14 | Resistance to and Acceptance of the Fatimids in North Africa: A Shiʿi Dynasty in Negotiation with Both Adherents and Enemies

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With the advent of the Fatimid state in Qayrawān beginning with the conquest by Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī (d. 298/911) in the spring of 296/909 and the formal proclamation of the new caliphate in early January of the following year, the Ismaili movement went from a mostly underground and clandestine operation into a government ruling over substantial territory and disparate religious populations, only a tiny portion of which had any devotion to Shiʿism.[1] Previous notable successes of these Ismaili groups were largely confined to conversion of single individuals or tribes. The new situation demanded a new and different form of appeal, more open and public. The *daʿwa* (mission) which had functioned well in the previous decades was not, by its very nature, apt to serve as a governing institution where the majority of citizens were possibly antithetical to it. The challenge of an empire so recently brought into existence demanded a new form of binding agency, or rather agencies, and a policy carefully keyed to the issues arising from the attempt to rule, religiously as well as politically, an incongruent conglomeration of peoples held together by bonds that for the most part had not previously existed. This volume is about the ties of social and

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[1] The almost epic story of the successful rise from an underground movement to the beginning of the Fatimid empire was covered by an unusually rich array of primary sources including most importantly: Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa wa ibtidāʾ al-dawla*, ed. Farhat Dachraoui (Tunis: al-Sharika al-Tūnisiyya li-l-tawzīʿ, 1975), now trans. by Hamid Haji in *Founding the Fatimid State: The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006); Jaʿfar al-Ḥājib, *Sīrat Jaʿfar*, ed. Wladimir Ivanow, *Majallat kulliyat al-ādāb* 4 (1936): 89–133; Eng. trans. Wladimir Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids* (Islamic Research Association Series 10) (London: Oxford University Press, 1942); French trans. Marius Canard, "LʾAutobiographie dʾun chambellan du Mahdi ʿObeidallah le Fatimide," *Hesperis* 39 (1952), 279–324; and Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt,* ed. and trans. by Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shīʿī Witness* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000). Heinz Halm's *Das Reich des Mahdi. Der Aufstieg der Fatimiden (875–973)* (München: C. H. Beck, 1991), Engl. trans. Michael Bonner, *The Empire of the Mahdi. The Rise of the Fatimids* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) is perhaps still the best general account of this event but see also Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids. The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Fourth Century of the Hijra, Tenth Century C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). Halm did not have Ibn al-Haytham's text and so missed some details it supplies.

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political interdependency that hold, or held, Islamic societies together. In this contribution I look at the way in which one set of new rulers attempted to bind their subjects to them despite formidable obstacles caused in part by religious differences or pre-existing loyalties and yet at the same time still favor the minority among them devoted in a particular faith.

Of the general populations of the newly created empire, only the Kutāma Berbers were Ismaili, they having been converted by Abū ʿAbd Allāh over the course of the nearly eighteen years of his mission to them. Many more of its inhabitants were stridently hostile for religious reasons. The majority were Maliki Sunnis with a long history of anti-Shiʿi sentiments. They were aided and abetted in this hostility by the Umayyads of al-Andalus and their ancient hatred of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) and the Hashimites. On yet another side, the Abbasids through their local Maghribi representatives harbored no love for either these Umayyads or the newly arrived Fatimids. In addition, the Kharijites, enemies of all three, enjoyed strong support along the edges of what was about to become the Fatimid domain; from the beginning, they lurked ready to pounce should the new state weaken.

But, in contrast to the rise of the Abbasids a century-and-a-half earlier, whose *daʿwa* – its apparatus of appeal and propaganda – ceased once the state came into being, for the Fatimids it became an instrument of government, eventually becoming formally a bureau of the state, operating more or less openly, at least within the confines of the empire. Outside, of course, it remained underground and highly secretive. Still it existed and was tied to the central administration under the control and direction of the imam-caliph. For the state, its supreme leader was the caliph, not unlike the earlier Islamic holders of this office; for the *daʿwa*, he was rather the Imam, the supreme authority both politically *and* religiously. This distinction was and is basic to Shiʿism. Formally, it can be represented by two circles, one inside the other. The larger of the two contains all Muslims. They are the *Muslimūn* in Arabic. The smaller one within denotes the Ismaili Shiʿi. They are the *Muʾminūn*, the Believers. The imam-caliph was the supreme authority governing both, but his charge could be, and often was, radically different for each of his constituencies, although essential and continuous for both parties.

