevertheless retained their ethnic designations.

One interesting bit of information may help suggest an answer about the Kutāma. In the year 376/986, the Fatimids in Cairo dispatched a missionary (*dāʿī*) to the Kutāma. This man's original purpose was to generate among them renewed enthusiasm for military service in the Fatimid armies of the east. This was a matter of no consequence to the Zīrid governors of the Maghrib, who accorded him their hospitality and provided money and the means to pass on to the region of the tribes he was sent to recruit. Once there, however, Abu'l-Fahm, the *dāʿī* in question, began to promote his own cause (rather

than that of the Fatimid imams), forming an army of rebellion and minting coins in his own name. Belatedly, alarmed by this growing insurrection, the Zirids angrily suppressed it as soon as they could.¹⁰ Did they blame Cairo? It is possible, but there is no clear evidence of long-term consequences. Nevertheless, surely the Fatimids would have thought twice about sending any more such recruiters.

In the long run it is quite likely that the Kutāma in Egypt formed, eventually, a disappearing remnant of the former army brought to Egypt with al-Mu'izz. Al-Maqrīzī even says as much. In commenting on the advent of Badr al-Jamālī and his importation of Armenian troops, he reports that, “the Kutāma were henceforth eclipsed and thereafter became merely a part of the general population, after once having constituted the elite notables of the state.”¹¹

Significantly, in the list of groups in Fatimid military regiments over the final 70 years, the Kutāma, to the best of my knowledge, never appear. Ethnic designations, however, tend to give way to names associated with the *wazīrs* who first created the militias in question, such as Juyūshīyya, Afḍaliyya, and more. Perhaps individuals, maybe even large numbers, of Kutāma joined one of these groups without our being now able to detect that fact.

About their continued loyalty and the possibility of adherence to the Fatimid cause in later times, however, we possess one potentially important piece of evidence. In the confusion generated by the succession crisis following the death of the caliph al-Mustanṣir, several of his sons departed Egypt rather than accept the imamate of their youngest brother al-Musta'li. Another son, Nizār, who also claimed the imamate, fled Cairo for Alexandria, where, after a year of struggle, he was eventually captured and most likely killed. When these events unfolded Nizār was already 49 or 50 and the father of sons of his own. Some of them—we have no idea how many there may have been—joined at least three of their uncles, Muḥammad, Ismā'īl and Ṭāhir, somewhere in the west, that is, in the Maghrib. Thus a small coterie of dissidents and Nizārī supporters gathered somewhere in the West waiting for an opportunity to reassert their claim(s) to the imamate. In 526/1132 a son of Nizār, Abū 'Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn—one who had fled Egypt in 488/1095—now ended his concealment by gathering a sizable force and setting out for Egypt. The ruler of that time, al-Ḥāfiẓ, managed to subvert the leaders of al-Ḥusayn's army and when it arrived within reach, had him arrested and killed, whereupon his troops disbanded.¹² The pitiful end of this al-Ḥusayn was, however,

10 *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1: 263.

11 *Khīṭaṭ* (A. F. Sayyid, ed.) 3: 32.

12 *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1973), 3: 147.

not the final attempt of these Western Nizārīs to make good on their claim to the imamate. In 543/1148 another army appeared from out of the Maghrib, led this time by a man who, according to al-Maqrīzī's entry, merely claimed to be a son of Nizār. His fate at the hands of al-Ḥāfiẓ, after an early success, was almost exactly that of al-Ḥusayn in the earlier incident.¹³ Yet again in 556/1161 (according to al-Maqrīzī) or 557/1162 (according to others), during the reign of al-ʿĀḍid, Muḥammad, the son of Ḥusayn, again approached Egypt from the West and made an appeal for support. He put together a large group of followers, assumed the name al-Mustanṣir, and resolved to move to take Cairo. Ibn Ruzzīk, the *wazīr*, however, easily duped him into thinking that he would personally raise the *daʿwa* in his favor and, by such false promises of favor, lured Muḥammad to his tent where he was arrested. Thereafter he was transported to Cairo and killed.¹⁴

What is important is that in Ibn al-Qalānīsī's account of the incident in 543/1148, he specifies that the army that advanced with the pretender toward Alexandria was comprised of Kutāma (among others). Evidently the Kutāma, under the right circumstances, could still be counted on to support the Fatimids and to travel to Egypt and fight on their behalf, long, long after their earlier period of involvement in the east.

Another group of Berbers in Egypt that require investigation is a bit more of a mystery. They are the Maṣāmida (Maṣmūdīs). It is not a question of identifying their ethnicity and origin. They are, after all, the tribe from which Ibn Tumart came and, with him, as the Mahdi later formed the Muwaḥḥidūn, the Almohads. Much before that, however, the Maṣāmida entered Egypt under the Fatimids and there constituted a separate group in the army, another element of the Maghāriba.¹⁵ Naṣīr reports that they were an infantry¹⁶ and were 20,000 in number. He says further that they had their own quarter in Cairo.¹⁷ Yet we do not know how or why or when they first joined and served the Fatimids in Egypt. Who recruited them and under what conditions? The earliest citation of Maṣmūdī troops occurs in an account of the siege of the citadel of Aleppo in

13 See *Ittīʿāz*, (Cairo, 1973), 3: 186, which likely follows Ibn al-Muyassar (p. 139). There is another account in Ibn al-Qalānīsī, p. 302. The similarity of the two cases of 526 and 543 might be mistaken as one and the same but Maqrīzī reports them separately.

14 *Ittīʿāz*, (Cairo, 1973), 3: 246.

15 Musabbihī, ed. Sayyid and Bianquis, pp. 69, 74, 75.

16 There are two different readings of Naṣīr's Persian text here. One *sipāh* would mean 'infantry soldier'; the other *siyāh* means 'black' and thus the Maṣāmida were 'blacks' rather than 'infantry' according to the latter reading, which, orthographically, differs but slightly from the first. See Thackston's 1986 edition of his translation, p. 48, note 21.

17 Naṣīr b. Khursraw, (2001) p. 66.

416/1025 by the Mirdāsids. We have the name of the commander of Maṣāmida who had a role, albeit unintended, in bringing about the Fatimid loss of Aleppo.¹⁸ A second report concerns the selection of the last Fatimid governor of Damascus much later in 468/1075. Again the new man was a Maṣmūdī, likewise the head of a regiment of his fellow Berbers. He was Zayn al-Dawla Intiṣār b. Yaḥyā.¹⁹

Over the next decades there is no further information and it is commonly assumed that the Maṣāmida played no role in the period. Nonetheless, they eventually reappear. In contrast to the Kutāma, the Maṣāmida are cited by name in the lists of the various contingents of the army. A notable example come from the historian Ibn al-Ṭuwayr and from the final decades of Fatimid rule. The order of caliphal procession he records puts the Maṣāmida first of the named regiments (just before the Rayḥāniyya, Juyūshiyya and others). The only other ethnically defined groups are Turks, Daylamis, Kurds, and Ghuzz. With the exception of the Maṣāmida, none are Westerners.²⁰

Another aspect of my topic concerns various individual Westerners who came to Egypt in the later periods. The era of Badr al-Jamālī, which followed immediately after years of chaos—the *ayyām al-shidda*—saw, as far as we can tell, little or no immigration from western regions. There is evidence that Badr may have been quite hostile to the possibility. His son al-Afḍal was, however, decidedly the opposite. Almost from the commencement of his rule in 487/1094, westerners began to arrive and the influx continued from then on unabated. A few examples must suffice here.

The Andalusian Umayya b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Abī’l-Ṣalt al-Dānī, author of the *Risāla al-miṣriyya*, is an interesting place to start. This man came to Egypt seeking patronage. He stayed from 489/1096 to 506/1112 but eventually left, going back to the Maghrib disappointed. Another Andalusian, Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Ṭurtūshī, who was a major scholar of Maliki law, reached Egypt about the same time after extensive travels further east. In Alexandria he met and married a local woman and then stayed the rest of his life. His fame brought others and led to the formation of a school with him at its center. In his case, however, and that of his followers, the center for them was Alexandria and not Cairo, which they rarely visited. In addition they were Sunnīs and thus not supporters of the Fatimids.

One more example should be mentioned if only in passing. ‘Abbās b. Abī’l-Futūḥ b. Tamīm b. Mu‘izz b. Bādīs al-Ṣinhājī was the son of Zīrid royalty.

18 Yaḥyā, Tadmūrī ed. pp. 478–79; Bianquis, *Syrie*, p. 455.

19 Ibn al-Qalānisi, pp. 99, 108, 109; Bianquis, *Syrie*, p. 649.

20 Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo*, pp. 91, 93.

His father, Abu'l-Futūḥ, and his wife suffered imprisonment in the Maghrib as a result of an attempted assassination of his brother, the Zīrid ruler. Eventually they with their son were sent into exile in Egypt. There they were accorded honors. When Abu'l-Futūḥ died soon afterward, the mother married 'Alī b. al-Sallār, the governor of Alexandria. The transplanted Maghribi son, 'Abbās, benefited from these connections, which later helped him to attain the high rank of *wazīr* (from 548 to 549). The rest of his story is, however, quite sordid, featuring as it does the murder of a caliph. It need not detain us here.

Given the location of the conference for which this paper was written, namely Palermo, better to return to an earlier case—to come, as it were, full circle, and to rejoin the Kalbids and the topic of their involvement with Egypt and Cairo.

By common consensus the high point of Arab rule over Sicily occurred during the long reign of Yūsuf b. 'Abdallāh, the seventh of the Kalbid *amīrs*. Normally it is stated that his control ended in 388/998, when he suffered a stroke that rendered the left side of his body useless. However, al-Maqrīzī reports a different date. He says explicitly that this event happened at the end of Rajab in the year 403 (mid-February 1013) and that only then did he turn over the reins of government to his son Ja'far. We thus have between the two dates a discrepancy of fifteen years. Without knowing more about why some sources say 388, it is hard to judge which is correct. However, al-Maqrīzī adds a useful fact. He claims that Ja'far already possessed a *ṣijill* issued by al-Ḥākim that provided for him to succeed his father in such an event (the incapacity of the latter). The caliph also granted this son the title Tāj al-Dawla wa Sayf al-Milla by means of a subsequent decree. Then, later, the caliph sent him a further distinction, a higher honor, by augmenting his title (*laqab*) by the term "al-Malik".²¹ Other than an extreme honor, the exact meaning of this term in this situation is unclear. A report from Egypt in 408/1017 mentions al-Ḥākim's determination to bring under control the proliferation of titles. He decreed that year that all, save eight or nine of those in effect, were to be annulled. Among those exempted, most significantly, were Thiqa al-Dawla, the title of Yūsuf, which as the ruler of Sicily was still in effect, and Tāj al-Dawla, the title of his son Ja'far.²²

As is reasonably well known, Ja'far was challenged by one of his brothers who led a revolt against him in 405/1014. That attempted coup was put down soon enough and the offending brother killed. However, policies pursued by

21 On Amīr Ja'far, see Maqrīzī's *Itti'āz* (Cairo, 1971), 2: 99, 161; his *Muqaffā*, 3: 66–67; Nuwayrī's *Nihāya*, 24: 376.

22 Yahyā, ed.-French trs., pp. 420–21.

Ja'far remained quite unpopular. Because his brother had had the support of Berber and slave troops, he decided to drive both groups out of Sicily. In addition a close advisor of his urged him to institute a system of taxation that, although in practice elsewhere in the Islamic world, had not been applied on the island.²³ Eventually, growing unrest put the tenure of Ja'far into serious jeopardy. With forces threatening to bring down the government, the old *amīr* had himself carried out before the mob on a litter. The date given is the 6th of Muḥarram 410 (May 14, 1019). Sight of the still respected ruler calmed the situation, but Yūsuf nonetheless heeded the demands of the people and deposed Ja'far by replacing him with yet another son, Aḥmad (called al-Akḥal). Further threats of violence and fear for the well-being of Ja'far prompted the old man to send him away from Sicily altogether. Accordingly, Ja'far left Palermo for Cairo in the aftermath of these troubles in 410.

Al-Maqrīzī and al-Nuwayrī indicate that the father departed the island soon afterward, likewise on his way to Egypt. Al-Nuwayrī further reports that the father took with him the astonishingly large sum of 670,000 dinars, plus goods and the like. Life in Cairo for the two retired *amīrs* of Sicily must have been sweet and comfortable.

The father appears to have joined his son in Egypt, although there is little or no record of him there. The years 410 to 414 for Egypt are not well documented. Perhaps the father died shortly after arrival. For the son, however, we have a report from 415. On the first of Shawwal of that year (December 6, 1024), in celebration of the feast, the caliph, as was his custom, marched in procession to the *muṣalla* for prayers and the *ʿid khuṭba*. The Egyptian historian al-Musabbiḥī was himself present on this occasion and he left us a detailed account of this event. After leading prayers, the caliph al-Zāhir mounted the *minbar*. Once up, he called out the names of those he hoped to honor by asking for them to climb up after him. One of the honorees on that day was Tāj al-Dawla, the former ruler of Sicily.²⁴ Although al-Musabbiḥī rather matter-of-factly comments that Tāj al-Dawla happened not to be present when this occurred, that he was so named must indicate that he was still alive and living in Cairo at the end of 415. Otherwise his name would not have been included. It also suggests that Ja'far had found an honored place in the Fatimid capital and its court where he

23 Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily: The Royal Dīwān* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 26.

24 The text of Musabbiḥī at this point gives the name simply as Tāj al-Dawla Ibn Abi'l-Ḥusayn but adds to it the phrase *Ṣāḥib Ṣiqilliya kāna*. Bianquis and Sayyid, ed. p. 66; Millward, p. 185. In any case the family name in many Arabic sources is Ibn Abi'l-Ḥusayn after the founding ancestral figure of the Kalbids.

remained a member of the local elite—and a most important member of the Maghāriba—some five years, perhaps much more, after leaving Sicily.

Appendix²⁵

The Kalbid *amīr* Tāj al-Dawla Jaʿfar, who fled Palermo for Cairo in 410 and became a prominent member of the Maghāriba there, was noted for supporting poets and also his own talent for composing verse. Perhaps the best-known lines of his are those that follow, supposedly exclaimed extemporaneously upon seeing two page-boys dressed one in red and the other in black silk brocade. The survival and subsequent fame of this charming example was due to efforts of the great collector of Sicilian Arabic poetry, Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ (ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī al-Shantarīnī), who was born in Sicily in 433/1041 but left at the time of the Norman conquest. Eventually he went to Egypt, arriving there in 500. Prior to his death in Egypt in 515/1121, he served as tutor to the sons of the *wazīr* al-Afdal. Therefore Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ himself represents yet another interesting case of a Westerner in Fatimid Cairo.²⁶

الأمير تاج الدولة جعفر، ابن الأمير ثقة الدولة، قول هذا الأمير وقد رأى غلامين على أحدهما
ثوب ديباج أحمر وعلى الآخر ثوب ديباج أسود، فقال:
أرى بدرين قد طلعا على غصنين في نسقٍ
وفي ثوبين قد صبغا صبغ الخلد والحدق
فهذا الشمس في شفق وهذا البدر في غسق

I see two moons ascending now
On top a pair of boughs, alike;
In tinted robes of contrasted hues
of blushing cheek and black of eye;
This one the sun of twilight's glow,
The other a moon in darkest night.

25 Although presented as part of the conference occasion, this material did not appear in the printed version and is therefore new.

26 On him see "Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ" by U. Rizzitno in the *EI2*. Significantly, we now know of this man's Sicilian collection—the *Kitāb al-Durra al-khaṭīra*—in part because the head of the Fatimid chancery, Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, copied from it and this latter version survives. Various reports of the verses given above in medieval sources (for example Ibn Khallikān) seem to date them to 527, which is impossible, but indicate instead the year when Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, who died in 542/1147, compiled his own notes on Sicilian poetry in which they were later found.

Egyptian Popular Festivals

Of the feasts and festivals observed by the Fatimids according to al-Maqrīzī as reported in his *Khīṭaṭ*,² three or four stand out as popular in origin rather than state promoted and sponsored. Even so they occupied a place in the annual calendar of events and were officially recognized, and to a degree participated in, by the government itself. These four, moreover, predate this dynasty in Egypt. One, ‘Āshūrā’, was and remained Shī‘ī, affecting thus primarily the Shī‘a. Two of the others, Epiphany or the Festival of Baptism and Coptic *Nawrūz*, are Christian, the latter specifically Coptic. The last, the four Nights of Lighting, was Muslim but with apparently a particularly Egyptian twist. The popular nature of each meant that the celebration arose from and responded to the wishes of ordinary citizens, not necessarily to the government, which frequently had to intervene to restrict and dampen the enthusiasm of the masses. Despite some scholarly attention to aspects of popular culture in medieval Egypt, there is as yet no complete discussion of all that we can learn about events of this type.

In contrast to such popular celebrations, those of a different type, notably the New Year’s Festival and First of the Year Festival (*mawṣim ra’s al-sanna and mawṣim awwal al-ām*), were particularly important in the history of Fatimid royal ceremonies for another reason and they have become the focus of scholarly attention in modern times, in part because of the strikingly detailed account of the an almost incredibly complex ritual involved. Al-Maqrīzī took his description from the much earlier historian Ibn al-Ṭuwayr who had himself witnessed the final decades of the Fatimids. Al-Maqrīzī included that material in his *Khīṭaṭ*, in the appropriate section, and his account of this festival so impressed historians, it has appeared in translation more than once. K. A. Inostrantsev first published a Russian translation in 1905.³ Marius Canard later provided one in French (with substantial annotation) and Paula Sanders based a good deal of her more recent book *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo*, itself a detailed study of Fatimid ceremonies, on the same information.⁴ However, there is evidence that the original author, Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, witnessed

1 Originally published as “Egyptian Popular Festivals in the Fatimid Period” in Obada Kohela, ed. *History and Islamic Civilization: Essays in Honour of Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid* (Cairo, 2014), pp. 69–91.

2 His summary list is *Khīṭaṭ* 2: 591–607, but there is much more material elsewhere.

3 “La sortie solennelle des Califes Fatimides.” (St. Petersburg, 1905).

4 See, in addition, Ayman Fuad Sayyid, *al-Dawla al-fāṭimīyya*, pp. 415–32.

a ritual event that had been considerably enhanced, if not all but invented, in the late period of Fatimid rule. It was newly created and was, moreover, heavily dependent on government sponsorship, almost entirely so. For the observance of the Islamic new year, nothing similar, either in scope or practice, is reported from the earlier 10th or 11th centuries.

Over the course of the final decades of the Fatimid dynasty, as its Ismaili supporters divided into schismatic factions, leaving the caliphate in Cairo weaker and weaker, the government aggressively promoted an enhanced array of public ceremonies, making some of them ever more elaborate over time. Ibn Khaldun's famous theory of the rise and fall of dynasties regards such extravagance—the expenditure of decreasing capital for ostentation display—as a sign of impending collapse. The Fatimids, who were to disappear in 1171, are a case in point. It is therefore essential in analyzing Fatimid feasts and festivals to look carefully at the role of the regime in staging them, combined with chronological controls covering changes over time. Which events are new, or predominately so, in the 12th century and which arose or were promoted and enhanced specifically to prop up a dying dynasty?

By contrast the four festivals to be discussed here were clearly popular and arose primarily based on broad public interest, not necessarily that of the government. To make the distinction as clear as possible, it is useful to begin with two examples, one popular and one much less so. They are the two Shī'ī rituals: 'Āshūrā' and the feast of Ghadīr. Given that the majority of Muslims in the Fatimid empire were Sunnī, widespread public involvement in either of them was not expected. Ritual mourning on 'Āshūrā' and the feast on the day of Ghadīr Khumm have a blatantly Shī'ī character. In contrast to a birthday, such as that of the Prophet or even of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the observance of which is not by its very nature a polemical act or a statement of doctrine, formal participation in either of these two quintessentially Shī'ī events constituted a declaration of allegiance to the position of the Shī'a and opposition to that of the Sunnīs. The Day of 'Āshūrā', which occurs on the tenth of Muḥarram, nevertheless became the occasion for a popular ritual under the Fatimids, who in part also encouraged its observance as a "day of mourning," including a feast called the *Simāt al-ḥuzn* ("Meal of sorrow"). Later the ardently Sunnī Ayyubids adopted 'Āshūrā' as a "Day of happiness" (*yawm al-surūr*) and, in opposition to the dynasty they supplanted, celebrated it festively. Al-Maqrīzī, apparently offended by what he saw as the excesses in either position, insists that both sides were wrong.⁵ Commemoration of the event of Ghadīr Khumm, when, according to the Shī'a, the Prophet designated 'Alī to succeed him, likewise

5 *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 417–21, 592–93; Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Majālis*, 397; *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1: 145–46.

formed a state sponsored ceremony. However, from early on this ritual was confined to the palace grounds. Although it eventually became quite elaborate, it did not spill over into the streets or intrude on the marketplace. Specific components of it included the marrying of widows, clothing and gifts to the notables of the state, guests, and eunuchs in government service, sacrifices and the distribution of the meat, a procession, sermon, and more.⁶

Paula Sanders, in her *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo*, comments extensively on the development of the feast of Ghadīr in the late period. She sees a deliberate elaboration and cultivation of this particular event as part of a polemical attempt to explain how the caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ could have succeed his cousin. Just as ‘Alī was the cousin and also successor of Muḥammad, so too al-Ḥāfiẓ of al-Āmir. She is likely quite right. However, in her analysis of much earlier practice, she tends to lump together the observances of ‘Āshūrā’ and Ghadīr, making of both a public expression of Shiism. To do so makes sense, but it does not exactly fit the few facts available.

That what happened on the day of ‘Āshūrā’ was primarily popular and public is not in doubt. Al-Maqrīzī remarks that Egypt had not been free of strife on that day under the dynasties previous to the Fatimids. Shī’īs used to gather at the tombs of Kulthum, a granddaughter of the imam Ja’far, and that of Nafīsa, daughter of al-Ḥasan b. Zayd b. al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī, for the observance; troubles apparently nearly always ensued. The coming to Egypt of the Fatimid al-Mu’izz considerably strengthened the cause of the Shī’a and that encouraged popular expressions of devotion. Here is the earliest account as reported by al-Maqrīzī:

Ibn Zūlāq reports in his book *The Life of al-Mu’izz li-Dīn Allāh* that, for the day of ‘Āshūrā’ in 363 [Oct. 11, 973], a crowd of the Shī’a and their followers preceded to the two shrines, the tomb of Kulthum and of Nafīsa. With them there was a group of cavaliers of the Westerners (*al-Maghāriba*) and their infantry, mourning and crying over al-Ḥusayn (on whom be peace). They smashed the vessels of the water-carriers in the markets and split open the water-skins. They heaped curses on those who bought and sold on that day. They proceeded on until they reached the Mosque of the Wind (*al-Rīḥ*), whereupon a group of the inhabitants of Fustat rose up against them. At that Abū Muḥammad Ibn ‘Ammār, who happened to be residing there in the house of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, went out and closed off the passageway thus blocking and separating both groups. Everyone then went back, a result pleasing to al-Mu’izz, since if it had not happened, there would have been a great riot instead, because the people

6 *Khīṭat*, 2: 298–305.

had already locked and shuttered their stores and houses, and emptied the marketplace.⁷

Several elements of this report are worth noticing. The presence of Westerners indicates that the Kutāma Berbers were involved and means that a substantial portion, if not the majority, of the mourners were Ismailis. However, what happened seems not to have been explicitly planned, nor did it have government sponsorship. It appears to have been more spontaneous, an expression of popular sentiment. And, as it threatened to get out of hand, to engender a full-scale riot of opposing factions, al-Mu‘izz was quite pleased with Ibn ‘Ammār’s swift intervention.

By contrast the first observance of Ghadīr is reported to us in the following terms:

Ibn Zūlāq reports in the book *The Life of al-Mu‘izz*, from which I now quote, [having used a copy] in the hand of the author himself, that on the 18th of Dhu’l-Ḥijja in the year 362 [Sept. 19, 973], which is the day of al-Ghadīr, a group of inhabitants of Fustat and of the Westerners (*al-Maghāriba*), and those who follow them, gathered for prayer because that was a day of feast since on it the apostle of God, may God bless and keep him, gave the covenant (*‘ahd*) to the Commander of the Believers ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. Al-Mu‘izz was quite pleased with what they had done. That was the first time it was observed in Egypt.⁸

Again, as with ‘Āshūrā’, the main participants are Ismailis, but the tenure of the ritual is quite different, involving solely gathering for prayer and a simple observance. It was not promoted apparently in a way so as to impede the lives or livelihood of non-Shī‘īs (as in attempting to shut down the market and interrupt commerce) and the imam was obviously delighted with that, in addition to the fact that the Ismaili community in Cairo (and perhaps Fustat) had, without official prompting, remembered the importance of the commemoration itself.

Note that these two reports concern ritual events that happened barely three weeks apart, at the end of 362 (Ghadīr) and beginning of 363 (‘Āshūrā’). The different outcome is thus striking.

From a little more than half century later we have another description of Ghadīr.

⁷ *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 418.

⁸ *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 300.

Al-Musabbihī reports: On the day of al-Ghadīr, which is the 18th of Dhu'l-Ḥijja, the people gathered at the Mosque of Cairo along with the Qur'an reciters, the jurists, and the singers. It was an immense gathering and they remained there until the afternoon. Then they went to the palace; and rewards were sent out to them.⁹

Fifty years after the first report, during the reign of al-Zāhir, the event has become larger and slightly more elaborate, but it remains essentially subdued and dignified. Sanders, who had seen all the evidence, thought, even so, that Ghadīr, over this period, resembled 'Āshūrā' as a popular manifestation. However, she laments the lack of evidence, as do we. The chroniclers tend to report merely that, in a given year, the feast of Ghadīr "occurred as it normally did". So what was normal? We know specifically that it was observed as it usually was in the years 381, 382, 383, 384, 389, 398 and 402. An important clue was added to the report for 389. There, after noting that the feast of Ghadīr was held as it normally was, the historian adds, "and the people paraded within the palace as was their custom on it."¹⁰

Again the contrast with what happened on 'Āshūrā' is instructive. Here is how al-Musabbihī describes 'Āshūrā' in the year 396:

An order went round as it usually did each year to close the markets and for the singers to go out to the Mosque of Cairo and set up there, assembled for lamentation and song. Then, following that day, the supreme *qāḍī* 'Abd al-'Azīz b. al-Nu'mān gathered together the rest of the singers who earned a living by lamenting and singing, and he said to them: "Do not impose on the people or collect from them of anything when you stop in front of their shops and do not cause them harm. You should not seek to gain by lamentation and singing. Whoever tries to do that will be exiled to the desert." Subsequent to that, a faction of them got together on Friday in the Old Mosque following the prayer service and commenced to sing. They went out as a group into the street and began to curse the Companions (*al-salaf*). [The authorities] then arrested a man and the cry against him was "This is the recompense of he who curses 'Ā'isha and her husband (peace be upon him)." But the riffraff and rabble joined him and

9 *Khīṭaṭ*, 2: 300.

10 *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 24.

they also cursed the Companions. Even so the man was brought out after the cry against him and hanged.¹¹

Although these brief reports well illustrate the difference between the two Shīʿī rituals, they provide little explanation as to why. Unfortunately, also we have no more examples from this early period to study. Our next cases depend on the accounts of Ibn al-Maʿmūn and Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, both from the 12th century.

Ibn al-Maʿmūn,¹² from earlier in that century, covers in some detail the observance of the *ʿīd* of Ghadīr Khumm. In his time it remained solely a commemoration of the moment when the Prophet publicly acknowledged ʿAlī's special relationship as the one who would succeed. On the festival, as he describes it, sacrifices were performed like those of the feast of sacrifice and, according to him, on that day in 516, after the *qādī* Abu'l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf b. Ayyūb led prayers, "the *sharīf* Ibn Anas al-Dawla rose and delivered the *khuṭba* of the *ʿīd* festival."¹³ Evidently the caliph did not take an active role in these proceedings.¹⁴ At a later period, following the caliphate of al-Ḥāfiẓ, the festival of Ghadīr Khumm assumed extra special importance. It was then used to affirm the possible accession of a cousin, as had been the case both with ʿAlī and with al-Ḥāfiẓ.¹⁵ Even in its expanded format, however, the ceremonies of this feast were quite private among loyal Ismailis and confined to the palace grounds. Moreover, although it featured a *khuṭba*, that *khuṭba* was given by the *khaṭīb*,

11 There is a version of this report in the *Ittiʿāz* (Cairo, 1971), 2: 67. Neither text is clear. The *Ittiʿāz* adds next "Then an order was forwarded to the chief of police that no one was to dare curse the Companions. Whoever did so was to be seized. Subsequently the rabble refrained from cursing."

12 As found in the *Khiṭaṭ* (2: 432–34); Ibn al-Maʿmūn, pp. 25–26, 40–42.

13 "The *khuṭba* of the *ʿīd* festival" means here a *khuṭba* like that of the other *ʿīds*. Ibn al-Maʿmūn, pp. 42–43; *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 431–32. In general the observance of Ghadīr Khumm, which is important for the Shīʿa and which was a part of the ritual calendar of the Fatimids, is less well documented. Ibn al-Maʿmūn's description is therefore especially important. He indicates that it was observed much like the *ʿīd al-naḥr*, but it is not clear if earlier practice was like that of late Fatimid times. My University of Chicago colleague Tahera Qutbuddin reports that she had found at least one example of a Ghadīr *khuṭba* in volume three of al-Muʿayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī's *Majālis*. For some idea of the content of *khuṭbas* given on Ghadīr Khumm, see the examples cited by al-Amīnī, *ʿīd al-Ghadīr fi ʾahd al-Fāṭimiyyīn* (Najaf, 1962; also Tehran, 1997), pp. 136–42.

14 But see, from a later period, the report by Ibn al-Ṭuwayr (*Nuzhat al-muqlatayn*), pp. 186–89 = *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 300–305; Sanders, chapter six (pp. 121–34).

15 For more on this development, see Paula Sanders, "Claiming the Past: Ghadīr Khumm and the Rise of Ḥāfiẓī Historiography in Late Fātimid Egypt," *Studia Islamica* 75 (1992), pp. 81–104.

not the imam, even though he sat close by in the *subbāk*, the royal grilled loge, which separated him from the audience.¹⁶

Thus of these two examples, one began and remained confined to the palace grounds, while the other commenced outside and thereafter affected the streets and markets, in other words the populace at large.

1 Four Nights of Lighting

The ritual called the Four Nights of Lighting (*layālī al-waqūd al-arbaʿ*) occurred on the night of first of Rajab, the night of its middle, the night of first of Shaʿbān, and the night of its middle, and is particularly fascinating. For these four nights the population of the capital city gathered to view a profusion of lights, some sponsored by the government but many others by individuals. Those present got gifts. Such events were apparently among the most popular, perhaps indicating a general appeal and an access for public participation. Nonetheless they were often attended by the imam-caliph and his family.¹⁷

Al-Maqrīzī covers them in a chapter of the *Khiṭaṭ* dedicated to the belvederes (*munāẓira*) belonging to the imam-caliphs of which there were many scattered around Cairo and Fustat. His account of the Nights focuses on the belvedere overlooking the Mosque of al-Azhar (Cairo) to which the caliph came to see the spectacle. During the event itself one description has the chief *qāḍī* present inside the mosque along with his notary witnesses and the notables of the city. Those in attendance included Qurʾan reciters and singers of religious songs. A key provision for each night supplements the regular supply of fuels, candles and wax, as well as incense, food and sweets. As the ceremony begins, ovens (perhaps a type of brazier) and lamps are lit. There are candles in all appropriate places within the mosque. Bread and sweets are brought first to the *qāḍī* and his party and then next passed out to the people. For the year 415 one reports notes the wonderful brightness of all the mosques once so lit. It was obviously a memorable moment. Al-ʿAzīz and al-Ẓāhir both are known to have participated; al-Ḥākim apparently cancelled the ceremony during a portion of his reign. Its restoration by al-Ẓāhir was much appreciated. In the late period, as with other ceremonies, this one also became more elaborated (and expensive) as the detailed descriptions provided by Ibn al-Maʿmūn and Ibn al-Ṭuwayr clearly demonstrate.

16 This development is fully described by Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City*; see her chapter six (pp. 121–34).

17 *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 522–28; Qalqashandī 3: 497–98; Sanders, p. 35.

As previously noted, al-Maqrīzī's main account of the Nights of Lighting comes in a section he devoted to what he calls *Discussion of the Belvederes* (*munāẓira*) *the Fatimid Caliphs had and their Places of Retreat and what they had in them of beautiful things*.¹⁸ There he reports that the caliphs had many belvederes in Cairo, Fustat, al-Rawḍa, the Qarāfa, Birkat al-Ḥabash, and the outskirts of Cairo. They also had many places of retreat (*mutanazzahāt*). His list of those in Cairo begins with the belvedere overlooking al-Azhar Mosque (followed by eleven others), but the material about the Nights of Lighting falls in the section devoted to this one belvedere.

There was near the Mosque of al-Azhar on its *qiblī* side a belvedere overlooking the Mosque of al-Azhar in which the caliph sat to observe the Nights of Lighting.

Nights of Lighting: The *Amīr* al-Mukhtār 'Izz al-Mulk Muḥammad b. 'Ubaydallāh b. Aḥmad al-Musabbihī reports in his great history, and from which I have taken it, the following: In the month of Rajab in the year 380¹⁹ the people went out during its nights as was their custom on the nights of Fridays and the night of the middle, to the Mosque of Cairo, that is, the al-Azhar Mosque, rather than the Qarāfa, and added for the event extra fuel along the edges of the mosque. Around its courtyard there were oven pits, candles and wax as was the custom each year. And there was food and sweets and incense in censers of gold and silver and these were passed round.

The *qāḍī* Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān was present on the night of the middle in the *maqṣūra* (the royal enclosure in the mosque) and, with him were his notary witnesses and a group of notables from the city. Baskets of sweets and food were brought to him. The reciters and others, and the singers and mourners, sat in front of him. He remained there until midnight and then departed to his house after presenting food from what he had to those who accompanied him and incensing them.

He also reports that in Sha'bān on Friday nights and the night of its middle, the people followed the pattern they observed in Rajab and with extras. He says: On the night of the middle of Sha'bān a great collection of people gathered in the mosque of Cairo consisting of jurisprudents, Qur'an reciters, and singers. The *qāḍī* Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān was present among all of his notary witnesses and notables of the city. The oven pits were lit, as were the lamps on the roof of the mosque and around

¹⁸ *Khīṭaṭ*, 2: 522–28.

¹⁹ June–July 990.

its courtyard. Candles were placed on the Maqṣūra and in the scholar's places (*majālis*). Al-'Azīz bi-llāh conveyed to them food, sweets and incense. There was an immense throng.

He says: In the month of Rajab in the year 402, the custom normally included bread and sweets laid out these three months for whoever stayed over in the mosque of Cairo during Friday nights and mid-month. That was cut off. The *qāḍī* Mālik b. Sa'īd al-Fāriqī was present at the mosque of Cairo the night of mid-Rajab but the people gathered in the Qarāfa for great amusement and fun as they usually did.

Al-Maqrīzī, who provides all this material, was obviously puzzled as to the origin of this event, which otherwise appears to have been purely Egyptian. The one example he cites at this point, however, seems hardly relevant.

Al-Fākihī relates in his *History of Mecca* that 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, used to shout among the inhabitants of Mecca, saying: "O people of Mecca, light the night of the new moon (*hilāl*) of Muḥarram so that you make clear your way to the pilgrimage to God's house, and maintain them the night of the new moon of Muḥarram until daybreak. The matter was like that in Mecca on this night until the governorate of 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Dā'ūd in Mecca.²⁰ He ordered the people to light the night of the new moon of Rajab. The people of Yemen kept it up and thus they observed it during his governorate but then abandoned it.

He next continues with examples from Egypt:

On the night of mid-month in Rajab in the year 415,²¹ the caliph al-Zāhir li-I'zāz Dīn Allāh Abū Hāshim 'Alī b. al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh was present and with him were the royal ladies (*al-sayyidāt*), private servants²² and others, along with the masses and common citizens. The caliph sat in the belvedere.

There was on the night of Sha'bān also a gathering the like of which had not been seen since the days of al-'Azīz bi-llāh. All of the mosques were lit up with wonderful brightness. It was a great spectacle the like of

20 This man was governor of Mecca in 240 and 241.

21 May–July 1024.

22 The text of this passage in what survives of Musabbihī (p. 48) adds here "and retainers (*al-muṣṭana'a*)."

which was for the people long in the past, because al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh used to cancel that and prevent its being done.

As with nearly every case involving Fatimid festivals, the next report jumps over an intervening century, about which we thus know almost nothing, and brings us into the 12th century. Al-Maqrīzī continues with the following account that reveals perhaps that the Nights of Lighting, as with other feasts, had, previous to the year in question here, been celebrated less gloriously. There are hints in our records that the powerful *wazīrs* Badr al-Jamālī and al-Afḍal imposed strict controls on the imam-caliph's expenditures for such displays. Evidently the new *wazīr* al-Ma'mūn allowed such extravagance to be resumed.

Ibn al-Ma'mūn reports: When it was the night of the onset of Rajab, that is, in the year 516,²³ the feast table was set up as it usually was. The caliph al-Āmir bi-Aḥkām Allāh sat at it, with the Illustrious al-Ma'mūn the *wazīr* and those whose custom it was sitting in front of him. The caliph displayed delight and joy of a kind not usual for him. He was excessive in thanking and praising the *wazīr*. He said: "You have restored to our kingdom its splendor, and renewed in it such benefits as did it not previously have. The days take a share of that, and the nights the rest. In it the festive seasons had once ceased to hold sway. And in it there is expansion, righteousness, and expenditure, and that is the Four Nights of Lighting. Now is their time. Seeing them is longed for. So the matter is to become an example." He directed that there be brought to the *qāḍī* fifty dinars to be spent on the price of wax and to arrange ridings on the four nights—and they are the nights of the onset of Rajab, its middle, the onset of Sha'bān and its middle—and that he issue an order to all of the witnesses to ride as his escort. And that he dispatch to the congregational mosques and other mosques an increase in oil for the customary purpose of lighting. And that he direct the supervisor of the treasury to take special care in the protocol of these nights in regard to the varieties of sweets, as would be necessary in regard to the palaces and the seat of the wazirate particularly.

And he said: In the year 517 and in the night of which the dawn would be the onset of Rajab,²⁴ the *qāḍī* Abu'l-Ḥajjāb Yūsuf b. Ayyūb al-Maghribī was present. There was recorded in his favor an amount [equal to] the application [for the purpose] in the previous year; it was renewed. That

²³ May–July 1122.

²⁴ May 1123.

consisted of fifty dinars from the treasury for the purchase of candles for the ceremony of the first night of Rajab. ... There was released for the four nights of lighting, for the ceremonies of the six mosques, namely al-Azhar, al-Anwar, al-Aqmar in Cairo, and the Tulunid and the Old mosque in Fustat, the mosque of the Qarāfa and the mausoleums that housed the noble relics, and some of the mosques belonging to elite notables, a large quantity of fine oil, and destined for the Mosque of Rāshida, the Mosque of Sāḥil al-Ghalla in Fustat, the mosque in Maqs, a lesser amount.

He said: The *qāḍī* al-Makīn b. Ḥaydara, who was one of the elite among the notary witnesses, told me about the whole group of servants who had responsibility for the Old Mosque, and that the group in its entirety used to gather before the night of lighting for the period it took to complete 8,000 wicks, and that the amount allotted for it in particular each night of lighting was eleven *qinṭārs* and a half of fine oil.

Finally we have a report from the end of the period.

Ibn al-Ṭuwayr reports: Once the middle of Jumādā al-Ākhira had passed—and the number of days in it according to them was twenty-nine—an order was issued to mold in the treasury of the House of Alptakīn sixty candles the weight of each one to be a sixth of a *qinṭār* in Egyptian. They were to be transported to the house of the supreme *qāḍī* for the procession of the night of the onset of Rajab. When the evening prayer on that day had passed, the witnesses also began to take special notice. Some would ride with three candles, others two or one only. Of them the inhabitants of Fustat would precede to Cairo. They prayed the *maghrib* prayer in the mosques and prayer halls. Then they awaited the riding of the *qāḍī*. He rode from his house in full regalia and in front of him there was a candle brought to him lit by those of the servants (*al-farrāshīn*) of a lower class assigned to do that. On each side there were thirty candles and in front the *mu'adhdhins* of the mosques calling upon God the exalted and invoking a blessing upon the caliph and the *wazīr* in accord with the established arrangement. Assigned to seclude him were three gate keepers and ten of the chamberlains, apart from the regular doormen of the standard rule, which were five in the robes of commanders. At his stirrup were Qur'an reciters chanting the recitation. The witnesses came behind him, arrayed as they would be in a session of court, those who precede preceded. Around each whatever he had in the way of a candle [ie. three or two or one]. They all passed from the first street in which was the *qāḍī's* house to the Bayna'l-Qaṣrayn. Men, women and

children had gathered of such a multitude for the time permitted the amount was uncountable. So many that no one could tell the chiefs from the subjects.²⁵

Although these reports suggest both that the government was involved and that, commencing with the wazirate of al-Ma'mūn, the rituals of the Nights of Lighting grew more and more elaborate, the essential popular nature of these festive events is reasonably clear. Hints here and there indicate that the regime was not the sole instigator or sponsor of them; others contributed as well and large numbers of the general citizenry participated.

2 Christian Rituals

At the end of al-Maqrīzī's list of Fatimid festivals, he added four that are purely Christian, having ostensibly no direct associate with Islam or Muslims. Still he insists with reason that they are to be included.²⁶ The four are:

1. *Nawrūz*, Coptic New Year, which is not to be confused with the Persian *nawrūz*, which takes place in the Spring.²⁷ Coptic new year begins on the 11th or 12th of September at which time the shops close and people congregate in the street in celebration. The Fatimid government participated by giving clothing to its people, their children and wives, plus other gifts. It was the occasion of much merriment, games, lighting fires, and playing

25 Maqrīzī offers some additional material on the Nights of Lighting in the late period. See also Qalqashanī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, 3: 497–98.

26 It is curious that al-Maqrīzī cites Fatimid observance of the four Christian rituals he mentions. Here we have an obvious case of the Imam's involvement in non-Islamic rituals and most likely suggests how important the Christians were to him and his government. A substantial portion of the bureaucracy was Christian; the population of Egypt was likewise heavily Christian throughout the period. However, why, out of fourteen major and minor Christian feasts, did they participate in the four only, two of which (Nativity and Epiphany) were major, one (Maundy Thursday) was minor. *Nawrūz* belongs strictly to the Copts and would not have constituted a holiday for the Melkites, for example. And what of Jewish holy days? The Muslims certainly knew about them; al-Maqrīzī provides a list, but apparently the Fatimids did not take part in any of them. The answer may lie in the nature of the ceremony, which, with the four, depended on public involvement. If the Christian community had tried to restrict participation to its own, the Muslims would not have joined in observing the event. I suspect that explains the lack of involvement in Jewish celebrations, assuming the Jews preferred privacy.

27 In Egypt at the time of al-Ḥākim, the Turkish soldiers (Easterners) observed the Persian *nawrūz* in the year 388 on March 16th, i.e. in the Spring, but this was not Coptic *nawrūz* (*Ittī'ūz* 2: 18).

in the water (or throwing water on one another) and matters often got quite out of hand.²⁸

2. Nativity (*al-Milād*). Jesus's birthday, which is a Christian festival, held on the 29th of the Coptic month Kiyahk. It was the custom of the Fatimids to distribute on this day bowls full of sweets, vessels containing fish, cups of rose water (*jullāb*), doughnuts, and more, which would go to ranking officials in accord with status.²⁹
3. Epiphany (*al-Ghiṭās*) is the feast of baptism in January. It involved setting up tents along the Nile, a night of lights, singing, drinking and games, leading to the time of immersion in the water. Great numbers of people participated, including Muslims, who likewise went into the water. The imam-caliphs frequent went to Old Cairo to watch.³⁰
4. Maundy Thursday (*Khamīs al-ʾahd* or *al-ʾads*) is the Thursday just prior to Easter, when Jesus is said to have washed the feet of his disciples. Among other customs for the occasion the Fatimids used to strike, out of full-size dinars, small gold coins (called *kharārīb*, sing. *kharrūba*) for distribution to their people.³¹

Each of these Christian festivals has one or more special features in terms of the involvement of the Fatimids in it. Each likewise, because it belongs to indigenous Christian observance, has therefore, for that reason alone, a popular aspect; and all pre-date the Fatimids. However, two of them drew an even broader participation on the part of the general population including most significantly Muslims, in addition to Christians. These two—the Feast of Baptism and Coptic *Nawrūz*—thus qualify as popular in the wider sense.

The feast of baptism was described by al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), who actually attended one such event, as follows (according to al-Maqrīzī):

Al-Masʿūdī says in the *Murūj al-Dhahab* (*Meadows of Gold*) that for the night of baptism in Egypt there is a great affair among its inhabitant and the people go without sleep on it. It is the night of the 11th of Ṭūba. [He adds] In the year 330 [940], I was present for the night of baptism in Fustat and the Ikshīd Muḥammad b. Ṭughj was in his abode known as The Choice (*al-Mukhtār*) on the island riding on the Nile. The Nile flowed around it. He gave an order and there were lit, on the side of the island

28 *Khiṭaṭ*, 2:600–03, and refs. there; Qalqashandī, 2: 429.

29 *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 603; 1: 729; Qalqashandī, 2: 426.

30 *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 603–05; Musabbiḥī, year 415; Qalqashandī 2: 426.

31 *Khiṭaṭ*, 1: 719–20; 2: 477, 605; Qalqashandī 2: 427.

and the side of Fustat, a thousand lamps not counting the lamps and candles lit by the inhabitants of Fustat.

On that night hundreds of thousands of people, Muslims and Christian, spent the night, some of them in rowboats, others in houses near to the Nile, yet others on the shores. None of those present were in disguise but openly displaying everything possible to show off: foods, drink, clothing, utensils of gold and silver, gems, musical instruments, whistles, and *qasf* (?). It was the finest night there is in Egypt, and the most complete of them in happiness. No alley way was closed. Most of the people immersed themselves in the Nile. They insist that doing so provides immunity against illness and a charm preventing sickness.³²

Another report describes the lighting of lamps and candles. Yet another, by al-Musabbihī for the year 388, says that,

[W]hen it was the feast of baptism of the Christians, tents, pavilions, and marquees (*al-khiyām*, *al-maḍārib*, *al-ashri'a*) were pitched in a number of places on the shores of the Nile. An elevated seat was set up for the chief (al-Ra'īs) Fahd b. Ibrāhīm the Christian, who was the clerk of Ustādh Barjawān. Candles and lanterns were lit for him. Singers and musicians came. He sat with his people drinking until it was time for baptism. He immersed himself and departed.

He said [also]: In the year 415, on the night of Wednesday the 4th of Dhu'l-Qa'da, which was the [feast] of baptism of the Christians, the arrangement on the part of the people was to purchase fruits, mutton and other stuff. The Commander of the Believers al-Zāhir li-I'zāz Dīn Allāh, son of al-Ḥākim, went down to the palace of his grandfather al-'Azīz bi-llāh, in company with the *ḥaram*, to observe the baptism.

A cry went round that the Muslims were not to mix with the Christians in their going into the river that night. Badr al-Dawla the black eunuch, who was the superintendent of the two police forces, pitched a tent at the levee and sat in it.

The caliph al-Zāhir li-I'zāz Dīn Allāh issued an order for the lanterns and fire to be lit in the night. There was a great supply of fuel. The monks and priests were present with crosses and fire and they officiated there at length until [time] for baptism.³³

32 *Khiṭaṭ* 2: 603–04.

33 *Khiṭaṭ* 2: 604.

The tendency of Muslims to join with the Christians in the act of immersion prompted at one point an order that the two not mix. In other words, the Christian were to remain separated from the Muslims during the baptisms. It is relatively easy to see what caused such alarm, although it is equally clear that the event attracted an unusual degree of what can only be described as broad popular participation.

Nawrūz was even more problematic and the record indicates Fatimid concern with the unruly behavior not uncommonly associated with it. In its simplest terms it involved the closing of the markets. Movements of people in the street diminished. Costumes were distributed on it to the men of state, their children, their wives along with customary amounts of money and the necessities of *nawrūz* itself.³⁴ But, alongside that, there was the lighting of fires the night preceding and the throwing of water during the day itself. Neither was a benign activity. The fires were dangerous and often destructive. Throwing water was more devilish than playful, the intent being to embarrass or humiliate. The water used was frequently unclean. In 363 al-Mu'izz ordered both stopped.

Ibn Zūlāq reports: In this year, namely 363 [974], al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh prohibited the lighting of fires the night of *nawrūz* in the sidestreets and the throwing of water the day of *nawrūz*. He [Ibn Zūlāq] said in regard to the year 364: On the day of *nawrūz* playing with water and the lighting of fires increased, and the parading about of the people of the markets. They made elephants (*fiyala*)³⁵ and went out to Cairo with their jests. They played for three days, and openly engaged in loathsome acts and display in the markets. Then al-Mu'izz ordered a call sent round to desist, and not to throw water [on others]. A group were arrested and jailed; another group were arrested and paraded in shame on a camel.³⁶

But the celebration of *nawrūz* obviously continued. Disreputable lowlifes and drunken transvestites joined together to perform lewd songs; they would confront honorable men in the street and demand the payment of a tax or fine.

34 Perhaps these necessities are, as in one report, the stuff of *nawrūz*: e.g. watermelon, pomegranate, branches of bananas, dried dates, baskets of Qūṣī dates, baskets of quinces, mixtures of *harīsa* (a sweet pastry) made with chicken, mutton, and beef, of every color, mixed with shredded bread.

35 The Arabic '*amilū fiyala* likely means to set up a fool or a buffoon who plays the role of the fool in these carnival type games. *Fiyala*, elephants, are chess pieces, the eastern equivalent of the bishop.

36 *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 600.

Those who failed to pay up suffered the disgrace of being covered with putrid water and filth, and possibly pelted with eggs. In short Coptic *nawrūz* was an occasion both for festivities of the acceptable kind—the bestowing of gifts and favors—and for a form of carnival in which the norms of ordinary society are inverted. Obviously the government had to maintain a watchful guard against the excesses that some elements of the population evidently regarded as their right. The Fatimids were not alone. Eventually the later Mamluk sultanate outlawed public celebrations of Coptic *nawrūz*.³⁷

Although technically the following report does not cover events during the Fatimid period directly, its author Qāḍī al-Fāḍil had been an important official during the final years of the dynasty. The information he provides likely applied as well to the earlier period and reflects thus a continuation, as he himself appears to imply. His account, though from a slightly later era fits, moreover, with other material, such as the report quoted above. Again all this comes to us from the *Khiṭaṭ*.³⁸

Al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil reports in a note to his *al-Mutajaddidāt* for the year 584 [i.e. 13 years after the end of the Fatimid dynasty in 1171]: Tuesday, the 14th of Rajab was the day of Coptic *nawrūz*. It was the onset of [the Coptic month] Tūt, and Tūt is the beginning of their year. It had been in Egypt in bygone days and [the time of] a defunct dynasty—that is to say, the Fatimid caliphate—one of the seasons of their holidays and also of their errors. On it abominations were displayed openly; obscenities on that day were quite evident. An *amīr* called the *Amīr* of *Nawrūz* rode about and with him a large group. He acted as a sultan ruling over the people in seeking a tax appropriate to his status at the homes of the notables. He came to them with the great mob [of his would-be followers]. And he wrote decrees and delegated intermediaries (*mutarassimīn*). All that as a means of mockery and [the demand] had been satisfied by the prosperous with a donation.

The feminine men (*al-mu'annathūn*, transvestites) and dissolute would gather beneath the Pearl Palace where the caliph could see them. In their hands they had musical instruments, raising sounds. Wine and *mizr*-beer was drunk openly among them in the streets. The people were doused with water, or water and wine, or water mixed with filth. If someone of good repute made the mistake of going out of his home, he would encounter a person who doused him and defiled his clothing, disdaining

37 Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 49.

38 2: 600–603.

his personal sanctity. Either he would ransom himself or suffer dishonor. The situation for this particular *nawrūz* [i.e. the one for 584], however, did not run quite like that [i.e. in open public spaces], although water was still thrown in the quarters, and the masters of depravities performed reprehensible acts inside houses.

He said also [in *Mutajaddidāt*] in the year 592 [1196], the affair of *nawrūz* ran as usual with the throwing of water but with the addition, during that year, of pelting with eggs and striking with leather mats. The people interrupted their activities and whoever was overtaken in the street was doused with filthy water and violated.

3 Conclusion

A careful review of the evidence available for popular participation in many of the yearly ritual events during the Fatimid period may indicate greater involvement by the lower classes than standard historical sources, which in general deal with the ruler and the elites, tend to indicate. The four celebrations described above, moreover, are prime examples of a type that had less to do with the policy and aspirations of the state than the customary traditions of the common citizen. There are additional rituals that might be added, several where the participants come from different social ranks, both high and low, but where the role of the government is also a key factor. In the material preserved for us by al-Maqrīzī, the regime—the imam-caliph and ministers of highest rank—occupy the principal place. In many cases we learn solely about the distribution of goods and benefits to them and their families, with the unstated and unexplained assumption of a further passing downward of portions or lesser gifts to those not so exalted. In the background we occasionally gain a glimpse of the ordinary citizen. Still some feasts and festivals, such as was the case with at least three of those discussed above, also did arise among the masses and even came to challenge the establishment, which could only respond to a situation it neither controlled without difficulty nor wanted to encourage actively.

Alexandria as an Entrepôt in the East-West Exchange of Islamic Scholarship

The arrival in Alexandria of al-Ṭurṭūshī from Spain and al-Silafi from Iran and the settling there of both early in the twelfth century created a nucleus of Sunnī learning that grew into a full-blown renaissance.¹ Many additional scholars participated, either as students and colleagues of these two, or on their own. As one result the city itself became, over the first half of that century, a noted entrepôt for the East-West exchange of scholarship in the Muslim world, and all this despite the core Shiism of the Fatimid dynasty that controlled Egypt, including Alexandria which partly as a consequence attracted the patronage and involvement of the government or major figures in it. This renaissance in fact continued to flourish until the Fatimids were finally supplanted in 567/1171 by the Ayyubids, a full two decades into the second half of the same century, at which time Cairo became, once again, a major center of Sunnīsm.

1 From the West

In the year 476/1084, a scholar by the name of Abū Bakr al-Ṭurṭūshī, from Tortosa on the east coast of Spain, then about twenty-four, departed his native al-Andalus for the east.² His purpose was the pursuit of knowledge in the heartlands of the Islamic world. Such journeys *fī ṭalab al-ʿilm* were commonplace for Muslims in his time but most especially for those from the far west, that is, from Spain and the Maghrib, for whom an extended visit to and study in the central regions aided in the preservation of orthodoxy and contributed

1 Originally published as “Fāṭimid Alexandria as an Entrepôt in the East-West Exchange of Islamic Scholarship” *al-Masāq*, 26 (2014): 36–48.

2 The best and most comprehensive recent study of al-Ṭurṭūshī's career is Maribel Fierro's introduction to her Spanish translation of his *Kitāb al-Ḥawādith wa-l-bidaʿ* (Madrid, Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1993), but see as well A. Ben Abdeselem, “al-Ṭurṭūshī” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam, new edition* and A. Turki's Arabic introductions to his edition of both the *K. al-Ḥawādith* (Beirut, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990) and the *R. fī taḥrīm al-jubn al-rūmī* (Beirut, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1997).

to a major elevation in the status of those who returned home afterward.³ It is likely that al-Ṭurtūshī went first to Mecca, the natural goal of most Muslim travelers. There, in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, he may have resided months or even years, before moving on to Baghdad. In each city he studied with the scholars he encountered, most particularly in the Iraqi capital, which already possessed well-established colleges each with famous professors. Certainly he attended the lectures of many, some of whose names are recorded in our sources, also later at Basra as well. Next he appeared in Syria where he lived for a period; from there he could easily reach Jerusalem. About 490/1097 he set off for Egypt, perhaps thinking of his eventual return homeward. Once in Alexandria, however, a different fate awaited.

His reputation for scholarship and piety had preceded him to Alexandria and he was extremely well received by the local notables. There he met a well-to-do Alexandrian woman, noted herself for piety, and he married her. She purchased for the couple a large two-story house, the upper level of which they would use as their home, while the lower with its ample reception hall and other rooms afforded him the space he needed for his studies and teaching. It provided him an office, a classroom, and temporary lodging for visiting students and scholars. It was, apparently, exactly what he required, finally giving him the secure base he had previously lacked. Subsequently, for the next thirty years or so, up to his death in 520/1126, he left Alexandria only for short excursions to Cairo. Despite all his previous travels and the distance from his homeland with which he maintained regular contact through correspondence and a steady stream of students who came to sit at his feet, he himself remained in Egypt.

Rather, as his fame grew, more and more students made the journey to Alexandria from Spain and the west precisely to study with him. He is described as fond of long walks, which he took frequently to a garden in the city, trailed by a stream of students and admirers with whom he kept up an

3 On the travel of the Andalusians to the east with particular regard for those who went to Egypt during the periods under review here, see the highly important study by Gary Leiser, "The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisūn 495–647/1101–1249," Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1976 (especially chapter three), and his article derived from it entitled "Muslims from al-Andalus in the Madrasas of Late Fāṭimid and Early Aiyūbid Egypt," *al-Qantara* 20 (1999): 137–59. On al-Ṭurtūshī in particular see this dissertation pp. 114–26, and this article, pp. 141–45.

ongoing discussion. On at least one occasion he was accompanied by as many as 360 followers.⁴

Once he was settled, al-Ṭurṭūshī also composed an impressive list of works: some taking the form of legal proscriptions of, for example, song and music, or the consumption of Greek cheese (*al-jubn al-rūmī*). Among the others was an exposition on the errors and heresies of deviant Muslims,⁵ and his most famous work, a treatise on the proper form of Islamic government, a kind of *fürstenspiegel*, called the *Lamplight of Kings* (*Sirāj al-mulūk*).⁶ The last of these earned him a grudging notice from the great Ibn Khaldūn, who commented, in his own justly famous work of a similar kind, that al-Ṭurṭūshī had had the right idea about what a book of this kind should include but lacked the skill to carry it out adequately.⁷ Still, Ibn Khaldūn also admitted the importance of al-Ṭurṭūshī's career in general and especially his position in the development of the Mālikī legal school to which they both adhered.⁸

Al-Ṭurṭūshī's presence in Alexandria quickly made it a major center of Mālikī scholarship. Despite the obvious conflict between his conservative Sunnī interpretation of Islam and the Shī'ī Ismaili doctrine of the Fatimid caliphs who ruled Egypt, al-Ṭurṭūshī, far from suffering persecution, thrived and in fact his status and far-reaching fame greatly benefited his adopted city. It is relatively easy to establish a lengthy list of important scholars who came there, principally from the west, to study with him and to receive from him a permit to teach works that he had either composed or transmitted.⁹ There are signs the leaders of the government in Cairo appreciated his role; he himself dedicated the *Lamplight of Kings* to the Fatimid *wazīr* al-Ma'mūn (d.523/1128).

When he died the impetus to Alexandrian scholarship that his influence started continued without letup. One particularly devoted student of his, Abū 'Alī Sanad b. 'Imān al-Azdī, composed a work on Mālikī law called the

4 Ibn Farḥūn, *al-Dibāj al-mudhhab fi ma'rifat a'yān 'ulamā' al-madhhab* (Cairo, 1932), p. 246. According to a tradition quite common in the biographical literature, as one measure of their success, great teachers in medieval Islam had to have at least 300 students.

5 His *Kitāb al-Hawāḍith wa-l-bida'*.

6 The Arabic text of the *Sirāj* has been edited several times: ed. Muḥammad Faṭḥī Abū Bakr, 2 vols. (Cairo, al-Dār al-Misriyya al-Lubnāniyya, 1994); other editions: Alexandria, 1872; London, 1990; and trans. into Spanish by Maribel Fierro (Madrid, 1993).

7 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, trans. Rosenthal (3 vols. New York: Pantheon, 1958), I, pp. 83, 316–7, and II, p. 87.

8 *Muqaddima*, trans. Rosenthal, III, pp. 16–18.

9 See in addition to the studies by Leiser cited above, V. Lagardère, "L'unificateur du malikisme oriental et occidental a Alexandrie: Abū Bakr aṭ-Ṭurṭūshī," *Revue de l'Occident Musulmane et de la Méditerranée* (hereafter *ROMM*) 31 (1981): 47–61. The latter author gives a list of at least a dozen, pp. 49–54.

Ṭirāz, which was to be a thirty-volume commentary on a major classic (the *Mudawwana* of the ninth century authority Ṣaḥnūn).¹⁰ When Sanad died in 541/1146, he was laid to rest beside al-Ṭurṭūshī, so close had been their association in life. But, much more important for the perpetuation of this legacy was the career of Abū Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Awf. He was not only a disciple of al-Ṭurṭūshī but his foster son; his mother was the sister of the great man’s wealthy wife. As the leading Mālikī authority in Egypt, Ibn ‘Awf inherited much of al-Ṭurṭūshī’s status. Subsequently, when the government wanted the opinion of the Sunnī Muslims in their realm, they invited Ibn ‘Awf to Cairo for consultations. And like his predecessor, his own fame grew. Finally, in 532/1137–38, in recognition of Ibn ‘Awf’s growing prestige and of the power of his teaching to draw significant numbers of students to Alexandria, the Fatimid *wazīr*, Riḍwān b. Walakhshī, ordered the construction and endowment of a residential college, a *madrasa*, for the support and encouragement of his activities there.¹¹ Fortunately, the text of the official decree appointing Ibn ‘Awf to the first professorship in the new college has survived.¹² Ironically, this same college, whose only purpose can have been to teach Mālikī, that is, Sunnī, law was to be named for the reigning Shī‘ī imam-caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ. Still, not only was the new Ḥāfiẓiyya the first *madrasa* in Egypt but it was quite likely the first Mālikī *madrasa* anywhere. Most significantly, it was created, not in Cairo, the capital, but in Alexandria.

2 From the East

Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī was born in Isfahan (Iran) in 472/1079 or possibly a year or two later.¹³ He came from a family of scholars in a town of scholars; before leaving he could account for having studied with some 600 of them, all detailed in a work by him on his many teachers in that city alone. The occasion of a pilgrimage to Mecca with his father in 497/1104—by chance the year before the

10 Sanad apparently did not live to finish his great work, but Ibn Khaldūn, among others, cites it; see the *Muqaddima*, trans. Rosenthal, III, 17–18.

11 See Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl, “Awwal ustādh li-awwal madrasa fi’l-Iskandariyya al-islāmiyya,” *Majallat Kulīyyat al-Adāb, Alexandria University* 11 (1957): 3–29; Leiser, “Restoration of Sunnism,” pp. 131–50.

12 From al-Qalqashandī’s *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā*, 10: 458–59, and published among other places by al-Shayyāl, pp. 27–29 of the article by him cited in the previous note. English trans. of the same, pp. 435–38 (Appendix 1), in Leiser’s “Restoration of Sunnism.”

13 On al-Silafī see Cl. Gilliot, “al-Silafī,” in the *EI2* and the extensive list of references given there.

latter died—set in motion a career of traveling in search of knowledge, particularly of hadith, first at Baghdad where he studied with and heard hadith from a great number of scholars (including some who had taught al-Ṭurṭūshī when he was there). Eventually, al-Silafī compiled, as he had with his native Isfahan, a catalog of those he encountered in Baghdad. He mastered in this fashion many subjects but specialized above all in the peculiar science involving the collection and transmission of Islamic hadith, oral reports of what the Prophet had said or done. Because of the continuing preference, if not requirement, that hadith must be received and transmitted by oral recitation, it was essential to hear them from an authority fully qualified to pass them on. Each version and each separate line of transmission had its own value independent of the rest. Therefore hadith material in one town might be different from those recited in another and yet be important in its own right. To accumulate and retain all of the variations, each with the intricately specific chains of those who had attested to its authenticity in the past, its *isnad*, required a prodigious memory. Al-Silafī's was exceptional; and for it he earned the honorific epithet al-Ḥāfiẓ (the great memorizer).

His travels did not stop with the holy cities of Arabia or with Baghdad but included as well visits to Kufa, Basra, Wasit, other cities of the east, and then Syria. After Damascus he eventually embarked at Tyre for Alexandria, perhaps attracted to it by the reputation of al-Ṭurṭūshī. In any case al-Silafī certainly realized that Alexandria would provide him access to the world of western Islam, with the possibility of still more hadith. He arrived there in 511/1117–18, eight years or so before the death of al-Ṭurṭūshī.

As matters turned out, like the Spaniard who preceded him, the Iranian al-Silafī also met in Alexandria a wealthy local woman and married her. With the funds she brought to their marriage, he was able to settle there as well and remain permanently in the city of his wife. She provided both living expenses and the necessary physical space for his scholarly activities, which included room to receive and teach and to house a substantial library. As with al-Ṭurṭūshī, once there, al-Silafī never left except for short trips to Cairo. When he died in 576/1180, he was still there, having taught Shāfiʿī law—in contrast to the Andalusians who were all Mālikī, he belonged to the Shāfiʿī school—and transmitted hadith in Alexandria continuously for over sixty years.

As he had with Isfahan and Baghdad, eventually al-Silafī would compose an account of those he met and from whom he transmitted in other places, including in this case most especially those in Alexandria. That work is his *Muʿjam al-safar*,¹⁴ a highly important source of information on scholars and scholarship in Egypt for the period.

14 Edited and publish (Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1993), but there are other editions as well.

Because of the oral requirement in the transmission of hadith and the necessity of actually hearing it from its previous transmitter, the chains of transmission, the *isnad*, that are attached to each report tend to lengthen substantially as time passes. By the period of al-Silafī, however, a clear preference began to develop against long chains in favor of the shortest one possible. This meant an *isnad* with the fewest transmitters, in effect giving a great advantage to the hearing of hadith from a scholar well advanced in years. Al-Silafī not only had collected many of those he transmitted early in his own lifetime—and from hundreds of individual transmitters from all over the eastern Islamic world—but he himself lived into his nineties. Moreover, with respect to hadith, al-Silafī's renown attracted interest as much from the west as from the east. A long list of Andalusian and North African scholars either came to Alexandria to hear him or corresponded with him.¹⁵ The last of the easterners to transmit from him died in 651/1253, of the westerners in 662/1264. The temporal span of his influence was thus enormous, running as much as a century and a half; for the preservation and propagation of hadith, he was perhaps unique in his era.

Most importantly, as with Ibn 'Awf, Fatimid authorities eventually recognized the significance of having al-Silafī. In 544/1149 the *wazīr* al-ʿĀdil Ibn al-Salār ordered the construction and endowment of a college, *madrasa*, in Alexandria, expressly for al-Silafī. Ibn al-Salār had been the governor of Alexandria and he therefore obviously knew al-Silafī quite well and as a fellow Shāfiʿī he deeply appreciated his presence. His new college became the second formal *madrasa* in Egypt, and the first there for the teaching of Shāfiʿī law. Initially it was called the ʿĀdiliyya after the *wazīr*, who, despite his position as chief administrator of a Shiʿī state, was himself both a Sunnī and a Shāfiʿī. Soon, however, local custom changed the name to the Ḥāfiẓiyya in accord with the honorific title of its professor (al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Silafī).¹⁶

3 A Renaissance in Alexandria

The biographies of these men reveal clearly the growing importance of Alexandria for Islamic scholarship generally. Al-Ṭurṭūshī and al-Silafī arrived

15 Leiser has collected the names of several of them. See pp. 148–49 of the article by him cited earlier.

16 Leiser, "Restoration of Sunnism," pp. 151–81. Note here that it is fairly easy to confuse the names of the two *madrasas* in Alexandria. One was originally called the Ḥāfiẓiyya, from the name of the Fatimid caliph. It became known as the ʿAwfiyya. The other was the ʿĀdiliyya but soon took its local name from the title of its founding professor al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Silafī, hence it was also the Ḥāfiẓiyya. That both Ibn ʿAwf and al-Silafī had the same *kunya*, Abū Ṭāhir, added to the possibility of mixing the two cases.

as outsiders but their continued residence in the city imparted to it a status it had not achieved previously. Though they were the most prominent, they were not alone. Alexandria in this period attracted others and in addition produced some of its own. Yet, in the broader historical view, this renaissance of Alexandria seems rather sudden, with little or no precedent for it earlier than the advent there of al-Ṭurṭūshī. But surely his arrival was not the sole cause.

Nevertheless, the history of Alexandria over the second half of the eleventh century is distinguished not by scholarship and learning but rebellion, in fact one rebellion after another. The root of some of this unrest derived from the chaos and anarchy common throughout Fatimid Egypt for a specific period beginning after 451/1060 and lasting until 466/1074. Governmental control of whole sections of the land had broken down and insecurity spread nearly everywhere, resulting in famine and wholesale brigandage both in the countryside and the cities. So serious was the situation in the capital that an important scholar living there decided Alexandria must be safer, perhaps with better access to a food supply. This man had come to Egypt from the east. He had acquired numerous permits to teach books he had studied with various authors; on such authority he was thereafter licensed to transmit this learning. In the depths of the troubles of this period, he set out with his son for Alexandria only to be robbed of his library en route by renegade soldiers now turned bandits. The poor man's story has added poignancy in that the son lived to witness and participate in the later renaissance of their newly adopted city.¹⁷

One key commander in this breakdown of the Fatimid army even attempted to declare the Ismaili caliphate null and void. He, like some other former commanders of Turkish origin, tended to gravitate to the western Delta and to Alexandria, using it as a rebel base. The end to all this came in 466/1074 when the caliph al-Mustanşir brought in from Syria its military governor Badr al-Jamālī. The latter arrived with his own private army and immediately began to restore order. He did so quite ruthlessly, attacking relentlessly the many rebel groups who then controlled various provinces of Egypt. Alexandria was at the time all but independent and in the hands of pirates and renegades. Badr took it back by brute force.

His rule was both bloody and extremely harsh; the power he had been given made him a virtual dictator. Yet, even though he was eventually securely in control, a major rebellion against him was set in motion in 477/1084 by his own son, who characteristically fled to Alexandria, which he then tried to separate

17 The son was Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-Rāzī (d. 525/1131), an important hadith scholar in his own right. On him see below.

from the domain of his father. Again, Badr seized the city by storm and the ordinary citizens suffered along with the rebels.

The next notice for Alexandria is likewise a rebellion ten years later in 487/1094. This one resulted from a succession dispute following the death of al-Mustanşir. His disappointed older son Nizār had been passed over, an outcome arranged by Badr al-Jamālī's successor in the wazirate, his own son, al-Afdāl. Nizār abandoned Cairo for Alexandria, where many of the locals supported him. Proclaiming himself caliph, he ruled the city briefly until al-Afdāl assembled a force sufficient to recapture it and put down this rebellion also.

In this litany of resistance there is little or no sign of scholarship nor a hint of a renaissance to come. To be sure most of Egypt suffered through the earlier chaos and troubles, but Badr al-Jamālī returned it to prosperity. The twenty years of his reign as *wazīr* were generally good, the economic condition of Egypt was sound. Nonetheless it is not a period noted for learning, in Alexandria or elsewhere. Most likely those who could had departed Egypt prior to the time of Badr al-Jamālī; we know for certain that many merchants and members of the elite had done exactly that. Perhaps they did not rush back after he restored order. However, one explanation that would concern Alexandria as the chief Mediterranean port more than any other city is the suggestion of a medieval historian that scholars, and other travelers from North Africa and Spain, deliberately avoided Egypt throughout the period of Badr.¹⁸ Apparently, on assuming the office of *wazīr*, Badr first tried to reach an accommodation with the Almoravids and other western rulers, this despite sharp religious differences. His attempt seems to have failed and Badr thereafter chose a contrary policy, which involved arresting and executing any traveler from the west who fell into his hands. Even if a blanket policy of such explicit intolerance actually did not exist, one incident definitely left that impression. A Maghribi judge and scholar 'Atīq b. 'Imrān, from Ceuta, had spent, like so many others, some years studying in the east. But, in 484/1091, he set out on a return voyage from Syria to his homeland. One sign of his personal importance is that he was carrying with him letters from the Abbasid caliph to the *amīr* of the west, Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn. Unfortunately for 'Atīq, however, adverse winds forced his ship into the harbor of Alexandria. Upon his subsequent arrest these same letters came to light. Badr then ordered him executed.¹⁹

18 The historian is the famous, most often reliable, Ibn al-Athīr. See his *al-Kāmil fī'l-ta'rikh*, 10: 414. This information was first noticed by Vajda; see the article cited in the following note.

19 On this incident see G. Vajda, "L'aventure tragique d'un Qadi maghrébin en Égypte fāṭimide," *Arabica* 15 (1968): 1–15.

It should be noted here that a similar incident had occurred exactly forty years earlier. With Byzantine connivance the Fatimids had captured at the time an ambassador traveling from the Abbasids to a North African *amūr*, with similar documents and insignia. But on that occasion, they merely subjected the man to public humiliation and then set him free. The difference in outcome is a measure of the uncommon harshness of Badr's reign.

The preceding facts would explain why the special flowering of Alexandrian scholarship, which was so closely tied to the immigration of scholars from the west, waited until the death of Badr. He died in 487/1094 and was succeeded by al-Afḍal only months before the succession of al-Musta'li, the youngest son of the caliph al-Mustansir, who happened to be the brother-in-law of the new *wazīr* and was most likely under his control. Al-Afḍal, in contrast to his father, was an avid patron of the arts and sciences. He, for example, sponsored a circle of poets,²⁰ he devoted funds to scientific research, and he collected books with such enthusiasm his library eventually held a staggering half million volumes. Thus, where Egypt (and Alexandria) had suffered a severe general decline in the years 451–66/1059–74 due to misrule and mismanagement and where there was little or no incentive for scholarship in the era of Badr, 466–87/1074–94, the advent of al-Afḍal brought a dramatic change.

At last the time of troubles was over, the harsh repression of Badr gone. Al-Afḍal welcomed an influx of outsiders, both easterners and westerners. Alexandria was free once again to resume its natural role as the threshold of Africa—not the dark sub-saharan Africa of nineteenth-century imagination, but North Africa, the old Roman province of that name and its hinterlands, which grew under Islam to include all of the Maghrib, Sicily and Spain. Alexandria was the eastern-most city, which still somehow belonged to that larger world of the west; and it was the entry point to it coming from the east. A traveler from the east might arrive in Egypt at Damietta or Tinnis, without visiting Alexandria, but going on to Alexandria was a preparation for destinations further west. And, with the restrictions imposed by Badr lifted (and the rebellion of Nizār over), travelers from the west, beginning about 489/1096, as they had been accustomed to under Islam in earlier periods, typically stopped and rested, if they did not remain for an extended stay, at Alexandria.

According to one account of al-Ṭurtūshī's arrival, he landed first at Alexandretta (Rashīd) near the mouth of the western branch of the Nile and some forty-five miles east of Alexandria. There he had to wait until the "ruler"

20 For a list see Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn, *Fī adab Miṣr al-fāṭimiyya* (2nd ed., Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1963), p. 212.

of Egypt put down a revolt then active in Alexandria.²¹ This reference is to the *wazīr* al-Afḍal and the rebellion of Nizār. Information from another source indicates that the former *qāḍī* of Alexandria, Ibn ‘Ammār, had sided with Nizār, but that Ibn Ḥadīd and his family secretly supported the *wazīr*. That this Ibn Ḥadīd was to become the leading figure in the local establishment is one result.²² Though he and al-Ṭurṭūshī enjoyed a rather testy rivalry later, the new *qāḍī* apparently initially welcomed the Spaniard warmly, having gone out himself to Alexandretta to receive him and extend a formal invitation to come to his city.

One other case also fits this scheme chronologically almost exactly, and yet it represents an important difference and a new dimension to the story. Umayya b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Abu’l-Ṣalt al-Dānī (460/1068–529/1134) came from Denia on the central east coast of Spain. He was moved to travel, not for religious knowledge, as was true of both al-Ṭurṭūshī and al-Silafī, but in pursuit of the secular, i.e. ancient sciences: medicine, geometry, astronomy, music, logic and philosophy in general, an encyclopedic range of disciplines matching the *quadrivium*. Yet he was also a poet with a keen interest in other poets; he not only composed his own verse but compiled a poetical anthology. Moreover, in contrast to the religious scholars, he apparently journeyed to Egypt with the express intent of seeking al-Afḍal’s patronage. Umayya already knew of the *wazīr*’s interest in astronomy, for example. His arrival about 489/1096 coincides with the commencement of the new policy put in place by al-Afḍal. By good fortune Umayya later wrote an account of what he saw in Egypt while there and of those he met, which he called “The Egyptian Letter” (*al-Risāla al-miṣrīyya*).²³

Nevertheless, Umayya’s experience was not all to his liking. His goal of gaining al-Afḍal’s attention was achieved slowly and with difficulty. Apparently he spent most of his time in Egypt in Alexandria. He was there, as it happened, when a ship laden with an extremely valuable cargo sank in the harbor. The local authority, the judge Ibn Ḥadīd, frantically sought a means to retrieve it. Umayya boldly asserted that he could arrange such a rescue. His plan, however, failed and the judge condemned him for it and made sure al-Afḍal’s anger—the lost goods were, it seems, his—was directed at the Spaniard. The *wazīr* promptly ordered Umayya put under house arrest (in Alexandria).²⁴

21 al-Ḍabbī, *Bughyat al-multamis fī ta’rikh rijāl ahl al-Andalus* (Cairo, Dār al-Kātib al-‘Arabī, 1968), pp. 136–37.

22 Ibn Zāfir al-Azḍī, *Akhbār al-duwal al-munqaṭi’a*, ed. A. Ferré (Cairo, IFAO, 1972), pp. 84–85.

23 Ed. by ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn in *Nawādir al-makhtūṭāt*, vol. 1 (Cairo, 1972), pp. 5–56.

24 On Umayya see “Umayya b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Abu’l-Ṣalt” by Mercé Comes in the *EI2*; A.-L. de Prémare, “Un andalou en Egipte a la fin du Xie siecle: Abu l-Ṣalt Umayya de Denia et

When he was finally released three years later, he remained in Alexandria trying to decide where else to go. Overall his decade of residence in Egypt was, however, not unproductive. Even when under detention he managed to write a great deal, both poetry and many treatises on the various subjects of his interests, parts of which survive, several in Hebrew translation, the very existence of which shows that they were important to scholars well into the fourteenth century. Ultimately Umayya returned westward, not to Spain but to Tunisia, where he found in the local ruler a more acceptable patron.

One of the many poets Umayya met in Egypt, most of whom were a part of a relatively large circle vying for the support of al-Afḍal, was the Alexandrian Zāfir al-Ḥaddād. There were other Alexandrians, some native and some who had adopted it as their city, but Zāfir was unique. His father had been a blacksmith and he also began in that trade, hence his name al-Ḥaddād (the blacksmith). His path to that of a ranking poet—the greatest of his age according to some—was thus not due to a refined literary education. His was a natural talent; a gift for spontaneous verse that struck those who heard it as tender and highly original. Eventually he joined the circles of important poets and he, like them, wrote panegyrics (of the *wazīr*), love poetry, and descriptive verses, some of which nostalgically commemorated the city of his birth. A loyal friend of Umayya, he expressed great sadness when the latter departed Egypt. But Zāfir remained; he died there in 528/1134.²⁵

Ibn Ḥadīd was the Mālikī chief *qāḍī* in Alexandria from the suppression of Nizār's revolt in 489/1096 until his own death in 529/1135, and is thus one more prominent local scholar. He was also close to al-Silafī.²⁶ Another is Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-Rāzī, the same man whose father had lost his books trying to move to Alexandria much earlier.²⁷ The son later achieved considerable fame in his own right. Al-Silafī is said to have gone to Egypt precisely in order to

son epitre egyptienne," *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire* 8 (1964–66): 179–208; and Ḥusayn, *Fī adab Miṣr al-fāṭimīyya*, pp. 212–21.

25 On Zāfir see "Zāfir al-Ḥaddād" by Ḥusayn Nassar in the *EI2*, the same author's *Zāfir al-Ḥaddād: Shā'ir miṣrī min al-'aṣr al-fāṭimī* (Cairo, GEBO, 1975), and Ḥusayn, *Fī adab Miṣr al-fāṭimīyya*, pp. 224–28. Naṣṣār published a collection of Zāfir's verse; see his *Dīwān* (Cairo, Maktabat Miṣr, 1969).

26 On him and the possibility of his having created his own "school" in Alexandria, see Leiser, "Restoration of Sunnism," pp. 126–30.

27 On him see Georges Vajda, "La Maṣyakha d'Ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb al-Rāzī: contribution à l'histoire du Sunnisme en Égypte fāṭimide," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 23 (1970): 21–99.

“hear” hadith from him;²⁸ one report claims in fact that al-Silafī succeeded al-Rāzī as the teacher of hadith.²⁹

Yet another important example of scholars who arrived in this period prior to al-Silafī is the Maqādisa, the Jerusalemites. Unlike the rest they were likely fleeing the European Crusaders who had just overrun their homeland.³⁰ Two arrived together, Abu’l-Qāsim Hibatallāh al-Maqdisī and Abu’l-Ḥusayn Yaḥyā b. al-Mufarrij al-Maqdisī. Both were Shāfi‘ī and Yaḥyā is listed as a teacher of al-Silafī along with al-Rāzī. Although the evidence is not clear, once on the scene, these men may have founded their own school, perhaps an informal *madrasa* of some type, as well.³¹

Four of the men just mentioned—al-Ṭurṭūshī, Ibn ‘Awf, al-Silafī, and Zāfir al-Ḥaddād—are certainly the most famous Alexandrians of their era. Each has a prominent place in the history of the arts and sciences in the Islamic world as a whole, yet all belong to a special time and place: Alexandria and the last seventy-five years of Fatimid rule, from 489/1096 to 567/1171. These four, with the addition of Umayya, and perhaps others such as Sanad, Ibn Ḥadīd, al-Rāzī and the various Jerusalemites, illustrate quite well what appears to have been a renaissance in that city, a flowering of learning without immediate precedent in the prior period. Moreover, the names of many more scholars and writers who contributed to this efflorescence could be culled from the Arabic biographical dictionaries. Adding them would deepen and support the general impression.

4 Alexandria as an Entrepôt for Islamic Scholarship

The role of Alexandria as an entrepôt in the exchange of scholarship is only hinted at in the biographies of these men. That al-Ṭurṭūshī and al-Silafī attracted many students is clear enough. Men came to Alexandria from all over the Islamic world during this period because they taught there. A list of the others must include those who, once they arrived, remained; others who came

28 The source for this information is Ibn al-Abbār (*al-Mu‘jam fī aṣḥāb al-qāḍī Abī ‘Alī al-Ṣadaḡī* [ed. Codera, Madrid, 1885]) as cited by S. M. Zaman, “Ḥāfiẓ Abū Ṭāhir Al-Silafī (d. 576/1180),” *Islamic Studies* 25 (1986), p. 159.

29 Leiter, “Restoration of Sunnism,” 155.

30 Aside from this case it is remarkable how few of the scholars noted in this study came to Alexandria as a direct result of the Crusades. One might expect more. The reason for such small numbers may lie in the relative paucity of scholarship in those towns (with the possible exception of Jerusalem) captured by the Europeans.

31 Leiter, “Restoration of Sunnism,” p. 130.

and studied with these two masters (and Ibn ‘Awf as the heir of al-Ṭurṭūshī) and then returned home; and yet others—quite a few in fact—who spent formative years in the schools of Alexandria but later moved elsewhere, to other parts of Egypt, for example, where they settled.³² One example is Ibn al-Mujāwir (d. 600/1204) from a Damascene family but himself born in Alexandria. He was a student of Ibn ‘Awf who went on to become *wazīr* to Saladin’s son and successor al-‘Azīz.³³ Al-Silafī’s students include Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-‘Uthmānī (d. 614/1218), born in Alexandria of a Spanish family who was both a scholar and a prominent merchant, and the ascetically inclined Spaniard, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Baysānī (d. 590/1194), who formerly taught in Valencia but then traveled to Alexandria and thereafter took up residence in al-Silafī’s *madrasa* for some twenty years, apparently using it in part as a refuge from the world at large, before finally moving elsewhere.

Without question an incidental exchange of scholarship resulted from the close proximity in one city of such a large body of scholars. A *madrasa* was above all a residence, a place in which to lodge students who had come from abroad. Moreover, despite the differences between competing legal schools—the Mālikīs and the Shāfi‘īs, represented by al-Ṭurṭūshī and Ibn ‘Awf, on the one side, and al-Silafī, on the other, their meeting in this instance was almost entirely cordial. Ibn ‘Awf and al-Silafī were good friends; each attended the other’s lectures, especially on subjects not connected to legal doctrine. Even so, al-Silafī was known to have taught the *Muwatta’*, the law book of Mālik ibn Anas, the founder of the Mālikī school, either in its original form or in the commentary on it by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr.³⁴ And many Mālikīs took an active interest in the hadith brought to them by al-Silafī. It may be significant that the decree that brought the first government sponsored *madrasa* into existence, the Ḥāfiẓiyya/‘Awfiyya, does not specifically name the legal school of either the professor, Ibn ‘Awf, or of the institution itself.

Al-Silafī, moreover, unlike al-Ṭurṭūshī, but more in tune with the others, was quite open-minded and non-controversial, even less so than the Sunnī *wazīrs* who supported him. He was noted for his gracious attitude to a wide range of scholarly tendencies; he corresponded with many famous men, some of whom—like al-Zamakhsharī, the great Qur’an commentator, who was a

32. Leiter collected most of the available data in his “Restoration of Sunnism.”

33. For more students of Ibn ‘Awf and their influence, see Leiter, “Restoration of Sunnism,” pp. 140–48.

34. Leiter, “Muslims from Al-Andalus,” pp. 148–49; “Restoration of Sunnism,” pp. 172–74 and Appendix iv.

Muʿtazilī—belonged to schools of thought normally at odds with his own. Portions of that correspondence survive.³⁵

One striking outcome of al-Ṭurṭūshī's move to Egypt was the recasting of the various threads of the Mālikī tradition. Due to the uneven spread of this school westward from its origin in Medina, three somewhat independent traditions developed: that of Spain, another for North Africa centered in Tunisia, and an eastern branch in Iraq and Egypt. When al-Ṭurṭūshī moved to Alexandria he brought with him the Spanish strain, which thereafter merged with that of Egypt.³⁶

A highly significant example of influence in the other direction—that is, east to west—can be subsumed under the theme of the reception of al-Ghazālī in Spain and the Maghrib. Within Sunnī Islam al-Ghazālī was a towering figure of academic brilliance, quite possibly the most important intellectual voice of his time. His was also a complex mind and he wrote major works in several fields: philosophy and logic, law and theology, each revealing the author's mastery of that particular subject. Up to the year 488/1095 he had been teaching in Baghdad. About then he resigned his professorship and left for a pilgrimage to Mecca. His subsequent wanderings, much of the time in Syria with visits to Jerusalem, lasted as much as eleven years. It was widely rumored that he got as far west as Alexandria.³⁷

His influence in the farther west has several aspects. One involved his high regard for and advocacy of Sufi ascetic and mystical thought; another is his theology, which basically supports that of the Ashʿarites, the dominant school in the east. Theology, of any kind, was not well accepted by most Mālikīs, who had little formal theological doctrine, since a legal tradition did not also require a theology. The Mālikīs were likewise deeply suspicious of the Sufis.

Still, as his fame spread, al-Ghazālī began to command attention. Nearly every scholar mentioned in this study is said either to have met him or to have tried to meet him. One important example not already cited is the jurist Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī from Seville. He and his father set off for the east in 485/1092; they performed the pilgrimage in 489/1096. Somewhere on their various journeys, Abū Bakr studied with al-Ghazālī. Later the father and son went to Alexandria, where the father died in 493/1100. After that the son finally

35 See Leiter, "Restoration of Sunnism," pp. 156–57.

36 Noted by Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, trans. Rosenthal, III, pp. 16–18.

37 This supposed visit by al-Ghazālī to Alexandria is difficult to prove. Most authorities mention it but appear unconvinced that it actually took place.

returned home, by then with a reputation for extensive, almost encyclopedic, learning.³⁸

The Maghrib was at the time under the control of the Almoravids whose countercrusading *jihad* in Spain had pushed back the Christians and reversed Muslim losses over the preceding period. The subsequent arrival of the Latin crusaders in the Levant made the Almoravids especially appealing to the eastern Muslims. The ruler of the Almoravids, Yūsuf ibn Tāshfin, was for many a sign of hope for the renewal of Islam. Both al-Ghazālī, whose supposed motive for going to Alexandria was a first step in contacting Ibn Tāshfin, and al-Ṭurṭūshī wrote personal letters to the Almoravid prince. Ibn al-ʿArabī in fact carried them with him on his return.³⁹

Ironically, though Yūsuf was himself, like most Mālikīs, conservative, his son and successor was more so. The latter proscribed al-Ghazālī's great work *The Revivification of Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā' ulūm al-dīn*) and had it publicly burned. Al-Ṭurṭūshī, who had personally met al-Ghazālī (though probably not in Alexandria), wrote a lengthy critique of this work in which he sought to correct what he saw as its heretical tendencies. But the opposite reaction to al-Ghazālī shows up in the thought of Ibn Tūmart, the *mahdī*, a kind of messianic leader of the movement that subsequently became the Almohads. They eventually overpowered and replaced the Almoravids. Early in Ibn Tūmart's career this Berber scholar temporarily abandoned his Maghribi homeland for the east, visiting and studying between 501/1107 and 511/1117, in Mecca, Baghdad, and Alexandria. Significantly the Almohads, in direct contrast to the dynasty they supplanted, advocated an Ash'arite theology like that of al-Ghazālī.

5 The End of the Alexandrian Renaissance

While the revival of scholarship in Alexandria began almost suddenly, and the ensuing flowering was unique in its importance, its duration was limited for the most part to the careers of al-Silafī and Ibn ʿAwf. With their deaths respectively in 576/1180 and 581/1185, an era ended. It is not that their influence disappeared then, or that the *madrāsas* created for them ceased to be active. In fact the ʿAwfiyya continued and various members of the same Banū ʿAwf

38 One important study of Ibn al-ʿArabī's travels and their purpose is Iḥsān ʿAbbās's "al-Jānib al-siyāsī min riḥlat Ibn al-ʿArabī ilā al-mashriq," *al-Abḥāth* 16 (1963): 217–36.

39 Ibn al-ʿArabī's packet of letters included also ones from the Abbasid caliph and his *wazīr*; they were published as a set by ʿIṣmat ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Dandash in his *Dawr al-Murābiṭīn fī nashr al-Islām fī ḡharb Ifrīqiya*, 430–515/1038–1121 (*maʿa nashr wa taḥqīq rasāʾil Abī Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī*), (Beirut, 1988), pp. 182–217.

ran it and taught there for some time to come. Rather the coming to power of the Ayyubids brought a new configuration to the patterns of scholarship in the eastern Mediterranean. Saladin, the founder of the new dynasty, was committed to a vast program of *madrasas*, which he and his successors built and endowed on an impressive scale. A part of his motive was the imposition of Sunnī Islam everywhere in his domain. Once free of the Fatimids, whom he at first served as *wazīr*, he quickly rid Egypt of all traces of Shiism, substituting where he could his own Shāfiʿī legal school. In all, not counting those created by his successors, he established seventeen *madrasas*, five in Egypt. But only one was in Alexandria, the other four in Cairo. The net effect was to increase substantially the scholarly importance of the capital, in this case at the expense of a provincial port. This tendency was relative; Alexandria was never excluded, but, because the new *madrasas* of Cairo were larger and better endowed, scholars went there instead.⁴⁰ In any case Cairo was the seat of the government and therefore a natural magnet for those seeking patronage. By the close of the twelfth century Cairo had retaken a clear lead—a lead it never thereafter lost.

Nevertheless, as might be expected of an ardently Sunnī ruler, Saladin greatly admired both Ibn ʿAwf and al-Silafī, as did many members of his family. While the two men lived he remained solicitous of their welfare. There is a touching story of how the great sultan made a special visit to Alexandria with his two sons in 577/1181–82, precisely in order for them to listen to Ibn ʿAwf deliver his commentary on Mālik’s lawbook the *Muwattaʿa*. Through Ibn ʿAwf they would have access to the teaching and tradition of al-Ṭurṭūshī. Later Saladin’s secretary, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, wrote him a letter in which he noted the significance of this act. It was, he said, just like the visit of the famous eighth century Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd to Madina with his sons al-Amīn and al-Maʾmūn to sit at the feet of Mālik and hear the *Muwattaʿa* from the author himself.⁴¹

40 On this development see Leiser’s “Restoration of Sunnism,” plus his remarks, pp. 150f, in the article cited earlier here in a previous note.

41 This story is recounted by al-Shayyāl in his “Awwal ustādh,” p. 16, citing for its source al-ʿImād al-Isfahānī as reported by Abū Shāma (*Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn* [Cairo, 1956], vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 24). For more details see Leiser, “Restoration of Sunnism,” pp. 138–40.

Royal Libraries and the Production of Texts

We possess a good deal of information in our sources about Fatimid royal libraries and about book collections, both those belonging to the imam-caliph and some in private hands.¹ The earliest evidence goes back to the beginning phase of this dynasty but it also continues throughout. Even viewing the available data with skepticism, the caliph's library must have been immense. One semi-public institution, the Dār al-'Ilm, begun by al-Ḥākim, was designed to foster book copying and it had its own library as well. Strictly within the *da'wa*, some evidence indicates a kind of curriculum: books and treatises that an authority indicates should be studied prior to reading those more advanced. Most were, however, carefully restricted to the faithful. But some others were not and were designed specifically for public consumption. We also have a royal decree in favor of a famous scholar that specifies how he is to produce books, both to add to the library and to enhance the honor of the Fatimid state.

At the very end of the state in 567/1171, the holdings of the various libraries housed in the palace were, based on the evidence we have, enormous and also comprehensive over a full range of what then existed in Arabic, with multiple copies of many of the most important works. One estimate claims that the Fatimids had amassed a million and a half volumes, a figure so large as to seem quite impossible. Still, even after discounting it as an exaggeration, we are nonetheless forced to recognize that the contents of this collection of books was far and away the largest we know of from that time, either in the Islamic world or elsewhere.²

For a history of books, particularly of those in Arabic from its classical period, it is essential therefore to account for this Fatimid achievement, to understand the genesis of this passion for book collecting, and what its purpose might have been. How, for example, was the royal library connected, if it was, to the activities of the Ismaili mission, its *da'wa*. Did the agents of that *da'wa*, the *dā'īs*, contribute notably to the production of books and treatises,

1 Originally published as "Libraries, Book Collection and the Production of Texts by the Fatimids," *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 4 (2016): 7–21.

2 Some of the basic information about Fatimid libraries was first discussed by me in two sections of an article entitled "Fatimid Institutions of Learning," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 34 (1997): 179–200, reprinted in my *Fatimid History and Ismaili Doctrine* (Variorum), no. 1, "Dār al-'ilm", pp. 20–28; "Libraries", pp. 28–35, with extensive citations to various sources for both institutions.

either by writing works or by copying and thus preserving them? Is there a relationship between the highly sophisticated philosophical and scientific doctrine we see in Ismaili literature from the Fatimid period and the accumulation of vast library resources? Were, in short, these libraries necessary to support the work of the *da'wa*?

Unfortunately, although this question is certainly validly asked, and it is something we would like to know more about, a quick answer is that we possess almost no evidence of such a connection. There are no examples, in what we have uncovered so far, of *da'wa* agents making direct use of the royal holdings, no signs of visitation or of having access. That may be the fault of the data available, which is not so forthcoming in this regard, and we may, accordingly, continue to suspect that parts of the story are missing from the reports in our sources.

Still what we have recovered of this Ismaili legacy over the past half century is impressive in its scope, even if there remain many gaps in our knowledge of what was originally composed and how and when and under what circumstances in relationship to the Fatimid rulers and the state. Some estimate of the size of material involved can be gleaned from I. Poonawala's essential *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature*³ which lists, for the Fatimid period, some fifty authors of about 314 titles. Of those Poonawala was able to locate a manuscript of 172⁴ and of these as many as seventy-five or more have now been published. And since this chapter was first presented as a paper a goodly number have been added, both editions and translations.

Nonetheless, attacking the problem posed above strictly from the vantage point of Ismailism leads almost nowhere. A better and more productive course is to follow the evidence that we have about book collections and libraries, the majority of which derives from non-Ismaili materials, much of which was preserved only by later chroniclers such as the fifteenth century al-Maqrīzī.

An intriguing initial case comes from an incident that occurred prior to the founding of the state. When the future caliph al-Mahdi departed from Egypt in 292/905, disguised as a wealthy merchant headed toward the Maghrib, he was

3 Malibu, CA, 1977. Although this work is now out of date and in need of revision it can still serve as a gauge of the extent of what we know. Prof. Poonawala is himself actively working on a second updated edition.

4 The existence of a manuscript of a work provides a good check on the authenticity of a given title. Poonawala was admirably thorough in collecting every known citation of an Ismaili text. But many of the works in his *Biobibliography* depend solely on a medieval citation of a title and nothing more; they are possibly suspect accordingly and, although some could be okay, others may never have actually existed. With the existence of a known manuscript of a title, we are on much firmer grounds.

accompanied by a substantial pack-train of his possessions. Four days travel west of Alexandria his party was attacked by thieves who looted the caravan and, in the process, stole his books. Apparently he, even then, travelled with his own library. An eyewitness says that what was lost contained “much knowledge of the imams,”⁵ here meaning apparently the prior imams of the Fatimid line which would also of course include Ja‘far al-Šādiq and those before him back to ‘Alī. The future caliph was quite upset with the loss of his books, more so than of anything else the thieves had taken. He was thus especially delighted when, ten years later, during the first Fatimid attempt to conquer Egypt, the army under his son recovered them. He is said to have remarked, “If this expedition had no other result than to return these books, it would have been a great victory indeed.”⁶

Exactly what was in those very important books is not known but as a collection it was only the beginning, a kind of nucleus, of a Fatimid royal library that was yet to come. Two reports from half a century later provide additional material. One from 351/962 cites an audience the caliph staged for Kutāma chieftains in which they observed him seated just outside the *khazā’in kutub* (library), surrounded by ink, documents and books.⁷ Another from the same period mentions a search for a specific book in the library that consumed half a night because of all the boxes of books that needed to be opened and checked for it.⁸ Even later still, from the time of al-‘Azīz—the year was 383/993—a mere mention of al-Khalīl’s *Kitāb al-‘ayn* prompted this caliph to have brought out from his library the thirty copies he owned (one an autograph). A similar story concerns al-Ṭabarī’s *History*; again the royal library possesses already twenty copies (also one in the hand of the author).⁹ In this particular case we find a key detail: the incident commences with a supporter coming to the caliph with a copy of the *History* that he wants to give him. Ismailis were now and then quite apt to bring valuable gifts to their imam. Obviously books were included

5 The basic report of this incident comes from the *Sīrat Ja‘far* which is a memoir by al-Mahdī’s manservant. The Arabic text ed. by W. Ivanow in *Majallat kulliyat al-ādāb*, Cairo University 4 (1936): 89–133, pp. 115–16, Eng. Trans. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids* (London, 1942), p. 197; French trans. M. Canard in “L’Autobiographie d’un chambellan du Mahdi ‘Obeidallah le Fatimide,” *Hesperis* (1952), 279–324, p. 295. Canard provides additional sources for the same event.

6 Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ al-da‘wa*, ed. Dachraoui (Tunis, STD, 1975), p. 161, trans. H. Haji in *Founding the Fatimid State: The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire* (London, I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 124.

7 Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz al-ḥunafā’*, ed. A. F. Sayyid, 1: 95.

8 Reported by Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Kitāb al-Majālis*, p. 533.

9 *Itti‘āz*, 1: 318; Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, ed. A. F. Sayyid, 2: 355.

and much of the holdings of the royal library may have been acquired in this manner.

An interesting point worth noting here is that we know the name of al-ʿAzīz's librarian, the very person in charge of the royal collections. He was Abu'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Shābustī and he is otherwise fairly well-known as an author in his own right, mainly for his *Kitāb al-Diyārāt* (Book of Monasteries).¹⁰

The next significant information comes from the year 461/1069. At that point the Fatimid regime was in the midst of an extreme crisis caused by a break down in its control of the economy and security in Egypt. Faced with an empty treasury, the government had no choice but to auction off its most valued possessions as a means to pay salaries to both military officers and civilian officials. Someone at the time recorded the items given away in lieu of payment and among them were countless numbers of books on a wide variety of subjects. They came out of as many as forty separate depositories in the palace, one of which yielded eighteen thousand volumes on the "ancient sciences". Our source here notes, however, that this kind of "looting" emptied only sections of what it refers to as the "outer" (*al-barrāniyya*) palace and not that of the "inner" (*al-dākhila*) palace, which was never touched and thus remained intact.¹¹

Even if much of the royal collection was saved, a considerable portion was lost. A report mentions someone seeing a string of twenty-five camels carrying loads of books toward the house of the *wazīr* al-Maghribī, his share of what was taken in lieu of salary (the figures given are 5,000 dinars due for compensation settled by 100,000 dinars worth of books). A month later many of these same volumes were stolen from the *wazīr*'s house in the chaos of the time. The local book market was flooded and became saturated. Dealers began to send what they had elsewhere, to Alexandria and from there to the Maghrib. Yet others went east to Baghdad.¹² But many of them also remained behind. Like other valuable objects taken from the palace during this period of troubles, they were later re-acquired. Some three decades afterward, the powerful *wazīr* al-Afdāl, himself a passionate collector of books, began to amass his own library by aggressively cornering the Egyptian book market. Most likely he could find many of the "looted" books still in local circulation.

Finally, the last reports about the royal libraries come from what are usually fairly sound and reliable sources, those by Ibn al-Ṭuwayr and Ibn Abī Ṭayyī, the former providing information from the period just prior to the end and

10 Ed. by Kūrīs ʿAwwād (Baghdad, 1966).

11 *Ittīʿāz*, 2: 388–90; *Khīṭaṭ*, 2: 355.