Therefore, understanding exactly how the Fatimids, locally considered as being foreign easterners in addition to heretical Shiʿis, negotiated sufficient acceptance in the Maghrib to withstand fierce opposition from Maliki Sunnis and Ibadi Khārijis, raises key issues concerning the formation of Islamic empires. Despite a plethora of enemies among the local population, they and their rule endured and even prospered. What we know of the details has

grown substantially with the fairly recent discovery of new sources for the critical earliest phase of this process. A good amount of data existed in older known accounts but, with Ibn al-Haytham's (fl. first half fourth/tenth century) memoir of his role and interactions during and just before the advent of the Fatimids[2] and with Abū al-ʿAbbās (d. 298/911), Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī's brother's *Keys to Grace* (*Mafātīḥ al-niʿma*),[3] we have substantially more information about (a) the interaction of Fatimid authorities with the local *ʿulamāʾ*, and (b) the inner dynamics of the *daʿwa* and its allocation of restricted knowledge to those most proven in their loyalty, as evidenced in part by payment of religious dues (*zakāt* and *ṣadaqa*). The former involved both the conversion of sections of the local elite and the demotion or expulsion of hostile elements in it. It required a mixed policy of co-option and exclusion, and it worked reasonably well as we can tell from a detailed accumulation of biographical data in part supplied by Ibn al-Haytham, who was himself a member of the same elite. His often eye-witness testimony helps balance and correct much in later anti-Fatimid accounts composed by blatantly hostile Maliki authors. The second aspect greatly benefits from having an internal document preserved by the *daʿwa* that explains clearly facets of its structure and what it meant to be a member of it in good standing, how its adherents were expected to prove their loyalty and the reward for doing so. Membership was exclusive as were the duties imposed and the reward accumulated. The Ismailis existed both as one component in the new society formed by the Fatimids and yet also remained quite apart as a community of Believers within the broader society of Muslims.

It may be noted here at the outset that various components of the problem at hand, that of explaining two quite different methods employed by the Fatimids to tie together and hold onto these two classes of supporters – non-Ismaili citizen subjects, on the one side, and loyal Ismailis on the other – have drawn the attention of a number of scholars,[4] myself included. We

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[2] *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt,* ed. and trans. by Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker, in *The Advent of the Fatimids*. The notes to the translation and the general introduction provide a great deal of specific information about the situation in Qayrawān.

[3] Abū al-ʿAbbās, *Mafātīḥ al-niʿma*, ed. and trans. by Wilfred Madelung and Paul E. Walker, in *Affirming the Imamate Early Fatimid Teachings in the Islamic West: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Works Attributed to Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī and His Brother Abu'l-ʿAbbās* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021).

[4] In addition to some already noted above, Farhad Daftary's masterful *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), although covering a vast scope, is often particularly good on key events and their background. Wilferd Madelung's groundbreaking study of the imamate in early Ismaili doctrine, "Das Imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre," *Der Islam* 37 (1961): 43–135, now available in English translation by

have together expanded considerably the available textual documentation, both historical and theological, that illustrates various facets of the Ismaili appeal during the era of the Fatimid caliphate. My volume of festival sermons (*khutab*) by the imam-caliphs is a case in point.[5] The rhetoric of public discourse, as in these sermons, needed to observe a delicate balance between an appeal to Sunni and Shiʿi supporters mixed together for the occasion. Various editions and some translations of prominent products by major authorities within the *daʿwa* constitute another body of evidence. The methods employed to draw in, convert and hold onto a growing body of members at large are better and more accurately appreciated than they were previously. One issue that remains in part an open question concerns not so much the arguments used on the potential adept in favour of Ismaili Shiʿism but how these Fatimids could form a community large enough to constitute an empire encompassing regions as widely diverse as the Maghrib, Egypt, the Hijaz, Yemen and Syria and retain the allegiance of the majority of its citizens as long as it did. One answer, the one explored here, involves a twofold policy: giving separate attention to a public at large, on the one hand, while cultivating close intimate ties to an inner restricted constituency of believers, on the other.