12 *Ittīʿāz*, 2: 389; *Khīṭaṭ*, 2: 356.

the latter from the period just after, when the Ayyubid rulers had begun to sell off what was found in the palace. Ibn al-Ṭuwayr says¹³ that there was a major library (one presumably among several others located elsewhere) in one of the great halls of the hospital. Its librarian was al-Jalīs b. ‘Abd al-Qawī. The collection itself was carefully arranged with shelves and partitions all locked and labeled. Altogether it contained 200,000 bound volumes covering such subjects as the *fiqh* of various schools, grammar, lexicography, hadith, histories, the lives of kings, astronomy, theology, and chemistry. He makes specific mention of the work of the two most famous calligraphers Ibn Muqla and Ibn al-Bawwāb, both of whom attracted considerable interest from the Fatimids who were avid collectors of their writings. Ibn Abī Ṭayyī’ comments that the extent of the royal holdings was truly amazing; nothing in all of Islam was as large. It contained, he insists, twelve hundred copies of al-Ṭabarī’s *History*, along with more than a million and a half other books.¹⁴ The famous al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, who had formerly been a ranking Fatimid official and who was now high in the Ayyubid court, transferred at least 100,000 volumes from it to his own new madrasa.¹⁵

Despite impressive evidence of Fatimid imperial interest in the acquisition of books of all kinds and on all subjects, there is little in what we are told to indicate, or even to confirm, that these collections contained a basic set of Ismaili texts. Perhaps they did but so far it seems impossible to confirm it. The story of specifically Ismaili writings during that era appears to be separate and to have followed a course not linked to these libraries. Another unknown concerns access: who used them? Did such luminaries as the renowned Ibn Yūnis, a towering authority in the field of astronomy, who benefited directly from the caliph al-Ḥākim’s support, have reading rights to the holdings of these libraries? We do not have an answer. But, by contrast, we do know quite a bit about royal patronage of a different sort. Several of the caliphs actively encouraged reading and copying. There are important instances of a donation by a caliph of books to either a mosque or a non-royal institute of another kind. Both al-Ḥākim and al-Āmir need to be cited here.

The former often enough sent to various mosques copies, most especially of Qur’ans, of books from his personal collection, i.e. the royal library. But

13 As reported in his name in Maqrīzī’s *Khīṭaṭ*, 2: 356–57.

14 Again as reported in his name in Maqrīzī’s *Khīṭaṭ*, 2: 358–59.

15 On this see now Konrad Hirschler’s *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library: the Ashrafiya Library Catalogue*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) contains important information about the role of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil and then his son in the transfer of books from the royal libraries first to the father’s madrasa and then much later to the Ashrafiya in Damascus (see pp. 33–34).

even more noteworthy is his establishment in 395/1005 of the Dār al-ʿIlm, a semi-public academy to which he donated a substantial collection of books and treatises. It thereafter constituted in effect a library open for public use. It was, moreover, quite separate from the weekly Majlis al-ʿIlm (or al-Ḥikma) convened strictly for faithful Ismailis. The latter was devoted to the propagation of the *daʿwa* to those who came for regular lessons in doctrine. The Dār al-ʿIlm was not Ismaili in that sense, but rather secular in having no particular religious purpose. So important (and unique) was this institution it may be useful to quote one of our primary sources (here as recorded by al-Maqrīzī):

In Jumādā al-Ākhira (March) [of 395/1005] the House of Wisdom [Dār al-ʿIlm] was opened in Cairo. Scholars took up residence in it. Books were brought to it. People entered to copy those books and to read them. Scholars of law, recitation, grammar and other subjects were assigned to it. It was furnished and servants provided to maintain it. Stipends were set up for those of the scholars and others who worked there. The ink, paper and pens required were also provided.¹⁶

Of the scholars who were assigned a place in it, all those that we know of were Sunnī, and thus certainly not Ismailis (or even Shīʿīs), but what is more striking is that the subjects reportedly taught there, such as grammar, seem to have been religiously neutral. Much later, over a century after its founding, the situation changed and the Dār al-ʿIlm eventual did become part of the Ismaili *daʿwa*. However that was not the case at the time of al-Ḥākim, nor was that seemingly his intention in setting it up.

In the year 400/1009 this caliph created a *waqf*, a true endowment of his personal property, for the perpetual support of several institutions: three mosques (including al-Azhar) and the Dār al-ʿIlm.¹⁷ But, in contrast to the expenditures for the upkeep of a mosque and its staff, the Dār al-ʿilm was granted 257 dinars annually to be spent for the following: ten for reed mats, ninety for the paper used by copyists, forty-eight for the keeper's (*al-khāzin*) salary, twelve for water, fifteen for the *farrāsh*, twelve for the paper, pen, and ink of the *fuqahā* who taught there, one dinar for the repair of the curtains on the doorways and windows, twelve for repairing books or replacing pages that might fall out of

¹⁶ *Khitat*, 2: 502–04.

¹⁷ We have in fact the text of the *waqfiyya* in question. Although Maqrīzī provides it in his *Khiṭaṭ*, he does so in separate pieces in his entries on each of the institutions that benefited from it. However the whole was preserved as an appendix to Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir's *al-Rawḍa al-baḥiyya al-zāhira fī khiṭaṭ al-muʿizziyya al-qāhira*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid (Cairo, 1996), pp. 143–50, which was possibly al-Maqrīzī's source for it as well.

books, five for felt given to the *farrāsh* in the winter, and another four for carpets (*tanāfis*) in the winter. This list covers only 209 out of the 257 allotted annually for the support of the Dār and it conspicuously leaves out salaries for professorships. The relatively small balance certainly would not go far in that direction, however. Still, the academic nature of al-Ḥākim's plan for the Dār al-ʿilm is obvious and it should be noted that, by this endowment, he made it a free-standing institution protected legally from the vagaries of future governmental intrusions. The Dār al-ʿilm was, from the year 1009 onward, a *waqf* according to the stipulations of Islamic law and not, therefore, an instrument of the state nor technically under its direct control. Here it is also essential to notice that not only had al-Ḥākim created a public library, but he supplied it with the materials need for copying of the books in it.

Still it must be admitted that the Dār al-ʿilm was never completely separated from government control; it was not quite a private institution nor did it represent the holdings of a single person. A better example of that would be the library of Ibn al-Haytham as described in his memoir¹⁸ recounting the advent of the Fatimids in 297/909. In the course of his first encounters with the famous *dāʿī* Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Shīʿī he mentioned inheriting a library from his own father and then adding to it.¹⁹ Among other works he says he possesses, he comments that he has many of the books of Aristotle and the books of Plato and many others. As he discusses various matters with the great *dāʿī*, and later with this man's brother, Abu'l-ʿAbbās, we hear of more books in his collection. And interestingly how owning such books might cause trouble with the Mālikī authorities who considered them heretical and, as a consequence, of his having to hide them.

It is useful to mention Ibn al-Haytham and his library both because it represents a good example of private holdings of books but also because it suggests that the educational background of individual Ismaili *dāʿīs*, as he was about to become, depended more on personal proclivities and interests than on a set course of education and training. These agents of the *daʿwa* came to the task well read in a broad range of Arabic literature, including the sciences of the ancients in translation.

Perhaps the most spectacular example of private book collecting in the Fatimid domain, however, is that of the Jewish physician Abū Kathīr Afrāʾim b. al-Ḥasan b. Ishaq b. Ibrāhīm b. Yaʿqūb, as recounted by Ibn Abī ʿUṣaybīʿa.²⁰

18 Ed. and trans. by Madelung and Walker in *Advent of the Fatimids*.

19 See particularly pp. 111–113, 154, 149.

20 Ibn Abī ʿUṣaybīʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbiyāʾ ʿī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Bāsīl ʿUyūn al-Sūd (Bayrut, 1998), pp. 523–24.

Afrā'im was famous in Egypt both for his medical skills and for his service to various caliphs which had made him rich and well off. Earlier he had been a student of the even more famous Egyptian physician Ibn Riḍwān. Afrā'im was passionately devoted to the acquisition of books, to which end he employed copyists in order to build up what became a substantial library of books in medicine and other topics. There were always copyists at work at his place, among them a particularly famous copyist, examples of whose work Ibn Abī 'Uṣaybī'a had himself seen. On these he also found the mark of Afrā'im indicating that these copies emanated from the latter's library. Ibn Abī 'Uṣaybī'a continues:

My father told me that there was a man from Iraq who had come to Egypt to purchase books and he sought out Afrā'im. The two met and agreed that Afrā'im would sell him, out of the books he owned, 10,000 volumes. That was in the time of the wazirate of al-Afḍal son of the *Amīr al-Juyūsh* [Badr al-Jamālī]. When this latter man heard of that, he decided to keep these books in Egypt and that they not be taken elsewhere. He sent to Afrā'im out of his own funds all of the amount he and the Iraqi had agreed upon as the price. And then he had the books transported to his own personal library whereupon he put his name and title on them.

Most importantly he then adds a personal note, "In confirmation of this I have found many books on medicine and other topics on the cover of which was the name of Afrā'im and the titles of al-Afḍal as well." As a kind of epilogue Ibn Abī 'Uṣaybī'a adds, even so, "Afrā'im was left with more than twenty thousand volumes and a considerable sum of money."

This whole incident serves us several purposes. First, of course, is the staggeringly large size of a wealthy man's personal holdings of books. Clearly, with enough money to pay a number of copyists to work full time, he could and did produce fairly easily a substantial library. We should ask where he found the books he had copied but that is not something we are told. A second important point is that al-Afḍal, acting not on behalf of the caliph or of the government, bought as many as 10,000 volumes at one time which he added to his own vast collection, reported to contain 500,000 books.

At this juncture his library is his privately. However, in 515/1121, he was assassinated in a purge possibly instigated by the caliph (al-Āmir) that included the murder of members of his family and the confiscation of all his possessions, which were then moved into the palace. That included the books. They thereafter became part of the royal library. A final point is that, when the Fatimid libraries were dispersed by the Ayyubids, these same books, originally owned

by Afrā'im, then by al-Afḍal, and ultimately by the caliph, went into local libraries where Ibn Abī 'Uṣaybī'a could still find them almost a century later.

In addition to this information about libraries, we possess some about the actual production of books. Here it is necessary to amend earlier remarks about the role of the *da'wa*. Although we have yet to establish a direct connection between the royal collections and Ismaili doctrine or its propagation, there is some other evidence of how doctrinal texts were used, not simply within the tightly controlled network of the *da'wa*. A large portion of Ismaili works from the Fatimid period were, from the beginning, reserved strictly for initiated members of the *da'wa* who had all sworn an oath of allegiance that stated, among other provisions, that knowledge imparted within the confines of the organization was never to be revealed to anyone not specifically authorized to have access to it. Thus, when we study this literature, it is essential to remember that most of it was not meant for public consumption or use. So successful was this requirement of secrecy and the necessity of guarding it carefully that few if any non-Ismailis ever gained access to such works. The examples of outsiders knowing or having read genuine Ismaili texts are rare, most especially during the Fatimid era. Later we see cases of what appears, for example, to have been the result of a renegade leaving the fold and taking knowledge gained earlier and making it public. Al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taymiyya from a much later time managed to find and read Ismaili works. But, in general, it was not until the last century that scholars at large could at last begin to study such books.

Thus, when there are, in Ismaili works, comments about some sort of reading curricula, of how a novice should commence with this or that text and move gradually into those of greater difficulty, or hints of controversy in which an earlier member of the *da'wa* upheld doctrines that should be replaced or improved upon, such examples involve matters internal to the mission and did not spill over into public discussion of them.²¹ Nevertheless there are other instances of works commissioned by the Ismaili Fatimid authorities to serve

21 Two good examples here are the author's introduction to al-Kirmānī's *Rāḥat al-'aql*, where he lists works to be read before his, and the same author's *Kitāb al-Ri'yāḍ* the express purpose of which is to correct the teachings of his predecessors al-Nasafi and al-Sijistānī. In addition to these two tendencies, we face another in the quite likely institutional censorship of works within the *da'wa*, possibly on instructions from an imam, but that is not necessarily clear. In several cases we suspect that parts of a given text disappeared or were no longer copied due to some change in doctrinal position. The works of the earliest *dā'īs* in the East, such as al-Nasafi and al-Sijistānī would have been 'edited' (often simply to leave out material) to make them conform to a later standard imposed by the Fatimid authorities.

a broader purpose involving some kind of appeal to a public audience. In the technical language of the *da'wa* such books and treatises do not contain or reveal restricted truths (*haqāiq*). Only the latter are tightly controlled; the others may circulate openly.

The writings of Qāḍī al-Nu'mān are often a good example. Much of what he wrote was intended for both Ismaili and non-Ismailis readers together. A substantial part of the commission given him by the imam-caliph he served was to put a face on Ismailism that any citizen of the Fatimid state would find unthreatening and certainly not heretical. He was, among other efforts, to promote a benevolent image of these caliphs, depicting them as ideal Muslim rulers. One parallel mission was to lay out a codified Ismaili law in a form useable by the general populace. To that end he composed several texts the most successful and widely known of which was his *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, a handbook of legal material. There were many others as well, some quite short and others more substantial. One curious case has him deliberately setting out to write a short book expounding material derived from the statements of the imams (*Ahl al-bayt*) that would be readily accessible to those interested and yet could come to market as a text that one could have copied for a dinar or less, thus presumably a book cheap enough that it could be owned by people of any class. He originally intended, in fact, to call it the *Kitāb al-Dīnār* before al-Mu'izz advised him to change the title and alter his approach.²²

Another example of this sort of public appeal on behalf of the *da'wa* is al-Kirmānī's *al-Maṣābīḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma* (*Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate*),²³ which he addressed to the Buyid *wazīr* of Baghdad Fakhr al-Mulk. It constituted a ringing defense of the Fatimid line and of al-Ḥākim, his own imam-caliph, all couched in stridently Shī'ī terminology and argument but not in the esoteric language of the *da'wa*. It was thus more a political document than an instrument of Ismaili doctrine.

Yet another slightly different example comes from the year 416/1025. In it the caliph al-Zāhir issued an order banning all law texts except the *Da'ā'im al-Islām* of Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and the *Mukhtaṣar al-wazīr* of Ibn Killis, which were the two principal books of Ismaili law (or as our source puts it: *fī'l-fiqh 'alā madhhab Aḥl bayt* "in law according to the doctrine of the family [of the Prophet]").²⁴ Our report adds that al-Zāhir allocated funds for whoever memorized the two and *dā'īs* held sessions in the mosque for discussion about

22 See his *Kitāb al-Majālis*, p. 359–60.

23 See Walker, *Master of the Age*.

24 *Ittī'āz*, 2: 231.

them. Presumably copying of them was also involved, thus making both texts widely available.

The second of these two law books was a work by the early *wazīr* Ibn Killis (d. 380/991).²⁵ Following his conversion to Islam, and to Ismailism, Ibn Killis devoted a substantial effort to the composition of books on several subjects but especially this one on law. It is, however, curious how a fully engaged bureaucrat of his august rank and responsibility could also find time to write lengthy treatises. His book of Ismaili law is said to have been half as large as the famous *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī,²⁶ which implies that was no minor undertaking. Like Afrā'im, Ibn Killis, however, was certainly wealthy and quite powerful and we know that he did maintain a considerable stable of clerks and scholars, all actively dealing with his own (and the government's) affairs. It seems likely that he used them in the writing of the books put out in his name. Still we also know that he actually held sessions in which he taught personally from this very book,²⁷ the contents of which he must therefore have known intimately.

Another case worth mentioning concerns Abū Ja'far Yūsuf b. Aḥmad b. Ḥasḍāi, a noted scholar of medicine and other sciences who came to Fatimid Egypt from al-Andalus in the second decade of the sixth/twelfth century.²⁸ He was thereupon engaged by the state to support various scientific ventures, among them the build of an observatory and the composition of commentaries on the works of Hippocrates. For the latter project, as a guest of the state, he was granted a salary, a clothing allotment, and other benefits, including a house in Cairo. His main patron was the *wazīr* al-Ma'mūn who replaced al-Afdāl after the latter's assassination in 515/1121. What is particular in the case of Ibn Ḥasḍāi is that we have a verbatim copy of the decree issued upon his assignment to the work of explaining the writings of Hippocrates.²⁹ A public proclamation declares how important the science of medicine is and how further advancement in the understanding of it will enhance the reputation of the Fatimid dynasty, both in the present and in the future. Ibn Ḥasḍāi, as scholar and scientist, is to become an instrument promoting the honor of the

25 On Ibn Killis see now my entry on him in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Three*.

26 This estimation is that given by al-Maqrīzī, who himself owned a copy of it (*Khīṭaṭ*, 4: 389).

27 *Khīṭaṭ*, 4: 452.

28 Concerning this Ibn Ḥasḍāi, there is a note added in both the 1973 edition of Maqrīzī's *Itti'āz* (vol. 3, p. 94) and Ayman F. Sayyid's 2010 edition (vol. 3, p. 110) stating that the Istanbul manuscript has at this point a marginal comment by al-Maqrīzī himself (in his own hand) claiming, among other things, that Ibn Ḥasḍāi converted to Islam in Cairo after his arrival there. In fact this passage in the ms. contains no such allegation. Where this claim actually comes from is not clear; it cannot be attributed to Maqrīzī.

29 The Arabic text of the decree is given by Maqrīzī in his *Itti'āz* (A.F. Sayyid ed.) 3: 110–111.

Fatimids. Furthermore, as he carries out this task, what he writes is to be delivered book by book to the royal library, there to be available for all students of the subject. He was to teach and practice his art two days a week and write his commentaries on the rest, with the product transported to the library where two scribes would make fair copies of what he had written.

Although this surely was not the only situation in which copies were made for the state library in a similar manner, it sits now as the sole example for which we possess the text of a decree ordering something of the kind, of books being both written and copied by a formal command of the Fatimids and for the stated purpose of the increase and diffusion of knowledge to augment the honor of the dynasty itself. Certainly there were other cases, perhaps many of them, but none are recorded in such special explicit detail by a preserved decree.

PART 2

Society and Culture



Social Elites at the Court

Occasional reports concerning the arrival of a foreign ambassador and, more frequently, detailed accounts of royal ceremonies and processions readily attest to the brilliance of the Fatimid court.¹ Typically such sources testify most fully about the caliph, his appearance, what he rode, what he wore, with less said about the courtiers, those of the elite who participated in such ceremonies, occupied the higher echelons of the government, and formed the social networks that surrounded and supported the court itself. What was the position of the members of the ruling family, for example? Were Ismailis privileged over others? How, and how often, did major families maintain their lofty status through succeeding generations? Was there a class distinction, a group elevated by self-perception of superiority, and, if so, did it function interactively by forming alliances through social relations and marriages?

The information required to answer these questions is far less obvious than that concerning the ruler. The center of this dynasty was clearly its imam-caliph who represented to his devout followers the Prophet's only legitimate heir. His rank in the earthly hierarchy was supreme, his authority unqualified and unmitigated, his very person exalted. If he was present all attention fell on him alone. Still, important data does exist about those around him, the courtiers at his court. It provides a means for investigating the role of these people: the rank order of marchers in a procession; who was summoned to climb the *minbar* at the festival, descriptions of an appointment to office, the seating arrangement at a session with the imam. Although most accounts of this type simply list a few names, in rare instances there is more information about the participants and the social context of their activities. Additional details can be culled from biographical materials where they exist and from the reappearance of the same individual or that person's descendants in yet other lists. In at least two cases, we possess as well the story of a private gathering—one features a quite notorious drinking party—in which members of the elite met together socially out of court. And such events suggest that the ties that bound the key figures of the government together operated separately from loyalty, religious or otherwise, to the caliph.

1 Originally published as "Social Elites at the Fatimid Court," in Jan-Peter Hartung and Albrecht Fuess, eds. *Court Cultures in the Muslim World*. (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 105–22.

1 Evidence for the Court and the Courtiers Who Attended It

The earliest report of the Fatimid court comes from the moment when al-Mahdī, recently released from house detention in Sijilmasa, sat to greet Abū ‘Abdallāh’s Kutāma Berber army and to be recognized for the first time as caliph in late August of 909.² Ja‘far, the imam’s personal servant, provides a fairly lengthy description of the ceremony, indicating that already the new dynasty intended to observe a much more lavish style than the rough and ascetic habit of the *dā’ī* who had organized the revolution that brought it to power. The trappings of the caliph’s office were to be appropriately royal, in fact so much so that one possibly legitimate explanation of why al-Mahdī felt forced to execute Abū ‘Abdallāh was the latter’s continued objection to what he saw as the corruption of the Berbers through the wearing of silk robes and other temptation of rank and privilege urged on them by the new ruler.

The memoir of Ja‘far, who was from that day and thereafter the chamberlain of the new court, is an essential source. Others include the recollections of Ibn al-Haytham,³ the records of Ustādh Jawdhar,⁴ and Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *Kitāb al-Majālis wa’l-musāyārāt*⁵ and the same author’s *Kitāb al-Himma fī ādāb atbā’ al-a‘imma*.⁶ Such material depicts an idealized situation which, nevertheless, reveals both an early caliphal taste for regal display and yet, alongside that tendency, a reluctance to ignore the old North African requirement of simplicity. There are accounts of al-Mu‘izz sitting, for example, for his Kutāma adherents in a manner devoid of pretense, the imam at work in humble fashion.⁷

With the advent of al-‘Azīz in 975, however, and the real commencement of the Egyptian, Cairene phase of Fatimid rule, the court ceased any pretense to humility and became as extravagant as the times and funds would allow. This caliph inherited a prosperous empire and he personally loved pomp and ceremony. He set the tone for all his successors who, with a few minor

2 *Sīrat Ja‘far al-Ḥājjib*, Arabic text, pp. 129–31; Eng. trans., 217–20.

3 See his *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, in *Advent of the Fatimids*, which describes in fair detail the “court” of Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Shī‘ī and his brother, and then the contrast under al-Mahdī.

4 *Sīrat Ustādh Jawdhar*. Jawdhar, who died in 362/972, was the majordomo—a quasi-*wazīr*—of the Fatimids during the North African phase of their rule.

5 Ed. al-Ḥabīb al-Faqhī, Ibrāhīm Shabbūh, and Muḥammad al-Ya‘lāwī (Tunis, 1978).

6 Ed. M. Kāmil Ḥusayn (Cairo, 1948). This text is, in fact, a manual on how the faithful are to behave at the court (i.e. in the presence) of the imam.

7 See as a particularly good example the account of al-Mu‘izz holding an audience for the Kutāma in 351/962 in which he reveals to them his austere working conditions; Maqrīzī, *Ittī‘āz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1: 95; Walker, “Fatimid Institutions of Learning,” *JARCE* 34 (1997): 194.

exceptions—a period of asceticism under al-Ḥākim⁸ and economic troubles in the middle of the reign of al-Mustansir⁹—continued to favor extravagant spectacle over modest self-effacement to the end of the dynasty.

A fine example that shows the court's lavish extravagance occurs in the following report of a Byzantine ambassador's arrival at the Fatimid court in 391/1001.

On the 16th of Jumādā al-ākhirā [13 May, 1001], an emissary from the Byzantine emperor arrived. Soldiers from various districts were mustered for the occasion. They stood in two rows, with al-Ḥākim positioned to be seen by them. The emissary approached between the soldiers to the Bāb al-Futūḥ where he dismounted and walked to the palace kissing the ground along the whole distance until coming into the presence of al-Ḥākim at the palace. The great hall of the palace had been furnished, rare drapes hung in it that were said to have been ordered searched for in the storehouses of furnishings until there were found in it twenty-one individual but similar pieces that the Lady Rāshida, daughter of al-Mu'izz, remembered that they had been in the train of furnishings transported from Qayrawān to Egypt with al-Mu'izz. The clerks of the furnishings' treasury found written on one of them the date 331 (942–3), the work of the servants, in brocaded silk and gold thread. The whole of the hall was furnished with it, hiding in the process all of its walls, so that its entire floor and walls were of gold, gleaming with majesty and luxury. In the center of the hall the golden shield was suspended crowned by a splendidly unique gem of each variety, radiating what surrounded it. When the sun hit it, eyes could not look at it out of feebleness. The emissary entered and kissed the ground, then presented letters and gifts.¹⁰

Other examples of this type exist, but most, as here, except for a mention of the caliph's aunt Rāshida, who belonged therefore to the royal family, offer no additional information about members of the elite. Better material comes

8 During the final seven years of his rule, al-Ḥākim began to present himself in a simpler, more ascetic style. Not infrequently, even so, he had his heir-apparent appear in full royal regalia.

9 In the period from about 1066 to 1074, years known as the *ayyām al-shidda*, the caliphate suffered severely from a financial crisis that forced it to curtail or limit many of its public functions.

10 *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 39–40. There is another version of this report in the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa'l-tuḥaf* (*Book of Gifts and Rarities*, trans. Ghāda al-Ḥijjāwī al-Qaddūmī (Harvard Middle East Monographs XXIX) (Cambridge, MA, 1996), para. #173, pp. 163–64.

occasionally from reports, especially when taken from an eyewitness, concerning royal processions. Here is how the *amīr* al-Musabbihī¹¹ describes three such events from the year 415/1024–25:

On Friday two nights into the month of Ramaḍān, our master (*mawlānā*) ..., rode for Friday prayer in the Anwār Mosque.¹² He was accompanied by all of his servants, as well as the elite notables of his government. He wore a fine linen shawl. ... The chief *qāḍī* Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī'l-'Awwām mounted the *minbar* with him, as did Ibrāhīm, the companion and tutor, known as al-Jalīs (the boon-companion).... He [the caliph] delivered the *khutba* for himself. It was a beautiful *khutba*, most complete and perfect. Then he offered a prayer for his forefathers, and for himself and all his servants and the prominent men of his government. The chief *qāḍī* and Ibrāhīm the tutor next raised the curtains of the dome that was above the *minbar* and the two descended before him. He, on whom be peace, then descended and prayed with the people a most complete and beautiful prayer. He departed for his palace safely, thanks to God. As was my custom, I walked along with the company of all the notables in the presence of the imam, both as he rode out and as he came back.¹³

Saturday was the *ʿid al-fiṭr* [Dec. 29, 1024] and our master.... rode in procession with his troops and the prominent men of the government. In front of him there was the one elephant that remained of the elephants and the giraffes, golden banners brocaded with silver, drums and other things. Various types of unmounted horses were paraded in front of him bearing saddles studded with jewels and heavy amber, along with all of the commanders of the Turks and the servants under commission in arms and others. ... With him were his black eunuch servants wearing types of gilded, heavy adornments, fashions of great value. I walked in his presence to the *muṣallā* from the time before reaching its gate until he entered. He prayed a quite beautiful prayer, quite complete and perfect, and next delivered a most eloquent *khutba*. When he, peace be upon him, went up the *minbar*, he summoned the chief *qāḍī*, who also went up. This man was ill as a result of a sting he had received. Next, he summoned Ibrāhīm, the boon-companion and tutor, and he climbed the *minbar*.

11 al-Mukhtār ʿIzz al-Mulk Muḥammad al-Musabbihī, who died in 420/1029, was both an important *amīr* at the Fatimid court and a major historian of that era.

12 This was later known as the Mosque of al-Ḥākim.

13 *al-Juzʾ al-arbaʿūn min Akhbār Miṣr*, pt. 1, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid and Th. Bianquis (Cairo, 1978), 62; paraphrased by Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 159.

Then he summoned Shams al-Dīn Abu'l-Faṭḥ Mas'ūd b. Ṭāhir al-Wazzān and he went up as well. He summoned Tāj al-Dawla Ibn Abī Ḥusayn, who was formerly master of the Sicilians, but he was not present. He summoned 'Alī b. Mas'ūd b. Abī'l-Ḥusayn Zayn al-Mulk and he went up. Then he summoned 'Alī b. al-Faḍl and after him 'Abdallāh b. al-Ḥājib, so he went up as well.¹⁴

The *ʿid al-naḥr* was Thursday the 10th of Dhu'l-Ḥijja [Feb. 9, 1025]. On it our master ... rode in procession to the outskirts of the *muṣallā* by way of the Bāb al-Futūḥ with his servants, his troops, his eunuchs, and the prominent men of his government. In front of him were handsome unmounted horses, golden banners brocaded in silver, two flags, the giraffes, and the one elephant remaining of the elephants. With him were his Turkish servants in heavily adorned robes and fine arms, and his servants who had received commissions as officers in the finest of attire, most splendid and perfect. ... Behind him were the Kutāma friends [i.e. Ismailis] and the notables of the government. ... On his forehead was a jewel and over his head the red parasol heavily adorned with gold being carried by the Slav Muẓaffar Bahā' al-Dawla. The notables dismounted in front of him as was their custom. He prayed a beautiful prayer, quite completely and perfectly. He climbed the *minbar* and gave an eloquent *khuṭba* that was most beautiful. He summoned up the *minbar* the chief *dāʿī* Qāsim b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. al-Nu'mān and handed over to him the roster of the names of those who, according to protocol, climbed the *minbar*. He summoned the chief *dāʿī* Shams al-Mulk but he was not present. He summoned Muẓaffar the Slav, then 'Alī b. Mas'ūd and Ḥasan b. Rajā' b. Abī'l-Ḥasan. Next 'Alī b. Faḍl. Prior to the group just mentioned, he called for the boon-companion Ibrāhīm, the tutor and goldsmith. Then he summoned at the end, 'Abdallāh b. al-Ḥājib and the son of his uncle. All of them mounted the *minbar* in accord with protocol.¹⁵

From almost exactly one hundred years later (516/1121), we have another important account from the contemporary chronicler Ibn al-Ma'mūn,¹⁶

The supervisor of those preparations stood with the *qāḍī* at the bottom of the *minbar*. Incense was released. The *wazīr* was responsible not to let

14 *Akḥbār Miṣr*, 65–66; paraphrased by Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 161.

15 *Akḥbār Miṣr*, 80–81; paraphrased by Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 167.

16 The historian Jamāl al-Dīn Abū 'Alī Mūsā Ibn al-Ma'mūn, who died in 588/1192, was the son of the Fatimid *wazīr* al-Ma'mūn.

anyone open any door except the door through which the caliph would come at which he stood. The *dā'ī* sat in the entryway with the *mu'adhdhins* reciting beside him. The princes, the *ashrāf* nobility, the witnesses, and notables entered but no one else unless given a pass by the *dā'ī*. If the prayer fell due the caliph approached in the attire we described ..., the scepter of power in his hand. Immediately behind him were all of his brothers and uncles.¹⁷

And again even later another as reported by Ibn al-Ṭuwayr:¹⁸

On the second Friday [of the month of Ramaḍān], he [the caliph] rides to the great Anwār Mosque wearing the outfit of the festival seasons and those items of accoutrement mentioned previously. ... When the call to Friday prayer sounds, the chief *qāḍī* goes into [the caliph] and says: "Greetings to the Commander of the Believers, the most noble judge, may God have mercy on him and bless him. The prayer, may God have mercy on you!" Then the caliph precedes out walking, around him are the eunuchs and *muḥannaks*, the *wazīr* behind him, and those of the elite following them, those belonging to the Youth Guard with weapons in their hands—they are officers bearing this name. He mounts the *minbar* to the top, beneath the perfumed dome. Once he is seated, with the *wazīr* at the door to the *minbar* facing him, he signals the latter to climb up. The *qāḍī* goes up until he reaches him and then kisses his hands and feet in full view of the people.

For the festival of fast-breaking, the caliph rides in procession at the onset of Shawwāl at the close of Ramaḍān. ... Once finished, he extends greetings and mounts the *minbar* for the *ʿid khuṭba* of the festival of fast-breaking. When he has taken his seat at the top. ... The people of that gathering see him sitting at the top. Standing at the base of the *minbar* are the *wazīr*, the chief *qāḍī*, the chamberlain, the commander of the army, the head of the chancery, the controller of the palace, the master of the bureau of state, the parasol bearer, the leaders of the *ashrāf* relatives, the treasurer, the lance bearer, the head of the 'Alid nobility. The *wazīr* faces him. The caliph signals to the *wazīr* to climb up and so he does, approaching and stopping, his face opposite his feet. He kisses them in view of all

17 Ibn al-Ma'mūn, *Nuṣūṣ min Akhbār Miṣr*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid (Cairo, 1983), pp. 88–89.

18 This and the following passages from his work were collected and published by Ayman Fuad Sayyid in *Nuzhat al-muqḥlatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn*, (Beirut, 1992), pp. 172–85, although they come from Maqrīzī's *Khīṭaṭ*. This historian lived from 525/1130 to 617/1220.

those present. Then he rises and stands to the right of the caliph. Once standing he signals to the chief *qāḍī* to come up. He goes up to the seventh step. Then the boon-companion. He takes out of his sleeve a register that has been presented to him the day before from the chancery after having been passed by the caliph and the *wazīr*. As he reads it he discloses what it contains. He says: "In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. This confirms who is to be honored by mounting this sacred *minbar* on such and such day, which is the *ʿid al-fiṭr*, of such and such a year, of the servants of the Commander of the Believers, may God's blessings be on him and on his pure forefathers, and the noble prophets, following the mounting of the Illustrious Lord and his approved title and his pious benediction." If the caliph wants to bestow honors on any of the sons of the *wazīr* and his brothers, the *qāḍī* would call them up by the title mentioned therein. Next follows the name of the aforementioned *qāḍī*, who is himself the reader [of the document]. ... Next he summons those we mentioned who were standing at the door of the *minbar* by their titles, citing their service and inviting them according to rank. In going up each of them knows his place on the *minbar*, left or right.

The authors of these accounts each observed the event in question and that makes the information in them highly significant. However, none of the original works in which they first appeared exist now. What survives of al-Musabbihī's text,¹⁹ although certainly a copy of a part of the original, belongs, in this instance, to a small fraction of what he wrote. Even so, although each report contains extensive detail about the ceremony and its protocol, there is precious little information about the participants beyond title and in several cases names. Nonetheless, each suggests the kind of material required to answer the questions raised above.

Fatimid ceremonial is well represented on the whole by a wealth of information covering hit and miss most of the dynasty's two and a half centuries and that has already attracted a number of scholarly studies, most notably *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* by Paula Sanders.²⁰ Many of the details have a prominent place also in Heinz Halm's volumes on the Fatimids.²¹ Thus,

19 Only a small section of the original survives and that in a manuscript in the Escorial, published as *al-Juz' al-arbaʿūn min Akhbār Miṣr*, pt. 1 (historical section), ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid and Th. Bianquis (Cairo, 1978), pt. 2 (literary section), ed. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār (Cairo, 1984).

20 Albany, NY, SUNY Press, 1994.

21 Halm, *Reich/Empire*; Halm, *Die Kalifen von Kairo: Die Fatimiden in Ägypten, 973–1074* (Munich, 2003).

although there is still more material available to be analyzed, these ceremonies as such are less in need of investigation than the social context surrounding them. Moreover, various descriptions of the apparatus of Fatimid government, especially those of al-Maqrīzī²² and al-Qalqashandī,²³ but others as well, provide data about offices and ranks. Still, even so, a court cannot exist without courtiers and it is their personal stories we are seeking in this instance.

A few reports add to the information provided by the accounts of processions. A few key examples may suffice. Al-Nuwayrī provides a description of what he calls “the customary order of giving salutations to the kings of this dynasty.”²⁴ First enters the *wazīr* (here al-Ma’mūn), then the *amīrs* each according to rank, next the *ashrāf*, the *dīwāns* of correspondence and the chancery, the chief *qāḍī*, the notary witnesses, the *dā’ī*, the supervisors of the grooms, the superintendent of the *dīwān* of the kingdom. From another direction comes the army, followed by the governor of Cairo, then Fustat. Next the patriarch and the Christians, and the clerks among them, likewise the head of the Jews, and next the poets by rank.²⁵ An incident from long before (the year was 395/1004–05) has groups of governmental officials, various members of the guards, servants of the palace, and all manner of others, fearing the wrath of al-Ḥākim, request a written guarantee of personal security (*amānāt*). The report we have²⁶ gives a relatively long list of these groups: Daylamīs, Jīlānīs, pages of various kinds, men belonging to the different guard regiments, purchased slaves, *mu’adhdhins* of the palace gates, and many more. Although there is no order to the list, it is quite extensive, possibly providing the most complete picture of those who served the court in one capacity or another. Unfortunately, however, it still gives us no names of individuals.

A more fruitful example comes from 516/1025–26 and an assembly formed to denounce the Nizārī claim to the imamate against that of the ruling caliph al-Āmir, whose father had succeeded in place of his brother Nizār.²⁷ In this case the reason for this session is in the main religious. Accordingly, those in attendance represented predominantly the Ismaili establishment, with some

22 See especially his description of Fatimid administration at the end of the *Ittī’āz*, (Cairo, 1973), 3: 335–44; AFSayyid ed. 3:399–410.

23 Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā*.

24 Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab* 28: 290.

25 *Nihāyat al-arab*, 28: 290.

26 *Khiṭaṭ*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid, 3: 60; *Ittī’āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 55–56.

27 Reported by Maqrīzī in his *Ittī’āz*, (Cairo, 1973), 3: 84. On this incident see Walker, “Succession to Rule in the Shi’ite Caliphate,” *JARCE* 32(1995): 239–264, pp. 248–58, [reprinted in Walker, *Fatimid History and Ismaili Doctrine* (Variorum, 2008)] and the references there (particularly to the earlier study of it by S. M. Stern).

others who were Twelvers (the *fuqahā' al-ismā'īliyya wa'l-imāmiyya*, as the text puts it). The list includes by name the chief *dā'ī* (*dā'ī al-du'āt*), a group of additional Ismaili *dā'īs*, the supervisor of the *Dār al-'ilm*, the *faqīh* of the Ismailiyya, his associate, the *sharīf* Ibn 'Aqīl, the elders (*shuyūkh*) of the 'Alid nobles (*shurafā'*), the chief *qāḍī*, the sons of al-Mustanṣir (i.e. the great uncles of the caliph), a group of the caliph's kin, the *kātib al-daṣṭ* (head of the chancery), and a selection of commanders. By including the names of each individual, this list offers more social information than those cited previously.

One more example, a particularly tantalizing case, comes from early in the reign of al-Ḥākim. Because it appears to describe a regularly-held sitting of the court, the information in it is unusually significant. Al-Maqrīzī reports that:

A group of those who were accustomed to visit al-'Azīz at night came to al-Ḥākim. They were ordered to frequent the palace at the time of his audiences, which then extended into the evening. The first such night was Wednesday, the 7th of Jumādā al-Awwal [390] [16 Feb. 1000]. Those who came included the general Ḥusayn, the general Faḍl b. Ṣāliḥ, and al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan al-Bāzyār, who took up seats to the right, first Ḥusayn, next Faḍl and then Ibn al-Bazyar. After them was Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī, followed by the *qāḍī* 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān. On the left sat Rajā' and Mas'ūd, two sons of Abu'l-Ḥusayn, beyond them the physician Abu'l-Faṭḥ Maṣṣūr b. Ma'shar, and the clerk Abu'l-Ḥusayn b. al-Maghribī and his brother. Placed close by were a number of relatives of the caliph and a group of commanders, among which were Manjūtakīn and some others. Next, another group including Ibn Ṭāhir al-Wazzān came in. This same order remained in effect until the 12th of Jumādā al-Ākhira.²⁸

In contrast to the reports about processions, the information here (almost certainly from al-Musabbiḥī) describes the court in session at the palace. Assuming we can locate additional material about the individuals named, about their relationship first to the state and second to each other, we can begin to understand the social underpinnings of the dynasty itself. Ultimately, merely having an account of an event or a session of the court, even with names of known individuals, is only a first step in the search for personal data about the holders of these offices and how they relate to one another socially. In most cases we do not even know, of those mentioned in various contexts, which were Ismailis (other than the head of the *da'wa* and the *dā'īs*). For most of the chief judges,

28 *Ittī'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 30–31.

for example, it is possible to track down such information in Ibn Ḥajar's work on the judges of Egypt (the *Rafʿ al-īṣr ʿan quḍāt Miṣr*).²⁹ But for lesser officials we have little or nothing of the kind.

Still, as with the example just cited above, many of the names mentioned in it are of reasonably well-known figures. They clearly represented the elite of the time. At least three of the men—the commander-in-chief, the head of the judiciary, and the leading member of the ʿAlid nobility—appear as participants in the drinking party to be discussed below. The two al-Maghribis belonged to a prominent family of clerks³⁰ all of whom—six or seven in all—were executed in 400/1009–10, with the exception of a son of one of these men. That son Abuʾl-Qāsim managed to flee; later he became quite famous as “al-Wazīr al-Maghribī”. Manjūtakīn was a prominent commander in Syria; three others at one time held the post of *wāsiṭa* (the lesser wazirate) under al-Ḥākim. Two, Faḍl b. Šāliḥ and al-Bāzyār, had briefly served as *wazīrs* to al-ʿAzīz (the former for a few days, the latter for a year and three months). Ibn Maʿshar³¹ had treated al-Ḥākim during an illness and for his effort received 10,000 *dīnārs*, a staggeringly large sum. He then became the caliph's personal doctor, a rank of high standing as is clear from the order of seating. He died four years later in 394/1004 and was replaced by Abū Yaʿqūb b. Anastās, about whom more needs to be said in connection with his death in 397/1007 as a consequence of the same drinking party. Rajāʾ b. Abīʾl-Ḥusayn was put to death in 399/1008–9 for having prayed the supererogatory *tarāwīḥ* prayers during Ramaḍān, thus strongly suggesting that he must have been Sunnī. All in all, in this instance and with this report, we are provided solid information. Admittedly, it comes from a fairly well documented period of Fatimid history, but it illustrates, even so, how scattered information together with an account of the court in session can begin to create a valuable picture of the social elite of the time.

2 Some Preliminary Results of this Line of Inquiry

Of the several questions posed at the start, a few remain quite difficult to study. The religious affiliation of many important figures in the Fatimid government is unclear despite attempts to determine it in each case. A few are obvious, but more are not. There were Ismailis, Twelvers Shīʿis, Sunnīs of various schools,

29 al-ʿAsqalānī, *Rafʿ al-īṣr ʿan quḍāt Miṣr: al-Juzʾ al-awwal fī qismayn*, ed. Ḥamid ʿAbd al-Majīd, et al (Cairo, 1957–1961).

30 On them in general see “al-Maghribī, Banū,” by P. Smoor in the *EI2*.

31 Sometimes read as Ibn Muqshir.

non-Muslims, both Jews and Christians, and many more of an undetermined variety. One obvious conclusion is that adherence to Ismaili Islam, and loyalty to the imam-caliph with full Shīʿī devotion, was not a requirement for government service, or membership in the social elites.

The following three areas of inquiry offer interesting conclusions as well: 1) the role and status of the royal family, 2) the long-term participation of major families, and 3) examples of social interaction out of court.

2.1 *The Royal Family*

It would be almost axiomatic that the social elite surrounding the caliph included, first and perhaps foremost, his extended family, primarily the blood relatives on his father's side. The several accounts quoted above indicate as much with a mention of "relatives of the caliph," "the sons of al-Mustaṣṣir (i.e. the great uncles of the caliph), a group of the caliph's kin," Rāshida, the caliph's aunt. More examples could be added to these. Clearly then the royal family was important quite beyond those sons of the imam-caliph who might have a chance of succeeding to the throne. The evidence we have also shows that the royals preserved their elite status economically as well as socially. However, in contrast to the Abbasid caliph—to cite the main opposition—who could be removed from the caliphate by the military, the Fatimid imam was, in theory, immune to a coup designed to replace him by another member of his family. The Buyid *amīr* Bahā' al-Dawla in 381/991 deposed the caliph al-Ṭā'ī and substituted for him al-Qādir, without violating irreparably the office or harming the Abbasid dynasty in the long run. Succession to the Ismaili line of imams, however, depended on the explicit designation by the preceding holder of that position of the person who follows, normally his son (though not necessarily his eldest son). Collateral members of the family have no share in the succession, nor can they have. A coup by one branch against another, one brother against a brother already seated on the throne, was unthinkable.

And yet it is fairly certain that the Fatimid caliphs regarded their own family with circumspection and caution not untypical of other monarchs. The royals were guarded carefully and kept in check. Nonetheless they were evidently pampered and showered with the privileges of wealth and elite status. Still, most curiously, no blood relative of the caliph, aside from the son or sons groomed for possible succession, seems to have held a position of authority, an office of government or a military command. Were they simply decorative? That appears to be the only conclusion possible. But, as a consequence of their lack of participation in the actual functioning of the government, the information about the royal family, individually or collectively, is relatively elusive.

A good place to begin is with its size. About that we know, firstly, the names of the sons of the caliphs, though usually only the names. The men of the dynastic family, those who did not become caliphs—the brothers, uncles, and great uncles—should be of interest. Again the information about them is scant. Because none were ever appointed to positions of authority, unfortunately, there exist for them almost no obituary notices. Moreover, since they could and did marry, as was not the case with Fatimid women, and they did produce offspring, their estates were inherited by their children. Accordingly, there was no reason for a government audit of their holdings. Thus their affairs were largely private and remained so, and no record of these inheritances entered the public domain.

By the time of al-Ḥākim's accession to the caliphate, five generations of earlier imams had, even without the participation of the female members, produced a burgeoning, extended royal family. Al-Mahdi left seven sons, including his successor al-Qā'im, who had himself seven more. Al-Mansur produced five sons; al-Mu'izz four. Those who lived to adulthood might well have in turn generated progeny, as is clear in several known cases involving the descendants of these same sons. The first three caliphs had between them sixteen daughters in all. There were thus potentially also many unmarried aunts and great aunts.

Immediately subsequent generations were thinly populated at the highest level. Al-ʿAzīz produced two sons, but only one survived. He left also a daughter, the famous Sitt al-Mulk. Al-Ḥākim likewise had two sons, of which one survived, and at least one daughter. Al-Ẓāhir had only one son. From here to the end of the dynasty the information about daughters is all but none existent. The sons are another matter. Al-Mustanṣir, partly as a benefit of a long reign, left as many as seventeen in all.

Inadvertently, al-Maqrīzī provides an unusual kind of evidence in this matter. When Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn brought a formal end to Fatimid rule in 567/1171, he ordered all available members of the former ruling family arrested and incarcerated in the Dār al-Muẓaffar, males and females to be kept separated. Obviously the females needed to be imprisoned for some months only. The males, however, were held until death. In the year 608/1211, the sixty-three individuals that remained were transferred to the citadel. Of these but forty were living in 623/1226 when an interested party decided to make an inventory of them. Al-Maqrīzī provides us that list and it gives the names of the surviving Fatimids with full genealogy back to al-Mustanṣir.³² Using it one can obtain the beginnings of a family tree for, at least, a portion of the later Fatimids. No such record is complete, however, but it does confirm for us that al-Mustanṣir

32 *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1973), 3: 347–48; AFSayyid ed. 3: 413–16.

had a great many sons.³³ It proves, moreover, that at the end—the time when it was abolished—there were a notably large number of Fatimids. As sons of al-ʿĀḍid alone, we can count seventeen, possibly eighteen, even though he was barely twenty-one when he died. It is slightly ironic that, over the final decades of the dynasty, when the strict rule of succession solely by designation broke down, and when with strife and murder among the royal family became more common, it proliferated.

Fatimid royal women, unfortunately, rarely appear in the histories. Sitt al-Mulk is an exception, notably so. Two daughters of the caliph al-Muʿizz are also prominent in our records. Both died long after him in 442/1050, at the age by then of about ninety. The first, called al-Sayyida Rāshida, left an estate worth an astonishing 1,700,000 *dīnārs*, a figure well beyond that for most rulers and kings of the time. The lady's wardrobe contained 30,000 silk gowns, 12,000 robes of unmixed colors, and a hundred glass jars full of camphor. She was, says one historian who reports this, even so quite devout, living off her spinning and not from funds of the government. Her sister, ʿAbda, died three days later. Both were born in Raqqāda in the Maghrib. The second sister also left such a massive estate it took, says the report, forty Egyptian pounds of sealing wax and thirty reams of paper to complete the inventory of all items found in it, among which were 1,300 pieces of silver, each weighing 10,000 *dirhāms*, four hundred swords embossed in gold, 30,000 pieces of Sicilian cloth, gems of which there was an *ardabb* [24 *ṣāʿ*] of emeralds. And yet throughout her life she ate nothing but bread mixed with some meat broth.

The evidence for the astonishing wealth of Fatimid royal women includes more examples but mainly, as in these cases, in connection with the obituary notice of their deaths. One more obituary of the same type concerns the daughter of al-Ḥākim. Known as Sitt Miṣr (the Lady of Egypt), she died in 455 (1063), long after her father, leaving again an impressive estate, among which were 8,000 female servants, over 30,000 Chinese vases all full of musk, unique gems, one of which was a piece of ruby weighing ten *mithqāls*. Her landholdings yielded an income of 50,000 *dīnārs* annually. Yet she, like her great aunts before her, was noted for virtue, in her case for generosity and munificence.

For the long run of Fatimid history there are other examples of the kind. What is rarely stated, however, is that all the estates in question, as fabulous as they were, became the property of the government. These women had no heirs; none had ever married. And, because they live so long, their brothers and other immediate family were deceased. In the case of Rāshida and ʿAbda,

33 It does not give a record of those who died without issue, or of those who left Egypt, or in one way or another did not get included in this highly unusual survey of survivors.

whose wealth obviously engendered the envy of each successive caliph, it would be al-Mustanşir who eventually benefited. It is most curious that we have no evidence of any of these women marrying; or producing offspring. Although no written policy exists to confirm it—there is in the literature no discussion of a rule to that effect—evidently Fatimid royal women, here mainly the daughters of the caliphs, were not permitted to marry. In contrast to the royal families elsewhere, whose fathers regularly contract marriage alliances through their daughters to enhance their prestige or solidify treaties of mutual association, the Fatimids never engaged in such a practice. The reason for this attitude eludes us. Since dynastic succession and the transference of the imamate occurred strictly by designation, not by primogeniture or any other means that allow either the automatic inheritance of the caliphate by the oldest son, or by any member of the family not explicitly chosen by the preceding imam, the possibility of some daughter spawning a contender was unlikely in the extreme. And in fact it never happened.

But also, if none were married, their estates can have only derived from personal inheritance, gifts, and the careful management of their holdings. By law these women, as daughters, like also wives, would have inherited a portion, less than males but not apparently negligible in these cases, of the estate of their fathers and husbands. If the father was the Fatimid caliph, such estates might have been enormous. The size of his daughter's holdings may thus provide some indication of al-Ḥākim's own estate, remembering that she would have received substantially less than her brother, the caliph al-Zāhir. The holdings of the two aunts hints likewise at the extreme wealth of the dynastic family as a whole.

One report that ought to be included here suggests that the royal family could and did create its own social network and that the caliph monitored its activities most carefully. In the year 392/1002, comments al-Maqrīzī,

that year ... 'Abd al-A'lā, son of the prince Hāshim who was a son of the caliph al-Manşūr, received permission to leave town to visit one of his estates. Al-Ḥākim himself gave this permission to his cousin who went out with a group of his boon companions. Al-Ḥākim sent with them a spy to report on their activities. The party traveled to the place of their recreation and began to eat and drink. A part of their story is that one of the sons of al-Mughāzili, the astronomer, said to Ibn Hāshim, "There is no doubt that the caliphate ought to be yours; you are the imam of this age." When they got back, Ibn Hāshim went to see al-Ḥākim. When he had taken a seat, al-Ḥākim pulled out from under a cushion an unsheathed

sword and struck him with it. Ibn Hāshim was carried to his own house and there wrote seeking to be excused for whatever crime had been reported about him. He swore that he had been struck even though he himself was not at fault. He begged for permission for a doctor to treat his wound and that was granted. However, when he had recovered, he sought permission to go to the baths, a permission granted. Al-Ḥākim sent to the baths someone to slay him there and bring back his head. He then turned against those who had been present at the party; they were killed and burned. Among them were the sons of al-Mughāzili, Ibn Khariṭa, the son of the [old] *wazīr* Abu'l-Faḍl b. al-Furāt, and a number of young Kutāma.³⁴

Here then is solid evidence that collateral members of the royal family were watched closely and kept under some form of strict supervision—as is proven by this prince needing to ask permission to leave town and to visit his own estate—and yet they managed, even so, to form their own social networks of friends and supporters.

2.2 *The Long-term Participation of Major Families*

Although much work remains to be done on this topic, it is already relatively easy to identify many instances of a family that contributed at least two successive generations to government service under the Fatimids. It is true from the earliest decades to the end. Often such service by the later member follows immediately that of the earlier, but not infrequently it skips over an intervening period. Occasionally we have a record of individuals from the same family rising to the highest positions generation after generation.

The most prominent case is that of justly famous Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and his clan whose hold on the office of chief judge ran through six individuals over four generations.³⁵ Al-Nu'mān entered Fatimid service as far back as 313/925. From 341/952, when he moved from being a regional judge (western Tripoli), to al-Manṣūriyya, the capital of the empire, he was recognized as the highest legal authority in the Fatimid domain.³⁶ Two of his sons, first 'Alī, until his death in 374/984, and then Muḥammad became chief *qāḍī* one after the other. Upon the latter's death in 389/999, the former's son al-Ḥusayn assumed the same lofty rank. He was coincidentally also the head of the *da'wa*, the *dā'ir*

34 *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 47.

35 The pioneering study of this family's influence is that of Richard Gottheil, "A Distinguished Family of Fatimide Cadis (al-Nu'man) in the Tenth Century," *JAOs* 27 (1906): 217–296.

36 He died in Cairo in 363/974.

al-duʿāt.³⁷ The caliph removed him in 394/1004 for his cousin Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmān's son ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who held the same two offices until his fall from grace in 398/1008. It is this same ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz who was mentioned as attending the sessions of the court in 390—his status was high as a judge even prior to his appointment as chief justice. He was also later a participant, with his brother-in-law, in the notorious drinking party discussed below. His son Qāsim expected to succeed his father but was passed over twice, before eventually landing the position of chief *dāʿī* in 414/1023–24. In 418/1027 he was given also the post of chief justice, which he lost and regained at least once. His tenure finally came to an end in 441/1049, a date which seems to signal the termination of this family's influence. Still it was a remarkable run. The al-Nuʿmān clan preserved their place in Fatimid society and in the government at the highest levels for a century and a quarter.

Another example, much less well known, is that of the al-Fāriqīs. Members of this family rose high enough to hold the same offices, that of chief justice and head of the *daʿwa*, and also, in addition, the post of *wazīr*. The first name in our sources is that of al-Ḥākim's tutor Saʿīd b. Mālīk al-Fāriqī (d. 391/1001). Two of his sons rose to become chief justice; one of them, Mālīk, was at the same time head of the *daʿwa*. Three sons of the other, ʿAbd al-Ḥākim, became chief justice, two were also *wazīr*, and one of the latter was twice head of the *daʿwa*. A member of this generation, ʿAbd al-Karīm, produced three sons who attained prominence, one, Aḥmad, becoming chief justice on seven different occasions and *wazīr* probably five times, the last in 461/1067–68.³⁸

2.3 *The Drinking Party*

Quite without warning, near the end of his report covering the year 397 (Sept. 1007–Sept. 1008), al-Maqrīzī comments tersely:

In it [397] Yaʿqūb b. Naṣṭās, the Christian, died. He was al-Ḥākim's personal physician. He was found drunk (*sakrān*) in a pool of water. He was carried to a church in a coffin and the town grieved over him. Then they returned him to his house and interred him in it. All the notables of the states (*ahl al-dawla*) marched in his funeral procession, along with a multitude of lighted candles and many censors of incense. He was the

37 On the relationship between these two offices, as well as more about the men who held them, see Walker, "The Relationship between Chief *Qāḍī* and Chief *Dāʿī* under the Fatimids." Now included in this volume, see above.

38 For all the details see the study by Walker, "Another Family of Fatimid Chief *Qāḍīs*: The al-Fāriqīs," *Journal of Druse Studies*. Vol. 1, no. 1 (2000): 49–69; reprinted in revised form in *Fatimid History and Ismaili Doctrine* (Ashgate, Variorum, 2008).

physician of his time, highly knowledgeable in the subject. He was also a prodigy of memory. Although a tune was played for him only once, he would memorize it. If a hundred singers each sang him one song in a single session, he would memorize all that they sang and could thereafter discourse on their melodies and poetry. He also had a gift for playing music. He was the sole doctor serving al-Ḥākim and he thus became rich, leaving in excess of 20,000 *dīnārs* in cash, not counting clothing and other things.³⁹

It is odd that this is all that al-Maqrīzī says for surely he knew more of the story, as, for certain, did his contemporary Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, who tells us the rest of it in his biographical notice for the chief justice ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmān, the latter a man who was himself a party to what happened.⁴⁰ In fact Ibn Ḥajar reveals that he has his information from al-Musabbihī, who in turn claims that he heard it from the astronomer Abu'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ismāʿīl al-Tabarānī, who was also present at the event.

One evening late in the summer of 1008, friends gather at the abode of al-Ḥusayn b. Jawhar. The house lay out of Cairo next to a small lake in the area between the city wall and the Nile. Al-Ḥusayn was at the time the chief executive of the Fatimid empire, a position called then the *wāsiṭa*, a kind of lesser *wazīr*, but nonetheless powerful. This man was the son of the famous Slavic slave from Sicily, Jawhar, who had risen to command of the Fatimid army that conquered Egypt, which he thereafter ruled for four years—it was he who built Cairo—prior to the arrival of the caliph and his court. Upon his father's death in 381/991, al-Ḥusayn inherited much of his father's status. With the advent of al-Ḥākim, he assumed a prominent role with the title "Commander-in-chief" (*qā'id al-quwwād*). He is often mentioned in the lists of those at various events (as in the sessions of court cited above). More might be said about him but he was, in short, wealthy, well connected and at the highest rank.

That fateful night his brother-in-law ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz came to visit. This man, born, like al-Ḥusayn, in North Africa (in 355/966), had likewise inherited his family's status. His grandfather was Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān; his father had been the chief justice for many years; and, after a long period of service in the judiciary, now he also, since 394/1003–04, held that same position, which included supervision of all judges, the *mazālim* courts, the endowed trusts, the mint, weights

39 Itti'āz, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 70.

40 It is available in Ibn Ḥajar's *Rafʿ al-iṣr* as well as in Ayman Fuad Sayyid's collection of quotations from al-Musabbihī which he called "Nuṣūṣ qā'i'a min Akhbār Miṣr li-l-Musabbihī," *AI* 17 (1981): 1–54, pp. 24–25.

and measures, and mosques throughout the empire. In addition he was head of the Ismaili *da'wa* (the *dā'ī al-du'āt*), a separate but also major responsibility. Like his host, 'Abd al-'Azīz was well off, well connected (two of his sons were married to two daughters of the general Faḍl b. Ṣāliḥ), and powerful.

Another guest was Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī al-Ḥasanī, the leading figure among the 'Alīd (*ashrāf*) nobility, who was greatly esteemed by the Fatimids. When sons were born to al-Ḥākim in 395, it was he who performed the '*aqīqa* ceremony (in company with al-Ḥusayn b. Jawhar). When the Fatimid army took Egypt, his father had been the head of the Ashrāf there. Eventually the son inherited the same position.

Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī was the court astronomer and was especially close to the caliph, who had a special love for this subject. Ibn Yūnus, the greatest astronomer of the day, lived in Egypt at the time but was so odd a character, so idiosyncratic and bizarre in his behavior, 'Alī served the public function of this office better, although the two astronomers were evidently personal friends as well as professional colleagues.

As the story unfolds, these four men are eating dinner at al-Ḥusayn's house, which is more likely a lodge, out by the river, when a servant enters the room to say that a man is at the door asking if he can join them. They are only too happy to receive him for he is Abū Ya'qūb Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Anastās (Nastās), the Christian doctor mentioned already. He like them comes from privilege, money and high rank, a member therefore of their inner circle. Moreover, he is well known as a *bon vivant*, and a talented musician to boot! They are quite happy to see him.

Soon the food and table are removed to be replaced by fruit and drink which they consume merrily. As the evening progresses enjoyably, they are, as the report says, soon enough drunk. The *qāḍī* decides to depart and does so, but al-Husayn and al-Rassī fall asleep more or less in place. Only the good doctor carries on, playing, singing and, of course, drinking, until he, finally overcome with intoxication, makes his way out to search for his mule. The servants, however, bring him the mule of al-Rassī, which he refuses. The poor servants then ask him to return inside to wait while they locate his. He goes back in and lies down next to al-Rassī and passes out. Later one of the servants goes to check on them. Raising the curtain around them, he finds al-Rassī but not Abū Ya'qūb. The man enters and begins to search for the missing doctor. Finally someone spots the doctor's clothes in the water. They call for a servant who knows how to swim. That man goes into the lake and retrieves the body. It is clear that the doctor came out in the night thinking to go for a swim and that, in trying to pull his *jalabiyya* up over his head, he, still quite drunk, tipped over and fell into the water where he drowned, tangled up in his own clothes.

The alarms sound. Those present immediately send for the *qāḍī* who returns at once. All know that: not only is drinking intoxicating beverages strictly forbidden, but that Abū Ya‘qūb was a particular favorite of the caliph. His death is an obvious tragedy and also an instant scandal. The great men pick the astronomer to go tell al-Ḥākim. As he is explaining to the caliph how the doctor brought about his own death, the other three arrive on foot and out of uniform, each to swear up and down that they had no responsibility for it, al-Ḥusayn and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz backing al-Rassī and he them.

There is no indication that drinking parties of this type were not uncommon among the elite but surely, even if they were, given al-Ḥākim’s determination to outlaw alcoholic drinks, we would normally have heard nothing of them. It took an accident and the scandal it revealed to open a window onto their existence and the behavior of the men who attended them. It helps that the doctor was Christian, someone who might rightly, in normal times, drink wine; his reputation was not thus jeopardized by the consumption of alcohol. The rest, however, did not have that protection. That the chief justice, a man who was also head of the *da‘wa*, might have participated and become intoxicated appears hard to explain. Perhaps the same is true of the others. But ultimately that is a minor issue. For us now this event suggests most clearly the evidence of a social elite in action. Its members, all powerful figures in the caliph’s court, gather together in friendship, to eat and drink quite separate from both their public duties, the affairs of government, and their loyalty to the ruler, who is here the Fatimid imam-caliph. The ties that bind them, moreover, are not any of those that might operate under other forms of rule or another dynasty. An ideological bond is not evident, for example. With the exception of the *qāḍī*, we cannot be sure if any of the others were Ismaili. Ethnicity is not a factor. Al-Ḥusayn was a Slav; not so the rest. Military service, patronage, land ownership, seems not to be involved. And yet wealth, inherited status and rank are certainly there. The Fatimid court in its urban setting had engendered an aristocracy that had come into existence quite apart from the caliphate, although symbiotically related to it, and, although certainly not in opposition, nonetheless largely separated from the military, two of the other poles of power in the empire.

3 Conclusions

The Fatimids typically proclaimed their right to rule with lavish ostentation. The caliph’s court began with show and maintained its extravagant display throughout its two and a half centuries. Ceremony and ritual spectacle remained

a cornerstone of the dynasty's claim to preeminence. At the center there was always the imam-caliph, a semi-sacred figure from a revered lineage; for some of his followers he held the ultimate authority in all matters, both religious and worldly. He was both pope and king together. Yet the empire he ruled comprised a diverse and mixed population: Ismailis, non-Ismaili Sunnis and Shī'īs, Christians of various sects, Jews, all further divided by ethnicity. Early attempts to impose a religious standard for full participation in Fatimid government service failed miserably. Instead, whether by policy or not, the court surrounding and supporting this caliphate settled for an eclectic mixture representing the diversity of its population. Fatimid armies prior to the advent of Badr al-Jamālī in 466/1074 and the commencement of a military wazirate, rarely threatened the state; an army coup from within, so common elsewhere, was not as likely here. However, as the direct power of the imam waned, even while the lofty status of the office was, in theory, preserved, a social elite consisting of those with inherited rank and wealth took over. This new aristocracy is most clearly apparent in the details of the drinking party, outlined above, but it existed at other times as well. Additional evidence suggests that it included a large selection of royal relatives, who belonged to the elite but had no role in government, as well as a continued presence of members of major families, such as the al-Nu'māns, the al-Fāriqīs, and many others, who staffed the higher ranks of the bureaucracy.

In truth, however, few or perhaps no members of the elite just described possessed a status earned or held independently of the ruling dynasty. They had all come to high rank because of it and the personal favor of the caliph. None were leaders of a major ethnic block and none had ties to land and territory. Absent the ruler's approval of them and his continued desire for their service to him and his government, they all might fall just as quickly as they had risen. It is especially significant that the long duration of the al-Nu'mān clan is exceptional; few others lasted more than two generations, typically a father and son. Severe limitations on the royal family also meant it had little chance of playing a critical role in the progress of the dynasty. They simply had almost no responsibility for the course of events. Therefore whatever new aristocracy might have been in the process of formation, it never attained a self-sustaining existence. If and when the Fatimid court ceased to exist, permanently or even temporarily, it died as well.

The Caliph al-ʿAzīz and His Daughter Sitt al-Mulk: A Case of Delayed but Eventual Succession to Rule by a Woman

1 Introduction¹

In his youth the future al-ʿAzīz, then merely the third son of the caliph al-Muʿizz, acquired a concubine, most likely a Greek-speaking captive, and produced with her a daughter who was to become the famous Sitt al-Mulk. Not only did her mother remain al-ʿAzīz's favorite long after he rose to the Fatimid throne in 975, she remained so until her death twenty years later, and the daughter continued throughout to hold a claim on his attention many considered unusually intense and extraordinary. This favor, combined with her own political acumen and sharp intelligence, enabled Sitt al-Mulk to exercise authority throughout her lifetime until she finally became the real ruler of the empire upon the disappearance of her eccentric half-brother, al-Ḥākim, in 1021. Drawing on chronicles written by both Fatimid and anti-Fatimid historians, this chapter considers the context for Sitt al-Mulk's extraordinary rise to power amid the unusual dynamics of the Fatimid royal family. It reveals the implausibility of accounts that attempt to discredit her and demonstrates that when at last she governed the empire she did so quite competently through a difficult time of transition.

2 The Origin and Rise of Sitt al-Mulk

In the year 969, Nizār the son of the Fatimid caliph al-Muʿizz then residing in the Maghrib, acquired a Greek concubine and with her in September of the following year produced a child, a girl. The mother thus became an *Umm walad* indicating her new, more favorable status as a mother of royal offspring.² In

1 Originally published as "The Fatimid Caliph al-ʿAzīz and His Daughter Sitt Al-Mulk: A Case of Delayed but Eventual Succession to Rule by a Woman," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 4 (2011): 30–44.

2 Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1:292; Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 175; Halm, "Le destin de la Princesse Sitt al-Mulk," p. 69.

fact that same daughter was to grow up and become the famous Sitt al-Mulk, a figure of such importance over a thousand years afterward she was to merit her own chapter in Fatima Mernissi's *Forgotten Queens of Islam*.

In the beginning her prospects were not particularly auspicious. Her father was merely the third son, with little likelihood of succeeding to the caliphate. However, about the time of her birth, the eldest son, Tamīm, was discovered to have some physical impediment that prevented his having progeny. The exact nature of his defect is unknown but, according to the Shī'ī principle applied by the Fatimid line, the reigning imam must engender offspring or be capable of it. Still, even with the exclusion of Tamīm, another older brother 'Abdallāh assumed the position of likely heir apparent in his place.

In 973, only a few years afterward, the whole of the Fatimid court moved *en masse* from al-Manṣūriyya in Tunisia to the newly founded imperial capital in Egypt, Cairo. Few or none were left behind. Among the travelers in this massive caravan was the young girl, her mother and father on their way to take up life in the palace in the newly constructed city on the Nile. Once there, however, Nizār's status was no higher; 'Abdallāh was widely expected to succeed until rather abruptly he took sick and died, leaving the succession suddenly up in the air. Soon thereafter in 975, al-Mu'izz himself also died, shortly before which he had finally designated Nizār the heir apparent, soon to become al-'Azīz bi-llāh, the new Fatimid imam-caliph. Sitt al-Mulk's prospect just as quickly brightened.

Over the next two decades, Sitt al-Mulk's mother retained, by all the evidence, the affection and attention of the father. Nonetheless, he would marry at least once and he produced two male offspring by other women, one of whom would become the next caliph with the regnal name al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh. Significantly, the names and identities of the wives remain totally obscure. Only Sitt al-Mulk's mother appears in our sources. Like her daughter she is known solely by a kind of title: al-Sayyida al-'Azīziyya "Azīz's Lady." Often, in the literature of the time, she is simply al-Sayyida, the Lady.

As this woman's role, and that of her family, helps explain the rise of Sitt al-Mulk, it is helpful to learn as much as about it as possible. She had at least two brothers both of whom, thanks to her influence on al-'Azīz, were in January of 986 appointed to exalted ranks in the Melkite Orthodox church hierarchy.³ One of them, Orestes, became Melkite patriarch of Jerusalem, a position he held for twenty years. Four years prior to his death, the Fatimids sent him to Constantinople as part of a delegation seeking a peace treaty. With the treaty concluded, however, Orestes elected to stay in the Byzantine capital. He died

3 Yahyā, II, 207.

there four years later in 1006. Surely he spoke Greek, as likely did all of his family. The other brother Arsensius was named in 986 Metropolitan of Fustat and Cairo.⁴ In June of 1000, upon the death of the previous patriarch, the see of Alexandria fell vacant. Al-ʿAzīz insisted that the post be given to Arsenius and the Melkite community of Egypt accepted. He went from Cairo to be consecrated but soon returned to reside in the monastery of Qusayr just south of Fustat (where Melkite patriarchs of Alexandria often lived as well).

New information not previously used in this regard mentions Sitt al-Mulk's maternal grandfather, though not by name.⁵ In the same year as the appointments of the brothers, al-ʿAzīz sent an order to his governor of Sicily Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad ordering him "to turn over to the monk (*al-Rāhib*), who was the father of his concubine al-Sayyida al-ʿAzīziyya, a fortress (*qalaʿ*) that Jaʿfar's grandfather had conquered. He was also to give him all that he held of things connected thereto of old or newly acquired." The monk, continues this account, then went to Sicily (presumably from Egypt). Jaʿfar settled him properly, delegating the necessary items to him and preventing any one from interfering with him. The Muslims were not to impede his free movement. That, says the report, lasted four months. Finally Jaʿfar gathered up all the old, infirm and sick Christians and sent them to this man, who subsequently moved to Constantinople.⁶

The exact meaning of this report is puzzling. Did this grandfather have a previous claim to that particular fortress, perhaps indicating that the family had originally come from Sicily? Were they all acquired, like so many others, as captives in the wars of conquest? If so were they all formerly enslaved persons? The Lady's status as a concubine suggests as much. That her father eventually moved to Constantinople, as did his son much later, points to a Greek connection. The likely answer to such questions is that the whole family had been captured in Sicily prior to 965, the year of Jaʿfar's grandfather's death. Evidently, they were members of the Greek-speaking nobility, a fact that, even in slavery, conferred on them a special status, which in part helps explain their subsequent rise to positions of power.

4 In Ibn Abī Uṣaybīʿa's biography of a famous medical authority in Egypt at the time of al-ʿAzīz, Sahlān b. Kaysān, we find a report of this man's funeral at which Arsenius appeared and marched. In the Arabic it calls him "the brother of the Sayyid". The later redactor did not know that he was the brother of the Sayyida and so changed her gender by lopping off the feminine ending (*ʿUyun al-anbiyāʾ*, p. 503).

5 Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, 3: 62, no. 1081.

6 Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad died in 985–6/375 not long after the father had moved back to Sicily, which, assuming that his protection was thus compromised, might explain the relative shortness of his stay there.

Sitt al-Mulk apparently remained all her life in close contact with her Greek Christian family roots, despite being herself Muslim.⁷ A church in Alexandria that her half-brother al-Ḥākim ordered destroyed was rebuilt just after the end of his reign in 1021. It needed vestments, chalices and other implements for the service because its own were long gone. She sent it some she had inherited from her maternal uncle Arsenius.⁸

Not only was her father unable to resist the influence of her mother but he is described as so devoted to his daughter that he did not (could not) refuse anything she asked of him. The chronicler Ibn Zāhir comments: *wa kāna al-ʿAzīz yuḥibbuhā ḥubban shadīdan wa lā yaruddu lahā qawlan wa la maṭlaban* (“al-ʿAzīz adored her mightily and denied her nothing”).⁹ Her father singled her out by giving the western of the two royal palaces in Cairo to her exclusively and creating a special guard force—a separate regiment—for her use called the Qaṣriyya.¹⁰

Perhaps the best evidence of the closeness of all three—father, mother, and daughter—is what happened when the mother died in the middle of Shawwal of 385 (mid-November 995). Al-ʿAzīz was then in the process of assembling, at Bilbays, a vast army for a final campaign into Syria with the hope of eventually moving from there into Iraq. As part of his planning, the greater portion of his personal entourage and court joined him for what proved an extended stay as preparations were made. Al-Sayyida al-ʿAzīziyya died while all were camped at Mina Jaʿfar near Bilbays. She was then transported back to the palace for interment in the royal mausoleum accompanied by the caliph and Sitt al-Mulk. Al-ʿAzīz himself prayed over her, placed her in the crypt and sealed her tomb with heavy gold and gems. Her burial shroud cost an extravagant 10,000 dinars

7 The insistence of many authors, contrary to solid evidence against it, that Sitt al-Mulk’s mother was also the mother of al-Ḥākim implies that he, too, had Christian roots. The Christianity of his mother became a part of his legend. A Christian writer in Europe in the first half of the eleventh century, Rodulfus Glaber, who possessed scant real knowledge of the east but a fervid polemical imagination, not necessarily against al-Ḥākim but the Jews of Lyon, who he insists put the caliph up to the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, claims to have known that she was called Maria and that she was instrumental in the rebuilding of the church, in part to make amends for her son’s destruction of it. William of Tyre, the great medieval historian of the crusades, comments that al-Ḥākim ordered it torn down to prove his *bona fides* as a Muslim against the Christianity of his own mother.

8 Yahyā himself reports that when the churches of Alexandria were rebuilt after their destruction by al-Ḥākim and, after he had disappeared in 1021, Sitt al-Mulk sent the new patriarch vestments, books and silver objects that she possessed because of her maternal uncle Arsenius.

9 Ibn Zāfir, *al-duwal al-munqatiʿa*, p. 41.

10 Maqrīzī, *Khitat*, AFS ed., 2: 495.

and the woman who washed the deceased took away as her fee what was under or on the body. It alone was valued at 6,000 dinars. In addition, over the next seven days, 2,000 dinars were distributed to the poor. The Qurʾan readers who recited at her tomb received 3,000. A group of poets eulogized her, each of whom received a reward, some as much as 500 dinars. The caliph returned to his encampment but his daughter remained with her mother mourning at her grave for a month. The father came to visit her almost every day.¹¹

During the next year, which proved to be the last of al-ʿAzīz's reign, Sitt al-Mulk's position did not diminish. She was then twenty-five and in full control of her domain, which, among other factors, provided her substantial wealth and power. Even so the eventual succession of her half-brother was not in doubt. Although only ten, he more than once stood in for his father and he had, moreover, been properly designated heir apparent. In addition, as al-ʿAzīz sensed his own approaching death, he carefully prepared for the enthronement of his son, in part by enlisting the aid of the three most eminent men of the court, one of whom was the chief justice of the empire itself.

Nonetheless, the death occurred not in the capital but at Bilbays, thus creating some anxiety about the possibility of trouble and opposition. The new caliph was after all by then a child of only eleven years. Immediately, those in the camp hastened to depart for Cairo. Sitt al-Mulk set off at once accompanied by the Qaṣriyya, her special guard. Why and what happened next does not, in the aggregate of the reports we have, suggest anything untoward. However, a Syrian source claims that she sought to instigate a coup in order to install by force the son of her father's brother ʿAbdallāh, with whom she was romantically involved. The powerful eunuch Barjawān, caretaker of the young al-Ḥākim, learned, so this story goes, of the plot and seized her to prevent it. He sent her, guarded by a thousand soldiers, back to her palace in Cairo, thereafter making sure that the people swore allegiance to al-Ḥākim.¹²

Several features of this account reveal its malicious anti-Fatimid purpose and no other evidence supports it. What actually happened in the crisis caused by the death of al-ʿAzīz was more of a mad scramble by all the parties in an effort to reach Cairo as soon as possible. Sitt al-Mulk and her group were the first, arriving in the middle of the night; with her was her own the Qaṣriyya. Among the group was the chief justice, Raydān the royal parasol bearer, and Abū Saʿīd Maymūn Dubba, the chief of police.¹³ Possibly, as in one other

11 Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 172; n. 571.

12 Ibn al-Qalānisi, *Dhayl taʾrīkh Dimashq*, p. 44.

13 Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār Miṣr*, pp. 173–74.

report,¹⁴ the chief eunuch of the main palace, Yānis, temporarily blocked their entrance to it, but nothing indicates anything like the plot cited by the Syrian historian.

That Sitt al-Mulk was infatuated with her cousin seems to belong to the kind of claim that would in another situation ring true because it is a standard of its type. She was already twenty-six and unmarried. The natural liaison for her in any case would be a son of her father's brother. Here, however, we encounter an interesting feature of the Fatimid royal family. Although we have no stated doctrine to work with, there is at the same time no evidence that any daughter of a caliph ever married. We do know about several, particularly because of the vast wealth each accumulated and left without an heir. In the previous chapter I included the details concerning the estates of two of al-Ḥākim's paternal aunts, daughters of the caliph al-Mu'izz, who died long after him in 1050. Both ladies' holdings were well beyond that for most rulers of the time.¹⁵ Note that our report specifically cites the amounts of sealing wax and reams of paper to complete an inventory,¹⁶ which thus became part of a public record since it involved an acquisition by the government.

The evidence for the wealth of Fatimid royal women includes more examples but mainly, as in these cases, in connection with obituary notices. Yet one more concerns the daughter of al-Ḥākim himself, who again left an impressive estate, landholdings alone yielding an annual income of 50,000 dinars annually.¹⁷

These women had no heirs; none had ever married. And it is most curious that we have no evidence of any of these women marrying or producing offspring. Although no written policy exists to confirm it, evidently Fatimid royal women, here mainly the daughters of the caliphs, were not permitted to marry.

All this, both the fabulous wealth and the celibacy, applied evidently also to Sitt al-Mulk. However, in contrast, to her paternal aunts and niece, she cultivated a penchant for political power as well.

Her active participation in the affairs of state at least in so far as we can see it, left her vulnerable to charges of the kind put forth by the Syrian chronicler. That a charge was made surely indicates that she was already so prominent

14 Ibn Saʿīd, 54.

15 Figures of great wealth such as those that follow here should be treated with caution and perhaps skepticism. Medieval sources often exaggeration, especially in the literature of gifts and treasures. However, in the three cases at hand, the origin for the numbers reported was a formal written audit conducted of the deceased's estate as it was transferred to the government.

16 *Kitāb al-Dhakhāʾir wa'l-tuhaf*, pp. 241–42; *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, pp. 223–24; Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, ed. AFSayyid 2:373–74.

17 *Kitāb al-Dhakhāʾir wa'l-tuhaf*, p. 240; *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, pp. 222–23.

that an outside observer could get away with suggesting that she planned a coup at that moment of crisis, even if the whole notion was quite unlikely in the extreme.

Once the succession had passed and al-Ḥākim was enthroned, as it turned out, without opposition or protest, the entire focus of our sources centers thereafter on him. Over the subsequent twenty-five years of his reign, Sitt al-Mulk for the most part disappears, although the occasional accusation of some important figure's complicity with her hints at a role for her that we know little or nothing about (although that has not prevented speculation).

In August of 997, Sitt al-Mulk gave her brother a gift of thirty horses with saddles, one studded with gems, another with rock crystal, and the rest with gold, twenty mules with saddles and bridles, fifty eunuch slaves of which ten were Slavs, a hundred wardrobes of clothes, an embellished crown, a decorated hat, many baskets of scents, and a garden made out of silver planted with a variety of trees.¹⁸ It was still quite early in his reign and he was as yet a child. This gift from her was of such extravagance it earned a mention in the later literature about fabulous gifts and treasure.

Two years later in 999, the young caliph granted Sitt al-Mulk fiefs, land holdings, rents and fees for properties in various parts of Egypt valued in excess of 100,000 dinars per year. It represented a gift to her of enormous size.¹⁹ Was it evidence of her brother's regard and generosity? Repayment for her lavish gift given to him earlier? Certainly it would appear that relations between brother and sister remained to this point quite amicable.²⁰

If the relationship soured, as often claimed, there is almost no evidence of that happening. Two men suffered for having a connection to her. The case of al-Jarjarāʾī, who lost both his hands as punishment for mishandling an issue in which she had an interest, does not provide a reason to believe a conflict existed. The other matter resulted in the execution of al-Fāriqī, then the chief justice and leading *dāʿī*. Rumors circulated, it is said, that he used to visit her

18 Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2:25.

19 Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 33.

20 In 1014 Bādis, the Zirid ruler/vassal of the Maghrib on behalf of the Fatimids, prepared and dispatched from Manṣūriyya a magnificent gift destined for al-Ḥākim. Before leaving it was paraded in public and a North African historian could thus offer a description of what was in it. There was also a gift from Umm Mallāl, Bādis's sister, for Sitt al-Mulk, al-Ḥākim's sister. Maqrīzī notes what happened next. The party bringing the gift reached the region of Barqa where they were intercepted by the Banū Qurra and all of it was taken by the tribesmen (Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 110–11).

and that was the cause of his falling out with al-Ḥākim. However it is difficult to substantiate (and also to disprove) claims of this type.²¹

The reign of al-Ḥākim was, as everyone admits, unusual, even bizarre. He issued a long series of rules and regulations some unprecedented in Islamic history. His restrictions on the public movements of women—for example, forbidding cobblers from making or selling footwear for them—imposed a severe hardship on the population. But there are many other features of his policies and here is not the place to review them. Over the final seven years of his rule, he himself changed into a strange ascetic figure, ever generous and accessible, but also tyrannical. In the end he rode out of Cairo one night all but alone, as he frequently did. Only this time he did not return. He had in fact vanished.

Conspiracy theory is an old preoccupation. It serves to explain what is otherwise obscure or unknown; it is also a tool of polemic, a means to denigrate a political or religious opponent. The last days of al-Ḥākim were no exception. The lack of solid information about what actually happened provided an opportunity for the invention of several stories that purported to fill the gap. One among them features Sitt al-Mulk as both the capable administrator who stepped in to preserve the dynasty at a moment of weakness and as the person responsible for the death of her brother. Ibn Zāfir reports that near the end, as a symptom of his pernicious misrule, al-Ḥākim began to threaten his highly competent and intelligent sister and to accuse her of having done such vile things the likes of which had never previously occurred. Although, at the start of his reign she had offered him the best advice and he had followed her opinion, by the end he had changed, becoming more hostile which led in part to the burning and looting of Fustat. According to this account, she was among those who went to him to complain and to try to stop the atrocities. Thereupon his attitude toward her soured; his deference for her seniority disappeared. Instead he castigated her for rumors he had heard about her behavior, things she should not have done. Lately, he said, I have heard reported that men have improperly come to see you in private, that your virginity is now lost. “I have decided to bring a midwife to examine you. If the matter is as I have heard, I will kill you; if it is not so, I will put you in confinement in prison.”²² For

21 Despite ample evidence of the high regard al-Ḥākim had for al-Fāriqī, in the year 1017, after he had held office for six years, nine months and twenty-one days, the Imam ordered his execution. The cause is reported to have been Mālik's visits to the house of Sitt al-Mulk, which the Imam interpreted as in some manner treasonous complicity. Nothing in this affair is quite clear; but it is the only information available to explain al-Fāriqī's sudden fall from favor.

22 Ibn Zāfir, *al-duwal al-munqati'a*, pp. 57–58.

her part, the account continues, fearing that the dynasty—the dynasty of her own father—was in dire peril and that, if the army should rise up and kill her brother, there would be no possibility of succession by a Fatimid, she resolved to seize the initiative. The caliph’s son was already living with her. In extreme secrecy she formed a plan to have al-Ḥākim assassinated and then to kill those who conspired with her to do it. His elevation of a mere cousin, ‘Abd al-Rāḥim Ibn Ilyās, as heir apparent in 1014, added to her sense of urgency, as did his execution of so many of the elite.

Whether it is true or not that she participated in any such plot, eventually Sitt al-Mulk assumed control of the government as it became clear that al-Ḥākim was gone for good. She ensured that her nephew receive the oath of allegiance from the army and bureaucracy, rank upon rank, until all agreed. The slight few who demurred were done away with; any who remained in doubt came around out of fear of her. But her success also fueled further elaboration of the charge that she actually planned and carried out the former caliph’s murder and concealed his body, while at the same time making sure that some evidence of his death surfaced. Several later medieval historians refused to believe anything of the kind, but strongly anti-Fatimid, eastern (i.e. Abbasid) writers showed no reluctance to repeat and embellish such accounts.²³

Sitt al-Mulk herself was already over fifty when her brother disappeared.²⁴ Although the years of his rule may have been difficult for her, she obviously retained her authority and sense of command. She knew that, once the declaration of al-Zāhir’s caliphate was made public, the government could tolerate no doubts or reservations concerning the death of al-Ḥākim. During one of the ceremonies for the swearing of allegiance to al-Zāhir, most of those present readily acquiesced—all that is, except a Turkish junior officer who had previously been the caliph’s spear bearer in processions. When confronted he said: “I will not swear the oath of allegiance until I learn what happened to my master.” The authorities then grabbed him, threw him down on his face and dragged him to the river and threw him in, there to drown. And, says Maqrizi, “fear spread thereafter accordingly.”²⁵

The hand of Sitt al-Mulk was certainly behind what happened even if she acted through others. Significantly, our sources now speak in the feminine: “she ordered” “she commanded.” The government instituted a rigorous policy designed to exclude any occurrence of resistance or any suggestion that

23 See for example Ibn Zāfir, *al-duwal al-munqati’a*, 57–59; Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Muntazam* 7:297–300; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira* 4:190–92.

24 She was born in the Maghrib in 970.

25 Maqrīzī, *Itti’āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2:125.

al-Ḥākim might still be alive. Partly to ensure that it did not, she assumed the position of regent, although her nephew was already sixteen. Typical is the judgment of al-Maqrīzī who, after noting that al-Zāhir's reign was in general quiet and peaceful, comments that the young caliph occupied himself with pleasures, leisure and listening to music. "The affairs of the state were in the hands of his aunt al-Sayyida al-ʿAzīza, Sitt al-Mulk."²⁶ She ruled thereafter so effectively that, when she died two years later, on the fifth of February 1023, her obituary notice took special note that, although a woman, she had been a patron to men.²⁷

In this later phase, Sitt al-Mulk was more often known as al-Sayyida al-ʿAmmā, the Princess-aunt.²⁸ One source of information is a section of al-Musabbihī's chronicle for the hijra year 415 (1024). She was deceased by then but several of those who had worked for her died that year. Among them was Taqarrub who had been her spy in the main palace in earlier times and was later the person in charge of her personal affairs, acting thus to pass on to her incoming communications and petitions.²⁹

It is clear that Sitt al-Mulk was responsible for "correcting" many of the excesses of her half-brother. She released women from confinement and allowed the Jews and Christians to regain their earlier status and prominence in part by rebuilding their houses of worship. Al-Ḥākim had begun to do this in his last months, but she promoted it actively (perhaps out of sympathy with her family's origins). Most important were her attempts to put the financial system back in order. Al-Ḥākim had recently cancelled the commercial *mukūs* taxes; she now restored them. He had given away considerable amounts of land that had formerly served as a revenue-producing endowment to support many institutions including, but not limited, to churches, monasteries, and synagogues. The state itself suffered from losses caused by his extravagant

26 Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 124.

27 Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, p. 271; Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 28: 205. On three of the key historical problems connected to her life, of which the exact date of her death is one, see Halm, "Le destin de la Princesse Sitt al-Mulk." The other two, also identified and discussed by Halm, are a) the allegation of the coup-attempt after the death of her father, and b) the claim that she was involved in the murder of her half-brother.

28 Musabbihī, *Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 47, where he mentions a garden on an island that had belonged to her, 79, where he comments on her palace, and 96, where he notes details of a funeral attended by "the eunuch servants of the palace and the eunuch servants that had served her personally".

29 Musabbihī, *Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 111. See also pp. 110–01 (death of al-Sharīf al-Musawī whose sister had worked for both Sitt al-Mulk and her mother), and 94 (death of Abu'l-Abbās Aḥmad b. al-Maghribī who had been an agent of first the mother and then afterward al-Sayyida al-Sharīfa, i.e. Sitt al-Mulk).

largesse. She now began to reclaim either for the government or various institutions what they had lost during the former caliph's final years.

Two of her notable acts in the first days of the new regime were the executions of the former heir apparent Ibn Ilyās and Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī Ibn Dawwās, the Kutāma *amīr* whom she had relied on to perform the public functions necessary to secure the oaths of allegiance from key segments of the military. According to al-Maqrīzī, she initially favored Ibn Dawwās, granting him wealth and power along with responsibility for the administration of the state. But, almost without warning, she soon arranged that the guard whose special role it had been to carry out executions for their master—the caliph—cut down Ibn Dawwās. On her command, their leader, a Sicilian named Nāsim, confronted him when he appeared in public, saying aloud to those present: “O slaves of our lord, the Commander of the Believers declares to you that this man is the murderer of your lord al-Ḥākim.” He then raised his sword and ordered the guard he commanded to kill Ibn Dawwās. Among the dead man's possessions, they discovered in a box the knife that al-Ḥākim had carried in his sleeve. Presumably Ibn Dawwās acquired it when he murdered the caliph.³⁰ How Sitt al-Mulk had come to know about all this instantly became a matter of intense speculation. Anti-Fatimid historians in the east thought they had the obvious answer: she was herself a co-conspirator and getting rid of Ibn Dawwās was a means to cover her tracks.

The oldest version of the “eastern” account comes from the Baghdad historian Hilāl al-Sābiʿ, who died in 1056, but it was picked up and repeated by many others from medieval times to the present. Although Ibn Taghrī Birdī was himself Egyptian, he strongly preferred and often deferred to the Baghdad line. In this case he offers the most elaborate version of it, one that he claims he had taken directly from al-Sābiʿ.³¹

It commences by noting Sitt al-Mulk's keen intelligence and resolution, that she tried to warn her brother that his actions were about to ruin the dynasty, and that she had heard rumors of a coup in the making. He is said to have responded with the threat, noted earlier, about his intent to have her virginity examined; she consequently realized that he would destroy her. Al-Sābiʿ then brings in Ibn Dawwās, the Kutāma chieftain, who so feared al-Ḥākim that he refused to enter the palace. He served the caliph but only on his horse in public. Confronted by al-Ḥākim he explained that he had served faithfully but that he now felt in his soul that the caliph intended to kill him. He is reported to have said: “I will expend myself to the utmost of my ability for you but you

30 Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2:125–28; Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, p. 271.

31 Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-Ẓāhira* 4:185–90.

have no need for my presence in your palace. ... If you should intend to do me evil, kill me in my home among my family and then my children can bury and care for me; I prefer that over your killing me in your palace and throwing me out where my flesh will be eaten by the dogs.”³² Al-Ḥākim reportedly laughed at this response and let the man be. However, it is quite reasonable to assume that Ibn Dawwās was not at all reassured.

Subsequently Sitt al-Mulk sent to Ibn Dawwās one of her most trusted private servants to announce that, “I have a matter for you concerning which it is necessary for us to meet. Either you adopt a disguise and come to me at night, or I will do the same.” He replied: “I am your servant and under your command.”³³ So she went to his house at night in disguise alone. When she entered, he stood and then kissed the ground in front of her several times only to stand up again, indicating his readiness to serve. She ordered him to sit. While they were alone, she declared: “O Sayf al-Dawla [calling him by his title], I have come about a matter that concerns my security and yours and the Muslims. In it you will find great good fortune. I need your assistance in this matter.” He responded: “I am your servant.” She then took from him an oath and covenant and stated: “You understand what my brother intends in your regard and that, when he is able, he will do away with you. It is the same with me. We are in the gravest of danger. Added to that is his proclamation of his claim to be divine and his tearing apart the sacred law, the law of his ancestors. His crimes have multiplied. I am fearful that the Muslims will rise up and kill him and kill us with him and this dynasty will end most disgracefully.” Ibn Dawwās replied: “What you say is true, O mistress of ours. What’s to be done?” She answered: “Kill him and be delivered from him. Once we have accomplished that, we will raise his son in his place and we will distribute monies. You will yourself become master of his army and his administration, the leader of the state and the one who commands it. I am a woman behind a veil; I have no desire except to be safe from him and that I live among you protected from humiliation.” Then she offered him vast land grants, promises of money, honors, and elaborate possessions. At that point he says: “Command me as you wish.” She replied: “I want two servants of yours that you trust with your secrets and can rely for your most important matters.” He produced two servants that he characterized as quite clever. She demanded an oath from them and gave them 1,000 dinars with an order for clothes, grants, riding mounts and other things. She said to the pair: “I want you to climb tomorrow up the mountain. It will be the time of al-Ḥākim’s

32 Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira* 4:186.

33 This quote and the dialogue that follows come from Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4:186–87.

riding and he will be alone, no one remaining with him except al-Qarāfi the groom. Perhaps he will dismiss him and enter among the people by himself. At that rush him and slay him, and kill also al-Qarāfi and the boy if both are with him.” She gave them two daggers of Maghribi manufacture, one of which is called “Yāfurat”, both of them tipped with points like those of a scalpel for cupping. Having set and determined what was to happen next, she returned to her palace.

Not content with the story so far, al-Sābi’ then revealed what al-Ḥākim was doing at that very moment. In studying the heavens and his horoscope, the caliph learned that his life was about to be cut short, although, if he were to make it through the night, he would live to be over eighty. Nonetheless he was reluctant to forego his habitual nocturnal ride. That same night he told his own mother what might happen, warning her against Sitt al-Mulk and providing a large sum should something bad come to pass. She begged him for her sake not to go out and he acquiesced for a while. However, toward dawn, he decided otherwise and mounted his donkey to set off. His sister was watching from her palace, which faced his; if and when he left, she would know it. As the caliph departed he sent back the captain of the guard and continued on with al-Qarāfi and the boy.

As morning approached, the two servants, now described as Sudanese blacks, pounced on him and threw him to the ground. He shouted: “Woe to you both, what are you doing?”³⁴ They killed him, cut him in pieces and stuffed all in a bag. They slaughtered the boy as well and carried al-Ḥākim’s corpse to Ibn Dawwās after having hobbled the donkey. With the two servants, Ibn Dawwās presented the body to Sitt al-Mulk. Together they buried it in her house to conceal the whole affair. She then rewarded Ibn Dawwās and the two servants richly.

Note in all of this how intimate our historian is with the details of private conversations, details of exactly what was said between Sitt al-Mulk and Ibn Dawwās and between al-Ḥākim and his mother when no one was listening except the two who spoke to each other. Al-Sābi’ had to have been a fly on the wall. He can have heard what was said no other way. The only other possibility is that he made it all up. And that is the most likely. If so then the charge of Sitt al-Mulk’s complicity rests on a fabrication and is a pure fiction put into circulation by pro-Abbasid writers as a way to defame the Fatimids.

34 Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira* 4:189.

Sitt al-Mulk died on the fifth of February in 1023/eleventh of Dhu'l-Qa'da 413.³⁵ Her rule, so competent and promising, thus ended barely two years after the disappearance of her brother. Its effects, however, lingered on. Al-Maqrīzī was under the impression that she governed five years eight months, a mistake on his part but perhaps a sign of the power of her imposing legacy nonetheless.

35 On this matter it is important to consult Halm, "Le destin de la Princesse Sitt al-Mulk," which offers a full review of the problem and the various sources. Even so some questions remain unanswered and uncertain regarding the exact date.

Intellectual Currents and Traditions

Shī'ī Islam revolves around a specific doctrine of the imamate: the notion that succession to the Prophet belonged to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib either by preference or absolute necessity.¹ Upholding 'Alī's exclusive right to supreme leadership of the Muslim community might be a matter simply of faith or of inherited tradition; but it could also involve issues of intellectual principles, that is of rationally determined judgment. Can the succession of 'Alī be defended as an essential result, all others, including those accepted by non-Shī'ī Muslims, failing the test of reason?

The Shī'ī intellectual tradition insists that this is so, that it can argue forcefully not only for the imamate of 'Alī but of his progeny as well. But is that all it comprises? Surely not, as we shall see. There are many additional features in Shī'ī thought that separate it and set it apart, that give it a special character. But what exactly is an intellectual tradition and how do we define it? Within the broad spectrum of Islamic thought where does Shiism fit? What does it include or exclude? A good example here is the major difference between two schools of theology, the Mu'tazila and the Ash'ariyya, the former once supported by a considerable body of scholars but later falling into decline, the latter its chief competitor eventually gaining dominance and finally coming to define Sunnī orthodoxy. It is and was perfectly possible for a Shī'ī to be also a Mu'tazilī, the imamate being only one issue among many. Still a great proportion of Mu'tazilīs were not Shī'īs. By contrast no Shī'īs, who often recognized and admitted some affinities with Mu'tazilīs, subscribed to the key doctrines of the Ash'arīs.

For our present purposes, which do not purport to be comprehensive on this score, intellectual tradition is best expressed as the undertaking of scholars working within a particular tradition. In the domain of scholarly pursuits, those to be examined involve issues and problems investigated by theoretical reasoning and the results obtained and then solved by applying the principles derived from that process. Even so, as with Islamic thinking generally, the topics of study comprise a vast set of fields ranging from fairly simple and readily

1 Originally published as "Intellectual Traditions", chapter five in Farhad Daftary, Aryn Sajoo and Shainool Jiwa, eds. *The Shī'ī World: Pathways in Tradition and Modernity* (London, 2015), pp. 94–110.

accessible to the common believer to areas of subtle complexity and sophistication well out of the reach of any but a highly trained specialist.

1 Fatimid Ismailis and the Making of Shī'ī Intellectual Traditions

For the Shī'a at large, there exist a wide array of topics that have been subject to scholarly treatment by its leading authorities: scripture and its interpretation, law and its application, the hadith of the imams, the imamate itself, prophecy, theology (*kalām*), philosophy and science (for example physics and metaphysics), and many others. A given treatise by a Shī'ī author might discuss the following subjects: moral obligations and reason, man's best interest, the prophets, their miracles and the Qur'an, the imamate, the attributes of God, divine justice, and features of natural philosophy, such as place, time, accidents, movement, the elements and mankind's position in the order of creation. Another might deal with the distinction between existence and essence and their relative importance, causality both temporal and ontological, God and His creating, motion and time, the divine attributes, God's speech and command, the nature of the afterlife, revelation and scripture, intellect and soul.

What Shī'ī authors had to say about each and how one might differ from another is an area not adequately investigated. There are, moreover, hundreds of writers and thousands of separate works to be considered. Much of this material, although reasonably well known in its own tradition (Imāmī material by Imāmī scholars, Zaydī by Zaydīs and Ismaili by Ismailis), has not entered modern scholarship, which has been slow to pay attention except sporadically. More recently, however, the tide has turned. In the past two or three decades sound critical writing about the Shī'ī intellectual tradition has begun to appear in profusion, almost as a rising flood of information, far too much to be easily digested. However, this far the separate Shī'ī traditions remain separate. A proper history of Shī'ī intellectual endeavors should integrate what was in many ways always a single interconnected tradition.

Out of this large field of authors, topics and works, it is necessary here to focus on a selection, a few major figures and essential problems and sources of knowledge, particularly as it concerns Ismaili thought in the seminal Fatimid period. One of the major issues involves the role of Greek philosophy, its acceptance and adaption, in possible conflict with scripturally revealed doctrines. Another is how the Shī'a, while affirming the absolute authority of the imam, have accorded special intellectual status to scholars and with them to a tradition of reasoned doctrines that depended on their efforts.

One answer points to the position of reason in the Shī'ī understanding of the roots and sources of religious truth. In contrast to the Sunnīs, who do not accept reason as one of the *uṣūl* (root-sources), the Shī'a do. What is true or false, allowed or forbidden, upheld or rejected, can be determined by reason (*'aql*). That distinction alone suggests why Shiism should be considered more rational than its opponents.

On the issue of supreme authority, few, if any, of the Shī'a would deny that the imam holds, theoretically, the highest rank. If he were accessible and could be consulted, his ruling must be accepted. However this condition is not and was not always possible. Each division of the Shī'a has a different position concerning the present imam and how his authority operates in practice. The Zaydīs hold that the imam, who can be any descendant of 'Alī's sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, must also be the most knowledgeable member of that lineage. His knowledge is thus critical to his imamate; he will be the leading scholar among them. The Imāmīs (Twelver Shī'a) maintain the absolute authority of their imam, but admitted that he is in hiding and thus not accessible for consultation. A community of religious scholars has for practical purposes taken his place. Among the Ismailis, in the long run, there have evolved two slightly different answers. One group upholds the imamate and authority of the living imam, who is in this case fully apparent (physically) and actively involved in governing his community. The other branch regards the chief *dā'ī* (*muṭlaq*) as the highest authority on behalf of an absent imam who is himself not accessible. The former are the Nizārīs, adherents of the Aga Khan, and the latter the Ṭayyibīs. Both were formed and then separated relatively late in the Fatimid era.

If an intellectual tradition is defined by scholarship and the relative value of that scholarship depends on its authority, then when the Shī'a benefit from the active presence of an imam, the intellectual tradition they observe will be confined to the teachings of that imam. What role could others of lesser rank play? In the absence of the imam for whatever reason, another model of authority develops and the importance of individual scholars increases. What actually happened historically supports such a conclusion in part, but not always and not absolutely. The Fatimid period offers a particularly intriguing case with both an actively present imam who presumably determines and controls the *da'wa* that supports him, yet is also at the same time an era during which the formation of a classical school of Shī'ī scholarship of impressive sophistication originates.

It is useful at this juncture to examine several cases, individual major figures, each with a solid claim to the highest regard, for clues to the development and propagation of the intellectual tradition that we are discussing.

In this instance we look at two Fatimid era Ismailis, two Imāmīs, and one who was both. They are Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī and Ḥamīd al-dīn al-Kirmānī, both Ismailis from respectively the 10th and early-11th centuries; al-Kirmānī’s nearly exact contemporary al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, an Imāmī; Naṣīr al-dīn al-Ṭusī from the 13th century, who was earlier an Ismaili and later an Imāmī; and finally Mullā Ṣadrā, an Imāmī from the 17th century. It is, of course, fair to question why these and not the many others. For one thing the written work of these five is now reasonably available and thus accessible to study and investigate. Accordingly, modern scholarship about each of them is relatively abundant. Each moreover occupies a prominent place in the later manifestations of the intellectual tradition of which they were seminal figures.

Al-Sijistānī was the leading voice of intellectual Ismailism during a period spanning the middle decades of the 10th century, from about 934 or earlier to 971 and perhaps a bit later. That was the classical period for the development of the intellectual tradition we are discussing. There were other important figures before him, from some of whom he drew doctrinal material and inspiration. His own writings display an attachment both to a previous set of Ismaili teachings and a newer, fairly recently imported type of Neoplatonism, that is of philosophical ideals and concepts derived from the Greek legacy then entering the Islamic realm. Al-Sijistānī combined them both and formed out of them a special synthesis, one part based on Neoplatonic philosophy and the other an Islamic (Ismaili) religious tradition.²

Al-Kirmānī³ flourished in the era of the imam-caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 996–1021). As an Ismaili authority of a fairly high rank, he supported the work of his predecessors, among them al-Sijistānī. But he tried as well to reformulate the philosophical component of their teachings, replacing much of what they had proposed by a fresh interpretation. Principally the changes involve rejecting Neoplatonic concepts in favor of ideas taken from a form of Aristotelianism which closely parallels that advocated by the famous Muslim philosopher al-Fārābī (c.872–950). These adjustments affected, in the main, doctrines of philosophy rather than those specifically of the Ismaili religious tradition. Although al-Kirmānī was well regarded in his own time, al-Sijistānī

2 For a full view of this man’s contributions and importance see my several studies of him and aspects of his thought: *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī*. (Cambridge, 1993); *Abu Ya‘qub al-Sijistani: Intellectual Missionary* (London, 1996); and *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A study of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī’s Kitāb al-yanābī*. (Salt Lake City, 1994).

3 On him see my *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Ḥākim*. (London, 1999) and D. de Smet, *La Quiétude de l’intellect: Néoplatonisme et gnose ismaélienne dans l’oeuvre de Ḥamīd ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī (x^e/xi^e s.)* (Louvain, 1995).

apparently retained his preeminence throughout the following century. Thereafter, most particularly in the Yemen where one later form of Ismailism survived, the situation was reversed, with al-Kirmānī now on top. The Ṭayyibī Ismailis up to the present regard al-Kirmānī, along with al-Mu'ayyad fil-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (1000–1078), as the leaders in the intellectual tradition which they have inherited. Al-Sijistānī is still studied, but his authority is less than theirs.

Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Nu'mān, known as al-Shaykh al-Mufid, (948–1032) became the leading theological spokesman of the Imāmī Shī'a and was already regarded as such by 987. In addition to standard Imāmī Shī'ī positions, he adopted the doctrines of one school of Islamic theology, the Mu'tazila. Among the Imāmīs his influence was large and his students included nearly all of the subsequent generation of Imāmī scholars, including the Sharīfs al-Raḍī and his brother al-Murtaḍā, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī,⁴ and Abū 'Abbās Aḥmad al-Najashī. All of these major figures of non-Ismaili Shiism worked and wrote during the period of the Fatimids, though in Baghdad and thus outside of their political reach.

Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī belongs to a later period; his life spans three quarters of the 13th century from 1201 to his death in 1274. A prolific writer and expert in many fields, including the hard sciences of astronomy, biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics, he contributed to them as well as to philosophy. In religion he studied both Ismaili and Imāmī authorities, finally accepting early in his adult life a form of philosophical Ismailism. But, following the Mongol invasions of the 1250s, he switched his allegiance to the Imāmīs.

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Shīrāzī (1572–1640), known widely as Mullā Ṣadrā, is the major intellectual figure of the Safavid era in Iran, but his fame has now spread elsewhere as well. Some consider him the most important Islamic philosopher after Ibn Sīnā. The complexity of his thought is formidable and many features of it are original to him. Thus despite his Imāmī Shiism, he has attracted the attention of *outsiders*—most particularly those interested in what became of Islamic philosophy in later centuries, and how it compares either to the much earlier period or to European thought.

4 The Sharīfs al-Raḍī (970–1015) and his brother al-Murtaḍā (967–1044) were consecutive official heads (*naqīb*) of the Imami Shī'ī community. Al-Raḍī is also famous as the compiler of the *Nahj al-balāgha*. This Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī is not to be confused with the much later Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī.

2 The Ismailis: al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī

Ismaili thought in its early formative period, it should now be clear, would be almost unintelligible without a background in philosophy, both Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism, each of which plays an essential part in the teachings of one of these major figures. It is not a matter of vague notions and superficial generalities, but of evidence that reveals the influence of specific works of Greek origin, and of a technical language in Arabic devised for the translation of them. The vocabulary employed by these Ismaili authors clearly indicates this one source of their ideas. Nevertheless, they deny vehemently that they are themselves philosophers—whom they generally regard, whether Greek or Islamic, as lacking a grasp of the ultimate truth. Some might have been brilliant and sections of what they wrote achieved a profound status; yet in the end, they failed to attain real validity and value.

But these Ismailis also insist on the absolute primacy of intellect, that is, reason, in the created realm. For them the first created being is intellect. It is the sum and essence of all subsequent being; it governs and rules everything, the whole of the universe. As a corollary, revelation, which in some systems would thus be in conflict with intellect, is here not in opposition in any sense. Religious law and the scripture do not constitute a separate source, but rather they are each a manifestation of reason itself. In essence, the two—reason and revelation—are identical. Simply put, the very process of revelation produces an incarnation of universal intellect. A prophet converts timeless theoretical reality into a practical instrument for the benefit of human society on its path to eternal salvation.

Among the earliest Ismailis who had accepted this premise and thus started to express their Ismaili Shiism philosophically, two are especially important. They are Muḥammad al-Nasafī and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, both from the first decades of the 10th century, and both Neoplatonists who used the technical terms then fairly common with the philosophers such as the well-known ninth century al-Kindī. Many other Ismailis of the time knew and read the works of Muslim philosophers and such Greek importations as the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, which was actually a paraphrase of the *Enneads* of Plotinus. By the time of al-Kirmānī at the beginning of the eleventh century, the scientific and philosophical resources had expanded considerably, and his writings show that he had mastered all or most of them. By then a classical library in Arabic would have included nearly all of Aristotle plus various works of many other Greek authors.

Al-Sijistānī from the middle of the 10th century thus drew upon a rich background, both of classical texts and of his predecessors among the Ismailis, some

of whom had already incorporated in their teachings many ideas taken from Greek sources. Their purpose, however, was to explain Ismaili religious concepts, not to promote philosophy, certainly not as an alternative. Al-Sijistānī continued this trend. His books and treatises are fairly numerous. In them he discusses side by side issues of critical importance for both Ismailism and for philosophy, sometime overlapping the two, at others keeping them separate.

In general, his doctrines range systematically over a descending and ascending scheme, from the simple and universal to the complex and particular, from the One to the many, and back again. The study of creation, for him, means to reveal the structure of the universe beginning with the perpetually stable higher realm, and coming down progressively into the sphere of constant flux in the lower material world. Human souls are entangled in this lower realm but their salvation and eventual eternity lies in the upper world. Creation moves downward from the foremost created being, the intellect, which is the first existent and is nearest to God Himself. Next, after intellect, comes soul, the universal form of soul not the individual. Then going downward is nature, which is in part simply a lower form of soul, its descending face. Following them the process changes from the sublime and spiritual to the mundane and corporeal. Nature at this reduced level generates the physical world, the earthly habitat of minerals, plants, animals—and above all of the highest species of animal, mankind.

For al-Sijistānī the upward turn and the reverse is of major concern. As is standard Ismaili doctrine, the return upward is a historical process leading to the collective salvation of the human being. To lead the way there exists a second hierarchy parallel to intellect, soul, and nature. It provides law and truth and it prompts humans to seek a path away from the physical and sensate and into the sublime spiritual world, from the realm of generation and corruption to the eternal world of intellect, wherein truth is never mixed with or masked by falsehood and deception. From his statements about this process and its details, we learn of several doctrines that now seem especially his.

His ideal of the One shows a particular concern to preserve its absolutely unqualified transcendence. Nothing and no concept can tie God to His creation. He is not the first in any sense because being first implies a second or third, thereby connecting the two. He is not the outer limit of things. Al-Sijistānī insists that God is not a substance, not intellect; He is not a being or a cause. Attributions of this kind are falsely applied in His case, although they are often cited in Islamic works of theology or philosophy. Al-Sijistānī devoted many chapters of his major books to refute such misleading concepts. It is and was common to claim that God is a thing not like any other thing. But that is wrong al-Sijistānī says. It would appear to maintain God's detachment but does not

in actuality. The proper procedure is to systematically deny of God all such qualifications. He is not in a place, not in a time, not describable—but then continue by denying each of these denials. God is not a thing and He is not *not* a thing; not in a place and not *not* in a place, and so on. A simple set of negatives produces an intellectual satisfaction that is, he maintains, deceptive and lacking in rigor. The second finally achieves a clear separation between God and His creation.⁵

To explain creation, which is here creation from nothing, *ex nihilo*, al-Sijistānī like many of his predecessors, including the Ismailis al-Nasafī and al-Rāzī, depends on a special kind of creation denoted by the Arabic verb *abdaʿa*, which means in this instance to bring something into being from nothing. All other forms of creation involve fashioning a new thing out of a pre-existing matter. He is careful to call these other types of creation by a different name. What is created by the process of origination (*abdaʿa*) is first of all intellect. In moving from intellect to the next stage which is, for him, soul, a different verb is used; soul gushes (*inbajasa*) or proceeds (*inbaʿatha*) out of intellect.

A special characteristic of al-Sijistānī's thought, a doctrine he shares with several others, inserts between God and intellect a command. God creates by fiat; He wills the universe into being. This command is the divine logos (*al-kalima*) but it is not an existent. Once issued it becomes the thing it brings into being, i.e. intellect. There cannot be a second command. The cosmos has come into being; it will not revert to chaos.

The objective of God's command is intellect and the latter is the sum and principle of all being, the form of all things, both those manifest and those hidden, the wellspring of all spiritual and physical light. Thus some aspects of it enter all subsequent being. Soul comes out of it, less in rank and by contrast imperfect. To achieve perfection the soul begins to acquire what it can of the perfection of its predecessor. This process moves sequentially and thus temporally. Soul is in motion and it thereby creates time itself. But soul is not always focused on the higher world of intellect and, in moments of heedlessness, it turns toward the world it itself made, namely nature and physical reality. There it becomes enthralled with sensate delight; it is forgetful of its source, having become disoriented. Only by proper reorientation, turning back upward toward intellect, can it attain salvation.

5 On this aspect of al-Sijistānī's thought, which is perhaps his most important contribution, see, in addition to my works cited above, the paper included in this volume as chapter nineteen ("An Ismaili Answer to the Problem of Worshipping the Unknowable, Neoplatonic God").

Key items in this system indicate its Neoplatonic origin. One is the universality of intellect. It does not separate or break up into individual intellects, even at the cosmic level. Likewise soul is a single soul, a universal. Our souls are parts of this same universal soul.

What then is prophecy? Clearly the prophets are not simply philosophers. In fact for al-Sijistānī, the lawgiving prophets belong to the same genealogical lineage and they all share an extraordinary faculty not available to other humans. They have perfect access to the timeless truth of intellect and thus function in the physical world as its deputies. They convert universal reason into language in order to convey its benefits to other humans. As a result they formulate laws and compose scriptures, bringing about in the process a regime that governs the community they were sent to rescue. The final such messenger was Muḥammad; his law was and is the most perfect of all those who came before him. But, since he has departed, there must be someone to preserve and defend his legacy in the meanwhile. Such a person will also understand better than anyone else how intellect became law and how the law indicates the intellectual reality on which it is based. This one individual unerringly traces the physical symbols, the language, in the law and scripture back to what is really real, and can thereby explain what the words used in it actually mean. He is the Imam.

Turning now to al-Kirmānī, we see almost immediately that many of the features in the thought of al-Sijistānī have been abandoned. The changes represent a move from concepts that are decidedly Neoplatonist toward the Aristotelian leanings of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. The single universal intellect becomes a descending series of intellects, each corresponding to one of the heavenly spheres. The world soul disappears. Individual human soul does not exist in any form prior to the body; it comes into being along with the body it inhabits. These are a few examples of the adjustments al-Kirmānī hoped would find acceptance. Had they been adopted, the Ismaili intellectual tradition of his time and later would have been much closer to that suggested by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.

Nevertheless, what al-Kirmānī proposed, although sharing features with al-Fārābī, is also markedly different in many ways. For him God is not the First Cause or the necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*) as the philosophers would have it. The initial element of a causal series is, despite its primacy, still a part of that series. The chain of intellects commences with an intellect, not with God. He is above and apart from it. Here al-Kirmānī acknowledges a doctrine somewhat similar to al-Sijistānī's double negation. God is utterly unknown and unknowable. Intellect might want to understand Him but simply cannot. God can no

more be grasped by the intellect than the sun can be seen by the naked human eye. Even trying to do so produces harm. But how, then, do we understand references to Him in religious materials? Al-Kirmānī's answer is that what we speak about is actually intellect at its highest and ultimate first level. It is not God, but as close to Him as humans can come. It suggests God but is not Him.

Creation begins with the unique act denoted by the verb *abda'a*, that of origination. It produces first intellect which is, thereafter, the absolute first of the cosmos: first being, first cause, first mover. It thinks, is thought, and what is thought, all at once. It is the mover of all motions, the actuality that brings all potentiality into actuality.

From first intellect a second intellect appears. The first unintentionally radiates its joy at being itself. That blush generates an image which becomes a separate intellect as a reflection of the first. This process is called procession or emanation (*inba'atha*). As second, this being clearly has rank and position; it is not alone or unique. But it retains some intellectual qualities. It is actual and not potential; it encompasses and preserves its own essence. In contrast to the first, it must conceive what it came out of as well as contemplate itself, thereby engendering a double aspect. It has a dual nature.

From these two aspects of second intellect there issue a further procession of intellects and with them a parallel series of material entities. The former are the additional intellects of the heavenly spheres and their material forms, the planets. At a final stage, the last of these intellects creates our physical realm and its corporeal beings. Al-Kirmānī assigns the governance and regulation of this world to the intelligences of the heavenly spheres. Each of these secondary intellects observes the veneration of God through perfect unchanging circular motion like, he notes, pilgrims circumambulating the Ka'ba. They also have providential interest in our world, though in practice it is the closest of them, the tenth intellect, that is most directly involved. This is what the philosophers call the Active Intellect.

In direct contrast to the doctrine of al-Sijistānī (and of the Neoplatonist), al-Kirmānī taught that soul commences with the body. In the beginning it is formless and devoid of knowledge; nevertheless, it is the first perfection of the natural body. For it, intellect is a kind of soul and as a substance it has the possibility of surviving its body. Here, in this world, it depends on the senses and physical existence. It possesses instincts about its physical condition, but gradually acquires more than they, a form of knowledge that leads to its second perfection. Thereby it endures and continues beyond the death and dissolution of the body. Ultimately, based on its acquisition of true intellect, it will reach an eternal state.

The kind of knowledge necessary for this final development comes from the eternal realm. It is brought down from there by teachers, a special class

of humans who have access to the Active Intellect. They are rare and unique, the great prophets and founders of religions, and at the end the messiah of the future. These men were the intellects of their time, the earthly image of the first intellect. At this present moment, the perfection of intellect in the physical world is the single living imam; he is the ultimate teacher, the master. Only he knows unerringly what is true because he, like the prophet, can see into the divine world as fully as any human can.

3 The Imāmīs: al-Mufīd, al-Ṭusī and Mullā Ṣadrā

A history of the Imāmī intellectual tradition has yet to be written, though the material for it has now grown into a formidably large collection of individuals and their works spanning many centuries and continuing into the present. However, for several reasons, Shaykh al-Mufīd is a good figure to start with. And he provides an instructive point of comparison with his Ismaili contemporary al-Kirmānī, as we shall see.

Imāmī scholarship prior to al-Mufīd, notably that of his own teacher Ibn Babūya al-Qūmī, largely focused on collecting, sorting and preserving the traditions reported from the twelve imams of the line they recognize. Al-Mufīd then turned in a different direction, moving toward a form of Muʿtazili theology (*kalām*). For him, a theologian (*mutakallim*)—here counting himself among them—was one who employed reason and disputation to find the truth and to repel falsehood through argumentation and proof. As with the Muʿtazila in general, he thus added to the sources of religious knowledge reason itself, not alone, but together with revealed scripture. Thereafter, except in regard to the doctrine of the imamate, Imāmī theology took up the positions and concerns of the Muʿtazila. But that meant that it now belonged to an intellectual tradition more complex and sophisticated than that of the Imāmīs in the previous century; theology had become an accepted discipline.

Al-Mufīd was himself acclaimed for his sharp mind and skill in debate. His house in the Shīʿī district of Baghdad and the nearby mosque became centers of discussion attracting followers and members of opposing factions. Against the latter, who included some of the most famous theologians of his time, he wrote tracts and treatises, in addition to debating them personally. Imāmīs elsewhere accepted his authority and the record shows evidence of his written responses to widely scattered communities of supporters. Unfortunately most of his writings, which may have numbered two hundred in all, are known only by title. Many were refutations of all sorts of opponents. In the subsequent generation of Imāmī scholars, few, if any, had not once been his students; the list of them is lengthy and its members distinguished.

The principal concerns of al-Mufīd, however, are theologically speaking fairly traditional. The issues that he is most apt to deal with fit and match well with those of Sunnī theologians, such as the famous al-Ash'arī. His answers tend to be Mu'tazilī, but the problems addressed are similar. Two examples may suffice to explain. On the question of the status of a grave sinner in this life—whether such a person may even so be accepted as a believer—he argued against the Mu'tazilī position, which takes a middle position between believer and unbeliever in this life, and condemnation in the next. For al-Mufīd, the Prophet and the Imams might intercede to restore any member of their following. With regard to the place of reason, he rejected a major Mu'tazilī doctrine that the truths of religion must be uncovered by reason—insisting instead that transmitted revelation is absolutely necessary for reason to acquire such knowledge. His Imāmī successors would go further and adopt outright the Mu'tazilī position, but he did not.

In his discussion of these issues, we can see the focus of his thought, what problems bothered him, and how he responded. The difference between him and the Ismaili thinkers cited earlier is striking, and the contrast is profound. No one would consider al-Mufīd a philosopher. The matters he takes up belong to a different tradition, one that is first of all based in the historical development of Islamic religious interests. Al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī have less concern for such questions; they are not of paramount importance for them and their thought is accordingly not rooted or confined to Islamic doctrine pure and simple, but to a scientific exploration of the cosmos and mankind's role in it. They were in this way far more philosophically inclined than al-Mufīd, or for that matter any of the Imāmī theologians of his century and earlier.

That is, in part, why our next figure is so fascinating and his achievements so important. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī was for much of his life and career an Ismaili and therefore, as such, he almost certainly inherited and then absorbed the intellectual concerns of both al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī, along with other leading authorities in its *da'wa*. An important additional example might be Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Yet because al-Ṭūsī eventually converted to a form of Imāmī Shiism, he contributed to its intellectual tradition as well, bringing in fact the two together perhaps for the first time, and creating in the process a new synthesis. After him, Imāmī scholars tended to follow his lead. One result was that philosophy, possibly with some Ismaili influences, became an essential component of post-Ṭūsī Imāmī thought.

Al-Ṭūsī was born most likely into an Imāmī family. His father was also a scholar and from him the son Naṣīr al-Dīn acquired a wide-ranging knowledge of the sciences, philosophy and the doctrines of various Islamic groups, including the Ismailis. Such openness to disparate fields and intellectual variety

allowed him to move freely through the works of his most significant predecessors, chief among them Ibn Sīnā, but a long list of others—philosophers and scientists—as well with some of whom he studied in person. By the time he was thirty-two he had completed his training and he found a patron in the Ismaili governor of Kuhistan, Naṣīr al-Dīn Muhtashim, for whom he composed his famous work on ethics, the *Akhlāq-i Naṣīri*, named after this patron. Somewhere in the process, influenced by the Ismaili imam, he declared himself to be a follower. A spiritual biography he wrote in about 1246, the *Sayr wa sulūk*, says as much. By this time he had arrived at Alamut where he was to remain off and on for about twenty years.

A critical step along this path was his realization that intellect alone could not answer the most fundamental metaphysical questions. Such an inquiring would have intellect explaining itself, its own origin, which he doubted it could do. Reasoning, as promoted by the Aristotelian philosophers, properly begins with a premise known to be universally true, and proceeds through the syllogism to a sound conclusion. But the universal validity of the assumed premise is open to question. On what authority do we accept it? Ultimately there needs to be a source of unquestionable authority. Possibly the answer for al-Ṭūsī, at least near the beginning of his career, lay in the imamate and specifically in the Ismaili imam.

We must assume that the Ismaili fortresses he visited and lived in for so long a period provided him with access to libraries rich in the classics of older Ismaili thought. Although the evidence for them as sources of his thought is not precise, it is reasonably clear in the books he wrote (or supervised), such as the *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* (*Paradise of Submission*), while directly affiliated with the *da'wa*. In it we find, for example, a doctrine of the divine command not dissimilar to that for which al-Sijistānī was noted and for which he was criticized by al-Kirmānī.

Faced with the onslaught of the Mongols, al-Ṭūsī was commissioned to negotiate with them in 1256. The outcome included surrender and destruction, especially of the Ismaili movement as it had existed until then. However al-Ṭūsī survived and entered the service of the new masters. As he did, he reverted to the Imāmism of his origins. Some of his writing during this later period indicates his new affiliation clearly. The Mongols also built for him an astronomical observatory near Tabriz, which quickly became a major center of scholarship of many kinds with its own substantial library, attracting important scholars who came there to work with al-Ṭūsī and take advantage of its collections.

At the end of his life, he moved to Baghdad where he died in 1274. By then he had composed a vast number of works with as many as 165 separate titles. Significantly, many of them survive and that is likely due to his growing fame

even while alive. And it needs be stressed that the range of subjects he wrote about is equally impressive. A list would include astronomy, astrology, geomancy, mathematics, physics, mineralogy, medicine, jurisprudence, philosophy including logic, mysticism and theology. In most of these fields he made original contributions, some of extraordinary importance. By comparison his intellectual predecessors, especially those cited here, rarely if ever worked directly in more than a few of these fields. The Ismaili figures, while undeniably learned in the hard sciences (astronomy, biology, mineralogy, mathematics), as we can easily see from the detailed references to scientific facts in their writings, did not attempt their own investigations of these areas. From other sources and materials we know, however, that the Fatimid imam-caliphs did promote this kind of science. The famous astronomer Ibn Yūnus (c.950–1009) was sponsored by al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 996–1021). There are many other such cases. But none of those involved were themselves Ismailis; none were members of the *daʿwa*. With the case of al-Ṭūsī, we therefore witness a dramatic change since he was deeply committed to both the hard sciences and to theology and doctrinal expression.

In each phase of his work, the Ismaili and the Imāmī, one of his enduring contributions was the incorporation of philosophy, in the former case by adapting it to support a particular view of the cosmological background to the imamate, especially in the period of *qiyāma*, and in the latter by reformulating Shīʿī theology to stress the importance of philosophical demonstration over religious dialectics. Several of his major treatises were written to defend Ibn Sīnā, one a commentary on the latter's *Ishārāt*, another to refute an Ismaili Neoplatonic text that had assailed him. Rescuing Ibn Sīnā from his detractors and rebuilding regard for him proved to constitute an enduring legacy of al-Ṭūsī, as well of the great philosopher himself. In part, al-Ṭūsī's explanations of his predecessor's work can often be clearer than the original. In addition, al-Ṭūsī's major Imāmī theological work, the *Tajrīd al-kalām* (*Abstract of Theology*) brought the terminology of metaphysics into that subject where it was to remain. This one work of al-Ṭūsī thereafter influenced nearly all Imāmī writings in this area, leading to the eventual fusion of theology and philosophy in the work of Mullā Ṣadrā.

Muḥammad Ṣadrā al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī was the son of a prominent court official and thus of a privileged background. He acquired a taste for philosophy fairly early, and eventually realized that he required a teacher in order to attain greater depth in this subject than he could acquire himself. He had the means to find the best, and moved from Shiraz to the capital Qazvin in 1591, studying there with Bahā' al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī and Mīr Damād, two highly important scholars at the royal court. There is much more to Mullā Ṣadrā's training, others he

studied with, but here it simply needs be noted that he had access to the finest minds of the time.

Through them and the written legacy of major predecessors, he was in contact with a whole tradition of learning and debate. Mullā Ṣadrā would have become familiar with many, but most especially Ibn Sīnā and al-Suhrawardī, two who influenced his thought directly. Another would have been Ibn al-ʿArabī (1165–1240). The concept of the unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*)—famously attributed to Ibn al-ʿArabī—was criticized by those who upheld the primacy of essence as the primary reality of all. For these, existence is merely derivative, a mental phenomenon. This latter was the position of al-Suhrawardī and Mīr Damād. Initially Mullā Ṣadrā followed them. Eventually, however, the primacy of existence dawned on him and from then on he was on his own.

Lacking a suitable patron and no longer finding likeminded colleagues in Shiraz he went into a kind of retreat, isolating himself in the village of Kahak outside of Qum, there to meditate. It was there that he commenced to write his grade summation of philosophy and theology, the *Transcendent Wisdom of the Four Journeys of the Intellect* (known in Arabic commonly as *al-Asfār al-arbaʿa*). The four journeys explore first the subjects of ontology, existence, essence, and movement; second, substance and accident; third, God's being and attributes; and forth, humanity and its destiny. The confluence of philosophy and theology is clearly apparent. This period of solitude lasted about five years and it provided Mullā Ṣadrā with new insights and the ultimate value of intuitive experience. He came to understand that truths must be experienced in order to produce certainty. Such knowledge is not new, but the degree of certainty attached to it is. Therefore the nature of existence and its uniqueness must be experienced through a non-rationally based process. Once existence is conceptualized, it become essence and in so doing real existence is falsified. That which is directly experienced is existence, but that which is understood by the mind is an essence.

Al-Suhrawardī was well known for his theory about light; that it is the only reality and has more and less intensities, a foundational idea of Illuminationism. Existence was for him a mere logical notion. Mullā Ṣadrā made al-Suhrawardī's light existence instead—including the idea that it is the only reality, and most significantly, that it is more and less intense. Existence, he held, is in perpetual motion climbing higher. It has priority and posteriority, perfection and imperfection, strength and weakness. Accordingly, it is systematically ambiguous. This movement ends with the Perfect Man who is a member of the divine realm, united among the attributes of God. Each stage in the process includes all of those lower, though the higher is more and more simple. The more something has of existence, the less it has of essence.

The latter is only in the mind; it is not actually real. God has no essence at all. He is absolute existence. Essences are the bearers of contingency, mere modes of existence at a lower stage. Existence is radically particular; the mind thinks only generalities. Existence is never static but perpetually in motion, a motion of substance, from more general and indeterminate to concrete and determinant or integrated. God is all existence, yet nothing relative or contingent can be attributed to Him.

This brief account does not render the ideas of Mullā Ṣadrā full justice by any means. He was a complex thinker, working at the outer limits of the Islamic intellectual tradition broadly speaking, and at the leading edge of Shī'ī thought more specifically. But however brief it may be, it is enough to suggest the critically important nature of the whole picture, were we to go into it at the length that it deserves. And Ṣadrā's legacy has grown accordingly in the modern era.

4 Conclusion

Of all the varied aspects of the Shī'ī intellectual tradition we might have considered, the main focus here is the role of philosophy—its incorporation and use to express doctrines that cover not merely the fine points of law and religious practice, but of the whole universe, of its creation and mankind's place in it. In many ways, that represents the high point of the tradition itself. Still, these other aspects should not be ignored, even though, in the present case, space does not permit including them.

Once focused on the introduction of philosophy and science, our view of the history of Shī'ī thought must inevitably note the essential role played by the Fatimid era Ismailis of the 10th and 11th centuries. Al-Sijistānī was not the first to employ philosophy to explain Ismaili Shiism, but he stands for us now as the most important figure in part because his major works survive. Although only recently finally published in sound critical editions, there is no reason now not to recognize his achievements and to acknowledge that he occupied a prime position at the very beginning of a trend running from him to Mullā Ṣadrā—even though as yet we do not fully understand or perceive all the connecting links.

We have seen, however, how little of philosophy there is in the work of the Imāmī al-Mufīd, in contrast to his contemporary al-Kirmānī on the Ismaili side. That observation highlights the importance of al-Ṭusī. Surely we are permitted to claim that he functioned as a transition point between the older Ismaili figures and a new phase of Imāmī thought that was now fully conversant with philosophical ideas and concepts. This assertion is not to downplay the huge

importance of Ibn Sīnā, but seeks to add an element not yet completely understood or recognized. In short, if we assume that al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī were sources for al-Ṭūsī—that he had read both—what further traces of their work can we discern in the later Imāmī tradition?

An answer is complicated by a situation of secrecy and extreme reticence about public disclosure among the agents of the Ismaili *da'wa*, who wrote for each other but not for non-Ismailis. Moreover, the veil of secrecy applies to the facts of their lives about which we know, at this point, little or nothing. Thus it is necessary to question whether and when what they said reached an audience that could have included Imāmī Shī'īs or even Sunnīs. About this problem there are a few clues. One is the anti-Ismaili tracts composed by al-Ghazālī (1058–1111). Clearly he had some access to Ismaili writings, as did some other non-Ismailis, significantly including Ibn Taymiyya who says he had read *The Keys* (*al-Maḳālīd*), a major book by al-Sijistānī. Thus when al-Ghazālī credits the Ismailis with a formidable system of thought based in philosophy, and Ibn Taymiyya comments that al-Sijistānī was the best of them, those judgments support our view of his importance—and with him, of the critical role the Ismailis may have played in adding philosophy to the Shī'ī intellectual tradition. There it took root and became in the long run the completely naturalized component that we find in the work of Mullā Ṣadrā, where philosophy and theology appear intertwined one with the other.

Literary Culture

By the late fourth/tenth century when the Fatimids took control of Egypt following their successful conquest in 969, Islamic culture had in general turned from oral traditions heavily to books and other forms of written communication.¹ The widespread use of fairly recently acquired paper-making technology made books much cheaper and therefore more readily available at prices even ordinary citizens might find amenable. Already in the earlier North African phase of the caliphate, book production and collecting flourished. It would continue in Egypt and the east. The Fatimids were to become famous for the immensely rich holdings of the royal libraries, which, at the end of their rule in 1171, contained more volumes on an all-encompassing variety of topics than any elsewhere in the world at that time.² But there is more to the story of Fatimid literature than these fabulous libraries and it must provide an account of a whole host of books, treatises and other literary documents written or created in that era, some directly sponsored by the imam-caliph and his government, others by private citizens and scholars living or working under them.

For the present purposes it is useful to divide our subject into sub-categories in part to allow maximum utilization of the evidence we find in our historical sources. On the one hand, there are the reports about libraries and book collections and these we can again separate into the royal caliphal book depositories and, in a few instances, into non-royal personal libraries, a given individual's own library. On the other hand, a second sub-section should cover the various forms of literary production and here distinguish between those composed by the Ismaili mission, its *da'wa*, and its agents, the *dā'īs*, for the explicit purpose of the religious appeal, aiming thus to instruct in doctrine and instill loyalty and devotion to the imamate, and the large body of works written, either with government sponsorship or without it, in various fields of learning, such as, for example, astronomy, medicine, history, or geography, and works of art, such as poetry, and chancery epistles and proclamations.

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- 1 Originally published as "Literary Culture in Fatimid Egypt" in A. S. Malikian-Chirvani, ed, *The World of the Fatimids* (Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, 2018), chapter five, pp. 160–175. The original publication is replete with lavish illustrations throughout, including my chapter. It has not been possible to reproduce and include them here.
 - 2 This point about the vast holdings of caliphal libraries has already been made earlier in chapter eight, "Royal Libraries and the Production of Texts." In this later chapter we are focusing particularly on literary culture more broadly.

1 Literature from the Fatimid Period³

The literature produced by the Fatimid era *da'wa* consisted for the most part in works, of varying sizes, that were carefully guarded from the view of outsiders. No Ismaili could read and study them without first pledging a solemn oath never to reveal anything of what they said. It involved a precaution against a host of enemies many of whom hoped to expose and exploit doctrines they found heretical. Unfortunately, such rules, clearly needed at the time, have tended to keep the majority of these works from the public eye and from the scrutiny of modern scholarship. However, over the past several decades, access has finally come, in part due to several notable members of the larger Ismaili, mainly Bohra Tayyibī, community who have opened their own personal collections and allowed many of the Fatimid classics to be examined, edited and published. We learn from surveys of titles and manuscripts that upwards of 175 separate works of Fatimid *da'wa* literature once existed and that, of those we know about, a substantial portion survive in the holdings of modern Ismaili groups.⁴ Approximately half have also been published. We are thus now, where a hundred years ago we knew little, considerably better informed.

This literary trove offers a view of a vibrant intellectual movement, not so much as a record of the Imam's personal involvement, but of the agents of his appeal in action. Individual *dā'īs* felt called upon to compose treatises to further the cause, to explain the intricacies of a particular world view, of cosmology and creation, of sciences and faith, as a whole and as parts, all in the service of Ismailism. The *da'wa*, it should be remembered, spanned substantially more territory than the Fatimid empire itself. Prominent authorities who contributed to this literature often lived and worked secretly under cover in distance lands. And so, if we seek a snapshot of the *da'wa* at the middle of the 4th/10th century as the Fatimids were about to assume rule over Egypt, we find major figures both in and outside the empire. Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman and Qāḍī al-Nu'mān wrote under the direct guidance of the Imam, mainly al-Mu'izz. But Muḥammad al-Nasafī, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, of arguably equal importance and stature, made their appeal in the hostile areas of Iran and Khurasan where, despite notable successes, they eventually also suffered martyrdom.

3 For additional information about the material that follows see Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and Its Sources* (London, 2002), chapter eight (pp. 170–85).

4 Although now in need of revision to bring it up to date, the most complete basic survey here remains Ismail Poonawala's *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature*.

Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman wrote within the safe protection of the caliphate but he also specialized in the art of esoteric interpretation of scripture and doctrine, a matter of guarded secrecy and so the works credited to him were not circulated outside of the *da'wa*, which preserved them, while also restricting access. By contrast, much of the vast output of Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, which included several major and minor treatises on law, histories of the imams and the founding of the Fatimid state, and a string of polemics aimed at various opponents of the Ismaili cause, was purposefully public. The best known of those he wrote are the *Da'ā'im al-Islām* ("Pillars of Islam") a handbook of Ismaili Shī'ī law and the *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa wa ibtidā' al-dawla* ("Opening of the Appeal and Beginning of the State"), both now available in English translation.⁵ Neither required restriction; both were for public consumption. In fact his *Pillars* was from the start accepted as the basic document forming an Ismaili school of law and it continued in that capacity throughout the Fatimid period and beyond. However, since it drew for its material solely on the statements of imams in a period long before the Fatimid era, it did not express the view of those who came later. During the reign of the caliph al-'Azīz, his *wazīr*, Ibn Killis, attempted to add to it a supplement bringing into the law the pronouncements of these later imams, most especially al-Mu'izz and al-'Azīz. Like the *Pillars*, this work of Ibn Killis, called after him, "The *Wazīr's* Epistle," enjoyed considerable success. In 416/1025 the caliph al-Zāhir issued an order prohibiting the use of any work of law other than these two; both were to be memorized, if possible, and a reward was offered to those who managed to do so. Unfortunately, although the *Pillars* has nearly always been readily available, the work of Ibn Killis has not, and it may not have survived.

Survival of the writings of the three eastern *dā'īs* mentioned above faced problems for a different reason. These men were exponents of a doctrine of the imamate at odds with that of al-Mahdī and his successors whose leadership they, at first, refused to accept. Of the three we can be sure that al-Sijistānī only eventually accepted allegiance, although in his case not until the time of al-Mu'izz.⁶ Accordingly, because the survival of their books ultimately depended on copies entering the *da'wa* of the Egyptian Ismaili authorities and subsequently circulating among them, what had been said in them needed to be brought into conformity with the doctrines advocated by the Fatimid

5 Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, trans. Fyzee and Poonawala, *The Pillars of Islam* and *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa wa ibtidā' al-dawla*, trans. Hamid Haji, *Founding of the Fatimid State*. Another important title is now available in English see his *Disagreements of the Jurists: A Manual of Islamic Legal Theory*.

6 On al-Sijistānī in general see Walker, *Early Philosophical Shi'ism* and Abū Ya'qub al-Sijistānī: *Intellectual Missionary*.

imams. Teachings that were at variance were expunged. Al-Nasafi's once widely read *al-Maḥṣūl* did not survive perhaps for that reason, but extremely important treatises by al-Rāzī (*Kitāb al-zīna*, *A'lām al-nubuwwa*,⁷ and *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*) and al-Sijistānī (*al-Yanābī*,⁸ *Kitāb al-Maqālīd*, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, *al-Ifṭikhār*) eventually gained honored status. They were studied carefully and most importantly copied by members of the *da'wa*, first in Egypt and then the Yemen, without let up into modern times.

The first of the *dā'īs* to come to Egypt from outside appears to have been also the most important. During the final years of al-Ḥākim, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, a prominent figure in the *da'wa* of the east, probably in either Baghdad or Basra, was asked to assume a position in Cairo, in part to counter various local tendencies that the main authorities found threatening.⁹ Al-Kirmānī had already composed a number of works, among them an interesting refutation of the famous physician Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, but others as well, including a treatise on early disagreements among Ismaili figures (his *Kitāb al-Riyāḍ*). In Egypt he added more and eventually completed his summa "The Comfort of Reason" (*Rāḥat al-aql*). Many of his predecessors in the *da'wa* favored a philosophically inclined doctrine and they were, like al-Sijistānī, heavily influenced by Neoplatonic thought. In contrast al-Kirmānī, not unlike the philosopher al-Fārābī from slightly earlier, espoused a teaching that depended more on Aristotle than Plotinus. In areas such as cosmology and metaphysics, his thought resembles that of his famous contemporary Ibn Sīnā. Yet, for the rest of the Fatimid era, al-Sijistānī remained more prominent and it was only later in the Yemen where al-Kirmānī rose above him in the esteem of the authorities in the *da'wa*. They regarded what he had written as the finest *da'wa* works on doctrinal theory of any from the Fatimid era.

There were of course many more authors at work for the *da'wa*. Here not all can be mentioned but two more are vitally important. They are Nāṣir b. Khusraw, a justly famous poet, travel writer and advocate of the Ismaili cause, and al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī who was likewise a poet, a composer of major works of Ismaili doctrine, and also the author of a personal memoir of his own. In many ways these two figures mirror each other. Both were Iranian and each left their homeland for Egypt at nearly the same time. They likely knew one another in Cairo and later kept up some kind of correspondence. Their careers were, however, ultimately different. Nāṣir wrote exclusively in

7 Eng. trans. by Tarif Khalidi, *Abū Hatim al-Razi: The Proofs of Prophecy* (Provo, Utah, 2012).

8 Trans. by Walker as *The Wellsprings of Wisdom*.

9 On al-Kirmānī and his works, see Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*. For the one work of al-Kirmānī available in English see *Master of the Age*.

Persian; al-Mu'ayyad mainly in Arabic.¹⁰ The poetry of each then found fame in that language, likewise with their personal accounts: Nāṣir's *Safarnāma* in Persian;¹¹ al-Mu'ayyad's *Sīra* in Arabic. Their doctrinal works follow a similar rule. Nāṣir set out to visit Egypt following his conversion to the Ismaili cause; al-Mu'ayyad, already long in service to the *da'wa*, was forced to flee his homeland and eventually to find safety in Cairo, where, after years of effort, he finally rose to become the head of the *da'wa*. Meanwhile Nāṣir ultimately returned to Iran and ended his days in partial exile in the remote region of Yumgan.¹² The principal achievement of al-Mu'ayyad, for which he was thereafter highly regarded by the subsequent *da'wa*, was the eight hundred sermon-like lessons he contributed to its literature. They came to be considered by later authorities as the very best examples from the classical period.

Of the considerable body of Fatimid era literature that does not have a close link to the *da'wa* and Ismailism per se, we can begin with a survey of the poetry produced in that period. The most famous single poet is likely to have been Ibn al-Ḥānī' who joined the Fatimids in North Africa and composed eulogies of the imam al-Mu'izz. His poetry pushed the limits of what could be said about an imam almost to a point of scandal, although, even so, it was much appreciated even in circles normally quite opposed to Ismailism. Ibn al-Ḥānī's true loyalties remain less than clear and he was murdered in mysterious circumstances en route to Egypt with the caliph.

On firmer ground with respect to his Ismailis faith, the next important poet was the eldest son of al-Mu'izz, Tamīm, from whom we have a complete *dīwān* of poems. Although he was the eldest son, Tamīm was passed over in the succession because he could not, for some reason, produce offspring, which is a requirement for the imamate. Later poets within the Ismaili fold would include the previously mentioned Nāṣir b. Khusraw and al-Mu'ayyad, the former justly famous for his Persian verse.

In general poets flourished under the Fatimids and many names are recorded in our sources although examples of their work may not, in some cases, have reached us. A key historian of the period running from al-'Azīz to al-Ẓāhir was the *Amīr* al-Musabbihī who lived through it and compiled what amounted almost to a year by year, even month by month, diary of events. As each year

10 On al-Mu'ayyad's poetry along with copious translations into English, see Tahera Qutbuddin, *al-Mu'ayyad al-Shūrāzī and Fatimid Da'wa Poetry*.

11 English translation by Wheeler Thackston, *Nasir-i Khusraw's Book of Travels*.

12 Much has been written about Nāṣir and his works. For the latest see Alice Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw: The Ruby of Badakhshan* (London, 2000). For the English of one of his most important doctrinal works *Kitāb Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* see *Between Reason and Revelation: Twin Wisdoms Reconciled* (London, 2012).

ended he added a sample collection of the best poetry produced during it. We now possess only one small section—one year's worth—but it indicates how much likely once existed in the years we do not have.

From the middle to the end of the 5th/11th century, difficult conditions in Egypt limited the possibility of patronage. Moreover, the advent of Badr al-Jamālī, the Armenian military *wazīr*, in 466/1074, although it brought peace and stability, did little to encourage scholarship and the arts simply because he was himself evidently uninterested. While he promoted a substantial building program of mosques and city walls, he had little concern for literature and scholars. However, in notable contrast, his son and successor in the wazirate, al-Afḍal, took the opposite approach and actively sponsored a body of court poets. His patronage also included scholars and scientists, many of whom were drawn to Fatimid Egypt once word of his largess spread. Among the new-comers was a Spaniard, Umayya b. Abī'l-Ṣalt, who arrived hoping for al-Afḍal's patronage. He would later write an account, called by him "The Egyptian Letter" (*al-Risāla al-Miṣriyya*), of his adventures in Egypt and the poets—we have the names of ten of them—he met there.

Nor was the Arabic poetry of Egypt the only product of this era. With the Norman conquest of Sicily in 1071, a once thriving poetic culture in Arabic on the island declined in part because of lack of patronage and the exile from it of many individuals. The record we have now of Sicilian Arabic poetry depended on the collecting of it in Cairo by Fatimid officials during the early part of the following century.

A final phase of poetic flourishing in Fatimid Egypt began with one of the last *wazīrs*, Ṭalā'ī b. Ruzzīk. Not only was he himself a noted poet whose *dīwān* we have but he was an avid patron of poets, among them 'Umāra al-Yamanī, who wrote several long poems in praise of his patron, among other important figures. From slightly later we have also Ibn Qalāqīs whose *dīwān*, which survives as well, includes poems in praise of the various *wazīrs* he served.

Another category of literature is often subsumed under the Arabic term *adab*, ("belle lettres"). The word has really no succinct definition and it is preferable to include in this group a wide range of works on various topics not otherwise included within major classifications. An early example would be the "Book of Monasteries" (*Kitāb al-Diyārāt*) by al-Shābustī, al-'Azīz's librarian. Yet it might also include a book on falconry (*Kitāb al-Bayzara*) written by the same caliph's keeper of falcons. Additional examples from the next century are the works of the *qāḍī* al-Quḍā'ī, such as, for example, his *The Sayings, Sermons and Teachings of 'Alī*,¹³ and the wildly popular *Mukhtār al-ḥikam wa maḥāsīn*

13 English trans. Tahera Qutbuddin, *A Treasury of Virtues* (New York, 2013).

al-kalīm of al-Mubashshir b. Fātik, which saw wide circulation in the Muslim world. The latter consists of a collection of mainly Greek wisdom concerning ethics and moral behavior. The same author also composed a biography of the caliph al-Mustanṣir that is, quite unfortunately, now lost.

Here is perhaps a good place to introduce the work of the Fatimid chancery. For nearly all Islamic dynasties, its chancery practice prompted special attention as the ability to produce elegantly phrased letters, decrees and documents was considered essential to good government and its reputation. However, as pointedly noted by al-Qalqashandī, the most widely respected medieval authority on the subject,

When the Fatimids assumed control of Egypt, they lavished extra attention on the chancery and its clerks. Accordingly, its value rose because of them and its fame spread everywhere. They appointed to the chancery some of the most excellent and eloquent of clerks, including both Muslims and non-Muslims.¹⁴

Several became famous in their own right; collections of their work, mainly pieces produced for the chancery, were published and read as examples of fine literature. Among the most highly regarded were Ibn al-Sayrafī and al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil—both later famous—but there are many more whose names would be recognized by specialists in Arabic epistolary. Two of these clerks also composed important manuals of chancery practice, one by ‘Alī b. Khalaf, the *Mawādd al-bayān* from the 5th/11th century, and the other by Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, his *Qānūn dīwān al-rasā’il* from the next.¹⁵ But many of the prominent clerks in the Fatimid chancery also wrote books and treatises on the side. A curious case is al-‘Amīdī who was supervisor of the chancery in 432/1040 and who composed a work on the plagiarisms of the great poet al-Mutanabbī (*al-Ibāna ‘an sariqāt al-Mutanabbī*).¹⁶

We have at least two works on music, one that combines both theory and practice by Ibn al-Ṭahhān, his “Compendium of the Arts to Comfort Sad Hearts” (*Ḥawī al-funūn wa salwat al-mahzūn*) from the first half of the 5th/11th century. Two examples of treatises on medicine are, first, the writings of Sahlān b. Kaysān, a Christian physician who enjoyed royal support during the reign of

¹⁴ Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā* 1: 96.

¹⁵ Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *al-Qānūn dīwān al-rasā’il*, French trans. Massé, “Code de la chancellerie d’état,” *BIFAO* 11 (1914): 65–120.

¹⁶ Eng. trans. by Arthur Wormhoudt, *The Revelations of the Plagiarisms of al-Mutanabbī* (Oskaloosa, Iowa, 1974).

al-ʿAzīz and who is remembered by among other writings for a small treatise on aromatics and perfume, and the much better-known Ibn Riḍwān who was appointed chief of physicians by the caliph al-Mustanṣir. He composed pamphlets against doctors he disagreed with and a book called *Prevention of Bodily Ills in Egypt*.¹⁷ For him also we have lists of as many as one hundred works credited by later authorities to his name.

The hard sciences¹⁸ like mathematics, physics and astronomy were both promoted and studied under the Fatimids but two names stand out: Ibn Yūnus (d. 399/1009) and Ibn al-Haytham (d. 439/1039), although the exact connection of the latter with Fatimid sponsorship is less than clear in our sources. He did come and work in Egypt, however. The former was the author/compiler of the famous *Zīj al-ḥākīmī al-kabīr*, a book of astronomical tables dedicated to the caliph al-Ḥākīm.

In politics, or more properly in the genre of advice for rulers, al-Ṭurtūshī's *The Lamplight of Kings* (*Sirāj al-mulūk*), completed in Fustat in 516/1122, and dedicated to his patron the Fatimid *wazīr* al-Ma'mūn, is rightly renowned as a classic of its kind. Originally from Spain, al-Ṭurtūshī eventually landed and settled in Alexandria where, even though a Sunnī, he commanded considerable respect from a broad spectrum of scholars, students and government officials.

Finally we can cite by name several histories composed under the Fatimids although few exist now in their original form rather than isolated quotations in works by later authors. Ibn Zūlāq, for example, composed a day-by-day account of the reign of al-Mu'izz once he had arrived in Egypt and taken control. Sadly it is now lost. The massive history of al-Musabbihī, said to have contained as many as 2,600 pages, comes to us only in one tiny section; the rest is apparently gone. Two more from a much later period have suffered a similar fate. The detailed history by Ibn al-Ma'mūn, the son of the *wazīr* al-Ma'mūn, exists in pieces. Ibn al-Muyassar and Ibn al-Ṭuwayr wrote important works on the history of the Fatimids but what we have now of either one is only a part, or, as in the case of Ibn al-Muyassar, the summary notes taken from the original by al-Maqrīzī. In fact al-Maqrīzī, a 15th century Mamluk era historian and admirer of the Fatimids, may have been responsible for most of what survives of the others. He had access to them and we do not, except through his writings,

17 *al-Rasā'il*, Arabic text and trans. Joseph Schacht and Max Meyerhof in *The Medico-Philosophical Controversy Between Ibn Butlan of Baghdad and Ibn Ridwan of Cairo*. (Cairo, 1937) and *Kitāb Daḥḥ muḍarr al-abdān fī Miṣr*, Arabic with Eng. trans. by Michael W. Dols in *Medieval Islamic Medicine* (Berkeley, 1984).

18 Here see Walker, "Science in the Service of the Fatimids and Their Ismaili *Da'wa*" in Eva Orthmann & Petra Schmidl, eds, in *Science in the City of Fortune: The Dustūr al-Munajjimīn and its World*. Now available in this volume.

among which is, most significantly, a history of the Fatimid imams which he entitled *Lessons for the True Believers in the History of the Fatimid Imams and Caliphs*.

2 Fatimid Libraries and Book Collections¹⁹

Two important pieces of information regarding book collections take us back to the very foundation of the caliphate. When the Imam, the future al-Mahdī, was passing through Egypt in the early years of the 4th/10th century as he fled from Salamiyya, Syria, where his recent forefathers had resided, he protected his true identity under the cover of a wealthy merchant and a retinue of servants. Egypt was then not safe, however, and he continued westward joining a caravan in Alexandria headed to the Maghrib. Not far out of that city, his group was attacked by brigands and many of his possessions looted, among which was a collection of books the loss of which sorely bothered him. Fortunately, ten years later, now with al-Mahdī formally installed as the caliph, a military expedition led by his son and later successor, al-Qa'im, recovered those same books. Al-Mahdi is said to have remarked that if this expedition achieved nothing else returning these books would have been enough. Clearly a library was vital and the imam-caliph himself was keen to acknowledge his personal interest in it. In fact more evidence from the next decades confirms, on a couple of occasions, the caliph's wish to be surrounded by books, a policy for which this is only a beginning. It was to continue without let up to the end of the dynasty.

A second piece of evidence comes from a memoir by Ibn al-Haytham,²⁰ an eager convert to the Ismaili cause in the first months of Fatimid rule in North Africa. As he explained to the great *dā'ī* Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shī'ī, he owned personally an impressive collection of philosophical and scientific works, among them the writings of Plato and Aristotle, but many others. We do not often see what books a private citizen might possess, but here is such a case. Private libraries could be fairly extensive, it seems, even in cities far away from Baghdad and the major centers of the east where the book trade flourished. This newly minted Fatimid *dā'ī*, although relatively young, was not only well-educated

19 For additional information about what follows here, with detailed references to sources, see Walker, "Fatimid Institutions of Learning," *JARCE* 34 (1997): 179–200 and "Libraries, Book Collection and the Production of Texts by the Fatimids," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 4 (2016): 7–21. The latter article is included in this volume.

20 English and Arabic in *Advent of the Fatimids*.

and well-read but possessed already, when he joined the *da'wa*, a substantial library of his own.

From this information, which is quite early, it is fairly easy to trace the ongoing development of the royal libraries although the sources comment on it only occasionally. What they report, nevertheless, often suggests more than they actually say. From the year 383/993 there is the story of a devoted follower of the Imam who brings him a copy of the famous multi-volume history by al-Ṭabarī, a major classic of Islamic scholarship. The caliph, al-'Azīz, then asks his librarian to go fetch the twenty copies he already owns of the same work. Incidents such as this involving the gift to the imam of a well-known title reveal in each additional case that the caliph's collections hold by this time many more examples of the same item, at least one of which is typically in the hand of the author in question. Clearly, by the reign of al-'Azīz, the library held a wide range of titles including most major items of Islamic and Arabic letters. From material of this type, we thus learn about the vast size of Fatimid royal holdings. Significantly, a librarian existed dedicated to the task of managing it all. The sheer size alone established the need for a professional. Surely the position was important. Even so only two are actually named in our sources. This one from the time of al-'Azīz was also famous for having composed the well-known book on monasteries, cited earlier.

Another possibly significant piece of incidental information helps explain the reputed vast scale of the royal collection: it contained many copies of the same book. As the figures given in later accounts, most especially at the end, seem impossibly large—a total of 1,600,000 volumes—it is worth remembering that bound volumes of a particularly large work containing many, many volumes are likely counted separately—that is, each bound volume that was subsumed under a single title—and that multiple copies of a certain title (e.g. twenty-one copies of al-Ṭabarī's *History*) could readily increase the totals without indicating or even suggesting how many individual titles are in a library.

The one negative report, an incident in which the royal libraries lost a substantial portion of their holdings, comes from a period of calamity and hardship during the 460s (1068–1074) when the government suffered a severe collapse due in part to lack of revenues. Because it could not pay its obligations, most particularly the salaries of army offices and government bureaucrats, its only recourse was to trade away the items of value in its treasuries. In exchange for money owed, soldiers and officials accepted such objects, which included books. Item after item came out of as many as forty separate depositories in the palace. One alone contained a reported 18,000 volumes on the ancient sciences. There were 2,400 boxed Qur'ans each with embellished illuminations of gold and silver. But here it should be noted that, as our source clearly indicates,

despite such losses, which were certainly substantial, some parts of the palace were never touched. Many individual treasuries and book collections were not depleted at all. They remained intact and were there to form the nucleus of the immense royal libraries we hear about in an even later period.

A different sort of library, neither of the restricted royal kind nor the possession of a private citizen, came into existence during the reign of the caliph al-Ḥākim when he created what amounted to an academic institution, known as the Dār al-ʿIlm ("House of Learning") in 395/1005. Basically new in the Islamic world, it was intended by the caliph as a public library with a faculty of professors. He endowed it not only with an operating budget but with as many as 1,500 books culled from the palace collections. Anyone could visit it, read the volumes it held, and learn from the scholarly staff. Moreover, he encouraged the public to make their own copies of the books, in part by supplying free paper, pens and ink for that purpose. We possess a copy of the deed of endowment²¹ and we can trace some of the subsequent history of this remarkable creation. Accordingly, we know that it was not, in its earliest phase, an instrument of the Ismaili *daʿwa*, in contrast to a separate institution the Majlis al-Ḥikma. The latter served as the weekly sessions of instruction and exhortation in Ismaili doctrine, its religious purpose being all too clear. The Dār al-ʿIlm simply did not promote any specific faith. The subjects taught in it were grammar and lexicography. The professors whose names we can recover were all Sunnīs.

In its later iterations, it may have moved more and more toward the promotion of Ismailism. It was the residence of the famous head of the *daʿwa* al-Muʿayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī. Still, many years later, in the period 513/1119 to 517/1123, its status as a public academy caused trouble for the government precisely because it was not directly controlled by the Ismaili establishment. The problem arose as a consequence of its open public nature. Non-Ismaili and non-conformist preachers adopted it as a base to launch their own heretical doctrines. As a consequence it was ordered shut at least once and finally closed and moved to a new location where it was reopened and this time put firmly under the control of the *daʿwa*. The caliph's vision of a public library, although it lasted well over a century, eventually required, in the view of the government, tighter safeguards against potential abuse.

From these later years, we have particularly intriguing information about a private book collector, the Jewish physician named Afrā'im, whose story was partially recounted above. This man's true passion was books, which he sought

21 It is preserved as an appendix to Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir's *al-Rawḍa al-bahīyya al-zāhira fī khitāt al-mu'izziyya al-qāhira* (Cairo, 1996).

so avidly that he employed full-time a number of copyists. His plan was to form a collection he could then sell as a set. A book dealer in Baghdad heard about it and came to Cairo hoping to buy it. However, at that moment, the all-powerful *wazīr* al-Afḍal approached the doctor and made him an offer he could not refuse. When al-Afḍal was later assassinated, everything he possessed, including his books, were transferred to the palace and added to the royal treasuries.

Near the end of the dynasty, the palace held an incalculable literary treasury. One section alone contained, we are told, 200,000 bound volumes covering such subjects as law, grammar, lexicography, hadith, history, the lives of kings, astronomy, theology, and chemistry. But there were many other libraries as well, some apparently intended as personal reading materials for each of the final three caliphs (al-Zāfir, al-Fā'iz and al-ʿAḍid) who were themselves school-age youths.

A collection of books of such enormous size as these libraries should have left evidence of itself. We might expect some volumes to have survived. However, we do know that the dynasty that took over from the Fatimids had little interest in them and that is apparent in our sources. Several modern scholars have, accordingly, mistakenly assumed that this lack of interest translated into purposeful attempts at destruction in order to eradicate any traces of Ismaili Shiism. The royal library contained heretical works and the Ayyubids systematically destroyed them according to this claim. However, there exists no evidence of such a move. Rather than destroy, the subsequent dynasty simply neglected these collections or tried to sell what they could. It took ten years to clean out the treasuries of the Fatimid palace. Prominent figures also were allowed to take what they wanted. Al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil gathered for himself 100,000 volumes and transferred them to a new madrasa that he had built.

So where are all these books now; surely some survive? From long after the Fatimids, one authority reports that, in local libraries, he found books on the title page of which were the names of previous owners, and in several he saw the names of both Afrā'im and al-Afḍal. Recent investigations have now also shown that there are examples of Arabic manuscripts in modern collections that state on the title page that they once belonged to the library of al-Afḍal and three, as is clear from an added notation, subsequently went into the library of either al-Fā'iz or al-Zāfir, two of the child caliphs mentioned above.

This brief account shows how much existed with clear indications that a complete review of Fatimid era literature and its book culture would require many more pages. If we can locate upwards of 175 single titles of books and treatises issued by the *da'wa* alone, the number for authors not tied directly to Ismailism would exceed that figure by multiples. In some cases we have long lists of works by a given writer that once existed and that were seen by

contemporaries or later authorities but that are often now lost. Still the surviving literary legacy, those works we do have available to us from the Fatimid period is certainly large and impressive.²²

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- 22 Here as with the subject of chapter eight above, it may be useful to take note of two later studies that contribute to the issue of what survived of Fatimid materials, in this case books, some perhaps from the royal library collections. Konrad Hirschler's *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library: the Ashrafiya Library Catalogue*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) contains important information about the role of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil and then his son in the transfer of books from the royal libraries first to the father's madrasa and then much later to the Ashrafiya in Damascus (see pp. 33–34). Fozia Bora's article "Did Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Destroy the Fatimids' Books? An Historiographical Enquiry," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, third series, 25 (2015): 21–39, likewise treats Ayyubid period evidence for the survival of what she calls "the Fatimids' books." Clearly neither Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn nor his dynasty actively destroyed what they inherited of Fatimid treasures, including books. There simply is no evidence for this claim and those who have made it should have known better. However Bora's concept of what might be involved with respect to Fatimid era literature or the royal libraries is woefully incomplete and unsophisticated. Her major contribution is a close, detailed examination of what Ayyubid and later sources say in this regard. Moreover a growing body of evidence proves that much later authorities could still find Ismaili and non-Ismaili books in Egypt and elsewhere. Al-Maqrīzī's citation of Ibn Zūlāq's book on al-Mu'izz, a copy of which written in the hand of the author, he had used, as well as the quite Ismaili legal compendium compiled by the *wazīr* Ibn Killis he appears to have owned personally are good examples. There are many more, some mentioned in my article.

The Pitti Palace Rock Crystal Ewer and the Sordid Story of How and Why It Came to Exist

The magnificent rock crystal ewer,¹ now in Florence's Palazzo Pitti,² has long been rightly considered one of the crowning jewels of Fatimid art and is often cited as such.³ Moreover, because it bears an inscription—one of three important rock crystal objects from their era with a datable inscription—its attribution to the Fatimids has never been in doubt. But, unlike the other two, each of which contains the name of one of the caliphs—al-'Azīz (r. 365/975–386/996) in the case of the ewer now in the treasury of San Marco and al-Zāhir (r. 411/1021–427/1036) on a crescent-shaped ornament⁴ in Nuremberg's Germanisches Museum—this one does not name a caliph but rather somewhat imprecisely indicates that it belonged to the “Commander of Commanders” (Arabic *Qā'id al-quwwād*). Nevertheless, in an article published sixty years ago by the art historian D. S. Rice,⁵ the matter seemed to most authorities resolved. Rice declared that this title “Commander of Commanders” most certainly pointed to al-Ḥusayn b. Jawhar, a high-ranking member of the court elite under the

- 1 In writing this article I benefited from expert readers, Anna Contadini and Jonathan Bloom, who both commented on an earlier version, and Jeremy Johns who reviewed it most carefully at a later stage catching errors and suggesting important considerations. Original published as “The Pitti Palace Rock Crystal Ewer and the Sordid Story of How and Why It Came to Exist” *JNES* 77 (2018) 41–46.
- 2 Museo degli Argenti, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, inv. no. 1917, height 15.6 cm (6.5 in), maximum diameter 97 mm (3.8 in). As a sign of its prominence in what survives of Fatimid art, images of it are not hard to find, for example, Jonathan Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious*, p. 103.
- 3 As the result of a tragic accident in 1998, this ewer broke into some 80 pieces but has now been restored. See Anna Contadini, “Facets of Light: The Case of Rock Crystals,” in J. Bloom and Sh. Blair, eds, *God Is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth: Light in Islamic Art and Culture* (New Haven, Yale U. P., 2015), pp. 123–55, p. 125. See p. 126 for a good image of the ewer before the accident and p. 127 for it in the process of restoration. The restoration was accomplished by Federica Cappelli who has described the process in a thesis “Uno brocchetta fatiimida in cristallo di rocca dal Museo degli Argenti: Problematiche di intervento,” Tesi di Diploma, Corso quadriennale 2000–2004, Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Scuola di Alta Formazione, Firenze. Reference kindly supplied by Jeremy Johns.
- 4 Jeremy Johns, who has recently examined this object, reports that the rock crystal actually forms a ring, not a crescent, but part of it is hidden from view by the uppermost mount. For a picture of this piece, see Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious*, p. 104.
- 5 D. S. Rice, “A Datable Islamic Rock Crystal,” *Oriental Art*, vol. 1 (1955–56): 84–93.

caliph al-Ḥākim (r. 386/996–411/1021). This al-Ḥusayn was, in fact, the son of the famous general who had conquered Egypt for the Fatimids, ruled it for several years, and started the construction of the city of Cairo. Rice was able to review in detail the career of al-Ḥusayn, noting among other matters that the father had the simpler title *al-Qā'id* (the Commander) and that, upon his death in 381/992, the regime accorded the son the title of *al-Qā'id ibn al-Qā'id* (Commander son of the Commander). Some eight years later, on 17 Jumādā 11 390/25 May 1000, an imperial decree announced that he would have a new title, that of *Qā'id al-Quwwād* (Commander of Commanders). It was a title the Fatimids had not used previously for anyone.

However, although Rice was correct to notice this connection, which, he was sure, made for a secure attribution of this ewer to al-Ḥusayn, he was in fact almost certainly wrong as the evidence about to be presented will show. He failed to see, or perhaps ignored, a second case where another major figure under al-Ḥākim was given this same title. The person in question was the eunuch Ghabn⁶ who was given this title soon after the death of al-Ḥusayn. As we will see, he is a far, far better candidate for ownership of this ewer. Most simply put, the ewer now in Florence was originally commissioned by the caliph al-Ḥākim as a particularly sumptuous gift for this man for whom he had conceived a bizarrely fickle but passionate infatuation. Ghabn would be the object of his extremes, alternating wild generosity with vindictive cruelty.

Nothing in the accounts that have reached us suggests that al-Ḥākim favored al-Ḥusayn or ever lavished him with gifts. The relationship between them was always tense, even hostile. In sharp contrast the caliph's strange affections for Ghabn, with his continuing wish to shower him with valuable presents of precious objects, positions of high rank and lucrative assignments, alternating with draconian punishments—the cutting off of first one hand and then the other and finally the tongue—which he appeared to regret immediately after inflicting them, was unique to the latter case.

The evidence in this instance comes to us from several historical accounts and from an object, one with an important inscription bearing the name Ghabn and clearly indicating his title along with that of this caliph. The oldest of the historical accounts occurs in the *History* of Yahyā of Antioch.⁷

6 Since some Arabic sources have a different spelling (Ghayn, for example, which is a possible reading of the Arabic in an undotted script), it is important to note that we possess an object from the time of Ghabn which has the name clearly spelled, the dots carefully marked, and thus there is no doubt about it.

7 Yahyā b. Sa'īd al-Anṭākī, *Ta'rikh*, part III, ed. Kratchkowsky, French trans. by F. Micheau and G. Troupeau, *Patrologia Orientalia* 47 (1997): 373–559; ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmūrī. (Ṭarābilis, Lubnān, 1990).

Composed slightly later than the time of Ghabn, it is nevertheless a key witness. Yaḥyā, we believe, lived in Egypt, most probably in Fustat, up to about 404/1013 after which he departed for Antioch due to an opening for emigration the caliph allowed then for the Christians of his realm. The Melkites such as Yaḥyā and others took advantage of this opportunity; Byzantine Antioch apparently appeared much safer than Egypt under al-Ḥākim. However, for the period of Ghabn's ascendancy Yaḥyā, then still in Fustat, was likely an eyewitness. His reports about events in Egypt, even those that deal with later years, are generally sound and reliable. He obviously knew people in high places.

A second major source is now found in two works of the 15th-century Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī, his chronologically arranged history of the Fatimid dynasty the *Itti'āz al-ḥunafā*,⁸ and his topography, the *Khiṭaṭ*.⁹ Although both are themselves late, their author had access to much earlier materials, here almost certainly the massive history assembled by the *Amīr* al-Musabbihī, a contemporary of the very period we are investigating. He actually lived through the reign of al-Ḥākim and, on occasion, spoke directly to him. His history was more of a diary, a yearly, perhaps even monthly, series of entries that recorded what happened, mainly in the Fatimid capital, or news that arrived there.

Ghabn's name comes up in yet other histories, including al-Ṣayrafī's history of Fatimid *wazīrs*.¹⁰ But even more important is the large charger, fragments of which, now reassembled, is in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. In the inscription around its outer rim, although for the most part missing, we find the name Ghabn, one element of the double title he held, and the name of his master the caliph al-Ḥākim. Like the rock-crystal ewer under discussion, this piece was also a gift from the caliph to Ghabn. For details see the discussion below.

The argument for the attribution of the Florence ewer to al-Ḥusayn appeared to make sense in the absence of a full account of what we know about Ghabn. Clearly al-Ḥusayn was an important well-placed figure during the early reign of al-Ḥākim. He was wealthy (although it is questionable that his wealth was enough for him to have commissioned this piece for himself), well-regarded, and moved easily through the establishment. The enormous prestige of his

8 *Itti'āz*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid.

9 *Khiṭaṭ*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid, special section on Ghabn, 4182–83.

10 Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *al-Ishāra ilā man nāla al-wizāra* ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid, p. 68. For two others, Ibn Duqmaq's *Itiṣār*, and Ibn Saʿīd's *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, see below. The one relatively short section of Musabbihī's *History* that survives contains a mention of a building that had once been known as the house (*dār*) of Ghabn (Musabbihī, *Akhbār Miṣr*. part. 1 (historical section), p. 78.)

father carried over to him even though it is uncertain in what manner he had earned it. He belonged to an elite that could trace their involvement with this dynasty back to the earlier period of rule in the Maghrib, among which were the sons and grandsons of the famous jurist al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān. Al-Ḥusayn was in fact allied through marriage ties to 'Abd al-'Azīz b. al-Nu'mān, who was his brother-in-law. However, as the erratic rule of al-Ḥākim progressed, al-Ḥusayn's position and his prominence appeared increasingly to invite the caliph's disapproval. Rice, in the article cited above carefully reviews the unpleasant chain of events leading to the downfall and eventual execution of al-Ḥusayn and 'Abd al-'Azīz. Several times, sensing trouble, they tried either to flee or to hide; more than once they reappeared and were forgiven, or so it seemed to them and their friends. They collected declarations of safety (an *aman*) each time, all of which were carefully confiscated at the final arrest. They were executed together on the 12th of Jumādā II 401/21 January 1011.

The information about Ghabn commences in our historical sources with a notice entered for the hijra year 402. It states that on the 9th of Rabī' II/9 November 1011 a robe of honor (*khila'*) was bestowed on the eunuch Ghabn as well as a sword. A decree was read out for him saying that he now held the title Commander of Commanders (*Qā'id al-Quwwād*) and that he was to use it in his correspondence and to be so addressed in letters to him. In addition he was paraded accompanied with ten horses each with saddle and bridle.¹¹ Thus, only a little over nine months after the killing of the previous holder of this title, it reappears, this time given to Ghabn.

Several comments are necessary here. From information provided by other sources, we know that Ghabn held a second title, or possibly a second part of a joint title. That made him the "Master Eunuch of the Master Eunuchs" (*Ustādh al-Ustādhīn*).¹² This latter title, along with *Qā'id al-Quwwād*, is mentioned as Ghabn's by Yahyā¹³ and is clearly visible on the charger mentioned earlier and about which more will be said later.¹⁴ Unlike the Arabic term *khādim*, which usually signifies a eunuch,¹⁵ the word *ustādh* has other meanings, including

11 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, ed. Sayyid, 2: 105–06.

12 The word *ustādh* here in this context may signify a title of more respect than simply eunuch and therefore I have translated it as 'master eunuch' but it would also be correct to say, to be more literal, in this case 'Eunuch of the Eunuchs'.

13 Yahyā, *Ta'rikh*, ed. Tadmūrī, p. 309.

14 In the case of the charger, we have only a fragment containing the phrase *Ustādh al-Ustā[dh]*. The other title is now missing but was most likely included on the original piece.

15 Of course the Arabic *khādim*, which means basically 'servant', is also ambiguous. However it commonly denotes a eunuch in the context we are investigating.

‘master’ or ‘teacher’. However here it certainly refers to eunuchs who were often called *ustādh*, as in the well-known Fatimid case of Ustādh Jawdhar, who had served as a kind of chief financial officer, a quasi-*wazīr*, during the Maghribi period (he died en route to Egypt with the caliph’s party). But when was this particular title given to Ghabn? At the time of the ceremony just cited or perhaps even earlier when it would have been separate from Commander of Commanders?

Following al-Maqrīzī’s trail of information,¹⁶ we learn that in the late Spring of the same year, approximately between the 1st of Shawwāl and the start of Dhu’l-Ḥijja (April 26 and June 30, 1012), Ghabn suffered an illness that prompted the caliph to ride to him to arrange his care. He also delivered to him 5,000 dinars and 20 horses with saddles and bridles. On this occasion he appointed him to the position of commander of the police and market inspection in Fustat, Cairo, and Jiza (or alternately the Jazīra). He was to supervise all goods and services. As part of the ceremony of investiture, he went to the Old Mosque in Fustat accompanied by the rest of the army with his robe of honor. There a decree was read making this appointment and adding a list of policies he should carefully observe in carrying out his new duties.¹⁷ The participation of the army (*al-ʿaskar*) may suggest that Ghabn also had come from the military.

In the following year, al-Maqrīzī includes a brief note about the caliph summoning to government service Ḥusayn b. Ṭāhir al-Wazzān who was, until then, serving Ghabn exclusively,¹⁸ and here he says Ghabn the “black eunuch”, thus explicitly citing his skin color, a fact also mentioned elsewhere. Unfortunately, although we know that Ghabn was black, that does not tell us much about his possible ethnicity or origin except for sub-Saharan Africa. As a eunuch slave, however, he is likely to have been purchased quite young and raised in the Fatimid capital, not necessarily with others of the same ethnic background.

The next information chronologically indicates that on the 1st of Ṣafar 404/13 August 1013, Ghabn was removed from his position and replaced by someone else.¹⁹ We have no further explanation of why this happened and why at that moment. But, just over two months thereafter, we come to a major crisis of some kind the result of which appears to set in motion the final downfall of Ghabn.

16 The next entry about Ghabn is *Ittīʿāz*, ed. Sayyid, 2:107–08.

17 For more details see Walker, *Caliph of Cairo: al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allah*, pp. 82 and 198.

18 *Ittīʿāz*, ed. Sayyid, 2: 111.

19 *Ittīʿāz*, ed. Sayyid, 2: 119.

The story here centers on the early career of the later justly famous *wazīr* ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Jarjarā’ī, *wazīr* to the Fatimid calphs al-Zāhir and al-Mustanṣir from 418/1028 to 436/1045. In 404/1013–14, however, he was simply the clerk of Ghabn and, in that role, he got caught up in a tragic mistake that cost him both of his hands. Al-Maqrīzī offers two different accounts of what occurred,²⁰ as if he did not trust the first. According to it, al-Jarjarā’ī had previously been clerk in the service of al-Ḥākim’s older half-sister Sitt al-Mulk but that, out of fear that she was displeased with him, he transferred from her to Ghabn and then sent her a letter hoping to placate her. He mentioned in his letter things he had come to know. She doubted his intentions and suspected it was a trick. So she sent the letter in an envelope to her brother. When he read it, he became furious and ordered both al-Jarjarā’ī’s hands cut off completely.

In the second account, it has Ghabn regularly delivering letters from ‘Uqayl, the head of the intelligence bureau, to al-Ḥākim. He takes the letter from ‘Uqayl sealed tightly. He then gives it to his clerk al-Jarjarā’ī pending a moment when he might be alone with the caliph and hand it over to him. But here, on this occasion, the clerk al-Jarjarā’ī breaks open the seal and reads the letter. In it he discovers sharp criticism of Ghabn. He then cuts out that part of the letter, roughs over the area and restores it. Then replaces the seal. ‘Uqayl finds out and requests of the caliph a private audience and, once granted, tells him what has happened. Thereupon al-Ḥākim orders both hands of al-Jarjarā’ī cut off. Fifteen days later, on the 3rd of Jumādā 1/10th of November, he orders the remaining hand of Ghabn cut off as well.

Here, and only at this point, our source²¹ notes that the other hand of Ghabn had been cut off three years and a month earlier. No source mentions this fact before this or explains why it happened. It places the first amputation in the year 400/1009, prior to the initial notice about Ghabn. Incidentally it also provides a clue that allows us to assume that Ghabn’s close involvement with al-Ḥākim predates the earliest event in which he is mentioned. Because three years and a month prior puts this incident in 400 (Rabī‘ 1)/1009 (Oct. or Nov.), we can push back accordingly the love-hate infatuation the caliph conceived for Ghabn that far and conclude that it also resulted then in this earlier expression of what was to become his intermittent fits of rage against the object of his affection.

After the later event, the hand was conveyed on a platter to al-Ḥākim, who then dispatched doctors to treat Ghabn. He also sent him utensils made of gold

20 Versions of both accounts appear in the two works mentioned above: *Itti‘āz*, ed. Sayyid, 2: 121–22, and *Khiṭaṭ*, ed. Sayyid, 4: 183, although they are not exactly the same.

21 *Khiṭaṭ*, ed. Sayyid, 4: 183.

and a number of suits of clothing. However, on the 13th of the same month, the caliph ordered that his tongue be cut out. That was done and it was also conveyed to al-Ḥākim, who again sent doctors to him. Here al-Maqrīzī adds simply “and he died after that”. The quite brief account provided by Ibn Duqmaq in his *Intisār* gives this date for the cutting of the tongue and then comments: “And then al-Ḥākim sent him ‘Atāb (or ‘Anāb) b. Sabā’²² the physician to treat him and he ordered all of the lords of the state to visit him, but then he killed him in the year 405.”²³ Having the notables visit Ghabn at this point is mentioned elsewhere. What is new here is a name of a specific doctor (as well as a date of Ghabn’s death).

There is more to say about when he died but at this juncture it appears especially important to bring in here the account provided by Yaḥyā as it neatly summarizes a view of these same events from a different perspective. It is useful also to quote him verbatim.

Al-Ḥākim was wont to draw Ghabn the black eunuch close to himself and yet then to turn against him and so he cut off his right hand. Still, afterward, he favored him with excessive devotion and bestowed on him the title Commander of Commanders and Master Eunuch of Eunuchs (*Qā’id al-Quwwād* and *Ustādh al-Ustādhīn*). He singled him out and advanced him over all the people of his state and the leading men of his kingdom. His devotion to him and infatuation with him increased. He appointed him to the most lucrative of positions and permitted him the choicest of royal properties and annual land grant tenancies. He brought him utensils so fine (*min al-ālāt al-mustaḥsana*) their worth was incalculable (*mā yu’azīmu miqdārāhī*). But, after a short while, he changed yet again and cut out his tongue.

He had cut off the hands of Ghabn’s clerk ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Jarjarā’ī at the wrist. And he followed what he had done to Ghabn the eunuch in cutting out his tongue by increasing his gifts and favors to him, presenting him with what amounted to double what he had given him previously.

While Yaḥyā adds little to clarify the exact sequence and chronology, he does offer key information about the gifts the caliph was apt to lavish on the object of his affections, some so fine as to be of incalculable worth. Surely among them

22 In the printed text available to me which is not perfectly clear, it’s not certain exactly what this name is, possibly ‘Anāb or ‘Atāb (‘Unāb, ‘Utāb) b. Sabā’. There appears to be no other information about him.

23 Ibn Duqmaq, *Kitāb al-Intisār li-wāsiṭat ‘iqd al-amṣār* (Cairo, 1894), 4: 115.

was the Pitti ewer. Its inscription says that it was explicitly “for the Commander of the Commanders personally (*khāṣṣatan*)”.²⁴

Another gift, though of distinctly less value, was the charger in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, which, although not on par with the ewer, is nevertheless an impressive lustre decorated piece that measures 50 cm in diameter, quite large enough to be distinctive and important. We can be certain of this association because of the inscription on the outer rim of it, which was carefully analyzed and then read conjecturally but with solid authority by Ḥasan al-Bāshā in 1965. The item itself survived in several fragments which have now been reassembled. There are only four separate pieces of the original, much larger, rim, each of which contains a few letters or words. The charger is 50 cm wide;²⁵ that provides some idea of how much of an inscription it originally had. Fortunately, the interior of the plate is complete enough for a secure placement of the rim fragments in relation to the center and to each other. What is visible are the following individual bits of the whole inscription: *li-ustādh al-ustā; ghabn mawlā a; ḥākim bi-amr; wa ‘alā ābā’ihi a*. The rest of it is missing. Our Egyptian authority, however, could judge fairly precisely the likely dimensions of the missing words or phrases and, in part by comparing it with known examples and other information, determined that the whole once read:

li-Ustādh al-Ustādhīn Qā’id al-Quwwād Ghabn Mawlā Amīr al-Mu’minīn al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh ṣulwāt Allāh ‘alayhi wa ‘alā ābā’ihi al-ṭāhirīn wa abnā’ihi al-akramīn (“For the Master Eunuch of the Eunuchs, Commander of Commanders, Ghabn, the Client of the Commander of the Believers al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, may God bless him and his pure forefathers and noble descendants.”).²⁶

This result, although in part based on surmise (especially the words *al-ṭāhirīn* and *al-akramīn*) seems entirely reasonable within the Fatimid context.²⁷

24 For the exact reading of the inscription which I have not personally examined I am relying on Rice’s judgment, p. 89 of the article cited above.

25 It is also 12 cm high and 10 cm deep.

26 Ḥasan al-Bāshā, “Ṭabaq min al-khazaf bi-ism Ghabn mawlā al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh,” *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University*, 18 (1965): 71–85, plus 50 figures, p. 82. Figures 1 to 5 provide images of the separate fragments. As a supplement to this article ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf ‘Alī Yūsuf, curator of the ceramics section of the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, published in the same issue a technical analysis of the material details of this object, “Ṭabaq ‘Ghabn’ wa’l-khazaf al-fāṭimī al-mubakkir”.

27 An inscription placed by Jawhar on the newly built Mosque of al-Azhar named the caliph al-Mu’izz and included the benediction *ṣulwāt Allāh ‘alayhi wa ‘alā ābā’ihi wa abnā’ihi*

There now remains the problem of determining exactly when Ghabn died. It is hard to imagine that he survived the torture of losing his tongue, despite the care of doctors, courtesy of the caliph. However, it may have been otherwise. Yaḥyā would appear to say that al-Ḥākim's infatuation did not end with the order to remove the tongue but continued. A brief isolated note in Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī's *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira* claims that al-Ḥākim killed Ghabn and that he was taken out of the room, presumably the one he lived in, wrapped in a mat.²⁸ The latter detail is odd if not true. The placement of this report appears to indicate that it occurred subsequent to the killing of the judge Mālik b. Saʿīd al-Fāriqī and Ibn Tāhir al-Wazzān in the year 405/1014–15. We have already cited this date from the account of Ibn Duqmaq. Thus Ghabn must have held on into the year following the cutting of his tongue, making, as far as we can tell, the range of dates for the two objects in question here span the period 402–405/1011–1015, especially since we have no evidence that the title(s) given to Ghabn were taken away at any time prior to his death.

Although the sum evidence presented here does not prove with absolute certainty that the ewer was a royal commission precisely for the purpose claimed, it makes a case that is surely far more persuasive than the alternative. With regard to the charger, moreover, there seems to be no doubt as its inscription, which confirms it, is clear enough. The remaining problem with the ewer is whether al-Ḥākim could have ordered it made for this purpose and with this specific dedication carved on it. In other words it is a matter of how much lead-time is required, but the same, or similar, problem would have occurred in the case of al-Ḥusayn. The caliph's infatuation with Ghabn—or whatever it was—lasted over three years at least, which is likely enough, especially if we assume that carving the inscription was the final step in the manufacture of the piece.

al-akramūn. In this case the actual inscription is lost but the text of it was recorded by al-Maqrīzī. See Ayman Fuad Sayyid, *La Capitale de l'Égypte jusqu'à l'époque fatimide (al-Qāhira et al-Fustāt)—Essai de reconstitution topographique*. (Beirut and Stuttgart, 1998), pp 191–92.

28 Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, p. 65.

Al-Ḥākim and the *Dhimmīs*

Commencing with the year 395/1004, the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim imposed on the *dhimmī* (protected non-Muslim) populations under his control a number of restrictions that eventually culminated with measures so vexing and injurious substantial numbers of them decided that there was no way out except to convert to Islam.¹ This period is often cited as one rare example of persecution that contrasted sharply with general tolerance and respect for Christians and Jews living under Islamic rule. Certainly for the Fatimids, it was an exception, notably so. The two-decade reign of al-ʿAzīz (365/975–386/996), al-Ḥākim's father and predecessor, dealt favorably with the *dhimmīs*, who flourished in part because of it and they remembered it and him accordingly. The anomaly of the son's policies has therefore never ceased to attract special interest. Later Fatimids likewise seldom sought to harass unduly their Christian and Jewish subjects. To be sure one oddity in the case of al-Ḥākim is that at the very end of his caliphate, he reversed himself, at least in part, allowing converts to reclaim their original religion and permitting the building (or rebuilding) of destroyed houses of worship. Thus questions about what happened under al-Ḥākim and why, about the details and the results, remain important and, partly because they have not been adequately explained, still require investigation.²

The initial measures, decreed in 395/1005, stipulating that Jews and Christians were to begin wearing the *zunnār* (a waist band or girdle) and fasten in a prominent place a *ghiyār* (a badge) were not particularly unprecedented. Both are fairly common features of Islamic regulations for *dhimmīs*. In at least two other periods of Fatimid rule, the authorities required they be worn.³

1 Originally published as “Al-Ḥākim and the *Dhimmīs*,” *Medieval Encounters* 21 (2015): 345–363.

2 For the broader questions about the reign of al-Ḥākim, as well as many of the specific features, see now my *Caliph of Cairo: al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, 996–1021* (Cairo, AUC Press, 2009) to which this particular paper constitutes a supplement.

3 The first instance I know of occurred in Rabīʿ 1 of 362 (Dec. 10, 972–Jan. 9, 973). The report (*Ittiʾāz* 1: 132, Sayyid ed. 1: 148, for full publication details see the following note) says simply that the Jews were ordered not to appear without wearing the *ghiyār*. Christians are not mentioned. The second case is connected to the troubles following the downfall of the Christian *wazīr* Bahrām and the rise of the ardently Sunni Riḍwān who rode to power on an anti-Christian platform. The measures he decreed in 532/1137–8 against the *dhimmīs* (Jews included), however, represented a quite serious program of restrictions, which, minus church destructions, rivaled in many ways those of al-Ḥākim. On this see *Ittiʾāz* 3: 165; Sayyid ed. *Ittiʾāz* 3: 201 and the editor's note drawing on the *History of the Patriarchs*.

An additional stipulation in 395 specified that both be black as, we are told, a symbol of the seditious enemy Abbasid caliph whose color was black (the Fatimid color was white). Yet one more measure set up a punishment for slave dealers who sold male or female slaves to the *dhimmīs*, indicating thus that the practice must have been forbidden. But, by themselves, such impositions do not add up to or harbingers the more draconian rules yet to come. Nevertheless, from that same year, one report clearly suggests general panic and fear among the population of Cairo and Fustat, especially those in government service a great number of whom were members of the *dhimmī* communities. Others, including Ismailis and other Muslims, were included and they then were among those now seeking royal forgiveness. Why is not clear, but understanding the reaction of these several groups requires seeing the broader picture. The changes decreed by al-Ḥākim, one seemingly after another, during that same year amounted to a raft-load of new policies regulating food, drink, movements of women, and attitudes toward revered figures of the past (i.e. cursing of the *ṣaḥāba*⁴); all or most, though not without precedent in Islamic history, had never been part of previous Fatimid policy.

It is simply impossible to grasp the full import of what happened in 395 and later without looking at the whole range of new laws and restrictions, not just those affecting Christians and Jews. Al-Ḥākim's attempt to rid his realm of alcoholic beverages or *mulūkhiyya* (a soup made from jute leaves, quite popular with Egyptians) and *jirjir* (arugula)—to cite a couple of examples—appear to have been connected in a general scheme of social reform that caught up the *dhimmīs* as well and threatened them harshly on a personal level. It also included a quite unprecedented program of church, synagogue and monastery destruction so vast it is hard now to imagine its true scope. Even so the bigger picture, which is what I presented previously in my book on al-Ḥākim and his reign (*The Caliph of Cairo*), leaves many problems unexplored. Accordingly, it is useful to revisit this caliph's treatment of the *dhimmīs* with an eye focused on issues more narrowly associated with the meaning of what he did, or possible meaning, for the history of Muslim (and Fatimid) policies in this one instance.

Nonetheless, it should be clear that, by extracting the data concerning the *dhimmīs* only from the broader record of the reign as it is presented by the major historical sources—as I am doing for this chapter—we are limiting the scope of inquiry. Although it appears necessary for the purpose of the present analysis, it carries risks. However, many questions about exactly what took place and when, or most importantly why and to what purpose, have not

4 The *ṣaḥāba* were the companions of the Prophet, some of whom were cursed in this instance for refusing to recognize the immediate succession of 'Alī.

been answered satisfactorily. Here is where we ask, for example, about the relationship of al-Ḥākim's regulations and those commonly associated with the so-called "Pact of 'Umar" (*al-shurūṭ al-'umariyya*): is there a connection?

1 Our Sources

The primary information available to us derives from an unusually rich array of sources including principally the works of al-Maqrīzī, whose *Itti'āz al-ḥunafā*⁵—his history of the Fatimids—is particularly valuable for chronology. Another essential work is the *History* by the Melkite historian Yaḥyā of Antioch,⁶ which is in part a contemporary eyewitness. As a Christian observer of that time, he was obviously both affected personally by al-Ḥākim's policies and as well as being in a key position to gather and present information. Much of what he reports was not accessible to Muslim authorities, even those such as the *Amīr* al-Musabbihī, a confidant of the elite during the crucial period, who is likely the chief source for al-Maqrīzī's account.⁷ The Coptic *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, in a section composed by Michael Bishop of Tinnis,⁸ also has special value, although because its aim is less historical than hagiographic, it must be treated with caution.⁹ Finally there are a few additional items, one curious piece among them being a treatise preserved by the Druze.

The upshot of having such variety is that we do not need here to rely solely on the view of a Muslim (al-Maqrīzī) or Christians of one kind or another (Yaḥyā the Melkite and Michael the Copt). To this point I am unaware of a specifically Ismaili account of the issues involved, or that of the Jews, although

5 Maqrizi, *Itti'āz*, ed. A. F. Sayyid.

6 Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Anṭākī, *Ta'riḫh*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmūrī. (Ṭarābilis, Lubnān), 1990; ed. I. Kratchkovsky with French trans. by A. Vasiliev, *Patrologica Orientalia* 18 (1924): 699–833 and 23 (1932): 347–520, part III, ed. Kratchkovsky, French trans. by F. Micheau and G. Troupeau, *Patrologica Orientalia* 47 (1997): 373–559. Citations below are normally first to the Tadmūrī edition and second to the French translation and its parallel Arabic.

7 On al-Musabbihī (368/978–420/1029) see the *EI2* article by Th. Bianquis and *EI3* by P. Walker.

8 *Ta'riḫh baṭārikat al-kanīsa al-miṣrīyya* (*History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, also called *Sīyar al-bay'a al-muqaddasa*). Ed. and trans. Y. 'Abd al-Masīḥ, A. S. 'Aṭīya, Uswald Burmester and A. Khāṭir. (Cairo, 1959–68).

9 On the value of this source especially in comparison with Yaḥyā, see in particular the comments of J. den Heijer in "Miḥā'il, évêque de Tinnīs, et sa contribution à l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie", in Kh. Samūr ed., *Actes du troisième congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes* (Louvain-la-Neuve, septembre 1988) = *Parole de l'Orient* 16 (1990–1991): 179–188.

the latter were certainly deeply affected by what happened (the famous Cairo Geniza after all began its existence consequent to al-Ḥākim's destruction of the Ben Ezra synagogue).

In what follows I will attempt to present an accurate chronology of two aspects of the matter: first, a list of the measures imposed on personal and ritual behavior; and second, the record of destructions. Although without doubt the policy of church destruction must have been connected to the regulation of *dhimmi* activities, there is no express reason offered and a rationale for a link is missing from our record. Thus it seems preferable to deal with the two separately. Once we perceive the exact dimensions of the case at hand, we can thereafter return to the question of why, looking at both the practical utility of such policies (if they in fact existed) and the theoretical issues of sources and influences.

2 The Record of What Happened: The Sumptuary Laws and Other Restrictions

Following the lead of al-Maqrīzī, the next year after 395/1004 to note is 398/1007–08, during which we find measures taken against the decoration of churches on Palm Sunday and another demanding confiscation of what was held in churches. Yet one more result saw the burning of crosses—presumably those taken from churches—at the entrances of mosques and police stations. In addition this is the year al-Maqrīzī outlines the case of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, why it was to be destroyed and how it was done, the exact chronology of which is hard to determine.¹⁰ Quite likely 398 is simply when the possibility first came up for discussion; perhaps also when the initial order for it was issued although the actual event came later. An odd detail in al-Maqrīzī's account for 398 claims that al-Ḥākim gave an order to raze the churches and synagogues in the various districts of his kingdom but rescinded it out of fear that the Christian monarchs would counter by destroying the mosques under their control. The elaborate rationale provided in Muslim sources, including al-Maqrīzī, for the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre contrasts markedly with

10 Marius Canard, "La Destruction de l'Eglise de la Résurrection par le calife Hâkim et l'histoire de la descente du feu sacré," *Byzantion* 35(1955): 16–43, reprint in *Byzance et les musulmans*, item xx; and J. M. F. Van Reeth, "Al-Qumāma et le Qā'im de 400 AH: le trucage de la lampe sur le tombeau du Christ," in U. Vermeulen and D. De Smet, eds, *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, 11 (Leuven, 1995), pp. 171–90.

the lack thereof for any other, as if this one case might possibly justify the rest. But the fraud cited for the Jerusalem church hardly applied to all cases.

From 399/1008–09 there is a report indicating that some Jews and Christians were no longer wearing the *ghiyār*. A few were caught without it and they were beaten as punishment. Another item states that a church on the way to Maqs and two in the Greek quarter of Cairo were torn down and looted. We know from additional information that, in these cases, the destruction in question was to facilitate the building (Maqs) or expansion of a mosque (al-Azhar). The Christians, moreover, were provided compensation and allowed to build replacement churches elsewhere.

400/1008–09 is the year of the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre in al-Maqrīzī's account, a date that seems likely. It also saw the monastery of Qusayr, which was often the residence of the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria, destroyed and plundered. Failing to wear the *ghiyār* was now treated even more harshly. But, in the following year, the matter grew yet more serious and Christians now had to wear heavy black turbans. Another new stipulation prevented them observing Epiphany (the Feast of Baptism). In 402 an interdiction precluded them gathering for the Feast of the Cross. They were forbidden to display lights on or in churches in a public manner.

Yet none of these earlier regulations quite matched in scope what occurred in 403/1012–13, a year that witnessed the culmination in various ways of what must have seemed a campaign targeting specifically, if not exclusively, the *dhimmīs*. The measures taken in 403 were as bad or worse in the aggregate, especially if we include the destructions, as any either before or after in the Islamic world. Here we have a plethora of detail, provided by both al-Maqrīzī and by Yaḥyā, each appearing to confirm the other. It is necessary to read both accounts. But we can start by listing one by one the rules imposed.

1. Christians are to wear black turbans and black hoods and to attach around their necks crosses of wood.
2. They are to ride on saddles made of wood, though none to ride horses but instead mules or donkeys.¹¹ Their saddles and bridles should have black straps with no adornments of silver. They could be no thicker than the sole of a shoe; stirrups were also to be of wood.
3. Muslims are not to act as servants for Christians, nor should the latter purchase slaves that are Muslim.

11 One common theme in early *dhimmī* regulations acts to ensure that Muslims will have a superior position over and above Jews and Christians both physically and religiously. A horse is taller than either a mule or a donkey.

4. Those who rent out mules and donkeys are not allowed to rent them to Christians.
5. The *dhimmīs* are not to ride in boats with Muslim boatmen.
6. In addition to the rule not to display crosses, bells and clappers (*nāqūs*) were not to be sounded in such fashion as the public might hear them.

Next a new order specified that the saddles be made of sycamore.

These stipulations are, it turned out, a start. One ominous condition announced at the time was that the people had been given permission to look into and watch out for violations of these rules, and evidently therefore to spy on each other and report infractions to the authorities.

Here is al-Maqrīzī's next report for that same year:

The Christians were compelled to have the crosses they wore on their necks be a cubit or equivalent. Their humiliation increased, as did the oppression imposed on them. An order was issued specifying the weight of the cross be five pounds and that it be visible on the outside of their robes. So they did that. But, when matters began to oppress them most heavily, many of them feigned Islam. The affair of destroying churches happened then. All of what was in them or what property belonged to them, such as tenements and lands, were allotted as fiefs to a group and mosques were set up, some had the call to prayer said in them and their lands were sold. There was found in the Suspended Church in Fustat and in the church of Bū Shanūda a great deal of finely worked items of value, vestments and other things. The destruction of churches continued without interruption. A letter was composed and sent to the other governorates for their destruction and they were destroyed accordingly.¹²

But to understand fully it is essential to add information supplied by Yahyā.¹³

The abominable offenses against them multiplied along with dreadful disquieting talk. So all the Christians in Fustat, the clerks, the office holders, physicians and others, in company with their priests and clergy, gathered together and set out for his palace on Thursday the 12th of Rabīʿ al-ākhir of that same year [26 Oct. 1012]. With uncovered heads, they walked barefoot, crying aloud, imploring him [al-Ḥākim] and asking for

¹² *Ittiʿāz*, 2: 94–95.

¹³ The original Arabic of the following passages from Yahyā can be found in several editions of the text. For the present purposes I have used the Tadmūrī edition (Tripoli, 1990), cited above.

his forgiveness and pardon. For the whole length of the way, they never ceased kissing the ground until they arrived at the palace, still in that same state. He [the caliph] sent out to them one of his men who took from them the petition they had composed by which to plead that he show mercy and bring an end to his evident displeasure with them. Accordingly, he sent back to them a messenger who responded favorably. Al-Ḥusayn b. Ṭāhir al-Wazzān [the newly appointed *wāsiṭa*] then spoke to the elders among them in like manner, in a response also conciliatory. He promised them reassurance and something to bring tranquility to their hearts. Feeling that their aim was gained and the intention toward them ameliorated, they took comfort in a decree read out in their favor on the subject of their security and safety. However, on Sunday in the middle of the month of Rabīʿ al-ākhir of this same year, they were also ordered to lengthen the crosses hanging from their necks and to make it measure a royal cubic in length and the same in width, and that its spread (*fatkh*) be two thirds of a hand-span, and its thickness a finger. The purpose in this was to further vex them, especially the elite of the clerks in his bureaucracy and those in his service for whom no replacement had been found.¹⁴

As he menaced the Christians, they were subject to terror and dreadful talk; and calumny against them increased. Many of the senior clerks, officials and others among the Christians adopted Islam and a great multitude of the commoners followed their lead. A group of the Jews also converted to Islam. Vile rumors multiplied among those remaining Christians who had not converted about having their limbs cut off and that slaves and neighbors would sell off their property and families, that inquiry and warrant would be set for those of the clerks and officials who had hidden and concealed themselves. The homes of a group who were hidden were plundered and their property seized. The majority converted to Islam, many following the lead of the others in close succession. There remained of them only a small few, a handful. The streets continued for many days devoid of Christians, none to be seen. The Jews largely held to their religion, only a tiny few among them adopting Islam. Likewise the Christian clerks who lived in other regions also retained their faith. Except for a few, the rest of the officials of the kingdom did not convert, other than the inhabitants of Cairo particularly whose situation, as we have explained, allowed them to witness firsthand and in close proximity

14 Yahyā, Tadmūrī ed., 295.

what was happening, and to verify also the evil intentions toward them in the actions of his during that period.¹⁵

Yaḥyā also adds a key detail: “Next he ordered a census of the names of the Muslims, those of the clerks that had been dismissed and let go [previously] yet might be suitable to be employed in the bureaus and departments as replacements for the Christians. Most of his clerks, the holders of service positions and the medical doctors of his kingdom were Christian, all save a small number of the clerks.”¹⁶ Thus when he comments that “The purpose [of the measures] in this was to further vex them, especially the elite of the clerks in his bureaucracy and those in his service for whom no replacement had been found,” he appears to see in it a motive. Are we therefore entitled to adopt his view?

In much of the preceding record the Jews are not mentioned in connection with the sumptuary regulations. However, surely they were included. Yaḥyā adds that “The Jews then were to wear nothing of wood along with the black *ghiyār*, but subsequently a call went round stating that they were to suspend from their necks also wooden balls weighing five pounds (*raṭl*) to signify the head of the calf they once worshipped.”¹⁷ Al-Maqrīzī reports something similar, only in a stipulation added in 404/1013–14, stating that neither Christians nor Jews should enter the baths unless wearing, in the case of the latter, a bell, and the former, a cross.

It seems obvious that the manner in which the size of crosses to be worn increased can only have served to humiliate, almost with the purpose of forcing either the Christians’ resignation from government service or conversion. There seemed to have been no let up, nor escape. Yaḥyā, however, had enough of a perspective by the time he composed his work to comment, perhaps wryly, that “One of the strangest aspects of all this was that in the month of Ṣafar of the year 402 [Sept. 1011], al-Ḥākim had ordered that no cross should appear publicly or to be where it could be seen, and the bells not be rung. Crosses were taken down from churches and all traces of them were removed from the surfaces of churches and temples. And yet in this latter time he specifies that crosses should be displayed in this manner.”¹⁸ In short crosses were not to be displayed and yet every Christian had to wear one on the outside of clothing, and it had to be large and obvious.

15 Yaḥyā, Tadmūrī ed., 298.

16 Yaḥyā, Tadmūrī ed., 295.

17 Yaḥyā, Tadmūrī ed., 295.

18 Yaḥyā, Tadmūrī ed., 296–97.

It might be useful to wonder at this point about how widely and deeply the pain and humiliation was felt among the *dhimmī* population. A rule proscribing the riding of horses did not affect persons too poor to own a horse (or a slave, for that matter) but other measures may have caused the lower classes discomfort nonetheless. Note that the pressure to convert seemed to start with those at the higher echelons who were also those most adversely troubled by the new impositions.

3 The Destruction of Houses of Worship

Yahyā is also the best source for the record of destructions. Here is the key passage from his account:

He granted all the churches and monasteries, both old and new, in Egypt and the districts of his kingdom, to the soldiery. He gave these to them, numbering in many thousands, with all of their furnishings, treasure, and goods, in order for them to destroy and reduce them to rubble. All of them were demolished; a few made into mosques. A decree was sent to the rest of his governorates to eradicate all traces of churches from the face of the earth and to remove all evidence of them. That was done; their very foundations were uprooted from the earth and, in several countries, the bones of the dead in the churches were thrown out. People burned them in the fires for the baths. They also burned copies of the Scriptures and other books found in the churches. In each region those Christians in charge of affairs were made to pay the amounts due to the workers and demolishers who destroyed the churches. This happened to all of them throughout the kingdom except for the monastery once known as Isqīṭ, which is in Maryut in the district of Alexandria, now called the Monastery of Abū Maqār and the small monasteries close by. Al-Ḥākim realized that two Arab tribes, the Banū Qurra and the Banū Kilāb, defended it and that they did so because of a benefit to them from it. So he held back against his hatred for it.

Anything approaching a complete record of destructions is impossible to obtain.¹⁹ A few churches are listed, mostly those of some fame. The first to

¹⁹ Of those either torn down or stripped of their goods, the list includes the Suspended Church, Bū Shanūda, Church of Mary al-Qanṭara, along with the Ya'qūbī church Mār Qosmā in Fustāt, al-Aqrāniyūn, Church of Mary Constantine, and Church of Marat

be destroyed appears to have been the Church of Our Lady in Damascus but many more followed. One source claims that the total was 30,000 (in both Egypt and Syria). Most likely the figure is much smaller although still large and significant. Moreover the devastation occurred not merely in urban centers, such as Fustat, Jerusalem and Damascus, but all over the realm.²⁰ Possibly the method of farming out the rights to church endowments along with the obligation to arrange the destruction encouraged private entrepreneurs to take up the task for whatever gain they might reap, thereby encouraging its spread.

4 What Happened after 404

The record to this point covers primarily the years from 395 to 404 (1004–1013). For the final half dozen of al-Ḥākim's reign, there is little or no information. Al-Maqrīzī evidently could find nothing in his sources; either that or they had inexplicably dried up. Still there is no indication that the measures previously in force against the protected peoples ever lapsed. But one curious addition comes from 404. That year the caliph announced that the *dhimmīs* in his kingdom could, if they so chose, emigrate to wherever they wanted, taking with them their moveable belongings. It was an opportunity many thereafter afforded themselves, though it mainly benefited the Melkites who alone might have found honored refuge in Byzantine (i.e. Melkite) Antioch.

From Yahyā and Michael we learn of the ultimate dramatic reversal of policy al-Ḥākim accepted as the year 410/1020 closed and 411—the year of his disappearance—commenced. This final episode began with people reporting to him that many of the recent converts from Christianity were meeting in secret at services during which they received the sacrament. Surprisingly, the caliph declined to object or to interfere. Eventually some of the Christians were emboldened enough to confront him and ask to be allowed to reclaim their original faith. He responded in the affirmative with the stipulation that they resume the restrictions of old, i.e. wearing the *zunnār*, the *ghiyār* and the cross. Note that he did not rescind (and had not) those impositions contained in the older stipulations. His earlier policy had not changed in that regard. Rather

Maryam in Damietta, and the Church of Our Catholic Lady in Damascus. The most complete listing is in Yahyā, Tadmūrī edition, 278, 279–80, 282–83.