And in contrast to many of the other studies in this volume, the principal evidence focuses attention not on cases that illustrate a ground–up process but rather top–down matters of broad policy emanating from core governmental institutions such as the imamate (caliphate), the judiciary and military or religious establishments. Presumably the effects of this policy were felt at the lower levels of society as some anecdotal reports suggest, but we know less about the responses of individuals and small groups than we might wish.

The Daʿwa before the Dawla

Many of the issues and details that come up with the advent of the Fatimids concern events and problems surrounding the origins of the *daʿwa* and its spread, most especially just prior to but including the mission of Abū ʿAbd Allāh and the journey of the future al-Mahdī from Syria to the Maghrib. It remains vital to have those in mind when explaining what happened afterwards.

Patricia Crone, "The Imamate in Early Ismaili Doctrine," *Shii Studies Review* 12 (2018): 62–155, remains not only useful but often, for some aspects of the topic, essential.

[5] Paul E. Walker, *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs: Festival Sermons of the Ismaili Imams* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009).

Tracing the movement back as far as solid information goes[6] brings the story to a central directed network operating from a headquarters in the north Syrian town of Salamiyya. From it, agents, the *dāʿīs*, were dispatched, usually in pairs, to various part of the Islamic realm. The goal was to establish as universal a coverage as possible; no territory was off-limits. The agents of the *daʿwa* were sent out to appeal for adherence and support. The earliest records, dating from about 261/875, concern, in the case of Iraq, the activities of the Qarāmiṭa, led by Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ (d. 321/933) and his brother-in-law ʿAbdān (d. 286/899). It is likely, however, that the movement had already been in existence for some time. Somewhat later, we begin to find names of *dāʿīs*, many of whom were converted by a certain al-Ḥusayn al-Ahwāzī (death date unknown), who was apparently acting on instructions from a central headquarters in Salamiyya. One of these new recruits, Abū Saʿīd al-Jannābī (d. 301/914), opened a mission in Fars and then one in al-Baḥrayn. ʿAlī b. al-Faḍl (d. 303/915), himself a Yemeni native, and Abū al-Qāsim b. Ḥawshab (d. 302/914) were sent to Yemen, where they initiated the *daʿwa* in 268/881–82 with great eventual success. Ibn Ḥawshab in turn ordered his nephew al-Haytham (death date unknown) from Yemen to Sind. These are merely some examples. More could be cited from a slightly later period. Eventually, such *dāʿīs* were sent as far as Constantinople.[7]

Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī, along with his brother Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad, began their careers as a *dāʿīs* in a similar fashion. From Iraq the two moved to Egypt and from there Abū ʿAbd Allāh went to Yemen, from which he returned a year later to accompany a party of Kutāma Berbers back to their homeland in eastern Algeria. After patiently tending to a growing flock of adherents and organizing them into an army, it was he who eventual achieved the most spectacular success by overthrowing the Aghlabid governorate (r. 183–296/800–909) and replacing it with the Fatimid caliphate, a task he was commissioned to do from the start. Exactly how he managed to do it is critically important in this context.

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[6]   The best and most complete accounts of current scholarship on this question can be found in Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs* and Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi*, although based on earlier work done particularly by Wilferd Madelung.

[7]   A striking example was the dispatch to Constantinople of Abū ʿAlī, also known as Hamdan Qarmaṭ. See Wilfred Madelung, "Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ and the Dāʿī Abū ʿAlī," *Proceedings of the 17th Congress of the Union européenne des arabisants et islamisants* (St. Petersburg, 1997), 115–24. Another of a slightly different kind was the delegation of *dāʿīs*, one of whom was Ibn al-Haytham, the author of the memoir, to support the Andalusian rebel Ibn Ḥafṣūn (d. 305/918) against the Umayyads, after he declared for the Fatimid caliph al-Mahdī (d. 322/934). See Paul Walker, "The Identity of One of the Ismaili *Dāʿīs* by the Fatimids to Ibn Ḥafṣūn," *al-Qanṭara* 21 (2000): 387–88.