20 Letters were dispatched to outlying districts with an order to destroy churches and synagogues, or perhaps more precisely in many cases, to allow the Muslims there to loot and then tear them down. One figure of the total from the period 403/1012 to 405/1015 claims that upwards of 30,000 churches, synagogues and monasteries were destroyed. Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ* ed. Sayyid, 4: 1007–09.

he now recognized implicitly that the conversions were, in essence, forced by other factors, for which, it seems from his later actions, he took no responsibility. Significantly, this time around, in contrast (apparently) to the events of 403, he now provided police protection for those who reclaimed *dhimmī* status after having previously converted to Islam.

Less readily explained is his allowing the restoration of endowments for churches and monasteries (notably Sinai and Qusayr) and the rebuilding of *dhimmī* houses of worship. Apparently, synagogues were included. Thus, where it is possible to see the resumption of previous religions as not a violation or reversal of the status quo ante, building anew or replacing represents a clear change and alteration of policy. What was once not allowed is now not only okay but also was, it appears from what Yaḥyā and Michael report, actually encouraged by the caliph himself.

In the analysis of why he ordered the restrictions and destruction in the first place, all these factors, the initial action decreed and a possible revision or reversal of it, must be investigated and accounted for. What do his final acts tell us about his original motives (if anything)?

5 Analysis: Possible Motives

For the preceding sections of this chapter I assembled and described most of the reports that have come to us of the edicts and commandments issued in respect to the *dhimmīs* by al-Ḥākim. That material therefore constitutes the evidence for what took place and in what order. It remains now to consider the matter of motive or motives. What suggested to the caliph that he apply against the Jews and Christians of his realm the policies he did? Note that there is virtually no indication of an official explanation for them in the surviving historical record. We must base our analysis on the items listed above and they are nearly all merely reports of rules and regulations decreed without context or explanatory elaboration. At several points in the reign al-Ḥākim did in fact provide explanations for some of his actions, as for example when he had Barjawān executed. On that occasion he issued a proclamation dealing with his reasons and why what he did was necessary. But that was not the case in the matter at hand as far as we know.

It is fairly normal to note in this regard that, by doing what he did, he in some respect went against Islamic law, most particularly in his wholesale destruction of houses of *dhimmī* worship, many, if not most of which, had been in existence even prior to the coming of Islam. However, the notion that there is a law to which the Fatimid caliph, who was both caliph and imam—the latter

in the Shīʿī sense of the term—must adhere does not apply. The law is what the infallible living imam says it is. In Ismaili Islam he need not follow any precedent whatsoever, although in practice he would normally apply the inherited rules put into place by his rightly guided ancestors, beginning, of course, with the Prophet and with ʿAlī (his grandfather and father, in the language of Fatimid imperial decrees, sermons and proclamations).

But there is no requirement that he explain himself, and possibly no expectation that he would do so. Fatimid writings from his era comment on the danger of trying to understand the actions of the Imam, which are, they admit, inscrutable.²¹ From our perspective what such texts caution against—attempts to second guess the current imam—appear to have been a special feature of this reign, when a perplexed population constantly worried about what might happen next.

Another common explanation—one a bit too facile—is that al-Ḥākim was erratic, possibly due to the effects of melancholic depression, and thus his actions are those of a madman. Therefore no explanation is required. However, that view avoids the issue by refusing to take the situation as seriously as the existing evidence implies was the case. This caliph never lost control but rather remained active and personally involved up to the moment of his disappearance early in 411 (1021). If he was in fact wildly erratic, that needs to be demonstrated carefully, based on evidence, not supposition.

In looking for a reason or reasons behind what he did, there are other important matters to consider. We might divide them into those that suggest a practical and utilitarian cause. Did the caliph have a result he hoped to achieve by coming down hard on the *dhimmīs* and by destroying their meetinghouses? And into the more theoretical, as in issues of law and historical notions of how *dhimmīs* should be treated and controlled, what measures should be applied to them, and when and where. In this latter case we need to bring up the so-called “Pact of ʿUmar”, the classic Islamic document of *dhimmī* regulation, several stipulations in which run parallel, in fact closely so, to those cited above.²²

21 See most especially the comments of Naysābūrī at the end of his *Kitāb Ithbāt al-imama*, ed. Arzina Lalani, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010). Note also the matters discussed in my section of the introduction to the same author’s *Mūjaza*. Naysaburi, *Risāla al-mūjaza al-kāfiya fī adab al-duʿāt*, ed. of Arabic by V. Klemm and trns. by Paul Walker in *Code of Conduct for the Dāʿīs* (London, 2011), pp. 23–31.

22 A complete bibliography on the “Pact” and related material would be fairly extensive. Those I consulted include: Mark R. Cohen, “What Was the Pact of ʿUmar? A Literary-Historical Study,” *JSAI* 23 (1999): 100–131; Maribel Fierro Bello, “A Muslim Land Without Jews or Christians Almohad Policies Regarding the “Protected People” in MM. Tischler and A. Fidora eds., *Christlicher Norden-Muslimischer Süden: Ansprüche und Wirklichkeiten von Christen, Juden und Muslimen auf der Iberischen Halbinsel im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter*

With respect to the first, where we possess so little to go on, Yaḥyā's comments about replacing the clerks in the bureaucracy and the allotting of church properties to soldiers must play a large part. The question then is was his heavy-handed approach designed specifically to drive the Christians out of the government and replace them with Muslims, as Yaḥyā seems to hint? His evidence would indicate as much, but most especially for the events of 403, when a combination of increasingly burdensome sumptuary impositions and general fear and panic caused by rumor and vile innuendo resulted in mass conversion of this very class of clerks. However does it work as well as an explanation covering the whole fifteen-year period, from 395 to 410 (1005 to 1020)?²³

In regard to the destructions, it would help if we knew more about the process of distribution of the right to church endowments and other goods. Certainly it appears clear that neither the government nor the caliph himself directly benefited from the looting and confiscation in these instances. Al-Ḥākim did create a special *dīwān* to receive properties seized from many of those he executed²⁴ but it does not seem to have played a role in this matter. There is no record of church goods or properties being garnered by and for the government. Instead they were looted by a ransacking mob, presumable to the benefit of members of that mob. Just how uncontrolled such crowds could be is indicated by several accounts of the plundering which moved from a church into the adjoining Christian cemetery, thereupon adding the uprooting of graves in search of items buried with the dead. Bones thrown out in the process then served as fuel for the fires of the local bathhouse. In the aggregate these reports suggest a situation of unintended violence against *dhimmī* sacred properties ranging far in excess of anything the caliph had in mind when he set in motion the process itself.

(Münster, 2011), pp.231–247; Milka Levy-Rubin, “*Shurūṭ ‘Umar* and Its Alternatives: The Legal Debate on the Status of the *Dhimmīs*,” *JSAI* 30 (2005): 170–206; Chase Robinson, “Neck-Sealing in Early Islam,” *JESHO* 48 (2005): 401–441; A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects*. London, 1930; Jens Scheiner, “Al-Ḥākim, die Šurūṭ al-‘Umariya und die Ahl al-Kitāb,” in V. Klemm and H. Biersterfeldt, eds, *Difference and Dynamism in Islam: Festschrift for Heinz Halm* (Würzburg, 2012), pp. 37–54; Seth Ward, “Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī on Construction, Continuance, and Repair of Churches and Synagogues in Islamic Law,” in W. M. Brinner and S. D. Ricks eds., *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions* 11 (Atlanta, 1989), pp. 169–188.

23 It is important to point out here that the caliph did not target all Christian members of the bureaucracy. There were at least three of them who held the post of *wāsiṭa*, which as chief executive officer, was as high or higher than any other rank, above even the chief justice and the head of the *da‘wa*. The three are Ibn ‘Abdūn, Zur‘a b. ‘Isā b. Nastūras (he died on the 12th of Rabī‘ 1/ 1 Oct. 1012 in office), and then later the latter’s brother Sa‘īd.

24 *Caliph of Cairo*, pp. 78, 166, 183.

For the larger question, that of motives in theoretical terms, here asking if the pattern of his legislation could have followed or imitated other examples of Muslim regulation of *dhimmīs*, we need to consider the so-called “Pact of ‘Umar,” versions of it, and/or other documents containing related material.²⁵ However, any matter attributed to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph of Islam, immediately runs into the intense hatred of him by Imāmī and Ismaili Shī‘īs. Whatever he instigated is, in general, rejected by them. He is and was the “Great Satan.”²⁶ Thus it is hard to see how any Fatimid ruler could have knowingly adopted measures this ‘Umar approved and which persisted under his name as the validating authority for them.

However, what came to be known as the “Pact of ‘Umar” is not likely actually to go back to him, as is now generally conceded. The provisions in it represent an amalgamation of rules and regulations issued over time and finally assembled in one document that subsequent authorities attributed to ‘Umar as a founding father of the doctrine contained in it. That process took time and it is fair to speculate about exactly what of it may have been in circulation by the era of al-Ḥākim. To be sure, in the scholarship about the “Pact,” a prominent example—perhaps the most often cited—of the classic text comes from al-Ṭurṭūshī’s *Sirāj al-mulūk*, which was dedicated by its author to the early 6th/12th century Fatimid *wazīr* al-Ma’mūn. Therefore, a century after al-Ḥākim, the “Pact” was reasonably well known in Egypt.

Still, as pointed out by those who have investigated the history of these provisions in Islamic legal writings, many discussions of them do not name ‘Umar I, but ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, whose interest in controlling the *dhimmīs* through regulation and restriction was even more obvious and palpable. Some authorities do not cite either. One good example is al-Shāfi‘ī, whose *Kitāb al-Umm* offers instead a generic boilerplate version of a covenant between a *dhimmī* community and the Muslim ruler. What he had to say must have been widely known in Egypt, at least among Sunnīs, long before al-Ḥākim.

But was there, during the earlier period, the notion of a pact in which the *dhimmīs*, in return for protection (*dhimma*), had promised to observe certain restrictions on themselves and their freedom to worship, to in effect accept

25 Although the case of al-Ḥākim is regularly cited in the literature about the *dhimmīs*, as for example in Tritton’s *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects* (London, 1930), the first scholar to investigate the subject carefully is Jens Scheiner in his “Al-Ḥākim, die Šurūṭ al-‘Umariya und die Ahl al-Kitāb,” cited previously.

26 For clear evidence of the Ismaili attitude, see the author’s introduction to the chapter on satans in *An Ismaili Heresiography: The “Bāb al-Shayṭān” from Abū Tammām’s Kitāb al-Shajara*, critical edition of the Arabic text, ed. Madelung and Walker with English translation and introduction (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 19–26.

a lower status socially and religiously? Aside from something specifically attached to the name of ‘Umar (I or II), what else might have existed? At this point we encounter a most curious document, epistle no. 3 of the Druze sacred cannon, the *Rasā’il al-ḥikma*.²⁷ In it we learn that, when the Jews and Christians confronted al-Ḥākim to complain about his treatment of them, he answered by citing a pact their ancestors had made at the time of the Prophet. When they had failed to recognize Muḥammad as the one foretold in the Bible (for example the Paraclete), the Prophet allowed them to wait up to 400 years for the person (the messiah) they continued to expect but insisted had not as yet come. However, if after 400 years, such a person had not appeared, the protected status he granted them would become null and void. The reign of al-Ḥākim saw the turn of the 4th to 5th *hijra* centuries; thus the 400-year deadline passed at some point during his era.

Unfortunately, in contrast to many of the early Druze epistles that carry a specific date putting them in the final years of al-Ḥākim, this one does not. Moreover the form and tone of this epistle is unlike the others, making it difficult to establish a connection that might suggest a date by association with them. The subject appears to be a legend rather than a real event which could have been created later than the period it purports to describe, even much later, and thus its historical value is quite suspect. Even so it does indicate that some party conceived of the conflict between al-Ḥākim and the *dhimmīs* in terms of an original ‘pact’, although one that had recently lapsed.

Ultimately, however, we need to abandon the idea that a direct connection with what is called the Pact of ‘Umar was evident in the measures instituted by al-Ḥākim. And many of its provisions, or those discussed by the jurists such as al-Shāfi‘ī, do not apply at all. In regard to others, as for example the question of whether or not a given town or city was captured by force or by treaty—a matter fairly prominent in the literature about what regulation govern the *dhimmīs* of one place or another—there is no sign in this case. But it is undeniable that some do; some are fairly close. The emphasis on *dhimmīs* not riding horses and using uncomfortable, undecorated saddles, or the prohibition against the display of crosses (even the rule about wearing a distinguishing object in the bathhouse), while not necessarily duplicating an item in the standard list included in the ‘Pact’, do echo features known from a much earlier period, most particularly from the time of ‘Umar II.

27 *Rasā’il al-ḥikma* (Druze epistles) epistles 1–40, ed. and trans. Daniel De Smet (Leuven, Peeters, 2007), pp. 143–153 (French), 471–480 (Arabic). I owe to Maryann Shenuda the idea that this Druze epistle and the “Pact” might have something in common.

Significantly, nothing in al-Ḥākim's legislation derives from the material of Ismaili Fatimid law as expressed in the prime sources known to us, mainly Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Da'ā'im al-Islām*. Thus, from our perspective they are without precedent, although we would have expected as much since there is also no sign of anything like them earlier than his reign (in fact earlier than 395/1004).

Beyond certain closely matching items, the general purpose of rules governing the *dhimmīs* is the same in both cases: segregation and denigration. That these are the two aims of the regulations is well known and often expressed, even in the medieval legal literature. Even if it is nowhere explicitly stated in our record, the new rules were intended to isolate and separate *dhimmīs* from Muslims. Badges and markers served to prevent Christians and Jews passing through the general population unnoticed. Having to wear a cross added to that imposition. Here another situation might be pointed out as confirmation. For the Feast of Baptism (Epiphany), it was the custom for Christians to go down to the river's edge, spend the night eating and drinking, and then to enter the water in the morning accompanied by priests for a kind of baptism. Once the Fatimids had taken control of Egypt, they added to their annual ritual schedule four Christian feasts, one of which was Epiphany (the others were Christmas, Maundy Thursday, and Coptic Nawruz).²⁸ The involvement of the government was not religious but rather social, most likely in recognition of the great numbers of Christians in the apparatus of the state. However, the Feast of Baptism, as observed in Egypt, included a substantial number of Muslims who performed the ritual more or less as the Christians did, including immersing themselves. Although it was a fairly well-established local custom—immersion prevented illness for the coming year—Fatimid authorities eventually attempted, perhaps in vain, to order Muslims to stay separate from the Christians. Al-Ḥākim, at the height of his campaign against the *dhimmīs*, simply forbade the event altogether.²⁹

Efforts to denigrate the *dhimmīs* and their religion, though normally not evident in Fatimid policies, are quite clear in the provisions decreed under al-Ḥākim. Destruction of houses of worship may have had that purpose: denial of a forum for the public (or semi-public) practice of a faith other than Islam functioned as a damning rejection. Michael's forlorn comment about the long period during which the Copts could not partake of the sacrament because there were no churches in which to celebrate indicates the devastating effects al-Ḥākim's destructions produced in the morale of the Christian population.

28 Maqrīzī lists and describes them in his *Khiṭaṭ*.

29 Here see also on this event, chapter six of Part One above on "Egyptian Popular Festivals."

PART 3

Religious Appeal



The Doctrine of *Ta'wīl* in Fatimid Ismaili Texts

Aside from the advocacy of the particular line of imams and the sacred lineage at the base of this dynasty, the area of doctrine most characteristic of the Fatimid Ismailis concerns various notions of esoteric interpretation of scripture and religious law, all of which might be subsumed under the single Arabic term *ta'wīl*.¹ Although often translated appropriately as 'allegorical interpretation,' the range of what this word could mean, especially in the Ismaili context is far wider. Normally *ta'wīl* deals with two classes of verses in the Qur'an, those that are admittedly ambiguous and those of fixed meaning. In Ismailism that distinction is only a beginning leading much further afield. The appeal (*da'wa*) spread on their behalf insisted on the all-important distinction between the outward, literal, plain wording (the *ẓāhir*) of revelation and its inner, less-than-obvious meaning (the *bāṭin*). The latter component could and often was conceived of as an esoteric dimension, hardly accessible to ordinary worshippers because it was either difficult to find and understand or was beyond the intellectual reach of those who have failed to accept and join the system that conveys it. Commencing with the issue of Qur'anic verses, the authorities writing for the *da'wa* could and did explore ways of uncovering the esoteric dimensions of, not only scriptures, but of the very structures of the natural world, with seemingly the whole of scientific investigation brought into play. A *ta'wīl* might operate on the most mundane of objects as well as the most sacred of texts.

Enemies of the Ismailis hope to expose their esotericism as antithetical to true Islam, a perversion of correct and proper faith. Somehow the idea that the Qur'an contained hidden content that is not available to ordinary Muslim scholars was anathema. But, even among many non-Ismaili authorities, the appeal to and use of *ta'wīl* was fairly common, particularly as a technique to bring harmony on matters of serious conflict between reason and revelation. Thus some forms of *ta'wīl* interpretation were shared with a larger body of Islamic doctrine and they do not distinguish Ismailis from other Muslims. But there certainly were additional aspects to this subject that move Ismaili esotericism away from the Islamic mainstream. A key test is the method employed to

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derive the *bāṭin*: Is it in some way discernable through the close examination or analysis of the outward form? Is there a logic connecting the two even if it is not clearly apparent to all? In some Ismaili examples that have come down to us, no such connection, or at least no obvious link, is obvious; the *bāṭin* in such cases is truly and really esoteric, a realm of knowledge in which no outsider can participate. *Taʿwīl* in this sense implies moving from a shared understanding based on common language, religious teaching, and culture into a secret world where interpretation can lead almost anywhere and in any direction.

Here, then, one begins to see how wide the gap separating the Ismailis from others can be. Two tendencies in Ismaili literature exploit, on one side, the possible ways interpretation can be used to explain the universe and its cosmic structure, from the smallest object or elements to the heavenly spheres of the pleroma, and, on the other, the meaning and significance of scripture, law and ritual performance as it is to be understood in terms of secret correlations with the history and hierarchy of the *daʿwa*. In the latter case, a given Qurʾanic verse is symbolic of matters no non-Ismaili would ever have thought of as being related.

Clearly then this is an area quite unfamiliar to all but those who have been initiated, either by having joined and been trained in the *daʿwa* or by serious scholarly endeavor working with those Ismaili texts that are now slowly emerging from a long concealment and obscurity. Fortunately, the latter task is less onerous than it once was; the number of properly edited and published writings by members of the *daʿwa* has grown steadily over the last several decades. And studies of this topic have begun to appear, most recently David Hollenberg's *Beyond the Qurʾan: Early Ismāʿīlī Taʿwīl and the Secrets of the Prophets*. Moreover this new work in part builds on several investigations by others before him.²

Hollenberg's particular concern in this book is an early emphasis among Fatimid North African authorities during the tenth century on what might be seen as the social role of *taʿwīl* in the formation, cohesion and preservation of Ismaili communities. Adherence to the *daʿwa* provided access to a doctrinal program no one else had the advantage of. The esoteric knowledge imparted to

2 As noted throughout by the author himself. See Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qurʾan*. It is useful here to add to those he cites specifically for this topic, particular chapters in my earlier works that deal directly with this subject. See my *Early Philosophical Shiism*, chapter 12 "Interpretation and Its Institution", pp. 124–33; and *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, chapter 4, "Double Observance by Works and Knowledge", pp. 62–79. Perhaps the most important single study to date, aside from Hollenberg, is Ismail Poonawala's "Ismāʿīlī Taʿwīl of the Qurʾan," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾan*, ed. A. Rippin (Oxford, OUP, 1988): 199–222.

the novice who joined the group made him or her a member of another world, one not shared by the outside. *Ta'wīl* under these secretive circumstances provided the new adept with a communal identity, a common bond of loyalty based in part on secret doctrines.

This subject as a whole is very large and complex with lots of material that we are only beginning to study in the detail necessary for a full understanding of it. Beyond his work there is much to do. Some interesting progress so far concerns mainly how Ismaili authorities have employed *ta'wīl* in their interpretations of Qur'anic material, a version thus of the broader topic of *tafsīr*.³ For balance we need also look closely at how *ta'wīl* operates in the thought of the mid-10th century Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī and the early 11th century Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, the two most important figures from other regions (Sijistānī in Iran) and later periods (Kirmānī from the time of al-Ḥākim [r. 996–1021]). Both of these authors represent the philosophical wing of Ismaili thought. Another problem concerns the exact way the knowledge gleaned through *ta'wīl* is taught and distributed and on what authority. The role of the imam is critical at least in theory, but how does it operate in practice? Who does *ta'wīl*, or perhaps who is allowed to do it? When is it not permitted and under what circumstances? Is (or has there been) false *ta'wīl* propagated by unauthorized persons, perhaps by enemies of the *da'wa*? Finally we need more works and examples, particularly to see if there was any standard to such knowledge. Was there a specific teaching or a doctrine? Is every *ta'wīl* of the same exoteric material alike,⁴ or is, alternately, as has been suggested, *ta'wīl* interpretation open to different methods and results? Does it depend or respond to circumstances or different audiences? Unfortunately, for the purpose of an investigation of this topic, important works by Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, his *Asās al-ta'wīl* and *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im*, which purely by title, most especially the first, appear to suggest some explanation of the process itself, in regard to the issue, have proven disappointing. And therefore an inductive approach whereby the evidence required accumulates from example to example works best under these less than ideal circumstances. In part evidence for this kind will have to be sought by investigating slightly odd—perhaps unique—instances, but the more examples the better.

3 In addition to the work by Poonwala just cited, two important examples of this approach are Meir Bar -Asher, "Outline of Early Ismaili-Fatimid Qur'an Exegesis," *Journal Asiatique* 296, no. 2 (2008): 257–95, and Karen Bauer, "Spiritual Hierarchy and Gender Hierarchy in Fatimid Ismā'īlī Interpretations of the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 14, no. 2 (Oct. 2006): 29–46.

4 For some examples of quite different interpretations (*ta'wīls*) of the same Qur'anic verse in Ismaili writings, see Poonawala, pp. 220–21 of the article cited above.

An especially instructive case comes from the first years of the Fatimid state in early tenth century North Africa. Ibn al-Haytham, a newly minted *dā'ī*, comments near the end of his memoir about his earliest days in the *da'wa* that, in his own words:

There was no duly authorized *dā'ī* among them but that I learned from him with the permission of the shaykh Abū Mūsā. I harvested from their fruits both the exterior and the interior (*min thimārihim ṣāhira wa bāṭina*), and there was not one of them who did not stay with me and visit my home. ... I shall never forget the *dā'ī* of Malūsa, the shaykh of the community and their legal authority, Aflaḥ b. Hārūn al-'Ibānī. He combined his activity as a *dā'ī* with the sciences of the religious law. I frequently met with him. ... He stayed with me many times ... I heard from him the summons for the women (*da'wat al-nisā'*, the '*da'wa* for women') and what types of proofs he would address to them that their minds will accept and retain. He would say, "God has the convincing proof (Q 6: 149)". He said: "This means the proof with which the scholar addresses the one he teaches or the ignorant person, using only what that person comprehends." He would address women and employ as evidence in their case items of their jewelry, rings, earrings, headgear, necklaces, anklets, bracelets, dresses, head binding. Next he would cite examples pertaining to spinning, weaving, costume, and hair, and other items that suit the natural disposition of women. He would speak to the craftsman using the terms of his craft and thus, for example, address the tailor by reference to his needle, his thread, his patch, and his scissors. He addressed the shepherd using references to his staff, his cloak, his horn, and his two-pouched travelling bag.⁵

Here is solid evidence of the *da'wa* in action giving us a few details of how authority functioned and how the appeal for allegiance to the *da'wa* followed the path of opportunity. Is therefore *ta'wīl* here a tool being tailored to circumstances and audience?

From even earlier we now have a newly revealed document, a letter in fact, written by Abū'l-'Abbās, the brother of Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shī'ī.⁶ Its true author was heretofore not understood because the later Ismaili tradition

5 Ibn al-Haytham, *K. al-Munāẓarāt*, in Madelung and Walker, eds. and trans., *Advent of the Fatimids*, Eng. pp. 169–70, Arabic pp. 121–22.

6 "*Maḥātīḥ al-ni'ma* (The Keys to Grace)," in Madelung and Walker, eds & trans, *Affirming the Imamate*.

wrongly attributed it to Qāḍī al-Nu'mān. It must have been composed prior to Abu'l-'Abbās's death in 911. Most significantly it forthrightly explains the close connection between proven fidelity to the *da'wa* and the payment of various dues in excess of the minimums required by ordinary demand, on the one hand, and access to the knowledge of *ta'wīl*, on the other. Simply put without appropriate payments, the *dā'ī* cannot and should not provide instruction in esoteric doctrine.

Here follow several examples of the kind of *ta'wīl* Abu'l-'Abbās gives in this instance.

A) "*Did We not give him two eyes, a tongue and two lips, and guide him along the two highways*" [Q 90:8–10], meaning by the two eyes, the Speaker and the Foundation,⁷ since they are the eyes of God on earth; the tongue is the Proof⁸ because he proves for the believers the science of the interpretation and the revelation; and by the two lips the *dā'ī* and the *ma'dhūn*⁹ because they are the gate to the Proof and they are the ones who strive for the religion of God. "*We guided him along the two highways*" means the two paths, the exoteric and esoteric, "*Yet he has not scaled the steep ascent*" [Q 90: 11]. Then He explained this saying: "*What will make you grasp what is the steep ascent? The freeing of a slave*" [Q 90: 12–13]. The meaning of 'freeing' is for the novice to produce what his *dā'ī* has commanded of him, because he made that a trial for him. Hence patience during that trial is the scaling of the steep ascent so that God can judge the vicious from the good, "*so that he who was to die might perish after a sign and he who was to live might live after a sign*" [Q 8: 42].

B) "*When believing women come to you as emigrants, test them; it is God who knows their faith*" [Q 60: 10]. This is, in the outward meaning of the law, the coming of a woman from the abode of polytheism to the abode of Islam. So they are asked to swear that they have not come except out

7 The two terms Speaker and Foundation are specific to the Ismailis. The first, in Arabic *Nāṭiq* (plural *Nuṭāqā*), denotes those prophets who have brought or issued a Law or Scripture. They are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and the expected Messiah (the *Qā'im*). The Foundation, in Arabic *Asās*, indicates the position of the one who initiates (or founds) the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of that Scripture. For the era of Islam that means 'Alī.

8 Proof here is the Arabic *ḥujja*, a term with slightly differing meanings in various Shi'i contexts, but in general for the Ismailis, it refers to a high rank in the *da'wa* coming just below that of the Imam. It can also indicate the Imam himself, as it seems to do in this passage. On the terms and its various usages, see F. Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, index s.v. *ḥujja*.

9 *Ma'dhūn* means 'the one who has a license, a permit' to teach or propagate doctrine on behalf of the *da'wa*, in some contexts a person who acts as the assistant of the *dā'ī*. For a complete review of this term in Ismaili sources, see F. Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, index s.v. *ma'dhūn*.

of love for Islam. This is its explanation in exoteric terms. As for the interpretation of it in this verse, it is that the women who believe in the religion of God are the students, since the male is like the teacher and the student is like the female. The meaning of emigration is the departure by the student from the threshold of ignorance to the state of seeking to understand and knowledge of the light and explanation. His saying, “*test them*” means that it is God who knows their faith best, that is, because their hearts are in the hand of God and no one else can know what is in them. The *dāʿī* knows of humans only what is apparent on the surface. Thus God orders him to examine the believers who seek the benefits of the religion to test out their secrets. If they bear the trial with patience, it is licit for the teacher to initiate them and raise them in the interpretive sciences. A person who breaks and perishes and does not bear up during the trial and ordeal is forbidden from being initiated. “*God knows their faith best*,” meaning that it is He who has access to their consciences. “*So if you find that they are believers*” [Q 60: 10], that is, if they bear up during the trial and testing, “*do not return them to the infidels*” [Q 60: 10], that is, to the people of outward meaning which they previously upheld.

C) “*Forbidden to you are carrion, blood, the flesh of pigs, what has been offered up to other than God, the strangled animal, an animal killed by a blow or by falling, an animal mauled by animals, or one eaten by wild beasts except what you have duly sacrificed, and what is sacrificed to idols*” (to the end of the verse) [Q 5: 3], in order that you understand that what is meant by this it is the prevention of initiating someone whose initiation is not licit. The outward meaning of ‘carrion,’ in which there is no movement, is the search for wisdom, interpretation and the benefits of proof. The meaning of ‘blood’ is the man who was a member of the *daʿwa* but who revealed the explanation and interpretation without the permission of his *dāʿī*. The meaning of ‘pigs’ is he who affirms all the ranks, and what he hears of the explanation and wisdom, and yet denies the position of the Imam. That is because the cloven hoof of the pig resembles the hoof of the sheep devoid of its head because it is deformed. That is like his disavowal of the Imam of the time who is the head of the believers. What has been offered up to other than God means the one on whose neck is pledged to another than the true Imam since God has made the oath obligatory only to the true Imam. Thus one from whom the pledge was taken to someone else is not permitted to be initiated. The ‘strangled animal’ is one who breaks the oath at the moment it is taken from him, so that he says: Give me time and have patience with me. The ‘animal killed by a blow’ is the one the shepherd has beaten to death. The shepherd is

like the *dā'ī*, and beating with a staff is like putting him to the test. The sheep is like the novice. When the *dā'ī* puts the novice to the test and the novice bears up patiently through the ordeal, he is allowed to initiate him in the keys to knowledge. If he flees and does not bear patiently the ordeal, initiation in knowledge is forbidden. The 'one killed by a fall' is the person who cannot bear the interpretation nor embrace its understanding. He may have once reached one of the ranks but then reverted to the outward meaning and its people. The 'one mauled by wild animals' is he who argues with the *dā'ī* and debates without any understanding or insight. Then he does not cease from that when he is forbidden. The 'animal eaten by a wild beast except the one you are able to properly slaughter' means him whom someone from the people of outward meaning has corrupted and who has turned his face from the *da'wa* of the truth. He is not to be initiated, except when properly slaughtered, meaning someone who has renewed the oath of covenant. What has been sacrificed on a stone altar is he from whom a pledge has been taken to an imam who appointed himself without having been chosen for it by God, and even so he puts himself in the position of God's guardian and summons the people to himself. All these people are forbidden to be initiated in the explanation and the interpretation.

D) Regard here the Sunna concerning the newborn. When he exits from the womb of his mother, a dinar is paid on his behalf. He is anointed, swaddled, his head rubbed with honey and aloe, then made to drink milk after that. He is given a name on the seventh day and the middle of his head is shaved. An offering is given for it and his hair weighed in silver and a sacrifice slaughtered for him. The meaning of the newborn is the novice; the meaning of paying a dinar on his behalf is what is required of the novice in fulfillment of the private consultation; the meaning of swaddling is the oath by which he swears allegiance. The meaning of honey and aloe is what is revealed to him of the explanation and interpretation and what patience is required of him in keeping that secret. The meaning of his being named on the seventh day is revealing to him the Imam of the age because the Imam, who is the master of the age, is one of the seven Imams. The meaning of shaving the middle of his head is disclosing the matter of his chief who is the Imam of the age. The offering for him by the weight of his hair has the meaning of redemption, and the sacrifice for him has the meaning of breaking him, that is, the novice by another novice and the taking from him of the oath. That is because, when he reaches maturity, he is then able to educate another. About that God has said: "*Test the orphans until they reach the age of marriage; if you*

find sound judgment in them, turn over to them their property and do not consume it" [Q 4: 6]. In this sense God says: "*and what you taught the hunting animals to catch in the manner directed by God; eat what they catch for you*" [Q 5: 4], that is, take the oath from the one they have broken and control him, "*and mention the name of God*", that is, call upon him, when taking the oath of him, to maintain obedience to the Imam and the Proof. At the moment of the sacrifice, it is said: "In the name of God". 'In the name of' (*bism*) consists of three letters, indicating thus the Proof (*ḥujja*); Allah has four letters, pointing to the Imam. For this reason God says: "*And when the children reach the age of puberty, let them ask for permission just as those before them asked for permission*" [Q 24: 59].

E) And take note of the actions of the pilgrimage and its rituals and the indication of what God imposed on every believer in producing his sacrifice by which he seeks to draw closer to God. God, the Exalted, says: "*A duty owed to God is the pilgrimage to the House for whoever has the means to do it*" [Q 3: 97]. Having the ability to do it involves provisions, riding animal, a secure passage, and expenditures for one's dependents. A person who has that must make the pilgrimage. There is no latitude in that for any Muslim by unanimous agreement. The meaning here of provisions is knowledge which is the nourishment of souls; the meaning of riding animal is the *dā'ī* who journeys with you in God's religion from rank to rank until he causes you to attain your place of safety and security and makes you understand what is obligatory, both for you and against you. He who finds a *dā'ī* is obliged to seek the Imam, until reaching him and accepting obedience to him, acknowledging the ranks of God's religion from the time of Adam to the Resurrection. The meaning of discarding the sown cloths you wore previously is your discarding knowledge of every imam of literal meaning that you had previously adhered to. Your putting on the covering and cloak is your entering into obedience to the Imam and the Proof. Your purification with water is your accepting the knowledge by which you are purified. Your saying: '*Labbayka*, O God, *Labbayka*' [Here I am, O God, here I am] is your responding to the Imam of the age when he sends the *dā'ī* to you to summon you to God and to knowledge of His religion, and you answered him with compliance, that is, affirmation. Your acceptance of the Proof is your acceptance of the knowledge and your acknowledgment that he is the gateway to the Imam, on whom be peace. Your circumambulation seven times is your affirmation of seven Imams. Your standing at al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa is your acknowledgment of the Speaker and the Foundation and your running back and forth between them is your seeking your sciences from them

both. Your coming to Minā is your coming to the one who bestows on you understanding and he is your *dā'ī*. Your prayer at Minā is your establishment of obedience to your *dā'ī* and submitting humbly to him. Your standing at 'Arafat and combining the prayers of midday and afternoon there is your maintaining obedience to the Speaker and the Qā'im and affirming both. Your ascending after that to al-Mawqif is your rising to understand the heavenly spiritual ranks and your praying at al-Muzdalifa the sunset and last evening prayer (*al-'ashā' al-ākhirā*) is your affirmation of the Founder and the Imam and those Imams who were concealed.¹⁰ Your gathering of pebbles to the number of seventy is your affirmation of seventy ranks who are the elect of God gathered with every Imam. Your throwing twenty-one pebbles is your repudiating the opponents of the seven Speakers, the seven Executors and the seven Imams.¹¹ Your burying the rest of those pebbles is your shielding of the ranks of God's religion who are seven heptads. Your driving of your sacrificial animal is your hastening to pay what God has made incumbent on you and every believer as a redemption. That is your sacrifice by means of which you draw closer to God by purifying your soul. Your shaving your head is your disclosing your chief who is the Imam of your time and the recognition of him. Your breaking the fast on three days is your enunciation of the explanation and revealing what you used to keep secret of the knowledge of the Speaker, the Foundation and the Imam. Your returning to Mecca is your returning to your *dā'ī* in order to seek to learn from him what remains that you do not know and that you do not abide with the people of literal meaning and do not put their sciences in a position treasured or valued by you since they are mere shells having no saving value in them.

10 Those "Imams who were concealed" is a fairly standard Ismaili Fatimid way of citing the Imams who immediately preceded the first caliph al-Mahdī. The usual enumeration would have three Imams between Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ja'far and al-Mahdī, all of whom went into concealment as a protection against Abbasid persecution. Typically their names are not given.

11 'Executors' (or alternately 'Legatees') is the Arabic *Waṣī* (plural *Awṣyā'*) referring here to what would otherwise be called the Foundation (*Asās*). The term Executor however emphasizes his role as the executor of the prophet's legacy by inheritance. Each Speaker-prophet has one and thus there are, at least potentially, seven in all, if the final Speaker, the seventh, has one. The Messiah, the Qā'im, would be the seventh and it is not clear how he would have a Foundation (*asās* or *waṣī*) let alone seven Imams after his advent, since he normally heralds the end of time. Is our author projecting a future event? Or, as specified in some early Ismaili texts, has the seventh speaker already appeared once, thus commencing a special era in which there is (or will be) an executor and a set of seven Imams, even though he will reappear again later?

Though not stated as clearly as we might like, these examples nevertheless reveal essential concerns at play in the process of interpretation, most especially of conditions for access. Here we find the ranks of the Ismaili *da'wa* cited and an explanation of the key roles of the imam of the time and his agents, the *dā'īs*, the latter being the contact point for each individual novice. It is the *dā'ī* who takes from every new adherent an oath of covenant prior to which no esoteric knowledge is even possible. Next comes a test to separate those unfit or perhaps apt to violate a later trust, who might refuse to acknowledge the Imam, or who could be content with a false imam or an imam solely of outward literal meanings. Once tested by the rites of initiation, the new member only then goes on to learn the esoteric *ta'wīl* in the particular forms of it taught by his or her *dā'ī*. Notice how little of such interpretation in this context depends on any explicit connection between the literal wording of the sacred text and its subsequent meaning as revealed by the science of *ta'wīl* as applied in these instances.

From these few quite early examples of Ismaili *ta'wīl*, we move now to the middle of the 10th century and to the writings of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī whose discussion of this topic takes many forms, some quite like those provided above but others more theoretical, even philosophical.

A slightly unusual but extremely interesting type of *ta'wīl* of a different sort but not uncommon in Ismaili writings explains the significance of pre-Islamic religions. Al-Sijistānī offers us a curious example in his attempt to bring Jesus and Christianity under the control of the *da'wa*. Here is part of what he says:

The wood Jesus was crucified on was provided for this purpose by a group other than his own, and these people were the ones who crucified him on it, openly and manifestly. Accordingly, the explanation that the messiah [the Qā'im] and his deputies, on whom be peace, will reveal concerns the sacred laws of the messenger-prophets who have come before him. The cross thus becomes a clear sign and evidence of all ranks of the hierarchy. [Christian] veneration of it is something required of them, as, similarly, our veneration of the [Islamic] profession of faith¹² is [required of us].

The profession of faith is built on denial and affirmation, beginning with denial and ending with affirmation. Similarly, the cross is two pieces of wood: a piece that stands on its own and another piece whose placement depends entirely on the placement of the other. The profession of faith is four words. Likewise the cross has four extremities. The end fixed in the ground has the position of the master of interpretation [*ta'wīl*] in

12 The profession is to say: "There is no god but God" (*lā ilāha ilā Allāh*).

whom the souls of the seekers attain lasting security. The end opposite this, high in the air, has the position of the master of divine inspiration [*ta'yīd*], in whom the souls of the inspired ones attain lasting security. The two ends in the middle, which are to the left and the right, indicate the Follower [i.e. the universal soul] and the Speaking-prophet, of who one is the master of natural composition [*tarkīb*] and the other master of scriptural compilation [*ta'līf*]. One is opposite the other, with the end standing for the Preceder [intellect] sustaining all of the edges.¹³

The works of al-Sijistānī contain many more examples of this type of *ta'wīl* but what is of particular significance is his discussion of interpretation in a more theoretical context, especially as paired or associated with 'revelation' (*tanzīl*). The latter he says resembles something having an undeveloped, organic form. By contrast *ta'wīl* is like a product of the craftsman who works with the organic material in order to make it into something of greater benefit. His own example is wood, which in a natural state is good only as fuel for a fire but when crafted becomes an object of greater benefit such as a door, a box, arrows, spears, a pulpit or a chair. Thus *tanzīl*, the revelation in plain form, is a set of "subjective items and restricted phrases beneath which there are hidden meanings. *Ta'wīl* on the part of its master puts all of these into a proper context and extracts from each phrase what was intended by it." The master of *ta'wīl* approaches each word or phrase in order to adduce its original meanings. Here we have the idea of exploiting and/or nurturing what was originally only 'seeded' in the scripture.

For al-Kirmānī, writing in the first two decades of the eleventh century, a tendency already evident in al-Sijistānī, to rationalize the process of moving from the *ẓāhir* to the *bāṭin*—in effect to make it less mysterious and esoteric—becomes clearer as if to correct an earlier restrictive sense for *ta'wīl*. Where the older forms needed to be kept from public view, certain aspects of some statements of al-Kirmānī suggest the possibility of an open discourse almost as if to engage in debate. Al-Kirmānī was in part most concerned to deny enemies and detractors their claim that secret interpretations made of Ismailism a heresy. Or that, by adhering only to hidden notions of what the law actually meant, an Ismaili could avoid performing and following Islamic rites, rituals and ordinary belief. Al-Kirmānī would insist that both *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* must be accepted, practiced and observed; one without the other was for him intolerable. Both together are absolutely essential. Here is what he says:

13 *Wellsprings of Wisdom*, paragraphs 146 and 147.

When we specify the *ẓāhir*, we mean by it the acts ordained in the law in accord with the subordinate parts of the profession of faith, namely alms-giving, fasting, pilgrimages, *jihād*, and the implementation of the acts of submission to the persons in authority, on whom be peace. All these acts and rites in the law which, when they come into being, are perceptible to the senses, are commonly perceived by every creature that possesses senses that are sound, as is the case with regards to the heavens, the earth, and what is between them of the planets, the elements, the natural kingdoms, which, in that they are evident and obvious, are subject to sensation and every creature having sensation perceives them equally without any differentiation between one over another. If we specify the *bāṭin*, we mean by it the knowledge that accrues from knowing the existence of a thing and its elements and of its existing as a thing and whether it is manifest or hidden, of its measure and its form, of the cause of its existence, of the purpose because of which it has existence, which is a matter not subject to sense perception but is rather known by the mind, and of eternal punishment, the gathering, the reckoning, paradise and the inferno, the temporal contingency of the world and its annihilation, and other matters which, since they are esoteric (*bāṭinī*) in essence and hence not subject to sensation, all groups do not participate in perceiving but instead one group only is singled out to acquire it.¹⁴

He explains further:

the absolute oneness of God and an understanding of the hierarchy of beings is a truly difficult matter, but, by means of it, there is life for the souls and their eternity, and salvation from the world of nature. ... Since it is so difficult, God knew that His servants as a whole would never achieve the level at which they could obtain a perfect understanding of God's hierarchy or of His own absolute unity. Therefore God favored among them all a single person in each age for that perfection and purity, as is the case with the Imam, may God bless him profusely. That is to say, God favored him with a perfection in which he receives completely the emanation that flows into the world of nature from the angels. This man, by virtue of that emanation, is the guardian over the rest. ... God has thus made obedience and love of him obligatory.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, p. 75.

¹⁵ *Ismāʿilī thought in the Age of al-Ḥākim*, p. 76, quoted from al-Kirmani's *al-Riyāḍ*.

Several conclusions arise as a result of this brief survey of Ismaili *ta'wīl*. It is obvious from the samples given above that, although we possess a rich trove of materials produced by the *da'wa*, once carefully secluded but now available to us, many unanswered—or insufficiently answered—questions remain. Al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī's discussions of theory help, but they, too, prompt more questions. Still, since this area is a key feature of Ismaili thought in general, we need to pay it added attention both in the details of specific examples and in view of the broader scheme of their doctrinal program.

To What Degree Was Classical Ismaili Esotericism Based on Reason as Opposed to Authority?

The Ismailis have been known from the beginning of their movement as a separate branch of the Shī'a, for advocacy of a form of esotericism, of stressing the critical importance of the inner non-apparent meaning for scripture and law, and of a carefully restricted access to interpretation of many, if not most, aspects of religion and faith.¹ Emphasis on the *bāṭin* alongside the *ẓāhir* and of special types or methods of applying *ta'wīl* came to be hallmarks of Ismailism, most particularly in the view of their opponents who cared little for fine distinctions and tended to exaggerate what they knew of real doctrines in a direction that made them seem blatantly heretical. Gross distortions of what the Ismaili authorities actually taught provided ammunition for the unscrupulous but it proved so effective its negative effects lasted. The Ismaili response, in the works of writer after writer in the Fatimid period, attempted to deny outright that knowledge of the *bāṭin* nullified the vital role of actions or that, once privy to the inner meaning of it, the law itself was no longer essential and did not have to be observed. Evidence of antinomianism among Ismailis in its mainstream *da'wa* is rare and all but non-existent. Still their opponents had found an opening for their attacks, one they exploited to the full. For them the Ismailis were a prime example of the *bāṭinī* heresy, which, in the most egregious cases, could, the enemy claimed, lead to various forms of atheism.

One real weakness on the Ismaili side was its insistence on secrecy in regard to whole areas of its doctrinal program. Members of it swore never to reveal the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) they learned once initiated. It was hard to defend against the charges hurled at them by opponents when open discussion and complete answers were not allowed. The enemy thus almost automatically gained the upper hand and from an early period saw its false assertions concerning Ismaili doctrine prevail and become widely accepted. As a result, a genuine account of Ismaili thought was all but impossible in the pre-modern era, and it is only now, when we are beginning to have full access to the works

1 Originally published as "To What Degree was Classical Ismaili Esotericism based on Reason as Opposed to Authority?" in M. A. Amīr-Moezzi, M. De Cillis, D. De Smet, O. Mir-Kasimov, eds. *Esotérisme shī'ite, ses racines et ses prolongements*, pp. 493–505 (Turnhout, Brepols, 2016).

of the *dāʿīs* from the classical period, that we can analyze what was actually said by them.

However, even with a relative plethora of source materials, much remains unclear and less than certain. We know that the wild claims of anti-Ismaili authors are simply wrong and often scandalously off the mark, a deliberate falsification and misrepresentation for polemical aims. Still there are important questions that are not easy to answer. One major issue still in doubt is the subject of this chapter: namely, to what degree was the esotericism of the Ismailis based on reason as opposed to authority. That they upheld the necessity of knowing the inner meaning, the *bāṭin*, is not in doubt. Certainly they did, but that alone leaves many matters unresolved. Is the inner meaning obtained by rational investigations, as might be employed in scientific inquiry? Or is it known solely to a person (or persons) possessing unique powers of understanding, as could be a condition of an elite ecclesiastical order or a single supreme individual blessed with divine support and access to ultimate truths? In the former case, knowledge of the esoteric aspects could be available to those with acute mental skill, that is, people able to reason theoretically who can accordingly uncover for themselves the inner significance of things. In such a situation, there is less need for authority, especially the personal authority of an intellectual elite, a priestly class, or an imam. In the latter case, some seemingly esoteric kinds of knowledge might still be known to such an elite, but ultimate truths and the highest values would nevertheless depend on special access not determined by pure reason alone but a form of ordination and divine inspiration. Knowledge brought by a prophet is the most obvious example. The great thinkers of human history are not, by virtue of having powerful minds, able to discover this highest level of truth. It is accessible only to those selected by God for revelation. For the Shīʿa the imams of the line they accept inherit some portion of a power similar though not the same as that of the Prophet. They stand at the summit of human knowledge, having thus complete, infallible access to all that mankind can know both on the theoretical level and the practical. Their ruling on any matter is, as a result, definitive. Therefore, following from this premise, knowing the hidden meaning of things depends ultimately on authority and not on rational processes.

Nevertheless, it should be fairly clear that the issue is subject to a variety of interpretations and nuance, and various arguments might be suggested that tend to cloud over the distinctions just mentioned. One simple claim here would hold that the imam has his authority by virtue of his superior access to reason itself. He is thus the embodiment of universal reason and what he knows comes to him rationally. This kind of doctrine serves us as a warning

that a fixed, clear and definitive answer to the question posed above may not be possible.

For the present, however, it will work best to approach this topic as if it contained two sides and that the doctrine can be neatly divided into opposing contentions: a) that esoteric knowledge, although often hidden and difficult to discern, is nevertheless available to a person who reasons skillfully and profoundly; or b) that access to such inner, non-apparent and concealed forms of knowledge requires the teaching of an authority able to sanction what is right and true and, without such authority, there is no certainty. In the latter situation, in the absence of such authority, inquiry yields mere opinion.

Whichever side we begin with, the essential Qur'anic proof text is 3: 7, which reads:

He it is who revealed to you the book, of it parts are firmly fixed and they are the mother of the book, but others are ambiguous; those in whose hearts there is deviousness follow what is ambiguous hoping thereby to spread sedition and the desire for its interpretation, but no one knows its interpretation except God and those firmly grounded in knowledge who say, 'We believe in it, all is from our Lord,' yet none remember except those with minds [3: 7].

Needless to say the exact meaning, or even of the reading, of this passage differs considerably from school to school and sect to sect. The famous philosopher Ibn Rushd declared that, for ordinary Muslims, the key period must fall after the word "God" and therefore read "none knows its interpretation save only God." Therefore, in this view, "those firmly grounded in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī l-'ilm*)" do not know the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of these ambiguous parts. But he also further claimed that for a special elite composed of those who are able to employ theoretical reasoning correctly, there is a different reading. They are in fact "those firmly grounded in knowledge" and, for them, the key period comes after the word "knowledge." But because common Muslims are not to be told about this alternative, the knowledge in question becomes the possession of an elite and is thus hidden from the others. Surely here we have a form of esotericism.

Further investigation of Ibn Rushd's doctrine substantiates this point but it does not lead far on the issue of authority. For him all those capable of demonstrative thinking, i.e. the Philosophers, belong to the elite and they all have access to such knowledge. It is thus esoteric only in relation to those incapable of this kind of reasoning. In addition his understanding of interpretation

(*ta'wīl*), as in the Qur'anic verse cited above, does not support or suggest further restrictions on access. He says:

The meaning of interpretation is extension of the significance of an expression from real to metaphorical significance, without forsaking therein the standard metaphorical practices of Arabic, such calling a thing by the name of something resembling it or a cause or consequence or accompaniment of it, or other things such as are enumerated in the accounts of metaphorical speech.²

We can extend his doctrine to a degree. He says,

In general, everything in these texts (i.e. religious texts) which admits of allegorical interpretation can only be understood by demonstration. The duty of the elite here is to apply such interpretation; while the duty of the masses is to take them in their apparent meaning in both respects, i.e. in concept and judgment, since their natural capacity does not allow more than that.³

Therefore, to the extent that he operates with a principle of esotericism, it is still fundamentally an exercise involving reason and reasoning. What might be considered hidden is in fact merely difficult. Because it cannot be easily explained and that trying to do so to persons unfit or incapable of grasping it is possibly hazardous, it needs to be kept hidden and restricted, or at least sheltered and protected.

In Ismaili Neoplatonism ultimate reality is based on and in the realm of intellect. There, all things are timeless and eternally unchanging. Once incorporated in physical forms, they shift into an imitation or a similitude that, by virtue of its corporate existence, may or may not indicate outwardly how exactly it relates to its theoretical and intellectual base mode. Thus, for Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, the leading voice of the Neoplatonic strain in Ismaili thought, the action of interpretation, of *ta'wīl*, involves tracing the significance of the physical manifestation back to its intellectual origin. For scripture and the law, which are both apparent in words and decrees, interpretation can perform an operation that uncovers the intelligible truth of which they are only physical reminders, symbols or markers that point to what is really real.

² *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 14; trans. Hourani, 50.

³ *Faṣl al-maqāl*, trans. Hourani, 65.

In an important chapter of his major work *al-Maqālīd* (The Keys),⁴ he discusses the difference between revelation (*tanzīl*) and interpretation (*taʿwīl*) and there makes a rather broad, somewhat puzzling, suggestion that the former is something having undeveloped organic form, such as, in his example, 'wood'. The latter operation (*taʿwīl*) is like the effort of a craftsman who turns raw wood into various objects such as arrows, a spear, a door, a pulpit. But he is clearer when he says that *tanzīl* creates a set of "subjective items or restricted phrases beneath which there are hidden meanings." "*Taʿwīl* on the part of those who are masters of it puts all of these into a proper context and thus extracts from each what was intended by it." How this action correlates with the art of the craftsman is still less than clear. Interpretation moves from the expression to its meaning and significance; but it also serves to explain and exploit what was merely seeded in scripture. The power of the one who performs the act of interpretation is the reverse of revelation, as it is implied by the Arabic term *tanzīl*, which means to 'bring down'. That action involves the embodiment of what was originally intellect, that is, it is to make intellect incarnate. The Qur'an is in fact intellect incarnate. Reversing the process functions to determine what the similitude truly is, not here in the physical world, but its true reality in the eternal realm of intellect. Thus we find two concepts for *taʿwīl*. One simply traces a physical object, word, or phrase to its theoretical origin in the world of intellect. The other seeks to discover and exploit the many possible meanings or implications that were and are contained in the physical form. The latter process would appear to be far more creative than the former, and it seems rather open ended.

Nevertheless, while his explanations helps to indicate the purpose (or possible purpose) of interpretation, it does not entirely solve the problem of how it is to be done and, most critically, by whom. Is the action of *taʿwīl* open to all who practice the art? His few examples may help. In the famous light verse of the Qur'an,⁵ he claims that 'light' (*nūr*) is not natural light but rather reason

4 For this work of al-Sijistānī we now have an edition by I. Poonawala, *Kitāb al-Maqālīd al-malakūtiyya* (Tūnis: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2011). The key chapter for what follows is *al-Iqlīd al-thānī wa'l-khamsūn fī'l-farq bayn al-tanzīl wa'l-taʿwīl* (pp. 236–44). The discussion here and quotations (some modified slightly) come from my earlier *Early Philosophical Shiism* which contained a separate chapter on "Interpretation and Its Institution" (pp. 124–33) based largely on this material although the citations to it were to a manuscript source.

5 "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth; the parable of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp—the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star—lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western, whose oil almost lights up, though fire should not touch it. Light upon light. God guides to His Light whomever He wishes" (Q 24: 35).

(*nūr 'aqlī*) as it radiates from the Word (i.e. Intellect) and Universal Soul. The 'lamp' is,

The lamp of knowledge standing in the Speaker's (i.e. the Lawgiver's) place after he has departed in order to spread this knowledge among his community so that it is guided by the light of his knowledge to the way of God and will thus be freed from the darkness of doubt and dissention.

Such an interpretation seems hardly unreasonable or unexpected. But he then insists that the 'glass' (*zujāja*) refers to the first imam Ḥasan "whose hold on the imamate was weak and extremely fragile (like glass)" and that the 'star' (*kawkab*) is Ḥusayn, whose knowledge and prominence resembled a star.

It is evidence that al-Sijistānī's *ta'wīl* in this case involves reason but also a predetermined agenda that arises out of his Shī'ī predilections and this latter element surely depends on some form of authority. And he admits that it comes from "the progeny of the Prophet and the *waṣī* (his heir)." The ambiguous verses of the scripture, which according to him are known to be so when they contradict normal custom and habit, require a degree of certainty not obvious in them. His example here is the speech of the ants in the account of Sulaymān and the queen of Sheba. For verses of this type, we must turn to "those firmly grounded in knowledge," which for the Shī'a are the imams. They possess the authority to interpret the sacred text.

To further complicate the matter, he next raises the questions of whether other less obviously ambiguous verses are susceptible to interpretation and why Scripture contains double meanings in the first place. He then confesses that ambiguity is not the sole factor in the application of *ta'wīl*. The cause of natural compositions and of the Qur'an's words derive both from a single intelligible source, the world of intellect. Since the composition of the natural world has within it forms that are both readily apparent and others that are concealed and hidden, the utility of which is not obvious, Scripture will be the same. Knowing the usefulness of natural objects often requires the expertise of scientists and other specialists; so too with the Qur'an. Even the unambiguous verses (the *muḥkamāt*) contain concealed knowledge (*'ulūm khafīya*).⁶

In addition al-Sijistānī himself brings up the issue of why not simply have the lawgiving prophet provide both the outward exoteric wording of the text and also its inner esoteric meanings, thus avoiding the necessity of interpretation. If both are known from the outset, there will be no need for *ta'wīl* and there would be, accordingly, no controversy about what it is and how it is obtained.

⁶ *Maqālīd*, pp. 243–44.

His response is that, if the interpretation, the esoteric *ta'wīl*, had been openly proclaimed by the lawgiver, the prophet's followers would have abandoned the revelation and the actions demanded by it. The deeds decreed in the law would be set aside in favor of the theoretical meanings behind it. They would cling to the *bāṭin* exclusively. His own example in this case concerns the meaning of ritual purification through ablution with water. It actually signifies purification by the believer of his heart with knowledge against doubt and misgiving. The lawgiver was deliberately silent about this *ta'wīl*, he insists, as a way of insuring that his people would truly and fully implement his law. They must observe the law. But, in creating ambiguities and double meanings, he made the ongoing search for knowledge and truth necessary; that search is a part of the law. The uncertainty in scripture in and of itself calls forth the quest. The greatest danger, in al-Sijistānī's view, is not that the search for truth would ever replace or cancel the law but that those stuck solely and exclusively on the literal outward meaning will never attain even a small portion of its other esoteric dimension, which is for him equally essential. One without the other, the *ẓāhir* or the *bāṭin*, represents a failure so momentous as to result in perdition and damnation.

However, in the end, al-Sijistānī leaves us with the impression that he prefers both answers, that reason is ultimately the basis for interpretation and the standard by which it is judged, yet he also insists on the vital role of an authority. The true interpretation, as opposed to what might be false or falsely so claimed, depends on the imams and agents of theirs, even if their own access to the truth is from some form of rational process.

Many decades after al-Sijistānī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, writing in the era of the imam al-Ḥākim, in part follows his predecessor but again trying to assert the superior position of reason. His *Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate* (*al-Maṣābiḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma*) contains one key chapter that is devoted to a proof of the absolute necessity of *ta'wīl*. His principle aim with the work as a whole was to convince the Shī'ī-leaning Buyid *wazīr* of Baghdad to change his allegiance to the Fatimids, instead of the Abbasids. Rational argument rather than a more narrowly sectarian appeal was appropriate. Nevertheless it is useful here to consider closely what proofs he offers, as in the following examples:⁷

7 The material quoted here all comes from al-Kirmānī's chapter in this work which is called "The Sixth Light: in proof of the interpretation of the revelation and the law that comes from the messengers," pp. 63–67 (English), 28–32 (Arabic) of my *Master of the Age*.

A) There is no way to comprehend what is unseen and not subject to sensation other than by means of an expression for it that is something that can be seen and sensed. The messenger reported about things that cannot be seen or sensed, such as God, paradise and its felicity, hell and its torments. From this fact it follows that, in his reporting and his expression of what he reported about, he gave an account of what cannot be seen and sensed using what can be seen and sensed. Thus, for example, he reported about paradise, which is the abode of the afterlife and which is neither seen nor subject to sensation, by referring to gardens and streams and trees and fruit and flowing water and, in regard to the manner of being of those in it, [he referred to them] as newborns, cups, pitchers, dark-eyed women, well-kept pearls and all sort of physical niceties that are in their entirety seen and sensed. ... If that is a necessary consequence, what he said and did and summoned to in regard to the afterlife, follows the rule of similitudes in forming likenesses. Similitudes require the things that are represented by them and the things that are represented are what is designated by interpretation.

B) Those humans who are wise and intelligent appreciate the absurdity of addressing an order to the dead who lack life, have no reward or punishment, no instrument for accepting the commandment to do good and avoid evil, or to respond, let alone to He who is most high and hallowed, the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Yet the messenger related of God that He spoke to the heaven and the earth in His statement: "Then He lifted Himself up to the celestial heaven when it was smoke; He said to it and to the earth, 'Come willingly or unwillingly,' they replied, 'We come willingly' [Q 41: 11]. God is all-knowing and all-wise and the heaven and the earth are inanimate, lacking a mind and having no tool for speech. Hence, in view of the absurdity of any wise person addressing the inanimate, it is necessary that there is, to His commanding the heavens and the earth and their answering Him, a meaning that makes the statement of God true and rationally acceptable.

C) God has said: "When He was causing slumber to overcome you as a security from Him and He sent down to you from the skies water with which to purify you, to carry away from you the defilement of satan, and to strengthen your hearts and firm up your footsteps" [Q 8: 11]. It is known that the defilement of satan is unbelief, doubt, uncertainty, hypocrisy, ignorance and error and whatever else occurs in the heart, minds and spirits that functions as these do. Given that the defilement of satan is in hearts and minds, it cannot be supposed that water, which comes down

from the sky and is felt and drunk, can purify them because it is impossible that the matter is like this. And, if the water that is mentioned here is natural water, everyone becomes pure, both the believer and the unbeliever. Hence it is necessary that, for this water, there is a meaning, which, if not for it, an absurdity would have come from God in His saying something that is contrary to it. That meaning we call an interpretation, an explanation, elucidation and an inner sense. Therefore the interpretation for that and what is like it is necessary.

D) In the justice of God, no one is punished for the crime of someone else. He has said: “No one bears the burden of another” [Q6: 164]. Yet it is a prescription of the Messenger and of his law to punish the uncle for the crime of his nephew if he kills in error. That is contrary to the justice of God and what He ordered. But it is unthinkable for the Messenger to do what is contrary to God’s justice and mercy, or that he ordered what would contravene the command of God. Hence it is necessary that it have a meaning and a wisdom, which, for rational minds, brings it into conformity with the justice of God and His mercy. Those meanings, which, for rational minds, brings it into conformity with the justice of God and His mercy, are the interpretation that we call the inner sense, the elucidation and the explanation.

E) God made the interpretation of what the messenger brought obligatory by His saying: “He it is who revealed to you the book, of it, parts are firmly fixed and they are the mother of the book, but others are ambiguous; those in whose hearts there is deviousness follow what is ambiguous hoping thereby to spread sedition and the desire for its interpretation, but no one knows its interpretation except God and those firmly grounded in knowledge who say, ‘We believe in it, all is from our Lord,’ yet none remember except those with minds” [Q3: 7]. The protest of those who protest is to say that the interpretation is known only to God and that “those who are firmly ground in knowledge” is a subject [of what follows], and not predicated of what went before. That is false due to the existence of what invalidates their objection in the speech of the Arabs when being brief and concise. ... Hence the interpretation is obligatory and those firmly ground in knowledge are the ones who know it.

It would be relatively easy to advance a claim that al-Kirmānī has here taken the same or quite similar position on this issue as that of Ibn Rushd, both basing their doctrine firmly on the side of reason. That would be true of what he says about the need for and methods of approaching *ta’wīl*. Notice the

references to “a meaning that makes the statement of God true and *rationally acceptable* (B),” “a meaning if not for which God would have done something absurd (C),” “a meaning and a wisdom, which, for *rational minds*, brings it into conformity with the justice of God and His mercy (D),” and such meanings are known to “those firmly grounded in knowledge (E).”

Elsewhere in this same treatise, however, he argues a different concept that insists on the absolute ultimate authority of the single divinely chosen imam whose ruling on any matter must stand alone. But the issue in these other passages is less about methods of interpretation than of social and communal governance and the preservation of its cohesion.

God imposed on the believers three acts of obedience in one verse, each linked to the others. No one can accept the first without the second or the second without the third. “Oh, you who believe obey God and obey the messenger and those in authority among you” [Q 4: 59]. It is necessary therefore that there exist for the community someone who is rightly the subject of their obedience, and they are to follow his command in regard to God and the religion of God.

It was necessary to put in the place of the Messenger someone to whom to refer those issues of religion about which there were differences. After the Prophet, someone must issue rulings in matters about which the people differ. That someone is the imam.

What the Prophet brought can be added to or subtracted from, and it is likewise possible to alter his regulations and pronouncements and thus to introduce deviation in them. Therefore there must be a person put in charge of these matters who guards them and prevents additions, subtractions, or alterations.

If all the meanings contained in one phrase are reasonable, wisdom requires that there be someone who teaches its people what is right to prevent anyone singling out one meaning rather than another. If the intended meaning adduced from one phrase is a single meaning or perhaps two, wisdom requires that there exist in the community a person who teaches them the intended aim. If the meanings that are adduced from the outward sense are all erroneous and what is intended by the phrase is not that meaning, but rather the word or phrase has the function of metaphor and symbol, wisdom requires there to be in the community someone who explains what those metaphors and similes refer to. Thus, if there are these three possibilities in this case and all three require that there be someone in the community to guide and to teach, the guide and the teacher is the imam.

It would thus seem that the operation of reason yields no consensus and in fact could well lead to disagreement and dissension, some of which might be dangerous. Note that he suggests that there are cases where “all the meanings contained in one phrase are reasonable” and therefore the community must still, in addition to rational inquiries, find out which, of all those options to which reason attests, is the right one, the truth, and the one intended by God. Rationality on its own does not provide us the full truth.

Such a view accords well with the Ismaili attitude to classical philosophy and the philosophers. For the Fatimid era writers, the Greeks had a claim to great achievement in certain aspects of the sciences but not in respect to the highest truths about which they differed profoundly, having come up with mere opinions that were often mutually contradictory.

But to this point we have paid attention to the work of Ismaili theoreticians like al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī. Both men were deeply involved in the *daʿwa* and, in some sections of what they wrote, we see comments of a less theoretical nature than much of the rest. Still the passages quoted above are found in a theoretical context. They do not necessarily tell us much about how this issue functioned in the day to day operations of the *daʿwa*. For the matter at hand, it is useful to select a text that speaks to the practical applications of *taʿwīl*, one that offers both a clear rule about gaining access to the *taʿwīl* and also examples of what might be seen as non-rational interpretation, where there is no evident reason why a particular *taʿwīl* of a verse goes in the direction its proponent claims it does—certainly not in the way that either Ibn Rushd or al-Kirmānī indicate. Judging from a wider array of material that emanates from *daʿwa* sources, such a form of *taʿwīl* certainly existed, and in fact may have been more common.

An ideal treatise for this purpose is the recently discovered *Mafātīḥ al-nīma* (The Keys to Grace) composed by the early *dāʿī* Abuʿl-ʿAbbās, brother of the more famous Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Shīʿī. The question that called for this work, according to its author, is whether a member of the Ismaili *daʿwa* must pay, either as *zakāt*, alms dues, or *ṣadaqa*, voluntary contributions, or other tithes, whatever the agent (*dāʿī*) in charge demands and what is the religious benefit in doing so. Evidently some Ismailis at the time harbored doubts about the monetary demands imposed by their *dāʿīs*. In Abuʿl-ʿAbbās’s response, there is a clear affirmation of the connection between payment and access to the *taʿwīl*. The latter is granted only to those who both swear an oath of obedience and loyalty, and also pay amounts asked of them and more. We thus find in this treatise not only confirmation of such a connection, that is, between payments and access, but also several examples of interpretations of Qurʾānic verses that differ significantly from the kind we saw above.

The following statements help explain the link between paying dues and access to *taʿwīl*:

in regard to what is required of you in respect to God's guardian [i.e. the imam], for the person who produces that [the offering] out of the goodness of his own self, God will cleanse thereby his spirit and purify his money, and it will thus be lawful for his *dāʿī* and mentor to reveal to him the interpretive (*taʿwīlī*) sciences and make known to him the truths hidden from the enemies of God's religion.

the religion of God, both the outward and inward, exist so that His unique oneness, both outwardly and inwardly, lead to three conditions and three benefits. One of them is the worship of God. The second of them is that by means of which the world flourishes, that is, by His commandments and judgments. The third is that it points to the inner meaning of the law, the interpretation of the revelation, and to the spiritual and physical hierarchy [that upholds them].

the believer pays what he pays on the measure of his sincerity and in accord with what his *dāʿī* determines for him in order to test him. If he pays that once, he has fulfilled the basic requirement of the religion and thus fulfilled the necessary obligation by his fulfillment of which he distinguishes himself from the people of outward meaning [i.e. those attached exclusively to the *ẓāhir*] and he departs from their ranks. If he pays a second time, his *dāʿī* knows the goodness of his intention and the firmness of his certainty *and then he reveals to him the secrets of the interpretation*. If he pays out a third time, his status with God's guardian rises and his rank similarly rises among the believers.

For examples of the kind of *taʿwīl* cited in this same work see the several quotations from it included above in chapter one.⁸

This latter type of *taʿwīl* in which there appears to be no claim of a rational process for moving from the literal to the figurative, or from symbol to what is symbolized by it, is fairly common in Ismaili literature and many more examples could be adduced as illustrations of it. However, they all belong to works produced in the *daʿwa* strictly for its own members. They did not circulate

⁸ In the original published version of this chapter quoted in full at this point items D) on "the sunna regarding the new born," and E) on "the actions of the pilgrimage." Both passages are now available above.

outside of a narrow circle and all of those privy to them were sworn to secrecy. A major provision of that oath threatened serious penalties for violation. None of these matters were to be shared with those not authorized to receive them; the *da'wa* thus controlled access to such knowledge. But, even with numerous examples of such interpretations in Ismaili texts from this early period, there is little information concerning the specific function of authority. From various theoretical discussions of the hierarchy of religious dignitaries and the ranks of authority in the *da'wa*, we can surmise a pattern of transmission in which knowledge of the *ta'wīl* was conveyed down from the top, that is, from the imam to those below him until finally reaching the novice member at the bottom. However, it would be nice to have a more explicit picture of the process, one in which we could see actual chains of transmission and sessions of instruction. To be sure, we now possess solid evidence and several examples of the *majālis*, a kind of instructional meeting designed in part to teach but also to motivate. What was said in them was often homiletic. To a certain degree it gives us what we want but such sessions of wisdom were not convened, as far as we can tell, for the *dā'īs* themselves. Instead they served a general Ismaili lay public. Surely there existed also instructional sessions in which *dā'īs* taught *dā'īs*, perhaps the latter being those of lower ranks or those less initiated into the more difficult parts of the doctrine.

In this context we note a detail in Abu'l-'Abbās's *ta'wīl* of the individual rites of the pilgrimage in which he interprets the pilgrim's final return to Mecca as "Your returning to Mecca is your returning to your *dā'ī* in order to seek to learn from him whatever remains that you have not learned."

Ultimately the evidence we have will not yield a clear answer to the question posed at the beginning. There are instances where a rational approach to the problem of finding the *bāṭin* and the esoteric meanings of scripture and law is quite pronounced. The essential role of reason is certainly a feature of Ismaili doctrine. Reason is a source for any and all knowledge. Revelation does not and never can contradict this source. What only appears to do so must be interpreted to accord with reason. However there is another vein of Ismaili thought that is less wedded to reason and rational processes. In it authority predominates and a hierarchy of authorities produce and manage the truth. Yet for this dilemma there is also a kind of reconciliation in a doctrine that such authority itself represents the intellect in the physical realm and is reason itself. The imam is the embodiment of reason; he is the deputy of intellect.

Techniques for Guarding and Restricting Esoteric Knowledge in the Ismaili *da'wa*

In Islamic doctrine the classical point of departure for discussions of what knowledge can or cannot be known, and can and cannot be revealed openly and thus must be carefully controlled, is Qur'an 3:7, which states fairly explicitly that the sacred book contains verses some of which are clear and unambiguous but others that are ambiguous. The latter require some form of interpretation (*ta'wīl*).^{1,2} The problem in front of us is how to determine who knows what the interpretation is and who might be authorized to speak about it. A common understanding of the same passage would claim that only God knows and humans do not and cannot. However, the teaching of the Philosophers in Islam, most particularly Ibn Rushd (Averroes), would insist that the elite scholars in the community, those capable of demonstrative thought, do have the requisite knowledge and should make such interpretations. They are the ones in the category of “those firmly grounded in knowledge” mentioned in this very Qur'anic text. They must not, however, speak about them to the general public but rather restrict their communications solely to those like themselves. Common folk, who are not capable of theoretical knowledge, are in fact harmed by being exposed to such abstractions. Here is what Ibn Rushd says:

When something of these allegorical interpretations is expressed to anyone unfit to receive them—especially demonstrative interpretations because of their remoteness from common knowledge—both he who expresses it and he to whom it is expressed are led into unbelief.

1 Originally published as “Techniques for Guarding and Restricting Esoteric Knowledge in the Ismaili *da'wa* during the Fatimid Period,” in *Sharing and Hiding Religious Knowledge in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. by Mladen Popović, Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, and Clare Wilde (de Gruyter, 2018), pp. 186–98.

2 The whole text of this verse runs as follows: “It is He who sent down to you the book, wherein are verses clear that are the essence of the Book, and others that are ambiguous. As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation (*ta'wīl*). But no one knows its interpretation (*ta'wīl*) save only God and those firmly grounded in knowledge; they say, “We believe in it.” All is from our Lord; yet no one remembers but men possessed of minds.” Needless to say there are many ways to translate this verse and punctuation can change and with it the meaning. It is also much discussed in the tradition.

The reason for that in the case of the latter is that allegorical interpretation comprises two things, rejection of the apparent meaning and affirmation of the allegorical one; so that the apparent meaning is rejected in the mind of someone who can only grasp apparent meanings, without the allegorical meaning being affirmed in his mind, the result is unbelief.³

His order not to speak about such knowledge to the general public is quite explicit.

One must not speak about those things concerning which the Holy Law is silent; the masses must learn that human understanding is not sufficient to treat these problems, and must not go beyond what the teaching of the Holy Law explains in its texts, since this is teaching in which all can participate and which suffices for the attainment of their happiness. And just as the physician investigates the measure of health which agrees most with the healthy for the preservation of their health, and with the sick for the curing of their illness, so the Lord of the Holy Law instructs the masses only in so far as is needed for their acquisition of happiness.

Among the Ismaili Shī'a, and some other branches of the Shī'a as well, it is standard to claim that knowledge of the inner, esoteric meaning of scripture, as in the verses of the Qur'an that are admittedly ambiguous, fall into the domain of the imams. The imams, commencing with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, as the chosen successor to the Prophet Muḥammad, and then running through his progeny one by one, know the true meaning of all scripture and the Law based on it. It is they who are "those firmly grounded in knowledge," again with reference to the Qur'anic text. What is obvious in it is its literal meaning, its exoteric dimension (*ẓāhir*), whereas the truth (or truths) behind the outward sense, its esoteric side (*bāṭin*), is concealed and is thus not available to ordinary Muslims. They do not and cannot know the interpretation solely as the result of personal effort. The truth comes only from the Imam.

Here then is an important distinction, one that needs to be cited here at the beginning because it involves an essential difference that sets Ismaili doctrine apart and in clear contrast to the Philosopher's limited esotericism. The latter is what Ibn Rushd calls the 'knowledge of the steadfast'.⁴ He and the

3 Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-maqāl*, Eng. trans. G. Hourani, "The Decisive Treatise" in *Averroes On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London, 1976), p. 66.

4 "But all this is the knowledge of those who are steadfast in their knowledge, and this must not be written down and it must not be made an obligation of faith, and therefore it is not taught

Philosophers like him would argue that the allegorical interpretation of scripture, which becomes essential when its apparent meaning appears to conflict with reason, can be discovered rationally by the extension of the significance of an expression from real to metaphorical but without forsaking standards of metaphor in the language.⁵ For the Ismailis there is no such restriction; esoteric knowledge (the *bāṭin*) need not be so confined. For them, as explained by their principal authorities—a selection of writers from the Fatimid period whose works we now possess—the matter is much more complicated. While the operation of interpretation as employed by the Philosophers (and others) is quite possible even for these Ismailis, there are for them more layers of explanation than that. All items of doctrine mentioned in scripture and the Law can have symbolic value. In fact all aspects and parts of the natural realm, the universe at large and in particulars, exist in parallel with corresponding religious values, ranks and meanings. Each may have a symbolic counterpart in the realm of faith. Each symbolizes something else, something of special religious meaning, often of particular significance in Ismaili propaganda and its appeal, in Arabic the *daʿwa*. There may be no logical, that is, rational, connection between the symbol and what is symbolized by it. We have here knowledge that is truly esoteric. It is not merely difficult to understand, but is genuinely beyond the capacity of humans of whatever class because it belongs solely to the imams and those authorized to represent them.

The Shīʿa believe that failure to acknowledge the living imam, the imam of the time, leads to perdition and hellfire. That condition results in part from not having access, as a consequence, to the knowledge required for entry into eternal bliss and salvation. One source⁶ explains that the human soul commences its existence as the first perfection of the body to which it is attached. If it has access to a teacher who can provide it with the truth, i.e. the true meaning of religion, it moves toward an end in which it will have acquired a second perfection and thus achieved perpetual felicity in the abode of the everlasting. The teacher is the imam. Lacking access and failing to adhere to the cause of the

by the Divine Law. And one who mentions this truth where it should not be mentioned sins, and one who withholds it from those to whom it should be told sins too.”

- 5 “The meaning of *taʿwīl* (allegorical interpretation) is the extension of the significance of an expression from real to metaphorical significance without forsaking therein the standard metaphorical practices of Arabic, such as calling a thing by the name of something resembling it or a cause or consequence or accompaniment of it, or other things such as are enumerated in accounts of the kinds of metaphorical speech.” (Ibn Rushd, “The Decisive Treatise,” Hourani trans., p. 50)
- 6 This form of the doctrine is that of the famous early eleventh century Ismaili *dāʿī* al-Kirmānī on whom in general and this concept of the soul in particular, see my *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*.

imam and his line implies doom and damnation. Thus knowledge of the esoteric dimension of the truth is key and that can only come from the *da'wa* and its agents, the *dā'īs*, who control access to it.

Of the several techniques used to restrict access, two are especially important. One is the oath of covenant administered to each and every adept who wishes to join the cause. We possess in fact copies of an exact text employed and descriptions of a kind of ceremony in which the neophyte swears his or her allegiance. One provision in it makes sure that all knowledge that is imparted to the novice is never revealed to others without explicit permission from senior officials in the *da'wa*. No such material is ever to be shared with those to whom it does not belong (i.e. are not members of the *da'wa* in good standing). The other method of control involves payments of various tithes and fees of one kind or another, the payment of which is often a test of the new member's sincerity and firm conviction. But it is only after such payments that the agent of the *da'wa* is allowed to divulge to the new initiate the esoteric knowledge he or she possesses. Exactly how this process works and under what circumstances is especially evident in a newly uncovered treatise from the earliest Fatimid period explaining the ways such payments can lead to esoteric knowledge, which, in turn, supplies the keys to salvation.

Thus in the rest of this paper it is essential to explore and explain in reasonable detail these two aspects (the oath and financial payments) of the Ismaili methods of controlling access to the interpretive (*ta'wīl* based) knowledge by the imam and the agents acting on his behalf, all the while stressing that according to the doctrine behind this policy, its purpose is the ultimate salvation of those who subscribe to this system.

1 The Oath of Allegiance

The Ismaili oath of allegiance is now fairly well documented. We have examples, whole or partial, from various periods and, since it is still used in one form or another by modern Ismailis, we can be reasonably certain that it is authentic. All persons who joined the *da'wa* swore such an oath and to the covenant it entailed. It is unclear, however, whether or not all Ismailis took the oath, which would imply that they had become members of the *da'wa*. Were all regarded as members of the *da'wa*, meaning any and all who had responded to the appeal? That is less than clear. But we do understand that the basic level in the *da'wa* was that of the novice, the *mustajīb*, 'the one seeking answers'. To judge from the variety of *majālis*, the teaching and exhortation sessions convened by the

agents, of which we possess several accounts and examples, they included women as well as men.⁷

The ceremony itself is described as solemn and certainly not lightly undertaken.⁸ The *dā'ī* administering the oath must ascertain carefully and surely the sound and sincere purpose of the new adept. There are ritual steps: citation of Qur'anic precedence, extirpation of previous beliefs, fasting, and prayer. Al-Naysābūrī, a leading *dā'ī* in the time of al-Ḥākim (r. 996–1021), explains the process as follows:

when he [the novice] has been broken down and wants to take the oath, the rule is to take it of him after he has fasted three days. Both the *dā'ī* and the novice should be in a pure state. Each should pray two prostrations so as to be at the most pure. Next he begins with thanking God the highest and praising Him, asking for His blessing on His messengers and on the pure imams. He takes of him the oath of covenant to God, His angels, His messengers, the oath to the legatees and the pure imams, and an oath to the imam of his own time, may the blessing of God be on them. He pledges to him allegiance, as is the rule for that in the book of covenant. He swears that he believes in God, and in His angels, His messengers, the pure imams from the legatee to the imam of the time, may the blessings of God be on them all, and that he will uphold the external and the internal and that he will support the imam of his time and will not forsake him, that he will not reveal any secret of the faith to a person not worthy of it or to anyone who has not sworn the oath of covenant, that he will not betray any of the brethren of believers who have joined him in swearing the oath, that he will treat as a friend those who have accepted the imams and as an enemy those who are enemies of theirs, that he will stay away from their enemies, that he will offer good counsel on behalf of God and His representative, upon whom be peace, and that, if he should go back on his oath, there will apply to him what applies to

7 We have accounts of these sessions specifically devoted to the instructing of women in Ismaili teachings. For one such example see *Advent of the Fatimids*, Eng. pp. 168–170. On this institution in general see Walker, “Fatimid Institutions of Learning,” *JARCE* 34 (1997): 179–200, pp. 182–186 (reprinted in *Fatimid History and Ismaili Doctrine* 1, pp. 7–15 (Ashgate, Variorum, 2008)).

8 An important addition to the examples that follow is found in the memoir of Ibn al-Haytham published in *Advent of the Fatimids* (Eng. trans. p. 95). There the author describes being “summoned to the faith” and taking the ‘oath’. The date of this event was Spring of 296/909 and it is therefore one of our earliest accounts.

those who rescind or violate an oath, that he will appeal for the imam of their time, ascribe knowledge to him and not a letter of that to himself.⁹

Note in particular the requirement of secrecy. A person given answers, i.e. the novice, is not to divulge those answers to anyone “not worthy of them”.

Here is another version of the oath:¹⁰

The *dāʿī* shall say to the person to whom he administers the oath (*ʿahd*): You impose on yourself God’s oath (*ʿahd*), compact (*mīthāq*) and obligation (*dhimma*), as well as the obligation of God’s envoy, of his prophets, angels, books and envoys, the same pledge, contract and obligation which He entered into with His [earlier] prophets: that you will keep secret what you will hear and what you have already heard, what you know and what you will learn, what knowledge you have and what knowledge you will yet acquire concerning myself and the one who dwells in this city as representative of the Lord of truth, the imam for whom—as you know—I declare myself, and to whose committed adherents I openly and honestly belong. ... Thus you must reveal nothing of it, neither little or much, nor in allusions, except those things about which I myself or the person responsible dwelling in this city explicitly allow you to speak, so that in this matter you must only act according to our command, which you must not contravene and to which you must add nothing.

[...]

You must be friendly to the friends of God and hostile to His enemies and observe God’s duties and customs (*sunan*) as well as the customs of His Prophet, in the exoteric and in the esoteric sense (*ẓāhiran wa bāṭinan*), both openly and in secret. All this is confirmed by this oath, rather than being invalidated by it; it is corroborated rather than cancelled by it, brought closer rather than removed, strengthened rather than weakened, imposed as a duty rather than repealed, clarified rather than obscured. This is equally true of the exoteric and the esoteric, and of all that the prophets have revealed of the Lord, according to the manifest conditions contained in this oath.—If you pledge to observe all this, then say: ‘yes’. Thereupon the summoned one says, ‘yes’.

9 Walker, ed. and trans., *A Code of Conduct* (with Verena Klemm) Eng. p. 61.

10 Maqrīzī (*Khīṭaṭ*, 2: 318–20) gives us a version of the Ismaili oath that he has taken from the work of Akhū Muḥsin (on which see Halm “The Ismaili oath,” pp. 94–6). Maqrīzī calls this section of his work “A description of the oath that is taken from the one summoned.” The following translation is that of Halm as it appears in that article (in English trans.).

Then the *dā'ī* says to him: The security and warrant for it are that you will not reveal any of the things which you have pledged by this oath, neither in our lifetime nor after our death, neither in anger nor in a contented mood, neither from desire nor from fear, neither in distress nor when at ease, neither out of greed nor out of need—may God assume the protection and guarantee for it!—according to the manifest conditions contained in this oath! ... So never betray either God or His friend, either us or one of our brothers and friend or anyone of whom you know that he belongs to us, whether for family reasons or for money, or else because of an opinion, an oath or an agreement which you might interpret as invalidating [this oath].

If you do anything of the kind, although you know that in so doing you violate [the oath], which you remember exactly, then you renounce God the Creator of heaven and earth, ... You renounce His earlier and later envoys, His angels who are close to Him, ... You renounce the Torah, the Gospel, The Psalter and the Wise Admonition (Q3:58 and elsewhere), every religion sanctioned by God in the approaches of the world to come, and every servant who is pleasing to God. You leave the party of God and his saints, to God's unconcealed disappointment, but He will soon bring retribution and punishment on you, and you will walk into the fire of *jahannam* [Hell], in which there is no mercy. You renounce the power and strength of God and rely on your own power and strength—so may there be on you the same curse of God with which He cursed the Iblīs, which barred paradise to him and assigned him to the fire forever!

If you violate any part of all this, you will some day appear before an angry God. ... And if you violate it, then everything you have acquired during the time of your violation shall be given as alms (*ṣadaqa*) to poor and miserable people who are not related to you by blood. This will bring you no reward from God, ... If you violate any part of it, all your slaves, male or female, who are in your possession and whom you will take into your service until the hour of your death will be free in the sight of God; all your wives, including those whom you will marry up to the hour of your death, will be divorced.¹¹

11 Halm, "The Ismaili Oath of Allegiance (*'ahd*) and the 'Sessions of Wisdom' (*majālis al-ḥikma*) in Fatimid Times," in Farhad Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History & Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 75–115. This particular version of the oath as trans. by Halm, appears on pp. 95–97. The rest of this article is also highly important for our subject.

From these examples it is relatively easy to see that the oath serves two main purposes. One is to ensure the absolute loyalty of each new member or adherent and the other, more germane for us, is to guard and protect and thus control access to the esoteric knowledge imparted in the course of the *da'wa*'s appeal and its instruction. Note in particular the following language of the first oath. The new adept swears that "he will support the imam of his time and will not forsake him, that he will not reveal any secret of the faith to a person not worthy of it or to anyone who has not sworn the oath of covenant." Or that of the second version: "Thus you must reveal nothing of it, neither little or much, nor in allusions, except those things about which I myself or the person responsible dwelling in this city explicitly allow you to speak, so that in this matter you must only act according to our command, which you must not contravene and to which you must add nothing." ... "If you do anything of the kind, although you know that in so doing you violate [the oath], which you remember exactly, then you renounce God the Creator of heaven and earth ..." ... "You leave the party of God and his saints, to God's unconcealed disappointment, but He will soon bring retribution and punishment on you, and you will walk into the fire of *jahannam* [Hell], in which there is no mercy. You renounce the power and strength of God and rely on your own power and strength—so may there be on you the same curse of God with which He cursed the Iblīs, which barred paradise to him and assigned him to the fire forever!"

2 Payments of Dues and Alms

Payments made to gain access to esoteric knowledge—what is sometimes called "the interpretive sciences" (*al-'ulūm al-ta'wiliyya*)—and the status accorded by membership at a higher rank are fairly clear in general terms. There were set fees for attendance at the weekly lessons (*majālis*); and additional dues for other occasions. Some, such as the regular payment called the "fee for confidential discourse" (*najwa*) is Qur'anic in origin, although not a standard institutionalized Islamic practice except for Shī'a, especially the Ismailis and a few others.

However, the exact correlation between payment and access to esoteric knowledge, that is, the interpretive sciences, might have appeared vague and imprecise from the evidence previously available. But new material, most particularly a critically important text from the very beginnings of the Fatimid caliphate, reveals in fairly explicit language how the connection between the two operated within the *da'wa*. The Ismaili movement certainly existed and had spread dramatically prior to the founding of the state in 909 in North Africa

but it, until then, remained largely underground and out of view. Our knowledge about it is therefore limited. Even afterward, when the Ismailis actually governed substantial territory, their doctrine, teaching and practice tended to be kept tightly restricted, in part to prevent hostile attacks from Sunnī and other anti-Shī'ī Muslims who had now either become subjects of the new state or enemies outside. Moreover, the literature produced over the two and a half centuries of the Fatimid caliphate remained throughout under watchful guard and out of the hands of detractors. That situation, which has made the investigation of our topic often quite difficult, is slowly changing with the recovery more recently of long concealed texts. And although much still needs to be done, some vitally important new material has emerged and more is on the way.

For our purposes the most important item is a work, a lengthy letter, composed by the brother of the famous Fatimid agent in North Africa who was responsible for the creation of the state, Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shī'ī.¹² The brother, Abu'l-'Abbās, wrote this document to explain carefully the fiscal duties of a loyal member of the Ismaili system as an adherent of the imam. Near the beginning he makes the connection between payments and knowledge clear.

With the payment [one makes] without having being forced or compelled, rendering that offering out of the goodness of one's own self, God will cleanse thereby his spirit and purify his money, and thus it will be lawful for his agent [*dā'ī*] and mentor to reveal to him the interpretive (*ta'wīlī*) sciences and make known to him the truths hidden from the enemies of God's religion.

Such payments are in part set up as an aspect of the duty of giving alms. But, in the Ismaili context, there is more to it. As our text says:

The believer pays what he pays on the measure of his sincerity and in accord with what his *dā'ī* determines for him in order to test him. If he pays that once, he has fulfilled the basic requirement of the religion and thus fulfills the necessary obligation, by his fulfillment of which he distinguishes himself from the people of outward meaning [Sunnī Muslims and other non-Ismailis] and he departs from their ranks. If he pays a second time, his *dā'ī* knows the goodness of his intention and the firmness of his certainty and then he reveals to him the *secrets of the interpretation*.

¹² *Affirming the Imamate*.

If he pays out a third time, his status with God's guardian rises and his rank similarly rises among the believers.

When the *dā'ī* puts the novice to the test and the novice bears up patiently through the ordeal, he is allowed to initiate him in the keys to knowledge. If he flees and does not bear patiently the ordeal, initiation in knowledge is forbidden.

If he gives what he is ordered to give by his *dā'ī* and guards against that in which there are the people of confusion and discord who do not know the interpretation of the books of God. If he does that, the way is made easy, his knowledge increases and his prestige rises with the believers and with God's guardian. His rank increases and his station rises. "But the one who is miserly, keeps for his own self, and considers the good to be false" [Q 92:8–9], that is, he who is miserly in respect to the obligation he has been commanded to observe and does not produce it, regarding himself as above having to pursue that in which there is his very life, and who declares false the interpretation God set forth to expand the understanding of the believers. "So for him We will ease the way to adversity" [Q 92:10] and poverty, thus cutting off for him the substance of the knowledge by means of which is his salvation.

God orders him [the *dā'ī*] to examine the believers who seek the benefits of the religion to test out their secrets. If they bear the trial with patience, it is licit for the teacher to initiate them and raise them in the interpretive sciences.

At this point the critical importance of the term *ta'wīl* should have become obvious. It means various things: allegorical interpretation, or other forms of interpretation, of Qur'anic verses or legal texts, this being only one facet or aspect of a complex network of methods of understanding it and its significance. This topic itself is vast in Islamic discourse. For the Ismailis it is likewise a matter of much debate and yet is clearly essential to its doctrinal program.¹³ What is outlined above only begins to probe the range of issues involved. At one end of a broad spectrum are the symbolic interpretations of religious texts, either separate particular passages or even whole sections. At the other end are what we moderns would call the natural sciences. Interpretation here deals

13 The most recent major study of *ta'wīl* in the Ismaili context is David Hollenberg's *Beyond the Qur'an: Early Ismā'īlī Ta'wīl and the Secrets of the Prophets*.

with the uncovering or discovering of the reality behind, say, a physical object. What is it made of, its constituent elements? What can be made of it, as in wood that becomes a table or a chair?

Ismaili writings, that is, the literature produced by the agents of the *da'wa*, from the Fatimid period 909 to 1171, are substantial, perhaps two hundred works in all. Many are small, short treatises of one kind or another, but there are also major items of considerable length. A century ago we would have known little about what has survived and what might be recovered. In part our ignorance was a deliberate result of Ismaili secrecy, of its stated policy of guarding its doctrine from outside scrutiny. The *da'wa* controlled access to these works and only rarely did non-Ismailis see them. But now most of those who we know about are becoming accessible, either in manuscript or print, with a few even translated into a language other than Arabic or Persian. That then brings up the question of how much of this substantial corpus of *da'wa* literature is to be classified as *ta'wīl* interpretation. Given the wide reach of subjects discussed in these texts, where do we find in it *ta'wīl*? And what portion of it falls under the rule of secrecy. Is all of it protected by the oath?

For modern scholars gaining access has often been difficult. Those who preserve these texts regard them as, for the most part, restricted. Outsiders should still not be allowed to read them. Even members of these communities need special permissions only granted after extensive training and education. But, as it has happened, copies have found their way piecemeal into our hands, few at first but many more later. Thus we have gained access without agreeing to the oath or making the necessary payments of fees and dues. Most importantly we are not loyal adherents of the cause or properly trained in its doctrine. We have penetrated the wall of secrecy and uncovered what has for hundreds of years been hidden and carefully guarded.

A central issue here involves determining what the Ismaili tradition calls the *ḥaqā'iq*, the 'truths' or perhaps the 'ultimate realities'. These lie at the core of its beliefs; they are the most sensitive items of doctrine, that portion the uncontrolled revelation of which could cause substantial harm to the community. But for scholars outside it is extremely difficult to find the exact line between what can be shared and what must be hidden, since we have no one to guide us to it.

The corpus of *da'wa* literature certainly contains a significant number of works composed for a public purpose. They are therefore part of an ongoing debate by Ismailis with their various adversaries, either to refute an opponent or to attract new adherents. Such treatises are clearly not part of the *ḥaqā'iq* and, rather than being restricted or guarded, are meant to engage the broader non-Ismaili community of scholars. A couple of examples here should suffice.

They might include the legal materials produced by Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān,¹⁴ as well as his numerous treatises of refutation of opponents,¹⁵ or al-Kirmānī’s *Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate*,¹⁶ which was written to convince the Buyid *wazīr* of Baghdad to convert to the Fatimid side.

But, about those that we are fairly sure were not to be made public, there still remains a question of the role in them of *ta’wīl*. Does a major work on the proofs of prophecy¹⁷ (by al-Sijistānī) fall within the realm of *ḥaqā’iq* and thus require access solely via the system of oath, payments and training? From what we know at this point it appears that it does. Even if portions of it could be shared with outsiders, too much of it cannot and it thus remains, for the tradition, a secret text.

14 Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*.

15 Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib*.

16 *Master of the Age*.

17 *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*.

Science in the Service of the Fatimids and Their *Da'wa*

Evidence for Fatimid interest in the natural sciences is not difficult to find. The roster of major figures associated with the royal court might include, to cite some prominent examples, Isaac Israeli, from the early 10th century, and Ibn Yūnus, Ibn al-Haytham and Ibn Riḍwān, from the 11th.¹ An ill-fated project to build an observatory during the reign of al-Āmir in the 12th offers yet another case, one here of direct government promotion of a large scientific project involving a substantial number of experts. There is, accordingly, little doubt that Fatimid concern for the sciences, particularly medicine and astronomy, formed part of a public policy. Of equal interest, moreover, is the use of the natural order—the physical world—in the service of the Ismaili *da'wa*, most especially in the writings of various *dā'īs* from the same period. The latter topic is what al-Kirmānī, writing in the period 1000–1020, calls *mīzān al-dīyāna*. For him and the others the material realm is a mirror of religion, one balancing the other. Parallel examples of such correspondences abound in the texts they produced, some more curious than others but all elements of a doctrine that ties science to religion and religion to science.

Nevertheless, exactly how the two related, the *da'wa*, with its religious appeal, and the scientists who were employed by the state, remains hard to determine precisely. For the latter group the data we have is often vague and uncertain. Biographical information about Isaac Israeli, for example, only suggests that he was the court physician for the first caliph al-Mahdī. The reality is more elusive; details are lacking. Even the dates are unclear. Somewhat better is the evidence for Israeli's student Ibn al-Jazzār. In both cases we know much more about the written work of these figures than their role in the Fatimid court. Were, for example, their scientific endeavors funded by the government in any meaningful way? Was the caliph a sponsor or patron? Is the Ismailism of the dynasty a factor?

Among the many additional examples that might be investigated, the case of Sahlān b. Kaysān, from near the end of the 4th/10th century, is especially

1 Originally published as “Science in the Service of the Fatimids and Their Ismaili *Da'wa*” in Eva Orthmann & Petra Schmidl, eds, *Science in the City of Fortune: The Dustūr al-Munajjimīn and its World*, *Bonner Islamstudien*, vol. 39 (Berlin, 2017), pp. 273–91.

interesting. He was the author of at least two treatises, one on aromatics (*Mukhtaṣar fi'l-ṭīb*) and the other on pharmacology (*Kitāb al-aqrābādhīn*) that survive. He was a Melkite Christian and rose to prominence during the reign of al-'Azīz (975–996) to whom he dedicated the former work. A particularly important clue as to the connection between the ruler and the author is provided by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's biographical notice on the latter. Upon Sahlān's death in 990 a grand funeral procession for him featured prominently, among other members of the elite, the Melkite Metropolitan of Cairo and Fustat, Arsenius, who was the brother of al-Sayyida, the Lady. She was none other than the caliph's favorite (wife?) and the mother of the famous Sitt al-Mulk, half sister of al-Ḥākim. Although not as explicit as we might hope for, it appears that the powerful consort of the caliph may have used her influence to promote the work of her Melkite coreligionist.

For the reign of al-Ḥākim (996–1021), it would be relatively easy to produce a list of his personal physicians, but most of them, although noted for exceptional knowledge of medicine and medical practice, did not, in contrast to Sahlān (and Israeli), also contribute to the medical literature. They were thus not necessarily active proponents of the science itself.² One curious case is that of Abū Ya'qūb Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhīm Ibn Anastās, another Melkite doctor. Here, rather than a man of science, we have a gifted musician well known for skilled playing and a prodigious memory for tunes and lyrics. He also had a fondness for drinking and partying, which pleasures contributed directly to his untimely death by drowning while drunk late one night in 1007.³

But few figures of that era match in eminence the achievement of the great astronomer Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn Yūnus, whose famous book of astronomical tables (*zīj*), is said to have been originally ordered by al-'Azīz. Eventually it was presented to the latter's son and called after him the *Zīj al-kabīr al-Ḥākīmī*. Given his and his *zīj*'s subsequent fame, it might be assumed that Ibn Yūnus was, until his death in 399/1009, the principal astronomer at the Fatimid court. However, that was not the case, at least he was not the court astronomer.⁴ The full story of why and who in fact performed that role offers a window onto the social reality of the time.

2 One evident exception is 'Ammār b. 'Alī al-Mawṣilī, who came to Egypt at the time of al-Ḥākim and wrote there a book on the eye, its diseases and their treatment with drugs and instruments, a work he composed for the caliph. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, p. 504.

3 For the details see Walker, *Caliph of Cairo*, pp. 73, 165–67.

4 On the question of whether or not Ibn Yūnus might have worked in an observatory, possibly one founded by al-Ḥākim, see the extensive discussion of sources by Aydin Sayılı in his *The Observatory in Islam* (Ankara, 1960) pp. 130–56. In the end there is little or no evidence of any such institution at the time.

The great astronomer was, despite his eminence and renown, a figure of ridicule, noted for absent-minded tactlessness. He was tall and he wound his turban over a lengthy conical cap and he put his cloak over the turban. Whenever he rode out the people would laugh at him because of his odd figure, unkempt appearance and shabby clothing.⁵ When the topic of Ibn Yūnus absent-mindedness came up during an assembly, the caliph himself is reported to have remarked:

he came into to see me one day carrying his shoes in his hands. He kissed the ground and sat close by, with me able to look at both him and them. When he was ready to leave he kissed the ground, gathered the shoes, put them on and departed.

All this he cited as evidence of Ibn Yūnus's heedlessness and inattention.⁶ In short it appears obvious that the man was unfit for a prominent role at a court where royal protocol counted heavily.

Instead, or perhaps in his place, the chief astronomer/astrologer of the time was Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ismā'īl b. Sulaymān al-Ṭabarānī, who besides his own not inconsiderable achievements in the sciences, was socially presentable. His friends included both the elite members of court and most significantly Ibn Yūnus himself. He was moreover apparently on intimate terms with al-Ḥākim. From him we have yet one more story of Ibn Yūnus's strange behavior. The historian al-Musabbihī, who, as a member of the elite, was also a participant in the events of that era, relates the following account:

The astronomer Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarānī told me personally that he once went with Ibn Yūnus up to the top of the Muqaṭṭam plateau and set up there to observe Venus. At that Ibn Yūnus took off his clothes and his turban and put on a red woman's dress and veiled himself in a red veil. Next he brought out an *'ūd* which he began to strum with incense burning in front of him. It was a most incredible sight!⁷

Al-Ṭabarānī's status in elite circles is in part revealed by another curious encounter, one having nothing to do with Ibn Yūnus. The incident involves a notorious drinking party featuring several of the highest officials of the land. It ended badly with al-Ḥākim's personal physician, the previously mention Ibn

5 Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* 3: 430.

6 Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* 3: 431.

7 Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* 3:430; trans. 2: 365.

Anastās, accidentally drowning late at night after becoming thoroughly inebriated. Those who were a party to the tragedy realized immediately that they faced the wrath of the caliph to whom it would have been nearly impossible to explain what happened without condemning themselves in the process. To soften the bad news, the group chose to send ahead of the rest al-Ṭabarānī, apparently in the hopes that, although himself complicit in having attended the party, his standing with al-Ḥākim would protect him and eventually them. In the short run he succeeded.⁸ What happened in the long run is not clear.

The measure of al-Ṭabarānī's scholarly credentials is best explained by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's entry on him, which appears under the name 'Alī b. Sulaymān.

He was an excellent physician, well versed in wisdom (*al-ḥikma*) and the mathematical sciences, quite distinguished in medicine and unique in understanding the rule of the stars (*aḥkām al-nujūm*). He was active in the time of al-'Azīz and his son al-Ḥākim and reached into the reign of al-Zāhir li-I'zāz Dīn Allāh, al-Ḥākim's son.

His books include: A Summary of the Book of Sweets Employed in Medicine (*Ikhtisār Kitāb al-halwa fī'l-ṭibb*), A Book of Examples, Experiences, Reports, Anecdotes and Medical Particulars Extracted from the Books of Hippocrates, Galen and others (*Kitāb al-Amthila wa'l-tajārib wa'l-akhbār wa'l-nukat wa'l-khawāṣṣ al-ṭibbiyya al-muntaja'a min kutub Abqarāt wa-Jālīnūs wa ghayrihimā*); his notes and exercises, a four volume book I found written in his own hand and in which he mentions that he commenced writing it in 391/1001 in Cairo; a book of philosophical notes, which I also found in his hand and in which he says he began to compose it in Aleppo in the year 411/1020–21; a treatise proving that the receptivity of body to division is unlimited and does not end in something that is indivisible; an enumeration of the doubts pertaining to Aristotle's treatise on vision; and an enumeration of doubts concerning comets.⁹

The careers of Ibn Yūnus and al-Ṭabarānī well illustrate Fatimid interest in their special subject. It appears clear that Ibn Yūnus drew support from royal patronage, al-Ṭabarānī also by benefit of his position at court. They together are the positive side of the matter. But there is, in contrast, evidence as well of the negative, of a policy just the opposite and of a deliberate campaign against the practice of astrology. The precise facts and dates of the latter effort are, however, less certain. They involve first the execution in Egypt of an astrologer

8 *Raf' al-iṣr*, entry on the *qāḍī* 'Abd al-'Azīz, pp. 248–49; "Nuṣūṣ" p. 24–25.