The main source here is Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's *Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa wa-ibtidāʾ al-dawla*,[8] which may also be taken as a semi-official history from the Fatimid side. Among other details in it that might not, under closer inspection, be entirely accurate is its portrayal of Abū ʿAbd Allāh's seemingly chance encounter in Mecca with the Kutāma party. More likely the *daʿwa* knew about these Kutāma, some of whom were, in fact, already Shiʿi, and knew as well that he fully intended to insinuate himself with them and travel beyond Egypt on their return all the way to their homeland, where he would propagate Ismaili Shiʿism. That he did so with such overwhelming success, although it entailed a long and arduous effort, is testament to the determination of both himself and the organization behind him. Certainly he was never quite alone but rather in regular contact with his own brother in Fusṭāṭ and with the *dāʿī*s who were occasionally sent to him, either from Yemen or at least from the East, possibly Salamiyya itself.[9] In his local setting in the eastern Algerian mountains, he faced and eventually surmounted serious opposition from portions of the Kutāma and from neighbouring tribal groups, some of whom were Kharijites. The Aghlabid authorities were sufficiently alarmed once they fully perceived the threat he might pose that they soon enough sent troops to suppress his movement, although not necessarily as expeditiously as they should have. Ultimately, they failed and were overtaken, bringing thereby an end to their rule.[10]

The situation inside the Aghlabid state, that is, in Qayrawān and Raqqada, is worth describing because in many ways it constitutes a crucial backdrop to developments in the early years of the Fatimid empire. For the scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) of the decades leading up to the events of 909, the main concern was never the Shiʿa, about whom they would likely have known little or nothing, even though we now understand from Ibn al-Haytham that some existed among their number. The principle division pitted the Malikis, who were the more numerous and who had the distant backing of Umayyad Spain, against the Hanafis, fewer in number but favored by the Aghlabid governors, who were at least in theory acting for and on behalf of the Abbasids. In local circles the former, whose *madhhab* owed its origins to Madina and Malik, were called the Madinans (al-Madaniyyūn,

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[8] Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa wa-ibtidāʾ al-dawla*, ed. Farhat Dachraoui (Tunis: al-Sharika al-Tūnisiyya li-l-tawzīʿ, 1975); trans. Hamid Haji, *Founding of the Fatimid State: The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

[9] On this matter and others related, see Paul E. Walker "Introduction," in *Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shīʿī Witness*, eds. Wilfred Madelung and Paul E. Walker (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000).

[10] Walker, "Introduction," 24–26.

ahl al-Madīna) and the Ḥanafīs were ʿIrāqīs (al-ʿIrāqiyyūn, ahl al-ʿirāq), or sometimes Kufans (al-Kufiyyūn). Similarly, to convert to Shiʿism meant to adopt the manner of the East (*tasharraqa*). Abū ʿAbd Allāh could be called the "Man from Ṣanʿāʾ" (al-Ṣanʿānī) despite having lived in Yaman for less than one year. During the ninth century and into the tenth, opposing factions of the Islamic elite in the west continued to be classified by an origin in the east, however tenuous or out-of-date that connection might have been. For Malikis and Hanafis this practice was becoming inappropriate. For the Ismailis, aside from Berber converts, it was clearly still applicable. Abū ʿAbd Allāh and his brother were most certainly easterners.

This distinctive labelling of the Ismailis likely began among the Kutāma themselves, perhaps as a way of signifying a transfer of allegiance from a purely local tribe or clan to a widespread movement with deep roots in the eastern centre of Islam itself. Qadi al-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974), whose *Ifititāḥ* is the main source for the origins and early activities of Abū ʿAbd Allāh and his brother, reports this name without comment or seeming hesitation. All of the North African writers use it. Al-Khushanī devotes a chapter of his *ṭabaqāt*[11] to "A Record of those scholars of Qayrawān who became Easterners (*man tasharraqa*)" in the period following the Fatimid takeover. For him, of course, it was not a note of approval but of innovation and heresy. The Ismaili Fatimids were foreign outsiders.