9 pp. 504–05.

named al-'Ukbarī, under circumstances that indicate extreme displeasure on the part of al-Ḥākim with this man whose work he once welcomed. The other is a measure issued by the caliph prohibiting speaking about the stars, meaning the casting of horoscopes. Both al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Yūnis were noted for doing just that, particularly the latter who obviously gained a portion of his income from the practice at which he seems to have done especially well.

In sorting out the various reports in the chronicles it is essential to remember that Ibn Yūnus died in 399 (June 1009). We have no reason to suppose that al-Ḥākim's anger against astrologers in general arose that early. However, the case of al-'Ukbarī came up apparently in 394/1003–04, several years before. This man is described as weak-minded (*ḍa'īf al-'aql*) and foolish (*aḥmaq*), but he did manage two spectacular successes with his astrological predictions. The first involved asking to be put in charge of exactly at what moment the fleet sent to Tyre to crush an anti-Fatimid rebellion would attack. If, he is said to have offered, the attack did not succeed, they could hang him. However, it succeeded. In the second he announced by letter that in his star reckonings, he had learned that there was a derelict mosque on the river shore at Birkat Rusays beneath which was a tremendous fortune. He requested permission to tear it down. If he should be proven wrong, he would rebuild the mosque on which he would spend a large sum. Permission was given and so much treasure found it took mules several days to transport it to the palace. His own reward was substantial. But, if he had once been slightly cautious about his predictions, he soon lost it, becoming excessive and outrageous, thus inciting quite unreasonable expectations on which people depended and for which they paid large sums. At that al-Ḥākim ordered him killed (presumably in 394/1004).¹⁰

How this event relates to the prohibition of astrology ten years later cannot be determined precisely. Elements of the report concerning al-'Ukbarī—the treasure under the mosque—have the air of fable in any case. But, in the brief notice by al-Nuwayrī in his *Nihāyat al-arab* (28: 178), he conflates the two saying,

he ordered the execution of his astrologer al-'Ukbarī, who was master of al-Ḥākim's observatory (*al-raṣad al-ḥākimī*) [...] The cry went out making the blood of astrologers licit declaring that they are heretics (*kuffār*). No astrologer remained in the land of Egypt.

10 For the story see my *Caliph of Cairo*, p. 155. The sources here are Ibn 'Idhārī, p. 256, and Ibn Sa'īd, p. 69.

Al-Maqrīzī, whose *Itti'āz al-ḥunafā'* is, in general, more trustworthy when it comes to chronology, reports that in the year 404/1013–14,

speaking about the stars (i.e. practicing astrology) was forbidden. Many of the astrologers went into hiding. A few remained and they were driven out. The people were warned against concealing any of them. Some reappeared and asked for forgiveness, which was granted, although they had to swear that they would not examine the stars.¹¹

While al-Nuwayrī's account is quite muddled and likely not accurate, he does associate the case of al-'Ukbarī with the eventual outright prohibition of astrology which seems to have been in effect over the final nine or so years of the reign. Whether it was in any way a cause is less important than the result. Did Fatimid support for the work of the astronomers cease in that period? What happened to al-Ṭabarānī? Here we note that one of his books is reported to have been started, not in Egypt, but in Aleppo in 411/1020–21. Is that evidence that even he had to flee?

The one additional fact about al-Ṭabarānī is a short notice of the death of a daughter of his on the 4th of Shawwāl in 415 (9 December 1024).¹² The *amūr* al-Musabbihī, who goes out of his way to report this, was a friend of the astronomer but even so including a death notice in his great history for a mere child in this instance suggests that al-Ṭabarānī was in fact again residing in Egypt.

Although the material evidence for the career of al-Ṭabarānī in his service to the Fatimids is admittedly slight, it nevertheless comes from a good source, the testimony of the historian al-Musabbihī who reports from firsthand experience. For the next two cases, that of the eminent physicist Ibn al-Haytham and the physician Ibn Riḍwān, both from the first half of the 11th century, nothing is as clear. It is not here a question of the written work of either but of a direct connection with the government.

One account of Ibn al-Haytham's career has him travel to Egypt and there earn his livelihood copying books—Euclid and the *Almagest*—to sell, with no mention of employment by the state. Another, offered by Ibn al-Qiftī, writing in the 13th century and thus long after the events he recounts, is much more elaborate and to the point. He claims that al-Ḥākim hoped to find someone who could discover a means to control the rise and fall of the Nile. Ibn al-Haytham is supposed to have announced that were he in Egypt, he could produce the

11 Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ*, 4: 144; *Itti'āz* 2: 100 (or p. 118, AFSayyid ed.)

12 Musabbihī, *Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 103.

desired result. Hearing that prompted the caliph to lure him to Cairo with a large sum of money. Once there he was welcomed by al-Ḥākim personally with great honor. Then came the fulfillment of his promise. Accompanied by a group of skilled workmen who were to carry out the construction devised by Ibn al-Haytham, he set off to explore the length of the river for the location he required. However, as they traversed the land in the direction of Aswan, Ibn al-Haytham saw the ancient monuments left behind by previous inhabitants of Egypt and how they towered into the sky finely engineered and of marvelous forms. At that he began to realize that what he intended to do was impossible. If those in bygone eras who obviously had no lack of skill and knowledge had wanted to do it, they would have done so. Once he understood this his resolve faded. And when he reached the spot he earlier thought might serve his purpose, he quickly saw that it would not do. Thereupon he understood that he had made a serious miscalculation. His promised achievement was not to be. Returning in shame, he could do nothing but apologize. The caliph even so appointed him to a government post in one of the bureaus. He accepted out of fear not desire, realizing that a career in the service of a ruler given to changing moods who was quick to execute his employees without cause was a mistake. To escape he feigned insanity. Thereafter he remained confined to his house. Government officials seized his belongings. Only after the news of al-Ḥākim's death reached him did he shortly later venture out and seemingly regained his proper intellectual faculties. He retrieved the possessions until then held by the state and he commenced to earn his living copying and selling texts out of a stall near the entrance to al-Azhar. Apparently that continued until his death in Cairo much later.

What the latter story tells about Fatimid sponsorship of the sciences depends on accepting it as true even though it has no corroboration in a source nearer to the time of al-Ḥākim. However the details of how Ibn al-Haytham came to realize the impossibility of controlling the Nile, especially his appreciation of the engineering skill of the ancient Egyptians, once he had witnessed firsthand the monuments they left behind, sounds authentic rather than contrived. What it says about this caliph also fits well with other reports about him.

The case of Ibn Riḍwān is different in that it is his own claim to have been appointed chief medical officer for the Fatimid state that is our only evidence of government sponsorship for his work. If that indeed happened, it occurred during the reign of al-Mustansir, that is between 1036—the start of the reign—and 1061—probable date of Ibn Riḍwān's death. But exactly what such an appointment entailed is far from clear. It may have meant little. Thus crediting the achievements of Ibn Riḍwān to the Fatimids is perhaps as hard, or even harder, than for Ibn al-Haytham.

The evidence from which our histories of the Fatimids derive has unexplained gaps, often of considerable size. A critically important period for which we have little or no information concerns the reigns of the all-powerful *wazīr* Badr al-Jamālī and the early years of his son al-Afdāl. Thereafter the material becomes significantly richer. But, with one major exception when we get reports about the ruler's interest in the sciences, the material is brief and limited. The caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ (r. 1130–49) is said to have had a special fascination with astronomy (*ʿilm al-nujūm*) and that he employed seven of the astronomers. The names of four are given: al-Maḥqūf, Ibn al-Mallāḥ, Abū Muḥammad b. al-Qalʿī, and Ibn Mūsā al-Naṣrānī,¹³ without further information about either them or the caliph's involvement in their work.

From the period of his predecessor, we are fortunate to have a detailed report concerning a major government-sponsored project to construct an observatory. The document was apparently still available long afterward when al-Maqrīzī composed his famous *Khīṭaṭ* and could include either it or a substantial summary of it in a special section on the observatory,¹⁴ even though little or no trace of the building remained in his time. As the project actually achieved almost nothing of consequence, that it did not survive is quite understandable. In truth the attempt itself featured a comedy of tactical errors and administrative incompetence, along with rivalry and jealousy on the part of its sponsors. The scientific value of the effort was in the end nil. However, it does clearly establish a case for Fatimid interest and there are in the account a few facts worth noticing.

The matter arose during the tenure of the *wazīr* al-Afdāl (in power from 487/1094 until his assassination in 515/1121) during the reign of the caliph al-Āmir. Astronomers in Egypt—the names recorded are Ibn al-Ḥalabī, Ibn al-Haytham and Sahlūn, but there were others as well—prepared a yearly report of observations (ephemerides, *taqwīmāt*) which they presented at the beginning of the new year. For their efforts each received a monthly salary and other benefits. Each one strove to prove best at calculations. Upon presentation, the work was compared with corresponding material data from Syria and serious differences noted. As the year 513 (1119–20) began, when this information was being presented as usual, the experts were assembled to answer the problem of why such discrepancies existed between the two sets of data. They responded that the Syrian astronomers made their reckoning according to the older *zīj al-Mumtahan al-Maʿmūnī*, whereas the Egyptians had long before adopted the much newer *zīj al-Ḥākīmī*, a more recent *zīj*—i.e. from an era closer in time to

13 *Ittiʿāz*, A. F. Sayyid, ed., 3: 231.

14 *Khīṭaṭ*, A. F. Sayyid, ed., 1: 340–47.

the present—being, by agreement among the ancients, regarded as sounder. The upshot was that the experts suggested that, if an observatory were built, it could provide even newer data in the form of a *zīj* that could bear the name of al-Afḍal as its sponsor.

Having been convinced, the *wazīr* next needed to select a suitable person to direct the effort. The first candidate recommended, who also happened to be an engineer, however, told him that the project was overly ambitious and would be difficult to carry out. Subsequently, al-Afḍal, upon the advice of his own chief of staff, Ibn al-Baṭā'ihī, turned to Ibn Qirqa (or Qaraqqa), who was a physician, although also in charge of the royal storehouses for arms, saddles, and other sorts of equipment.

The story of all the starts and stops, limited successes and stunning failures, that followed have been amply discussed by Aydin Sayılı in his *The Observatory in Islam*¹⁵ including such mistakes as picking one site that did not allow a clear view of the horizon and the casting of a large metal ring that proved to sag from its own weight when turned up vertically. The murder of al-Afḍal prior to completion merely passed the project on to his successor Ibn al-Baṭā'ihī, who was apparently equally keen on it. However the arrest of this *wazīr* in 519/1125 brought the effort to a close. The caliph himself had no interest and, most likely, in fact, resented it because it stemmed, not from himself, but from the *wazīrs*. What remained of its instruments were salvaged and returned to the royal stores.

At the end of the report about the making of the observatory (*ʿAmal al-raṣd*), we find a list of the engineers (*al-muhandisīn*) charged with the daily supervisions of the work. They include: Abū Jaʿfar Yūsuf b. Ḥasadāy, the *qāḍī* Ibn Abī'l-ʿAysh, the *khaṭīb* Abu'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Sulaymān b. al-Bawwāb, Abu'l-Munajjā b. Sanad al-Sāʿatī al-Iskandarānī al-Muhandis, Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ṣiqillī al-Muhandis, and others specialized in calculation, and the astronomers such as Ibn al-Ḥalabī, Ibn al-Haytham, Ibn Naṣr, who was a student of Sahlūn, Ibn Diyāb, al-Qalqī, and yet others who came every day during the work. Altogether it is an interesting mix of those known for skills in engineering or astronomy with some other professions such as judge and preacher.

Of them only Ibn Ḥasadāy achieved, or had achieved, substantial renown. He had come to Egypt from al-Andalus where he had been close to the famous philosopher Ibn Bajja. After arriving he converted to Islam and became a special guest of the state with salary, a clothing allotment for winter and the two festivals, plus other benefits, including a house in Cairo. In al-Maqrīzī's history

15 pp. 167–75.

of the Fatimids¹⁶ we have the text of public proclamation (a *manshūr*) indicating that the fame and honor of the Fatimid state (*al-dawla al-fāṭimiyya*) would be enhanced by granting benefits to Ibn Ḥasadāy, in effect putting him to work writing commentaries on the books of Hippocrates “which are the most excellent and perfect of the books on medicine, the most obscure and the most useful of them.” What he thereafter produced was to be delivered one by one to the royal library and thereafter to be read by all students of medicine.¹⁷ He was to devote one day a week to students and another for consultation with the physicians of Fustāt and Cairo; the rest of the week was set aside for writing. Two copyists were assigned to make fair copies of what he wrote.¹⁸

It would be nice to have a similar record for all other cases of Fatimid employment of scientists, and perhaps especially to have an idea of what kinds of support the government supplied them (salary, allotments of clothing, housing, copyists, and the like). However, although there exists some more information, it mainly consists of names minus such details.

The foregoing survey demonstrates Fatimid interest and involvement in the study and investigation of the sciences without, however, ever indicating that it was any more unusual a policy than was true of many other Islamic dynasties. What is obviously missing is a connection with the Ismaili doctrine of the state. The formal agency for that doctrine was the *daʿwa*, whose agents, the *dāʿīs*, worked for the Fatimids, seemingly alongside the figures just discussed. The *daʿwa* also operated abroad, thus outside of the Fatimid empire. At this point we know quite a bit about individuals who were a part of that effort and most particularly what they wrote, that is, what books and treatises they composed to propagate the Ismaili message. Many of them, as stated at the beginning of this paper, are full of information clearly derived from the sciences the knowledge of which must have depended on written works on the subject. But here there is a disconnect. The list of scientists employed by the Fatimids contains none that are otherwise engaged directly in the program of the *daʿwa*. None of them were members, as far as we can tell, of the Ismaili mission; they were not *dāʿīs*. Moreover, many of them were Christians and thus obviously not actors working on behalf of Ismaili Shiism. But for all the rest there are also no indications of Ismaili belief or acceptance.

One curious detail may be revealing of this tendency. The *zīj al-Ḥākimī* evidently found a niche in the practice of Egyptian astronomy, possibly as early as the time of its composition at the beginning of the 11th century. Over a

16 *Ittiʿāz*, A. F. Sayyid, ed. 3: 110–111.

17 The decree itself was issued in Dhūʾl-Qaʿda of 516 (January 1123) and is found on pp. 110–11.

18 *Ittiʿāz* 3: 112.

hundred years later, as the story of al-Afdal and his consultations with Syrian astronomers shows, it had not been adopted even as nearby as that neighboring country. By 513/1119–20, Syria was, for the vast part, outside the domain of the Fatimids and had been for decades. Nevertheless, that was not true during the reign of al-Ḥākim at which time the *da'wa* operated freely throughout most of Syria. Aleppo, for example, fell within the Fatimid domain. Even later in the 12th century, the *da'wa*, though now active clandestinely, was not entirely absent in Syria. Yet a major achievement of Fatimid science, the *zīj* that bore the name of a revered imam-caliph, was apparently unknown there. Clearly the Ismaili mission was not instrumental in its spread. Did the *dā'īs* even consult it? Were they possibly unaware of it or its importance?

It is true that the *zīj*, and perhaps many other products of the scientists—the works of the figures mentioned above—would have had a limited, specialized audience that may not have included most of the Ismaili *dā'īs*. Islamic doctrinal writings rarely depended heavily on the natural sciences. But that was not true in a significant number of cases for the Ismaili authors of that era. A delineation of parallels between the realm of religion and that of the natural world was a standard feature of at least a large portion of many treatises produced by the *da'wa*. Finding and explaining the elements of correspondence appears to have been crucial. The hierarchical arrangement of one needed to match that of the other. The balance between the two, the *mīzān al-diyāna*, was, accordingly, discovered nearly everywhere and in all things.¹⁹ The common Qur'anic proof text for this activity is 41:53: “We will show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves so that it becomes clear to them that it is the truth,” a verse frequently quoted in this context.²⁰

From the works composed by the *dā'īs* therefore, we can now recover a fairly accurate picture of what they knew about the natural world. Likewise we are able to find examples of lapses in their understanding and, most particularly, cases where they pushed overly hard to establish a correspondence, straining the evidence provided by nature to fit a predetermined religious concept. Here, in the following passages, we have examples of the latter tendency.

In an early treatise ascribed to the famous 9th century *dā'ī* 'Abdān, which was only recently published for the first time, we find the argument given below. Significantly the work itself bears the title: *Book of Norms, Pairedness*

19 On this topic in general see D. De Smet, “Mizān al-diyāna ou l'équilibre entre science et religion dans la pensée Ismaélienne,” *Acta orientalia Belgica*, 8 (1993), pp. 247–54.

20 One among many examples occurs in the 8th chapter of the 5th section of the treatise by al-Sijistānī cited below. There the reckoning of the final judgment takes account of both adherence to the religious Law and to the witnessing of the signs of Nature (*al-āfāq wa'l-anfūs*). An equal plus in both means success.

and Ranking (*Kitāb al-rusūm wa'l-izdiwāj wa'l-tartīb*). Of several parts that might be cited in the present context, this one is especially noteworthy for its somewhat bizarre inference.

Among the indications for the grades of the hierarchy that summons to God [...] is the calculation according to the cycles of the grades of the hierarchy [...]. The first starting-point of the calculation that uses the hands goes from one to nine and its positions cover three fingers.²¹ When it reaches nine, it brings it back to ten and the units. When it reaches nine tens, it consolidates it into hundreds and it runs through them on other fingers than those which accommodated the tens and now accommodate the hundreds. When it reaches nine hundred, it consolidates them into thousands and turns to the other fingers. It accommodates ten thousand up to reaching ninety thousand. The calculation turns from those to other fingers which accommodate a hundred thousand up to reaching a thousand thousand (i.e. one million). At that the reckoning that can be done on the hands comes to an end. [...]. Likewise the world is established in seven eras, the seventh of which is that of the Qā'im. The beginning of creation is Adam, and the seven imams; the period of Adam and the seven imams and their era lasted until the appearance of Noah. He attained a multiple of the power that had been Adam's; it is the multiple of the tens over the ones. He and his Foundation lasted until the appearance of Abraham. His power and the power of his Foundation and the seven imams was a multiple of the power of Noah as in the multiple of hundreds over tens. Similarly Muḥammad. His power and the power of his Foundation and the seven imams was a multiple of what came before him of the Speaker-Prophets as in the multiplying of thousands and hundreds and tens and ones up to reaching a million. That is the limit of numbers accommodated on the hands because, above a million, it cannot be counted on the hands. That is an indication of the Qā'im, who is the Speaker and who is the summation of the Speakers who came before because his rank is higher than the realm of work (*'amal*). Works are of no avail with him. Calculation [over one million] is no longer carried out with the hands.²²

21 On the *ḥisāb bi'l-yad* see in general the article "Ḥisāb al-'aql" by Ch. Pellat in the *ET*. It is, however, not clear that the method described here is the same.

22 Madelung and Walker, "The *Kitāb al-rusūm wa'l-izdiwāj wa'l-tartīb* Attributed to 'Abdān (d. 286/899)," pp. 103–165, trans. p. 135, Arabic pp. 140–41.

In other words Noah possessed ten times the spiritual power of Adam, Abraham a hundred times, Moses a thousand times, Jesus ten thousand, Muḥammad a hundred thousand, and finally the Messiah a million times. Exactly how that makes sense or what it might mean in practical terms—what function does a huge increase in power imply—is not explained by the author. Thus the consequence of finding the parallel between a method of counting and its religious reality seems to have led to an almost fantastic and possibly absurd conclusion.

The next example comes from the mid-4th/10th century as found in a work of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/972). In his *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt* (*Proofs of Prophecy*) he provides a long list of reasons why prophecy is absolutely essential for the world and human society. Much of his argument depends on religious doctrine. Two of seven sections of the book, however, attempt to establish the essential link via the parallel between prophecy in its domain and the structure of the natural world. Thus his third section is "On Proving Prophecy with Respect to Natural Things (*al-ashyā' al-ṭabī'iyya*)". The twelve separate chapters of that section prove prophecy from the evidence of respectively:

1. natural genera (*al-ajnās*),
2. species (*al-anwā'*),
3. differentia (*al-fuṣūl*),
4. specific properties (*al-khawāṣṣ*),
5. accidents (*al-a'rāḍ*),
6. motions (*al-ḥarakāt*),
7. times (*al-azmīna*),
8. places (*al-amkina*),
9. generation and corruption (*al-kawn wa'l-faṣād*),
10. opposition and difference (*al-taḍādd wa'l-ikhtilāf*),
11. relation (*al-idāfa*), and
12. actions (*al-a'fāl*).

The terms natural genus, species, differentia, specific property, accident, motion, time, place, generation and corruption, opposition and difference, relation, and action all belong normally to the technical categories of logic and logical sciences. They hardly seem to apply to prophecy and its proof. And in truth al-Sijistānī makes them supply the evidence he wants with difficulty, often forcing the issue by artificially tailoring one side of the equation to fit the other.

The second section of this type moves on to consider what he labels "spiritual things" (*al-ashyā' al-rūḥāniyya*) but spiritual here means non-physical. His proofs now depend on the correspondence between such things as intellect, soul, numbers, thought (*al-fikr*), memory (*al-ḥafẓ*), recollection (*al-dhikr*), love (*al-muḥabba*), domination (*al-ghalaba*), felicity (*al-sa'āda*), and honor and nobility (*al-karam wa'l-sharaf*).

Yet one more of his examples concerns the importance of the number seven and sevens. Along with other claims he makes based on the parallels between nature and religion, there is the following:

Just as the six internal organs [of the human body] culminate in the seventh, which is the kidneys, by means of which the bodily form is born [brought into being], so also by means of the seventh of the speaker-prophets, who is the messiah (al-Qā'im), peace be upon him, the spiritual forms arise [in resurrection].²³

A final example comes from al-Kirmānī's *Rāḥat al-'aql* the latest recension of which dates to 411/1021. In two chapters on the heavenly bodies, their situations, parts, movements and influence on the existence of natural beings, he comments on the number of the spheres.

The existence of the hierarchy in regard to the greater cycles [of time] being seven requires that the heavenly spheres, not counting the first and second, also be seven, and the fact that there are six imams in each smaller cycle requires that for each of the seven spheres there be six additional smaller cycles revolving along with the larger.²⁴

Earlier (p. 180) he had specified that the imams altogether add up to forty-two—i.e. seven for each of six cycles—and thus for each of the larger planetary orbits there exist smaller orbits that add up [in total] to a like number.

Obviously he is thinking of the retrograde elliptic revolutions needed to adjust the planetary model to fit an earth-centered system. Though not widely cited in philosophical works, they were well enough known despite a more commonly discussed concept that features seven perfectly spherical planetary motions, a stripped down and simplified system. But the number 42 is odd. It appears to depend on the total number of imams in all the past eras, and not on the requirements of the Ptolemaic model, which would need 56 in order to account for all revolutions. However, al-Kirmānī is less than clear. If we add into the number the seven greater cycles that would bring the total to 49. Another seven makes it 56. It is possible that he means to imply here that there are ultimately more than the 42 imams, perhaps including seven completer-imams of a seventh (messianic) era.

²³ *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, 5th *maqāla*, 8th *faṣl*.

²⁴ *Rāḥat al-'aql*, p. 187.

Whatever the final outcome his claim of a parallel in this instance it is yet one more curious case of the *dā'īs* appealing to scientific fact for support of religious doctrine, or in some cases, the reverse. To be sure much of what they wrote is hardly objectionable. Commonplace items or categories of the natural world match the structures of religion. The signs on the horizon and in the soul do, it would seem, point to God's creation as well as to His hierarchy of spiritual authority, one suggesting the other and vice versa. But not all examples match as well as others and science could suffer as a consequence. And in the end we are left with hardly any observable connection between Fatimid sponsorship of scientific endeavors, as in the specific cases cited earlier, and the descriptive material concerning the natural world in the treatises produced by members of its *da'wa*.

An Ismaili Answer to the Problem of Worshipping the Unknowable, Neoplatonic God

Many of the problems involved in worshipping the remote, ineffable and unknowable God of the Neoplatonists are well known and often discussed. Theologians and philosophers are both familiar with radical de-anthropomorphism, with arguments about the nature of absolutes, and with the difficulty in feeling affection for something that is considered to be outside human sense perception.¹ Generally those who have proposed such an absolute view of God, as for example to say with the Neoplatonists that He is beyond both knowledge and being, have been regarded almost necessarily as mystics, at least in theology. Indeed it has been hard to discover a rational and non-mystical, yet religiously satisfying, explanation for such a paradox as human worship of an unknown God.

This problem is not new, however, and its history is long and varied. In Islam there have been any number of thinkers motivated by just such considerations. Here the mystical response has, on the whole perhaps, constituted the best known and most widely employed solution. Various views can be found in the writings of many Sufi masters. Even before the great surge of intellectual Sufism, such as that of al-Ghazālī, however, leading members of the Ismaili sect accepted, along with their own particular version of Islam, a considerable dose of Neoplatonic theory as a reinforcement for a dogma whose central proposition was the unknowableness of God. Within the context of their speculations and those they inherited from several sects that preceded them, the Ismā'īlīs evolved both an interesting method of conceiving (or in this case of not conceiving) the absolute, Neoplatonic God, and significantly, a unique orientation to the problem of worshipping such a God.

Among the early scholars of Ismā'ilism, credit for this development apparently belongs to the work of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), the

1 Originally published as "An Ismā'īlī Answer to the Problem of Worshipping the Unknowable, Neoplatonic God," *American Journal of Arabic Studies* (Leiden, Brill) 2 (1974): 7–21. Reprinted in *Ilm* (London, Ismailia Association) 2 (1976): 12–22. A later revised version appeared in *Ishraq: Islamic philosophy yearbook* (Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Philosophy). (Moscow, 2013), pp. 186–98. What follows is that later version.

prominent and perhaps most influential theologian-philosopher of the classical period of Ismaili literature.²

Because his work found favor in the various centers of the Fatimid *da'wa*, particularly in its Cairo headquarters, al-Sijistānī's thought continued to be followed by later generations. His works, unlike those of Muḥammad al-Nasafī, his only slightly less important predecessor, were collected and preserved.³ They still exist in the surviving sect libraries and from them we can begin to reconstruct his doctrine concerning worship with some precision.

It should be noted at the onset, however, that Ismaili thinking was not totally dominated by any one philosophical school; and al-Sijistānī's work, though heavily influenced by Neoplatonism, was likewise not bound to its every dogma.⁴ Therein lay some of its most curious aspects and the source, at least in part, of its uniqueness, the full understanding of which requires an appreciation of the background to his conception of God and his notion of worship.

2 Al-Sijistānī's biography is almost hopelessly obscure. Though mentioned by Sunnī heresiographers, the only ascertainable dates for him are 322/934, at which point he passed through Baghdad on his return from the Ḥajj, and 361/971, shortly after which he composed his *al-Iftikhār*. From internal evidence, it is apparent also that this work came near the end of his literary career. See S.M. Stern, "The Early Isma'ili Missionaries in North-West Persia, and in Khurasan and Transoxiana," *BSOAS*, XXIII (1960), pp. 56–90.

3 For a list of his works and those of al-Nasafī, see Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature*. While there is nothing left, except fragmentary quotations of al-Nasafī's major work, *al-Maḥṣūl*, which may have perished because it was considered heretical even within the *da'wa*, at least ten, perhaps more of al-Sijistānī's writings have survived. Four of these have been published and at least six more are available in manuscript. The following were consulted in reference to this study (original version): *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa* (or *al-Nubuwwat* as in the edition of 'Ārif Tāmir (Beirut, Catholic Press, 1966); *Tuḥfat al-Mustajibīn* (ed. 'Ārif Tāmir in *Khams Rasā'il Ismā'īlīya*, (Beirut, Dār al-Anṣāf, 1956); *al-Iftikhār* (MS, Great Mosque. San'a); *Sullam al-Najjāt* (MS, Fyzee Collection. Bombay University Library, Bombay); *Kitāb al-Yanābī*, ed. Henry Corbin, *Trilogie ismaélienne* (Tehran, Institut Franco-Iranien, 1961; *al-Maqālid* (MS. Library of Dr. 'Abbās Ḥamdānī); *Musliyyāt al-Aḥzān* (MS, Fyzee Collection, Bombay University Library, Bombay) and *al-Nuṣra* (available now only in quotations by Ḥamid ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī in his *ar-Ri'yāḍ* (ed. Tāmir, Beirut, Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1960). [For recent editions of these titles see the post-script below.]

4 In the extant works of al-Sijistānī, Galen, (*Sullam*, f. 6b.) and Empedocles, (*al-Ri'yāḍ*, pp. 99 and 147), are the only ancient philosophers explicitly cited. The influence of others, however, is undeniable. Some Neoplatonic source or sources reached the early Ismaili scholars. Most likely it was a form of the *Theology of Aristotle*, an Arabic translation and paraphrase of books IV, V and VI of the *Enneads*. Since the surviving pieces of this work have been found in several places, it is difficult to know what it contained in its ninth and tenth century versions. The Ismailis also, in all probability, had the *Fi al-Khayr al-Maḥḍ* (*Liber de Causis*) and other Neoplatonic texts.

From the time of Plotinus (d. 270 AD), philosophy was as fully conversant with the theological problems in worshiping an unknowable, ineffable “ultimate ground of existence” as were the proponents of those various monotheistic sects that had ostensibly given birth to such conceptions. There is of course an intense controversy as to the origin of the idea of the Unknowable God. Some say it was characteristically eastern and was illustrated most forcefully by the Gnostic mythologies. Others argue that it could have arisen just as well from Greek philosophical sources and they cite for example the extremely subtle musings of Plato in his *Parmenides*. It is, on the other hand, also possible that it developed independently both in the religions of the Near East and in the philosophies of the Hellenic world. It might be seen, therefore, as a product of their respective concerns with ultimate reality and ultimate truth.

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that it was Plotinus who raised this concept to philosophical respectability. From any number of theories of unity and existence, of the one and the many, and of good and being, he extracted the notion of an absolute, supra-existential unity that, according to him, transcended both Soul $\phi\upsilon\lambda\lambda\acute{\eta}$ and Intellect $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$. It was therefore root and source of all things. This god Plotinus most often described as the One or the Good.⁵ “The Good beyond being,” was a phrase he adopted from Plato.⁶ This hypostasis was, for him, not simply an *anousion* and hence an unknown god; it was the *hyperousion* and so the God beyond the realm of knowledge. The One refused all predication.⁷

Interestingly, though he himself was little given to the theurgic religious practices of his later Greek followers, Plotinus is remembered as the proponent not only of a strict and rigorous monotheism, but also of the idea that there is an intense driving force calling the individual soul to seek and to rise to a union with the One. Indeed there is, in the extreme passion and poetry with which he describes the One, a kind of religious fever akin to ecstatic worship.

5 “We are in agony for a true expression: we are talking of untellable; we name, only to indicate for our own use as best we may. And this name, The One, contains really no more than the negation of plurality ... the designation, a mere aid to inquiry, was never intended for more than a preliminary affirmation of absolute simplicity to be followed by the rejection of even that statement ...,” Plotinus, *The Enneads*, transl. Stephen MacKenna, 3rd ed., revised by B. Page (London, Faber, 1956), p. 408 (v.5.6).

6 *Republic* vi1, 5091B.

7 On Plotinus’s doctrine of the One, see, in addition to the *Enneads*, the studies of Arthur H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1949), É. Bréhier, *La Philosophie de Plotin* (Paris, 1961) and others.

It is lyrical, mystical, and intensely personal. The following passage, here taken from the Arabic version of *Enneads*, illustrates this point.⁸

Often have I been alone with my soul and have doffed my body and laid it aside and become as if I were naked substance without body, so as to be inside myself, outside all other things. Then do I see within myself such beauty and splendor as I do remain marvelling at and astonished, so that I know that I am one of the parts of the sublime, surpassing, lofty, divine world, and possess active life. When I am certain of that, I lift my intellect up from that world into the divine place. And there I see such light and splendor as tongues cannot describe nor ears comprehend. When that light and splendor overwhelm me and I have no strength to endure it, I descend from mind to thought and reflection. When I enter the world of thought, thought veils that light and splendor from me, and I am left wondering how I have fallen from that lofty and divine place and am come to the place of thought, when my soul once had the power to leave her body behind and return to herself and rise to the world of mind and then to the divine world until she entered the place of splendor and light, which is the cause of all light and splendor.

However, in spite of the tone of reverence and awe, of love and passion for the One, which pervades the *Enneads*, the statements of Plotinus were generally insufficient by themselves for the purposes of formal religious practice.

The complex, three-fold theology of the Pseudo-Dionysius (fl. fifth–early sixth century), a Christianized Neoplatonism of the Proclean school was closer to that of the Ismailis. It first emphasized the symbolic characterization of God and then went to reject all such symbols as misleading. Unfortunately for modern attempts to tidy the historical record, the works of the Pseudo-Dionysius may not have had any direct influence on Ismaili theologians as they were apparently not translated into Arabic until the eleventh or twelfth century.⁹ By

8 *Uthlūjyā Aristūṭālīs*, ed. ‘Abd ar-Rahmān Badawī, (Cairo: Maktabat an-Nahḍah, 1966), p. 22. The English version quoted here is that of G. Lewis, *Plotini Opera*, II, ed. Henry and Schwyzer (Paris, 1959), p. 225. The Arabic version of this statement apparently became quite well known among Muslim writers. It should be noted that within Plotinus’s mystical experience there is an emphasis on a vision or a visionary grasping of the One. In another place (v 5. 6; trans. MacKenna, p. 408) he says: “This is a principle not to be conveyed by any sound: it cannot be known on any hearing but, if at all, by vision ...”. This attitude is in contrast to that of some later Neoplatonists and the view of most Ismaili theologians.

9 There is a possibility that his doctrines were transmitted indirectly through John Philoponus or John of Damascus.

contrast the *Enneads*, known in Arabic as the *Theology of Aristotle*, were widely available from the middle of the ninth century and almost certainly played a significant role in the development of Ismaili Neoplatonism.

The case with respect to al-Sijistānī's sources may never seem clearer, however, for he like other Ismaili writers seldom mentioned other works or other writers as the origin of his own inspirations. For him, moreover, the matter of God's absolute unity was of supreme importance, not because Neoplatonic theory demanded it, but in all likelihood, because it was the most fundamental tenet of Islam and, by his time, it had been the cornerstone of a century or more of theological speculation in Arabic. Without a proper understanding of *tawḥīd* (the process of declaring God to be absolutely single), a Muslim's perception of God would necessarily involve some form of *shirk* (a compromising of God through association)—the most dreaded of all Islamic sins.

In nearly all his works, al-Sijistānī begins by setting his own views of this problem against those of his antagonists. In his mind all other approaches—i.e. other than his—to the problem of achieving an unblemished notion of *tawḥīd* fail because they contain one kind of impurity or another. They fall into either *tashbīh* (trying to understand God by analogy and comparison), on the one hand, or *ta'ṭīl* (denuding God of all content by a strict denial of *tashbīh*), on the other. The former tends to make God anthropomorphic and the latter renders Him unsatisfactory for religious consciousness.¹⁰

Amongst the schools that uphold some form of *tashbīh*, al-Sijistānī includes those who attribute to God a *jism maḥdūd* (a finite body). These he calls the *ḥashwīya* (meaning probably the Sunnī traditionalists). There are also, according to him, those who call God a *shay' mawsūm* (a classifiable thing). These are the *Mutakallimūn* (most probably scholastic theologians). Finally there were the Philosophers who maintain that God is a *jawhar maṣṣūb* (a structured substance). All the foregoing are wrong in this doctrine, according to al-Sijistānī, because in one way or another they limit the absolute nature of God.¹¹

In another place he explained his position using a different frame of reference. There are, he said, four classes of worshipers: 1) idol worshipers, 2) anthropomorphists, 3) the *Ahl al-ʿAdl*, and 4) the *Ahl al-Ḥaqāʾiq*.¹² The first, idol worshipers, existed almost exclusively outside Islam and were in any case of little concern for al-Sijistānī. The second apparently included most of those guilty of committing *tashbīh*, though here he probably thought mainly of those who accepted Qurʾanic *tashbīh* literally. The third group contained

10 See the first *bāb*, 'fī al-Tawḥīd', f. 5b–15a, of *al-Ifṭikhār* [pp. 81–99 of the Poonawala edition.]

11 *al-Ifṭikhār*, f. 6b. [P. 83 Poonawala edition]

12 *al-Ifṭikhār*, f. 11a. [Pp. 90–91 Poonawala edition]

(here he is specific) the *Mu'tazila*, the *Khawārij* and the *Rawāfiḍ* (apparently the Imāmī shaykhs). These he seems to have in mind when he speaks of "... a group of ancients (i.e. Greek philosophers) and a collection of sects in Islam,"¹³ who, he says, maintain that God is indescribable, indefinable, uncharacterizable, unseeable, and not in a place.¹⁴ These people, he adds, "... reckon that this evaluation constitutes a glorification of God and an exaltation of Him and that they are [thereby] free of *shirk* and *tashbih*."¹⁵ It is clear, nevertheless, that they, like him, believed in an unknowable God and it was their position which he found most threatening to his own. "They," he says, "do not worship God with the correct worship due Him and they are not cognizant of Him in the proper way."¹⁶

It is to the fourth class of worshippers, the *Ahl al-Ḥaqā'iq*, of course, that al-Sijistānī belongs. They are the ones, he says, who alone, "obey the established guides and draw near to God through obedience to the bearers of religious knowledge and those with an expertise in it."¹⁷ The substance of his attack by which he would destroy the position of those he sees as his most threatening opposition and in which he will establish the claims of himself and the *Ahl al-Ḥaqā'iq* involves unveiling the correct way of coming to a proper cognizance of God and thereby achieving a solution to the problem of right worship. In general, he hopes to prove that the method of the third class of worshipers is anthropomorphic and, therefore, little better than that of the second class. As he says,

Whoever removes from his Creator descriptions, definitions, and characteristics falls into a hidden anthropomorphism just as one who describes Him, defines Him and characterizes Him falls into obvious anthropomorphism.¹⁸

His own position must, therefore, avoid both errors.

In general, the method of characterizing God by stating what He is not, as for example that used by al-Sijistānī's third class of worshipers, is the famous *via*

13 *al-Maqālīd*, p. 41. [P. 77 Poonawala editon]

14 "*ghayru mawṣūfin wa lā maḥdūdin wa lā man'utin wa lā mar'yin wa lā fi makānin*"

15 *al-Maqālīd*, p. 41. [P. 76 Poonawala edition]

16 *al-Maqālīd*, p. 41 [p. 77 Poonawala], "... *lam ya'būdū allāha ḥaqqa 'ibādatihi wa lam ya'rīfūhu bi ḥaqīqati 'l-ma'rīfati*"

17 *al-Iftikhār*, f. 11a. [P. 91 Poonawala edition]

18 *al-Maqālīd*, p. 47. [P. 81 Poonawala edition]. Here I need to recognize and thank an unnamed editor (surely Yanis Eshots) who kindly added these and the following essential references to the Poonawala edition.

negativa, part of the negative theology of so many thinkers. “Whoever wishes to describe the Almighty Creator must remove from Him all attributes ...,” said the Arabic Plotinus source, for example.¹⁹ But the *via negativa* was widely used both in classical antiquity and in Islamic times before al-Sijistānī. In an appendix to his edition of Proclus’s *Elements of Theology*, E.R. Dodds has discussed the unknown God and has given there a useful classification of the ways in which a god may be said to be unknown. He says that a god may be unknown in the following ways:

(i) because he is foreign or nameless; (ii) unknown to mankind in general owing to the necessary limitations of human knowledge; (iii) unknown to all who have not enjoyed a special revelation or initiation; (iv) unknown and unknowable in his essence, but partially knowable by inference from his works or analogy with other causes, (v) unknown and unknowable in his positive character, but definable by negations, (vi) unknown and unknowable, but accessible in a *unio mystica* which is not properly speaking knowledge, being supralogical.²⁰

Of these the sixth seems to have been a particular favourite of Plotinus and also of many Islamic Sufis.

Paradoxically all problems of the unknowability of God revolve around the difficulty of knowing the unknown and the unknowable. Acknowledging God therefore must be connected logically with determining that He is and/or what and how He is. It would certainly seem necessary to prove the existence of God first.²¹ This problem, however, was not the primary concern of al-Sijistānī although he states in his *al-Maqālīd* that there are four circumstances that allow a cognizance (*maʿrifa*) of God. They are the following: (i) by direct inspiration (*taʾyīd*); (ii) from the obvious order in creation, i.e. by mastering physical sciences; (iii) through the obvious message of the divine scriptures the understanding of which requires literary sciences like lexicography and

19 *Fī al-ʿilm al-ilāhī (Epistola de Scientia Divina)*, ed. Badawī, Aflūṭīn ‘inda al-ʿArab (Cairo, Maktabat al-Nahḍa, 1966), p. 183. Quoted from the translation of Lewis, *Plotini Opera*, p. 357. The *Epistola* is another fragment of the *Enneads* in its Arabic form.

20 Proclus, *The Elements Of Theology*, ed. and trans. with commentary by E.R. Dodds, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, revised ed. 1963), appendix I, pp. 310–313.

21 Cf. S.M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli, A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1958), pp. 21–23, for a discussion of some notions of Muslim and Jewish Neoplatonists about inquiries concerning the “whether it is” and the “how is it” of God.

grammar; and (iv) by hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*). The last of these was, according to him, easiest and most noble.²²

It should be clear that al-Sijistānī offers no new method for knowing the unknowable God. His ways of reaching a cognizance of God presuppose a god unknown in one of five ways (ii–vi) defined by Dodds. Strangely, though perhaps implied in his system, the *unio mystica* had no formally stated place in al-Sijistānī's theology. Despite the foregoing scheme, moreover, from which it can be seen that he thought cognizance of God could be reached in several ways,²³ he never really concerned himself with a demonstration of how he knows the unknown God to exist. This problem (which really has no logical solution, of course) was, for him, secondary. He was most concerned, not to prove that God exists, but to find the way to a correct appreciation of His position and rank. In many ways this is a clear indication that he was more troubled about the need to purify Islamic worship than with abstract arguments about the existence of God.

Proper cognizance, the most vital element in al-Sijistānī's theology, must begin, according to him, with a rigorous and complete renunciation of all attempts to limit or compromise God's absoluteness. In this, of course, he agreed with many of his enemies and also with his Greek Neoplatonic forerunners. The difference lies in the rigor with which he pursued this goal.

In arguments repeated in many of his works but expounded most completely in his *al-Maqālīd*, he attacked the doctrine of his antagonists and rivals one by one. At times he tried to refute the views of others; at other times he worked from scriptural sources but always striving for a purification of the doctrine of *tawhīd*. Basically, he argued that the imagination or the ability to create conceptions is consequent to sensation and is produced by it. Even a thing with spiritual substance can be comprehended only as the result of direct inspiration from outside the human perceptual system. Man's power to perceive and to understand is limited and he is beholden to something beyond him for direction in matters outside the scope of his powers. Ultimately, of course, it is God who will do the guiding. The point, therefore, is that all notions and names, either as language or thought, are defective unless certified valid in respect to any realm beyond that for which and in which they were created. Human language is valid when talking about the human realm but only God can tell humans how to talk about Himself since their language is insufficient.

22 *al-Maqālīd*, pp. 66–67. [P. 101 Poonawala edition]

23 Though from other statements it would seem that he thought all four necessary.

From this position al-Sijistānī undertook to analyze and clarify a number of terms used by his predecessors that, in his view, were defective and theologically false. The following are some examples:

A. For him God has *qudra* (power), but not *qūwa* (force). This means that God has the absolute power to act, e.g. to create the universe from nothing. It does not mean that He has a force that operates on, in, or by means of something. This would, according to al-Sijistānī, imply that God is less than absolutely transcendent. *Qudra*, for him, is a part of *irāda* (will); *qūwa* is an applicable force.²⁴

B. He argued that God's true being or identity (*innīya*) is not conceivable or knowable. All that is known of God, as, for example, His command (*amr*) and His goodness (*jūd*), is really known only as something united with and part of Intellect (*al-ʿaql*)—the second hypostasis of al-Sijistānī's Neoplatonic scheme.²⁵

C. God's uniqueness (*fardāniya*) is pure and absolute; He alone is unmultipliable unity. He is the One that transcends even the basic unity of all numbering.²⁶

D. He is not, as maintained by most philosophers, a cause or a cause of causes. There is no effect, he says, of an uncaused cause and if God were a cause, there would *necessarily* be something of which He would be the cause.²⁷

24 "fi qudrat al-mubdī [Iqlīd 4]," *al-Maqālīd*, pp. 17–19. [pp. 53–55 Poonawala edition]

25 "fi al-*innīya* [Iqlīd 5]," *al-Maqālīd*, pp. 19–23. [pp. 56–59 Poonawala edition.] The noun *ʾinn*, from which *innīya* derives, is vocalized several times in the text as *in* *ʾinn*. Therefore this term is not to be read *an* or *ān*, in spite of its Latin equivalent *an* and *ánitas*. In Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's *al-Muqābasāt* (Cairo, 1929), pp. 317–318, for example, the Creator (*mubdī*) is said to be *innīya* only (*innīya faqaṭ*). Cf. al-Fārābī (*al-Alfāz al-mustʿamala fi al-manṭiq*, ed. Muḥsin Mahdī (Beirut, 1968), p. 45, Georges Vajda, "La Philosophie et la théologie de Joseph Ibn Caddiq," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen âge* (1949), p. 161, and Soheil M. Afnan, *Philosophical Terminology in Arabic and Persian* (Leiden, Brill, 1964), pp. 94–97.

26 "fi al-fardāniya [Iqlīd 7]," *al-Maqālīd*, pp. 28–31 [pp. 65–67 Poonawala edition]; and "fi al-farq bayna wāḥidī'l-a'dād wa'l-wāḥidī'l-ladhi laysa minī'l-ʿadad [Iqlīd 12]," *al-Maqālīd*, pp. 51–54 [pp. 86–88 Poonawala edition], *al-Iftikhār*, f. 8a and 9b. Cf. *Epistola*, Lewis trans., p. 345 and *Enneads*, v.1.8 and v.5.4. "Absolute One, it has never known measure and stands outside of number," *Enneads*, v.5.11, trans. MacKenna, p. 412.

27 "fi anna allāha ... laysa bi ʿillatin [Iqlīd 8]," *al-Maqālīd*, pp. 31–36 [pp. 68–71 Poonawala edition]. In the *Theology of Aristotle*, for example, God is consistently called a cause of things or the cause of causes. Here is a fairly clear difference between al-Sijistānī and the philosophical tradition. The Neoplatonists held, as a fundamental doctrine, that the cause is superior (in ontological status) to its effect (see for example Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 7). This was apparently insufficient in al-Sijistānī's way of thinking to preserve God's absolute transcendence. His primary concern was to divorce creation from

E. To say that God is a thing (*shay'*) not like things, as proposed by some scholastic theologians, is, according to him, false. Such a formula applies to Intellect only.²⁸

And so the arguments run through many pages. God clearly was not subject, for al-Sijistānī, to being described either by the attributes of something or by the characteristics of anything for which there are words or on which the intellect might dwell.²⁹ He, therefore, must not be thought of as having thingness, limit, attributes, place, time, or even being. He is, in fact, outside both being (*aysīya* or *hastī*) and not-being (*laysīya*).³⁰

Al-Sijistānī's process of *tanzīh* (removing all association from God) was, it would seem, as rigorously thorough as any Islamic attempt in the field of *tawhīd*. Though God was nevertheless called *al-khāliq*, *al-bārī*, *al-mubdī*, *al-muṣawwir*, *al-mu'ayyis*, and was said to have will, power, command, and absolute unity, all of these terms denote God in His proper role (and presumably only known role) as Creator. When used technically they have a sharply restricted meaning and they function only analogically in a unique situation. The epistemological basis of this is, of course, as cloudy in many ways as that of the arguments of al-Sijistānī's rivals, but he himself seemed satisfied that negation had left nothing positive in the image of God and that, more precisely, God was free of all positive human conceptions.³¹

The reaction to this doctrine was one of indignation. It is clear from al-Sijistānī's own polemics that he and his group were attacked for having committed the sin of *ta'tīl*.³² Indeed, he admitted, the process of negation carried to such a radical extreme was *ta'tīl*, if left unclarified. Those who stop there are guilty of incorrectly understanding God and worshipping Him falsely. The

God as its Creator whereas Plotinus sought to describe the intelligible world and its relative levels of divinity.

28 "fī anna qawla al-qā'il inna'llāha shay'un lā ka'l-ashyā' bāṭilun muḥālun [Iqlīd n]," *al-Maqālīd*, pp. 48–51 [pp. 83–85 Poonawala editon]. The title of this *Iqlīd* appears incorrectly in the table of contents in this manuscript and is corrected here from the text of the chapter. The doctrine he attacks was held, for example, by al-Māturīdī (see his *Kitāb at-tawhīd*, ed. Fathallah Kholeif [Beirut, 1970]).

29 *al-Iftikhār*, f. 10a. [P. 89 Poonawala edition]

30 Here see Sijistānī's *Kashf al-mahjūb* [available only in Persian paraphrase], "Maqāla-i awwal dar tawhīd," p. 4–27, as well as his *al-Maqālīd* and *al-Iftikhār*. The Persian term *hastī* is apparently a translation of either *aysīya* or *innīya*. Cf. Afnan, *Philosophical Terminology*, pp. 95–97.

31 Sijistānī may never have earned credit for his logical thoroughness in rejecting all compromising attributes of God, but one suspects that terms like *Mubdī* on which he continues to rely are less than free of cognitive defects.

32 His work *al-Iftikhār*, in particular, is bitterly polemical. In the first chapter of both this work and that of *Kashf al-mahjūb*, he specifically defends his group against this charge.

problem is, according to him, that the de-anthropomorphism of God is itself a human conceit. The whole attempt to deny God all human attributes or not to describe Him in human terms fails because, although the god that remains would not be physically human, He would still be intellectually human. This is what al-Sijistānī calls “hidden anthropomorphism”.³³ The *via negativa* fails, not because it is too rigorously pursued, but because the method itself is a logical device—a human invention to satisfy human sensibilities. The God of al-Sijistānī had to be beyond even this.

The complete process of verifying God’s absolute transcendence—of coming to a correct cognizance of Him and therefore of reaching the right form of worship—must include two steps, according to al-Sijistānī. First there should be a full and rigorous denial of all *tashbīh*. One must specify that God is not a thing, not limited, not describable, not in a place, not in time, not a being. This should then be followed by a second denial: a negation of the first negation. God is *not* not a thing, *not* not limited, *not* not describable, *not* not in a place, *not* not in time, *not* not a being. This method of twofold negation was, according to him, the only answer to the charge of having committed *ta’ṭīl*, and it was at the same time the solution to his major theological problem. It provided a formula by which the theologian could really say nothing about God—positive or negative. Of it he says,

There does not exist a *tanzīh* more brilliant and more splendid than that by which we establish the absolute transcendence of our Creator through the use of these phrases in which a negative and a negative of a negative apply to the thing denied.³⁴

Al-Sijistānī’s method does in fact seem almost unique in Islamic theology, but though novel, it is certainly not clear immediately that it avoids all the sins its author wished to avoid. The opposition, he himself admits, might argue, for example, that the statements “God is not describable” and “God is *not* not describable” are mutually contradictory. If one is true, the other must be false since it is the negation of a true statement.³⁵ According to al-Sijistānī, however, these paired statements are not mutually contradictory because they are both species of the negative; and, he adds helpfully, the first negative strips

33 “*al-tashbīh al-khafī*,” *al-Maqālīd*, p. 47. [p. 81 Poonawala edition]

34 “*wa laysa bi-mawjūd tanzihun asnā wa ashrafa mim mā nazzahnā bihi mubdī’anā bi hadhihi’l-alfāzī’l-latī yataqābalu fihā al- nafi’yāni: nafiyun wa nafiyu nafiyn ...*,” *al-Ifṭikhār*, f. 9b (partially vocalized in the text). [p. 88 Poonawala edition]

35 *al-Maqālīd*, p. 46. [p. 80 Poonawala edition]

God of association with the physical and the second removes Him from any association with the spiritual.³⁶ God is thus neither within the sensible nor within the intelligible. The negation of the negated is, for him, actually the absolute disassociation of God from intelligibility. God cannot be A and God cannot be [not A] –the item [not A] being an intelligible despite its doubtful ontological status. It should be clear therefore that the formula “God is *not* not describable” alone is just as inadequate as a simple negation without a second.

There was another capital objection that al-Sijistānī found important enough to both state and refute.³⁷ Although the method of the twofold negative might purify the process of *tawḥīd* and free whatever human worship there would be from the sin of *shirk*, it nevertheless fails to assert that God is absolutely certain (*thābit*), i.e. that God Himself is undenied and undeniable. For al-Sijistānī God is more certain than everything certain (*athbatu min kulli ithbātin*). “Detractors suppose,” he says, “that what has no definition (*ḥadd*) and has *no* no definition is not certain [*muthbit*] since there is no certainty (*thubūt*) to it in any way. Therefore we need to make it clear to them that what provides true certification (*ithbāt ḥaqīqī*) is precisely what has no definition and *no* no definition.”³⁸ Both what has no definition and what has *no* no definition are certified (provided with a certainty). They are certain figuratively not truly since they are things contingent to some kind of certification (or here perhaps ‘definition’ is a better word). God, for al-Sijistānī, is beyond the process of certification; He transcends certainty.³⁹

It is important to note here that the process of reaching the correct cognition of the truly absolute God is itself an act of worship. Correct appreciation of God is the prime element of worship. Without it, the object of worship would be a false god. Curiously, however, whereas Plotinus admits to ecstasy and an intense feeling of awe upon reaching this awareness of the truly absolute, al-Sijistānī seems quite content with form alone. His theology was not in this sense “mystical.” He seems quite confident in the power of reason and logic

36 *al-Maqālīd*, p. 47. [p. 81 Poonawala edition]

37 *al-Maqālīd*, pp. 60–64. [Pp. 95–98 Poonawala edition]

38 “*zanna al-muʿānīdu anna mā lā ḥadda lahu wa lā lā ḥadda lahu, ghayru thābitin idh lā thubūtu lahu bi wajhin min al-wujūhi fa naḥtāju ilāʾl-ibānati lahu bi annaʾl-ithbāta ʾl-ḥaqīqī huwa mā lā ḥadda lahu wa lā lā ḥadda lahu ...*,” *Maqālīd*, p. 60 [p. 95 Poonawala edition]. Other thinkers agreed that God is indefinable but for Sijistānī what has no definition is nonetheless contingent upon what makes it have no definition.

39 *Maqālīd*, pp. 60–64 [pp. 95–98 Poonawala edition]. This argument seems to be a species of the contingency argument concerning God’s existence. Ibn Sina, for example, speaks of God as *wājib al-wujūd* (necessary of existence). It is noteworthy that al-Sijistānī uses neither the term *wujūd* or *wājib* in theology.

in the proper place and he does not ask for some kind of supralogical knowledge. His God is not simply difficult to know, but rather is genuinely unknown.

Islamic worship was almost always formal and ritualistic. To some theologians the repetition of scriptures and the names of God as a part of worship was onerous in those cases where the sacred text contained words that implied an unacceptable compromising of God's absolute transcendence. They consequently rejected the use of many of the scriptural attributes of God. Al-Sijistānī went even further. That God should be properly understood solely from the uninspected symbols of religion, e.g. from Qur'anic phrases, was, for him, an impossibility; but, unlike the theologians of so many sects who attempted a compromise between the literal and the figurative in scripture, al-Sijistānī, like other Ismailis, rejected even this. For them all scripture has a double meaning—an exoteric (*al-ẓāhir*) and an esoteric (*al-bāṭin*). In the sphere of the former (and to those for whom the latter is unavailable), worship is literal and symbolic. An Ismaili however is privy to a hidden, esoteric truth in addition. As he worships with exoteric symbols and formulae, in conformity with Islamic law, he takes cognizance of the true deity—the remote, awesome, unknowable, ineffable, Neoplatonic One, stripped, both physically and spiritually, of all attributes and of all description and limit. This is, for them, the real God behind the symbols and beyond all illusions.

In sum it seems that al-Sijistānī was well aware of some of the difficulties and advantages of the position he held. Most likely he had arrived there by analyzing problems at least in part derived from a previous tradition of Islamic theology. His motive in restricting worship of God by an austere absolute conception of His transcendence was probably born of his Islamic background. It was, on the other hand, a Neoplatonic explanation of God's unknowability that provided him with a rational science by which he could document his findings. The basic concept and the proofs of God's unknowableness were Greek. The *hyperousios*, according to the Pseudo-Dionysius for example, could not be the object of knowledge.⁴⁰ God, Plotinus had said, is seen by the soul as nothing; He is "another thing which is above all images and species."⁴¹ It is not clear, however, that al-Sijistānī's doctrine of twofold negation did in fact derive from

40 On the negative theology of the Pseudo-Dionysius, see *The Cambridge History of the Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Arthur H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 468–469.

41 See Arthur H. Armstrong, *Architecture*, p. 31. Cf. *Ennead*. v. 5. 13, "The only way is to make every denial and no assertion" (MacKenna, p. 414). "Things above time," says John Philoponus, "can neither be apprehended nor expressed by us who use temporal language," quoted by Samuel Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), p. 170. "The First Cause is above every name naming it," *Fī al-khayr*

some previous usage. While his conception of God was that of Plotinus, the application of his own method of *tawhīd* may well have been original with him. Unwilling to abandon the Neoplatonic God, so reasonable to him, he came up with an ingenious solution that, in his own mind at least, allowed him to retain his theological position yet avoid those errors so offensive to his enemies and the community at large.

1 Post-script

The original of this chapter appeared almost four decades ago at a time when the investigation of al-Sijistānī's thought had barely begun. Several key works of his were difficult to find even in manuscript form. Since then we have witnessed great advances in our knowledge of his teachings. My own contributions include three books and many other articles. Ismail Poonawala has provided careful critical editions of *al-Iftikhār* (Beirut, 2000) and, most significantly, *al-Maqālīd* (Beirut, 2011). Others have written about al-Sijistānī as well (among them W. Madelung, H. Corbin and H. Landolt). Therefore it might seem strange to re-publish this now quite old study of his teaching about *tawhīd*. However, despite some attention to this aspect of his thought, it remains both important and central in any evaluation of him and his contribution. The first version of this piece, moreover, was published in a short-lived journal that died after only three issues and suffered from quite limited circulation. Thus it was then, and has been since, accessible to no more than a small number of scholars. And yet the topic, al-Sijistānī's special method of establishing proper worship, continues to prove critically important in the history of Islamic doctrines in this area. With a solid understanding of what he advocated and the exact details of his position, the possible influences of al-Sijistānī both among the later Ismaili authors and those few Sunnī authorities who admit to having read his works can now be investigated. On that score Yahya Michot's discovery of a connection to Ibn Taymiyya is especially significant. The evidence noted by Michot⁴² was expanded by Poonawala for his introduction to the *Maqālīd* and, recently, Rodrigo Adem, at the time writing a Ph.D. dissertation at the

al-maḥq, ed. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Badawī, *Neoplatonici apud Arabes* (Cairo: Maktabat an-Nahḍa, 1955).

42 First announced in Michot's "A Mamlūk Theologian's Commentary on Avicenna's *Risāla adḥawiyya*, Part 1." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14 (2003): 149–203, see appendix II, pp. 199–203.

University of Chicago on Ibn Taymiyya, added more still.⁴³ As it turns out this very doctrine, as formulated and explained in this work of al-Sijistānī, drew considerable comment from Ibn Taymiyya, who struggled with it and against it at some length.

43 See, for example, his *Sharḥ al-Iṣbahāniyya*, ed. Muḥammad ibn ‘Awdah al-Sa‘awī (al-Riyāḍ, 1433/2012), p. 522, where he quotes from al-Sijistānī’s *Maqālīd* (the 10th *iqlīd*). There he also recognizes al-Sijistānī as “... among the best (*afḍal*) of these Qarmaṭians (*al-Qarāmiṭa*).” This reference was brought to my attention by Rodrigo Adem.

PART 4

Rivalries



Ismaili Polemics Against their Opponents

The standard dictionary definition of a polemic is a contentious argument that is intended to support a specific position through a contrary position. It is mostly seen in arguments about controversial topics, particular those concerned with religion and religious doctrine.¹ The practice of such argumentation is called polemics and it commonly contains aggressive attack on or refutation of the opinions or principles of another and involves the art or practice of disputation or controversy.

Ismaili writings from the Fatimid period abound in refutations of their opponents. Some are quite explicit, naming specific individuals for repudiation, frequently in substantial detail. A number of this type appear as separate treatises, each devoted to a single person. We have a list of such works by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974): against Ibn Surayj (d. 306/918), al-Shāfiʿī (204/820), Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), Mālik (d. 179/796), and Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767). Another example is al-Kirmānī's (d. after 411/1020–1021) polemic against Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. ca. 313/925 or 323/935), his *al-Aqwāl al-dhahabiyya*. Yet others do not single out a named opponent but rather a school or sect. It is quite common to find, for example, a refutation of those who pretend to philosophy. Al-Kirmānī wrote separate chapters of his *Tanbīh al-hādī* against them, as well as the Twelvers, the Zaydis and the Nusayri *ghulāt*. Both al-Nuʿmān and al-Kirmānī devoted separate sections to the refutation of those who uphold *taqlīd*, or *qiyās*, or advocate the use of *naẓar*, *istiḥsān*, *istidlāl*, and *ijmāʿ*, or *ijtihād* and personal *raʾy*. In addition there is a whole range of materials wherein, rather than individuals or groups, a category or item of doctrine is refuted generically. Much of this effort by the *daʿwa* to censure its enemies and detractors has become better known especially recently with attention to the works of al-Nuʿmān, particularly his *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib*. Important new material, however, is to be found in the unpublished work of al-Kirmānī, his *Tanbīh al-hādī waʾl-mustahdī* just mentioned. And there is much more in the work of a variety of authors from just prior to and the first century and a half subsequent to the founding of the Fatimid state.

1 "Ismaili Polemics Against their Opponents during the Fatimid Period" in O. Mir-Kasimov ed. *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: the Ismaili thread*. (London, I.B. Tauris, 2020), pp. 27–50.

The Ismaili *da'wa* operated in the first instance as appeal, aiming to attract the loyalty of those who accepted membership either to an unnamed supreme leader, the imamate, before the declaration of the caliphate, or to the reigning imam-caliph once the empire had come into existence. The *da'wa* is thus a summons whose basic function is to bring followers into the fold. But a key step in this process often involved a concerted effort to break down and render null and void any pre-existing religious affiliation that might be held by the target individual. The process is typically described as 'breaking' and a specialist assigned to do it is the 'One who breaks' (*mukāsir*), although most ranking agents of the *da'wa* are thought to have performed a similar operation.

The exact technique employed likely varied and depended heavily on the capacity of the potential novice. However, the action itself is often mentioned in connection with the administration of the oath of allegiance and fidelity which was a fairly routine rite of admission to the *da'wa*. An early treatise by Abu'l-'Abbās, brother of Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī (both d. 298/911), comments: 'in the inner meaning of the law, the one for whom the *dā'ī* breaks the external on which the novice previously relied because he did not know the [true] interpretation or its meanings, he is in the position of someone captured from the land of ignorance, being moved to the land of knowledge.' The *dā'īs* are 'those who break the people of outward meaning [from earlier beliefs] and then place the oath of covenant on the necks of those of the believers who respond to the appeal of truth.'² From a century later we find the following confirmation in a manual that outlines the proper conduct of the *dā'ī*. Once the agent of the *da'wa* ascertains that the novice's 'objective is God and true religion, he is first to break him down and extirpate those notions he previously upheld, so that his prior beliefs have then become so thoroughly destroyed he no longer has an argument in their favor. ... Shower him with arguments ... until he has been broken down and wants to take the oath.'³

Thus polemic was built into the program of the *da'wa* even at its most basic level. Every agent who hoped to further the Ismaili cause, to convert new members and expand the appeal, needed the tools required to countermand and nullify the arguments put forth by opponents of various kinds. In short they required not only firm knowledge of doctrine, but how to defend it and deflect contentions that ran counter to it. At the most sophisticated levels of argument, it obviously helped to have at hand the kind of works mentioned earlier, some

2 Madelung and Walker, ed. and trans, *Affirming the Imamate*.

3 Naysāburī, *al-Risāla al-mūjaza al-kāfiya fī ādāb al-du'āt*, ed. Klemm, trans. Walker as *A Code of Conduct*, pp. 60–61.

themselves impressive masterpieces of polemical reasoning, but all in service to the *da'wa*.

Of course not all propagation of the appeal began with obvious polemical argumentation. A particularly subtle technique is represented in a record of Abū 'Abd Allāh's preaching in the period before the proclamation of the state.⁴ His general method involved casting doubt without direct confrontation. He would suggest that the misdeeds and errors committed by the communities of earlier prophets, mostly as described or hinted at in Qur'anic passages, had almost exact parallels in the actions of Islamic counterparts. The pharaohs of the Muslim community were repeating the evils perpetrated by the pharaohs at the time of the Israelites. What befell the earlier groups when they went astray are now matched by those who deny the family of the Prophet and fail to follow their lead. In fact argument of this type easily expands. The mistakes of the present mirror actions in the past. As several versions of a well-known hadith insist: 'The Apostle of God said: "This community will not abandon the practice of previous generations so much as this thumb leads the one that follows it."' Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān⁵ said: 'There was nothing with the Israelites but that its like will be with you.' 'The messenger of God warned his community against disunion and mutual difference and he informed them that they will perpetrate what the nations that came before them perpetrated. And so he said: "Surely you will follow the practice of the Israelites in a completely identical manner, exactly alike." 'You shall keep to the path of those who came before you in a completely identical manner and to take after them exactly, whether inch by inch, cubit by cubit or yard by yard, to the point that, were they to enter the burrow of a lizard, you would enter it as well.'

From this basic hard to challenge claim, which in and of itself has no direct link to a doctrinal position, he could move progressively on to more and more overt cases of sin, corruption and degradation specifically within the Islamic community following the death of the Prophet when it refused to acknowledge the succession of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661). Finally it would become clear that accepting the appeal of agents acting on behalf of the true guardian of God's religion, the about to appear Mahdī, is the sole avenue to salvation.

Yet another polemical technique, one that might seem quite unorthodox—assuming that there exists anything like an orthodox method in polemical writing—can be found in the 'Chapter on Satan' by an obscure Eastern *dā'ī* known to us only as Abū Tammām (fl. 4th/10th century).⁶ In it all the erring

4 See *Affirming the Imamate*.

5 Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān was one of the Prophet's Companions.

6 Madelung and Walker, *An Ismaili Heresiography*.

sects of Islam are condemned as a whole and as individual movements, each being established by a satan leading his followers away from the true religion.

The text that contains the heresiographical “Chapter on Satan” comes from a fourth/tenth century Ismaili work called *Kitāb al-Shajara*. Even in the tradition of the *da‘wa* of his own or parallel Ismaili groups who preserve what is left of his book, its author is known only by the *kunya*, Abū Tammām. Nevertheless, from internal evidence, it is clear that he either lived and wrote in Khurāsān or came from there or both. He was also a disciple of the famous *dā‘ī* and philosopher, Muḥammad al-Nasafī, who was executed by Samanid authorities in 332/943, and who is mentioned frequently with special reverence in various places in the *Shajara*.

The “Chapter on Satan” is actually one part of a fairly large work and the general structure of the whole treatise is not necessarily polemical. At the outset, the author expresses his intention to explain in this work the following classes of beings: angels (*al-malā’ika*), jinn, satans (*al-shayāṭīn*), devils (*al-abālisa*), and humans (*al-ins*), as they exist both in potentia and in actuality. He says that he will do so in response to a request from a colleague who has become perplexed on this issue. The satans in potentia are those, he says, who adhere to the exterior and who are far from the truth, that is, who stay away from it. These satans have supporters of only one sort, the devils, because those who adhere to exterior realities consider matters from one aspect exclusively and that is from its exterior and not its interior, its shell and not its kernel.

The author continues by also relating the well-known hadith of the Prophet, in which he said:

The tribe of Israel broke up after Moses into seventy-one sects that are in hell except for one that is in paradise; the community of Jesus broke up after him into seventy-two sects that are in hell except for one that is in paradise; and my community will break up into seventy-three sects that will be in hell except for one among them that will be in paradise.

For Abū Tammām,

there is no doubt that, for each one of these sects, a chief or a leader summons the people to his particular opinion and belief. These are the satans that the messenger of God mentioned. What fits exactly the words of the messenger of God is the fact that the proponents of external meaning have divided into seventy-two sects, while the partisans of inner meanings remain in the same state they were when the messenger of God departed from this world. There has not occurred among them any breaking up or

mutual opposition or irresolution as has occurred among the proponents of external meanings who curse and repudiate each other. In our view this fact establishes the correctness of the doctrines of the proponents of inner meaning and the corruption of the various dogmas held by the proponents of external meaning who curse each other because God has said: 'Had it not been from other than God, surely they would have found in it much disagreement.' From this we learn that, if the doctrines of the proponents of external meaning were actually taken from God, they would not now be in disaccord. I will here spell out these divisions and sects one by one and explain briefly and concisely the beliefs of each of them.

The divisions and sects in his list, each of which was founded or led by a satan, are the Mu'tazila, the Khawārij, the Ḥadīthiyya, the Qadariyya, the Anthropomorphists, the Murji'a, the Zaydiyya, the Kaysāniyya, the 'Abbāsiyya, the Ghāliya, and the Imāmiyya, along with the various sub-branches of each. In total they are seventy-two; all destined for hellfire. The seventy-third Islamic group, the 'one among them that will be in paradise,' are of course the Ismaili Shī'a.

Any heresiography is by its very nature polemical; it seeks to identify, expose and condemn the groups its author considers heretics. This Ismaili example is, however, relatively unique. Nearly all those from the classical period of Islam that we possess are Sunnī, or composed from the Sunnī viewpoint. Abū Tammām's "Chapter on Satan" is the only one that expresses the Shī'ī perspective. But it also strongly denounces a whole series of Shī'ī groups, among them the Zaydiyya and the Imāmiyya. Most striking, however, is its censure of several favored imams of Sunnī legal and theological schools, among them Mālik b. Anas, al-Shāfi'ī, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), Abū Ḥanīfa, and 'Alī b. Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935–936).

The following examples will illustrate Abū Tammām's methods and provide some idea of how thorough—with what detail—he both describes and refutes these heretical tendencies.

Azāriqa

The first [of the Khawārij] is the Azāriqa related to Nāfi' b. al-Azraq. This Nāfi' was the first to create dissension among the Khawārij. It was he who instigated the dissociation from those who remained at home and the testing of those who attempted to join his army. The Azāriqa do not dissociate from those of the early generation among the Khawārij who came before them and who associated with the quietists and failed to declare them unbelievers. They say instead that this matter has become clear

to us but it was hidden from them. The Azāriqa uphold strict determinism in the manner that was taught by Jahm. They maintain further that whoever remains in the territory of unbelief is an unbeliever and nothing avails him but to emigrate away from there. They also sanction the torment of children [in the hereafter].⁷

Shāfi'iyya

The second sect [of the Ḥadīthiyya] is the Shāfi'iyya, the followers of Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī. They maintain that the most excellent of people after the messenger of God, were Abū Bakr, then 'Umar, then 'Uthmān, and then 'Alī, and that these caliphs are the four who were rightly guided. They say further that the messenger of God died and did not appoint a successor and that the community appointed for themselves Abū Bakr as leader. According to them he was more deserving of the imamate than anyone else, and the messenger of God had said, 'My community will not agree on an error.' They affirm reasoning by analogy and personal endeavor although they do not accept the establishment of a ruling on the basis of discretion. They hold that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was right in all of his wars but that Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, Mu'āwiya, 'A'isha, and 'Amr b. al-Āṣ argued for fighting him and exerted personal judgment to that end. All of them are in paradise just as God said, 'And We shall remove from their hearts any lurking sense of injury as brothers facing each other on raised couches.' They say that beasts will be resurrected and thereafter become dry dust by the order of God and that the unbeliever will want to be in their state when he cries out, 'O would that I were become dry dust.' As for the children and the insane, they will, by the mercy of God, be entered into paradise. Al-Shāfi'ī had numerous differences with Abū Ḥanīfa and other legal experts in the Islamic community on matters of legal rulings and the law. Handling the penis negates the ablution according to him.⁸

Jahmiyya

The first sect [of the Qadariyya] is the Jahmiyya related to Jahm b. Ṣafwān. They say that faith is cognizance and conviction in the heart rather than confession and excluding the rest of the acts of obedience. If a man were to live a hundred years and acknowledge God and recognize Him in the heart but never confess to this with his tongue, he is nonetheless

⁷ *An Ismaili Heresiography*, trans. p. 35.

⁸ *An Ismaili Heresiography*, trans. pp. 45–46.

a believer. They maintained as well that God's knowledge is originated. God knew from eternity that a thing will come into being but did not know it as existing. When a thing has come into existence, it may be said God knows it as having come into existence. That God's knowledge is other than He is proven because of the temporal origination of knowledge. Examples are the humans, the heavens, the Torah, the Furqān [Qur'an], the Gospels, the earth, and other kinds of created things. Jahm argued that he would not say that God knew eternally because, if he were to say that, it would require that there have been another eternally with Him. He agreed that he would not say He was eternally either knowing or ignorant because knowing is an act of His. When He performs the act of knowing, He has knowledge. If He performs the act of ignorance, He is in fact ignorant. Thus Jahm would say that all ignorance in this world, as well as knowledge, is an act of God. They hold that the will of God [encompasses] all the actions of humans, as for example those of obedience and disobedience, in the same way as they maintained is the case with knowledge. They say that the Qur'an was created, and that God will not be seen by anyone in the afterlife. God is the Creator of things, their Innovator, and the Maker of created things. None of His creation can possibly act or bring something into being and all the acts that we witness that are ascribed to the animals are actually due to God's acting through them, as is the case for the sun, the moon, and dying. Therefore, when you say a man became an unbeliever or had faith or moved or disobeyed or was obedient, committed adultery, or stole, that is the same as your saying the sun set, the moon rose, so-and-so died, grew long, grew short, or the tree dried up. All the actions in this world are actually acts of God. God will punish the servants on the day of resurrection for what He did on their behalf, not for what they did for themselves since they have no acts of their own. It is possible that God will punish all of the people and the closest angels and will reward the hypocrites and the satans and preserve them forever in His paradise. They state: this appears to us to be unjust but it is not unjust in regard to God because He is not like us and because we are merely His chattel and slaves who are not to question His actions. The proof is that, if it were possible for humans on their own to have actions, either of movement or of rest, they could adjust the heavens and the earth. If that were possible, they would seek it, but it is impossible. They say further that motions are bodies; it is absurd for them to be non-corporeal for the reason that what is non-corporeal is God Himself and nothing is like Him. They hold that God acts unjustly, capriciously, and imposes a legal burden on His servants which they do not have the

ability to fulfil but all that is not, on His part, unjust but rather for Him it is a bounty and a charity. That occurs only on the part of someone under command and prohibition whereas He, the mighty and glorious, is not subject to command and prohibition.⁹

Karrāmiyya

The third sect is the Karrāmiyya related to Muḥammad b. Karrām al-Sijistānī. They maintain that God is a body adjoining the throne, that He will be seen in the next life, and that the Qur'an is uncreated. Muḥammad b. Karrām was a man given to self-mortification and asceticism. He claimed that he was a person who relied solely on God and that he had intended to go into the desert with many of those who followed him without provisions, water, or riding mounts. The ruler prevented him from doing that and threw him in prison, saying, 'This man will destroy himself and these other poor wretches as well. It is incumbent on us to stop him and to assume control over him.' The Karrāmiyya say that the Prophet was never the proof [*ḥujja*] and that was because he died and God's proof will not die. They insist also that there is nothing among us that is the word of God; the Qur'an is only a narration of the words of God and a narration is not the same as the narrated. They claim further that there is not, in the heart of any of the saints, the prophets, or the faithful, faith in God. That is because faith with God is speech rather than cognizance, assent, or the rest of the acts of obedience. The location of speech is not in the heart but rather solely on the tongue. They maintain that the hypocrites are actually believers. On the matter of the acts of humans, they hold doctrines like those of the Najjāriyya. There are, however, oddities in which they stand alone and among these is their claim that a woman is unlawful to anyone who has had sexual intercourse with her mother. Another is permitting their associates, whenever

9 The entry on Jahm continues as follows: 'They deny the punishment of the grave, Munkar and Nakir, and the Balance. We do not claim, they say, that God is a thing but rather that He is the Maker of things. Their proof that God, the exalted, is the Maker of things is that thingness applies only to the created and it is impossible that God have any of the characteristics of creatures. They uphold rebellion against an unjust ruler by any means available to them, by the sword or what is less than it. According to them, paradise and hell have not now been created and will not occur except at their proper time; they will be created following the day of resurrection but they will not endure after God creates them. This group believes that paradise and hell may be annihilated, and they draw support for this from the statement of God, the mighty and glorious, 'He is the First and the Last. He was in the beginning when there was nothing and, likewise, He will be at the end when there will be nothing with Him.' *An Ismaili Heresiography*, trans. pp. 49–51.

in the middle of a dispute with opponents and the opponent asks them for a hadith from the Prophet in accord with their doctrine, to invent the hadith spontaneously for that particular occasion and to attribute it to the Prophet and use it as their proof of that doctrine. Their argument for this is that their doctrines are true and the Prophet would only have spoken the truth and summoned to it. Thus, when they relate of him that he said this or that in which they believe, they have been quite truthful. According to them the people will be assembled [at the Resurrection] in Jerusalem and their leader Muḥammad b. Karrām gathered from Khurāsān and its vicinity more than five thousand families and moved them to Jerusalem. Thereafter when the people gather to assemble there, having already moved to it at present, it will be easier for them on the day of resurrection in that they will be closer to the assembling point. They hold that God creates conviction in the hearts of His servants although He did not create it in the hearts of some of them. It is a gift from God which humans have no ability to acquire on their own. The capacity, they insist, precedes the act.¹⁰

Sabā'iyya

The second sect [of the Ghāliyya] is the Sabā'iyya, related to 'Abd Allāh b. Saba'. They claim that the imam after the messenger of God was 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. He is the Mahdī who will fill the earth with justice as it is now full of wrongdoing and oppression. 'Abd Allāh b. Saba' once said to the person who brought to al-Madā'in the news of the death of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, 'By God, if you brought us the brains of 'Alī seven hundred times over, we would still know that he will not die until he returns and drives the Arabs with his rod.' As a result when this was reported to Ibn 'Abbās, he remarked, 'If we had known that, we would not have married off his womenfolk nor parcelled out his inheritance.' They also have a number of evil doctrines other than this.¹¹

Wāqifiyya

The fourth sect [of the Imāmiyya] is the Wāqifiyya. They say that the imam after the messenger of God was 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, then al-Ḥasan, then al-Ḥusayn, then 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, then Muḥammad b. 'Alī, then Ja'far b. Muḥammad, and then Mūsā b. Ja'far. Mūsā was the seventh of the imams and he did not die nor will he die until he reigns over the world,

¹⁰ *An Ismaili Heresiography*, trans. pp. 58–59.

¹¹ *An Ismaili Heresiography*, trans. p. 100.

both the east of it and the west, and until he fills the earth with justice as it is now full of wrongdoing and oppression. He is the Qā'im and the Mahdi. They are called the Wāqifiyya because they stop [*waqafū*] with Mūsā b. Ja'far and do not go beyond him to any others after him. Some of their opponents call them the Mamṭūra. It is said the reason for that is because once a member of their group debated Yūnus b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān who was from the Qaṭ'iyya. Yūnus at one point said to him, 'You people are of less weight to me than rain-soaked dogs,' and this term stuck to them thereafter.¹²

Much of the information in this kind of heresiographical text simply repeats material gleaned from older works in the Islamic tradition of this genre, although Abū Tammām does add a few of his own personal observations and does include accounts of several sects that either do not appear elsewhere or not in as complete detail. There is, however, an interesting Ismaili parallel in the massive treatise on lexicography by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/933–34), his *Kitāb al-Zīna*, which offers a rich treasure of information about Arabic words and technical terms. One section of it provides, as the author says, 'an account of the names (*alqāb*) of the various sects in Islam'.¹³ Under each he recounts details—often derogatory—that we would otherwise find in an Islamic heresiography. Ultimately it is not so obviously a polemic because, among the long list of sects, he incorporates an account of what we assume is his own, the 'Ismā'īliyya',¹⁴ and not all the others are clearly condemned and denounced, perhaps because they advocate doctrines not antithetical to his own.

A more overtly polemic work by Abū Ḥātim, although again not quite of the standard form, is his *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, which is his after-the-fact record of an encounter and debate with the famous physician, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (Rhazes).¹⁵ For reasons not completely obvious this al-Rāzī drew the ire of a number of Ismaili *dā'īs* who felt called upon each to compose a substantial work whose main purpose was the condemnation of this man. A second, by al-Kirmānī, will be discussed later. Here we can take up Abū Ḥātim's diatribe against 'the heretic' and the ideas he stood for. It might be noted, however, that Abū Bakr does not really speak for himself in this work. What he had said or advocated

12 *An Ismaili Heresiography*, trans. pp. 113–114.

13 Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Zīna fī'l-kalimāt al-islāmīyya al-'arabiyya*, ed. Sa'īd al-Ghānamī (Beirut, 2015), vol. 1, pp. 487–569.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 527–530.

15 Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, ed. and trans. by Tarif Khalidi as *The Proofs of Prophecy* (Provo, UT, 2011).

in the meeting of the two comes to us in the words of his Ismaili opponent. Still the material in this book that supposedly reflects the views of Abū Bakr conforms to what we know about them otherwise.

The principal issue is prophecy, which is fundamental to Islam in general and Ismailism in particular but which Abū Bakr apparently rejected, claiming the prophets were frauds and their so-called revelations of no value. He argued that the revealed text was essentially incoherent nonsense. Another point of contention was creation. Abū Bakr upheld a doctrine that recognized five eternal principles: God, matter, soul, time and place. The universe had come to be out of the interaction of these five. Abū Ḥātim brought up these and other issues that he explains and refutes, broadly denouncing Abū Bakr's reliance on and devotion to ancient Greek philosophy, most especially Socrates and Plato. One of his arguments is especially interesting, as it became a standard part of the Ismaili rejection of the preeminence of philosophy over revelation. In Abū Ḥātim's view the ancient philosophers failed to reach a consensus on crucial points. Instead they each favored mere opinions where they should have attained certainty. What is of ultimate value in the sciences and philosophy has come from the prophets. The overall argument is clear from key chapter titles and runs as follows:

An account of what transpired between me and the heretic; concerning his argument that the five are eternal, with no other eternal except them, and the debate about time and space; that the world is created; conflict among philosophers regarding principles; a summary of divergences among views of philosophers; which of the two groups is more deceitful?; there is no divergence among prophets regarding principles; all religious laws are true, but falsehood has been mixed with them; further views of the heretic; the prophets as originators of the sciences and the philosophers as their heirs.

In terms of the sheer number of and variety of polemics credited to a single Fatimid authority, it would be the work of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, whose voluminous output included many examples. At least six titles of those he wrote contain the Arabic phrase *al-radd 'alā* ('the refutation of'), which is a standard indication of a polemic. Additional Arabic verbs that might be used for this purpose are *faḍaḥa* ('to disclose or uncover someone's faults'), *aḥḥama* ('to silence with counter arguments'), and *aḥṣada* ('to denigrate, thwart, devalue'). But, as we have seen, polemical rejection of an opponent can come in many forms. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's treatise, often called, using a simple title, *Kitāb*

al-Manāqib wa'l-mathālib,¹⁶ and which might be translated as *Book of Virtues and Vices*, is actually titled *Kitāb al-Manāqib li-ahl bayt rasūl Allāh al-nujabā' wa'l-mathālib li-banī Umayya al-lu'anā'*, which translates as *Book of the Virtues of the House of God's Messenger, the most noble, and the Vices of the House of Umayya, the accursed ones*. It thus has two intentions: one to celebrate the virtues of the Prophet's own family and most especially of the imams of the Fatimid line; and the other to castigate and condemn the Umayyad house. This second aspect is decidedly polemical, although the polemic is dispersed and accompanied by its opposite, a laudatory glorification of the competing lineage.

Significantly, he begins his review of the subject with generations of both lines reaching back even prior to the Prophet himself. His first chapter recounts the virtues of 'Abd Manāf b. Qusay and the origin of the dispute between his two sons. From there he continues in parallel lines, on one side Hāshim and the other 'Abd Shams, and then 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and Umayya, and next the Prophet's father 'Abd Allāh and Ḥarb b. Umayya. Eight chapters and eight examples of this type of parallels follow. A key passage at the end concerns the Andalusian Umayyads, most specifically 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (r. 300–350/912–961) and his caliphate, which al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān regards as particularly despicable. At this point the polemical nature of the whole work concludes with a vehement attack on this rival caliphate.

About the Umayyads of Spain in general he says:

These were all wicked rulers, of vile standing, of despicable intentions, who drank wine, passed time with musical instruments, amused themselves with young boys, caroused with fools, listened to singing girls, ate forbidden things, transgressed regulations, in the same way as their forefathers in the past.¹⁷

The advent of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III then brought changes, making the situation far worse.

He exceeded the boundaries and crossed over into what none of his forefathers had done. ... He called himself 'Commander of the Believers', coined money, decorated *ṭirāz* with his name. ... The vileness of his condition and meanness of his character and intentions and the shamelessness of his opinions was caused by what we have cited as the malicious

16 Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *al-Manāqib wa'l-mathālib*, ed. M. A. al-'Atiyya (Beirut, 2012).

17 *al-Manāqib wa'l-mathālib*, p. 400. For the full text see below chapter twenty-two.

states of his forefathers that had come together in him. ... He was well known and famous ... for sexual intercourse with his young boys, group after group. ... That went along with his openly drinking wine, listening to singing girls, playing *ṭanbūrs* and *ʿūds*. The keepers of pleasure houses visited him from remote lands and he settled them with him accordingly, in close proximity, and he gave them abundant gifts and favors. ... He had his subjects believe a [vile] behavior good, thereby permitting them these same transgressions. ... So they amused themselves with young boys, openly practicing pederasty in public. Daughters were shared among them as they accustomed her [to it] young and proceeded with the same when older. Among them fornication was evident and they flaunted openly sedition and wealth. They did commerce in wine in their markets, safe with him from this manifesting of crime that was due to their own moral depravity.¹⁸

Of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's treatises that employ the more formal indication of a polemic, most are now lost.¹⁹ One was devoted to the Khawārij, six others to specific named individuals: Aḥmad b. Surayj, a famous Shāfiʿī scholar of the third/ninth century (d. 306/918), Mālik b. Anas (or someone of his school), Abū Ḥanīfa, someone called al-ʿAtakī (or al-Ghatakī, al-ʿItakī, according to Poonawala, or either al-ʿUtbī or al-ʿUtaqī),²⁰ Ibn Qutayba (*Risālat dhāt al-bayān fiʾl-radd ʿalā Ibn Qutayba*), which still exists,²¹ and finally al-Shāfiʿī himself in a work called *al-Risāla al-miṣrīyya fiʾl-radd ʿalā al-Shāfiʿī*, which may have been aimed at an Egyptian audience in preparation for the Fatimid invasion of 367/969. All of these appear to have concerned law and legal theory. Yet one more is important here. That is his *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib* ('Disagreements of the Jurists'), which according to the author's grandson and fully authorized transmitter of it,²² has the complete title 'The Islamic Legal Schools' Conflicting Principles of Interpretation and Refutation of Those Who Contradict the True Doctrine Therein', with the phrase *al-radd ʿalā man khālafa al-ḥaqq fiḥā* and its stipulation added, thereby making its polemical intent more obvious.

18 *al-Manāqib waʾl-mathālib*, pp. 400–401. Full text below chapter twenty-two.

19 For a complete list of title see Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismāʿīlī Literature*, pp. 48–68 (section on 'Polemics and Refutations', pp. 62–65).

20 Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib*, ed. and trans. Stewart as *Disagreements of the Jurists*, p. xiii.

21 Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Risālat dhāt al-bayān fiʾl-radd ʿalā Ibn Qutayba*, critical edition by Avraham Hakim as *The Epistle of the Eloquent Clarification Concerning the Refutation of Ibn Qutayba by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān b. Muḥammad* (d. 363/974) (Leiden, 2012).

22 See the grandson's preface to the book, *ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

The main issue in this work from the Ismaili side was the authority of the Fatimid imams, all of them, but particularly al-Mu'izz for whom al-Nu'mān composed this work. On the opposing side were those legal scholars and would-be experts who claimed that they could determine the law and rulings of the religion by methods other than appeal to these same imams and thus derive legal judgment from sources that lack authority. For al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān the only valid means to ascertain true doctrine in the absence of an explicit ruling is to follow the practice of Muḥammad and that of the guiding imams, the people of his house. Arbitrary submission to authorities (*taqlīd*) is impermissible except in this latter situation. He rejects consensus (*ijmā'*), speculation (*naẓar*), analogy (*qiyās*), preference (*istihsān*), inference (*istidlāl*), interpretation and personal judgment (*ijtihād* and *ra'y*) and any person or party that upholds one or more of these methods as a valid way to determine the law. To each he devoted a separate chapter of substantial length and detail.

At about the same time that al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān reached the pinnacle of Fatimid authority in service to al-Mu'izz, Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, active in far-away Khurāsān, attain a similar status as one of the most influential voices in the *da'wa*. By then he had accepted the imamate of the Fatimids and now supported them whereas earlier he may have hesitated. Of the several treatises by him that have been preserved and were studied within the *da'wa*, most contain either whole sections or individual chapter that constitute a polemic of one kind or another. Al-Sijistānī took pains to refute a long list of doctrines that he found faulty, ranging from key points of metaphysics—items of contention in Neoplatonic thought, for example—to issues in Islamic religious principles. He, for example, adamantly rejects bodily resurrection. But there are many more we might cite. For a work that has its principal aim a type of polemic, it is essential to mention his *al-Iftikhār* (The Boast).²³ Apparently when he composed this treatise, which appears to come fairly late in his career, perhaps just before he was martyred, he was not particularly concerned to shield his views from the opposition. Quite the contrary. In it he states most of his claims as a challenge: We, he says, are the Proponents of Truth, you are not. He then castigates all those who fail to acknowledge the true imams and the doctrines they promote, which, for him, is true Islam.

His enemies and opponents are both specific individuals and broader categories. He denounces “ignorance like that of the literalists (al-Ḥashwiyya),” “conceit like that of the theologians (al-Mutakallimīn),” and “presumption like that of the Philosophers (al-Falāṣifa).” Yet he will also run through a list of Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs each noted for evil and depravity. In fact his

23 Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, ed. Poonawala.

chapter on the imamate is especially interesting for this reason. His purpose is to establish the absolute right of the Fatimid imams to rule as the only true and proper authorities in the Islamic community. As the Ismailis regard 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as the Legatee (al-Waṣī) and thus not an imam, he begins with Ḥasan whose confrontation with Mu'āwiya in no way denied him the imamate, the treaty he made with the latter notwithstanding. Next is the "Accursed son of the Accursed" Yazīd. Those who uphold his caliphate have the blood of Ḥusayn on their hands. Yazīd did many bad and un-Islamic things and he is ultimately, according to al-Sijistānī, the "Accursed Tree" (*al-shajara al-mal'ūna*) mentioned in Qur'an 17:60. It is common in Ismaili writings to insist that the Umayyads are the "accursed tree," which is also the Tree of Zaqqūm, and to castigate the whole lineage accordingly. But al-Sijistānī would rather, at least in this instance, make the reference specific to Yazīd. He and not the rest was the Accursed Tree.²⁴

As he continues his polemic, to each successive valid imam of the Fatimid line he opposes either the Umayyad or Abbasid usurper. 'Abd al-Mālik b. Marwān was famous for drinking wine and for destroying the Ka'ba, both signs of his unfitness for the caliphate. Al-Sijistānī's general method is to ask pointedly: Where do you stand with respect to ... and then name the enemy, for example, al-Walīd b. Yazīd who he calls the Zindīq (which can be translated as heretic). The Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr is mentioned simply as al-Dawānīqī; al-Amin is Ibn Zubayda. The latter was a shameless reprobate, inattentive and careless, devoting himself to poets and their praise of wine. Al-Ma'mūn was guilty of yet another sin. He spent the treasury of the Muslims on translations of the works of Greek atheist and materialist philosophers.²⁵ One more example here is his reference to the caliph al-Muqtadir as "your *muqtadir*," as if to say dismissively, "the one you believe holds power."

The next major figure in the Ismaili arsenal of polemicists would be Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, whose numerous writings span a period that appears to correspond fairly exactly with the reign of al-Ḥākim (386–441/996–1021). In his case we have eighteen titles that survive and an almost equal number that are lost. Many are relatively small having probably been issued as single pamphlets, but some are substantial. As we ought to expect, polemics or polemical intent prompted him to compose several. Like his predecessor in the *da'wa*, Abū Ḥātim, he was eager to refute Abū Bakr al-Rāzī. The latter's *al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī* (Spiritual Medicine) he decided needed an answer, a denunciation, for its pretense to know something about the medicine of the soul. He called his

²⁴ *al-Iftikhār*, pp. 171–72.

²⁵ *al-Iftikhār*, p. 175.

treatise *al-Aqwāl al-dhahabiyya* (The Golden Sayings).²⁶ In al-Kirmānī's view the admitted pre-eminence of Abū Bakr in the medicine of physical ailments and their treatment in no way qualified him to administer to the illnesses of the soul. As he put it: in the former field he is a vigorous stallion who gallops at will, but in the latter he is a dried up and withered limb devoid of benefit. The maladies of the soul can be cured only by the medicine of prophetic religion as dispensed by the living imam and his *da'wa*.

After his attack on Abū Bakr, al-Kirmānī turned his attention to al-Jāḥiẓ whose *Kitāb al-Uthmāniyya* was universally rejected by the Shī'īs for its refusal to recognize the superiority of 'Alī over 'Uthmān, or even Abū Bakr and 'Umar. It was also pro-Abbasid. Al-Kirmānī's answer was the *Ma'āṣim al-hudā wa'l-iṣāba fī tafḍīl 'Alī 'alā al-ṣaḥāba*²⁷ (The Protecting Links to Guidance and the Validation of the Superiority of 'Alī Over the Companions). The first part, his specific reply to al-Jāḥiẓ, is lost but the second survives. Curiously when it comes to Abū Bakr's virtues, al-Kirmānī admits that he can only recount the good that he had once done before the Prophet's death. Al-Ḥākim had issued clear orders in the year 401/1010–11 that the Companions are henceforth to be mentioned only in connection to these earlier acts, not to those committed in the subsequent period.

Of his pamphlets,²⁸ one is a refutation of the Zaydī imam and another of the proto-Druze figure Ḥasan al-Farghānī, who was known as al-Akhram. As the second of these was composed in the middle of 408/1017–18 in Cairo, it is quite specific as to date, occasion and its opponent, and what it claims about al-Akhram and his associates is key evidence concerning the formation of what later became the Druze. Al-Kirmānī adamantly denies that the imamate will end with al-Ḥākim, that he is the messiah, or is actually God incarnate as upheld by these people.

Among his more substantial works, two, his *al-Maṣābīḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma*²⁹ (Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate), and *Tanbīh al-hādī wa'l-mustahdī*³⁰ (The Exhortation to the Guiders and the Guided) would normally not be categorized as polemic even though they each contain interesting

26 Kirmānī, *al-Aqwāl al-dhahabiyya*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣawī (Tehran, 1977).

27 Kirmānī, *Ma'āṣim al-hudā wa'l-iṣāba fī tafḍīl 'Alī 'alā al-ṣaḥāba*, MS 724, Institute of Ismaili Studies Library.

28 Eleven of his short pieces, including these two, were gathered together in the Ismaili manuscript tradition and were published in modern times as *Majmū'at rasā'il al-Kirmānī*, ed. M. Ghālib (Beirut, 1987).

29 Kirmānī, *al-Maṣābīḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma*, tr. as *Master of the Age*.

30 Kirmānī, *Kitāb al-Hādī wa'l-mustahdī*, MS 723, Institute of Ismaili Studies Library; MS 57, Fyzee Collection, Bombay University Library.

sections with clear polemical intent. The major purpose of the first is to validate the imamate of al-Ḥākim in as explicit a manner as possible, thereby not merely to prove the obligation of the Muslim community to admit that the imamate is an essential institution of Islamic governance, but to recognize specifically the Fatimid imam-caliph who held it at the time of writing. Thus the reign of al-Ḥākim is a critical factor. And, in that sense, this is a political work with a clear agenda to establish the right of the Fatimid dynasty to universal allegiance against all other claimants, Abbasids, Umayyads, Zaydis and the rest.

Designation is crucial. The community cannot validly elect an imam; its choice determines nothing in that regard and, if expressed, has no meaning. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was designated by the Prophet, a point al-Kirmānī attempts to prove, before he next traces the line of imams from him to Ja‘far al-Šādiq and to the latter’s son Ismā‘īl. From there it must, he says, continue in Ismā‘īl’s progeny. Ultimately, it reaches the Fatimid caliphs and specifically al-Ḥākim, the sixth of them. Al-Kirmānī provides a list of what an imam does and what virtues he displays. Moreover, he names all those in his time who claim the imamate but who either are not qualified for it or fail to perform the actions it requires or fulfil the duties required of them as true imams. His roster of false imams has special interest. They are Aḥmad b. Ishāq (al-Qādir), the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, al-Hārūnī (al-Mu‘ayyad bi’llāh), the Zaydī imam in Hawsam in Gilan, ‘Umar al-Nazwānī, the Ibāḍī imam in ‘Umān, the Umayyad ruler in Spain and the Maghrib, and the leaders of the Qarmatian remnant in al-Aḥsā’. His references cite quite specific individuals of a fairly limited time and set of places (about 404/1013). He also mentions the expected imam of the Twelver Shī‘a.

Here is what follows we can see, in tabular form, what specific failings invalidate the claims of all these men.³¹

Aḥmad b. Ishāq, who resides in Baghdad:³² He is not a lineal descendant of al-Ḥusayn; he is not pure in soul due to his consumption of forbidden things (*suḥṭ*) and his setting the price of wine that is sold for him on his estates in Baghdad and its hinterland and for the ignorance deeply rooted in him due to the lack of knowledge; the existence in him by his own admission of things connected to the imamate that he does not know and his utilisation of resources in ways not religiously commendable; being devoid of the knowledge associated with the religious declaration of

31 *Master of the Age*, trans. pp. 119–121.

32 The Abbasid caliph al-Qādir, who ruled from 381/991 to 422/1031.

God's absolute oneness and his reliance on the leaders of the Postponers (al-Murjī'a), such as Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, and others; contempt for the regulations of God, not commanding the good and forbidding the bad in his own household and entourage, let alone for any other Muslims; being devoid of the designation of the person who occupies the place of the apostle and instead having been put in office by the August *Amīr* Bahā' al-Dawla, may God's mercy be upon him.³³

Al-Ḥārūnī al-Ḥasanī, who resides in Hawsam:³⁴ He is not a lineal descendant of al-Ḥusayn; he is not pure in body because of leprosy that has taken hold of him, nor in the soul because of his ignorance of God's true oneness; the existence in him of his judging all matters out of ignorance and his responding to questions asked of him with what he has not learned from his own school doctrine or that of any other; being devoid of the knowledge associated with the declaration of God's oneness and his reliance on the statements of the Ḥashwiyya³⁵ and others like them; the existence in him of contempt for the regulations of God, the lands of the Muslims being devoid of an appeal (*da'wa*) of his to God; lacking the nobility conferred by designation and appointment, he being like the others who have not inherited the imamate.

ʿUmar al-Nazwānī,³⁶ who resides in Jabāl ʿUmān: He is not a lineal descendant of al-Ḥusayn; he is not pure of body on account of leprosy that has taken hold of him and settled in most of his limbs, nor in soul due to ignorance; there exists in him by his own admission what he does not know; being devoid of religious knowledge; the existence in him of contempt for the regulations of God, not commanding the good and prohibiting the bad; lack of designation and appointment.

33 Bahā' al-Dawla was the Buyid supreme ruler (*amīr*) in Iraq and then southern Persia as well from 379/989 to his death in Jumādā 11 403/December 1012. In 381/991 he had deposed the Abbasid caliph al-Tāʾi and replaced him with the same man's cousin, Aḥmad b. Ishāq, who took the throne name al-Qādir bi'llāh.

34 This person is Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Mu'ayyad bi'llāh Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Hārūn, the Zaydī imam in the Caspian region until his death in 411/1020. Kirmānī dedicated the treatise mentioned earlier, *al-Risāla al-kāfiya fi'l-radd ʿalā al-Ḥārūnī al-Ḥusaynī* (or *al-Ḥasanī*) *al-Zaydī* against him.

35 The term *ḥashwiyya* often refers to the extreme literalist doctrine of the Proponents of Ḥadīth or to those who mindlessly relate *ḥadīths*, even contradictory ones, without attempting to determine if they are valid and reasonable.

36 This man who is here said to be the Ibāḍī imam at the time is otherwise unknown.

The Umayyad, who resides in al-Andalus: He is not a lineal descendant of al-Ḥusayn; he is not pure due to his being from the Tree of Zaqqūm which are the Umayyad clan; there exists in him by his own admission what is not his business; being devoid of knowledge; there exists in him contempt for the regulations of God in his promoting among his subjects behaviour not that of the Prophet; lacking the designation and appointment.

Those who call themselves the Lords, who reside in al-Aḥṣā':³⁷ they are not lineal descendants of al-Ḥusayn; they are not pure because of drinking wine; there exists among them the expenditure of their funds for purposes not religiously commendable; there exists among them contempt for the regulations of God in their permitting forbidden acts; they are devoid of religious knowledge; they lack the designation and appointment.

Earlier in the same work he had reviewed in a similar fashion all those Companions of the Prophet who either claimed superiority over 'Alī or were possibly so considered. In this instance he does list Abū Bakr's faults (again in tabular form) in addition to a couple of his merits.³⁸

Abū Bakr: He did not have revelation from God; he was not chaste because of his having drunk wine in the period of Jāhiliyya and his commission of mortal sins; he was not designated by God or by His apostle; he was not pure nor purified, he had worshipped idols and had prostrated himself to them and not God; he was not brave or recognized for strength and bravery; he was pious not covetous; he was generous, spending freely; he was not selected by God nor by His apostle, and he was not dear to either of them nor among those described as such; he was not among those characterised by ascetic restraint; he was not just in the exercise of authority and did not show mercy to the daughter of God's apostle when he seized her property unlawfully; he came early to Islam; he did not have knowledge of the Book of God nor is one mentioned for that; he was not knowledgeable about what is permitted and what is forbidden and is not cited for that; he was not someone who knew the interpretation; he did

37 He refers to the Qarmatians in Bahrayn who are, according to what Kirmānī says about them, at this time completely excluded from the Ismaili fold. For their relations with the Fatimids in the period just prior to this, see Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, p. 194.

38 *Master of the Age*, trans. pp. 97–98.

not understand how to make judgments and deferred the argument in such matters to 'Alī; and he was not close to God nor to His apostle.

Yet one final example in this survey is the second text mentioned above, *Tanbīh al-hādī wa'l-mustahdī*. Al-Kirmānī wrote it, as he says, because he observed that the Muslims (*ahl al-qibla*) had broken up into factions in conformity to each group's individual viewpoint. In doing so they had abandoned true religion. He now sets about rectifying this situation by first outlining acceptable doctrine, namely that of the Ismaili *da'wa*, on matters such as the imamate, the *sharī'a*, faith, purity, prayer, alms-giving, fasting, pilgrimage, *jihād*, obedience to the imam, the oath and covenant, knowledge of interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and others, each in its own chapter. That section is not polemical. But after this basic exhortation to awaken the desire for proper adherence to the teachings of the imams, he moves on to criticize those who fail to obey. Significantly the first chapter of this part warns against the corruptions of those who pretend to philosophy (*al-mutafalsafūn*). Next come the false beliefs of the Mu'tazila and those who uphold inference and speculation (*ahl al-istidlāl wa'l-naẓar*) and their ignominies, followed by the Ash'arīs with an explanation of their errors. From here he adopts a course much like that found in al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Ikhtilāf*, with chapters refuting the doctrines of those who uphold *qiyās*, then *ra'y* and *ijtihād*, next *istiḥsān*, the people who accept *taqlīd* (*ahl al-taqlīd*) and then *ijmā'*.

The following chapter admonishes against the warped doctrine of those 'who refer to themselves as the Qaṭ'iyya Imāmiyya Ithnā 'ashariyya'. After that he takes on the Zaydiyya whose corrupt beliefs put them in opposition to the Book of God and the law of Muḥammad. And one more of this polemical section denounces the delusion of the Ghulāt, specifically the Nuṣayriyya and Ishāqiyya and those who agree with their doctrines and infidelities.

At this point we might conclude this exploration of early Ismaili polemics by raising an issue that is peculiar to its *da'wa*. Given the well-known reticence—some would say notorious reluctance—on their part to disclose publicly much of their esoteric doctrine, what portion of the polemical material in the surviving works actually entered into open debate in which both sides participated actively? Or was all this conceived and elaborated solely from a safe distance? The one direct piece of evidence for an exchange in a public setting is Abū Ḥātim's confrontation with Abū Bakr, which supposedly occurred in a formal session of disputation, or at least an initial debate between them appears to have taken place during such an occasion.

Membership in the Ismaili *da'wa* came from the very beginning with a strict requirement that imposed on the novice an oath of allegiance in which he or

she swore never to reveal the secret teachings about to be received. *Dā'īs* obviously maintained a cautiously circumspect demeanor both to protect themselves and their doctrines from hostile scrutiny but also to observe this rule of imposed secrecy. Without authorization a *dā'ī* could not speak about the *da'wa* to others. They were simply not to discuss delicate doctrinal matters in the presence of outsiders. And yet it is clear from the material presented above that the agents of the *da'wa* engaged in rather heated argument denouncing opponents and in defending the Ismaili understanding of Islam. Many of them were highly educated and knew in full detail the issues of contention among the various parties and the history of the sectarian divisions that had arisen in the community. Ultimately, however, the answer may lie in the nature of polemic which, in general, involves the exposure and denunciation of an opponent's views without necessarily confessing to the most problematic of the doctrines one held oneself. The Ismailis could actively promote vigorous refutation, even denunciation, of various opponents and enemies by attacking them for what they deemed false doctrines, manifest sins and glaring errors, while still, even so, hiding, and thus preserving, their own esoteric traditions which, had they become better known, might have more seriously threatened or weakened their position.

Islamic Ritual Preaching (*Khuṭbas*) in a Contested Arena: Shīʿīs and Sunnīs, Fatimids and Abbasids

In circumstances of political and religious conflict, the Islamic ritual sermon could be traumatic, especially when such sermons signaled a change in allegiance from a Sunnī to a Shīʿī ruler (or vice versa).¹ For more than two centuries the Ismaili Fatimids confronted the Abbasids, each claiming for itself the right to be invoked in the official sermon in the congregational mosques. One dramatic example of this change of loyalty is illustrated by a verbatim copy of what the preacher said on the occasion. This text, together with a few others that have been preserved, offer an opportunity to analyze this genre of preaching in a contested arena. The chapter that follows deals specifically with the signaling of changes in political allegiance in the *khuṭba*; the rhetoric and rhetorical strategies employed in the Fatimid *khuṭba*; blessings and curses used in the *khuṭba*.

In the era of dueling caliphates, a period of intense political and religious rivalry, especially between the Sunnī Abbasids and the Ismaili Shīʿī Fatimids, a most public act in support of one over the other took place during in the Friday sermon, the *khuṭba*. Although not required by Islamic law, it had long become a fixed custom to ask, as a key part of these *khuṭbas*, for God to bestow His favors and benedictions upon the current ruler, the one recognized in that particular locale. Any change or alteration in that request, particularly an omission of a name or substitution of another, was noted and commented upon. It most often implied a switch of allegiance, religious or otherwise. Medieval chroniclers record such events carefully. It is in fact one of the surest methods of tracking where and when a given town moved from one political camp to another. The inscriptions on coins likewise indicate these shifts, but less immediately. In times of frequent alteration, the weekly sermon and its invocation offers the most accurate evidence of what precisely happened.

¹ This chapter draws on and depends in part on my volume of collected Fatimid sermons, Walker, *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*. The thirteen *khuṭbas* included there are numbered from 1 to 13 and the numbers cited here below in the notes are to them as they appear in that book. It was originally published as “Islamic Ritual Preaching (*Khuṭbas*) in a Contested Arena: Shīʿīs and Sunnīs, Fatimids and Abbasids,” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 42 (2012), pp 119–140.

1 Signaling Changes in Political Allegiance in the *khuṭba*

For the two and a half centuries (909–1171) that the Fatimids, first from North Africa and then from Cairo, were locked in a bitter conflict with their Baghdad rivals, the issues at stake were as much religious—Sunnī versus Shīʿī Islam—as political and territorial, a matter of which party possessed the sole right to govern the Muslim community. Normally, within the domain of one, the Friday sermon was common routine, a ritual unexceptional in every way. However, for those rare moments of change, when the preacher invoked the name and titles of the enemy power instead of the one formerly recognized, all present would have noticed and reacted, with word of what occurred spreading rapidly far beyond the location of the mosque in which he preached. If the new language also signaled a conversion from Sunnism to Shiism (or vice versa) on the part of the local governor, those in attendance—the audience—might or might not have acquiesced, but about that in most cases we know little or nothing. Our sources follow the sentiments of rulers and occasionally comment on the person whose task it was to deliver the sermon but not ordinary people. Nonetheless how could these preachers, the *khaṭībs*, whose profession was the composition and pronouncement of the Friday *khuṭba*, so readily switch from one side to the other? Were they not religiously bound to a doctrine that precluded, or at least made impossibly difficult, such alteration, especially in so short a period?²

Relatively rapid back and forth variations were, to be sure, quite exceptional and most likely occurred in border towns and cities. A good example is Aleppo, and some other locations in Syria, which fell between the two Islamic empires. Mecca and Madina also witnessed years of turmoil both at the advent and the waning of Fatimid influence in the Hijaz, when competition on the part of the caliphs for acknowledgement from the local elite resulted in frequent alterations. However, a most dramatic instance of this kind of switching, and perhaps the best known of them, took place in the year 401 (1010–1011), when the semi-independent ʿUqaylid ruler of northern Mesopotamia, Qirwāsh b. al-Muqallad, rather abruptly proclaimed his allegiance, not to the Abbasid caliph in nearby Baghdad, as was previously the case with him, but to the more distant Fatimid al-Hākim bi-Amr Allāh in Egypt. Qirwāsh had thus now become a subject of the caliph of Cairo; he had in effect instituted an appeal, a *daʿwa*, on behalf of his former master's great rival. It was cause for anguish and

2 Most of the material presented in this article provides the perspective of the Shīʿī Fatimids. For the Sunnī view, one might see, for example, M. J. Viguera Molins, "Los predicadores de la Corte."

apprehensive reproach in the east and for pride and celebration in the west. The two sides made as much of the event as they could.

The public manifestation of the change, as was typical of the times, occurred in the next subsequent Friday *khutba*, this one delivered appropriately in Qirwāsh's capital Mawṣil. The 'Uqaylid ruler simply handed his *khaṭīb* the text of the sermon for the occasion and the man dutifully read it to the assembled worshippers. In the weeks that followed a similar message was heard in the congregational mosques of other cities belonging to Qirwāsh, among them al-Anbār, al-Madā'in, Qaṣr ibn Hubayra, and probably Kūfa as well. Quite suddenly, and most likely unexpectedly, Iraq outside of, but nevertheless all around, Baghdad had gone over to the Fatimids. The Sunnī caliphate was surely in mortal danger of a Shī'ī take over.

That it did not happen is due less to the actions undertaken by the rightly alarmed Abbasid caliph than by his much more powerful sponsor, the Buyid *amīr* Bahā' al-Dawla. The Sunnī caliph had no army himself and he could only employ a sort of moral persuasion that would prove effective solely on those already loyal to him. One was the famous theologian Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, whose anti-Isma'ili proclivities were well known. But even al-Bāqillānī could do no more than appeal to Bahā' al-Dawla. The Buyids, who were inclined to Shiism on their own, nonetheless saw Qirwāsh's act as a challenge to them as well as to the Abbasids. The *amīr* ordered 100,000 dinars to be spent either on a military option or as a bribe. Whichever one it was, it worked and Qirwāsh reversed himself. The *khutba* in his lands quickly reverted and once again called for God's blessing to fall on al-Qādir in Baghdad. The matter was therefore soon resolved in favor of the Abbasids.

In all, this incident represents therefore but a brief interval, ordinarily hardly worth more than a passing mention. The rivalry between the two caliphates was by then old. Even so, while not itself a lasting stage in this competition, an unexpected benefit of Qirwāsh's declaration of 401 is that a verbatim copy of the actual text of the *khutba* he issued for the occasion survived. And, most curiously, it was carefully preserved by the anti-Isma'ili Baghdadi historian Ibn al-Jawzī, and from him by the much later Egyptian Ibn Taghrī Birdī.³ For a vehemently anti-Fatimid writer to include this *khutba*, which is clearly Shī'ī as well as pro-Fatimid, in its entirety, is at the least curious. But beyond that what is odder even still is that it is the sole complete example of a standard Friday *khutba* on behalf of the Fatimids to reach us.⁴

3 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, 7: 248–51; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4: 224–27.

4 For an English translation of the full text see the appendix at the end of this chapter.

The historians of medieval Islam regularly report changes of allegiance that were announced in the Friday sermon, but they seldom tell us more about what was actually said in the process. They do not, as a general rule, comment on the body of the sermon. They are interested in politics not in the subtleties of expression or nuances of doctrine. Therefore to learn more it is essential to have available to us whole texts, at best verbatim copies of at least some of the *khuṭbas*, perhaps representative samples. Although all but unique, Qirwāsh's declaration of 401 provides, therefore, just about the only evidence of this kind we have. This one sermon must stand for the rest of which there would have been thousands and thousands.

Sunnī historians, principally Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Taghrī Birdī, also had a hard time making sense of this incident, even though they provide far more details about it than any other sources. Both historians insist that the inhabitants of Mawṣil agreed to the change with the "positive response of an enslaved flock, while concealing their true aversion and disgust," and both marvel at how easily the *khaṭīb*, who had previously pronounced the sermon in the name of the Abbasid caliph, al-Qādir, would acquiesce in the change, which amounted to converting from Sunnī to Shī'ī Islam. They offer a list of rather sumptuous new accoutrements—by implication a bribe—bestowed on him for the occasion. The list is clearest in Ibn Taghrī Birdī. But one explanation for Qirwāsh's having bestowed what amounts to a *khil'a*, a formal robe of honor, on his *khaṭīb* is that the Fatimid colors were white whereas those of the Abbasids were black. Accordingly, *the qabā' dabīqiyyā*, a tunic of *dabīqī* linen, mentioned by him would have been white to symbolize the change officially.⁵

Thus these Sunnī authorities are convinced that the new *khuṭba* disgusted the audience who heard it, in part thereby indicating that they had decidedly not agreed to become Shī'īs. Also they hint that the preacher went along with the change in response to a bribe. However neither claim is likely to have been as totally valid as these authors insist. Their words have the feel of Abbasid propaganda against the Fatimids, which is, in many other situations, reasonably easy to spot. Still, although we are fortunate enough to have the whole text of the sermon, we have no sure way of learning the exact religious sentiments of either the *khaṭīb* or the populations of Mawṣil in 401. The audience for Qirwāsh's declaration was likely mixed, some leaning toward the Shī'a, others against them, just as similarly would have been true even in Egypt or North Africa when they were both Fatimid territories.

5 In addition he was given a yellow turban, pants of red brocade and red shoes. See A. Metz, *Renaissance of Islam*, p. 325.

Another case of major importance is the first Friday sermon following the Fatimid conquest of Egypt. For it, although the whole text does not exist, the crucial portion has come down to us. Ibn Taghrī Birdī, the same historian mentioned above, reports that, immediately after seizing control, Jawhar cut the *khuṭba* for the Abbasids and prohibited the wearing of black, replacing it with white. He commanded that the *khuṭba* everywhere have added to it:

O God, bless Muḥammad, the chosen, ‘Alī, the approved, and Fāṭima, the chaste, and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the two grandsons of the messenger, from whom God has removed impurity and purged of all sin. Bless the pure imams, the forefathers of the Commander of the Believers, al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh.⁶

The message, clear to all, is unmistakably Shī‘ī. Yet another account relates a portion of the first *khuṭba* delivered in Fuṣṭāṭ.

When it was Friday with ten days left in Sha‘bān, Jawhar went down with the army to the Old Mosque [in Fuṣṭāṭ] for Friday prayers. Hibat Allāh b. Aḥmad, the deputy of ‘Abd al-Samī‘ b. ‘Umar al-‘Abbāsī [i.e. the *khaṭīb* of that mosque] gave the *khuṭba* wearing white.⁷

When he reached the prayer portion [the second *khuṭba*], he read the following from a written note:

O God, bless Your servant and Your deputy, the fruit of prophecy, scion of the rightly guided guiding family, the servant of God, the Imam Ma‘add Abū Tamīm al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh, Commander of the Believers, just as You blessed his pure forefathers and his predecessors, the rightly guided imams.

O God, raise high his rank and advance his word, make his proofs clear, bring the community together in obedience to him and their hearts loving friends of his, make guidance follow his sanction, have him inherit the eastern parts of the land and its west, have him be master of the beginning of things and their outcomes, for truly You speak and Your word is

6 The date for the first use of the new formula was Friday the 8th of Dhu’l-Qa‘da (according to Ibn Khallikān). Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4: 36; Maqrīzī, *Ittī‘āz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1: 117.

7 The name *al-‘Abbāsī* “the Abbasid” indicates that this man was a member of the Abbasid family and thus a relative of the Abbasid caliph. Jawhar confirmed him as the *khaṭīb* of the mosque of ‘Amr in Fuṣṭāṭ and he held that post at least until 365.

the truth. "We had written in the Psalms after the remembrance that the servants of righteousness shall inherit the earth" [Q21: 105].

Your religion has been subject to vexation. When that which is sacred to You was defiled, *jihād* on Your behalf extinguished, pilgrimage to Your house and visitation of the tomb of Your messenger ... disrupted, he made his preparations for the *jihād*, got ready everything necessary and sent the armies to support You. He expended funds in adherence to You, taking pains to please You, to curb those who are foolish and restrain those who are arrogant, to cause the truth to appear and the false to come to nothing. So, O God, support the armies that he has sent and the detachments that he charged with fighting the polytheists, contending with the heretics, defending the Muslims, building up of the border territories and the holy places, eradicating injustice, suspicions and greed, and spreading justice throughout the nations.

O God, make his banners stand high and prominent, his armies dominant and victorious; plant righteousness through him and by his hand; and grant us through him supreme protections.⁸

Whereas the briefer phrases were to be included in all *khuṭbas* everywhere in the newly conquered territories, the longer version applied to a specific event and depended on having a written text for the *khaṭīb* to read. The source suggests, in any case, that the preacher delivered his regular *khuṭba* for the first of the two halves of the sermon and referred to the written text only for the second. What has reached us is the latter—i.e. written—portion only.

The holy cities of the Hijaz possessed huge symbolic significance to the rival caliphates. The caliph could claim ultimate supremacy only if he controlled them. The Fatimids obtained recognition in Mecca and Madina with the advent of the caliph al-Mu'izz in Egypt. The *khuṭba* there named them thereafter until the pro-Abbasid Seljuks grew powerful enough to contest it. As with other cities and regions, however, the *khuṭba* in Mecca and Madina could revert even then.⁹ Aleppo in northern Syria witnessed frequent changes of allegiances throughout the 5th/11th century. The Zirids in North Africa likewise both renounced their recognition of the Fatimids and returned to it on several occasions, beginning in the mid-5th/11th century and continuing onward to the time of al-Āmir in the early part of the next.

⁸ Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1: 114–15.

⁹ Various medieval chronicles preserve details of these changes back and forth. See my *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, p. 8, note 11 and the references there.

Nor were *khuṭbas* accorded this level of political importance solely within the lands of Islam. An interesting case is that of Constantinople and the Byzantine empire. Fatimid relations with the Byzantines continued, at times with animosity and at other periods with peace, for two centuries or more. In the year 378/988, a treaty concluded with Byzantium stipulated, among other provisions, that the *khuṭba* said in the mosque of Constantinople name the Fatimid caliph al-ʿAzīz as the Muslim supreme authority.¹⁰ It is difficult to imagine that the congregation of Muslims in the Byzantine capital was large enough to be significant. However, renewals of this treaty maintained that provision. In 418/1027, a treaty with the Emperor made sure that *khuṭbas* in the lands of the Byzantines were to name only the Fatimid al-Ẓāhir. The mosque in Constantinople is to reopen, it says, and in exchange al-Ẓāhir will permit the reopening of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (both were evidently closed in the period prior to this).¹¹ Three decades later, in 447/1055, this stipulation remained in effect (or had been renewed in subsequent treaties), when an ambassador from the Seljuk sultan Tughril Beg arrived in Constantinople and asked if he could use its mosque. The Emperor granted him permission. The man went to the mosque on Friday to say his prayer and while there also gave a *khuṭba* in the name of the Abbasid caliph al-Qāʾim. At the same time the *qāḍī* Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Quḍāʿī, who was the official representative of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustanʿir, happened to be in Constantinople on behalf of his own master. He reported this breach of the treaty to Cairo, whereupon al-Mustanʿir revoked its provisions and ordered that all the goods and possessions in the Holy Sepulchre be seized by the government, leading predictably to a serious deterioration of relations with the Byzantines.¹² Yet it is unclear if the Byzantines fully appreciated how a small gesture on their part—allowing a visitor to use the mosque—could cause such an aggressive reaction elsewhere. Or how easily one Muslim could violate standing policy by his choice of a simple benediction in a Friday sermon.

Changing the *khuṭba* might come with other symbolic measures as well beyond the naming of the new ruler and altering the color of the preacher's robes. In 450/1058, when the *amīr* al-Basāsīrī captured Baghdad on behalf of the Fatimids, he had the *khuṭba* read in the name of al-Mustanʿir in all its mosques and the *muṣallā* (the festival grounds) one by one. Al-Maqrīzī reports that, on the Feast of the Immolation (*īd al-naḥr*), he smashed the *minbar* (pulpit) in the *masjīd* (mosque) in Baghdad and built a new one, stating “this

10 Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4: 152.

11 Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 176.

12 Ibn Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 14.

[old] *minbar* is sinister; from it hatred of the family of Muḥammad has been proclaimed.”¹³

But the other side could be equally as vociferous. A case in point involves the Zīrids. They were theoretically vassals of the caliph in Cairo. The Ṣanhāja Berbers from which tribe these rulers came were not, however, ever converted to Ismailism. Most remained Maliki Sunnī even while supporting, at first loyally, the Fatimid cause. Thus they were partisans of the Fatimid caliphate politically, but not religiously. al-Mu‘izz b. Bādīs, the Zīrid ruler, preserved the trappings of continued allegiance, notably the *khuṭba*, until 440/1048–49. In that year he cut his ties to Cairo for the first time. The Maghribi (Sunnī) historian Ibn ‘Idhārī reports that he ceased the *khuṭba* in favor of the lord of Egypt and burned the banners of the Fatimids. He also quotes from the poet Ibn Sharaf al-Qayrawānī, who was extremely well connected at the Zīrid court and lived contemporary to the event.¹⁴ He offers a detailed account of this al-Mu‘izz’s switching the *khuṭba* to the Abbasids, thereby putting an end to the *da‘wa* of the Fatimids. The reason given by him is that, following the departure of the caliph from the Maghrib in the middle of the previous century, the appeal of the Fatimids—recitation of their names from the *minbars*—was resented so strongly that fewer and fewer attended the Friday service, leaving the mosques empty. After many years the Zīrid ruler finally, according to this view, came to agree with his subjects, broke off the *khuṭba* in their favor, and divorced himself from them. On top of that he ordered his *khaṭīb*, commencing with the *khuṭba* of the next *‘id al-aḍḥā*, to insert into the *khuṭba* a cursing of the Fatimids. Ibn Sharaf preserved a copy of the portion that contained this curse and we have it even now.¹⁵

It is worth wondering again, as the medieval authors often do, how the same *khaṭīb* could, after perhaps years of calling upon God to bless the Fatimid caliphs, suddenly recite a string of curses against them, asking that God do the same. But this problem occurred often enough as we have seen. In the obituaries of famous preachers, their biographers might note, as in one example, that ‘Abd al-Karīm b. al-Ḥusayn Abu’l-Barakāt, a well-respected preacher, had said the *khuṭba* in Damascus for both the Abbasids and the Fatimids.¹⁶ And, as with

13 Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 254.

14 On this man see “Ibn Sharaf al-Qayrawānī” by Ch. Pellat in the *EI2*.

15 Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, pp. 277–78. The curse is fairly elaborate and full of invectives, given that al-Mu‘izz and the Zīrids were later to revert to the Fatimids on more than one occasion.

16 Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 5: 138.

Qirwāsh's *khaṭīb* in 401 and the example here for the Zīrids, there are many more like him.¹⁷

Most *khutbas* were never copied; and it is probable that on the vast majority of occasions the preacher spoke extemporaneously, perhaps embellishing a memorized sermon, or elements thereof. Famous *khaṭībs*—those noted for their rhetorical skills and eloquence—did in certain instances assemble collections of their work in book form, providing in turn models for others in the profession. However, it is difficult now to determine which of them might have been originally actually read in a mosque rather than composed solely for the book. Thus, while such books of sample sermons may have value as literature, they tell us little about historical events. Under such conditions, the survival of a verbatim copy of Qirwāsh's *khutba* is extraordinary.

We may have the copy of Qirwāsh's *khutba* because it was not merely a written text, which seems to have been a basic requirement for survival, but because copies of it circulated to the other cities of his domain. The same *khutba* was likely used in al-Anbār, Qaṣr and al-Madā'in, and perhaps elsewhere in towns unnamed in our reports. Obviously, agents of the Abbasid caliph obtained an example of it, which thus made it available to later historians such as the Baghdad-based Ibn al-Jawzī. The one portion of the first *khutba* in Egypt similarly survives because it began as a written text.

Within their own domain the Fatimids ruled a diverse population; their subjects belonged to a complete array of Islamic sects and schools. Even the chief justices, men who had ultimate responsibility for the *khutba* and the *khaṭībs* employed under their supervision, were frequently not Ismaili. Many judges were Maliki or Hanafi, in other words, Sunnīs.¹⁸ Yet a basic stipulation of holding such offices required acceptance of the *khutba* that was said in the name of the Fatimid caliph. Muslims attending Friday services anywhere within the empire would hear the preacher ask God to bestow His blessings on these Ismaili imams. The average citizen need accept what he heard only passively. Even so he could not escape at least a basic level of recognition of those who ruled over him without fleeing or hiding, and there is little evidence of that, notwithstanding the resistance in the Maghrib cited above. Many other parts of the Fatimid empire accepted their rule without protest. These caliphs enjoyed considerable support and evident loyalty from all their subjects. Willingness to

17 Not all *khaṭībs* so readily acquiesced. In 401 when the change of the *da'wa* first reached al-Anbār and was presented to the resident *khaṭīb*, rather than accept, he fled from there to Kūfa to avoid it (Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, 7: 251).

18 A notable example is Ibn Abī'l-'Awwām, mentioned later, who was Ḥanafī, but there were many others.

listen to that *khuṭba* would have constituted a minimal requirement for citizenship within their territory.

The Friday sermon is a required element in Islamic ritual; it is universally acknowledged by Muslims and performed in every weekly service as part of the community's congregational worship. Its origin is extremely old, going back to the practice of the Prophet, perhaps even earlier. Many of the provisions for it are common to the several *madhhabs*, including the Shī'a. The Fatimids were no exception.¹⁹ Typically, the ordinary sermon, which precedes prayers, is delivered by a professional preacher. Under the Fatimids *khaṭībs* (the Arabic plural is *khuṭabā'*) were government officials employed by the judiciary. Although the Fatimids continued to maintain the *da'wa*, its teaching and proselytizing organization, which was likewise a bureau of the government, the *khuṭba* was not the responsibility of the chief *dā'ī* or of his missionaries. Apparently the *dā'īs*, who as members of the *da'wa* were the agents for the religious appeal of the Fatimid imams, did not deliver such sermons. Thus there was a distinction in this regard between the *khaṭīb*, the preacher, and the *dā'ī*, even though both were agents of the government. One obvious difference is that preaching was considered a public activity open to a wide and diverse audience, whereas the *da'wa* was restricted to a smaller group consisting solely of those who had sworn an oath of religious devotion to the imam.

A late source reports that the salary allocated for individual *khaṭībs* was ten to twenty dinars per month,²⁰ which is a not inconsiderable amount, and indicates how important they were.²¹ A passage from a section of al-Qalqashandī's manual of chancery practice includes the text of a decree of appointment for a judge under the Fatimids. One paragraph in it is devoted to the role of the *khaṭībs* whose job he is to supervise:

The *khaṭībs* are the knights of the *minbars*, the tongues of those assembled, the spokesmen of the sacred rituals, and the leaders of the congregations. They are the emissaries of the heart to its lofty station by means of the ears, its purifier that makes hearts overcome its illnesses. His warfare drives away the satans of the communities when they commit aggression against them. He gives expression to guidance and uses his eloquence to the utmost to lead them rightly. He perfects the articulation

19 For some indication of Fatimid doctrine in regard to the *khuṭba*, see Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, part one, pp. 182–87, Eng. trans., vol. 1, pp. 227–33.

20 Maqrīzī, *Ittī'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 3: 340.

21 There is unfortunately little specific discussion of the appointment of individuals to the office of *khaṭīb*, the *khaṭāba*. But see *Orations of the Fatimid Caliph*, p. 6, n. 8, for some references.

of the letters so that they serve to enable their fulfillment and manifestation. His exhortation unties from the hardened eyes the knots that bind them and he calls to the rusted hearts until his cry unleashes their tears. He wears proudly the robes of high dignity so that *minbars* appear properly dressed because of him. His sermons nourish the souls when they come to him seeking assistance and appealing for help.²²

Just as they would have been in other regions of the Islamic world, these “knights of the *minbar*”, whether Ismaili or not, were, under the Fatimids, men of distinction and religious probity.

Other occasions for the *khuṭba* include the two *ʿīd* festivals: *ʿīd al-fiṭr*, breaking of the fast following the close of Ramaḍān, and *ʿīd al-aḍḥā* (also called *ʿīd al-naḥr*) the feast of sacrifice on the 10th of Dhu’l-Ḥijja. *Khuṭbas* may be a part of rituals for special purposes such as an eclipse, a drought, or an appeal for a *jihād*. A festival *khuṭba*, which, in contrast to that of Fridays, follows prayers, conforms to the occasion of it, featuring instructions to the congregation on the stipulations for either the *zakāt al-fiṭr* (alms due at the breaking of the fast) or for proper and acceptable sacrifice (i.e. what animals may be slaughtered and how).²³ This later type of *khuṭba* was, in Fatimid lands, the responsibility of the imam-caliph in person, who delivered it personally whenever possible. Luckily more examples of it, although even so few enough, survive.

With the addition of some dozen of this type, the material for analysis becomes that much richer, although not precisely of the same order as the common Friday sermon, which is therefore different in many respects. Even so the rhetoric in them and its use can tell us a great deal about how the imam-caliph sought to engage an audience often at odds with him. The festival sermon could thus also involve a contested arena, though seldom as dramatic as that of Qirwāsh. A major exception comes from early in the reign when the future caliph al-Qāʾim preached the sermon to a hostile Egyptian crowd during a military incursion. That text which survives provides some of the most vehement denunciations of Fatimid enemies to appear in the surviving literature.²⁴

22 This document was written by Qāḍī al-Fāḍil on behalf of the final Fatimid caliph al-ʿĀḍid for the appointment of a judge who is not named (Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 10: 424–434); the paragraph about the *khaṭīb* is found on pp. 432–33.

23 On the role of the *khuṭba* in Islamic ritual, see “*Khuṭba*” by A. J. Wensinck in the *EI2*, and for the Shīʿī (Fatimid) rules for it according to the imams, see the section on ritual prayer in Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān’s *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, particularly Arabic pp. 182–87, trans. pp. 227–32.

24 Quoted in part elsewhere in this volume. Full text of the Arabic with Eng. trans. *khuṭba* no. 1, in my *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, pp. 87–92 and 1–5 (Arabic section).

Many of the reports we have provide detailed descriptions of the festival itself, but not necessarily joined to a copy of the text, which rarely exists. The first of those in Egypt is a nice example of such detail.

On the day of fast-breaking [in 362], al-Muʿizz rode in procession to the *muṣallā* of Cairo that Jawhar had constructed for the *ʿid* prayer. ... al-Muʿizz approached in full attire²⁵ with his banners and coverings. He prayed with the people the prayer of the *ʿid* at full length and completely, reciting for the first, after the *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, “Has the story of the overwhelming event reached you” [Q 88: 1].²⁶ Following the recitation, he pronounced the *takbīr*, bowed for a long time, and prostrated at length. ... Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān relayed the *takbīr* from him. In the second he recited, after the *Fātiḥa*, the *Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā* [no. 93] and said the *takbīr* following the recitation. This was the prayer of his grandfather ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. He held the bowed position and the prostration in the second also at length. ... When he had completed the prayer, he mounted the *minbar* greeting the people on the right and the left. Next he unfurled the two banners that were on the *minbar* and he delivered the *khuṭba* with them to the front of him. On the highest step of the *minbar*, there was a heavy brocaded cushion for him to sit on between the two *khuṭbas*. He began the sermon with “In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate.” With him on the *minbar* were Jawhar, ‘Ammār b. Jaʿfar, and Shafīʿ, the bearer of the royal parasol. Then he commenced with “God is great, God is great”, opening with this. He preached so eloquently the people cried. His *khuṭba* was humble and submissive.

When he had completed the *khuṭba*, he departed with his troops, followed by his four sons wearing armor and helmets riding on horses in the finest attire. Two elephants preceded him.²⁷

The record for the reign of his grandson al-Ḥākim, to cite another example, is spotty and uncertain; no copies of what he said in any of his *khuṭbas* survive.

25 The attire of the imam on these occasions was highly important if only for ritual purposes. Note the hadith quoted from the imams by Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān in the *Daʿāʾim al-Islām* (trans. pp. 228 and 230) to the effect that the imams on Friday and the two festivals should wear their finest. Requirements of royal prestige obviously added another dimension.

26 On the recitation of this passage as well as other details of the *ʿid* prayer see the hadith of Jaʿfar al-Šādiq related by Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān in his *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, 1: 186, trans. 1: 232.

27 This account is from Maqrīzī's *Ittiʿāz* (Cairo, 1967, 1: 137–38) but ultimately from Ibn Zūlāq. In Maqrīzī's notes from Ibn Muyassar's *History of Egypt* (*Akhbār Miṣr*, A. F. Sayyid edition, pp. 159–60) the same passage appears, indicating that this work was his source for it.

Even so one account from the year 395 offers the following description of one such event:

The Mosque of Rāshida was fitted out and the caliph rode to it on the feast of fast-breaking, wearing a plain yellow robe with an indeterminate turban on his head, which had been wrapped on his head with a hanging tail and with a jewel between his eyes.²⁸ In front of him in the procession were six horses bearing saddles studded with jewels, six elephants and five giraffes. He prayed with the people the *ʿid* prayer and preached to them. In his *khuṭba* he cursed his enemy oppressor as was his due and those who would spread false rumors about him. The commander of the armies and the chief judge climbed the *minbar* with him.²⁹

Most reports of this type are important less for what they say about the giving of the *khuṭba* than for the information they provide about the procession to the place where it was given. Obviously, the ceremony on these occasions needed to be as elaborate as possible. The number and type of animals was one key element. From only a few years before, an account of the Zīrid ruler's procession to the *muṣallā* in 387 describes him as wearing the finest attire and being preceded by an elephant, two giraffes and "a gleaming white camel the like of which had never been seen before".³⁰ There are also descriptions of family members and other notables who walked behind the caliph and in what order. However, as interesting as these ceremonies might be, it is the language of the actual *khuṭba*, its rhetoric, that concerns us here. How, in a situation fraught with potential conflict between Sunnī and Shīʿī, did the speaker convey his message? Was the Shiism of the dynasty obvious and always present?

2 Rhetoric and Rhetorical Strategies in the Friday *khuṭba*

Whoever delivers the Friday *khuṭba*, or that of the two *ʿid* festivals, must assume the responsibility of employing terms and phrases aimed at a broad audience, the rhetoric, in other words, of public address. To understand fully what might have been involved, we ought to have a much larger sample of these sermons. But, although the evidence is not as plentiful as we might want, what we do have is all the more precious for its rarity. If we cannot expect

28 Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo*, p. 25.

29 Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 58.

30 Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, 1: 238–9.

definitive answers, we nonetheless have important material to investigate in the sermons that survive.

The Fatimid caliphs obviously always guarded carefully what they said, but perhaps no more so than on the occasions of the *khutbas* just described when they spoke before an audience that may well have included a vast array of their subjects, representing many different religious inclinations—Sunnīs and Shīʿīs of various kinds—and also a variety of ranks: men of the elites from both the military and the bureaucracy, merchants, religious scholars, and the common folk among them. These rulers knew well that the audience for such *khutbas* likely consisted both of their most loyal subjects and at the same time others less attached, possibly some who harbored grave doubts about them, even hostility. The surviving *khutba* by al-Qāʾim in Alexandria in 302 acknowledges such conditions forthrightly. The future imam even anticipated the resistance and possible enmity of the Egyptians to himself and his dynasty.³¹ The ceremonial *khutba* was open at least theoretically to all Muslims, not simply to Ismaili believers, and the person speaking had to take that fact into account in choosing his words. The sermon for the festival, moreover, was delivered at the *muṣallā*, which was always a large open space designed to accommodate the maximum number of worshipers at one time. The Friday *khutba* given inside a mosque naturally limited the size of the audience. No so that of the *ʿid*.

With crowds so large it is fair to ask how many could actually hear what was said. Even in a mosque that may have been a problem. The congregation was under strict rule to maintain absolute silence. A hadith on the authority of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq states clearly “When the imam stands up to deliver his sermon, it is obligatory for the congregation to observe complete silence.”³² Nevertheless, in the open air of the *muṣallā*,³³ surely only those close to the *minbar* heard the words of the imam directly. Perhaps the same was true in the largest congregational mosques. But this difficulty was in part overcome by having a series of voices relay the message out beyond the reach of the speaker’s own immediate circle.

It is likely that those allowed to be close to the imam had a special claim to this privilege, either through rank or proven loyalty. From the descriptions provided by eyewitnesses from the last phase of Fatimid rule, it is clear that

31 For more detail about what he said on that occasion see below.

32 Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, 1: 182, 186, trans. 1: 227–28, 231.

33 The Imam Jaʿfar had stated that “The prayers on the two festivals should be offered neither under a roof nor in a house. For the Messenger of God used to go out of [Madina] until the horizon would come into view [far away from habitation] and place his forehead on the bare earth”, Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, 185, trans. 230.

the protection of the caliph was taken seriously whenever he appeared in public. The occasion of the *khutba* required careful control of exactly who came into close proximity to him. One note indicates that no one outside of the governing elite was admitted to the ceremony without being vouchsafed by the chief *dā'ī*. That stipulation would appear to confine the scope of the public audience—that is, those from outside the government—to Ismailis. Only Ismailis would have had access to the *dā'ī*. This condition, however, may have applied more to the Friday *khutba* that the caliph gave in Ramaḍān in a mosque than to the festivals. In any case there is no comparable evidence about such a restriction from the earlier periods.

One important detail in two of the *khutbas* from North Africa, however, features a direct appeal by name to the Kutāma Berbers, who must therefore have constituted a major portion of the audience at the time. The first instance is particularly striking. It occurs in the *khutba* read to the army during Abū Yazīd's siege of al-Mahdiyya in Rajab 333 (March 945). In the name of al-Qā'im, the judge al-Marwadhī praises the Kutāma, whose forefathers had performed so gloriously both in keeping the rights of the Fatimid line safe when it had been forced into hiding and in fighting for its return to triumphal victory. "You were the cache where God placed this Muḥammadan, Fatimid, *mahdist* right [to the imamate] until He caused it to triumph". "You are," it goes on to say, "like the apostles of Jesus and the Anṣār of Muḥammad."³⁴ The appeal here is so specific we must conclude that the audience on that occasion was predominantly if not exclusively Kutāma Berber. The second instance is the festival sermon for the *īd al-fīṭr* of 336, again at al-Mahdiyya. In it al-Manṣūr addresses part of his remarks to the Kutāma, noting effusively God's favors to them and thus their special status in the Imam's eyes, and how pleased he is with them and their devotion to the Fatimid dynasty.

An element in the rhetorical strategy of these *khutbas* may have involved the use of phrases that a Sunnī audience would understand differently from the Shī'a. For example the commonly employed words '*Alī walīy Allāh*' ("Alī is the *walīy* of God"), which eventually appeared on all Fatimid coins and is quite standard in Shī'a discourse of every type, is readily taken by Sunnīs to mean "Alī is the friend of God". Ordinarily, because this sense of the word *walīy*, which is perfectly valid for it, is not objectionable, it causes no resistance or hostility on their part. For the Shī'a, however, it means more than 'friend'. 'Alī was, in their view the 'guardian' (*walīy*, in a different sense) of God's community on earth. He was thus the agent of God with exclusive authority to act as regent for the Muslims; he is their guardian.

34 *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, 94.

One good example, albeit by mistake, of how Sunnīs might misread the words of a Fatimid *khuṭba* occurs with the line in Qirwāsh's Friday sermon about God, "... who, by His light, caused the rising of the sun of truth from the west. ..." Islamic messianic speculation, even among Sunnīs, regarded the signal for the end of time as the rising of the sun from its place of setting, in other words of time being made to reverse course or to cease altogether. With the Shī'a, in expectation of the return of this or that imam, who had temporarily gone into occultation, such speculations are more pronounced. The doctrine of several early Shī'ī sects included a rising of the imam from the west, from where he will restore true Islam and reclaim his rightful position as head of the Muslim community. The Fatimids, who had first attained power in the Maghrib, i.e. in the west, naturally made the most of this concept. They were, beginning with al-Mahdī, but subsequently collectively, the embodiment of such messianic aspirations. With their rising to the imamate in the westernmost region of the Islamic realm, these speculations had become a reality. But, in at least one major source that reports these opening words of Qirwāsh's *khuṭba*—Ibn al-Athīr's early 7th/13th century universal history, *al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rikh*—some copies have changed the word 'west' to 'Arabs', which in Arabic script is quite easy: instead of *al-gharb* (the west), read *al-'arab* (the Arabs), the difference is a dot above the Arabic letter غ or ع.³⁵ Thus the key phrase would have the "sun of truth rising from the Arabs", which would sound quite reasonable to a Sunnī audience.

To bear witness or testify that Muḥammad was the prophet and messenger of God is a standard feature of the *khuṭba* in general. Most of the attributes ascribed to Muḥammad in Fatimid *khuṭbas*, moreover, agreed well with such statements in those not by them. What is different and uniquely Fatimid is the reference to him as the "grandfather", e.g. of the current caliph, or, as it most often appears, as "our grandfather", as in the invocation of God's blessings on "our grandfather" (*jaddinā*). The meaning, of course, is ancestor or forefather, but it carries a special connotation in conjunction with references to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who is always called "our father" (*abūnā, abīnā*).

3 Blessings and Curses in the Fatimid *khuṭba*

References and characterizations of 'Alī are particularly important as a sign of the ancestral lineage of the Fatimids and of the Shī'ī assertion of legitimacy

35 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rikh*, 9: 223. This edition, in fact, prefers the reading *al-'arab*, listing *al-gharb* in the notes as an alternate given by one of the manuscripts.

for its imamate. ‘Alī bears the title Commander of the Believers, which, for the Shī‘a, applies to him alone among the companions of the Prophet since they do not recognize any of the others as valid successors to the imamate. In his position as heir to the Prophet, both physically and spiritually, he carries also the title of Legatee (in Arabic *waṣī*). In Qirwāsh’s *khuṭba* he is called the Lord of the Legatees (*sayyid al-waṣīyīn*). Another appellation denotes his close family relationship to Muḥammad, which for the Shī‘a means, in reference to ‘Alī, brother. For them the Prophet had adopted him as his own brother. He was, moreover, in the same position as had been Aaron with respect to his brother Moses. The Prophet had stated, according to a hadith of special importance to the Shī‘a, that, “‘Alī is to me as Aaron was to Moses.”

Here follow some examples from the *khuṭbas*:

and bless the first to respond to him [i.e. the Prophet], ‘Alī, the Commander of the Believers and Lord of the Legatees, the establisher of excellence and mercy, the pillar of knowledge and wisdom, the root of the noble and righteous tree generated from the sacred and pure trunk. And [blessings be] on his successors, the lofty branches of that same tree, and on what comes from it: the fruit that grows there.³⁶

God bless our grandfather, Muḥammad, the guide to the shining path, and our father, the Commander of the Believers, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, his brother and son of his paternal uncle, whom he sanctioned for the position of executor, and the chaste imams among the descendants of both, the clear evident proofs of God to His creatures.³⁷

And bless, O God, our father, the Commander of the Believers, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who held the place with respect to him that had Aaron with Moses, the one who spoke to God.³⁸

From a brief mention of a ritual of mutual cursing which is apparently what is taking place in Qur’an 3: 61 (“If any one disputes this with you after the knowledge has come to you, say, ‘Come, let us gather our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves; then let us pray and invoke the curse of God on those who lie’”), an entire tradition developed around the implied story of Muḥammad having brought under his cloak on that occasion

36 *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, Qirwāsh’s *khuṭba* (no. 11).

37 *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, Qirwāsh’s *khuṭba* (no. 11).

38 *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, *Khuṭba* of al-Āmir (no. 12).

his immediate family members. They were the *aṣḥāb al-kisā'* (the Companions of the Cloak). The question then became who exactly belonged to this set. For the Shī'a this has never been much of a question since they include only the Prophet, 'Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. The non-Shī'a dispute the matter and they have alternate interpretations of the tradition.³⁹ However, in the Fatimid *khuṭbas*, as one would expect, the Shī'i point of view prevails, as in the following passages from them.

O God, bless Your servant and Your messenger with a perpetually perfect blessing, increase him with an honor to his honor and a nobility to his nobility. Bless also all of the Companions of the Cloak (*aṣḥāb al-kisā'*), the pure ones, the immaculates: 'Alī, the Commander of the Believers, Fāṭima the radiant, mistress of the women of the two worlds, and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the two most noble and most righteous, and [bless] the rightly guided imams among the progeny of al-Ḥusayn, the luminaries of guidance, the full moons of the darkness, the masters of mankind, friends of the Most Merciful, the proofs of times, and pillars of the faith.⁴⁰

the rightly guided (*mahdist*) imams among his noble and chaste progeny who have been chosen for the caliphate and approved for the imamate, confirming their proof in the testament of the messenger, making obedience to them necessary in the revelation, after His conferring excellence on them over the world through the parentage of Muḥammad, the lord of the messengers, and 'Alī, the most excellent of the legatees, those whose mother was the mistress of women, the fifth of the Companions of the Cloak.⁴¹

The third caliph al-Manṣūr speaks of Fāṭima as "the radiant, mistress of the women of the two worlds" or, "the radiant, mistress of the women of the two worlds," and in yet another *khuṭba*, in reference to his own father and grandfather, the imams al-Qā'im and al-Mahdī, he calls her "Fāṭima, the radiant virgin,⁴² your mother". In a sermon by the fourth caliph al-Mu'izz the rightly guiding imams are "those whose mother was the mistress of women, the

39 For additional information, see the articles in the *EI2* on "mubāhala" by W. Schmucker, "Ahl al-kisā'" by A. S. Tritton, and "Ahl al-bayt" by I. Goldziher, C. van Arendonk and A. S. Tritton.

40 From the *khuṭba* by al-Manṣūr on the 'īd al-fiṭr 335 (*Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, no. 5).

41 From the *khuṭba* by al-Mu'izz on the 'īd al-naḥr 341 (*Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, no. 9).

42 'Virgin' here means 'immaculate' (*al-Baṭūl*), untainted by menstrual impurity.

fifth of the Companions of the Cloak'. Similar characterizations appear in the *khuṭbas* of al-Āmir well over a century later.⁴³

In Fatimid era *khuṭbas* both Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are cited as imams and members of the five Companions of the Cloak, although they make quite clear that the imamate continued after them solely among the descendants of Ḥusayn. Some examples:

al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the two most noble and most righteous, and [bless] the rightly guided imams among the progeny of al-Ḥusayn, the luminaries of guidance, the full moons of the darkness, the masters of mankind, friends of the Most Merciful, the proofs of times, and pillars of the faith.⁴⁴

al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the two lords of the youth among the people of paradise; and the imams from the progeny of al-Ḥusayn, the chaste ones, the remainder of the messenger of God and his fruit, his two heirs, his proof to the servants, the mountains of religion, lords of the believers and saints of the worlds.⁴⁵

Clearly the imams after al-Ḥusayn are his offspring, not those of al-Ḥasan. However the individual imams are seldom mentioned by name in the surviving *khuṭbas*, even those prior to the period of concealment which commenced with Ismā'īl, the son of Ja'far al-Šādiq, or with his son Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, who was actually the first never to have appeared in public. In Qirwāsh's sermon they are in all simply "the righteous imams, the best and most excellent, those of them that stood forth and appeared and those of them that were concealed and hidden". In the first *khuṭba* by al-Manṣūr he calls his grandfather al-Mahdī, the "son of the Rightly Guided Ones (*al-Mahdiyyīn*), the noble son of the most noble" without going further into the matter. That seems to have been, to judge from these *khuṭbas*, the preferred policy for public pronouncements. Only in a *khuṭba* of al-Āmir are any of them cited by name. There he refers to the imams prior to al-Mahdī as "Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-Ābidīn, and Muḥammad b. 'Alī Bākir 'Ulūm al-Dīn, and Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Šādiq al-Amīn, and the true imam Ismā'īl, and Muḥammad his son, possessor of the

43 "And [bless] our mother Fāṭima, the radiant and chaste"; "[Bless] our mother Fāṭima, the radiant, nurturer of the prophecy singled out for revelation and nobility of character and honor".

44 From the *khuṭba* by al-Manṣūr on the *ʿid al-fiṭr* 335 (*Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, no. 5).

45 *Khuṭba* of al-Manṣūr on the *ʿid al-aḏḥā* in the year 335 (*Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, no. 6).

nobility of the authentic caliphate, and those who had all excellences and superiority, and [bless] the imams who were concealed from their enemy who opposed in his actions, all of them in like manner,” whom he contrasts with “the piercing stars of truth, the suns rising from the places of setting.” The latter he names one by one starting with al-Mahdī.

However, it was evidently customary practice to cite each of the preceding imams by name back from the current caliph to al-Mahdī, the founder of the dynasty (but not further back). Ibn al-Ṭuwayr a source from near the end of the Fatimid era suggests as much. In one of the two *khutbas* of al-Āmir, this caliph lists all of those who came before him from al-Mahdī through al-Mustaʿlī, his own father. All those up to the reign of al-Ḥākim are named likewise in the *khutba* of Qirwāsh. Since the full name of each caliph contained the word Allāh, as in al-Manṣūr bi-Naṣr Allāh or al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, in the sermon where the name appears as part of a request addressed directly to God for Him to bless each of the imams so named, the proper form requires a personal pronoun, thus al-Manṣūr bi-Naṣrika (“The One who is victorious through Your support”, rather than “The One who is victorious through the support of God”) or al-Ḥākim bi-Amrika (“The Ruler by Your Command” rather than “The Ruler by the Command of God”).

From the medieval period until now it has been customary to call the dynasty of Ismaili imams the Fatimids. But the history of this term is not yet clear. Did, for example, the earliest caliphs of this line refer to themselves by that name? The Spanish scholar Maribel Fierro published in 1996 an important study of this problem and of the use in general of the terms *al-fāṭimī* (Fatimid) and *al-fāṭimiyyūn* (the Fatimids).⁴⁶ Although she carefully surveyed many of the major sources, she found little evidence of these terms in works written by adherents of the dynasty. Further investigation by others since has turned up more information. These terms do, in fact, appear but more so, and more often, in the later phases of this rule. By the end of the dynasty it was fairly common to call it *al-dawla al-fāṭimiyya* (“the Fatimid state” or “the Fatimid dynasty”), and thus later authors grew quite accustomed to this term.

Nevertheless, it is strikingly rare in the earliest documents produced by those who held positions of authority in the government, including most particularly the imams in their public pronouncements and declarations. The *khutba* would have been a natural occasion for its use. Yet only one of those we now have contains the word in a form that suggests an appropriate meaning. In a *khutba* that al-Qāʾim dictated for his chief judge to read to the army in 333, while al-Mahdiyya remained under the siege of the Kharijite forces of Abū

46 “On al-fāṭimī and al-Fāṭimiyyūn,” *JSAI* 20 (1996): 130–161.

Yazīd, his words addressed to the Kutāma appeal to them as the depository where God put the rights of the Fatimid line until it could be revealed once again. “You were the cache,” it states, “where God placed this Muḥammadan, Fāṭimid, *mahdist* right [to the imamate] until He caused it to triumph and raised it high again.” The Arabic reads for the key terms: *al-ḥaqq al-muḥammadī al-fāṭimī al-mahdī*. Therefore it is certainly technically correct to say that the Fatimids called themselves “Fatimid” from quite early. It would not have been used in this fashion otherwise. The terms *al-imām al-fāṭimī* and *al-fāṭimīyyīn* also appear in early pro-Fatimid poetry.⁴⁷

Significantly, however, it appears in this one instance joined by two other adjectives, ‘Muḥammadan’ and ‘mahdist’ (*al-muḥammadī* and *al-mahdī*), either or both of which have the same claim to apply to the dynasty. The latter term *al-mahdī* or its plural *al-mahdiyyūn/al-mahdiyyīn*, moreover, was, to judge from the *khuṭbas* and other surviving documents, the standard way these early Fatimids referred to themselves. The phrase *khulafāʾ al-rāshidīn al-mahdiyyīn* “the rightly guided *mahdist* caliphs” was a part of the very first Fatimid *khuṭba*. Al-Qāʾim in 302 asked for God’s blessings on *al-khulafāʾ al-rāshidīn al-mahdiyyīn*. In al-Manṣūr’s first *khuṭba* he uses the words *ibn al-mahdiyyīn* “son of the *mahdis*” for his grandfather. Later in the same sermon he cites *al-hudāt al-mahdiyyīn* (“the rightly guided guides”). In a subsequent *khuṭba* he speaks of al-Mahdī as *wārith faḍl al-aʾimma al-mahdiyyīn min ābāʾihi al-khulafāʾ al-rāshidīn* “the inheritor of the excellence of the *mahdist* imams from his forefathers, the rightly guided caliphs.” In the same sermon he calls al-Mahdī “the distinguished offspring of the rightly guided imams” (*najīb al-aʾimma al-mahdiyyīn*). The phrase *al-aʾimma al-mahdiyyīn* becomes standard in subsequent *khuṭbas*. And it appears regularly in many contexts—documents and *khuṭbas*—throughout the Fatimid period.⁴⁸

Many of the *khuṭbas* feature condemnations of various enemies of the Fatimids. The very earliest text requests God to “grant him [the Imam] victory over Your apostate enemies (*aʿdāʾika al-māriqīn*), and heal through him the breasts of the believers, conquer through him the easts of the land and its wests as You promised him, support him against the iniquitous rebels.” Those who oppose the Fatimid cause are in fact enemies of God. In the earliest sermon by al-Manṣūr he says: “Bring down upon his [meaning his father, al-Qāʾim’s] enemies, in the east and the west, on land and on the sea, the most severe assaults and retributions that You have done or caused to occur with

47 See al-Yaʿlāwī, *al-Adab bi-Ifriqiya fiʾl-ʾahd al-fāṭimī*, pp. 37 and 139.

48 One other term that might have been considered is “Ismaili” (*Ismāʿilī*). However, it appears nowhere in the *khuṭbas* and is exceedingly rare in Fatimid era literature as a whole.

any of those who were enemies of Yours, with destructive misfortune, dishonoring exemplary punishments; destroy them by annihilation and burn them in the fire of hell.”

The first *khutba* by al-Qā'im deals with specific dynastic opponents, here the Abbasids and the Umayyads. Responding to the situation in which he was at the time having invaded Abbasid Egypt, al-Qā'im castigates both the rulers in Baghdad and also their predecessors, the Umayyads. Although he does not say so in this *khutba*, descendants of the Umayyads he denounces were still governing Spain and portions of far western North Africa. They thus remained to be overcome and defeated just like the Abbasids.

Here are a few key items of invective in this *khutba*:⁴⁹

The lying apostate community, reneging on its intentions, deviating from the command of their Lord, suppose that it has been correct in what it claims about its caliphs whom they insist are the caliphs of the Lord of the worlds, such as a youth not yet mature, like the boy lacking knowledge, or like the child who, according to their claim, governs Islam.

So much for the Abbasids. For the Umayyads he names specific names.

O God, curse Your enemies, the people who disobey You among the ancients and the later comers: ... and the tyrants of the tribe of Umayya and tribe of Marwān, and Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, who took from Your servants the rightful share of dinars and dirhams, and waged war with them against the Emigrants and Helpers. Curse 'Amr b. al-ʿĀṣ, ... [Here he lists fourteen more], and those who were faithless and deviant, the apostates, transgressors and heretics, and those who put off [acknowledging 'Alī's succession] and those who refrained from going to war under the Commander of the Believers.

It should be noted that this list, by including the names of certain Umayyads or Umayyad supporters and not others, suggests that the enemies named are worse than those not mentioned. Al-Qā'im likely knew what he was doing. He did not for example explicitly condemn Abū Bakr or 'Umar, the two earliest caliphs whom the Shi'a generally castigate vehemently, or the third caliph 'Uthmān, who was himself an Umayyad and usually considered an enemy. To invoke the curse of God on any of these three in Egypt at the time of this *khutba* would have provoked a strongly negative reaction. In contrast the men

49 For the full text see below in the following chapter.

named, who al-Qā'im likens to a set of enemies cited in the Qur'an (the nation of Noah, 'Ād, Thamūd, and the Associates of al-Rass), were not even remotely as well regarded.

4 Conclusions

The public face of Shiism, as it appears in the few sermons to reach us from the Fatimid period, suggests that, even in situations fraught with partisan conflict and the potential for violent opposition, the preacher held to a fairly clear message. Thus despite some evidence of caution and the use of rhetorical strategies designed to bridge sharp divides of doctrine, the words spoken, most particularly in the request for God to bestow His favor on the Ismaili imams, consistently upheld the Shī'ī position against that of the Sunnīs and of the Fatimids of North Africa and Egypt in direct opposition to the Abbasids of Baghdad. The enemies of a dynasty could be castigated, even cursed, from the pulpit; asking for God to bless one party might be paired with another request for Him to condemn the other. And one individual *khaṭīb* may have uttered sentiments of support or those of rejection and aversion, both for and against the same ruler barely more than a week apart. But it is less obvious that he managed the switch on his own rather than depend on a precise written text in all likelihood produced by an authority higher than himself, which was handed to him for the occasion. Written copies are, moreover, apparently a key to the survival of any of the sermons. If a *khuṭba* did not originate as a written document, no exact notion of what was said in it has come down to us. That rule applies also to those by the caliphs.

Appendix: Qirwāsh's *khuṭba*

God is great, God is great; there is no god but God.

For Him is the praise of those who are, by His light, above the floods of fury, who, by His power, burst asunder the pillars supporting idols, who, by His light, cause the rising of the sun of truth from the west, who, by His justice, blot out the tyranny of injustice and break, by His might, the back of inequity so that matters revert to their original state and truth returns to its owners. Distinct in His essence, alone in His attributes, manifest in His signs, solitary in His indications, time passes by Him not so that the seasons preceded Him and forms do not resemble Him so that places contain Him. Eyes do not see Him so that tongues can describe Him. His existence is prior to all existences;

His goodness surpasses all goodness. His oneness is fixed in every intellect; His presence exists in every vision. I praise Him with what is required of His grateful friends, the highest of praise for Him. I implore Him to do as He wills and wants. I acknowledge about Him what His most sincere friends and His witnesses acknowledge. I bear witness that there is no god but God, alone, no partner does He have; this is testimony unadulterated with the filth of idolatry or afflicted with delusions of doubt. It is free of deceit; it consists solely of obedience and submission.

I bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant and His messenger, may God bless him. He chose him and selected him for the guidance of the people and for the upholding of the truth so that the message and guidance away from error arrives. The populace was at that time heedless and astray from the path of truth because of following personal whims. He saved them from the worship of idols and commanded them to obey the most Merciful so that the proofs of God and His signs were upheld. He brought to perfection his words by the delivery of them,⁵⁰ may God bless him, and bless the first to respond to him, ‘Alī, the Commander of the Faithful and Lord of the Legatees, the establisher of excellence and mercy, the pillar of knowledge and wisdom, the root of the noble and righteous tree generated from the sacred and pure trunk. And [blessings be] on his successors, the lofty branches of that same tree, and on what comes from it: the fruit that grows there.

O people, “fear God with the piety He is due” [Q 3: 102]; seek His reward: beware of His punishment. You have seen what was recited to you in His book. God the exalted said: “the day We summon all the people by their imam” [Q 17: 71] and He said: “O you who believe, obey God and obey the messenger and obey those with command among you” [Q 4: 59]. So beware, beware, O people, it is as if the present world were leading you to the next. Its conditions have become clear, the pathway looms up, interrogation is its reckoning and entry is according to its book: “thus whosoever does an atom’s weight of good he will see it; whosoever does an atom’s weight of bad he will see it” [Q 99: 7–8]. Climb aboard the ship of your salvation before you flounder; “hold fast to the rope of God altogether, do not scatter” [Q 3: 103]. Know that He knows what is in your souls, so beware of Him.⁵¹ Return to God with the best of returns, respond to the summoner⁵² who is the gateway of compliance, before “you yourself should say, Ah, woe is me, I neglected my duty to God and am now among those who scoffed; or should say, alas, if God had guided me I would

⁵⁰ Qur’an 6: 115.

⁵¹ Qur’an 2: 235.

⁵² Qur’an 46: 31.

have been among the God-fearing; or should say, upon seeing the punishment, O that I could have another chance that I might be among those who do good" [Q 39: 56–58]. Be on your guard against heedlessness and indifference before that remorse, and the sorrow, the hoping for another chance, the begging for redemption, and "it is too late to escape" [Q 38: 3]. Obey your imam and you will be well guided; cling to the holder of the covenant and you will be led on the right way. He has shown you knowledge by which you are led rightly and the path by which you are guided. May God make us and you those who follow His wish; He makes faith his provision. He inspires him with his piety and good sense. May God the most magnificent grant us and you forgiveness, and for all Muslims the same.

[Then he sat and rose again and said:]

Praise be to God who is the most glorious and who is the creator of mankind, who determines the divisions though He is [Himself] matchless in eternity and perpetuity, who causes the dawns to break, who creates phantoms and makes spirits. I praise Him as the first and the last. I testify that He is the outward and the inner. I seek His aid as the divine power. I request His support as the victorious guardian. And I testify that there is no god but God, alone, who has no associate, and that Muḥammad is His servant and His messenger, this testimony from one who affirms His absolute oneness in true faith and who confesses to His divinity willingly, knowing the demonstration of what He summons to and understanding the truth of the proofs for Him. O God, bless your radiant guardian and your greatest friend, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the father of the rightly guided imams. O God, bless the two pure grandsons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn and the righteous imams, the best and most excellent, those of them that stood forth and appeared and those of them that were concealed and hidden.⁵³ O God, bless the imam who is "The one rightly guided by You" [*al-Mahdī bi-llāh*], and who conveyed Your commandments and made manifest Your proofs and who took up the cause of justice in Your lands as the guide for Your servants. O God, bless "The one who takes charge by Your order" [*al-Qā'im bi-amr Allāh*] and "The one who is victorious through Your support" [*al-Manṣūr bi-naṣr Allāh*], these two who expended themselves for Your satisfaction and waged holy war on Your enemies. O God, bless "The one who makes strong Your religion" [*al-Mu'izz li-dīn Allāh*], warrior in Your cause who revealed Your authentic signs and prominent proofs. O God, bless "The one who is mighty because of You" [*al-'Azīz bi-llāh*] by whom the land is cleared

53 This is a reference to those imams in the Ismaili line—usually said to be three between Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ja'far al-Šādiq and al-Mahdī—who went into hidden to avoid Abbasid persecution.

and by whom the servants are guided. O God, extend all of Your blessings and the most perfect of Your favors to our lord and master, the imam of the age, fortress of the faith, head of the Aliid *da'wa* and prophetic religion, Your servant and guardian on Your behalf, al-Manṣūr Abū 'Alī al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh, Commander of the Believers, just as You blessed his rightly guided forefathers and as You ennobled Your saints who were rightly guided. O God, bear in mind what You have appointed him to do and safeguard him in what You observe of him. Favor him in what You bring to him; support his armies; raise high his banners in the east of the land and its west, for indeed You are capable of all things.

[Source: Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, 7: 248–51; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4: 224–27]

Portrayals of the Umayyads in Official Pronouncements and in *Da‘wa* Literature

Anti-Umayyad polemic occurs often in Fatimid writings, although most commonly aimed at the enemies of ‘Alī and the *Ahl al-bayt* in the time long before any confrontation between the two later caliphates. Nevertheless the same or similar attitude of hostility carries over.¹ A *khuṭba* by al-Qā’im condemns “the tyrants of the tribe of Umayya” as “evil doers and their associates”. Some of this rhetoric is generic, a broad denunciation of the Umayya clan. Thus, in general, the Spanish caliphate appears somewhat distant to the immediate concerns of the Fatimids and their *da‘wa* perhaps because it was represented in North Africa by anti-Fatimid proxies, particularly the local Maliki ‘ulamā’, rather than the Umayyads themselves. Even so there are several cases that specifically attack the Umayyads of Spain. Some important material comes from Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *Majālis*. Another essential passage is by al-Kirmānī who rebukes the Umayyad who resides in al-Andalus for an impure lineage due to his being from the Tree of Zaqqūm and for displaying a contempt for the regulations of God by promoting among his subjects behavior not that of the Prophet. An earlier authority quotes a line of poetry that states: “I had hoped that I would die and not witness atop the *minbars* a preacher for Umayya.” There is more, much of which has yet to be collected but can and should now be brought out for discussion.

From the start it should be clear that the Fatimid attitude toward the Umayyads, including those in Spain, was based on the long record of animosity between rival clans of the Quraysh and that it had such deep roots in Islamic history that the eventual confrontation between the two caliphates in the western Mediterranean constituted almost a footnote, still both inexorable and unavoidable.

On the Fatimid side, the major issue was likewise lineage, although, with them, it was the nobility and sacrality of their own ancestry that counted; they were the descendants of prophets, most particularly of both Muḥammad and ‘Alī. From the first public proclamations, the Fatimids never let an occasion go

¹ “Fatimid Portrayals of the Umayyads in Official Pronouncements and in *Da‘wa* Literature” in M. Ali de Unzaga, ed. *Fatimids and Umayyads: Competing Caliphates*. (forthcoming in *Competing Caliphates*, a volume of conference proceedings).

without proudly claiming their membership in the family of Islam's prophet and of his divinely chosen successor. They belonged to the line of those imams of true righteousness, the upholders of God's religion. The rhetoric of this claim is important here as marking an essential contrast to the words their spokesmen used to deprecate and demean the opposition, among which were the Umayyads then reigning in al-Andalus.

The reluctance of the Fatimids, commencing with the first caliph and continuing to the end of the dynasty, to provide the names of their immediate genealogical predecessors, those who would have occupied the gap of more than a hundred years between al-Mahdī and Ismā'īl b. Ja'far al-Šādiq, the last of the much earlier line, opened them to a host of charges of false lineage and fraudulent descent. Eventually the Abbasids would make this apparent weakness a major issue in their own polemic against the Fatimids. However, nothing in the historical record suggests that the Fatimids agreed, even hesitantly, to hedge their claim to the imamate. It was theirs through descent from the Prophet. The very first Friday *khutba* of al-Mahdī ran in part as follows:

O God, bless Your servant and Your deputy, the one responsible for the affairs of Your servants in Your land, the servant of God, Abū Muḥammad, the imam al-Mahdī bi-llāh, Commander of the Believers, just as You blessed his forefathers Your deputies, the rightly guided guides (the *mahdis*), who have discharged the duty of truth and in regard to it acted justly. O God, and just as You chose him for Your guardianship and for Your deputyship (*li-khalīfatika*) and You made him the defense of Your religion and its foundation, and for Your creation a refuge and sanctuary, so grant him victory over Your apostate enemies, and heal through him the breasts of the believers. Conquer through him the easts of the land and its wests as You promised him; support him against the iniquitous rebels, O God of creation, Lord of the worlds.²

The Fatimid side thus had no hesitation about its righteous claims, its sacred lineage, and God's favor. It, and it alone, was the source of piety and true Islam. Many more examples of public statements from the first decades of Fatimid rule, as in the *khutba* above, could be brought in here, but they all merely confirm what was said in this one.

How the Fatimids depicted those who would deny their claims and uphold an opposing doctrine—a doctrine Ismaili authorities regarded as heretical—became an important aspect of Ismaili and Fatimid literature,

2 Walker, *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*), p. 17.

with a considerable number of works composed to serve such a purpose. Much, if not most of it, however, concerns either specific individuals or various smaller sectarian groups. The Abbasids were already a major enemy from long before the Fatimid caliphate and that rivalry continued without let up to the close of the caliphate in 1171. It naturally occupied much of this literature. The Umayyads of Spain, because the direct confrontation was not as long and because it occurred mainly in the far west, where Fatimid aspirations for expansion were significantly less pressing than the east which they obviously hoped to return to and conquer, seemed to have attracted by comparison less concern. Still some important material indicates Fatimid attitudes toward these western enemies.

From quite early under the Fatimid caliphate we have a particularly interesting document in which the future caliph al-Qā'im speaks for his dynasty on the *Īd al-fiṭr*, 302 (April 19, 915) at Alexandria. He was then leading the Fatimid army during its first invasion of Egypt. As our source reports: "And when it was the feast of fast-breaking and al-Qā'im, who was then staying in Alexandria, he, God bless him, went out and prayed the prayer of the feast with the people for the year just mentioned; and he delivered the *khutba* of the feast at Alexandria. He said."³ Here follows a verbatim record of his sermon on that occasion. It is the very first by the Fatimids to survive in complete form and, because it is so early, it deserves special attention for what it might say about the issues and concerns of these rulers, most especially as al-Qā'im is in this instance addressing what we presume is largely a hostile Sunnī audience. Even so his sermon boldly decries the sinful regime of the Abbasids using fairly explicit language to condemn them.

You accuse me of being a rebel bent on spreading heresy. You witnessed my effort and fighting and that God is my supporter and helper. I observe the inhabitants of the cities; they pray against me in their mosques. God, the Great and Glorious, is the One who questions their words: 'they think they stand on something but they are instead liars' [Q 58: 18]. The lying apostate community, reneging on its intentions,⁴ deviating from the command of their Lord, suppose that it has been correct in what it claims about its caliphs whom they insist are the caliphs of the Lord of the worlds, such as a youth not yet mature, or like the boy lacking

³ Idrīs, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, ed. al-Yaʿlāwī, p. 198.

⁴ Q 23: 66.

knowledge, or like the child who, according to their claim, governs Islam.⁵ And yet among them a woman brings them wine from every valley and region on the backs of horses and in the bottoms of ships. As God the Exalted said: 'They take their priests and monks as lords besides God' [Q 9: 31]. They spend the funds of orphans and the poor, wrongly on their part and unjustly, for singing lute players, skilled *ṭanbūr*ists and *mi'zaf*ists,⁶ and talented drummers. You have seen their governors of cities, how one of them mounts the wooden planks of the Prophet's *minbar* to preach to the people but he does not preach to himself. Instead, he descends from that position and inquires of those in that land for male and female singers, *ṭanbūr*ists, *'ūd* players, thieves, short change artists, and shavers of weights so that those can be brought to serve him. God curses the unjust and prepares for them a blazing fire.⁷ That man is someone who neither commands the good nor prohibits the bad.

To this point he has singled out the Abbasids as might be expected since they constituted his principal opposition both at large in the Islamic world and in Egypt where he would eventually be forced into retreat by troops sent there from the east. However, later in the same *khutba*, he concludes his tirade against the enemies of the Fatimids with the following:

O God, grant victory to our troops and armies, in the eastern regions of the earth and in the western, on its land and its sea, its plains and its mountains. O God, curse Your enemies, the people who disobey You among the ancients and the later comers: the nation of Noah in the two worlds⁸—truly they were an impious group⁹—and 'Ād and Thamūd, and the Associates of al-Rass, and the tyrants of the tribe of Umayya and tribe of Marwān,¹⁰ and Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān,¹¹ who took from Your servants the rightful share¹² of dinars and dirhams, and waged war with them against the Emigrants and Helpers. Curse 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ, 'Utba b. Abī

5 He refers to the Abbasid caliph of the time, al-Muqtadir, who had ascended to the throne in 295/908 at the age of thirteen, the youngest to do so.

6 Players of the long- (*ṭanbūr*) and short- (*mi'zaf*) necked lutes.

7 Borrowed from Q 33: 64.

8 This is a reference to Q 37: 79.

9 Q 51: 46.

10 The Marwānids were a branch of the Umayyad clan.

11 Founder of the Umayyad dynasty.

12 Q 4: 128.

Sufyān,¹³ al-Walīd b. 'Utba,¹⁴ al-Walīd b. Abī Mu'ayt,¹⁵ and that lizard son of a lizard—namely Marwān b. al-Ḥakam¹⁶—and al-Mughīra b. Shu'ba,¹⁷ Ziyād b. Summayya,¹⁸ 'Ubaydallāh b. Ziyād,¹⁹ al-Sulamī,²⁰ Dhu'l-Kalā',²¹ Ḥawshabā,²² al-Ash'ath b. Qays,²³ 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān,²⁴ al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf,²⁵ 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muljam,²⁶ and those who were faithless and deviant, the apostates, transgressors, and heretics, and those who put off [acknowledging 'Alī's succession] and those who refrained from going to war under the Commander of the Believers [i.e. 'Alī].

As he seems to indicate, the list features heavily the Umayyads or their partisans, namely, as he puts it, “the tyrants of the tribe of Umayya and tribe of Marwān.” That he would make such an elaborate and detailed castigation of them in this context possibly suggests something of interest for the theme of the present conference. If the Umayyads had long ceased to exist and had in effect disappeared altogether rather than being still active in a region where they could continue to threaten Fatimid rule, would he have bothered to attack them? One answer is that the Shī'a never stopped recalling the past injustices of the Umayyad clan. Even if there were no Umayyads in al-Andalus when this *khutba* was given, al-Qā'im might still have used it to damn those who were responsible for years of oppression and torment. But it is also noteworthy that he does not mention the Umayyads of his own time and the question for the present purposes is to find out where and when the conflict between the two rival caliphates in the west becomes specifically polemical, one side against the other and thus to determine through public pronouncements and the

13 Brother of Mu'āwiya, who was on the side of 'Ā'isha at the Battle of the Camel and of his brother at Ṣiffin.

14 Governor of Madīna on behalf of his uncle Mu'āwiya; he used to harass al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī.

15 al-Walīd b. 'Utba b. Abī Mu'ayt, half brother of 'Uthmān via his mother, he was one of those who sought to avenge the blood of 'Uthmān and blame 'Alī.

16 He was the first caliph of the Marwānid branch of the Umayyad dynasty.

17 One of Mu'āwiya's governors of Kūfa but not an Umayyad.

18 Ziyād b. Abīhi, the Umayyad commander in Iraq and killer of the Shī'ī hero Ḥujr b. 'Adī.

19 Son of the previous man. He was governor of Iraq on behalf of the Umayyads.

20 Abu'l-A'war 'Amr b. Sufyān al-Sulamī, a close ally of Mu'āwiya and a general in his army, he was excoriated by 'Alī accordingly.

21 Abū Sharāḥīl al-Ḥumayrī, a supporter of Mu'āwiya at Ṣiffin.

22 Ḥawshab b. Ṭakhma al-Alhānī Dhū Ḍulaym was also on Mu'āwiya's side at Ṣiffin.

23 al-Ash'ath b. Qays al-Kindī was blamed by the Shī'a for having forced 'Alī into arbitration at Ṣiffin.

24 He was the fifth Umayyad caliph (r. 65/685 to 86/705).

25 On him see 'al-Ḥadjdjādī b. Yūsuf' in the *EI2* by A. Dietrich.

26 The murderer of 'Alī; see 'Ibn Muljam' in the *EI2* by L. Vecchia Vaglieri.

literature of the Ismaili *da'wa* how the Fatimids portrayed the Umayyads and the Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba.

Nevertheless, while we might hope to locate a specific Fatimid depiction of the Umayyads in their own time, it is true as well that the denunciations of the Umayyads in the dynasty's pronouncements and in Ismaili discourse of that era promote generally the notion that the evil and wickedness of this clan is generic, a flaw in the lineage inherited by all its members from long ago. The Spanish Umayyads are reprehensible in the same way as were those cited by al-Qā'im, and the same is to be expected of all descendants of this tribe. They are, as it is often repeated by the Fatimids and other Shī'a, from the Tree of Zaqqūm, the accursed tree mentioned in the Qur'an (37: 62–65, 44: 43–46, and 56: 52). They constitute both its root and its branches.²⁷

One statement of this principle comes to us in a work by the great *dā'i* al-Kirmānī and it is moreover quite specifically related to the Umayyads of al-Andalus. In his *Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate* (*al-Maṣābiḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma*), a treatise he composed about 405/1014, and thus fairly late in the confrontation with the Umayyads of the West, he reviews all those who claim the imamate in his own day to prove that all except the Fatimid al-Ḥākim are completely unqualified. His list includes the Abbasid, Zaydī, Ibādī, Qarmaṭī and Umayyad claimants. But about the Umayyad, and here specifically the one "who resides in al-Andalus", he says: "he is not pure due to his being from the Tree of Zaqqūm which are the Umayyad clan." He is disqualified for the imamate also because, according to al-Kirmānī, he is devoid of religious knowledge and is contemptuous of the regulations of God in that he promotes among his subjects behavior that is not that of the Prophet.

From Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Kitāb al-Majālis wa'l-Musāyarāt*, an extremely important source for our topic, as we shall see, there is an explicit confirmation of the connection between the "accursed tree" (*al-shajara al-mal'ūna*, Q17: 60) and the Umayyads based on the testimony of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz and the others (including the Prophet) he cites. Yet another mention of the same by al-Manṣūr is to be found in a letter sent to his son al-Mu'izz, now found in the collection of documents preserved by Ustādh Jawdhar. In it he comments: "Know, O my son, that the Cursed Tree in the Qur'an applies to the Umayyads".

The connection between the "Accursed Tree" and the "Tree of Zaqqūm" is apparently fairly standard but taking it further and equating both with the Umayyads depends on accepting a hadīth in which the Prophet is said to have said: "There is no group but among them there are some who are noble and

27 As explicitly so stated by al-Mu'izz in one report in the *Majālis*, see, for example, his discussion of this issue, p. 116.

saved except for the clan of Umayya; none of them is either noble or saved." This hadith is quoted in a key passage about the Umayyads in Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's book mentioned above.²⁸

In addition to this important evidence from that work, we find occasional comments about the Umayyads recorded in Fatimid-Ismaili sources (or ones preserved or influenced by them). One example is the lines of poetry cited by Ibn al-Haytham, an early North African convert to the Ismaili cause, in his *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*:²⁹

I had hoped that I would die and not witness
Atop the *minbars* a preacher for Umayya.

Or the remark of Abū Ja'far Muslim, a leading member of the *ashrāf* in Egypt who said about the caliph al-Mu'izz: "I would love for my father and grandfather to have seen him so that they might boast of him. Truly I cannot compare him to any caliph of the Banū Umayya or those of the Banū 'Abbās".³⁰ Of course neither example is directed explicitly to the Spanish Umayyads.³¹

For that we need turn to Qāḍī al-Nu'mān whose *Kitāb al-Majālis wa'l-Musāyarāt* contains more, much of it quite specific to the Umayyads of Cordoba.³² But an even more essential work by him in this regard is a treatise of

28 Here see particularly Haji's translation of the *Sīrat Ustādh Jawdhār* (pp. 57–58 and note 118), as well as *al-Majālis wa'l-Musāyarāt*, p. 116.

29 Edition and trans. by Madelung and Walker, in *Advent of the Fatimids*, pp. 172–73.

30 Maqrīzī, *Ittī'āz*, (AFSayyid ed.) 1: 170.

31 Another example comes from the Fatimid caliph al-Manṣūr's own *Tathbūt al-imāma* (trans. p. 24), his own treatise on the imamate, in answer to the question: Can the imamate go to the lesser person? He says: [In regard to why people pay allegiance to a would-be imam] "Is it because he is supported by the evil doers and their associates? If this were the case [i.e. allowed], then Mu'awiya b. Abī Sufyān, Yazīd b. Mu'awiya, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, al-Walīd, Sulaymān, Ḥishām and others, and all the tyrants of the clan of Umayya would be the best and most righteous of all mankind and the most deserving of the station of the Messenger of God."

32 Note key examples as follows: (pp. 92–3) a list of their criminal activities such as consuming wine and selling it in public, pederasty and prostitution, imprisoning women and selecting certain of them for sex; (pp. 115–16) a session in regard to the cursing of the Banū Umayya, discussion of the Accursed Tree; (pp. 164–70) episode of the Fatimid raid on Almeria, counter raids, Byzantine truce (source passage p. 168 for material above), preparation for Jawhar's conquest of the furthest Maghrib to cleanse it of the supporters of the Umayyads; (p. 190) expression of scorn for the inhabitants of al-Andalus who are feeble-minded (*sakḥf 'uqūlihim*) and coarse in character (*ghalīẓ ṭibā'ihim*); (p. 234) 'Abd al-Raḥmān's committing of forbidden acts openly; (p. 253) are they related to dogs, monkeys or pigs?; (pp. 285–86) a session for disparaging the Banū Umayya, Marwānid cursing of the Fatimids from their minbars, al-Mu'izz sees al-Nāṣir in a dream.

his often called simply *Kitāb al-Manāqib wa'l-mathālib*, which might be translated as *Book of Virtues and Vices*. However its actual title is *Kitāb al-Manāqib li-ahl bayt rasūl Allāh al-nujabā' wa'l-mathālib li-banī Umayya al-lu'anā'*, which translates as *Book of the Virtues of the House of God's Messenger, the most noble, and the Vices of the House of Umayya, the accursed ones*. Note here he does not include the Abbasids; this work is directed at the Umayyads alone. And, most significantly for the present purpose, it concludes with a chapter entitled "A review of the virtues of the imams who presently hold the imamate and the vices of those of the House of Umayya who dominate the territory of al-Andalus." Although this one is only a final chapter of many, it offers the most explicit view of the Spanish Umayyads as they were seen by the Fatimids (or as they wanted them to be seen). It is, in short, a prime document in their polemical attack against the rival caliphate of the west.

Here we might want to speculate as to why Qāḍī al-Nu'mān is arguably our main source for this exact topic. It is true that aside from what he cites about them, there is relatively little else. In contrast to the situation with respect to the Umayyads, Fatimid exchanges, interactions and polemic with the Abbasids, as already noted, occurred on many levels and with such frequency that a record of it is substantial, including, for example, the trading of poems, one by al-Qā'im derogatory of the Abbasids and one by al-Ṣūlī against the Fatimids in reply, the theft of major items of insignia, a contest for control of the Hijaz, and, of paramount significance, the public decrees issued in Baghdad to denounce Fatimid genealogical claims, most notably the famous Manifesto of 402, which was signed by the leading Aliid nobles of the East. But it is true as well that the contest with the Abbasids began even prior to the founding of the Fatimid caliphate and continued unabated through to its end. Direct interaction between the Fatimids and Spanish Umayyads was mainly confined to the North African period before the Fatimid move to Egypt, after which the Umayyads were distant with secondary powers between the two. To a lesser extent that was also the case earlier. The immediate threat to Fatimid authority in the west came not directly from Spain but from intermediaries some acting with the backing of the Umayyads. Two challenges came from Berbers operating out of a kind of Umayyad protectorate created by the Miknāsa and the Zenāta tribes in opposition to the Fatimids. The Malikī *'ulamā'* both in al-Andalus and in North Africa constituted, in another way, a critical block separating these caliphates.

Unlike many of the high-ranking figures in the Ismaili-Fatimid *da'wa* who either came from the east or remained there, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān was a North African by birth and education. He surely knew and was particularly sensitive to the political currents running through the West. And his life (he died

in 363/974) spanned the period when the confrontation of the two western caliphates was most intense. He moved to Cairo with al-Mu'izz but died shortly thereafter. By then his service to the Fatimid cause was of immense importance; the literature he added to it—works in history, law and polemic—was both voluminous and foundational. His *Book of Virtues and Vices* is certainly not among the most important, although it is, in this instance, extremely valuable.

Given what we have already noted about the importance of lineage, both for the Fatimids and against the Umayyads, it is perhaps no surprise that Qāḍī al-Nu'mān begins his review of the subject with generations of both lines reaching back even prior to the Prophet himself. His first chapter recounts the virtues of 'Abd Manāf b. Qusay and the origin of the dispute between his two sons. From there he continues in parallel lines, on one side Hāshim and the other 'Abd Shams, and then 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and Umayya, and next the Prophet's father 'Abdallāh and Ḥarb b. Umayya. Eight chapters later and more than 300 pages, we finally arrive at the key passage that concerns the Andalusian Umayyads, most specifically 'Abd al-Raḥmān III and his caliphate, which Qāḍī al-Nu'mān considers particularly despicable, both the man personally and his governing policies. What he has to say could well be taken as the definitive statement of the Fatimid position.

Having just named the Umayya rulers of al-Andalus from 'Abd al-Raḥmān I to 'Abd al-Raḥmān III, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān then comments:

These were all wicked rulers, of vile standing, of despicable intentions, who drank wine, passed time with musical instruments, amused themselves with young boys, caroused with fools, listened to singing girls, ate forbidden things, transgressed regulations, in the same way as their forefathers in the past. All of them were styled *amīrs*. None claimed the caliphate, nor styled themselves as imams; they did not preach from the *minbar*, nor was the *khuṭba* said for them from it. They did not mint coins in their own name, neither dinar nor dirham, and they did not name themselves in the *ṭirāz* or on flags. The coinage with them was struck with the name of the governor of Ifrīqiyya among the commanders of the House of 'Abbās. All that ran in accord with the standard practice in the region by its governors. They did not permit themselves to transgress that, nor contradict anything in it. Nor to depart from the limits set by the previous rulers who had occupied their position and controlled the place, until the advent of the time of 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad. It was he who exceeded the boundaries and crossed over into what none of his forefathers had done. He was allowed that by the common people of al-Andalus who, had his forefathers wanted to do that, they would not

have allowed them nor approved of them doing it. So it was that he called himself "Commander of the Believers," coined money, decorated *tirāz* with his name. He parted with his loyal followers because of his animosity due to the vileness of his condition and meanness of his character and intentions and the shamelessness of his opinions. This was caused by what we have cited as the malicious states of his forefathers who had come together in him, being deposited in his soul and active in it. That aspect of his condition was not hidden nor was there any way to avert the possibility of its being proved. He was well known and famous for it and he adopted from the possessors of stamina and power for sexual intercourse that with his young boys, group after group. They knew about that and characterized him so. That went along with his openly drinking wine, listening to singing girls, playing *ṭanbūrs* and *ʿūds*. The keepers of pleasure houses visited him from remote lands and he settled them with him accordingly, in close proximity, and he gave them abundant gifts and favors. He manifested a mockery of heroes even though he was the one most certainly mocked by doing it. But he insisted on that for reasons of pretense and meanness. He had his subjects firmly believe a behavior good according to his own claims for it by permitting them these transgressions and by passing over the reprehensible in it, thus leaving it aside, along with what of their doctrine they might have believed. So they amused themselves with young boys, openly practicing pederasty in public. Daughters were shared among them as they accustomed her [to it] young and proceeded with the same when older. Among them fornication was evident and they flaunted openly sedition and wealth. They did commerce in wine in their markets, safe with him from this manifesting of crime that was due to their own moral depravity. He acted unlawfully against their interest in that and it was mentioned to whoever among the people of the land wanted to get into that and he boasted about those among them who had emigrated to him, even though if he was boastful about it that was against him not for him. After this was spread in the regions of the earth and the districts of the lands from the people of his country, there is, if those who consider carefully consider it and investigate reports, not a village to be found in which Muslims congregate in the east and the west, except that there was in it a group among them of those who have emigrated away because of knowing about him and dislike of him and fearing that the wrath of God will fall on those in it. Would that not happen because of our being far from him in the hands of His friend as He promised them and with the support of His religion as He has so written. But then there stood against his nastiness and for what

God intended, glory is His mention, in order to inflict on him His vengeance by means of the warfare waged by al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh. And so God has him taste it when He brings on him the most painful hurt. And causes him depravity and disgrace in the sterility of his house. God grants victory to His guardian and raises His word through him. I have mentioned what of that happened in the biography of al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh and, if I were to repeat that in this book, it would constitute a repetition too long and too extensive and, accordingly, this book would depart, by citing all that, from its intended limit and the theme that was set for it. He who wants to learn about that and what we have cited, we have established it in books other than this book. If he seeks it, he will find it in what we have said there in a complete form.³³

This catalog of sins and signs of moral depravity just outlined by Qāḍī al-Nu'mān runs through a register of the kind of charges fairly often made against heretics and other dissenters in medieval Islamic literature. Whether any of it has a real basis in fact is doubtful. But it is common and standard, the sort of things Fatimid authorities might say about the Abbasids, for example. And nearly all of what he claims here was confirmed by the caliph al-Mu'izz in the sessions he held with his agents and which Qāḍī al-Nu'mān recorded in his *Majālis*.

A common theme in Fatimid denunciations of the Umayyads is their drinking wine, which seems to come up often. It is also a feature in Fatimid and others of the Abbasids. But at this point we might note the evidence Dachraoui discovered and announced in an article long ago about the Umayyad conception of Fatimid corruptions. He adduced their view—that is, the Umayyad view—by extracting information from Ibn Sahl's account of testimony taken in a case brought against a person (Abu'l-Khayr) who was thought by Spanish authorities to be an agent working in al-Andalus on behalf of the Fatimids. The testimony presented to the judge is hearsay but likely indicates, even so, what the Umayyad authorities considered the vices of the Fatimids, which were therefore what their agents would have advocated or practiced. Among them was condoning the cursing of Abū Bakr and 'Umar and slandering 'A'isha, denying intercession and advocating permanent punishment by the fire of sinning Muslims, not performing the five prayers or attending prayer on Fridays,

33 Qāḍī al-Nu'mān at several points in this chapter says much the same, that an account of the virtues and excellences of the Fatimid imams and their predecessors was set out by him in detail in other works of his. Thus he sees no explicit need to repeat it in this treatise which is therefore primarily devoted to the vices of the Umayyads.

and drinking wine. The culprit in question—the so-called Fatimid agent—was apparently so devoted to wine consumption that he is reported to have said: “when I die, wash me in it.”³⁴

Not all the material available is quite so stark as Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s diatribe quoted above but it does tend to confirm the same attitude which basically regards the Umayyads as simply unacceptable in many respects but most particularly in having decided to claim the caliphate. An additional report preserved in one of Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s works³⁵ provides us al-Mu‘izz’s reply to an envoy from al-Nāṣir who had come to him hoping to arrange a truce. Specifically in answer to the Spaniard’s claim to be the Commander of the Faithful, al-Mu‘izz says:

Only we are deserving of this, neither he nor anyone else. We consider that God obligated us to oppose anyone else who presumes and claims this apart from us. Aside from what exists between our ancestors and his ancestors, what occurred between our fathers and his fathers, in distant times and in the present—that ancient original enmity and hostility, both in the *jāhiliyya* and in Islam—and what they thought of us and demanded from us in the era of Islam, [as well as] from the curses of the Messenger of God ... on their fathers and his killing of them in their state of polytheism and disbelief, their demand for vengeance and satisfaction of blood, and our demand for vengeance for our people who were killed under their power and in the days of their rule. So how can a settlement they seek be enacted after such devastating events? I am not willing to be close to the enemies of God.

The clash of these two caliphates was obviously particularly acute about mid-tenth century and featured a personal antagonism between ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III, as al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (caliph until his death in 961), and Abū Tamīm Ma‘add al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh (caliph from 953 to 975). It might be fair to ask, if the Umayyads in Spain had not staked a claim to the caliphate, would the Fatimid reaction have remained more subdued and less hostile, as seems to be implied in Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s extreme denunciation of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, which he likely wrote at the height of this conflict when tensions were most grave and serious.

34 Dachraoui, pp. 100–101.

35 Quoted here via Idrīs ‘Imād al-Dīn’s *Uyūn al-akhbār*, (trans. by Shainool Jiwa in *The Founder of Cairo* [London, I.B. Taurus, 2013] pp. 131–32). Idrīs depended heavily on Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s work.

But ultimately it is necessary to remember that Fatimid aspirations were from the beginning directed eastward. The Umayyads constituted an annoyance more than a menace. Their pretensions to Islamic rulership, including the caliphate, always troubled the Fatimids less than the Abbasid enemy. The Spanish caliphate seldom threatened territory and, after the move to Egypt, was even that much farther away in the distant rear.

Conflict with the Ibādīs and the Ibāḍī Version of the Imamate in North Africa and in the East

Despite intense and often violent conflict with the Ibādīs in North Africa, surviving Fatimid and Ismaili sources contain surprisingly little direct comment on Ibāḍī doctrine and its imamate.¹ Some does exist but we might have expected more. Possibly, as the threat of the Ibādīs receded in the decades after the suppression of Abū Yazīd's once formidable revolt, most especially when the Maghrib was no longer a vital concern of the Fatimids, the Ibādīs were forgotten. Nevertheless, what we find—scattered items and a few earlier passages of text and documents—is often valuable and it needs to be spelled out and examined carefully.

This situation might be quite different if we now possessed two important works of the great 10th century Ismaili jurist and historian Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, who himself wrote during and right after the major era of Fatimid-Ibāḍī conflict. His refutation of the Khawārij has apparently not survived. If it had, we would have heard more about them from this Ismaili source. But, even the existence of this work is in doubt as it is cited nowhere but in a passing mention by the author himself. He says there: "I dedicated a book to the refutation of them [the Khawārij] so that those looking to investigate that topic can find its refutation in that book."² Even so this work likely dealt more narrowly with the Kharijite claim that 'Alī's imamate ceased with the arbitration, rather than later or contemporary manifestations of the group.

The other book was more promising. What al-Nu'mān says about it suggests that it was, or became, a major source for the history of the encounter with Abū Yazīd. In his history of the Ismaili imams, his *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, he wrote at length about the miracles and miraculous signs that attest to the sacred standing of the imams he follows. At one point he comments:³

1 "Fatimid Conflict with the Ibādīs and the Ibāḍī Version of the Imamate, in North Africa and in the East," in *L'ibadisme dans les sociétés de l'Islam medieval Modèles et interactions*, ed. Cyrill Aillet, *Studies in the History and Culture of the Middle East* 33, (DeGruyter, 2018) pp. 299–310.

2 Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, p. 62.

3 *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, 3: 431.

As for those of the miscreants who revolted against him [the Fatimid imam-caliph al-Qā'im] and against the imams among his sons, including those of the Khawārij who rose against them, and what there was in all that transpired that was also a proof for them [i.e. the Ismaili imams], if we were to go into it fully, it would countermand our desire as to the extent of this particular book and exceed its limits. However, the most extreme of that is what occurred during the troubles caused by the accursed Dajjāl Makhlad during the days of al-Qā'im, al-Manṣūr (and al-Mu'izz in events that came after them⁴). I laid out at length a report on the troubles of the accursed Dajjāl Makhlad, and what signs, proofs and miracles there were in it in favor of al-Qā'im and al-Manṣūr, in a large, thick book (*kitāb ḍakhm kabīr*) and gave an account in it of all that happened at the time.

Surely, despite not having clear evidence in this case, al-Nu'mān's book served as a conduit for one or more accounts by eye-witnesses contemporary to the campaigns against Abū Yazīd and his followers through which they reached later Ismaili authors, such as the 15th century historian Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn where we now find critically important details of the lengthy struggle involved. But without the book itself, what else it might have said about the Ibādīs, their doctrine concerning the imamate and other claims of theirs, is missing.

From a substantially later period, and from the east, unconnected to events in the west, another Ismaili condemnation of Ibādī pretention to the imamate occurs in the writing of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, the leading Fatimid doctrinal authority during the reign of the caliph al-Ḥākim. One of his works, *Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate* (*al-Maṣābiḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma*), written about 405/1014, contains a detailed discussion of claimants to the Islamic imamate at various points in the past and ends with a catalog of those making such a claim in his own time, i.e. the time of writing this work. Here is how he approaches the topic:⁵

There is no doubt that the imam must exist for the worship of God and that God never leaves His earth devoid of an imam in each and every time, who upholds the rights of God and who, as His proof to His servants, is

4 It is uncertain exactly to what he refers here but perhaps later revolts by the Ibādīs in the Maghrib such as that of Abū Khazar against whom the caliph al-Mu'izz led an expedition in Shawwāl 358/September 969 long after Abū Yazīd. This Abū Khazar and his followers from the Zanāta were, according to Ibn al-Athīr (*al-Kāmil*, 8: 598), Nukkārīs. See also the translator's note 240, p. 115, in *Inside the Immaculate Portal* and references there.

5 Kirmānī, *al-Maṣābiḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma*, Eng. p. 118; Arabic pp. 85–86.

the guidance to His absolute unity, who represents them to their Lord “on the day wherein We summon the people through their imam” [Q 17:71]. Those who attempt to secure the nobility of the imamate as his own possession and who make a claim to it in our time are: al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh, Commander of the Faithful; Aḥmad b. Ishāq from the family of ‘Abbās, who resides in Baghdad; al-Hārūnī al-Ḥusaynī al-Zaydī, who resides in Hawsam in the region of Jilān; ‘Umar al-Nazwānī, who resides in Jibāl ‘Umān; the Umayyad who resides in al-Andalus and what is beyond Qayrawān; and those among the offspring of al-Jannābī who call themselves the Lords (*al-Sāda*) in al-Aḥsā’. The traits that preclude the meriting of the imamate fill the tables that we have set up at the end of this demonstration in their names, but the table for al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh, Commander of the Faithful, is devoid of them. From that we determine that al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh, Commander of the Faithful, given the falsity of any of the others meriting the imamate and given the impossibility of the earth being without an imam, is the imam to whom obedience is an obligation. Therefore al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh, Commander of the Faithful, is the imam to whom obedience is required of all and sundry.

In keeping with his polemical intent, al-Kirmānī does not dignify his adversaries with a title, merely a name and place of residence. Also, for his specific reason why each cannot be regarded as the imam, meaning what disqualifies each, he offers the information in the form of a list of traits without further elaboration. Exactly why or how al-Kirmānī would back up his claim is not clear. For the Ibādī imam he says:⁶

‘Umar al-Nazwānī, who resides in Jabāl ‘Umān: he is not a lineal descendant of al-Ḥusayn; he is not pure of body on account of leprosy that has taken hold of him and settled in most of his limbs, nor in soul due to ignorance; there exists in him by his own admission what he does not know; he is devoid of religious knowledge; there exists in him contempt for the regulations of God, for not commanding the good and prohibiting the bad; he lacks designation and appointment.

One additional claim by al-Kirmānī indicates that this ‘Umar “does not show himself to anyone either at prayer time or on any other occasion.”⁷ Perhaps this extra information serves to reinforce the claim of leprosy.

6 *al-Maṣābiḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma*, Eng. pp. 120–21; Arabic, p. 88.

7 *al-Maṣābiḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma*, Eng. p. 126, Arabic, p. 94.

What al-Kirmānī says reveals his partisan view and is not likely based on accurate knowledge except in regard to the name and existence of the person he disparages in this instance. However, that is useful here. This man who is the Ibāḍī imam at the time is otherwise unknown. His name does not figure in the standard histories of the imams of ‘Umān, which, however, do not list anyone as imam for the exact period (about 403/1012 to 405/1014) in question, perhaps because the authors of these accounts did not know who he was.

Al-Kirmānī’s attack is, to be sure, more personal than doctrinal and he, moreover, does not actually mention the Ibāḍīs except by implication. We understand that he is speaking about the Ibāḍī imam of the time but he does not say so, nor use the term. Still from other Ismaili sources we know quite well that the Ismaili authorities possessed a clear picture of who and what the Ibāḍīs were and how they fit into the general divisions of the Khawārij. From slightly before the mid-10th century we have an Ismaili heresiographical work, the “Chapter on Satans”, by the Khurasanian *dā‘ī* Abū Tammām. In it, in fairly standard language for this type of treatise, the author lists and describes fourteen Kharijite sects. He comments:⁸

They themselves [the Khawārij] further subdivide into fourteen sects. The Khawārij agree together that the acts of obedience are all components of faith and that faith increases and decreases. They are in accord in declaring ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī unbelievers and they say: we declare our loyalty to the two fathers-in-law and dissociate from the two sons-in-law, the latter being ‘Alī and ‘Uthmān; we are quite certain of the unbelief of whoever commits a major sin. They uphold rebellion against an unjust leader and they regard appropriate dissociation from Abū Mūsā and ‘Amr and those who appointed these two as arbitrators or who approved of them or associated with anyone who concurred with either of the two arbitrators or approved of him. They allow the imamate in the lowliest of persons who are nevertheless both just and knowledgeable. Thereafter in other issues they differ and have split into fourteen sects.

[...] namely the Azāriqa, the Najdiyya, the ‘Ajārīda, the Bida‘iyya, the Khāzimiyya, the Tha‘āliba, the Ṣufriyya, the Ibāḍiyya, the Ḥaṣṣiyya, the Yazidiyya, the Bayhasiyya, the Fuḍayliyya, the Shimrākhiyya, and the Ḍaḥḥākhiyya.

And he continues commenting on each sect one by one. The eighth is the Ibāḍiyya. About them he says:⁹

8 Abū Tammām, *An Ismaili Heresiography*, Eng. pp. 34–35; Arabic, p. 20.

9 Abū Tammām, Eng. p. 39; Arabic, p. 28.

The eighth sect is the Ibāḍiyya related to ‘Abdallāh b. Ibāḍ. A portion of this group uphold the doctrine of justice in the manner of the Mu‘tazila. They claim that their opponents among the people who pray toward Mecca are infidels by ingratitude (*kāfirū nī‘ma*) but are not polytheists; their property, their weapons, and their riding mounts are lawful booty during warfare, but what goes beyond that is unlawful and it is forbidden to capture them or to kill them surreptitiously. They further insist that the abode – that is, the abode of their opponents – is an abode of inequity. Those who commit major sins they consider monotheists, even though infidels because of ingratitude and not believers. The punishment of the children of polytheists is possible in their opinion but they recognize that God might nonetheless enter them in paradise by an act of grace.

Abū Tammām himself is no expert, nor is his report unique but rather here a duplicate of a common account found in other Islamic heresiographies. Still it does show what was probably the way the Ibāḍīs were perceived when the Ismailis and their *da‘wa* first encountered them in the Maghrib. Idrīs, for example, comments simply that:¹⁰

Abū Yazīd was Ibāḍī in his *madhhab*, meaning that he upheld the views of the apostate Khawārij, and he was one of those who accept the leadership of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar and dissociated from the Commander of the Believers ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and from ‘Uthmān. He approved the capturing of the children of those Muslims who oppose his views and creed and he considered them infidels.

Idrīs is a late source and in any case does not reflect closely what Abū Tammām reports. However, there is a remarkably close confirmation of Abū Tammām’s account in more elaborate and specific terms in the report of conversations between Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Shī‘ī and Ibn al-Haytham. The latter was an Ismaili *dā‘ī*, himself born and raised in Qayrawān, newly recruited to the Ismaili cause in the earliest days of Fatimid rule. Their exchange of views was supposed to have occurred in the late Spring of 296/909.

In answer to Abū ‘Abdallāh’s question about several theological issues and about works and faith, Ibn al-Haytham in part replies:¹¹

10 Idrīs, *‘Uyūn al-akhbār*, p. 264.

11 Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, in *Advent of the Fatimids*, Eng. p. 130, Arabic, p. 77.

The Mu'tazila and the Ibāḍiyya uphold the implementation of the threat and say that it is like the promise in terms of obligation and necessity, and that the threat and the promise are a communication and communication is never abrogated nor is it subject to interpretation. Some of them label the offender an unbeliever because of ingratitude toward God. Others call the sinner an iniquitous polytheist. They have various interpretations for all this. The proponents of authorization [*tafwīḍ*] maintain that those believers who offend are subject to the will of God, there being no inevitability that God will inflict punishment on them as it is likewise not obligatory on Him to grant them mercy, but instead they are in a state of suspension between grace and justice. If He punishes them, He will be just; if He forgives them, He will be bestowing a grace.