In the years leading up to the Fatimid triumph, this rivalry between Malikis and Hanafis, about which much new information comes from Ibn al-Haytham's memoir,[12] carried with it, in addition, implications of differences in theology. The Malikis tended to reject the subject itself, whereas at least some of the Hanafis adopted a Muʿtazili position, often as a reaction to a question about the createdness of the Qurʾan. But, even strictly in law, the opposing positions had hardened and become more intractable after the Maliki Saḥnūn (d. 240/854). Later Ibn ʿAbdūn (d. 299/911), grand *qāḍī* during the reign of Ibrāhīm II (r. 261–89/875–902) and a Hanafi, was well known for his severity against the Malikis. In 280/893 he was replaced by the equally harsh Maliki ʿĪsā b. Miskīn (d. 295/907), who persisted with his anti-Hanafi policy until this Ibrāhīm departed for the *jihād* in Sicily. He in turn was replaced by Ibrāhīm b. Aswad al-Ṣaddīnī (in office 289–90/902–903), who was both Hanafi and Muʿtazili. He was also decidedly

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[11] Muḥammad b. al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Khushanī, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt ʿulamāʾ Ifrīqiya. Classes des savants de l'Ifrīqiya*, ed. Mohammed Ben Cheneb (Paris: E. Leroux, 1915); trans. Mohammed Ben Cheneb (Alger: Jules Carbonel, 1920).

[12] In addition to the text itself and the notes, see Walker's "Introduction," 18–31.

antagonistic to traditional Malikis and some of them suffered as a result. Subsequently, when Ziyādat Allāh III (r. 290–96/902–909) came to power, in 290/903 he elected to appoint Ḥimās b. Marwān al-Ḥamadānī, who had been a student of Saḥnūn. A bit later in 293/905, he added a Hanafi as well in a parallel position as *qāḍī* of the administrative suburb of Raqqada where the court itself was located. Ibn al-Haytham had personal encounters with four of these men, who were all alive when the Fatimids arrived. They and others of the local *fuqahāʾ* found themselves confronted by a situation quite different, one they certainly never fully anticipated, which threatened their common Sunni view of Islam, though less so for the Hanafis than for the Malikis, who were not then or ever amenable to Shiʿism. As will become clear, they would soon announce what antipathy and hostility to the Fatimids they deemed appropriate and dared to make public. And, over the ensuing century or more, they made up, full of increasingly virulent propaganda and false claims, historical accounts of what happened to them, written, in part, for self-vindication and thus justifying their own later brutal persecutions of the Ismailis. The evidence from the earliest accounts in no way substantiates their later claims, which were often wildly embellished with stories of martyrdom. The actual harm they suffered, as will be seen below, was from their perspective serious, and Fatimid authorities in key offices were not nearly as accommodating to local Malikis as they eventually became. From the initial period of Shiʿi rule we do in fact find some signs of attempts to impose Shiʿism as might not have been expected given the general policy of tolerance for religious diversity among the later Fatimids.

The Fatimid State and Its Religious Policies

The immediate consequences of the rise of the Fatimids to political dominion required two quite different approaches: on the one side, a way to control a subject population of whom a mere fraction were loyal Ismailis; and on the other, a means to retain their leadership of an Islam-wide network of believers, most of whom could be contacted solely in secret. Because the ultimate aim of the caliphate was universal, all Islam, and even beyond Islam, the *daʿwa* continued to be essential. It would be important that it should function at least as successfully as it had done previously, although its ways and means might have been altered somewhat by the advent of the state. Within its own confines, the restrictions imposed by secrecy were obviously different than those necessary in hostile areas outside. Still, certain elements of secrecy needed to be preserved. About that, more later.