Thus Ismaili authorities possessed a fairly precise and detailed knowledge of the doctrinal stance of Kharijite sects and the differences among them.

However, that may have applied more to theory than practice as would occur in the direct confrontations Abū 'Abdallāh faced when he began his mission in the territory of the Kutāma in 280/893, almost two decades earlier. There, one of his major opponents was Fath b. Yaḥyā, a leading figure of the Masāla, a subgroup of the Kutāma. This man and his followers were Ibāḍī, reportedly the only members of the Kutāma to adhere to that sect.¹² Abū 'Abdallāh's dealing with Fath may have been complicated by internal rivalries among the Berbers, but he was eventually forced to wage war against Fath more than once. The final battle took place at a formidable fortress called Nūbar, or alternately Wushnūk, from which Fath's troops could throw huge rocks down onto Abū 'Abdallāh's men below. Each rock "echoed like thunder" and the Ismaili commander "covered his face with his sleeve [as it approached] so as not to see the injuries it inflicted upon his followers."¹³ Eventually Abū 'Abdallāh succeeded in overcoming his enemy, killing in the process most of those in the fortress. His troubles in subdoing the Ibāḍīs in this instance could well explain the next event in the Fatimid conflict with them: his attack on Tāhart and the violent elimination of the Ibāḍī imamate based there.

Finally, having conquered the Aghlabids and once he had set up a governing apparatus in Qayrawān and Raqqāda, the great *dā'ī* proceeded to lead his army west to Sijilmāsa and to the rescue of his imam. Significantly, the route he traveled brought him directly to Tāhart, rather than, say, by-passing it to the south. He entered the city after granting it an *amān*. This assurance of safety

12 Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa*, p. 111; Eng. trans. p. 96; Idrīs, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, p. 105.

13 Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa*, pp. 112–113; Eng. trans. p. 98.

did not, however, cover the Ibādī imam Yaḳẓān and members of his family, who were all executed and their heads dispatched back to Raqqāda. The heads were subsequently paraded through Qayrawān and then displayed on the gate of Raqqāda. And thus, comments Ibn 'Idhārī, our source, "the dynasty of the Banū Rustum ceased to exist."¹⁴

It is important to note Abū 'Abdallāh's apparent determination to put an end to what he must have known was, or had become, in effect, a hereditary imamate by not only killing Yaḳẓān, the imam of the time, but also as many of his potential heirs as he could find. That at least one escaped and fled south into the Basin of Wārjlān was likely an unintended result of a situation he could not control completely. Still, he accomplished his main aim: the elimination of the Ibādī imamate in the Maghrib.

Oddly our main Ismaili source for this time, al-Nu'mān's *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa*, which had much to say about the resistance of Faṭḥ, does not offer any information here. He reports merely that Abū 'Abdallāh "attacked tribes he came across on his way [en route to Sijilmāsa] about whose wickedness he had received intelligence."¹⁵ Surely the destruction of this rival imamate merited comment, but he is silent about that.

Ibādī records, which appear to be more complete,¹⁶ suggest a complicated scenario in which Yaḳẓān and members of his family met the Fatimid commander at some distance from Tāhart. They exchange words, and Abū 'Abdallāh accuses Yaḳẓān of having killed his *amīr* and usurped his kingdom and other crimes, whereupon he orders him executed along with all those in his party. Thereafter the Fatimid army enters the city, plunders it and violates its womenfolk. A further detail in the same work, from a different report, it appears, adds that Abū 'Abdallāh found in Tāhart a library full of books which he brought out and then selected for himself all those he thought might be useful for administrative purposes. The Rest he burned.¹⁷

That Ibādī sources claim a worse outcome for Tāhart, as if there was no *amān* involved or that it was purposely violated, than that suggested by Ibn 'Idhārī's

14 Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān al-mughrib*, p. 153.

15 Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa*, p. 276; Eng. trans. p. 196.

16 Modern scholars, who have worked on the Fatimids, have not in general paid enough attention to Ibādī sources, particularly the *Kitāb al-Sīra wa akhbār al-a'imma* by Abū Zakariyyā' al-Warjalānī. Likewise, those who study the Ibādīyya in North Africa and who depend mainly on Ibādī sources tend to focus narrowly on this group and its history. In the near future I hope to add to the present paper another that will analyze the value of Ibādī materials for the history of the Fatimids, thus bringing a needed balance to our subject. But see now instead the highly important contribution of Cyrille Aillet, a leading colleague in this effort, cited below in a brief appendix to this chapter.

17 Abū Zakariyyā', *Kitāb al-Sīra wa akhbār al-a'imma*, p. 163.

own source, most likely ‘Arib b. Sa’d, might indicate a slightly polemical interpretation of the events, purposely defaming Abū ‘Abdallāh, but we cannot be sure. Still, ‘Arib represented the Mālikī point of view which was normally quite hostile to the Fatimids. He thus had no reason to wish well of the Fatimids. In this situation it might help to have an account from the Ismaili side.

The anti-Fatimid revolt instigated and led by Abū Yazīd Makhlad b. Kaydad is of course the major example of confrontation between the Ibāḍīs and the Ismailis. Many details of what happened are well known and adequately studied in previous scholarship¹⁸ but there are a few matters worth recalling here. One is that Abū Yazīd was a student in Tāhart at precisely the moment when Abū ‘Abdallāh arrived there. He therefore had an opportunity to witness the execution of the imam. However, as a Nukkārī,¹⁹ did he owe any allegiance to this imamate? If not, why was he there? Or was his Nukkārī inclination a later development in his life? Much could have changed between 297/909 and 332/944 when his own revolt commenced in earnest.

Another aspect deserves special notice. Where it had taken Abū ‘Abdallāh almost eighteen years, first to convert the Kutāma and then form a military force out of them able to capture Qayrawān and replace the Aghlabids, Abū Yazīd accomplished something quite similar in a few months. He and his army fell on the Fatimids so swiftly and so decisively, the Ismaili state had little time to react appropriately. It is true that Abū Yazīd benefited significantly from spreading anti-Shiite and anti-Fatimid feeling among the Sunnī population, notably the Mālikīs, but he could also call upon a whole network of local tribes and clans among whom Ibāḍī sympathies were fairly well established. In other words, Abū Yazīd was himself a Berber and a Maghribi summoning to battle others like himself, whereas Abū ‘Abdallāh was an easterner and an outsider, in addition to his Shiism, which was then and remained in the minority.

Fatimid writers nearly always refer to Abū Yazīd as the Dajjāl, the Arch-Deceiver. It would be interesting to see exactly when this term begins to be applied in this case. Is it possibly a back-projection from a point where the full record of Abū Yazīd’s excesses had become clear? For the events in question we possess an unusually rich supply of materials: documents, proclamations, personal accounts and other records on the Fatimid side. In some Abū Yazīd is specifically labeled “Nukkārī”, as in a *khutba* of 333/945 where the caliph

18 Two of the more recent are those of Halm, *Empire of the Mahdi*, pp. 298–325, and Brett, *Rise of the Fatimids*, pp. 164–75, but there are others.

19 A Nukkārī was by definition a disowner or rejecter of the Ibāḍī imamate as established at Tāhart by the Rustamids. This faction thus tended to condemn the Rustamids for their usurpation of the imamate. See T. Lewicki, “al-Nukkār,” *EI2* (supplement).

begins "O people! Truly this accursed Nukkārī has exacerbated his wickedness and his disease has infested the land." But how precise was their knowledge of Abū Yazīd's status among the Ibādīs, or his history with them (or that of Abū 'Ammār, his mentor)? A comment of a Fatimid authority at one point during the revolt puts him among the Azāriqa, instead of Ibādīs or Nukkār, and that appears to reflect an appreciation of Abū Yazīd's adoption of the doctrine of *isti'rāḍ* as his revolt progressed and he began to capture towns, especially Qayrawān. Was he therefore in their eyes, as supreme leader of his sect, also a claimant to the Islamic imamate?

However, despite having an usual array of sources on the Fatimid side, the rapidity with which events unfolded may make an accurate appraisal of this problem and its precise chronology difficult. The earliest dateable document that mentions Abū Yazīd by the Fatimids is almost certain to be the *khutba* cited above which we can date to the siege of al-Mahdiyya by the Kharijite army. The sermon itself was read in the name of the caliph al-Qā'im by the judge al-Marwadhī in Rajab of 333 (March 945). Its rhetoric served an obvious purpose: to rally the troops for the fight against the rebels. Its language is pointed and of course highly partisan. Even so it is especially interesting that it commences abruptly:²⁰

O people! Truly this accursed Nukkārī has exacerbated his wickedness and his disease has infested the land. Deceptive hopes sustain him, and the soul that urges to evil²¹ prompts him to esteem lightly the favor of God the exalted to him; and the devil, who is his associate, intimates to him²² that he has no conqueror. But it is merely that the Commander of the Believers loosens for him his reins in order to cause him to stumble in the abundance of his halter. So may God curse him with a calamitous curse and humiliate him with lengthy ignominy and make of him a blazing fire;²³ 'None shall burn in it but the most wretched' [Q 92: 15].²⁴

You have done, O men of Kutāma, what your fathers and veterans among your forbearers did as required for obedience and adhering to its bonds and taking shade in its shadow. And fighting for God with the

20 *Sīrat Ustadh Jawdhār*, pp. 53–55 (French trans. 78–80); Haji, *Inside the Immaculate Portal*, Eng. pp. 46–47, Arabic, pp. 31–32; and Idrīs, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, pp. 311–12. The trans. here is that of Walker, *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, pp. 93–94.

21 Q 12: 53.

22 Q 47: 25.

23 Q 92: 14.

24 'Therefore I warn you of a blazing fire; none shall burn in it but the most wretched, who denied the truth and turned away', Q 92: 14–16.

effort due Him. You were the cache where God placed this Muḥammadan, Fāṭimid, *mahdī*-ist right until He caused it to triumph, raising it high again. He made of you its pride and its glory. You are like the Apostles of Jesus and the Anṣār of Muḥammad, may God bless them both.

O sons of the Emigrants and the Anṣār, those who came first²⁵ and before, who were most intimate, was it not through you that God ended the dynasties of the tyrants, which had passed its long period of years, until He made them into a crop that withers away?²⁶ 'Did He not cause you to inherit their land and estates' [Q 33: 27]; and thus it was that you commenced to conquer after having been conquered?

An accursed arch-deceiver has settled in front of you with a misled, erring party that does not draw on the light of true guidance. They are like startled [and heedless] cattle, figures that merely imitate the real, planks of wood propped up,²⁷ frightened donkeys.²⁸ If they stand in place, they are destroyed, and if they are called back, they are overtaken. Do not recoil after advancing! You are the party of God; they are the party of Satan.²⁹ Your dead are in paradise; their dead are in hellfire. So which truth other than this truth would you seek? With which imam other than your imam would you fight?

Most significantly the sermon announces its purpose simply by referring to Abū Yazīd as that "Nukkārī", as if the audience required no further elaboration. That presumes also that everyone understood what the term meant and that it by itself sufficed in this case. It is true that later in the same sermon the term "accursed arch-deceiver" (*dajjāl la'īn*) appears as well but there, at least in the version recorded by Idrīs, it lacks the definite article. Thus it could be read "an accursed arch-deceiver", not yet having become the standard name for Abū Yazīd as would become normal in Fatimid writing shortly thereafter when he is nearly always called "*The Accursed Arch-deceiver*" (*al-Dajjāl al-La'īn*).

From even later, at a time undetermined, the Ismaili author who edited the biographical scrapbook of Ustadh Jawdhār, the high-ranking eunuch in charge of much of Fatimid administration, a person on intimate terms with the imam-caliphs he served, adds to this name in several instances the term "Azāriqa". The followers of Abū Yazīd are now the "heretical and nefarious

25 Q 9: 100.

26 Q 21:15.

27 Q 63: 4.

28 Q 74:50.

29 'party of God' (Q 58: 22) and 'party of Satan' (Q 58: 19).

Azāriqa" who have been enemies of the Prophet's household since the beginning of Islam in the time of the Prophet himself.³⁰ It is not clear whether this judgment is that of Ustadh Jawdhar or of his editor. Nevertheless, we may assume that it represents Fatimid opinion in the period after the threat posed by the Kharijites has receded but the eventual excesses of Abū Yazīd's mistreatment of those who came under his control were being denounced, especially by the residents of Qayrawān, who first accepted him and then regretted having done so. He is now not an Ibāḍī (or Nukkārī) but, far worse, an Azraqī, a member of the most uncompromisingly severe sect among the Khawārij.

Thus Fatimid materials from this early period hint strongly that the authorities in the government and in the *da'wa* possessed full and detailed knowledge of the sectarian positions held by the Ibāḍiyya in its various forms. In short they knew their enemy well. It is unfortunate, even so, that we do not have more information and therefore, in regard to the conflict between the Ismā'īliyya and Ibāḍiyya and their respective representatives, we need to rely on limited bits and pieces expressed here and there in the surviving Fatimid sources. But, surely, the indications that we do have prove that there once was a great deal more, although it was certainly also polemical and replete with nasty hostile rhetoric. Accommodation between the Khawārij and the Shī'a was clearly always out of the question.

Appendix: Even before the actual publication of this article, Cyrille Aillet, a leading expert on this subject and who in some ways brought me to this topic in the first place, had already prepared and published a major contribution to the task of bringing Ibāḍī sources into conversation with those produced by the Fatimids. See now his "L'ibadisme maghrébin en contexte fatimide (début x^e–milieu xi^e siècle)," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée, Les Fatimides et la Méditerranée centrale x^e–xii^e siècles* 139 (2016): 127–46. Here I am providing a summary of his conclusions in that paper.

The advent of the Fatimid caliphate constituted a turning point in Ibāḍī history in putting an end to the existence of the Rustamid imamate. Until today this event has nourished a memory of the fall associated with an idealization of the golden age of Tāhart, and of the subsequent development instead of the notion of being an elite minority, although even so persecuted and condemned to successive periods of exile. Abū Zakariyyā' al-Wārjalānī forcefully contributed to this historical image and the study of his *Sīyar* confirms the complexity and richness of this historical contrivance. More specifically, Ibāḍī sources

30 *Sīrat Ustadh Jawdhar*, in Haji, *Inside the Immaculate Portal*, Eng. pp. 38, 40, Arabic, pp. 24, 26–27.

themselves open for us a new vision of the advent of the Fatimid movement, raising in particular questions about the objectives behind the curious journey of al-Mahdī through Berber territory and his long stay at Sijilmāsa. This vision is completed by the apologetical narrative of resistance against the “tyrants.” However quarrels internal to Ibāḍism commanded more attention than any desire to unit against the common enemy of Shiism. But how then might an Ibāḍī orthodoxy compete with the heroic saga of Abū Yazīd, the schismatic (Nukkārī) figurehead of rebellion? First, by presenting him as a “Kharijite” leader who had spread the *“fitna”* over the whole country, and, secondly, by putting forward another revolt, the forgotten episode of Bāghāya (969), which was seen as a legitimate and righteous uprising, decided by the community and led by its *‘ulamā’*. However this attempt to produce a counter-memory also sheds light on another reality: the coexistence between the Ismaili authority and the Ibāḍī-Wahbī community as represented by its religious elite. This equilibrium finally began to break down over the years from 1030 to 1050, when local dynasties in the Maghrib became less and less attached to distant Cairo and more oriented in their ambitions to the interior of the land.

The Abbasid-Fatimid Rivalry for Control of the Holy Cities and the Hijāzī Response

Under an old arrangement the Hijaz and the Ḥaramayn fell within the jurisdiction of the Abbasid governor in Fustat.¹ When the Fatimids supplanted the Abbasids in Egypt, they also acquired this right. However, recognition in Mecca and Madina was important to the Fatimids quite separately from their old rivalry with eastern enemies. The *ashrāf* nobility in the holy cities belonged to a common lineage; their acknowledgement of the Fatimid imamate provided public vindication of its authenticity. But, even with tacit acceptance by the Hasanid and Husaynid *amīrs* in the Hijaz, the situation always remained tense and difficult.

Ḥajj caravan politics certainly play a major part and it provides its own set of evidence for the effects of this rivalry on the holy cities. Iraqi pilgrims reported the strange innovation that, when the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim's name was mentioned in Mecca, everyone stood up. The Abbasids were allowed to send pilgrims but they were not allowed to embellish their standards with the names of the Abbasid caliphs. These are but two examples; many others are reported. Other aspects of the relationship, however, fell outside the *ḥajj* and were part of a policy to control the Hijaz. Annual donations by the Fatimids to the Hijāzī *amīrs* were substantial and consisted of funds, plus supplies of staples such as wheat, barley, flour and oil. By combing the chronicles year by year (especially the works of al-Maqrīzī, but others as well), it is possible to suggest the extent of Hijāzī dependence on Fatimid support of this kind over time.

But other evidence reveals Hijāzī resentment at having to acquiesce to Fatimid control and interference. One occasion of the latter saw an agent from al-Ḥākim arrive in Madina, open the long-sealed house of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, removing the contents to Cairo. The Madinese *ashrāf* followed behind to protest in a vain effort to ensure the return of these objects most of which the Fatimid caliph insisted on keeping, arguing that he had a superior right to them, his lineage out-trumping theirs. This well-attested incident, however, gave rise to

1 Originally published as "The Abbasid-Fatimid Rivalry for Control of the Holy Cities and the Hijazi Response," in Hinrich Biesterfeldt and Verena Klemm, eds., *Difference and Dynamism in Islam: Festschrift for Heinz Halm on his 70th Birthday* (Würzburg, ERGON VERLAG, 2012), pp. 145–62.

stories of how agents of the Fatimids twice traveled to Madina to tunnel from a distance into the Prophet's crypt to steal his body for reburial in Cairo.

Ultimately, the clearest sign of Ḥijāzī resistance was the revolt in 401–03/1010–11 of Abu'l-Futūḥ Ḥasan b. Ja'far al-Ḥasanī, the *amīr* of Mecca, who not only renounced his allegiance to the Fatimids but also proclaimed himself caliph, the Amīr al-Mu'minīn, adopting the throne name al-Rāshid bi-Allāh ("The Person Guided by God"). He had thus not merely switched his loyalty to the Abbasids, as was often done in earlier periods and was to happen much later, when the commitment of the Ḥijāzīs fluctuated back and forth between these two superpowers. Instead the step he now took was highly unusual, a signal of total independence. Neither the Abbasids nor the Fatimids were his equal; his lineage as a descendant of Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was at least as, if not more, noble than that of either of these two rival dynasties. Although the immediate consequences were short lived, lasting in all barely two years, such a bold act long continued to engender considerable discussion and comment and eventually notice in the modern scholarship concerning the history of Arabia. Was this declaration by Abu'l-Futūḥ, for example, evidence of the true aspirations of the Meccan (and Ḥijāzī) Alid nobility? Was it shared by the majority of those who inhabited the region? But it also raises the issue of whether or not the Hijaz, specifically the amirates of Mecca and Madina, were politically viable in the absence of support, economic or otherwise, provided by and from Egypt. What were the consequences of cutting that tie, as had occurred during this episode?

Abu'l-Futūḥ's proclamation came at a midpoint in the era of Fatimid domination of the Hijaz, which was a time of unique religious and political conditions, when Mecca and Madina were under the control of a Shī'ī caliphate. That period also roughly coincided with the amirate in Mecca of what are commonly called the Ja'farids or Sulaymānids, a Hasanid dynasty that commenced with Ja'far, the father, followed by two of his sons, one of whom was Abu'l-Futūḥ, and finally the latter's son Shukr. Coincidentally, for most of the same period, the Buyids dominated the Islamic east, the advent of the later Saljuks and their growing interest in the holy cities being the major reason for the eventual termination of Fatimid control over them.

Fatimid concern for the Ḥaramayn was indisputably a serious element of its public policy as is easily proven. Already in 307/919, while leading the second invasion of Egypt, Abu'l-Qāsim—the future caliph al-Qā'im—wrote to the people of Mecca inviting them to acknowledge the Fatimid imamate. At the time they refused.² Later, in his first festival sermon, given on the feast of

2 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī'l-ta'rīkh*, 7: 113.

sacrifice in 341/953, the new caliph al-Mu'izz expressed his hope to visit the holy cities. On that occasion he said: "O God! ... Provide me the means to visit his [Muḥammad's] tomb and mount his *minbar*, stay in his house, and perform the pilgrimage to Your sacred house, and with our banners halt at those majestic shrines." Although he died before he could make the journey, there is evidence that he retained the wish to do so to the end of his life. And, perhaps as important, once his army had conquered Egypt, he was acknowledged at last in both Mecca and Madina in the Friday sermon.

As appears to be typical of a period of transition, the exact details of the initial Ḥijāzī recognition of the Fatimids is confused in the sources available, which may not be the fault of those who indicate various dates for it, but suggest a situation that remained for a time fluid. The dates given range from 358/969 to 364/975, but all might be true. Madina seems to have more readily accepted the Fatimids, with Mecca less committed, possibly changing back and forth depending on local circumstances.³ Previously, despite some interest on the part of the early Buyids to assume a direct role in the Hijaz, most often the Abbasid authorities simply allowed Egypt, which was more closely bound to the Ḥaramayn for economic reasons, to have the Hijaz. Accordingly, the Ikhshidid governors of Egypt accrued the prestige associated with rule over Mecca and Madina. In a sense the Fatimids inherited that responsibility, although with them, it now became a matter of great importance. Recognition by the *ashraf* nobility in the holy cities was a clear sign of their legitimacy, one that had to be obvious to all Muslims.

Upon the transition from al-Mu'izz to his son al-'Azīz in 365/975, the Ḥijāzīs hesitated. It became necessary for the new caliph to dispatch troops with the pilgrimage caravan to ensure that the Meccans would comply. The commander of this force is reported to have approached the city and then stopped, withholding from it the provisions he carried, causing much hardship until the Meccan authorities relented and resumed the *khutba* in the name of the Fatimids.⁴ These details may have been enhanced by anti-Fatimid Sunnī

3 The information collected by the Meccan historian Ibn Fahd (*Itḥāf al-warā bi-akhbār umm al-qurā*), ed. Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt, vol. 2, (Cairo, 1983) indicates, for example, that in 358 al-Mu'izz was recognized in the Ḥaramayn and that the commander of the Egyptian caravan distributed lots of money there. In 359 the *khutba* was said for the Abbasid al-Muṭī' in Mecca but al-Mu'izz in Madina. He also notes that the leader of the Qarmatians himself did the pilgrimage and allowed use of the name of the Abbasid caliph. In 363 the *da'wa* on behalf of al-Mu'izz prevailed. In 364 troops sent by the Buyid 'Aḍud al-Dawla reached Mecca and the sermon was said for the Abbasids. In 367 al-'Azīz had Bādīs b. Zīrī, brother of the ruler of the Maghrib, led the caravan. In 368 Ibn Fahd notes that the sermon was said in the name of the Buyid 'Aḍud al-Dawla but not after that.

4 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1: 238; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4: 110.

historians, many of whom have a tendency to insist that the Hījāzīs accepted the Shiite imamate—and its Shiite religious policies—only and solely when compelled to do so.⁵

From a later period another report mentions a certain Baltakīn al-‘Azīzī, who went on the pilgrimage from Egypt and then returned via the Wadi al-Qura where he seized a fortress and attempted to remain there as governor.⁶ In general, however, the Fatimids seldom expended military resources for the control of the Hijaz, apparently that not being necessary.

Dramatic, though slightly ambiguous, evidence of the Meccan amīrate’s loyalty to Cairo occurred in 381/991–92, during the changeover in the Abbasid caliphate from al-Ṭā’ī‘ to al-Qādir. The new caliph, wanting to assert his authority, composed and dispatched a formal letter of appointment for the *amūr* of Mecca. Abu’l-Futūḥ, acting for his brother, who was technically the *amūr*, simply sent the letter to al-‘Azīz in Cairo, who himself wrote his own decree of appointment to the amīrate, which he returned to Mecca along with money and robes of honor (*khila’*) for the *ashrāf* of the Banū Ḥasan. The Meccan *ashrāf* gathered at the *ka’ba* to divide the money among themselves. Evidently it was the season of the *ḥajj*. As they dressed the *ka’ba* with the white (Fatimid) *kiswa*, Abu’l-Futūḥ proclaimed: “Thanks be to God, O sons of Fāṭima, the radiant, you who are the partisans of the illustrious law, that His house is now adorned with the attire of happiness after once wearing the attire for mourning, and for giving possession of the holy cities to the sons of His messenger’s daughter, the descendants of al-Ḥusayn and al-Ḥasan, for He is pleased with both of them.”⁷ Abu’l-Futūḥ notes here quite pointedly that his family is “Fatimid”, just as are the descendants of Ḥusayn, the latter presumably, though it is not stated explicitly, including the caliphs in Cairo.⁸ Is his statement not also evidence that he believed himself genealogically equal to them?

In the modern histories of the Hijaz (those of Mortel and al-Zayla’ī, for example⁹), it is common to attribute the cause of Abu’l-Futūḥ’s renunciation of the Fatimids in major part to the caliph al-Ḥākim’s order, issued in 395/1004–05, to begin public cursing of those Companions who had failed

5 Ibn Fahd, *sub anno* 365. For 366 he claims that al-‘Azīz again sent troops but that another force came from the east to stop the *khuṭba* for the Fatimids, replacing it with that for al-Ṭā’ī‘.

6 Yahyā b. Sa’īd al-Anṭākī, *Ta’rīkh*, ed. Tadmūrī, p. 217, for the year 378.

7 Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, bio. no. 1176 (Abu’l-Futūḥ al-Ḥasanī).

8 It should also be noted that the *amīrs* of Madina were, like the Fatimids, descendants of Ḥusayn.

9 Richard T Mortel: *al-Aḥwāl al-sīyāsīyya wa’l-iqtisādīyya bi-Makka fi’l-‘aṣr al-mamlūkīyya*. (al-Riyāḍ, 1985); Aḥmad ‘Umar al-Zayla’ī: *Makka wa ‘alāqātuhā al-khārījīyya* (301–487h). (al-Riyāḍ, 1981).

to uphold 'Alī's exclusive right to succeed the Prophet. Supposedly he sent a decree to this effect to Mecca where it was greeted with wide spread hostility and rejection. One account claims that Abu'l-Futūḥ requested the local *qāḍī* to read the decree in the mosque. It is, however, difficult to sort out exactly what might have happened.¹⁰ Certainly, it is likely that al-Ḥākim did send such an order. The command to curse the Ṣaḥāba was put into effect that year in Egypt and in all other regions of the empire, which would have included the Hijaz. Reaction everywhere was mixed. Sunnīs revere the very persons singled out for execration; many of the Shī'a either avoid the practice in open society or refuse to condone it altogether even in private. But the point here is that al-Ḥākim himself soon rescinded his initial order and, in its place, proclaimed a doctrine of tolerance: the Companions were henceforth to be mentioned solely for the good they had done when the Prophet still lived. What took place after his death was no longer open to discussion in this regard. His new order to refrain from cursing also entailed the removal of all vestiges of the earlier one.

Meanwhile the Fatimids had faced, in 396/1005–06, the deadly serious revolt of Abū Rakwa, whose armies came close to destroying them. Upon the capture and execution of this rebel, along with the obviously sigh of relief it brought to both the population and the ruling classes, a proclamation of victory went out to all and sundry. Major figures, judges and governors, of outlying cities and areas, notably those of Syria, made the journey to Cairo to extend felicitations. One among them was the *amīr* of Mecca, Abu'l-Futūḥ, who was generously received in Egypt, given a robe of honor and lodged in the house that had formerly been occupied by Barjawān, when he was the chief executive of the state, the *wāsiṭa*.¹¹

Abu'l-Futūḥ's sojourn in Cairo in 397 is of interest for a couple of reasons. First it indicates that he harbored apparently no hostility concerning the matter of cursing; and second it might have allowed him personal contact with key members of the governing bureaucracy, one of whom, at the time, was Abu'l-Qāsim al-Maghribī, who was later intimately involved in the *amīr*'s revolt against the Fatimids.

A second cause suggested for it in modern literature is the failure of the Egyptian caravans for the years just prior to 401/1010–11, which, since the provisions normally brought by it did not arrive, created serious hardship in Mecca.

10 A relatively elaborate version of this story appears in Ibn Fahd's account for 395, which, like his report for 390, when supposedly al-Ḥākim tried to have Abu'l-Futūḥ seize Madina and extract the Prophet's remains for transfer to Cairo, must be treated with caution. Ibn Fahd himself seems to doubt its validity. In the later incident a mob gathers to prevent the *qāḍī* reading the decree and they smash the *minbar* so that he cannot.

11 Abu'l-Futūḥ arrived in Sha'bān, 397. Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 66.

However, there is some evidence of successful caravans for 397, 398, and 399; 400 may simply not be mentioned in our Egyptian sources. The record of the pilgrimage in this period is scanty and not necessarily complete (or always reliable) in any case.

One curious incident may need to be added, if only to complete the record. At one point al-Ḥākim dispatched his agents, under the *dā'i* Khatkīn al-Ḍayf, to open the house of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in Madina and bring its contents back to Cairo. Versions of the basic account appear in both Egyptian and Eastern sources by, among others, Ibn al-Jawzī¹² and Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir.¹³ Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, the Ismaili historian of the imams,¹⁴ also records it, as most significantly, does Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, who was a contemporary of the event.¹⁵ Ibn al-Jawzī's note, recorded under the year 400, claims that al-Ḥākim obtained the consent of the Alid *ashrāf* in Madina to open the house with the promise that he only wanted to see what was in it and that the items would be returned to their original place once they had been brought to Cairo for his inspection. The house had reportedly not been entered since the death of Ja'far, over two hundred and fifty years before. But now, from it, Fatimid agents retrieved a bed (*sarīr*), carpets or mats, utensils, and a Qur'an (*maṣḥaf*), which they carried to Cairo accompanied by a delegation of Husaynid and Hasanid nobles. In the end al-Ḥākim gave back only the bed and kept the rest, arguing that they were more rightfully his. Idrīs, writing from the Ismaili side, adds the important fact that al-Ḥākim had already known what was in the house and exactly where. He was thus able to instruct his agents accordingly. His knowledge derived from inherited family memory; it was proof of his imamate and his true descent from Ja'far.

The immediate cause of Abu'l-Futūḥ's defection is, however, more complicated and is most likely not related at all to these events. It involves directly the Abu'l-Qāsim al-Maghribī previously mentioned. He had been one of a family of clerks and bureaucrats in Fatimid government service. As a result of an internal dispute they had with the Christian head of the bureaucracy, al-Ḥākim

12 *al-Muntaẓam*, 7: 246. See also Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4: 222, Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rikh*, 9: 219; Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, *Uyūn al-akhbār wa funūn al-āthār*, ed. M. Ghālib. Vol. 6 (Beirut, 1978), 6: 288.

13 *al-Rawḍa al-baḥiyya al-zāhira fi khitāṭ al-mu'izziyya al-qāhira*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid (Cairo, 1996), p. 40. Virtually the same information appears in al-Maqrīzī's *Khitāṭ* (Bulaq, 1853), vol. 1, p. 453.

14 Idrīs, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, 6: 288. Idrīs assigns the event to the year 410 which must be a mistake for 400 and credits his information to al-Sharīf al-Ḥimyarī al-Ḥusaynī's *Kitāb al-ma'rūf bi-Kanz al-akhbār fi'l-siyar wa'l-akhbār*.

15 The incident is mentioned in his as yet unpublished *Tanbīh al-hādī wa'l-mustahdī* (p. 234 of ms. #723 belonging to the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London).

had all members of the family arrested and executed. Only Abu'l-Qāsim managed to hide and escape; the rest, his father, father's brother, two of his own brothers and two or three additional family members died. The survivor made his way in secret to Palestine and there found protection with Ḥassān, the oldest son of Mufarrij b. Dagħfal b. al-Jarrāḥ, the chief of the Ṭayy Bedouins, who controlled not only southern Syria but much of the desert area north and east of the Hijaz. The Jarrāḥids often intercepted the Iraqi pilgrimage caravan and extracted large fees from it. They, most especially Mufarrij, were notorious for altering their allegiance to suit an immediate goal of theirs. Mufarrij had more than once rebelled against the Fatimids; yet his three sons brought to al-Ḥākim's side badly needed reinforcements in the battle against Abū Rakwa, all for a hefty payment, to be sure.

Abu'l-Qāsim was a master of eloquence, highly skilled with words and language. To Ḥassān he recited a *qaṣīda* in praise of the Jarrāḥids and the Ṭayy. It proved most effective; they granted him protection against the effort of the caliph to arrest him. He, in turn, persuaded them to renounce al-Ḥākim and seek another caliph in the *amīr* of Mecca. Up to this point, it is unclear how much Abu'l-Futūḥ knew of this plan. The Jarrāḥids were easily prompted into revolt and they seized Ramla as their capital. Next they asked Abu'l-Qāsim to go to Mecca and obtain Abu'l-Futūḥ's assent. Once there, the *amīr* agreed. Al-Maghribī suggested that he use funds deposited with a wealthy man from Jidda, kept by him for commitments to merchants, plus the gold and silver objects held inside the *Ka'ba*, to fund the venture. The gold and silver was melted and fashioned into coins bearing the name of Abu'l-Futūḥ, now the *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, al-Rāshid bi-Allāh. Such coins were known locally as *fathīyya* (or according to another account, *ka'biyya*). They were distributed to the followers of the new caliph, those who now offered their pledge of allegiance to him, including members of his Hasanid family, other inhabitants of Mecca and tribesmen from several Ḥijāzī Arab groups. Evidently he also had a force of black slaves numbering perhaps a thousand.¹⁶

One version of what happened next has al-Maghribī return alone to the Jarrāḥids to confirm their acceptance of the plan. He then went back to Mecca to urge Abu'l-Futūḥ to move to Palestine, which he did, there being royally received by the Ṭayy who recognized him as the imam-caliph.¹⁷ Al-Ḥākim was

16 Ibn Fahd reports that Abu'l-Futūḥ was accompanied to Ramla by 1,000 horsemen of the Banū Ḥasan and 1,000 slaves belonging to his commanders.

17 The procession of arrival has Abu'l-Futūḥ riding on a horse wearing a sword that he claimed was Dhu'l-Faqār and in his hand he carried a rod they said was that of God's messenger; Ibn Fahd, *sub anno* 401.

quite pointedly denounced in the next Friday sermon as Pharaoh, a Qur'anic reference. Abu'l-Futūḥ took up residence in the governor's house in Ramla; the Jarrāḥids then controlled nearly the whole southern portion of Syria. The famous *khaṭīb*, Ibn Nubāta, is reported to have given a *khuṭba* in the new caliph's name.

One early consequence of the revolt was the cancellation of the pilgrimage caravans for that year (i.e. 401). The one from Egypt had reached Qulzum when it turned back. The Iraqi-Khurasanis never started.¹⁸ The following year the Iraqis managed to reach Mecca but barely survived the return. The Egyptian pilgrims were eventually ordered not to proceed. In fact there was a more general command that no one was to journey to Mecca or engage in commerce with it.

Here it is important to investigate to what extent Mecca depended on the funds and provisions these caravans brought. There are hints that al-Ḥākim recognized a cousin of Abu'l-Futūḥ as a replacement *amīr*; or that Abu'l-Futūḥ himself arranged it. The order not to deal with Mecca in 402/1011–12 indicates, rather, an embargo that precluded cooperation. In the end the policy of the Fatimid caliph vis-à-vis the Jarrāḥids, as many times before, was to rely on the temptation of money, gifts and presents, tangible incentives to drop their revolt and return to the fold. Over time—and not a long time—it worked. The three sons of Mufarrij accepted al-Ḥākim's enticements, as much as 50,000 dinars each. Abu'l-Futūḥ sensed that his position was becoming less and less secure. He complained to Mufarrij, asking only that the old man provide him an escort back to Mecca. That he did. Once back home Abu'l-Futūḥ publicly withdrew his claim to the caliphate and restored the name of al-Ḥākim in the Friday sermon. He also wrote to al-Ḥākim seeking to be forgiven. It was apparently granted. The North African historian Ibn 'Idhārī adds that the Fatimid caliph sent him a substantial sum and ordered the people traveling to Mecca to take with them food and other appropriate goods.¹⁹ All that apparently arrived with the caravan at the end of 403/1013.²⁰

Al-Maghribī, like the *amīr*, saw his status in peril and he requested an escort to the east into Abbasid territory. Thus, by the end of 403, the whole affair had come to an end: the Jarrāḥids soon acknowledged Fatimid suzerainty, as did Abu'l-Futūḥ, who was now, once again, merely the *amīr* of Mecca. He had, however, saved himself from a worse fate.

18 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, 7: 252; Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, vol. 1, p. 260.

19 Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, p. 260.

20 Or was it 404?

But the question of to what extent his eventual fate rested on the ability of Mecca to do without what the *hajj* provided remains. Possibly, it is solely an issue with respect to Egypt. The Iraqi caravan seldom offered the Hijaz much of anything as far as can be determined. Back in 366/977, Jamīla, the daughter of Nāṣir al-Dawla Ibn Ḥamdān, went on the pilgrimage with her two brothers. It was, say the sources that report it, a pilgrimage the like of which gave rise to proverbs. She distributed so much money to those resident in Mecca (the *mujāwirs*) that they became rich.²¹ But this case was obviously quite exceptional. There are no other mentions in this period of payments by the Iraqis to Meccans or for the support thereof. Instead the common complaint made is about the cost of fees, duties, extortion and robbery by the Arabs along the route, principally the Banū Ṭayy under the Jarrāḥids and the Uṣayfira, another tribal group. The caravan simply had to come prepared to pay, not the Meccans but the tribesmen between Kufa or Basra and the Ḥaramayn. With luck, as happened in 385/995, a wealthy donor provided a major portion of what was required. In that year Badr b. Ḥasnawayh al-Kurdī, *amīr* of the Jabal, sent the sum of 5,000 dinars to pay off the Uṣayfira in lieu of what they might have demanded from the pilgrims. He, moreover, pledged the same amount or more for each year thereafter.²² In 389 the two great *sharīfs* al-Raḍī and al-Murtaḍā made the journey in person. The Jarrāḥids intercepted the party and forced the two of them to turn over 9,000 dinars of their own money to let the caravan pass. So expected were such payments the pilgrims came to anticipate the encounter with dread; this interference with the *hajj* was hateful, but the Arabs counted on what it provided them. In 394/1004 the Uṣayfira blocked the route. The members of the caravan chose of their number two men to negotiate, both of whom were remarkably gifted Qur'an reciters, as good as any anywhere. They performed in front of the Bedouin chief who then asked them, "How is your life in Baghdad?" They replied, "A pleasant enough life. We are given robes of honor and a stipend." He said, "Have you ever been given a 100,000 dinars at one time?" "No," they answered, "not even 1,000." He said, "I am giving you the caravan and its possessions." They bid him farewell and departed to the joy of the pilgrims who were therefore this time free and clear.²³

Therefore, given that the paramount concern of the Iraqi caravan was surviving the Arabs, the economic value of its reaching Mecca must have been minimal. And, it often did not. There were long periods when no one came from the east. That was, it seems, increasingly the case over the first half of

21 Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4: 126–27.

22 On this man who died in 405, see his obituary, Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4: 237.

23 Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4: 211.

the 5th/11th century.²⁴ When Nāṣir-i Khusraw performed his four pilgrimages in 438, 439, 440 and 442 respectively, he could report that no one else came, none from the east but also none from Egypt (except a tiny few). Only when a government provided direct aid and support—as in the rare instance when Maḥmūd of Ghazna was persuaded to take an interest, which he did for 415/1025, sending Ḥasanak—did it have more than half a chance.²⁵ Some tried to convince Maḥmūd that the pilgrimage was more important than the conquest of heathen territory in India. But the argument did not produce a long-term result. It was not until the advent of the Saljuks that the situation changed and only under Alp Arslan and later.

The difficulties of the Iraqis and other easterners did not, however, normally include doctrinal problems as might have been expected. Some religious tension did exist, but the participation of the Sunnīs was tolerated, provided only that the name of the Abbasid caliph was not visible on standards and flags (or anything else) carried by the pilgrims.²⁶ Returning Iraqis reported in 396/1006 that, when the *khuṭba* was said for al-Ḥākim in the Ḥaramayn, the people stood up at the mention of his name. This information from the anti-Fatimid Ibn Taghrī Birdī claims that they were commanded to do so, “as it was done in Egypt and elsewhere; when al-Ḥākim’s name was said, they stood and prostrated in the market or other gathering places.”²⁷ The latter assertion seems like an exaggeration to heighten the heretical aspect of this practice, if it, in fact, took place at all.

It would be useful to determine exactly what the Egyptian caravan provided to the holy cities. The evidence is, however, scattered and not quite clear enough. The Meccan Ibn Fahd seems not to have had access to such records as he seldom reports anything about Egypt. Al-Maqrīzī is our primary source. In his *Ittī‘āz al-ḥunafā’*, which he arranged chronologically, he typically includes a note within his account of a given year about the caravan’s departure or its return, or both. Some additional information exists in his work about Fatimid gifts to the *ka’ba*: *miḥrābs* for the inside in gold and silver with the name of al-Mu‘izz, for example.²⁸ Similarly, for 368/979 the caravan carried another

24 The record compiled by Ibn Fahd has but a few successful Iraqi caravans over the whole half century, some cancelled out of fear of the Arabs, others due to the late arrival to Baghdad of the Khurasanis.

25 Apparently the effort to persuade Maḥmūd to fund the caravan began in 412. See Ibn Fahd under that year.

26 Mentioned by the Ismaili author Idrīs ‘Imād al-Dīn, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, 6: 216, specifically for the period of al-‘Azīz.

27 *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4: 214.

28 Maqrīzī, *Ittī‘āz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1: 230.

miḥrāb of gold along with wheat (*qumḥ*), barley (*sha'ir*), flour (*daqīq*), oil (*zayt*), and other types of grains and oils, plus stipends (*ṣilāt*) for the *ashrāf*.²⁹ For the following year he mentions the *kiswa*, the stipends, perfumes (*ṭib*), wax (*sham'*) and oil and reports that the total expenditure for all that was 100,000 dinars.³⁰ In 380 the caliph sat to review what is reported to have been "a grand caravan" (*qāfila 'aẓīma*) that must have carried a similar set of goods although the report this time lists only the *kiswa*, perfumes and the stipends.³¹ For 383/993 he mentions only the *kiswa* and the stipends, which together cost 30,000 dinars, but adds that it was a large caravan and that it was accompanied by 3,500 soldiers.³²

Reports of a similar kind continue into the reign of al-Hākim. For 387/997 the list includes the *kiswa*, oil, flour, wheat, wax and perfumes for, this time, both Mecca and Madina.³³ Another from 391/1001 mentions the *kiswa*, wax and the stipends.³⁴ It is also common for him simply to say that the caravan departed with its provisions as had become customary, thus no longer supplying any detail. Fortunately, in al-Maqrīzī's *Khiṭaṭ* we have information about the caravan that he gleaned from the *Book of Treasures and Rarities* (*Kitāb al-Dhakhā'ir wa'l-tuḥaf*).³⁵

The expenditure during the season each year that the caravan departed was 120,000 dinars. Of that amount the cost of perfume (*ṭib*) and saffron perfume (*khalūq*) [or sweets (*ḥalwā'*) according to another reading], and wax came to 10,000 dinars each year. The expenditure for the delegation that came to the Presence was 40,000 dinars. The cost of food allowances (*jirāyāt*) and charity, the renting of camels, and assistance to those of the army who made the journey, the commander of the festival, the servants of the caravan, the digging of wells and other items, came to 60,000 dinars. This expenditure during the era of the *wazīr* al-Yāzūrī each year

29 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1: 246.

30 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1: 252.

31 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1967), 1: 267.

32 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, 1: 279.

33 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 15. Both of the Ḥaramayn are mentioned in this instance but presumably both were included, although not mentioned, in those from earlier.

34 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 41.

35 Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, new edition by Ayman Fuad Sayyid, 2: 598; Bulaq 1:492. Evidently this information was in the mid 11th century work of this name, only part of which entered later recensions.

was more, reaching 200,000 dinars.³⁶ No other nation spent so much as this on the festival.

This information casts some doubt about the amount that was actually spent for goods and stipends, that is, the value of the material delivered to the Hijaz, as opposed to the cost of the caravan and its protections and maintenance *en route*. There is no amount listed for the *kiswa*. The unexplained but rather large figure for the “delegation that came to the Presence” (*al-wafd al-wāṣilīn ilā al-ḥaḍra*) might represent the total of stipends for the *ashrāf*. Still, if so, it is hard to understand what the phrase means. In any case there is a fairly consistent number of 100,000 to 120,000 going back to the advent of the Fatimids in Egypt. And it is possible that this figure does not cover food and other provisions on the theory that they constituted expenditures not directly related to the festival of the *ḥajj* specifically.³⁷

In general, aside from the information above, there is little else to help. One exception is the account provided by the Ismaili traveler Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who devoted a lengthy portion of his *Safarnāma* to his four visits (pilgrimages) to Mecca. For the third, which took place in 440, he comments:

During Rajab 440 [Jan. 1049] the sultan's representative announced once again that there was famine in the Hijaz and that, since it was unwise to go on the pilgrimage, the people should excuse themselves from this obligation and adhere to God's commandment. This year also no pilgrims went, although there was no shirking the sultan's duty, and therefore the covering for the *Ka'ba*, and that for the servants, retinue, and the emirs of Mecca and Medina, the gift for the emir of Mecca (the stipend for each being three thousand dinars a month), a horse, and a robe of honor, which are sent twice yearly, were duly expedited. This year a man called Qāḍī 'Abdallāh, a judge from Syria, was entrusted with these duties. I went in his company via Qulzum.³⁸

36 al-Yāzūrī had performed the pilgrimage some time before coming to Egypt. While visiting the mosque of the Prophet in Madina, a piece of it fell on his shoulder, prompting one of the locals to predict that he would attain a lofty position. Perhaps he was repaying the favor. Ibn Zāfir, *Akhbār al-duwal al-munqaṭi'a*, pp. 78–79.

37 An interesting, but not necessarily germane, bit of information from the year 417 recounts the caliph al-Zāhir's fall from his horse, an accident that wounded him so badly they feared he would die. When he recovered, he set aside 100,000 dinars as alms. Of that 40,000 went to Mecca and Madina but only 20,000 each to Syria, the Maghrib and Egypt. That may say something about the relative status of each, the Ḥaramayn being clearly favored in this circumstance. Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 175.

38 Ed. and trans. by Wheeler Thackston, p. 78.

Here we discover that, even when the caravan could not proceed to the Hijaz, the Fatimid caliph felt obliged even so to send the *kiswa* and the stipends, now said to amount to 3,000 dinars a month—‘each’ possibly meaning the *amīrs* respectively of Mecca and Madina—which was forwarded to them in semi-yearly installments.

Still as Nāṣir reported, no caravans reached Mecca in the years he was there. Without the provisions the caliph sent with them, hardship must have been likely. In fact the same source mentions severe conditions in the Hijaz during his second pilgrimage in 339/951, a drought so bad the *mujāwirs* were leaving because of it. In 440/1048–49, 35,000 Ḥijāzīs came to Egypt, having been driven out of their homeland by the famine.

This year 35,000 people came to Egypt from the Hijaz; and, since they were all hungry and naked, they received clothing and pensions from the sultan until the next year, when the rains came and food was once again plentiful enough in the Hijaz to support these people. The sultan gave them all clothing and gifts and sent them back to the Hijaz.³⁹

There are at least two other reports of a similar kind. In 415/1025,

a delegation from the Hijaz assembled at the entry to the royal palace pleading for aid. They are reported to have said: “O people, we have come to you leaving our families on the point of starvation from hunger. If there had not been a need for creating a *da‘wa* in Mecca and Madina, you would have kept away from us. There are those who wanted us to expend ourselves in raising a *da‘wa* to someone other than your imam but we did not accept to do so. Now we want someone to speak to about this matter.” But no answer was given them. They had previously tried various prominent men of the state, such as Mi‘dād and others, but they were shunted from this one to that one. Finally when they departed from the entry of the palace in disappointment, Bahā’ al-Dawla Muẓaffar, the Sicilian, who was master of the royal parasol, sent them 1,000 dinars of his own money. They said: “We will take only what the Commander of the Believers provides us. This stipend we accept, however, and may God reward you for it, but we will disperse it among our poor and our servants.” They divided it accordingly, among 500 individuals, two dinars for each one.⁴⁰

39 Ibid.

40 Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 163–64.

Al-Musabbihī, who is the source of this report and who was likely an eye-witness to, at least some, aspects of what happened, adds a bit later in his account that, on the 15th of Dhu'l-hijja of the same year, the Meccan delegation departed, having by then been given half of what they had expected and that nothing at all was sent with them for Abu'l-Futūḥ. They left quite displeased. And it seems that there were repercussions to the Meccan *amīr*'s earlier revolt after all.⁴¹

In 447/1055–56 the scarcity of bread in the Hijaz was so bad its price rose dramatically and then it was not to be found at all. The inhabitants and the pilgrims were on the point of dying when, says the report, God unleashed such a flood of locusts they filled the earth and served as a substitute food. And then the caravan returned, easing the situation for the people of Mecca. The cause for this period of scarcity was a low Nile that resulted in an inability to export food from Egypt.⁴²

Whatever else the earlier of these reports may imply, it confirms how serious drought conditions might be in the Hijaz and, when the worst came, how also it was to Egypt the inhabitants looked for succor. The second connects the supply of food directly to the ability of Egypt to export what was required.

Conditions in Egypt in 447/1055–56 were relatively sound compared to those of a decade later, when the long slow decline of government services, following the fall of al-Yāzūrī, steadily weakened the economy, which sank first into stagnation and then into chaos. Eventually Egypt could not feed itself, let alone the Hijaz. It was the period known as the “great calamity” (*al-ayyām al-shidda*).

In the Hijaz itself, the consequences of troubles in Egypt were evidently slow to arrive. Before that, the dynasty of the Ja'farids (or Sulaymānids) came to an end with the death of Shukr b. Abu'l-Futūḥ in 453/1061–62. There followed a period of uncertainty and conflict among factions vying for the amirate. In 455/1063–64 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣulayḥī, who had then already conquered the whole of Yemen, came to Mecca to put things in order. Reports of his actions laud his brief intervention as a model of goodness and justice, a humble man and a fine administrator, who won over the hearts of the people. He restored items that had been taken by the previous rulers and, notably, the report says, he dressed the sacred house in white silk.⁴³ Although 'Alī had hoped to become the savior of the Fatimid imamate, reluctance in Cairo kept

41 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 169.

42 Ibn Fahd, *Itḥāf*, 2: 464. Note that, for at least one year, 451, the opposite of scarcity occurred. That year food was so plentiful the price of wheat and dates dropped to a low never seen before. Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 5: 64.

43 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 268–69; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 5: 72.

him at bay. His efforts in Meccan, once so promising, also ended soon enough. Troubles in the Yemen contributed to his murder in 459/1067.

Without him, the ability of Cairo to control the Ḥaramayn continued to diminish. The military in Egypt fell apart with one ethnic unit fighting another, one commander against others. Internally security ceased except in the capital. Food and funds failed to reach the cities; commerce ceased. Even the caliph suffered from the resulting scarcities. Moneys collected by the Ismaili *da'wa* did not arrive. The Hijaz likely received less and less simply because there was nothing to send, and no sure way to send it. It was perhaps only a matter of time before the Meccans would look to someone else. That finally happened in 462/1069–70. The *amīr* was Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. Abī Hāshim, of a new dynasty, the Hawāshim. The Abbasid caliph al-Qā'im was then supported by the Saljuks under 'Aḍud al-Dawla Alp Arslān who had moved from Khurasan to Aleppo. He now sent to the *amīr* of Mecca 30,000 dinars along with a sumptuous robe of honor and a commitment to pay him 10,000 dinars a year. He dispatched 20,000 to the ruler of Madina, as well. The Meccan *amīr* had been put in his position in 456 by 'Alī al-Ṣulayhī but that connection was evidently old and no longer valid by 462. With moneys now flowing from the Saljuk authority, the *khuṭba* for al-Mustansir ceased; it was said instead in the names of al-Qā'im and Alp Arslān.⁴⁴ Additional information suggests that it was Muḥammad who first contacted Alp Arslān by sending an emissary and his own son to the Saljuk sultan to announce the cessation of the Fatimid *khuṭba* (and of use in the call to prayer of the Shiite formula "Come to the best of works.") Only then did Alp Arslān come up with the sums mentioned which included also a stipend for the *amīr* of Madina of 5,000 per year.⁴⁵

Given the uncertainty of exactly what the Fatimids paid the two *amīrs* in prior years, it is hard to assess whether or not Alp Arslān's 10 and 5 thousand yearly contribution was more. However, in the circumstances of Fatimid poverty in the late 450s and early 460s, it appears quite likely to have been considerably more at the time. In the face of the new interest of the Saljuks in the Ḥaramayn, any chance for Cairo to reclaim its hegemony in the Hijaz would have to wait for a return of order and prosperity in Egypt.

For 463/1071 Ibn Khaldūn reports that, during the *ḥajj* season, the *amīr* of Mecca gave the sermon, saying: "Thanks be to God Who has guided us to the people of His house, those of sound opinions, and has returned its [the House's] physique to the attire of youth [i.e. black hair] after having worn the attire of an old man [i.e. white hair], and brought our hearts around to obedience and

44 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 303–304.

45 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rīkh*, 10: 61.

adherence to the imam of orthodoxy.⁴⁶ In restoring the black Abbasid *kiswa* in place of Fatimid white, it seems that the *amīr* had not forgotten the words of Abu'l-Futūḥ on a similar occasion more than eight decades earlier.

Four years later the situation changed. With the advent of Badr al-Jamālī in Egypt in 466/1074 order quickly returned. In 467/1075 the Fatimid caliph al-Mustanṣir was able to send a letter accompanied by a magnificent gift to the *amīr* of Mecca pointing out to him that his previous pledge of allegiance was to al-Qā'im and to Alp Arslān, both of whom were now dead (the caliph in 467/1075, the Saljuk sultan in 465/1072). Accordingly, Ibn Abi Hāshim dropped the *khutba* for the Abbasid al-Muqtadī in favor of that for al-Mustanṣir, only to reverse course yet again the following year.⁴⁷ We are here entering a period of flux; the Meccans for a time hoped to have it both ways. The *khutba* now began to go back and forth. From 470/1078 we have a report that, due to a threat by Badr to cut off supplies and funds and to provide support for the opponents of the Meccan *amīr*, the latter came over to the Fatimid side once again. Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī insists that he did so involuntarily, though, even so, he erased the names of the Abbasid and the Saljuk sultan from the plaque that was over the well of Zamzam and took down the *khurasani kiswa* and put in its place one of white *dabīqī* linen on which was the name of al-Mustanṣir.⁴⁸

In that same year there arrived in Mecca from Baghdad during Ramaḍān a large *minbar* that had inscribed on it in gold: "There is no god but God; Muḥammad is the messenger of God. The imam al-Muqtadī bi-Amr Allāh, Commander of the Believers. This was ordered made by Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Juhayr." Its arrival happened to coincide with the restoration of al-Mustanṣir's name and so the new *minbar* was promptly smashed and burned.⁴⁹

The information covering the next decade is mixed. It would appear that both al-Mustanṣir and al-Muqtadī were recognized at times up to 479/1087.⁵⁰

Although it was not to last, al-Mustanṣir was considerably pleased with his initial success in this regard. In Sha'bān of 468 (March 1076), al-Mustanṣir

46 *Al-ḥamdu llāh al-ladhī hadānā ilā ahl baytihi bi-l-ra'yī'l-muṣīb wa 'awwāda binyaha bi-lībsat al-shabāb ba'da lībsat al-mashīb, wa amāla qulūbanā ilā al-tā'ati wa mutāba'at imām al-jamā'ati*, Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Ibar*, 4: 103 (cited in Mortel, *al-Aḥwāl al-siyāsiyya*, 25).

47 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī'l-ta'rikh*, 10: 97–98; Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz* (Cairo, 1971), 2: 314.

48 Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī: *Mir'at al-zamān*, p. 174. It might be suggested that Sibṭ's account confuses events from 467 with those of 470.

49 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 319; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'at al-zamān*, p. 193.

50 Maqrīzī says that the naming of the Fatimid ceased in 472, 478, and 479, thereby suggesting that it had been restored in the meanwhile but the situation is far from clear. Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, (Cairo, 1971), 2: 322 and 324.

wrote to the Yemen to boast of the restoration of his name in the holy cities and the eradication there of the shame of the Umayyads and the Abbasids. If Badr al-Jamālī, he says, “were to accomplish nothing other than this glorious feat, done so recently, that would be sufficient.”⁵¹

1 Postscripts

Historical information about the period of Badr and his son al-Afḍal is exceedingly scarce, if not non-existent, and thus an accurate account of Fatimid policy toward the Hijaz once the *khutba* ceased being said in the name of the Ismaili caliph is largely unknown. However, the next major incident is a raid by the *amīr* of Mecca on the Red Sea port of ‘Aydhab in 512/1118. He took from the merchants he found there their goods and they complained to the *wazīr* al-Afḍal, who set about preparing a response. He prohibited the pilgrimage in 514/1121 and cut supplies to the Hijaz. He also wrote to the *amīr*, who then, apparently, repented and promptly restored or reimbursed the merchants for what he had seized.⁵²

The event noted much earlier for the year 400/1009–10, in which agents of al-Ḥākim opened Ja‘far al-Šādiq’s house in Madina, was as far as we can ascertain historical fact, but the stories that would enter circulation less than a century later about al-Ḥākim’s sending his men to tunnel secretly under the tombs of the Prophet and of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar in order to steal the remains of all three for reburial in Egypt are hardly credible. But the charge was made nonetheless both in western sources, such as the writings of the Spanish geographer al-Bakrī, and the easterner, Ibn Fahd al-Makkī.⁵³ Yet why al-Ḥākim even entertained a notion of this kind is difficult to image. Abū Bakr and ‘Umar were to the Shī‘a hated villains and great satans. Of what use could their remains be in this situation? And, despite hints that the Fatimids hoped to create a cult center in Cairo, there is no evidence that they wanted to negate or in any way annul the pilgrimage to the holy cities of the Hijaz. The *hajj* obviously remained important to them.

51 See Ayman Fuad Sayyid, *al-Dawla al-fāṭimiyya fī Miṣr*, 2nd ed., p. 212; the source of the words of al-Mustanṣir is his *sijill* no. 58, also no. 57, in *al-Sijillāt al-mustanṣiriyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Mājid, (Cairo, 1954), pp. 192–93 and 187–88 respectively.

52 Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 28: 278–79.

53 On this claim and the various versions of it, see the study by Yūsuf Rāgib, “Un Épisode obscur d’histoire fatimide,” *Studia Islamica* 48 (1978), pp. 125–32. See also Shaun Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Societies* (New York, 1995), pp. 35–38.

But, although clearly an attempt to smear the Fatimids and their imam-caliph falsely, stories of the same kind were repeated and even readjusted to fit later conditions. According to a record in al-Nuwayrī, the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ, frustrated by Abbasid and Saljuk control over the holy cities in the Hijaz in his time, contrived a plan whereby he sent as many as forty agents, described as clever and quite capable men, to Madina to steal the Prophet's body and bring it back to Cairo. These men set themselves up in Madina and, to avoid detection, attempted to dig a tunnel to the Prophet's burial place from quite a distance away. They calculated that they could accurately judge exactly at what point to emerge from underground in order to achieve their aim. But, reports al-Nuwayrī, "God, the exalted, preserved His Prophet from the violation of being moved away from the place that He had chosen for him." The tunnel the thieves were digging caved in on top of them and they were all destroyed.⁵⁴

54 *Nihāyat al-arab*, 28: 308.

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Index

- Aaron, as *wazīr* of Moses 39, 50–51, 51*n*15,
90–91, 354
- al-‘Abbāsī, ‘Abd al-Samī‘ b. ‘Umar 342,
342*n*7
- Abbasid Caliphate/Abbasids
 appointment to public office 42, 80
 colors of 229, 341, 342
 condemnation of/polemics against 6,
 321, 330, 331, 333, 369, 371, 374
 in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 341, 359, 360,
 366–367
 on disappearance of al-Ḥākim 183, 188
 invocation in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 338,
 345, 403
 jurisdiction over/control of Hijaz/
 Ḥaramayn 389, 390, 391, 403, 406
 military coups 165
 qādis al-quḍāt (chief judges) in 65
 removal/replacement of caliphs 78, 165
 rivalry between Fatimid and 1, 333, 339,
 340, 341, 342, 366, 376
 Saljuks and 49, 55, 343, 403
 wazīrs 49
- ‘Abda bt. al-Mu‘izz (d. 1050) 167
- ‘Abd al-Aḷā b. Ḥāshim b. al-Manṣūr 168–169
- ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 570) 328,
372
- ‘Abdallāh b. al-Mu‘izz (d. 974) 176, 179
- ‘Abdallāh b. al-Ḥājib 159
- ‘Abdallāh b. Ibāḍ 381
- ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Thawbān
(*qāḍī*) 65
- ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Dā‘ūd 115
- ‘Abd Allāh b. Saba’ 325
- ‘Abdān (*dā‘ī*) 295–296
- ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu‘mān
(chief *qāḍī* and chief *dā‘ī*, d. 1011) 67,
163, 222
 on ‘Ashūrā’ (Shī‘ī festival) 111
 at drinking party 170, 171–172, 173
 execution 222
- ‘Abd al-Ḥākim b. Wāḥb al-Malījī *see* [al-]
 Malījī, ‘Abd al-Ḥākim b. Wāḥb
- ‘Abd al-Jabbār (chief *qāḍī*) 66*n*43
- ‘Abd al-Karīm b. al-Ḥusayn Abu’l-Barakāt
(*khaṭīb*) 345
- ‘Abd al-Mālik b. Marwān (5th Caliph of the
 Umayyad Caliphate, r. 685–705) 331,
 368, 370*n*31
- ‘Abd Manāf b. Qusay (2nd Chief of the
 Quraysh, b.c. 430) 328, 372
- ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (4th Chief of the Quraysh,
 d. 578) 328, 372
- ‘Abd al-Rāḥim Ibn Ilyās (Heir-apparent of the
 Fatimid Caliphate, 1013–1021) 183, 185
- ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I (1st Emir of Córdoba,
 r. 756–788) 372
- ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III (1st Caliph of Córdoba,
 r. 912–961) 328–329, 370*n*32, 372–374,
 375
- ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥjam (murderer of
 ‘Alī) 368
- ‘Abd al-Samī‘ b. ‘Umar al-‘Abbāsī *see* [al-]
 Abbāsī, ‘Abd al-Samī‘ b. ‘Umar
- ‘Abd Shams b. ‘Abd Manāf 328, 372
- Abraham 19, 25*n*7, 296, 297
- Abu’l-‘Abbās (brother of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-
 Shī‘ī, d. 911) 146
 on ‘breaking’ novices 318
 on payment of dues and alms to
 dā‘wa 250–251, 281–282
 on pilgrimage 272
- Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn (son of Nizār b.
 al-Mustanṣir) 101–102
- Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Nu‘mān *see*
 [al-]Mufid, al-Shaykh
- Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Quḍā‘ī (*qāḍī*) 344
- Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī (*dā‘ī*, d. 911) 156*n*3,
 250, 281, 318
 appointment of *qādis* by 58, 59
 background 384
 condemnation of/polemics
 against 383–384
 conversations with Ibn al-Haytham 146,
 214, 381
 elimination of Ibāḍī imamate 382–383
 execution 156
 polemical techniques 319
 victory over Aghlabids (909) 58, 59
- Abū ‘Alī Ḥasan b. Aḥmad (*dā‘ī*, d. 933,
 previously Ḥamdān Qarmat) 63–64, 67
- Abū ‘Ammār (mentor of Abū Yazīd) 385

- Abū Bakr (1st Caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate, r. 632–634) 322, 332, 335–336, 359, 374, 381, 405
- Abu'l-Faḍl b. al-Furāt (*wazīr*) 169
- Abu'l-Fahm (*dā'ī*) 100–101
- Abu'l-Faṭḥ Maṣṣūr b. Ma'shar (physician of al-Ḥākim) 163, 164
- Abu'l-Fawāris Aḥmad b. Ya'qūb 14
- Abu'l-Futūḥ Ḥasan b. Ja'far al-Ḥasanī (*amīr* of Mecca, r. 994/5–1010) as anti-caliph 390, 395 (causes of) renunciation of Fatimids 392–395 death 104 in Egypt 393 lineage 392 revolt against Fatimids (1010–1011) 390, 395–396, 402
- Abu'l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf b. Ayyūb (chief *qāḍī*) 74n72, 112, 116
- Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) 33, 317, 321, 322
- Abu'l Ḥasan 'Alī b. Sulaymān b. al-Bawwāb 293
- Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Mu'ayyad bi-Allāh Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn b. Hārūn (Zaydī imam, Caspian region) 32, 333, 334, 334n34, 379
- Abu'l-Ḥasan Muḥammad (chief *dā'ī*) 67
- Abū Ja'far Muslim (Egyptian noble) 370
- Abū Kathīr Afrā'im b. al-Ḥasan b. Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Ya'qūb (Jewish physician) 146–148, 150, 216–217
- Abu'l-Khayr (Fatimid agent in al-Andalus) 374, 375
- Abū Khazar 378n4
- Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn *see* [al-]Mahdī
- Abu'l Muḥammad 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ṣiqillī al-Muhandis 293
- Abu'l Munajjā b. Sanad al-Sā'atī al-Iskandarānī al-Muhandis 293
- Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī (Companion of the Prophet. d.c. 662/672) 380
- Abū Mūsā, Shaykh 250
- Abu'l-Qāsim al-Ṭayyib (Imam of Ṭayyibī Ismailī Islam, r. 1130–?) 76
- Abū Rakwa (Umayyad pretender) 393
- Abū Sa'id Maymūn Dubba (chief of police) 179
- Abu'l-Ṣalt (Andalusian polymath, d. 1134) 103, 133, 135, 211
- Abū Ṭāhir Ibn 'Awf *see* Ibn 'Awf, Abū Ṭāhir
- Abū Tammām (Khurasanian *dā'ī*, fl. 10th c.), “Chapter on Satan” 319–326, 380–381
- Abu'l-Thurayyā Najm b. Ja'far (chief *qāḍī* and chief *dā'ī*) 73
- Abū Ya'qūb b. Anastās (Melkite physician of al-Ḥākim) 164, 170–171, 172–173, 286, 287–288
- Abū Ya'qūb b. Ya'qūb (chief *qāḍī*, d.c. 798/799) 65
- Abū Yazīd Makhlad b. Kaydad (Kharijite rebel, d. 947) background/affiliation 381, 384, 385, 388 condemnation by al-Qā'im 384–386 epithets for 384–385, 386 *isti'rād* doctrine of 385 revolt of 34, 60, 62, 98, 352, 357–358, 377, 378, 384
- Accursed Tree *see* Zaqqūm/Accursed Tree
- Acre 47, 53
- Active Intellect 198, 199
- 'Ad (ancient tribe) 360, 367
- adab* literature (“bell lettres”) 211
- adab al-qāḍī* (judge's comportment) 78
- Adam 251n7, 254, 296, 297
- Adem, Rodrigo 313
- al-'Aḍīd li Dīn Allāh (Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid Caliphate, r. 1160–1171) 102, 348n22
- offspring 167
- royal library of 217
- 'Ādiliyya (*madrasa*, Alexandria) 129, 129n16
- 'Aḍud al-Dawla Alp Arslān *see* Alp Arslān
- al-Afḍal (Fatimid military *wazīr*, r. 1094–1121) 52, 55, 106
- arts and sciences/patronage under 132, 133, 147, 211, 292
- assassination 73, 150
- immigration under 103, 132
- library of 143, 147, 216, 217
- observatory of 293, 295
- policy toward Hijaz 405
- popular festivals under 116
- style of rule 73, 132
- Afḍaliyya (militia of al-Afḍal) 52, 101
- Aga Khan 191

- Aghlabid Dynasty/Aghlabids 58, 59, 60, 61, 382, 384
 'ahd (commission) of 'Alī 80, 85–87, 93
Ahl al-'adl 304–305, 305–306
Ahl al-bayt 64, 64*n*32, 149, 364
Ahl al-ḥaqā'iq 304, 305
 Ahmād b. Ishāq *see* [al-]Qādir
 Aḥmad b. Baḥr b. 'Alī (*qādī*) 60, 60*n*14
 Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855) 321
 Aḥmad, Muḥammad 7*n*4
 Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī'l-'Awwām *see* Ibn Abī'l-'Awwām
 Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Walid (Mālikī leader) 60
 Aḥmad b. Surayj (d. 918) 329
 al-Aḥsā' 333, 335, 379
 Aillet, Cyrille 383*n*6, 387
 'Āisha (d. 678) 111, 322, 368*n*13, 374
 'Ajārida (sect, branch of Kharijites) 380
 al-Akhal (*amīr* of Sicily, r. 1019–1037) 105
Akhlaq-i Naṣīrī (Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭusī) 201
 al-Akhram (Ḥasan al-Farghānī, Zaydī imam) 332
 Akhū Muḥsin 278*m*0
A'lām al-nubuwwa (Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī) 209, 326
 Alamut (Iran) 201
 alcohol consumption
 drinking parties 163, 164, 170–173, 174, 286, 287–288
 prohibition by al-Ḥakīm 173, 229, 288
 see also wine consumption
 Aleppo 403
 book production in 288, 290
 da'wa in 295
 shifting political allegiances in 339, 343
 siege of (1025) 102–103
 Alexandria
 book trade 143
 conquest of 48
 destruction of churches 178, 178*n*8
 entry point to the west/chief Mediterranean port 131, 132, 214
 festivals 366
 madrasas in 127, 129, 129*m*16, 135, 138–139
 Mālikī school in 126, 137
 Melkites in 177
 qādīs in 41, 66, 66*n*45, 133
 rebellions/revolts 101, 130–132, 133
 scholarship/scholars in 131
 eastern scholars 127–129, 138
 exchange of Islamic scholarship 124, 135–138
 renaissance and end of
 renaissance 129–135, 138–139
 western scholars 103, 124–127
 Algeria 1, 77
 'Alī b. Abī Shu'ayb (*qādī*) 62
 'Alī b. Abī Sufyan 62
 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (4th Caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate, r. 656–661)
 '*ahd* of 80, 85–87, 93
 application of inherited rules of 239
 birthday 108
 Companions of the Prophet and 26, 229*n*4, 332, 335
 death 325, 368*n*26
 enemies 364, 368*n*15
 on imamate 27
 invocation in *khutbas* (sermons) 352, 353, 354, 355, 361, 362
 lineal descent/descendants from 1, 11, 17, 32, 34–35, 39, 62, 75, 142, 189, 191, 353–354
 as Mahdī 325
 prayers of 349
 refutation of 229*n*4, 319, 331, 380, 381
 right to imamate/as rightly guided
 imam 11, 14, 15, 322, 325, 331
 succession of the Prophet 75, 108, 109, 112, 189, 229*n*4, 319, 325, 331, 333, 354, 393
 ta'wīl and 25*m*7
 titles 34, 354
 wars by 322, 368
 as *wazīr*/brother of the Prophet 39, 50–51, 50*m*13, 51*m*15, 90–91, 354
 'Alid *ashraf* (nobility) 363, 371
 at Fatimid court 160, 163, 164, 172
 in Ḥaramayn/Hijaz 389, 390, 391, 392
 'Alī b. al-Faḍl 159
 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidīn (4th Shī'ī Imam, r. 680–712) 325, 356
 'Alī b. Khalaf (head of chancery) 50*m*13, 89, 212

- 'Alī b. Mas'ūd b. Abī'l Ḥusayn Zayn al-Mulk 159
 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣulayḥī (Sultan of Yemen, Tihamah and Mecca, r. 1047–1066) 53, 402–403, 403
 'Alī b. al-Nu'mān (chief *qāḍī*) 65–66, 169
 'Alī b. al-Sallār (Governor of Alexandria) 104
 'Alī, Zāhid 12
 allegorical interpretation 247, 263, 274, 275, 275n5, 282
 see also ta'wīl
 Almeria 370n32
 Almohads 102, 138
 Almoravids 131, 138
 alms 400n37
 payment of dues and alms to *da'wa* 251–252, 271, 276, 280–282, 283, 284
 Alp Arslān (Sultan of the Saljuk Empire, r. 1063–1072) 49, 391n3, 398, 403, 404
 Alptakīn (Turkish military commander) 100, 117
 Amalric (King of Jerusalem, r. 1163–1174) 1
 al-'Amīdī (supervisor of chancery) 212
 'Āmīlī, Bahā' al-Dīn 202
 al-Amīn (6th Caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate, r. 809–813) 139, 331
Amūn al-Dawla (title) 96
amīr al-juyūsh (Commander of the Armed Forces, title) 46, 51–52, 51n18, 53–54, 72, 73
 al-Āmir bi-Aḥkām Allāh (Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid Caliphate, r. 1101–1130) 73
 arts and sciences/patronage under 285
 claims against imamate of 162, 343
 observatory of 285, 292–293
 popular festivals under 116
 royal library of 147
 sermons by 36, 36n43, 356, 357
 Amīr al-Mu'mīnīn, al-Rāshid bi-Allāh *see* Abu'l-Futūḥ Ḥasan b. Ja'far al-Ḥasanī
amūrs
 appointment of 87, 104, 392
 in Hijaz 389, 401
 payment of 401, 403
 role in festivals/processions 162
 'Ammār ibn 'Alī ibn Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Kalbī (military commander, d. 958) 98
 'Ammār b. Ja'far 349
 'Amr b. al-'Ās (Governor of Egypt, d. 664) 322, 359, 367, 380
 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ Mosque (Old Mosque, Fustat) 117, 342
 anarchy 130
 al-Anbār (Iraq) 340, 346
 al-Andalus/Andalusians 99, 124, 335, 364, 369, 370n32, 371, 374
 scholars 129, 150, 293
 see also [al-]Ṭurṭūshī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad
 see also Umayyad Caliphate/Umayyads
 animals, in processions 158, 159, 349, 350
 Anṣār 34, 352, 386
 anthropomorphism/anthropomorphists 304, 305, 310, 321
 Antioch 221, 237
 ants, speech of the 265
 al-Anwar Mosque (Cairo) 117, 158, 160
 apologies, on imamate 32–33
 appointment decrees *see* decrees
'aql see reason/reasoning
 al-Aqmar Mosque (Cairo) 117
 al-Aqrāniyūn Church (Damyetta) 236n19
al-Aqwāl al-dhahabīyya ("The Golden Sayings", al-Kirmānī) 33, 317, 332
 Arabia/Arabs 1, 48, 77, 128, 390
 see also Hijaz
 Arabic literature 146, 194, 210, 211, 212, 217, 283, 303–304
 Arabs 98, 99, 104, 236, 268, 325, 353, 397, 398n24
 'Arafat 255
 'Arīb b. Sa'd 384
 Aristotelianism 192, 194, 197, 201
 Aristotle 146, 194, 209, 214
 Armenians 47, 101, 211
 army
 Armenians in 101
 Berber tribes in 95, 99–103, 156, 352, 357, 384
 Easterners in 96, 100
 Egyptian 403
 invocation in *khutbas* 34, 352, 357–358, 385–386

- salutations 162
 slaves in 105, 171, 395, 395*n*16
see also military campaigns/expeditions;
 military commanders
 Arsensius (Melkite Metropolitan of
 Fustat and Cairo, later Patriarch of
 Alexandria) 177, 177*n*4, 178, 178*n*8, 286
Arts of the City Victorious (Johnathan M.
 Bloom) 3
 Asad al-Dīn Shīrkūh (Fatimid *wazīr*,
 r. 1169) 52, 54, 55
 Asadiyya (militia of Asad al-Dīn
 Shīrkūh) 52, 54
Asās al-ta'wīl (Qāḍī al-Nu'mān) 249
al-Asfār al-arba'a ("Transcendent Wisdom of
 the Four Journeys of the Intellect", Mullā
 Ṣadrā) 203
Aṣḥāb al-kisā' (Companions of the
 Cloak) 354–356
 al-Ash'arī, 'Alī b. Ismā'il (d. 935–936) 200,
 321
 Ash'arites/Ash'arīs 137, 138, 189, 336
 'Āshūrā' (Shī'ī festival) 107, 108, 109–110,
 111–112
 al-'Asqalānī, Ibn Ḥajar *see* Ibn Ḥajar
 al-'Asqalānī
 astrology 202, 288, 289–290
 astronomical tables (*zīj*s) 286, 292, 293,
 294, 295
 astronomy/astronomers 144, 168, 169, 171,
 172, 213, 285, 287, 288, 290, 292
see also Ibn Yūnus, Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī; [al-]
 Ṭabarānī, Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ismā'il
 Aswan (Egypt) 48, 291
 'Atāb/'Anāb b. Sabā' (physician of
 al-Ḥakīm) 225
 al-'Atakī/Ghatakī/Itakī 329
 atheism/atheists 260, 331
 'Atīq b. 'Imrān (Maghribi *qāḍī*) 131
 authority
 of *dā'īs*/chief *dā'īs* 56, 74, 75, 76, 81,
 81–85, 163, 191
 delegation of 90
 esotericism based on reason vs. 260,
 261–272
 hierarchy of spiritual 296, 298, 299
 of imams/imam-caliphs 13, 20–21, 26,
 27, 29–31, 57*n*6, 79, 86, 155, 174, 190, 191,
 261, 274, 330
 of *qāḍīs*/chief *qāḍīs* 56, 59, 65, 75, 76, 81
 'Awfiyya (government sponsored *madrassa*,
 Alexandria) 129*n*16, 136, 138, 138–139
 'Aydhab (Red Sea port) 405
ayyām al-shidda (economic crisis, 1066–
 1074) 143, 157, 157*n*9, 215–216, 402–403
 Ayyubids 124
 adoption of Shī'ī festivals 108
 dispersion of Fatimid libraries 144,
 147–148, 217, 218*n*22
 scholarship under 139
 Azāriqa (sect, branch of Kharijites) 321–
 322, 380, 385, 386–387
 al-Azdī, Abū 'Alī Sanad b. 'Imān
 (d. 1146) 126–127, 127*n*10, 135
 al-Azhar Mosque (Cairo) 113, 114, 117, 145,
 226*n*27, 232, 291
 al-'Aziz bi-l-lāh (Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid
 Caliphate, r. 975–996) 63, 65, 66, 120,
 176
 arts and sciences/patronage under 286,
 288
 concubine of 175, 176–177, 178–179,
 178*n*7, 286
 death 95, 179
dhimmīs under 228
 extravagance/lavishness at court 156
 invocation in *khutbās* (sermons) 344,
 362, 391
 involvement of Easterners in government
 and army 96, 100
 offspring 166, 175
see also Sitt al-Mulk
 physicians of 212–213
 pilgrimage caravan to Mecca 391, 391*n*3,
 392*n*5
 popular festivals under 113, 115
 pronouncements of 208
 recognition in Hijaz 391
 royal library/librarians of 142–143, 143,
 211, 215
 transition of power to/guardianship of
 al-Ḥakīm 95–96, 98–99, 179, 181
wazīrs of 49–50, 164, 208
 al-'Azizī, Baltakīn 392
 al-'Aziz Uthman (Sultan of Egypt,
 r. 1193–1198) 136

- Bādīs b. Zīrī 391*n*3
bāb al-abwāb (head of *da'wa*), chief
dā'ī vs. 63–64, 63*n*28, 75, 76
 Bādīs ibn al-Manṣūr (Zirid ruler,
 r. 996–1016) 18*n*20
 Badr al-Dawla (eunuch) 120
 Badr al-Jamālī *see* [al-]Jamālī, Badr
 Bāghāya uprising (969) 388
 Baghdad
 book production/trade in 80, 143, 214,
 216
 capture of (1058) 1, 71, 344
 da'wa in 209
 scholars in 125, 128, 137, 138, 193, 199, 201
 wine trade 333
 Bahā' al-Dawla (Buyid *amīr* of Iraq, r. 988–
 1012) 78, 165, 334, 334*n*33, 340
 Bahā' al-Dawla Muẓaffar (master of the royal
 parasol) 401
 Bahrām (Christian *wazīr* of
 Fatimids) 228*n*3
 al-Bakrī (Spanish geographer) 405
 Banū 'Awf 138–139
 Banū Ḥasan 392, 395*n*16
 Banū Kilāb 236
 Banū Qurra 181*n*20, 236
 Banū Rustum *see* Rustamids
 baptism *see* Epiphany
 al-Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr (d. 1013) 32, 334, 340
 Barjawān al-Ustādīh (eunuch/caretaker of al-
 Ḥākim, d. 1000) 97, 120, 179, 238, 393
 Barqa 64*n*32, 181
 al-Basāsīrī (*amīr*, d. 1060) 71, 344
 al-Bāshā, Ḥasan 226
 Basra 125, 128, 209, 397
 al-Batā'iḥī (Fatimid *wazīr*) 81*n*11
bāṭin (inner meaning) 248
 ẓāhir (literal wording) vs./and 247, 257–
 258, 260, 266, 272, 274, 312, 320–321
 Battle of the Camel (656) 368*n*13
 Bayhasiyya (sect, branch of Kharijites) 380
 Bayna'l-Qaṣrayn (Cairo) 117
 al-Baysānī, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm 136
 Bedouins 62*n*25, 395, 397
 beings, classes of 320
 believer (concept) 75
 belvederes 113, 114
 Ben Ezra synagogue (Cairo) 231
 Berber tribes 95, 99
 see also Kutāma Berbers
Beyond the Qur'an (David Hollenberg) 248
 Bida'iyya (sect, branch of Kharijites) 380
 Bilbays (Egypt) 178, 179
Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature (Ismail
 Poonawala) 33, 141, 141*n*3–4
 Birkat al-Ḥabash 114
 Birkat Rusays 289
 blessings, in *khutbas* (Friday sermons) 34–
 36, 353–358, 360, 386
 Bloom, Jonathan M. 3
 Bohra Ṭayyibī 207
 Bonner, Michael 2
 book collection *see* libraries
 book copying/production 147, 150, 206,
 207–214, 288
 by *dā'īs*/role of *da'wa* in 140–141,
 148–151, 207
 circulation of works 208–209
 conformity with Fatimid Ismaili
 doctrine 208–209, 290
 sponsorship of 140, 206, 216, 290
 survival of works 208, 217–218, 218*n*22
 see also Dār al-'Ilm
 book trade 143, 147, 214, 216, 291
 Bora, Fozia 218*n*22
 Brett, Michael 3, 46*n*2, 96*n*3
 al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl
 (d. 870) 150
 Bū Shanūda Church (Fustat) 233, 236*n*19
 Buyid Dynasty/Buyids 49, 55, 66*n*43, 340,
 390
 Byzantine Empire/Byzantines
 battle for Sicily 98
 emigration of Christians to 221, 237
 Fatimid-Byzantine relations 344
 Muslim congregation in 344
 treaty on invocation of imam-caliphs in
 khutbas 344
 Cairo
 advent of Badr al-Jamālī 47, 48
 belvederes 114
 Dār al-'Ilm 140, 145–146
 da'wa 209, 210
 dhimmīs in 229
 foundation/construction 1, 171, 220

- madrasas* 139
 Melkites in 177
 mosques 65, 111, 113, 114, 117, 145, 226*n*27, 232, 291
 move of al-Muʿizz/Caliphate to (973) 65, 99, 100, 109, 157, 176, 213, 372
 popular festivals 110, 111, 117
qāḍīs 41, 66, 67
 scholarship/scholars 125, 127, 128
 Westerners (*Maghāriba*) in 95, 99, 102
 Cairo Geniza 231
Caliph of Cairo (Paul E. Walker) 5
 caliphs
 listing of caliphs in sermons 36
 Sunni vs. Shīʿī 78
 Canard, Marius 107
 caravans *see* pilgrimage caravans
 censorship 148*n*21, 149
 ceremonies 161–162, *see also* festivals; processions
 Ceuta (North African port city) 131
 chanceries
 documents produced by 88–89, 212
 staff and supervision of 93, 212
 “Chapter on Satan” (Abū Tammām) 319–326, 380–381
 chargers 221, 222, 226, 227
 chief judges *see qāḍīs al-quḍāt*
 children, capturing of 381
 Christian festivals 118–119, 118*n*26
 ban on 243
 excesses at 121–122
 participation of Muslims in 120–121, 243
 see also Epiphany; *Nawrūz*
 Christianity/Christians
 conversion to Islam 234, 237–238, 240
 courtiers/in government service 93, 118*n*26, 165, 170, 172, 173, 234–235, 240, 240*n*23
 daʿwa and 256–257
 dress code for 228, 228*n*3, 232, 233, 237, 243
 emigration of 221
 physicians 164, 170–171, 172–173, 212–213, 286, 287–288
 under al-Ḥākim 184, 228, 233–234, 238
 see also churches; *dhimmīs*
 Christmas 243
 churches
 in Alexandria 178, 178*n*8
 decoration of 231
 destruction and looting of 229, 230, 231–232, 233, 236–237, 236–237*m*9, 237*n*20, 239, 240, 243, 344
 rebuilding of 238
 right to church endowments 237, 238, 240
 Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Jerusalem) 178*n*7, 231–232, 237, 344
 Church of Marat Maryam (Damyetta) 237*m*9
 Church of Mary al-Qanṭara (Fustat) 236*m*9
 Church of Mary Constantine (Damyetta) 236*m*9
 Church of Our Lady (Damascus) 237, 237*m*9
 clerks 224
 Christian 234–235, 240
 literary production by 212
 see also al-Jarjārāʿī, ʿAlī b. Aḥmad
 coins/coinage 46, 49, 74, 101, 119, 338, 352, 372–373, 395
 see also mint
 colors, political allegiance and 341, 342, 344, 392, 404
 Commander of the Believers (title) 34
 Commander of Commanders (*Qāʾid al-Quwwād*, title) 220, 222–223, 225, 226
 Companions of the Cloak (*Aṣḥāb al-kisāʾ*) 354–356
 Companions of the Prophet *see Ṣaḥāba*
 Constantinople 176, 177, 344
 conversion
 of *dhimmīs* to Islam 228, 234, 237–238, 240
 signaling conversion in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 338, 339
 to Ismaili Shiism 98, 100, 384
 of women to Islam 251–252
 Coptic festivals *see Nawrūz*
 Corbin, H. 313
 Cordoba, caliphate of 369, 370
 see also Umayyad Caliphate/Umayyads
 cosmology 207, 209

coups

- allegedly planned coup by Sitt al-Mulk 179–180, 181, 183
- military 165, 174

courts/courtiers 155

- court sittings/audiences 162–164
- extravagance/lavishness at courts 156–157, 172–173
- religious affiliation of courtiers 164–165
- see also* social elites

creation 195–196, 198, 296

crosses

- public display of 232, 233, 234, 235, 242, 243
- as symbol 256–257

Crusades/Crusaders 1, 135, 135*n*30

curses/cursing

- comparison of Umayyads to Zaqquṁ/Accursed Tree 331, 335, 364, 369, 370*n*32
- in *khutbas* (sermons) 345, 353, 354, 358–360, 367–368, 384–385
- of Ṣaḥāba (Companions of the Prophet) 392–393

Daʿāʾim al-Islām (“Pillars of Islam”, Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān) 26–29, 80, 243

- access to/availability of 64, 149, 208
- ḥadīth in 27, 349*n*25–26

Dachraoui, Farhat 61*m*18, *n*20, 374

Daftary, Farhad 12–13

Ḍaḥḥākiyya (sect, branch of Kharijites) 380

dāʿīs (missionaries)

- appointment of/decrees of appointment for 39, 40, 87, 91
- book production 140–141, 207
- see also* *daʿwa* literature
- duties and authority 22–24, 74, 76, 81–85, 163
- khaṭībs* (preachers) vs. 347
- knowledge of natural sciences 295–299
- qualifications and virtues of 81–82, 83, 146
- see also* *daʿwas*

dāʿīs al-duʿāt (chief *dāʿīs*)

- appointment of/decrees of appointment 67, 68, 71, 91
- attire 56

bāb al-abwāb vs. 63–64, 63*n*28, 75, 76

- combined office of chief *qāḍī*, *wazīr* and 67, 70, 73, 75

- duties and authority 56, 67, 69, 74, 75, 76, 81, 163, 191

- literary production 68–69

see also *daʿwas*

Damascus 68, 88, 100

- churches 237, 237*m*9

- madrasas* 218*n*22

- scholars 128, 136

Damyetta (Egypt) 47, 65, 132, 236*m*9

al-Dānī, Umayya b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abī l-Ṣalt

see Abū l-Ṣalt

Dār al-ʿIlm (“House of Learning”,

- Cairo) 140, 145–146, 216

daughters

- of imam-caliphs 166, 167

see also Rāshida bt. al-Muʿizz; Sitt al-Mulk

see also women

daʿwa literature

- access to/availability of 148–151, 207, 208, 248, 260–261, 271–272, 276, 281, 283–284

- corpus and authors 207, 209, 283–284

- natural sciences in 295–299

- works on imamate 25–31

see also *taʿwīl*

daʿwas (missions)

- admission to,

- novices 253, 276, 277, 318

- oaths of covenant 253, 254, 256, 276–280, 318

- reading curricula 140, 148, 148*n*21, 318–319

- censorship of enemies 317

- Christianity and 256–257

- in earliest Maghrib phase 63–64, 75

- in Hijaz 401

- knowledge transmission 272, 273–274

- payment of dues and alms to access and interpret knowledge 251–252, 271, 276, 280–282, 283, 284

- sessions of knowledge (*majālis*) 145, 216, 272, 276–277

- in later Egypt phase 69, 70, 71, 75

- license/conditions for teaching
 doctrine 251, 251n9
 open debates with opponents 336
 polemics in program of 318–319
 ranks and authority of and within 57,
 59, 69, 75, 76, 81, 256, 272, 276
 relation with judiciary 56, 59, 67, 74, 75
 role/purpose 56, 81
 royal/public libraries and 140–141, 216
 scientists and 285, 294
 secrecy in operations 81, 148, 205, 207,
 248, 257, 260, 276, 278, 283, 336–337
 in Syria 295
 women in 250
 works on 22–24
see also *dā'īs*; *dā'īs al-du'āt*; *ta'wīl*
Dawr Kutāma fi ta'rikh al-khilāfa al-fāṭimiyya
mundhu ta'sisihi ilā muntaṣaf al-qarn al-
khāmis al-hijrī (Musa Laqbal) 99n9
 Daylamites/Daylamis 96, 103, 162
 decrees (*siyillāt*)
 of appointment/investiture 46, 78,
 87–93
amīrs 87, 104, 392
 Commander of Commanders (*Qā'id*
al-Quwwād) 222
dā'īs/chief *dā'īs* 39, 40, 67, 71, 87, 91
 heads of *maẓālim* courts 40, 62–63,
 87, 91–92
khaṭībs (preachers) 347–348
 professorship 92–93, 127
qāḍīs/chief *qāḍīs* 39, 40, 61, 62, 65,
 66, 68, 74n72, 87, 88
wazīrs 39, 46, 50, 50n13, 51, 52, 54–55,
 87, 90, 96
 on imamate 38–41
 on safety 234
 on writing texts/producing books 140,
 150
 devils 320
dhimmīs (protected, non-Muslim people)
 conversion to Islam 228, 234, 237–238,
 240
 covenants/pacts between rulers
 and 241–242
 destruction of houses of worship of 233,
 236–237, 237n20, 238, 239, 240
 emigration of 221, 237
 (motives for) persecution and reversal of
 restriction policies 228, 237–243
 protection and tolerance of 228, 238
 sumptuary laws and restrictions
 against 228, 231–236
 association with Pact of 'Umar 230,
 239, 241–242
 ban on having Muslim servants 232
 ban on riding horses 232, 236, 242
 church decoration/public display of
 religious symbols 231, 232, 233,
 235, 242
 dress codes/markers 228, 228n3, 232,
 233, 234, 235, 237, 242, 243
 observing religious holidays 232
 permission to spy and report on
 violations of rules 233
 petition for pardon to
 al-Ḥākim 233–234
 replacement by Muslims in
 government positions 234–235,
 240
see also Christians; Jews
 al-Dhuhli, Abū Ṭāhir (*qāḍī*) 64–65
 Dhu'l-Kalā' (Abū Sharāḥil al-Ḥumayrī) 368
 disparity (*tafāwut*) 19–20
diwāns (bureaus) 87, 88, 162, 240
see also chanceries
 Dodds, E.R. 306, 307
 drinking parties 155, 164, 170–173, 174, 286,
 287–288
 drought 401, 402
 Druze 68, 69, 230, 242, 332
 dues, payment of dues and alms to
da'wa 251–252, 271, 276, 280–282, 283,
 284
 dynasties
 empires vs. 1–2
 fall of 108
 Easterners (*Mashāriqa*)
 in Egypt 100
 origins of 100
 scholars 127–129
 Westerners (*Maghāriba*) vs. 96–99, 100
 economic crisis (*ayyām al-shidda*, 1066–
 1074) 143, 157, 157n9, 215–216, 402–403

Egypt

- advent of Badr al-Jamālī (1074) 47–48, 53, 71, 72, 130–131, 174, 211, 404
- army 99–103, 403
- book collection and literary production 206, 211
- dā'īs*/chief *dā'īs* in 69, 210
- economic and food crisis 402, 403
- festivals 107, 109, 118n26
- invasions/conquests of,
 - conquest by Fatimids (969) 1, 77, 98, 100, 206, 220, 342, 391
 - first (914–915) and second (919) Fatimid invasions 359, 366, 367, 390
 - invasion by Saljuks 48
- al-Mahdī's travel from Syria to 141–142, 214
- Mālikī school in 137
- migration to 103–104, 105, 106, 131, 132, 401
- move of al-Mu'izz/Caliphate to (973) 63, 65, 75, 98, 99, 100, 109, 157, 213, 372, 391–392
- qāḍīs*/chief *qāḍīs* in 61, 64–67, 66, 75
- Westerners (*Maghāribā*) vs. Easterners (*Mashāriqā*) in 95, 96–98, 99, 100
- works on 56, 99
- see also* Alexandria; Cairo; Fustat
- Elements of Theology* (Proclus) 306
- elites *see* social elites
- emanation (*inba'atha*) 198
- Empedocles 301n4
- The Empire of the Mahdi* (Heinz Halm) 2
- empires, dynasties vs. 1–2
- engineers 293
- Enneads* (Plotinus) 194, 301n4, 304
- Epiphany (Festival of Baptism) 107, 118n26, 119, 232, 243
- esotericism
 - based on reason vs. authority 260, 261–272
 - Ismailis vs. mainstream Islam 247–248
 - see also* *bāṭin*; *ta'wīl*
- esoteric knowledge
 - access to and availability of,
 - by general public 273–274
 - by imams 274

- by persons who reason skillfully 262, 273
- teaching of 262
- techniques for guarding and restricting 273–284
 - by oaths of covenant 276–280, 283, 284
 - by payment of dues and alms 251–252, 271, 276, 280–282, 283, 284
- essence 190, 203–204
- eunuchs, Master Eunuch of the Master Eunuchs (*Ustādh al-Ustādhīn*, title) 222–223, 225
- ewers *see* rock crystal ewer
- Executors (*Awṣiyā'*) 255n11
- exegesis *see* *tafsīr*; *ta'wīl*
- existence 203–204
 - of God 204, 306–307
 - unity of (*waḥdat al-wujūd*, concept) 203
- Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and Its Sources* (Paul E. Walker) 2
- external meaning *see* *zāhir*
- extravagance at courts 108, 156–157, 181, 184–185
- Faḍl b. Šālīḥ (general and *wazīr*) 163, 164, 172
- Fahd b. Ibrāhīm (Christian clerk) 120
- al-Fā'iz bi-Naṣr Allāh (Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid Caliphate, r. 1154–1160) 217
- Fakhr al-Mulk (Buyid *wazīr* of Baghdad) 15, 149, 266, 284
- al-Fākihī (d.c. 885–892) 115–116
- falconry 211
- famine 400, 401, 402
- al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr (d.c. 950) 192, 197
- al-Faramā (Egypt) 65
- al-Farghānī, Ḥasan *see* [al-]Akhrām
- al-Fāriqī, 'Abd al-Ḥākim b. Sa'īd (chief *qāḍī*) 69–70
- al-Fāriqī, Abū'l-Faraj (*qāḍī*) 70
- al-Fāriqī, Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥākim b. Sa'īd (chief *qāḍī*) 71
- al-Fāriqī family 170, 174
- al-Fāriqī, Mālik b. Sa'īd (chief *qāḍī* and chief *dā'ī*, d. 1014) 66–67, 115, 170
- execution by al-Ḥākim 67, 67n48, 181–182, 182n21, 227

- role of descendents in judiciary 70, 170
- al-Fāriqī, Saʿīd b. Mālik (father of Mālik b. Saʿīd and tutor of al-Ḥākim, d. 1001) 170
- al-Fāriqī, Saʿīd b. Saʿīd (brother of Mālik b. Saʿīd and tutor of al-Ḥākim, d.c. 1000/1001) 67n48
- fast-breaking *see* ʿīd festivals
- Faṭḥ b. Yahyā (leader of Masālta) 382, 383
- Fātima bt. Muḥammad 35, 355–356, 392
- Fatimid Caliphate
 - decline and abolishment 1, 73, 75, 108
 - genealogy/lineage 34–35, 149, 166–167
 - naming of 357–358
 - origins/foundation/rise 1, 2, 58, 77, 95, 156, 280, 388
 - population 77, 108, 174, 346
 - size of empire 1
- The Fatimid Empire* (Michael Brett) 3
- Fatimid History and Ismaili Doctrine* (Paul E. Walker) 5
- Fatimid studies 2–7
- Feast of the Cross 232
- female rulers *see* Sitt al-Mulk
- festivals (Egypt) 107
 - Christian 107, 118–119, 118n26
 - khutbas* at 348–350, 351, 352, 366–368
 - Shiʿī 107, 108–109
 - state-promoted/public 107–108, 109
 - see also* ‘Ashūrā; Epiphany (Festival of Baptism); Four Nights of Lighting; Ghadir Khumm; ʿīd festivals; *Nawrūz* (Coptic New Year); processions
- Fierro, Maribel 124n2, 357
- fiqh* (jurisprudence) 59, 92, 144, 149
 - see also* *madhhabs*
- first intellect 198, 199
- First of the Year Festival (*mawṣim awwal al-ʿām*) 107–108
- Florence, Pitti Palace 219, 220, 221
- Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Fatima Mernissi) 176
- Foundation (*Asās*) 251, 251n7, 255, 255n11
- Four Nights of Lighting (Muslim festival) 107, 113–118
- Fuḍayliyya (sect, branch of Kharijites) 380
- Fürstenspiegel* *see* mirrors for princes
- Fustat 162, 294, 389
 - belvederes 114
 - burning and looting of 182
 - churches 233, 236n19, 237
 - dhimmīs* 229
 - khutbas* delivered in 342
 - Melkites 177
 - mosques 65, 109, 110, 117, 223, 342
 - popular festivals 109, 117, 119
 - qāḍīs* 41, 64, 66
 - scholars 213, 221
- Galen 301n4
- Germanisches Museum (Nuremberg) 219
- Ghabn (eunuch and “Qāʿid al-Quwwād”, “Commander of Commanders”)
 - career and downfall 223–224
 - charger attributed to 221, 222, 226, 227
 - corporal punishments and death 220, 224–225, 227
 - (decree of) appointments 222, 223
 - gifts from al-Ḥākim to 220, 221, 225–226
 - origins 223
 - relation with al-Ḥākim 224, 225
 - rock crystal ewer attributed to 220, 226, 227
 - titles 220, 221, 222–223, 225
- Ghadir Khumm (Shiʿī festival) 108–109, 110–111, 112
- Ghāliya (sect) 321, 325
- al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) 137–138, 205, 300
- ghiyār* (badge) 228, 228n3, 232, 235, 237, 243
- Ghulāt sects 317, 336
- Ghuzz/Oghuz Turks 103
- Glaber, Rodulfus 178n7
- Gnostic mythology 302
- God
 - acts/actions of 323
 - as cause 308, 308n27
 - cognizance/existence of 306–307, 311, 311n39
 - creation 195–196, 198, 296
 - God-fearing piety 81
 - God’s/divine command between intellect and 196, 201
 - knowledge of 323
 - Neoplatonic/unknowable 197, 300, 302, 305, 306–307, 312–313
 - Oneness of/*tawḥīd* 302–303, 302n5, 304, 307, 308, 309, 313, 334

God (*cont.*)

- power vs. force of 308
- tanzih* (removing all association from God) 309, 310–311
- tashbih* (trying to understand God by analogy and comparison) 304, 305, 310
- as a thing 196, 309, 310, 324n9
- transcendence of 195, 308, 308n27, 310, 312
- unio mystica* 306, 307
- will of 323
- governance 6, 81–83, 198, 269, 333
- government services
 - Christians in 93, 118n26, 165, 170, 172, 173, 234–235, 240, 240n23
 - offices and ranks 162
 - prominent families in 169–170
 - religious affiliation and 164–165
 - royal family in 165
 - Westerners (*Maghāriba*) vs. Easterners (*Mashāriqa*) in 96, 99, 100
- al-Guyūshī (oratory, Muqāṭṭam) 52

ḥadīth 136

- on adherence to imamate 27
- on ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib 34
- on attire of imams at festivals 349n25
- collection and (chains of) transmission
 - of 128, 129, 134
- on Israelites 319
- on *khuṭbas* 351, 351n33
- Proponents of Ḥadīth 334n35
- on sects 320
- on Umayyads 369–370
- Ḥadīthiyya (sect) 321, 322
- al-Ḥāfiz li-Dīn Allāh (Caliph-Imam of the Fatimid Caliphate, r. 1132–1149)
 - astronomers of 292
 - attempt to transfer Prophet’s remains to Cairo 406
 - claim on imamate by Nizārīs 101–102
 - madrasas* under 92, 127
 - succession of al-Āmir 109, 112
- Ḥafīziyya (government sponsored *madrasa*, Alexandria) 92, 127, 129, 129n16, 136
- Ḥafīziyya (sect, branch of Kharījites) 380
- hajj* see pilgrimage