Here it is perhaps essential to take note of the major schism among the Ismailis at large: the split between Fatimids and Qarmatians[13] which began two decades prior to the state but continued long after, in fact through to the end of the fourth/tenth century. The founding of the Fatimid empire tended to exacerbate the divide. One side conducted a *daʿwa* in favor of an imam, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d 148/765), then in occultation, and the other a living present imam in the person of the caliph al-Mahdī. No accommodation between them worked. And thus the loyalty instilled by the *daʿwa* acting on behalf of the Fatimids (and against Qarmatian opposition) remained a vital component of state policy. This same *daʿwa* sought to attract as well as many of the Shiʿa as it could reach. Its methods require explanation insofar as they are known to us.

With respect to the non-Ismaili populace the Fatimids inherited, some substantial portion simply accepted them as overlords without much fuss. That they were Shiʿi might not have made as much difference as may be imagined. Allegiance was based more on power than faith. For many of the Hanafis the situation was more complicated. Ibn al-Haytham indicates that he and some others had previously more or less pretended to support Hanafism to hide their true beliefs. They now revealed themselves and joined the Fatimid cause. Ibn al-Haytham quickly became a *dāʿī* himself. The father of his school chum, al-Marwadhī (d. 303/915), also a Shiʿi, was appointed *qāḍī* of Qayrawān. In addition, many if not most of the Hanafis converted. Hanafism in the Maghrib all but disappeared, having been eventually absorbed by the Fatimids. But the Malikis were, for the most part, implacably unable to adjust.

The most serious direct result for them was loss of employment and status. In the new order, there was no role for Malik, the Maliki legal school, neither for its theoretical nor for its practical application. Ibn al-Haytham reports, for example, that "The books of Mālik and Abū Ḥanīfa were sold to physicians, pharmacists, and druggists who, out of disregard and contempt for them and despair of anything in them being of benefit, used them as wrapping paper."[14] Under such difficult conditions, many departed for al-Andalus, hoping for a better reception in the Umayyad domain. Some of

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[13] The Qarmatian movement and its split from the Fatimids has been the subject of much fine scholarship, including that of Samuel M. Stern, Heinz Halm and Farhad Daftary, but perhaps the best and most complete account is to be found in Wilferd Madelung's "Fatimiden und Bahrainqarmaten," *Der Islam* 34 (1959): 34–88; republished in a slightly revised translation as "The Fatimids and the Qarmaṭīs of Baḥrayn," in *Mediaeval Ismaʿili History and Thought,* ed. Farhad Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21–73.

[14] Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitāb al-Munāzarāt,* 166.

these books went with them. In a couple of cases, Malikis suffered a worse fate, but the details as revealed by Ibn al-Haytham fail to justify the obviously false or embellished accounts of what happened in much later Maliki *ṭabaqāt* works, as the Malikis were by then hell-bent on making the event into an act of martyrdom in which the evil Fatimids had persecuted their own. The reality was quite different. One of the men, Ibn al-Birdhawn (d. 297/909),[15] had a long history of agitation against the Ḥanafīs. At one point when the Ḥanafīs were in power, he was arrested and officially beaten. Following the Fatimid takeover, he was denounced for pro-Umayyad propaganda and for that he was executed (in 297/909). But his story served as material for Maliki revenge long afterward. A much later version of his end has him forcefully brought before the caliph al-Mahdī, who sits flanked by the brothers Abū ʿAbd Allāh and Abū al-ʿAbbās. When ordered to confess to the divinity of the Fatimid ruler, he responds: "If the man on one side were the sun and the other, the moon, I would still refuse." For that answer he was put to death, an obvious martyr for his faith.

A key development in the process of forming a new government, one in which non-Ismaili sentiments might have played an important factor, was the initial appointment of a *qāḍī* for Qayrawān. Ibn al-Haytham recounts almost matter-of-factly what took place, how the request arose on behalf of the people of the city, and how he himself urged the selection of al-Marwadhī, the senior master among the local Shiʿa. Abū ʿAbd Allāh agreed but warned the new judge to "guard against grudges and, in the case of any blood between you and anyone in the era of ignorance [i.e. before the coming of the Ismaili *daʿwa*], regard it as non-existent." When one of the Kutāma chieftains protested, rejecting the very need for a qāḍī at all, Abū ʿAbd Allāh replied to him almost off-handedly, "What harm is there to us if we appoint a sweeper for every garbage heap."[16]