- al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf 368
- al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid Caliphate, r. 996–1021)
 - appointments/decrees by 41–42, 49–50, 67–68, 104, 171, 392–393
 - arts and sciences/patronage under 144–145, 202, 288, 291
 - astronomy 213, 286, 289, 294
 - Dār al-‘Ilm 140, 145–146, 216
 - scholarship 192, 209, 249, 266, 331
- asceticism of 157, 157n8, 182
- attempt to transfer Prophet’s remains to Cairo 390, 393n10, 405, 406
- bans and restrictions under,
 - alcohol and food 173, 229, 288
 - movement of women 182, 184, 229
 - popular festivals 113
 - royal family 168–169
 - see also *dhimmīs*
- on Companions of the Prophet 332, 392–393
- corporal punishments and executions
 - by 185–186, 291, 394–395
 - Barjawān 238
 - al-Fāriqī 67, 67n48, 181–182, 182n21, 227
 - Ghabn 220, 224–225, 227
 - al-Ḥusayn b. Jawhar and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Nu’mān 222
 - Ibn Hāshim 168–169
 - al-Jarjarā’ī 51n17
 - al-‘Ukbārī 288–289
- court/courtiers 162, 219–220, 222
 - astronomers 286, 287, 288
 - extravagance/lavishness at court 157, 181, 184–185
 - physicians 163, 164, 170–171, 172–173, 225, 286, 287–288
 - physicists 290–291
- da’wa* under 74, 80, 209, 277
- disappearance/murder 69, 175, 182, 183–184, 185–187, 239, 291, 332
- see also Sitt al-Mulk
- enthronement and guardianship 95–96, 98–99, 166, 179, 181
- see also Sitt al-Mulk
- finances under 184–185

- gifts to/from 181, 181n20, 220, 221,
 225–226
 inheritance 168
 invocation in *khutbas* (sermons) 36,
 357, 389, 396, 398
 mental state 239
 mother of 176, 178n7
 offspring 166, 167, 168, 172
 persecution,
 of astrologers 288–290
 destruction of houses of
 worship 178, 178n8, 184, 228, 231,
 236–237, 236–237n19, 238, 239, 240,
 243
 see also dhimmīs
 recognition 21, 149, 339
 as designated and infallible imam/
 validation of imamate 14, 15, 16,
 238–239, 333, 369, 379
 in Mecca 394–395, 398
 see also Abu'l-Futūḥ Ḥasan b. Ja'far
 al-Ḥasanī
 refutations during reign of 32–33
 removal of Ja'far al-Šādiq's possessions to
 Cairo 389–390, 394, 405
 sermons by 96, 349–350
 Halm, Heinz 2–3, 13, 46n2, 55n34, 161
Hamārē Ismā'īlī madhhab (Zāhid 'Alī) 12
 Ḥamdān Qarmāṭ (later Abū 'Alī Ḥasan b.
 Aḥmad, *Bāb*, d. 933) 63–64, 67
 Ḥamza b. 'Alī (Druze prophet, d.c. 1021) 69
 Hanafi school/Hanafis 59
 converts to Ismailism 60
 Mālikī school vs. 58, 60
 qādis/chief *qādis* 68, 68n50, 346
 Hanbali school/Hanbalis 68n50
ḥaqā'iq (truths/ultimate realities) 283
 Haramayn
 'Alid ashraf in 389, 390, 391, 392
 jurisdiction over/control of 389, 390,
 398, 403–405, 406
 qādis in 66
 see also Madina; Mecca
 Ḥarb b. Umayya 328, 372
 al-Ḥārūnī al-Ḥasanī *see* Abu'l-Ḥasan al-
 Mu'ayyad bi'llāh Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b.
 Hārūn
 Hārūn al-Rashīd (5th Caliph of the Abbasid
 Caliphate, r. 786–809) 65, 139
 al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Alī b. Salāma *see*
 Ibn al-'Ūris
 Ḥasanak Mikālī (Iranian statesman,
 d. 1032) 398
 al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī (2nd Shī'ī Imam, 661–670)
 imamate of 11, 265, 325, 331, 355
 invocation in *khutbas* (sermons) 35–36,
 355, 356
 lineal descendants of 191, 390
 al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī al-Husayn al-Kalbī
 (Fatimid governor of Sicily, d. 964) 98
 Ḥasan b. Rajā' b. Abī'l-Ḥasan 159
 al-Ḥasan b. Zayd b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī 109
 al-Ḥasanī, 'Īsa b. Ja'far *see* 'Īsa b. Ja'far
 al-Ḥasanī
 al-Ḥasanī, Abu'l-Futūḥ Ḥasan b. Ja'far *see*
 Abu'l-Futūḥ Ḥasan b. Ja'far al-Ḥasanī
 al-Ḥasanī, Ja'far b. Muḥammad *see* Ja'far b.
 Muḥammad al-Ḥasanī
 Hashīm b. 'Abd Manāf (3rd Chief Leader of
 the Quraysh, d.c. 497) 328, 372
 Ḥashwiyya (extreme literalist
 doctrine) 334, 334n35
 Ḥassān b. Mufarrīj b. Dagħfal b. al-
 Jarrah 395, 396
 Hawāshim dynasty 403
Ḥāwī al-funūn wa sawat al-maḥzūn (Ibn
 al-Ṭahhān) 212
 Hawsam (Rudsar, Gilan, Iran) 333, 334, 379
 Ḥawshab b. Ṭakhma al-Alhānī Dhū
 Zulaym 368, 368n22
 heavenly spheres 248, 298
 intellects of 197, 198
 Heijer, Johannes den 46n2, 55n34
*Heresy and the Politics of Community: The
 Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (Marina
 Rustow) 3
 Hibat Allāh b. 'Abd allāh b. Kāmil (chief *qādi*
 and chief *dā'i*) 73
 Hibat Allāh b. Aḥmad (deputy of 'Abd al-
 Samī' b. 'Umar al-'Abbāsī) 342
 hidden imams 191, 255n10, 353, 356, 357, 362
 see also Qā'im (Messiah)
 hierarchy, of spiritual authority 296, 298,
 299

Hijaz

- amīrs* 389, 401
- dependence on Fatimid support 389, 390, 401, 402, 403, 405
- famine 400, 401, 402
- jurisdiction over/control of 389, 390, 395, 406
- migration to Egypt 401
- military expeditions to 390n3, 392, 392n5
- recognition of/loyalty to Fatimid imamate 390–392, 404
- revolt of Abu'l-Futūh (1010–11) 390, 395–396, 402
- Hippocrates 150, 294
- Hirschler, Konrad 218n22
- Ḥishām b. 'Abd al-Malik (10th Caliph of the Umayyad Caliphate, r. 724–743) 370n31
- histories 213–214
 - see also Itti'āz al-ḥunafā'* (al-Maqrīzī); al-Musabbihī, al-Mukhtār 'Izz al-Mulk Muḥammad
- History* (al-Ṭabarī) 142, 144, 215
- History of Mecca* (al-Fākihī) 115
- History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church* (Michael, Coptic Bishop of Tinnis) 230
- History* (Yahyā of Antioch) 220, 220–221, 222, 230
- Hollenberg, David 248–249
- holy cities *see* Ḥaramayn; Madina; Mecca
- horses
 - in army 97
 - ban for *dhimmīs* to ride 232, 236, 242
 - as gift 96, 181, 223, 400
 - in processions/parades 158, 159, 222, 223, 349, 350, 395n17
- Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān 319
- Ḥujr b. 'Adī (Companion of the Prophet, d. 660) 368m8
- Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (3rd Shī'ī Imam, r. 670–680)
 - imamate of 11, 265, 325, 355
 - invocation in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 35–36, 355, 356
 - lineal descendants 191, 333, 335, 379, 392, 392n8
 - mourning of 109
 - opponents 368m14

- Ḥusayn b. 'Alī Ibn Dawwās (Kutāma chieftain) 185–187
- al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. al-Nu'mān (chief *qāḍī* and chief *dā'ī*, d. 1004) 39, 40–42, 66, 67, 169–170
- al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan al-Bāzyār (*wazīr*) 163, 164
- al-Ḥusayn b. Jawhar (*wāsiṭa* and *al-Qā'id al-Quwwād*, “Commander of Commanders”)
 - attribution of rock crystal ewer to 219–220, 221, 221–222, 223, 227
 - background 221–222
 - drinking party 171–173
 - execution 220, 222
- al-Ḥusayn b. Ṭāhir al-Wazzān (*wāsiṭa*) 163, 227, 234
- Ibāḍīs/Ibāḍiyya (sect, branch of Kharijites)
 - doctrine 377, 378, 381, 382
 - elimination of Ibāḍī imamate by Abū'Abdallāh al-Shī'ī 382–383
 - Ibāḍī sources of information 383m6, 387–388
 - imamate 378, 380
 - internal quarrels 388
 - refutation of 6, 369, 377, 378, 387
 - revolts by 378n4, 384, 385, 388
- “L'ibadisme maghrébin en contexte fatimide” (Cyrille Aillet) 387–388
- al-Ibāna 'an sariqat al-Mutanabbī* (al-'Amidī) 212
- al-'Ibānī, Aflaḥ b. Hārūn (*dā'ī*) 61m8, 250
- Ibn 'Abbād, al-Ṣāḥib 78
- Ibn 'Abd al-Barr 136
- Ibn 'Abd al-Qawī b. al-Jalīs (chief *qāḍī* and chief *dā'ī*) 74
- Ibn 'Abdūn (*wāsiṭa*) 240n23
- Ibn Abī'l-'Awwām (chief *qāḍī*, d. 1027) 66–67, 68, 69, 158, 346m8
- Ibn Abī'l-'Aysh (*qāḍī*) 293
- Ibn Abī Hāshim 404
- Ibn Abī'l-Minhāl (*qāḍī*) 65–66
- Ibn Abī Ṭayyī' 143–144
- Ibn Abī 'Uṣaybī'a 146, 147, 148, 177n4, 286, 288
- Ibn 'Ammār, Abū Muḥammad 109, 110
- Ibn 'Ammār, al-Ḥasan (senior commander and *wāsiṭa*) 95–99

- Ibn 'Ammār (*qāḍī* of Alexandria) 133
 Ibn Anas al-Dawla (*sharīf*) 112
 Ibn al-'Arabī, Abū Bakr (d. 1148) 137
 Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240) 203
 Ibn al-Athīr 131^m8, 353, 378ⁿ4
 Ibn 'Awf, Abū Ṭāhir 92, 127, 129, 129^m6, 135, 136, 138, 139
 Ibn Babūya al-Qūmī (teacher of al-Mufid) 199
 Ibn Bajja (philosopher) 293
 Ibn al-Baṭā'ihī (chief of staff of al-Afḍal) 293
 Ibn al-Bawwāb (calligrapher) 144
 Ibn al-Dawādārī 69ⁿ56
 Ibn Diyāb (astronomer) 293
 Ibn Duqmāq 225, 227
 Ibn Fahd al-Makkī (Meccan historian) 391ⁿ3, 393^m10, 395^m16–17, 398, 398ⁿ24, 405
 Ibn Ḥadīd (*qāḍī* of Alexandria, d. 1135) 133, 134, 135
 Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī 64ⁿ31, 65, 68, 69ⁿ57, 164, 171
 Ibn Ḥalabī (astronomer) 292, 293
 Ibn al-Hānī' (d.c. 973) 31, 210
 Ibn Ḥasdaī, Abū Ja'far Yūsuf b. Aḥmad 150–151, 150ⁿ28, 293–294
 Ibn Hāshim ('Abd al-A'lā b. Hāshim b. al-Manṣūr) 168–169
 Ibn Ḥawqal (d. after 978) 63
 Ibn al-Haytham (*dā'i*, b.c. 881–882) conversations with Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī 146, 214, 381
 on earliest experience in *da'wa* 250, 277ⁿ8
 on Fatimid court 156
 on Ibādīs 381–382
 on imamate 25–26
 personal library of 146, 214–215
 on *qāḍīs* 57–58, 58ⁿ7–8, 61^m18
 on Umayyads 370
 Ibn al-Haytham (physicist, d.c. 1040) 213, 285, 290–291, 292, 293
 Ibn 'Idhārī (Sunnī historian) 345, 383, 396
 Ibn al-Jawzī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān (Sunnī historian, d. 1200) 340, 341, 346, 363, 394
 Ibn al-Jazzār (student of Isaac Israeli) 285
 Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) 108, 126, 403
 Ibn Khariṭa 169
 Ibn Killis, Ya'qūb (Fatimid *wazīr*, 979–991) 49–50, 51, 65, 70, 149–150, 208, 218ⁿ22
 Ibn al-Mallāḥ (astronomer) 292
 Ibn Mammatī 87
 Ibn al-Ma'mūn, Jamāl al-Dīn Abū 'Alī Mūsā (historian, d. 1192) 112, 112^m13, 113, 159–160, 213
 Ibn Mujāwir (d. 1204) 136
 Ibn Muḥla (calligrapher) 144
 Ibn Mūsā al-Naṣrānī (astronomer) 292
 Ibn al-Muslima (Abbasid *wazīr*) 49
 Ibn al-Muyassar 48ⁿ6, 102^m13, 213, 349ⁿ27
 Ibn Naṣr (astronomer) 293
 Ibn Nasturius (head financial officer) 95–96
 Ibn al-Qalānīsī 88, 102, 102^m13
 Ibn Qalāqīs 211
 Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' ('Alī b. Ja'far 'Alī al-Shantarīnī, d. 1121) 106
 Ibn Qirqa/Qaraqā (physician) 293
 Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) 33, 317
 Ibn Riḍwān (physician) 147, 213, 285, 290, 291
 Ibn Rushd 262–263, 273
 Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī 227
 Ibn Sahl 374
 Ibn al-Salār, al-'Ādil (Fatimid *wazīr*) 129
 Ibn al-Ṣayrafi (head of Fatimid chancery, d. 1147) 89, 106ⁿ26, 212, 221
 Ibn Sharaf al-Qayrawānī (poet) 345
 Ibn Sīnā 193, 197, 201, 202, 203, 205, 209, 311ⁿ39
 Ibn Surayj (Shāfi'ī scholar, d. 918) 33, 317
 Ibn Taghrī Birdī (Sunnī historian, d. 1470) 185, 340, 342, 363, 398
 Ibn al-Ṭahhān 212
 Ibn Ṭāhir al-Wazzān 163
 Ibn Taymiyya 148, 205, 313, 314
 Ibn Tūmart 102, 138
 Ibn al-Ṭuwayr (d. 1220) on army 103
 on citing of imams in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 36, 357
 on *dā'īs/da'wa* 74
 on festivals 107–108, 113, 117
 history by 213
 on processions 160–161
 on royal libraries 143–144

- Ibn al-ʿŪrīs (al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAlī b. Salāma, chief *qāḍī* and chief *dāʿī*) 73, 74
- Ibn Yūnus, Abuʿl-Ḥasan ʿAlī (astronomer, d. 1009)
 appearance and behavior 172, 287
 astronomical tables (*Zīj*) 213, 286
 death 286, 289
 sponsorship of 202, 213, 285, 288, 289
- Ibn al-Zāhir (chronicler) 178, 394
- Ibn Zūlāq 64n31, 109–110, 121, 213, 218n22
- Ibrāhīm (“al-Jalīs”, tutor/
 boon-companion) 158–159
- ʿīd festivals 112, 112n13, 160
ʿīd al-aḍḥā/ʿīd al-naḥr (feast of sacrifice) 159, 344, 348
ʿīd al-fiṭr (fast-breaking festival) 158, 160, 161
khuṭbas (sermons) at 348–350, 352, 366–368
- idol worshippers 304
- Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn 55n33, 63, 71–72n66, 378, 381, 394, 394n14–15
- Ifriqiya 99, 372
- al-Iftikhār* (“The Boast”, al-Sijistānī) 209, 301n2, 309n32, 313, 330
- Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa* (“Opening of the Appeal and Beginning of the State”, Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān) 208, 383
- Iḥyāʾ ulūm al-dīn* (“The Revivification of Religious Sciences”, al-Ghazālī) 138
- ijmāʿ* (consensus) 317, 330, 336
- ijtihād* (interpretation) 317, 330, 336
see also taʿwīl
- Ikhshidid dynasty 391
- Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib* (“Disagreements of the Jurists”, Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān) 62, 62n24, 317, 329, 336
- Illuminationism 203
- Imāmīs/Imāmiyya (Twelver Shīʿa) 321
 authority of/hidden imam 191, 325–326
 courtiers 164
 doctrine 199, 200
 refutations of 317
 scholarship/scholars 199
see also [al-]Mufīd, al-Shaykh; Mullā Ṣadrā; [al-]Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn
- imamate
 authority of 93
 claims on, proof, legitimacy and recognition of 13, 15–16, 18, 34–35, 101–102, 369, 378
see also [al-]Maṣābiḥ fi ithbāt al-imāma
 conditions for 12
daʿwa literature on 25–31
 doctrine 189
 Fatimid works on 13–25, 79
ḥaḍīth on 27
 imperial letters and decrees on 38–45
 necessity of 14, 16
 polemics, apologies and refutations 32–33
 role, purpose and functions of 16–17, 19, 57n6
 sermons on 33–38
 Shiite position on 14, 17
- “Das Imamate in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre” (Wilferd Madelung) 12
- imams/imam-caliphs
 acknowledgement of living 275–276
 appointment of public positions by 38–44
 at festivals,
 attire 349, 349n25, 350
 involvement in non-Islamic festivals 118n26
 authority of 20–21, 330
 application of inherited rules of the Prophet and ʿAlī 16, 239
 delegation of authority 31, 50, 86, 90, 191, 275
 Fatimid vs. non-Fatimid doctrine 11, 27, 44, 93–94, 191
 religious vs. political 1, 13
 rules for followers/believers 29–31
 supreme/ultimate authority 57n6, 174, 190, 191, 261
 waning of direct power 174
- death of 11, 36–38
- false imams/pretenders 18, 26, 29, 101–102, 131, 162, 333–383
- hidden/concealed 191, 255n10, 353, 356, 357, 362
- infallibility 16, 17, 42–43, 77, 79–80, 239, 261
- in *khuṭbas* (sermons)/*khuṭbas* by *see* *khuṭbas*

- knowledge and intellect of 191, 199, 274
 offspring 166–167
 poetry on 13, 31–32
 qualifications and virtues 11, 17, 20, 21,
 333, 371, 374ⁿ33
 rightly guided/righteous 14–15, 28, 322,
 356, 358, 365
 role/purpose of 16–17, 18, 19, 24–25, 79,
 83–84, 333
 security at public events 352
 similarity to Jesus 32
 succession of,
 appointment/selection by people 27
 designation 112, 165, 168, 333
 lineage 11, 12, 13, 78–79, 155, 165
 replacement of imams 165
 see also Qā'im (Messiah)
 imperial letters 38–39
 India 398
 inheritance 64, 69, 166, 167, 168
 see also orphans
 inner meaning *see* *bāṭin*
 Inostrantsev, K.A. 107
Inṣiṣār (Ibn Duqmaq) 225
 Institute of Ismaili Studies (London) 3
 intellect 195, 196
 Active Intellect 198, 199
 chain/levels of intellects 197, 198
 first 198, 199
 God's/divine command between God
 and 196
 incarnation of 264
 revelation and/vs. 194
 second 198
 single universal 195, 196, 197
 see also reason/reasoning
 intellectual tradition
 definition 189, 191
 Ismailis and making of Shī'ī 190–193
 role of philosophy 204, 205
 interpretive sciences 252, 280, 282
 see also esoteric knowledge
 Iran 210
 scholars in/from 70, 124, 127, 128, 193,
 207, 209, 249
 see also [al-]Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shirāzī;
 Mullā Ṣadrā; Naṣīr b. Khusraw; [al-]
 Sijistānī, Abū Ya'qūb; [al-]Silafī, Abū
 Ṭāhir
 Iraq 63, 178, 334ⁿ33, 340
 Mālikī school 137
 pilgrims from 389, 395, 396, 397, 398
 al-'Irqī, Abū Ya'lā Ḥamza b. al-Ḥusayn b.
 Aḥmad (chief *qāḍī*) 72ⁿ67
 Isaac Israeli (Jewish physician of al-
 Mahdī) 285, 286
 'Īsa b. Ja'far al-Ḥasanī (*amīr* of Mecca, c.
 976/977) 390, 392
 Isfahan, scholars in/from 127, 128
 Ishāq b. Abī'l-Minhāl (*qāḍī*) 60
 Ishāqiyya 336
al-Ishāra ilā man nāla al-wizāra (history of
 Fatimid *wazīrs*, Ibn al-Ṣayrafī) 221
Ishārāt (Ibn Sīnā) 202
 Islamic law, observance of 57
 Ismā'īl b. Ja'far (6th Ismaili Imam,
 r. 702–762) 11, 15, 356, 365
 Ismā'īl b. al-Mustanṣir 101
The Ismā'īlis: Their History and Doctrines
 (Farhad Daftary) 12–13
 Ismaili doctrine
 natural science and 295–299
 Neoplatonism and 194, 300, 304
 philosophy and/vs. 194, 205, 274–275,
 301, 304ⁿ4, 303–304, 304
 pre-Fatimid 12
 secrecy of 260
 see also *ta'wīl*
 Ismaili law 64, 149–150
 Ismaili scholarship/scholars 190, 192, 194
 see also [al-]Kirmānī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn; [al-]
 Sijistānī, Abū Ya'qūb
 Ismaili Shiism/Ismailis
 authority of imams 191
 conversion to Ismaili Shiism 98, 100, 384
 in Fatimid Caliphate 1, 2, 77
 festivals 110, 112
 high level/government positions 57,
 164–165
 Mongol invasions and 201
 opponents 326
 promotion of Ismailism 216
 qāḍīs 58, 59, 60, 61ⁿ18, 75
 schisms 12, 75, 101–102, 108, 191
 spread of 280–281
 see also Ṭayyibī Ismailis
 Ismaili (term) 11

- Ismaili texts
 audience 149
 reading curricula 140, 148, 148*n*21,
 318–319
 in royal libraries 144
isnāds (chains of transmission) 128, 129
 Isqīṭ monastery (Monastery of Abū Maqār,
 Maryut) 236
 Israelites 319
 al-Iṣṭakhrī, ‘Alī b. Sa‘īd 32, 32*n*32
istidlāl (inference) 317, 330
istihsān (preference) 317, 330, 336
isti‘rāḍ doctrine 385
Ithbāt al-imāma (“Proof of the Imamate”, al-
 Naysābūrī) 18–22, 79
Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt (“Proof of Prophecy”, al-
 Sijistānī) 209, 297–298
Itti‘āz al-ḥunafā’ (al-Maqrīzī) 7*n*4, 66, 87,
 112*n*11, 221, 230, 290, 349*n*27, 398
- Jabāl/Jibāl (Iran) 379, 397
 Ja‘far II b. Yūsuf al-Kalbī (Tāj al-Dawla, *amīr*
 of Sicily, r. 998–1019) 104–106, 159
 Ja‘far (chamberlain of al-Mahdī) 156
 Ja‘farid/Sulaymānid Dynasty 390, 402
 Ja‘far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman 24*n*20, 207–208
 Ja‘far b. Muḥammad (*amīr* of Mecca,
 r. 967–980) 390
 Ja‘far b. Muḥammad (governor of Sicily,
 d. 985–6) 177, 177*n*6
 Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq (6th Shī‘ī
 Imam, r. 732–765)
 followers and opponents of 26
 on imamate 27–28
 knowledge of 26, 142
 lineal descent from/succession of 11, 13,
 15, 325, 356
 removal of possessions to Cairo 389–
 390, 394, 405
 on sermons 351, 351*n*33
 al-Jāhiz (d. 868/869) 332
 Jaḥmiyya (sect, branch of
 Qadariyya) 322–324
 Jahm b. Ṣafwān 322, 323, 324*n*9
 al-Jamālī, Badr (Fatimid military *wazīr*,
 r. 1074–1094) 101
 advent in Egypt (1074) 47–48, 53, 71, 72,
 101, 130–131, 174, 211, 404
- arts and sciences/patronage under 131,
 132, 211, 292
 authority/power 53–54, 55, 72
 building program for mosques and city
 walls 211
 death and succession 132
 decree of appointment 52
 formal titles 46, 47, 48, 51–53, 55, 72,
 72*n*68, 75
 immigration of Westerners under 103,
 131
 inscriptions 52–53
 international relations 131
 military background/career 48–49
 policy towards Hijaz 404, 405
 policy towards travelers 131, 132
 popular festivals under 116
 rebellions against 130–131
- Jamīla bt. Nāṣir al-Dawla Ibn Ḥamdān 397
 al-Jannābī, Abū Sa‘īd (Ruler of the Qarmatian
 State, d. 913) 379
 al-Jarjarā‘ī, ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad (Fatimid *wazīr*,
 r. 1027–1045) 51
 authority 39, 70, 90
 as clerk 224, 225
 corporal punishment 51*n*17, 181, 224, 225
 decree of appointment 39, 46, 50, 90
 Jarrāḥids (Arab dynasty) 395, 396, 397
 al-Jawdhārī, Maṣṣūr al-‘Azīzī 26
 Jawhar (“al-Qā‘id”, Fatimid general,
 d. 992) 64, 99–100, 171, 220, 342, 349,
 370*n*32
- Jerusalem 325
 conquest by crusaders 1, 135*n*30
 destruction of Church of the Holy
 Sepulchre 178*n*7, 231–232, 237, 344
 scholars in 135*n*30, 137
 Jerusalemites (Maqādisa) 135
- Jesus 251*n*7, 320
 apostles of 34, 352, 386
 Christian festivals 119
 crucifixion 256
da‘wa and 256
 similarity of imams to 32
 spiritual power of 296, 297
- Jews 178*n*7
 conversion to Islam 234
 courtiers 165

- dress code/appearance 228, 235, 243
 festivals 118n26
 persecution of 238
 recognition of imams by 13
 status and tolerance of 184, 228
see also dhimmīs
 Jidda/Jeddah 395
jihād 348
 Jilānis 162
 Jilān (region) 379
 Jīza/Jazīra 223
 John of Damascus 303n9
 John Philoponus 303n9, 312n41
 Joseph, as *wazīr* to Pharaoh 51, 90
 judges *see qāḍīs; qāḍīs al-quḍāt*
 judiciary
 in earliest Maghrib phase 57–61, 75
 in later Egypt phase 64–67, 69–70, 71, 75
 level of rank 57
 prominent families in 70, 75
 relation with *daʿwa* 56, 59, 67, 74, 75
 see also qāḍīs; qāḍīs al-quḍāt
 Juljūlī, Ismāʿīl b. Salāma (chief *qāḍī* and chief *dāʿī*) 73, 74
 jurisprudence *see fiqh*
 al-Juyūshī, Abū Maṣṣūr Sārtakīn 52n21
 al-Juyūshī, Munīr al-Dawla (Governor of Syria) 52n21
 al-Juyūshī, Nāṣir al-Dawla 52n21
 al-Juyūshiyya (militia of Badr al-Jamālī) 52, 101, 103

 Kaʿba
 destruction 331
 kiswa 392, 399, 400, 401, 402, 404
 pilgrims/pilgrimage gifts 198, 395, 398
al-Kāfiyya (al-Kirmānī) 26
 Kahak (village near Qum) 203
 Kalbids 95, 98, 104
 see also Ibn ʿAmmār, al-Ḥasan
Kalifen und Assassinen (Heinz Halm) 3
Die Kalifen von Kairo (Heinz Halm) 2–3
al-Kāmil fiʿl-taʾrikh (Ibn al-Athīr) 353
 Karrāmiyya (sect) 324–325
Kashf al-asrār wa hatk al-astār
 (al-Bāqillānī) 32
Kashf al-asrār wa naqd al-afkār
 (al-Bustī) 32

Kashf al-mahjūb (al-Sijistānī) 309n32
 Kaysāniyya (sect) 321
 al-Khalil b. Aḥmad 142
 Kharijites/Khawārij (sect)
 on ʿAlī's imamate 377
 anti-Fatimid revolts 357, 378, 388
 branches 321–322, 380–381, 387
 Mālikis vs. 60
 refutations of/polemics against 33, 305, 321–322, 329
 see also Abū Yazīd Makhlad b. Kaydad;
 Ibāḍīs/Ibāḍiyya
*khaṭīb*s (preachers)
 appointment 347–348
 books of sample sermons 346
 dāʿī vs. 347
 indicating change in political
 allegiance 339, 341, 342, 343, 344
 job description 347–348
 salary 347
 see also khuṭbas (ritual preaching/Friday
 sermons)
 Khatkīn al-Ḍayf (chief *dāʿī*) 68–69, 394
 Khāzimiyya (sect, branch of Kharijites) 380
al-Khiṭaṭ (al-Maqrīzī) 160n18, 221
 editions 7n4
 on Fatimid administration 87
 chief *qāḍīs* and chief *dāʿīs* 56
 wazirate 46, 51n18–20, 55n33
 on observatory of al-Ḥāfiẓ 292
 on pilgrim caravans 399
 on popular festivals 107, 113, 122
 Khurāsān 320, 325, 403
khuṭbas (ritual preaching/Friday sermons)
 after Fatimid conquest of Egypt 342
 announcement of death of
 imam-caliphs 36–37
 audience and reception 33–34, 351–353, 366
 authority over 68, 71n64, 74n72
 blessings in 34–36, 353–358, 360, 386
 books of sample sermons 346
 by imams/imam-caliphs 33–38, 34n37, 35n40–41, 36–37, 38n44, 158, 159, 344, 348, 349, 351–352, 384–385, 391, 396
 condemnation of enemies/curses
 in 345, 353, 354, 358–360, 364, 367–368, 384–386

khutbas (cont.)

- festival *khutbas* 112–113, 112n13, 348–350, 351, 352, 366–368
- on imamate 33–38
- invocations in,
 - of army 34, 352, 357–358, 385–386
 - of Companions of the Prophet 393
 - of imams/rulers 338, 356–357, 391, 403
- in Mecca/Madina 391, 391n3, 396, 398, 404
- origins 347
- rhetoric and rhetorical
 - strategies 350–353
- signaling change in political allegiance
 - in 338, 339–350, 404
- see also khatibs*; Qirwāsh b. al-Muqallad al-Kindī, al-Ash'ath b. Qays (chief of Kinda tribe, d. 661) 368, 368n23
- al-Kindī (polymath, d. 873) 194
- al-Kirmānī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn (*dā'ī*, d.c. 1021)
 - authority/reputation 192–193, 209
 - career 192, 209
 - on creation 198
 - on God 197–198
 - on heavenly spheres/cycles 298–299
 - on imamate 15–18, 26, 79, 149, 199, 284, 378–380
 - on intellect 194, 197–198
 - operation of *ta'wīl* in thought of 249, 257–258, 259
 - patronage of 69
 - philosophy in thought/work of 200, 204, 249, 298
 - Aristotelianism 197, 209
 - on prophecy 198–199
 - refutations of/polemics against 32–33, 336
 - Abū Bakr 335–336
 - Abū Bakr al-Rāzī 317, 326, 331–332
 - false imams 333–335, 378–380
 - Ibāḍis 378–380
 - al-Jāhīz 332
 - refutations/polemics by 331–336
 - on relation between science and religion 285
 - on removal of Ja'far al-Sādiq's possessions to Cairo 394

- on revelation 194
- on the Soul 197, 198
- sources of inspiration/as source of
 - inspiration 148n21, 194, 205, 209
- on *ta'wīl* 266–270
- on Umayyads 364, 369
- works 209, 317
- on *zāhir* and *bāṭin* 257–258
- Kitāb al-Ahkām al-sulṭaniyya* (“Book of the Ordinances of Government”, al-Māwardī) 78
- Kitāb al-aqrābādīn* (Sahlān b. Kaysān) 286
- Kitāb al-'ayn* (al-Khalīl) 142
- Kitāb al-Bayzara* (book on falconry) 211
- Kitāb al-Dhakhā'ir wa'l-tuḥaf* (“Book of Treasures and Rarities”) 399
- Kitāb al-Diyārāt* (“Book of Monasteries”, al-Shābustī) 143, 211
- Kitāb al-Ḥawādith wa-l-bida'* (al-Ṭurṭūshī) 124n12
- Kitāb al-himma fī ādāb atbā' al-a'imma* (“Book of Resolution with Respect to the Comportment of the Followers of the Imams”, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān) 26, 29–31, 156
- Kitāb al-Is'lāḥ* (al-Rāzī) 209
- Kitāb al-Majālis wa-l-musāyārāt* (Qāḍī al-Nu'mān) 62, 62n22, 149, 156
- Kitāb al-Manāqib wa'l-mathālib* (“Book of Virtues and Vices”, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān) 327–328, 371, 372
- Kitāb al-Munāzarāt* (Ibn al-Haytham) 25–26, 57–58, 57n7, 370
- Kitāb al-Riyāḍ* (al-Kirmānī) 148n21, 209
- Kitāb al-rusūm wa'l-izdīwāj wa'l-tartīb* (“Book of Norms, Pairedness and Ranking”, 'Abdān) 295–296
- Kitāb al-Shajara*, “Chapter on Satan” (Abū Tammām) 319–326, 380–381
- Kitāb al-Sira wa akhbār al-a'imma* (al-Warjalānī) 383n16, 387
- Kitāb al-Umm* (al-Shāfi'ī) 241
- Kitāb al-Uthmāniyya* (al-Jāhīz) 332
- Kitāb al-Zīna* (al-Rāzī) 209, 326
- knowledge *see* esoteric knowledge; religious knowledge
- “knowledge of the steadfast” (Ibn Rushd) 274–275, 274–275n4
- Kūfa 340, 397
- scholars in 128

- Kulthum, tomb of 109
 al-Kundurī (Saljuk *wazīr*, r. 1055–1063) 49
 al-Kurdī, Badr b. Ḥasawayh (*amīr* of the Jabal) 397
 Kurds 103
 Kutāma Berbers 142, 169
 on ‘Āshūrā festival 110
 conversion to Ismailī Shiism 100, 384
 Easterners vs. 96, 100
 in Egypt 99
 in Fatimid army 99–103, 156, 352, 357, 384
 invocation in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 34, 352, 357–358, 385–386
 mission of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shīrī to 382
 origins 100
 qāḍīs/on *qāḍīs* 58–59, 61*n*18
 rebellions 95–98
 in Syria 99
 Turks vs. 97, 100
- Landolt, H. 313
 Laqbal, Musa 99*n*9
 Lawāta (Berber tribe, Egypt) 48
 leprosy 334, 379
Lessons for the True Believers in the History of the Fatimid Imams and Caliphs (al-Maqrīzī) 214
 letters *see* imperial letters
 lexicography 326
Liber de Causis 301*n*4
 libraries/librarians 143, 144, 206, 214–218, 215
 see also Dār al-‘Ilm; private libraries/ collections; royal libraries
The Life of al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh (Ibn Zūlāq) 109–110
 light 203, 264–265
 literal wording *see* *ẓāhir*
 literary production *see* book copying/ production
The Lost Archive (Marina Rustow) 3
- Ma‘ūṣim al-hudā* (al-Kirmānī) 26, 332
 al-Madā‘in (Iraq) 340, 346
 Madelung, Wilferd 12, 13, 14, 26*n*27, 64*n*30, 313
- madhhabs* (schools of Islamic jurisprudence) 57, 58*n*10, 60, 64*n*32, 347, 381
 see also Hanafī school; Hanbali school; Ibāḍīs; Mālikī school/Mālikīs; Shāf‘ī school
ma’dhūn (one who has license to teach doctrine) 251, 251*n*9
 Madina/Medina
 attempt to transfer Prophet’s remains to Egypt 390, 393*n*10, 405, 406
 jurisdiction over/control of 390, 391, 406
 Mālikī school 137, 139
 qāḍīs/chief *qāḍīs* 41, 66
 recognition of Fatimid imamate in 391
 removal of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s possessions to 389–390, 394, 405
 scholars in/from 125, 128
 shifts in political allegiance 339, 343
 see also Ḥaramayn; Hijaz
- madrasas*
 in Alexandria 127, 129, 129*n*16, 135, 136, 138–139
 appointment of heads/teachers of 39, 87, 92–93, 127
 in Cairo 139, 144, 144*n*15
 in Damascus 218*n*22
Maghāriba *see* Westerners (*Maghāriba*)
 al-Maghribī, Abū’l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. (agent of Sitt al-Mulk) 184*n*29
 al-Maghribī, Abū’l-Ḥusayn b. (clerk) 163
 al-Maghribī, Abū’l-Qāsim (“al-Wazīr al-Maghribī”, d. 1027) 164, 393, 394–395, 396
 al-Maghribī (*wazīr*) 143
 Maghrib/Maghribīs 132, 143, 353
 Almoravids 138
 da‘wa in 63–64
 Ḥanafīs 60
 move of caliphate to Egypt 63, 65, 75, 98, 99, 100, 109, 157, 213, 372, 391–392
 qāḍīs/chief *qāḍīs* 41, 57–61, 63, 64, 66, 75
 revolts 378, 378*n*4, 388
 scholars in/from 124, 138
 travel of al-Mahdī to 141–142, 214, 388
 see also Westerners (*Maghāriba*)

- al-Mahdī bi-llāh (Imam-Caliph of the
Fatimid Caliphate, r. 909–934) 63, 353
book collection/royal library 141–142,
214
extravagance/lavishness at court 156,
156*n*3
invocation in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 36, 355,
356, 357, 358, 362
letter to followers in Yemen 24*n*20
lineal descent from 11
military expeditions 214
offspring 166
physicians of 285, 286
predecessors 255*n*10, 365
recognition as imam-caliph 1, 77, 156,
208
sermons by 365
travel from Egypt to Maghrib 141–142,
214, 388
mahdī-qā'im see Qā'im (Messiah)
al-Mahdiyya (Ifriqiyya)
capture by Kharijites 34, 352, 357, 385
qādis in 61, 61*n*18, 62, 62*n*25, 64
Maḥmūd of Ghazna 398
al-Maḥqūf (astronomer) 292
al-Maḥsūl (Muḥammad al-Nasafi) 209,
301*n*3
al-Majālis (al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-
Shirāzī) 26, 112*n*13, 370
Majālis al-'Ilm/al-Hikma (sessions of
knowledge) 145, 216, 272, 276–277, 280
al-Majālis wa'l-Musāyarāt (Qāḍī al-
Nu'mān) 31, 364, 369, 374
al-Makīn b. Ḥaydara (*qāḍī*) 117
al-Malījī, 'Abd al-Ḥākīm b. Wahb (chief
qāḍī) 71, 71*n*64
Malik al-Ashtar (Governor of Egypt,
r. 658) 85
Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795) 136, 139
refutations of 33, 317, 321
Mālikī school/Mālikīs
in Alexandria 126, 136, 138
Fatimids vs./and 146, 345, 364, 371, 384
Hanafī school vs. 58, 60
Khārijites vs. 60
madrasas 127
origins and threads of 137
qādis 60–61, 64, 75, 346

see also Ibn 'Awf, Abū Ṭāhir; [al-]Tūrtūshī,
Abū Bakr Muḥammad
Malik (title) 54
Mamluk Sultanate 55*n*34, 122
Mamṭūra see Wāqifiyya
al-Ma'mūn (7th Caliph of the Abbasid
Caliphate, r. 813–833) 139, 331
al-Ma'mūn al-Baṭā'ihī (Fatimid *wazīr*,
r. 1121–1125) 74*n*72, 162
arts and sciences/patronage under 150,
213
popular festival under 116, 118
works dedicated to 126, 213, 241
Manjūtakin (military commander, later
Governor of Damascus) 51*n*9, 100, 163,
164
al-Manṣūr (2nd Caliph of the Abbasid
Caliphate, r. 754–775) 331
al-Manṣūr bi-Allāh (Imam-Caliph of the
Fatimid Caliphate, r. 946–953)
death and reburial 37, 99
on imamate 13–14, 24
invocation in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 357,
362, 363
letter to al-Mu'izz 369
offspring 166
origins 99
personal pronoun 36
revolts against 378
sermons by 347*n*37, 35*n*40–41, 36–37,
36*n*42, 352, 355, 356, 358
testament 24*n*20
on Umayyads 369, 370*n*31
victory over Abū Yazīd 60, 61, 62, 98, 377
al-Manṣūriyya (Ifriqiya) 169, 181*n*20
move of Caliphate to Cairo 176
qādis/chief *qādis* 62, 64, 65–66
al-Maqālid ("The Keys", al-Sijistānī) 205,
209, 264, 307, 313
Maqādisa (Jerusalemites) 135
al-Maqdisī, Abū'l-Ḥusayn Yahyā b.
al-Mufarrij 135
al-Maqdisī, Abū'l-Qāsim Hibatallāh 135
al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) 7*n*4, 99, 141, 148
on advent in Egypt of Badr al-Jamālī 101
on al-Ẓāhir 184
on Arab rule over Sicily 104
on astrology and astronomy 290, 292

- on chief *qāḍīs* and chief *dā'īs* 56, 66, 67, 68_{n50}
- on claims on imamate 102
- on drinking parties 170–171
- on festivals 107, 108, 109, 113, 114, 115, 116, 118, 118_{n26}, 119, 123, 160_{n18}, 349_{n27}
- on Ghabn (eunuch of al-Ḥākīm) 221, 222, 222_{n11}, 223, 225
- on government apparatus 87, 162
- on Ḥijāzī dependence and political allegiance 389, 404_{n50}
- history of Fatimid dynasty 213–214, 218_{n22}, 221
- on Ibn Ḥasdāi 150_{n28}
- on al-Jarjarā'ī 224
- on Kalbids 105
- on libraries 141, 145
- on oaths of covenant 278–279, 278_{n10}
- on observatories 292
- on persecution of *dhimmīs* 230, 231–232, 233, 237
- on pilgrimage caravans 398–400
- on political allegiance in Hijaz 404_{n50}
- on regency of Sitt al-Mulk 181_{n20}, 183, 184, 185, 188
- on royal family 166, 168–169
- on Saljuk invasion of Egypt 48_{n6}
- on *wazīrs* 46, 48_{n7}, 51_{n18}–20, 53–54, 55, 55_{n33}
- al-Maqs Mosque (Cairo) 117, 232
- market supervision (*ḥisba*) 39, 58_{n8}, 83, 87, 223
- Mār Qosmā Church (Fustat) 236_{m9}
- marriage, of royal women 167–168, 180
- al-Marwadhī, Muḥammad b. 'Umar (al-Marwarūdhī, *qāḍī*) 34, 58–59, 60, 352
- Marwān b. al-Ḥakam (Marwān I, 4th Caliph of the Umayyad Caliphate, r. 684–685) 359, 367, 368, 370_{n31}
- Marwānids (branch of Umayyad clan) 359, 367, 367_{m10}, 368, 370_{n32}
- al-Maṣābiḥ fi ithbāt al-imāma* ("Lights to illuminate the Proof of the Imamate", al-Kirmānī) 15–18, 26, 79, 149, 266, 284, 332–333, 369
- Masālta (branch of Kutāma) 382
- Mashāriqa* see Easterners
- Maṣmūdīs/Maṣāmida (Berber tribe) 102–103
- al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956) 119–120
- al-Māturīdī, Abū Maṣṣūr (d. 944) 309_{n28}
- Maundy Thursday 118_{n26}, 119, 243
- Mawādd al-bayān* (manual on chancery practice, 'Alī b. Khalaf) 50_{n13}, 89, 212
- al-Māwardī (Sunnī polymath, d. 1058) 47, 78
- al-Mawṣilī, 'Ammār b. 'Alī 286_{n2}
- Mawṣil/Mosul 340, 341
- maẓālim* (grievances) courts 39, 62–63, 65, 66, 71_{n64}, 87
- appointment of Qāḍī al-Nu'mān as head of 39, 40, 62, 62_{n25}, 63, 91–92
- Mecca
 - alms to 400_{n37}
 - festivals 115
 - jurisdiction over/control of 390, 391, 406
 - pilgrimages 127, 137, 255, 272
 - (dependency on) funds/goods brought by pilgrimage caravans 396, 397, 398–400, 401, 402, 403
 - qāḍīs*/chief *qāḍīs* 41, 66
 - recognition of/loyalty to Fatimid imamate 389, 391, 392, 404
 - scholars in/from 125, 128, 138
 - shifting political allegiance 339, 343, 404
 - see also Ḥaramayn; Hijaz; pilgrimage caravans
- medicine 150, 212–213, 285
- Medieval Damascus* (Konrad Hirschler) 218_{n22}
- Medina see Madina/Medina
- Melkite Church/Melkites 118_{n26}, 176–177, 286
 - emigration of Melkites 221, 237
- merit (*tafāḍul*), differences in 19–20
- Mernissi, Fatima 176
- Mesopotamia 339
- Messiah see Qā'im (Messiah)
- Messina (Sicily) 98
- metaphysics 190, 202, 209, 330
- Mi'ḍād (eunuch) 401
- Michael (Coptic Bishop of Tinnīs), on persecution of *dhimmīs* 230, 237–238, 243
- Michot, Yaḥya 313

- migration
 of Christians/*dhimmīs* 221, 237
 to Egypt 103–104, 105, 106, 131, 132, 401
 Mikhāsa (tribe) 371
 military *see* army
 military campaigns/expeditions 214, 378*n*4
 to Egypt 47–48, 100
 to Hijaz 391*n*3, 392, 392*n*5
 to Sicily 98
 to Syria 96, 97, 100, 178
 military commanders 46, 51, 96
see also [al-]Afḍal; Ibn ‘Ammār, al-Ḥasan;
 [al-]Jamālī, Badr; Jawhar
 military coups 165, 174
 military *wazīrs* 174
 position of chief *qāḍī* and chief *dāʿī*
 under 72–74
see also [al-]Afḍal; *Amīr al-juyūsh*; [al-]
 Jamālī, Badr
 Mina Jaʿfar (near Bilbays, Egypt) 178
 minbars (pulpits)
 destruction of *minbars* 344–345, 404
khaṭībs (preachers) as ‘knights of the
minbar’ 347–348
 mounting of 155, 158, 159, 160, 161, 349,
 350
 mint
 control of the 65, 66, 66*n*43, 68, 74,
 74*n*72
see also coins/coinage
Mīrat al-zamān (Sibt Ibn al-Jawzī) 48*n*6
 Mīr Damād (scholar) 202, 203
 Mirdāsīd Dynasty/Mirdāsids 103
 Mīrgūsh (residential area, Cairo) 52
 mirrors for princes (*Fürstenspiegel*) 24, 78,
 79, 80–81*m*11, 85*n*14, 86, 126, 213
 Miṣr *see* Egypt
 monasteries, destruction of 229, 232, 236
 Monastery of Abū Maqār (previously Isqīt
 Monastery, Maryut) 236
 Mongol invasions (1250s) 193, 201
 Mortel, Richard T. 392
 Moses 34, 90, 251*n*7, 297, 320, 354
 Aaron as *wazīr* of 39, 50–51, 51*m*15, 90
 mosques
 in Cairo 65, 111, 113, 114, 117, 145, 158,
 226*n*27, 232, 291
 in Constantinople 344
 donation of books to 144–145
 expansion of 232
 financial support to 145
 Four Nights of Lighting 113–117
 in Fustat 65, 109, 110, 117, 342
 in Rāshida 117, 350
 supervision of and control over 57, 65,
 66
 treasure underneath mosque at Birkat
 Rusays 289
 Mosul *see* Mawṣil/Mosul
 mourning *see* ‘Āshūrā’ (Shīʿī festival)
Muʿjam al-saḡar (Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī) 128
 Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (Muʿāwiya I, 1st
 Caliph of the Umayyad Caliphate,
 r. 661–680) 368*m*13–14
 condemnation of/polemics against 322,
 331, 359, 367, 370*n*31
 al-Muʿayyad biʾllāh Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn b.
 Hārūn (Zaydi imam, Caspian region,
 d. 1020), condemnation of/polemics
 against 333, 334, 334*n*34
 al-Muʿayyad fiʾl-Dīn al-Shirāzī (poet and chief
dāʿī, d. 1078)
 authority and reputation 76, 193
 career as *dāʿī*/chief *dāʿī* 70–71, 71*n*65,
 72*n*66
 death 53, 72, 73
 decree of appointment 39, 40, 71, 91
 residence/public academy of 216
 works 26, 31–32, 71–72*n*66, 112*m*13, 209,
 210
 al-Mubashshir b. Fātik (philosopher, fl.
 11th c.) 211–212
Mudawwana (Saḥnūn) 127
 Mufarrij b. Dagħfal b. al-Jarrāḥ (chief of Ṭayy
 Bedouins) 395, 396
 al-Mufid, al-Shaykh (Abū ‘Abdallāh
 Muḥamma al-Nuʾmān, d. 1032) 192,
 199–200
 authority and reputation 193, 199
 philosophy in thought/work of 204
 on reason 199, 200
 on sin and condemnation 200
 sources of inspiration 200
 students 193, 199
 works 199
 al-Mughāzili (astronomer) 168, 169

- al-Mughīra b. Shu'ba (Governor of Kūfa) 368, 368ⁿ¹⁷
- Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr 109
- Muḥammad b. Abū 'Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn 102
- Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Bāqir 'Ulūm al-Dīn (5th Shī'ī Imam, r. 712–733) 325, 356
- Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl (7th Ismaili Imam, r. 762–813)
- concealment of 356
 - as rightful imam 14
 - succession of 11, 12, 211ⁿ¹⁰
- Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. Abī Hāshim (*amīr* of Mecca, r. 1063–?) 403
- Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Juhayr 404
- Muḥammad b. al-Mustanṣir 101
- Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān (chief *qāḍī* and chief *dā'ī*) 66, 95, 97, 98, 114, 169, 170
- Muḥammad (the Prophet)
- '*ahd* of 'Alī and 85
 - 'Alī as *wazīr* of 39, 50–51, 50ⁿ¹³, 51ⁿ¹⁵, 90
 - attempt to transfer Prophet's remains to Cairo 390, 393ⁿ¹⁰, 405, 406
 - family members 109, 354–355
 - imam's and/vs. Prophet's function 16–17, 24–25, 79, 197
 - invocation in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 353
 - law/rules of 197, 239, 251ⁿ⁷
 - lineal descent from/descendants of 1, 17, 25, 29, 32, 34, 35, 39, 364–365
 - observation of birthday 108
 - recognition of 242, 324
 - spiritual power 296, 297
 - succession of 25, 79, 109, 319
 - appointment of successor by Prophet 25, 35, 108, 112, 322
- Muḥammad b. Ṭuḡḥj (autonomous ruler of Egypt and parts of Syria, r. 935–946) 119
- al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh (Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid Caliphate, r. 953–975) 12, 62
- conquest of and move to Egypt 65, 98, 99, 100, 109, 157, 213, 372, 391–392
 - correspondence 24ⁿ²⁰, 369
 - court of 156
 - death and eulogies 176, 210
 - dream about al-Nāṣir 370ⁿ³²
 - festivals under 109–110, 121
 - gifts to *ka'ba* 398
 - invocation in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 342, 362, 391, 391ⁿ³
 - literary production by order of/under protection of 149, 207, 208, 330
 - military expeditions 378ⁿ⁴
 - offspring 166, 167, 175
 - pilgrimage to Mecca/Madina 392
 - pronouncements of 208
 - recognition in Hijaz/Haramayn 391, 391ⁿ³
 - reputation 370
 - sermons by 37, 349, 355–356, 391
 - on/and Umayyads 369, 374, 375
- al-Mu'izz b. Bādīs (Zīrid ruler, r. 1016–1062) 345, 345ⁿ¹⁵
- al-Mūjaza al-kāfiya fī adab martaba wa shurūt al-da'wa al-hādīya* (al-Naysābūrī) 22–24, 80, 81–85, 86
- mukāsirs* (ones who break) *see* novices
- Mukhtaṣar fī'l-ṭīb* (Sahlān b. Kaysān) 286
- Mukhtaṣar al-wazīr* (Ibn Killis) 149–150
- Mukthār al-ḥikam wa maḥāsīn al-kalim* (al-Mubashshir b. Fātik) 211–212
- Mullā Ṣadrā (Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Shīrāzī, d. 1640) 192
- authority and reputation 193
 - educational background 202
 - on existence and essence 203–204
 - fusion of theology and philosophy by 202, 203, 205
 - period of retreat 203
 - sources of inspiration 203
- al-Muntaẓam fī ta'rīkh al-mulūk wa'l-umam* ("The Well-Organized Book Concerning the History of Kings and Peoples", Ibn al-Jawzī) 363
- Muqaffā* (al-Maqrīzī) 66ⁿ³⁹, 145, 68ⁿ⁵⁰, 99
- Muqaṭṭam (Eastern Desert Plateau, Egypt) 52
- al-Muqtadī (27th Caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate, r. 1075–1094) 404
- al-Muqtadir (18th Caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate, r. 908–929) 331, 367, 367ⁿ⁵
- al-Murādī, al-Ḥasan b. Majallī b. Asad b. Abī Kudayna 71ⁿ⁶⁵
- Murji'a (sect) 321
- al-Murtaḍā, al-Sharīf 193, 193ⁿ⁴, 397

- Murūj al-Dhahab* ("Meadows of Gold", al-Mas'ūdī) 119
- al-Musabbihī, al-Mukhtār 'Izz al-Mulk Muḥammad (Fatimid *amīr*, d. 1029)
 on al-Ṭabarānī 290
 on court sessions/audiences 163
 on *da'wa* 74
 on drinking parties 171
 on Ghabn 221*n*10
 history by 210–211, 213, 221, 230
 on Ibn Yūnus 287
 on popular festivals 111, 114, 120
 on processions 158–159, 161
 on Sitt al-Mulk 184, 184*n*28–29
 on Tāj al-Dawla (Ja'far II) 105
- Mūsā b. Ja'far (al-Kazim, 7th Shī'ī Imam, 765–799) 14, 325–326
- al-Musawī, al-Sharīf 184*n*29
- Museum of Islamic Art (Cairo) 221, 226
- music/musicians 120, 122, 126, 133, 171, 172, 184, 212, 286, 328, 372
- Muslims
 concept 75
 participation in Christian festivals 120–121, 243
- al-Musta'li bi-llāh (Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid Caliphate, r. 1094–1101) 36, 73
 invocation in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 357
 succession of al-Mustanṣir 101, 132, 162
see also Nizār b. Mustanṣir
- al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh (Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid Caliphate, r. 1036–1094)
 appointment of Badr al-Jamālī 47, 49, 53, 130
 arts and sciences/patronage under 291
 biography 212
 court/courtiers 157, 224
 death 101
 economic crisis 157, 157*n*9
 inheritance of family estates 167–168
 invocation in *khuṭbas* 344, 403, 404
 offspring 166, 166–167
 physicians of 213, 291
 recognition in Ḥaramayn 404, 405
 succession crisis 101, 131, 132
see also Nizār b. Mustanṣir
- al-Muṭī' li-llāh (23rd Caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate, r. 946–974) 39*m*3
- al-Mutanabbī (poet, d. 965) 212
- Mu'tazili/Mu'tazila 137, 321
 Ash'arīs vs. 189
 condemnation of 305, 321, 336
 doctrine 193, 199, 200, 381
 Shī'īs and 189
- Muwahḥidūn *see* Almohads
- Muwaffa'* (Mālik ibn Anas) 136, 139
- Muẓaffar Bahā' al-Dawla (Slav royal parasol bearer) 159
- mysticism/mystics 137, 300, 311
- Nāfi' b. al-Azraq (leader of the Azāriqa, d. 685) 321
- Nafisa bt. al-Ḥasan b. Zayd b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī 109
- al-Naḥṭī, Muḥammad b. 'Imrān (*qāḍī*) 60
- Nahj al-balāgha* ("The Path of Eloquence", al-Sharīf al-Raḍī) 80, 85, 85*m*14
- al-Najashī, Abū 'Abbās Aḥmad (d. 1058–1059 or 1071) 193
- Najdiyya (sect, branch of Kharijites) 380
- Najjāriyya (sect) 324
- al-Nasafi, Muḥammad (d.c. 943)
 on creation 196
 execution 320
 philosophy in thought/work of 194
 works 148*n*21, 207, 208, 301, 301*n*3
- Nāṣir al-Dawla Ibn Ḥamdān 397
- Nāṣir al-Dīn Muhtashim (governor of Kuhistan) 201
- Nāṣir b. Khusraw (traveler and *dā'i*) 200, 209
 on Fatimid army 100, 102, 102*m*6
 on pilgrimages 398, 400–401
 works 26*n*27, 31, 209
- al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh *see* 'Abd al-Raḥmān III
- Naṣr Aftikīn 52*n*21
- Nativity festival 118*n*26, 119
- natural sciences 285
 doctrinal writings and 295–299
- Nawrūz* (Coptic New Year) 107, 118–119, 118*n*26, 121–123, 243
- nawrūz* (Persian festival) 118, 118*n*27
- Nawshirwan 83
- Naysabur (Iran) 49
- al-Naysābūrī, Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm (*dā'i*, fl. 10th/11th c.)

- on *da'wa/dā'īs* 22–24, 80, 81–85, 86, 93
 - on imamate 15, 18–24, 79
 - on oaths of covenant 277–278
- naẓar* (speculation) 317, 330
- al-Nazwānī, 'Umar (Ibādī imam in Jabāl 'Umān) 333, 334, 334*n*36, 379
- negation, twofold 310–311, 312
- negative theology/*via negativa* 305–306, 310
- Neoplatonism 192, 194, 197, 198, 202, 209, 263
 - Neoplatonic/unknowable God 197, 300, 302, 305, 306–307, 312–313
- New Year's Festival (*mawṣim ra's al-sanna*) 107–108
- Nihāyat al-arab* (al-Nuwayrī) 289
- Nile 119–120, 171, 402
 - control of rise and fall of 290–291
- Nizām al-Mulk (Saljuk *wazīr*, 1064–1092) 49
- Nizāris 101–102, 191
- Nizār b. al-Mustanṣir (Fatimid prince, d. 1095)
 - claim on imamate 101–102, 131, 162
 - revolt of 132, 133, 134
- Noah 25*n*7, 296, 297, 360, 367
- nobility *see* 'Alid *ashraf*; social elites
- noble families
 - in government service 169–170
 - see also* social elites
- non-Muslim population *see dhimmīs*
- North Africa 1, 6, 77, 98
 - book production 206
 - hierarchy of *qāḍīs* for 64
 - Ibādīs 377
 - Mālikī school 137
 - scholars from 129
 - see also* Egypt; Ifriqiya; Maghrib
- novices (*mustajīb*)
 - 'breaking' of 318
 - compared to newborns (in *ta'wīl*) 253
 - fasting 277
 - knowledge transferred to 276
- al-Nujūm al-Zāhira* (Ibn Taghrī Birdī) 363
- al-Nujūm al-Zāhira* (Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī) 227
- Nukkarīs (branch of Ibādīs) 378*n*4, 384, 384*n*9, 385, 387, 388
- al-Nu'mān family 169–170, 174
- al-Nu'mān, Qāḍī *see* Qāḍī al-Nu'mān
- Nuremberg 219
- Nusayrīs/Nuṣayriyya (sect) 317, 336
- al-Nuwayrī
 - on astrology 289, 290
 - on attempt to move Prophet's remains to Cairo 406
 - on order of salutations 162
 - on Tāj al-Dawla (Ja'far II) 105
- oaths of covenant (*da'wa*) 253, 254, 256, 276–280, 318
- obedience 16, 24, 28, 38, 254, 255, 269, 322, 323, 324, 379, 380
- observatories 201, 285, 289, 292–293
- The Observatory in Islam* (Aydin Sayılı) 293
- Old Mosque (Mosque of 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, Fustat) 117, 342
- Oneness of God *see tawḥīd*
- One, the *see* God
- opponents 27, 32–33
 - claim of *bāṭinī* heresy 260
 - condemnation in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 345, 353, 354, 358–360, 364, 367–368, 384–386
 - open debates between *da'wa* and 336
 - see also* Abbasid Caliphate/Abbasids; Ibādīs/Ibāḍiyya; Kharijites/Khawārij; Mālikī school/Mālikīs; polemics; refutations; Umayyad Caliphate/Umayyads
- Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs: Festival Sermons of the Ismaili Imams* (Paul E. Walker) 5
- Orestes (Melkite Patriarch of Jerusalem) 176–177
- origination (*abda'a*) 196, 198
- orphans, *qāḍīs* managing funds of
 - orphans 43, 43*n*48, 89, 89*n*23
- Pact of 'Umar (*al-shurūṭ al-'umariyya*), al-Ḥākim's *dhimmī* policy and 230, 239, 241–242
- Palermo 105, 106
- Palestine 68, 395
- Palm Sunday 231
- paradise 267, 320, 322, 324*n*9
- paramilitary groups 68

- Parmenides* (Plato) 302
patronage *see* poetry/poets; scholarship/
scholars
pederasty 328–329, 370n32, 372, 373
persecution, *dhimmīs* 228–237
Persians 100
personal judgment *see* *raʿy*
philosophy
 fusion of theology and 202, 203, 205
 Greek 190, 194
 Ismaili doctrine and/vs. 194, 204, 205,
 274–275, 301, 301n4, 303–304
 refutations of philosophers 317
 see also Aristotelism; natural sciences;
 Neoplatonism
physicians 147, 163, 164, 213, 225, 285, 290,
291, 293, 326
 Jewish 146–148, 150, 216–217, 285, 286
 Melkite Christian 164, 170–171, 172–173,
 212–213, 286, 287–288
pilgrimage (*hajj*) 127, 137, 198, 392
 Abbasid/Iraqi pilgrims 389, 403
 importance to Fatimids 405
 sermons during 403–404
 in *taʿwīl* 254–255, 272
pilgrimage caravans 389
 of al-ʿAzīz 391, 391n3, 392n5
 cancellations and interceptions/
 robberies 393–394, 395, 396, 397,
 398n24
 (dependency on) funds/goods brought
 by Fatimid 391–392, 391n3, 396, 397,
 398–400, 401, 402, 403, 405
 Iraqi 395, 397–398, 398n24
 value of goods and costs of caravan 400
Pillars of Islam (Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān) *see* *Daʿāʾim*
al-islām
Pitti Palace (Florence), rock crystal
 ewer in 219, 220
plagiarism 212
Plato 146, 214, 302, 327
Plotinus (d. 270) 309n27
 on the One 302–303, 303n8, 311
 as source of inspiration 194, 209, 301n4
 on unknowability of God 306, 312–313
poetry/poets
 Ismaili/pro-Fatimid 133, 209–211, 358
 patronage 106, 210, 211
 praising/on imams 13, 31–32, 133, 210
polemics
 against sects 319–326, 380–381
 anti-Umayyad 328, 364–376, 405
 definition 317
 on imamate 32–33
 phrases/words indicating 327
 polemical techniques 319–320
 in program of *daʿwa* 318–319
 Sunnī vs. Ismaili 321
 see also curses/cursing; refutations
political allegiance
 signals of change in,
 colors 341, 342, 344, 392, 404
 khuṭbas 338, 339–350, 404
 smashing of *minbars* (pulpits) 344–
 345, 404
polytheism/polytheists 251, 343, 375, 381,
382
Poonawala, Ismail 33, 141, 141n3–4, 313, 329
population
 acceptance of Fatimid rule by 346, 384
 diversity of 77, 108, 174, 346
prayers
 regulation of 57, 68, 71n64, 74n72
 see also *khuṭbas*
preachers *see* *khaṭībs*
preaching *see* *khuṭbas*
Prevention of Bodily Ills in Egypt (Ibn
Riḍwān) 213
private libraries/collections 146–148, 206,
207, 216–217
procession (emanation, *inbaʿatha*) 198
processions 158–161, 162
 animals in 158, 159, 349, 350
 see also festivals
Proclus 306
prominent families, in government
 service 169–170
Proof (*hujja*) 251, 251n7
prophecy 19, 197
 Abū Bakr al-Rāzī on 327
 natural sciences and/proof of 296–297
Proponents of Ḥadīth 334n35
proselytization *see* *daʿwa*
protected peoples *see* *dhimmīs*
Pseudo-Dionysius (fl. 5th–early 6th c.) 303,
303n9, 312

public duty

- '*ahd* of 'Alī as statement of 80, 85–87, 93
- concept 77–80, 94
- works on 78–87
- see also* decrees

public libraries *see* Dār al- 'Ilm

public office/positions

- appointments to 38–44
- decrees of appointment 46, 78, 87–93
- duties of 89–90, 94
- see also* *dā'īs*; *dā'īs al-quḍāt*; *maẓālim* (grievances) courts; *qāḍīs*; *qāḍīs al-quḍāt*; *wazīrs*

Qadariyya (sect) 321, 322–324

Qāḍī 'Abdallāh (Syrian judge) 400

al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (Chief Secretary of Ṣalāh al-Dīn, d. 1200)

- on Coptic *nawrūz* festival 122–123
- literary skills/production 89, 212, 348n22
- madrasa* of 144, 144n15, 218n22
- on Ṣalāh al-Dīn's visit to Alexandria 139

Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 974)

- on Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī 383
- audience and access to works 149
- authority 75, 330
- background 371
- career,
 - as *dā'ī* 63, 67
 - (decree of) appointment as head of *maẓālim* 39, 40, 62, 62–63n25, 63, 91–92
 - as *qāḍī al-quḍāt* (chief judge) 62–63, 75
- death 65
- descendants' role in judiciary/*da'wa* 69, 70, 95, 169–170, 171, 222
- on Fatimid court 156, 372
- on imamate/authority of imams 13, 26–31, 330, 372
- on Ismaili law 64
- literary production/works 207, 208, 243, 284, 317, 372
- on/and *ta'wīl* 249, 251
- on public duties 80, 85
- refutations 33, 284, 327–330, 336
 - of Abū Ḥanifa 317, 329
 - of Aḥmad b. Surayj 329

of al-Shāfi'ī 317, 329

of Ibn Qutayba 317, 329

of Ibn Surayj 317

of Khawārij 329, 377–378

of Mālik b. Anas 317, 329

of Umayyads/'Abd al-Raḥmān III

328–329, 364, 369, 370–374, 375

al-Qādir (25th Caliph of the Abbasid

Caliphate, r. 991–1031)

claim on imamate 379

invocation in *khutbas* (sermons) 340, 341

refutation of 333–334

substitution of al-Ṭā'i' 78, 165, 334n33, 392

qāḍīs (judges)

adab al-qāḍī (judge's comportment) 78

appointment of/decrees of

appointment 39, 40, 57–59, 68

authority/power 57n6, 76

coinage 46, 49, 74

conflicts on gaining *qāḍī*ship 58–59

duties 40–42

in earliest Maghrib phase 57–61, 75

in later Egypt phase 64–67, 75

Māliki 60–61, 64, 75, 346

managing funds of orphans 43, 43n48, 89, 89n23

relation with *dā'īs* 59

qāḍīs al-quḍāt (chief judges) 164

appointment of/decrees of

appointment 40, 61, 65, 66, 71, 74n72, 86, 87, 88

attire 56, 61

authority/rank 56, 59, 65, 75, 76, 81

duties/responsibilities 74, 163

joint office of chief *dā'ī*, *wazīr* and 67, 70, 73, 75

in later Egypt phase 61, 64–67, 69–70, 75

in Maghrib 61, 75

prominent families in position of 70, 75, 169–170

role in festivals/processions 158, 159, 160, 161

title 65

Qā'id al-Quwwād ("Commander of

Commanders", title) 220, 222–223, 225, 226

- Qā'im (Messiah) 12, 13, 25ⁿ⁷, 255ⁿ¹¹, 296,
297, 298, 319, 325–326, 332, 353
- al-Qā'im bi Amr Allāh (Imam-Caliph of the
Fatimid Caliphate, r. 934–946)
on Abbasids 371
death 36, 65
invocation in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 355,
358, 362
military expeditions 214
offspring 166
revolt of Abū Yazīd against 34, 60, 62,
98, 352, 357–358, 377, 378, 384–386
second invasion of Egypt 390
sermons by 38ⁿ⁴⁴, 348, 354, 352, 357–
358, 359–360, 366–368, 369, 384–386
- al-Qā'im bi-amr 'llāh (26th Caliph of the
Abbasid Caliphate, r. 1031–1075)
invocation in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 403,
404
sermons by 344
- al-Qal'ī, Abū Muḥammad b.
(astronomer) 292
- al-Qalqashandī
appointment decrees and 66, 87, 88
on government apparatus 50^{m10}, 89,
162, 212
on *khaṭībs* (preachers) 347–348
- al-Qalqī (astronomer) 293
- al-Qamūdī, Muḥammad b. Maḥfūz
(*qāḍī*) 60
- al-Qānūn fi dīwān al-rasā'il* ("The Code of the
Chancery", Ibn al-Ṣayrafī) 89, 212
- Qarāfa (City of the Dead, Cairo) 114, 115, 117
- al-Qarāfī (groom of al-Ḥākim) 187
- Qarmatism/Qarmatians 12, 333, 335ⁿ³⁷,
369, 379, 391ⁿ³
- Qāsim b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. al-Nu'mān (chief
dā'ī and chief *qāḍī*) 69, 70, 159, 170
- Qaṣr ibn Hubayra (Iraq) 340, 346
- Qaṣriyya (guard force of Sitt al-Mulk) 178,
179
- Qaṭ'iyya Imāmiyya Ithnā 'ashariyya 336
- Qaṭ'iyya (sect) 326
- al-Qawī, al-Jalīs b. 'Abd (librarian) 144
- Qayrawān (Ifriqiya)
capture by Khārijites/Abū Yazīd 60, 384,
385, 387
conquest by Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shī'ī 382–
383, 384
- dā'īs* 381
- qāḍīs* 58, 58ⁿ⁸, 61, 62, 62ⁿ²⁵, 64, 64ⁿ³²
- Qazvin/Qazwin 66ⁿ⁴³, 202
- Qirwāsh b. al-Muqallad ('Uqaylid emir of
Mosul, r. 1001–1050)
khuṭba (Friday sermon) of 35ⁿ³⁸–39, 36,
340, 341, 346, 348, 353, 356, 357
complete text 360–363
shift in political allegiance 339–341
- qiyās* (analogy) 317, 330, 336
- al-Quḍā'ī (*qāḍī*, d. 1062) 211
- Queen of Sheba 265
- Qulzum (ancient town and seaport on Red
Sea) 396, 400
- Qum (Iran) 66ⁿ⁴³, 203
- Qur'an 26, 264, 323, 324
- Qur'anic interpretation *see ta'wīl*
- Qur'anic verses
3 The Family of Imran (*Āl 'Imrān*) 268,
273ⁿ²
3:7 262, 273
3:61 354
3:97 254
3:102 360
3:103 361
- 4 Women (*al-Nisā'*),
4:6 254
4:59 16, 38, 361
4:64 24
4:103 42
4:128 367^{m12}
- 5 The Feast (*al-Mā'idā*),
5:3 252
5:4 254
- 6 Livestock (*al-An'ām*),
6:149 250
6:164 268
- 8 Battle Gains (*al-Anfāl*),
8:11 267
8:42 251
- 9 Repentance (*al-Tawba*),
9:31 367
9:100 386ⁿ²⁵
9:128 38
- 12 Joseph (*Yūsuf*),
12:53 385ⁿ²¹
12:55 51^{m6}
- 17 The Night Journey (*al-Isrā'*),
17:60 331, 369

- 17:71 16, 361, 379
 20 Ta Ha (*Tā'Hā*), 20:25–34 50n14
 21 The Prophets (*al-Anbiyā'*),
 21:15 386n26
 21:73 22
 21:105 343
 22 The Pilgrimage (*al-Ḥajj*), 22:27 40
 24 Light (*al-Nūr*),
 24:35 264, 264n5
 24:59 254
 25 The Criterion (*al-Furqān*),
 25:35 50n14
 33 The Joint Forces (*al-Aḥzāb*),
 33:27 386
 33:64 367n7
 37 Ranged in Rows (*al-Ṣaffāt*),
 37:62–65 369
 37:79 367n8
 38 Ṣād (*Ṣād*), 38:3 362
 39 The Throngs (*al-Zumar*), 39:
 56–58 362
 41 [Verses] Made Distinct (*Fuṣṣilat*),
 41:11 267
 41:53 295
 44 Smoke (*al-Dukhān*), 44:43–46 369
 47 Muhammad (*Muḥammad*),
 47:25 385n22
 51 Scattering Winds (*al-Dhāriyyāt*),
 51:46 367n9
 56 That Which is Coming (*al-Wāq'ā*),
 56:52 369
 58 The Pleading (*al-Mujādilah*),
 58:18 366
 58:19 386n29
 58:22 386n29
 60 Women Tested (*al-Mumtaḥanah*),
 60:10 251–252
 63 The Hypocrites (*al-Munāfiqūn*)
 63:4 386n27
 74 Wrapped in his Cloak (*al-Muddaththir*),
 74:50 386n28
 88 The Overwhelming Event (*al-Ghāshiyā*), 88:1 349
 90 The City (*al-Balad*),
 90:8–10 251
 90:11 251
 90:12–13 251
 92 The Night (*al-Layl*),
 92:8–9 282
 92:10 282
 92:14–16 385n24
 92:14 385n23
 92:15 385
 99 The Earthquake (*al-Zalzalah*),
 99:7–8 361
 Quraysh (clan) 364
 Qusayr Monastery 177, 232
 Qutbuddin, Tahera 31–32, 71–72n66, 112n13

 al-Raḍī, al-Sharīf 80, 193, 193n4, 397
Raf' al-īsh 'an quḍāt Miṣr (Ibn Ḥajar al-
 'Asqalānī) 64n31, 65, 68, 69n57, 164
Rāhat al-'aql ("The Comfort of Reason", al-
 Kirmānī) 148n21, 209, 298
 Rajā' b. Abī'l-Ḥusayn 164
 Ramaḍān 164, 348, 352
 see also 'id al-fiṭr
 Rametta (fortress, Sicily) 98
 Ramla 395, 395n16, 396
 Raqqāda (Maghrib) 58, 167, 382–383
 qāḍīs 61, 61n18
Rasā'il al-Hikma ("Epistles of Wisdom", Druze
 sacred writings) 68, 242
Rasā'il (Ibn 'Abbād) 78
 Rāshida, Mosque of 117, 350
 Rāshida bt. al-Mu'izz (d. 1050) 157, 165, 167
 al-Rass, Associates of 360, 367
 al-Rassī, Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm ('Alid
 nobleman) 163, 172, 173
 Rawāfiḍ (derogatory term Sunnis use for the
 Shī'a) 305
 al-Rawḍa (Egypt) 114
Rawda-yi taslīm ("Paradise of Submission",
 Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī) 201
 Raydān (royal parasol bearer) 179
 Rayḥāniyya (military regiment) 103
ra'y (personal judgment) 317, 330, 336
 Rayy (Iran) 66n43
 al-Rāzī, Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn al-
 Khaṭṭāb (d. 1131) 130n17
 al-Rāzī, Abū Bakr (Rhazes, d. c. 925 or 935)
 polemics against/refutation of 33, 209,
 317, 326–327, 331–332, 336
 on prophecy 327
 al-Rāzī, Abū Ḥatīm (d. 934)
 on creation 196
 literary production and circulation 207,
 209

- al-Rāzī, Abū Ḥatīm (d. 934) (*cont.*)
 Neoplatonism of 194
 refutations by, of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī 326–327, 331, 336
- al-Rāzī, Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb 134–135
- reading 144
- reading curricula 140, 148, 148*n*21, 318–319
- reason (*ʿaql*)/reasoning
 deductive reasoning 29
 esotericism based on authority vs. 260, 261–272
 rationally determined judgment 189
 revelation/revealed scripture and 194, 199, 200, 247, 272
 Shīʿis vs. Sunnis 191
 in *taʿwīl* 262–270, 275
see also intellect
- rebellions *see* revolts/rebellions
- refutations 6, 199, 317
 on imamate 32–33
see also curses/cursing; polemics
- Das Reich des Mahdi: Der Aufstieg der Fatimiden* (875–973) (Heinz Halm) 2, 13
- religious allegiance, signaling of conversion in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 338, 339
- religious authority, justice vs. *daʿwa* 57
- revelation (*tanzīl*) 28, 262
 intellect and/vs. 194
 reason and 194, 199, 200, 247, 272
taʿwīl vs. 257, 264
- revolts/rebellions
 of Abūʾl-Futūḥ (1010–11) 390, 395–396, 402
 of Abū Rakwa (1005–1006) 393
 of Abū Yazīd (944–947) 34, 60, 62, 98, 352, 357–358, 377, 378, 384–386
 against irreligious or unjust caliphs 78
 Bāghāya uprising (969) 388
 of Ibādīs 378*n*4, 384, 385, 388
 of Kutāma Berbers 95–96
 of Mufarrij b. Dagħfal b. al-Jarrāḥ 395, 396
 of Nizār b. al-Mustanṣir (1095) 101, 131, 132, 133, 134
 of son of Badr al-Jamālī (1084) 130–131
- rhetoric, in Friday *khuṭbas* (sermons) 350–353
- Rice, D.S. 219–220, 222, 226*n*24
- Riḍwān b. Walakhshī (*wazīr*) 127, 228*n*3
- rightly guided/righteous imams 14–15, 28, 322, 356, 358, 365
- al-Risāla al-kāfiya fiʾl-radd ʿalā al-Hārūnī al-Ḥusaynī al-Kirmānī al-Zaydī* (al-Kirmānī) 32–33
- al-Risāla fiʾl-imāma* (“Letter on the Imamate”, Abūʾl-Fawāris Aḥmad b. Yaʿqūb) 14
- al-Risāla al-miṣrīyya fiʾl-radd ʿalā al-Shāfiʿī* (Qāḍī al-Nuʾmān) 329
- al-Risāla al-miṣrīyya* (“The Egyptian Letter”, Abūʾl-Ṣalt) 103, 133, 211
- Risālat dhāt al-bayān fiʾl-radd ʿalā Ibn Qutayba* (Qāḍī al-Nuʾmān) 329
- al-Risāla al-wāʿiza* (al-Kirmānī) 26
- Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Paula Sanders) 107, 109, 161
- ritual preaching *see* *khuṭbas*
- rituals *see* festivals
- rock crystal 219–221, 226, 227
- royal family
 availability of information on 165, 166
 detention after end of rule 166
 in government positions/authority 165, 174
 inheritance 166
 list of members 166–167
 offspring 166
 supervision over 168–169
- royal libraries
 access to 144
 acquisition of works 150–151, 215–216
daʿwa and 140–141, 216
 dispersion by Ayyubids 144, 147–148, 217, 218*n*22
 donations to 215
 holdings 140, 143, 144, 206, 215, 217
 Ismaili texts in 144
 origins of 142
 selling off books during economic crisis 143, 215–216
see also Dār al-ʿIlm
- Rustamid Dynasty/Rustamids 383, 384*m*9, 387
- Rustow, Marina 3
- Ruzzik b. Ṭalāʾī 39

- Sa'īd b. Īsā b. Nastūras (*wāsiṭa*) 240n23
 Sabā'iyya (branch of Ghāliyya) 325
 al-Sābi', Hilāl (historian, d. 1056) 185, 187
Safarnāma (Nāṣir b. Khusraw) 210, 400
 Safavid Dynasty/Safavids 193
 Ṣaḥāba (Companions of the Prophet) 332
 condemnation/cursing of 229, 335,
 392–393
Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 150
 Sāḥil al-Ghalla Mosque (Fustat) 117
 Sahlān b. Kaysān (Melkite physician) 177n4,
 212–213, 285–286
 Sahlūn (astronomer) 292, 293
 Ṣaḥnūn (d. 854–855) 127
 Salāḥ al-Dīn (Sultan of Egypt and Syria,
 r. 1174–1193) 74, 89, 136
 detention of Fatimid ruling family 166
 Fatimid royal libraries and 218n22
 as Fatimid *wazīr* 1, 51, 52, 54, 55, 55n34,
 139
 scholarship under 139
 Salamiyya (Syria) 214
 Saljuks/Seljuks
 Abbasids and 49, 55, 343, 403
 control of over Ḥaramayn 390, 398, 403,
 406
 invasion of Egypt 48
 Salmān b. Ja'far b. Falāḥ (Kutāma military
 commander) 96
 salutations 162
 Samanid Dynasty/Samanids 320
 Sanders, Paula 107, 109, 111, 161
 Ṣanhāja Berbers 345
 San Marco, Treasury of 219
 satans, "Chapter on Satan" (Abū
 Tammām) 319–326, 380–381
 Sayılı, Aydın 293
The Sayings, Sermons and Teachings of 'Alī
 (al-Quḍā'i) 211
 al-Ṣayrafi *see* Ibn al-Ṣayrafi
Sayr wa sulūk (Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī) 201
 al-Sayyida al-'Aziziyya (concubine of al-
 'Azīz) 175, 176–177, 178–179, 178n7, 286
 Sayyid, Ayman Fuad 7n4, 72n66, 160m18
 Scheiner, Jens 241n25
 scholarship/scholars
 authority/status of 190, 193
 East-West scholar exchange
 (Alexandria) 124–140
 Fatimid studies 2–7
 Imāmī 190, 192, 194
 patronage 103, 124, 133, 134, 139, 144, 211,
 285, 288, 291, 292, 294, 299
 science/scientists
 da'wa and 285, 294
 interpretation of scientific texts 247
 second intellect 198
 sects, polemics against 319–326, 380–381
 sermons *see khuṭbas*
 sexual intercourse 329, 370n32, 372, 373
 al-Shābustī, Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī (librarian) 143,
 211
 al-Shāfi'ī, Muḥammad b. Idrīs (d. 820) 33
 Abū Ḥanīfa vs. 322
 on *dhimīs* 241, 242
 refutations of 317, 321
 Shāfi'ī school/Shāfi'iyya 128, 129, 135, 136,
 139, 322, 329
 see also [al-]Shāfi'ī, Muḥammad b. Idrīs;
 [al-]Sīlafī, Abū Ṭāhir
 Shafī' (royal parasol bearer) 349
 Shams al-Dīn Abū'l-Faṭḥ Mas'ūd b. Ṭāhir
 al-Wazzān 159
 Shams al-Mulk (chief *dā'i*) 159
 al-Shantarīnī, 'Alī b. Ja'far 'Alī *see* Ibn
 al-Qaṭṭā'
 Sharḥ al-akhbār (Qāḍi al-Nu'mān) 377
 Shāwar (Fatimid *wazīr*, r. 1162–1169) 54
 Shaybān (*dā'i* in India) 24n20
 al-Shayyal, Jamāl al-Dīn 7n4
 Sheba, Queen of 265
 al-Shī'ī, Abū 'Abd Allāh *see* Abū 'Abd Allāh
 al-Shī'ī
 Shiism/Shī'īs 189–190
 conversion to Sunnism/conversion from
 Sunnism to 339, 341
 festivals *see* 'Ashūrā'; Ghadir Khumm
 main topics of scholarly treatment and
 works 190–191
 see also imamate; philosophy; reason/
 reasoning
 Sunnīs vs. 58, 126, 191
 see also Imāmīs/Imāmiyya; Ismaili
 Shiism/Ismailis

- Shimrākhiyya (sect, branch of Kharijites) 380
- Shiraz 202
- al-Shirāzī, al-Muʿayyad fi'l-Dīn *see* [al-] Muʿayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shirāzī
- al-Shirāzī, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm *see* Mullā Ṣadrā
- shirk* (compromising God through association) 304, 305
- Shukr b. Abu'l-Futūḥ (*amir* of Mecca, r. 1010–1012) 390, 402
- Sibt Ibn al-Jawzī (preacher and historian, d. 1256/1257) 48*n*6, 404
- Sicily/Sicilians 1, 68, 77, 132, 171
- Arabic poetry 106, 106*n*26, 211
- Arab rule 104–106
- hierarchy of judges 64
- Muslim conquest (965) 98
- nobility 98
- Norman conquest (1071) 211
- qāḍīs* in 66
- Sicilian roots of Sitt al-Mulk 177
- Siffin, Battle of 368*n*13, 368*n*21–23
- signatures (*tawqīʿ*), for appointment of *wazīrs* 54–55
- sijillāt* *see* decrees
- Sijilmāsa (Morocco) 156, 382, 383, 388
- al-Sijistānī, Abū Yaʿqūb (d. 971) 194–197
- allegiance to Fatimid imams 208
- authority/reputation 192, 193, 330
- on creation 195, 196
- doctrines 195–197
- on God/the One 195–196
- cognizance/existence of God 306–307, 311
- command between God and intellect 196
- God as cause 308, 308*n*27
- God as a thing 309
- Oneness of God/*tawḥīd* 304, 308, 313
- unknowability of God 307, 308, 310, 312, 312–313
- on imamate 197
- on intellect 194, 195, 196
- natural sciences in work 295*n*20, 297–298
- opponents 309, 330
- philosophy in thought/work 200, 204, 249
- Neoplatonism 192, 197, 198, 209, 263, 300–301
- pilgrimage 301*n*2
- on prophecy 197
- refutations/polemics by 195, 330–331
- on revelation 194, 257, 264
- on the Soul 196
- sources of inspiration/as source of inspiration 192, 194–195, 205, 304
- on/and *taʿwīl* 249, 256–257, 259, 263–266
- twofold negation 310–311, 312
- works 26*n*27, 148*n*21, 192, 195, 207, 301, 301*n*3
- on worship 304–305, 312, 313
- al-Sijistānī, Muḥammad b. Karrām (d. 868) 324, 325
- al-Silafi, Abū Ṭāhir (*ḥaḍīth* scholar, d. 1180)
- in Alexandria 128, 129–130, 138
- background/career 127–128
- collection and transmission of *ḥaḍīth* 128, 129, 134–135
- epithet 128
- madrasa* 129, 129*n*16, 136
- reputation 139
- students 136
- teachers 135
- travels 127–128, 133
- works 128
- Silvestre de Sacy, Antoine Isaac 12
- Simāʿ al-ḥuzn* (“Meal of sorrow”, feast) 108
- al-Ṣinhājī, ‘Abbās b. Abī'l-Futūḥ b. Tamīm b. Muʿizz b. Bādīs (Fatimid *wazīr*, 548–549) 103–104
- sin/sinners 200, 304
- Sīra* (al-Muʿayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shirāzī) 210
- Sirāj al-mulūk* (“Lamplight of the Kings”, al-Ṭurṭūshī) 80–81*n*11, 126, 213, 241
- Sitt Miṣr (“Lady of Egypt”, daughter of al-Ḥākim, d. 1063) 167
- Sitt al-Mulk (Regent of the Fatimid Caliphate, r. 1021–1023) 166, 167, 224
- allegedly planned coup by 179–180, 181, 183
- correction of excesses of al-Ḥākim 184–185

- death 184, 188
 disappearance/murder of al-Ḥākim 182,
 183, 185–187
 executions by 185
 family roots 175, 176–177, 178
 gifts to/from 181, 181n20
 mother of 175, 176–177, 178–179, 178n7,
 286
 participation in government affairs 179,
 180, 181, 182
 regency of 183–187
 relation with father 178
 romantic liaisons 67n48, 179, 180,
 181–182, 182n21, 185
 wealth and power 179, 180
Siyāsat-nāma (“Book of Government”, Niẓām
 al-Mulk) 78
 slaves
 in army 105, 171, 395, 395n16
 dhimmīs and 229, 232, 234
 enslaved nobility 177
 eunuch 177, 181
 freeing of 279
 slave girls at courts 97
 Slavs 159, 171, 173
 Smoor, Pieter 32n30
 social elites
 at court/court sessions 155, 162–164, 164
 influence/status 174
 prominent families in government
 service 169–170
 religious affiliation 164–165
 role in processions 158–161
 royal family 165–169
 Socrates 327
 sons, of imam-caliphs 166, 167, 172
 Soul, the 196, 197, 198
 Spain 132
 Mālikī school 137
 scholars from 124, 213
 see also Umayyad Caliphate/Umayyads
 Speaker (*Nāṭiq*) 251, 251n7, 255, 255n11
Ṣubḥ al-a’shā (al-Qalqashandi) 50n10, 87,
 88, 89
 Sufism/Sufis 137, 300, 306
 see also al-Ghazālī
 Ṣufriyya (sect, branch of Kharijites) 380
 al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191) 203
 al-Sulamī, Abu’l-A’war ‘Amr b. Sufyān
 (general) 368, 368n20
 Sulaymān b. ‘Abd al-Malik (7th Caliph of the
 Umayyad Caliphate, r. 715–717) 370n31
 Sulaymān (Solomon, prophet) 265
 al-Ṣūlī (d. between 941 and 948) 371
 sultanates 55
sultān (title) 53, 54, 55, 55n34
 Sunnī law, *see also* Mālikī school/Mālikis
 Sunnī scholars 213, 216
 Sunnism/Sunnīs 139
 appointment, removal and replacement
 of caliphs 78
 appointment to public office 43
 conversion to Shiism/conversion from
 Shiism to 339, 341
 imams and 11, 13
 participation in pilgrimage caravans 398
 reception/interpretation of *khutbas*
 by 352–353, 366
 on religious authority 27
 Shī’īs vs. 58, 126, 191
 Sunnī population in Fatimid
 Caliphate 77, 103, 384
 see also Hanafi school/Hanafis; Hanbali
 school/Hanbalis; Mālikī school/
 Mālikis; Shāfi’ī school/Shāfi’iyya
 Suspended Church (Fustat) 233, 236n19
 synagogues 229, 231, 238
 Syria 1, 77
 astronomy/astronomers 292, 295
 da’wa operations 295
 Jarrāhids in 395, 396
 Kutāma in 96, 99
 al-Mahdī’s travel to Egypt from 141–142,
 214
 military expeditions,
 from Syria to Egypt 47, 48, 130
 to Syria 96, 97, 100, 178
 qāḍīs 66
 scholars in/from 125, 128, 131, 137
 al-Tabarānī, Abu’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ismā’īl (court
 astronomer)
 at drinking party 171, 173, 287
 career and works 288
 al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr (d. 923) 142,
 144, 215

- Tabriz (Iran) 201
tafāḍul (merit) 19–20
tafāwut (disparity) 19–20
tafsīr (exegesis) 249
 see also ta'wīl
 Tāhart (modern Tiaret, Algeria) 382, 383, 384, 387
 Ṭāhir b. al-Mustanṣir 101
 al-Ṭā'ī bi'llāh (24th Caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate, r. 974–991) 78, 165, 334*n*33, 392, 392*n*5
 Tāj al-Dawla wa Sayf al-Milla (Ja'far II b. Yūsuf al-Kalbī, *amīr* of Sicily, r. 998–1019) 104–106, 159
Tajrid al-kalām (“Abstract of Theology”, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī) 202
 Ṭalā'ī b. Ruzẓik (Fatimid *wazīr*, r. 1154–1161) 54, 102, 211
 Ṭalḥa ibn 'Ubayd Allāh (Companion of the Prophet, d. 656) 322
 Tamīm b. al-Mu'izz (d.c. 984) 31, 176, 210
Tanbīh al-hādī wa'l-mustahdī (“The Exhortation to the Guiders and the Guided”, al-Kirmānī) 317, 332–333, 336
tanzīl see revelation
tanzīh (removing all association from God) 309, 310–311
 Taormina (Sicily) 98
 Taqarrub (spy of Sitt al-Mulk) 184
taqlīd (arbitrary submission to authorities) 317, 330, 336
Tarīkh al-Ṭabarī (“History”, al-Ṭabarī) 142, 144
tashbīh (trying to understand God by analogy and comparison) 304, 305, 309, 310
ta'tīl (denuding God of all content by strict denial of *tashbīh*) 304, 309, 310
Tathbīt al-imāma (“Confirming the Imamate”, al-Manṣūr) 13–14, 24, 370*n*31
tawḥīd (Oneness of God) 302–303, 302*n*5, 304, 307, 308, 309, 313, 334
Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im (Qāḍī al-Nu'mān) 249
ta'wīl (Qur'anic interpretation) 6
 access by general public 273–274
 access to knowledge of and authority to perform 249, 251–253, 264, 273–274
 al-Kirmānī on 266–270
 al-Sijistānī on 263–266
 ambiguity and 247, 262, 265, 273
 of both scripture and scientific texts 247
 examples 250–257, 259
 Ibn Rushd on 262–263, 273
 meaning/employment in Ismaili context 247, 248–249, 260
 methods and results 249, 260
 payment of dues and access to 251–252, 271, 276, 280–282, 283, 284
 reason vs./and authority in 262–270, 272, 275
 revelation vs. 257, 264
 tailored to circumstances and audience 250
 term/meaning 275*n*5, 282
 ẓāhir vs./and *bāṭin* 247, 248, 257–258, 260, 266, 274, 312
tawqīf see signatures
 taxes 184
 Ṭayy Bedouins 395, 397
 Ṭayyibī Ismailis 76, 191, 193
 see also [al-]Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī
 teachers
 appointment of/decrees of appointment 39, 87, 92–93
 men compared to (in *ta'wīl*) 252
 Tha'ālība (sect, branch of Kharijites) 380
 Thamūd (tribe) 360, 367
 theology 199
 fusion of philosophy and 202, 203, 205
Theology of Aristotle (Enneads) 194, 301*n*4, 304
 Thiqa al-Dawla (Yūsuf b. 'Abdallāh al-Kalbī, *amīr* of Sicily, r. 990–998) 104, 105
al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī (“Spiritual Medicine”, al-Rāzī) 33, 331
 time cycles 296, 298
 Tinnīs/Tennis (medieval Egypt) 65, 70, 132
Ṭirāz (Abū 'Alī Sanad b. 'Imān al-Azdī) 126
tirāz (medieval Islamic embroideries/inscribed textiles) 46, 49, 52
 Tortosa (Spain) 124
 transvestites 121, 122
 travel/travelers 100, 125, 131, 132, 133
 see also Naṣīr b. Khusraw; pilgrimage; pilgrimage caravans; [al-]Silafī, Abū Ṭāhir; [al-]Ṭurṭūshi, Abū Bakr

- "A Treatise on the Imamate of the Fatimid Caliph al-Manṣūr bi-Allāh" (Wilferd Madelung) 14
 Tripoli, *qāḍīs* 6118, 62
 Tughril Beg (Sultan of the Saljuk Empire, r. 1037–1063) 49, 344
 Tulunid Mosque (Egypt) 117
 Tunisia 1, 77
 Mālikī school 137
 Turks
 in Egypt 100
 in Fatimid army 103
 Westerners (*Maghāribā*) vs. 96, 97–98, 100
 al-Ṭurṭuṣhī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad (d. 1126)
 arrival and settlement in
 Alexandria 125, 128, 129–130, 132–133, 137, 213
 Ibn Khaldūn on 126
 reputation/success 103, 125, 126n4, 128, 135
 rivalries/opponents 133, 138
 students/disciples 103, 126–127, 136, 139
 travels 103, 125, 133
 works 80n11, 126, 138, 213
 al-Ṭusī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad (d. 1067) 193, 193n4
 al-Ṭusī, Naṣīr al-Dīn (d. 1274) 204–205
 background 200–201
 conversion from Ismaili to Imāmī Shiism 192, 193, 200, 201
 on divine/God's command 201
 on imamate 201
 on intellect 201
 on metaphysics 202
 philosophy in thought/work of 202, 204
 on reason 201
 sources of inspiration 200–201, 205
 works 201, 201–202
 Twelver Shī'a *see* Imāmīs (Twelver Shī'a)
 Tyre (Lebanon) 128, 289
 'Ubaydallāh b. Ziyād (Umayyad Governor of Iraq, d. 686) 368, 368n19
 al-'Ukbarī (astrologer) 288–289
 'Umān (country) 380
 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz 241, 242
 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (2nd Caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate, r. 634–644) 115, 322, 332, 359, 374, 381, 405
 'Umar, Pact of 230, 239, 241–242
 Umayya b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, Abū'l-Ṣalt al-Dānī *see* Abū'l-Ṣalt
 Umayya b. 'Abd Shams (b.c. 515) 328, 359, 372
 Umayyad Caliphate/Umayyads 60
 condemnation of Fatimids by 364, 374
 condemnation of/polemics against 405
 by Qāḍī al-Nu'mān 328–329, 364, 369, 370–374, 375
 comparison to Zaqqūm/Accursed Tree 331, 335, 364, 369, 370n32
 in *khuṭbas* (sermons) 359, 367–368
 rulers 328, 330, 331, 333, 372–373, 376
 Spanish Umayyads 328–329, 369
 origins of rivalry between Fatimids and 364–365, 366, 371
 Umm Mallāl (sister of Bādīs, Zīrid ruler) 181n20
unio mystica 306, 307
 'Uqayl (head of intelligence bureau under al-Ḥākim) 224
 Uṣayfira (tribe) 397
Ustādh al-Ustādhīn ("Master Eunuch of Eunuchs", title) 222–223, 225, 226
 Ustādh Jawdhar (high-ranking eunuch, d. 973) 156, 156n4, 223, 369, 386, 387
ustādh (term) 222–223, 222n12
 'Utba b. Abī Sufyān 367–368
 'Uthmān (3rd Caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate, r. 644–656) 322, 332, 368n15, 380, 381
 al-'Uthmānī, Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1218) 136
'Uyūn al-akhbār (Iḍrīs 'Imād al-Dīn) 55n33, 63, 71–72n66
 Valencia 136
 Venice 219
 viziers *see* *wazīrs*
 Wadi al-Qura 392
 al-Walakhshī, Rīḍwān b. (Fatimid *wazīr*) 92
 Walī'l-Dawla Abū 'Alī b. Khayrān 50n10

- al-Walid b. Abi Mu'ayt 368
 al-Walid b. 'Utba (Governor of Madina, d. 624) 368, 368n14
 al-Walid b. Yazid (11th Caliph of the Umayyad Caliphate, r. 743–744) 331, 370n31
 Walker, Paul E. 2, 5
waqfs (endowments) 145, 146, 216
 Wāqifiyya (branch of Imāmiyya) 325–326
 al-Warjalānī, Abū Zakariyyā' 383m6, 387
 Wārjlān, Basin of 383
 Wasit (early Islamic city) 128
wāsiṭa (rank/title) 50, 50m10, 96, 240n23
 wazirate, development/evolution of 46–47, 51m8, 52, 55
wazīrs
 appointment of/decrees of
 appointment 39, 46, 50, 50m13, 51, 52, 54–55, 87, 90, 96
 attire 55n33
 tīrāz (medieval Islamic embroideries) 46, 49, 52
 classes of 47, 51m8, 54
 military *wazīrs* 46, 47, 48–49, 52, 53, 55, 72, 73, 174
 Fatimid vs. non-Fatimid 39, 46, 49
 joint office of chief *qāḍī*, chief *dā'ī* and 70
 in late Fatimid vs. early Fatimid period 46, 49–51, 52, 90
 rank/status 53–54, 56, 75, 81, 90
 residences 55n33
 role in festivals/processions 159, 160, 161
 title 46–47, 50, 51m8, 54, 55, 72
 "The Wazīr's Epistle" (Ibn Killis) 208
 weights and measures, control of 66, 66n43, n45
 Westerners (*Maghāriba*)
 on day of 'Āshūrā 109–110
 definition/term 99
 Easterners (*Mashāriqa*) vs. 96–99, 100
 in Egypt/Cairo 95, 96
 migration to Egypt 103–104, 131
 scholars 124–127
 see also Kalbids; Kutāma Berbers; Maṣmūdīs
 William of Tyre 178n7
 wine consumption 122, 331, 370n31, 374–375
 by rulers 329, 331, 335, 372, 373
 drinking parties 163, 164, 170–173, 174, 286, 287–288
 prohibition of alcohol by al-Ḥākim 173, 229, 288
 "Wine, Love and Praise for the Fāṭimid Imāms" (Pieter Smoor) 32n30
 wine trade 333, 370n31, 373
 women
 compared to students (in *ta'wīl*) 252
 confinement of 182, 184, 229
 conversion to Islam 251–252
 in *da'wa* 250
 instruction in Ismaili teachings/in *majālis* 276–277, 277n7
 royal 167–168, 180
 marriage 167–168
 wealth 167–168, 180
 rule by 175
 see also Sitt al-Mulk
 worship/worshippers 311, 312, 313
 types of worshippers 304–305
 Yahyā of Antioch (Melkite historian, d.c. 1066)
 accessibility of work 230
 on destruction of houses of worship 236
 on Ghābn (eunuch of al-Ḥākim) 220–221, 222, 225, 227
 on persecution of *dhimmīs* 230, 233–235, 237–238, 240
 al-Yamani, 'Umāra (poet, d. 1174) 211
al-Yanābī' (al-Sijistānī) 209
 Yānis (chief eunuch) 180
 Ya'qūb b. Naṣṭās (physician of al-Ḥākim) 164, 170–171, 172–173
 Yaqqān (Ibādī imam, r. 906–909) 382–383, 383
 Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya (Yazīd I, 2nd Caliph of the Umayyad Caliphate, r. 680–683) 331, 370n31
 Yazīdiyya (sect, branch of Kharijites) 380
 al-Yazīrī, al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī (Fatimid *wazīr*, r. 1050–1058) 49, 51
 as chief *dā'ī*, chief *qāḍī* and *wazīr* 70–71
 expenditure on pilgrim caravans 399–400, 400n36
 fall and execution 71, 402
 rank/authority 70–71, 76

- Yemen 53, 115, 193, 209, 403, 405
- Yumgan (region, modern Afghanistan) 210
- Yūnus b. 'Abd al-Rahmān (*ḥadīth* transmitter, d. 823–824) 326
- Yūsuf b. 'Abdallāh al-Kalbī (Thiqa al-Dawla, *amīr* of Sicily, r. 990–998) 104, 105
- Yūsuf b. Tāshfin (*amīr* of the Almoravids, r. 1061–1106) 131, 138
- al-Ẓāfir bi-A'dā' Allāh (Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid Caliphate, r. 1149–1154) 217
- Ẓāfir al-Ḥaddād (poet) 134, 135
- al-Ẓāhir li-I'zāz Dīn Allāh (Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid Caliphate, r. 1021–1036)
- alms by 400n37
 - arts and sciences/patronage under 288
 - censorship 149–150, 208
 - courtiers 224
 - inheritance 168
 - invocation in *khutbas* 344
 - offspring 166
 - popular festivals under 111, 113, 115, 120
 - in royal processions 158–159
 - sermons by 105
 - succession of al-Ḥākim 183, 184, 186
 - regent *see* Sitt al-Mulk
- ẓāhir (literal wording), *bāṭin* (inner meaning) vs./and 247, 257–258, 260, 266, 272, 274, 312, 320–321
- al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143) 136–137
- Zamzam (well) 404
- Zaqqūm/Accursed Tree, Umayyads compared to 331, 335, 364, 369, 370n32
- Zayd ibn 'Alī (5th Zaydi Imam, r. 714/715–739/740) 26
- Zaydis/Zaydiyya (Shī'ī sect) 317, 321, 333, 336
- imams 26, 32, 191, 332, 369, 379
 - scholarship 190
- al-Zayla'ī, Aḥmad 'Umar 392
- Zayn al-Dawla Intiṣār b. Yaḥyā 103
- Zenāta/Zanāta (tribe) 371, 378n4
- Zīj al-kabīr al-Ḥākīmī* (Ibn Yūnus) 213, 286
- zījs* (astronomical tables) 286, 292, 293, 294, 295
- Zīrid Dynasty/Zīrids 99, 100–101, 103–104, 343, 345, 345n15, 346, 350
- Ziyād b. Summayya (Ziyād b. Abihī, Umayyad commander) 368, 368n18
- al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwām (Companion of the Prophet, d. 656) 322
- Zur'a b. 'Isā b. Nastūras (*wāsiṭa*) 240n23
- Zurāra b. Aḥmad (*qāḍī*) 62

I NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

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Volume 172

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