It is hard to interpret this report although it hints at the ad hoc nature of Fatimid policy. The new caliphate was to govern a diverse populace; it was no longer simply a *daʿwa* binding together a network of believers, all of whom understood and confessed their allegiance and loyalty not only to the ultimate authority of the Imam but to their *dāʿī* as well. This latter point is made quite clear in the letter by Abū al-ʿAbbās to be discussed in greater detail below. For non-Ismailis – in these early days, the vast majority of inhabitants of Qayrawan – some additional forms of governance would be

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[15]   On him and this event, see Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt,* 165–66, with note 175 which has references to the other sources.

[16]   Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, Eng. 116–17; Ar. 64.

essential. By the choice of al-Marwadhī, a Shiʿi with local roots, Abū ʿAbd Allāh seems to have, perhaps without much thought, moved decidedly to promote Shiism. And, in fact, that is what occurred. The new *qāḍī* insisted on Shiʿi observance and forbade those practices considered by him to constitute heretical innovations by ʿUmar (r. 13–23/634–44) and hence the Malikis, such as performing the *tarāwīḥ* prayers during Ramaḍān with an imam.[17]

The reign of al-Marwadhī as *qāḍī* evidently found approval with al-Mahdī, who kept him in office for six years despite clear signs that his policies were harsh and intolerant. The Fatimids appeared to have believed that, with the establishment of the state, their religious cause would prevail even to the extent of becoming dominant numerically. Therefore, appointing an Ismaili Shiʿi as judge and adopting a policy of imposing some forms of Shiism would succeed over time. If the *qāḍī* was also a *dāʿī*, both the *daʿwa* and the judiciary would be merged. The next judge, Ibn Abī al-Minhāl (d. ca. 335/948), was an Ismaili converted from Hanafism. However the policy itself was flawed in that the populace did not respond positively and, in the long run, more and more harbored resentments against the Fatimids. These were to erupt finally and dramatically during the sudden onslaught of the Kharijite rebel Abū Yazīd (d. 336/947) some two decades later. Despite obvious incompatibility between Khariji and Maliki doctrine, the Malikis initially welcomed Abū Yazīd. They hated even more the enemy they knew close up.

The lesson eventually learned was that, while the *daʿwa* remained essential as a tool for the propagation of religious loyalty and the adherence of its members, its role in general governance needed limitations. For the rest of the Fatimid dynasty, though occasionally merged in that the chief *qāḍī* was also the chief *dāʿī*, the two offices were basically separate and distinct.[18] Most significantly, in the aftermath of near disaster for the state represented by the Abū Yazīd revolt, the authorities selected for Qayrawān a Maliki judge. And that is the way it was to remain. In fact, upon the Fatimid conquest of Egypt, the previous qāḍī, a Maliki, was kept in office. Exclusion had not worked; co-option, though not always completely successful, was a much better strategy. The administration of justice did not need to be confined doctrinally to Ismaili law. An early eleventh-century chief qāḍī of the empire was Hanafī.

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[17] Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, Eng. 118–19, with note citing "*tarāwīḥ*" by A. J. Wensinck in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition.*

[18] On this issue and its history and variations throughout the Fatimid caliphate, see Paul E. Walker, "The Relationship between Chief Qadi and Chief *Dāʿī* under the Fatimids," in *Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies,* eds. Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 70–94.

When he held court, several experts in Ismaili law sat with him in case there should be a situation in which it should prevail. In rank order, the chief qāḍī was higher than the chief *dāʿī*, as perhaps befitted his broader range of responsibilities. Still, the *daʿwa* retained and preserved a key function in governance both within and without the physical dominion of empire.[19]

The Ismaili Daʿwa following the Creation of the State

The sources available for the early Fatimids include most importantly information from: ʿArīb, as reported in Ibn ʿIdhārī's *al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa l-Maghrib*,[20] which deals primarily with matters not directly related to the *daʿwa*; and Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's *Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa wa ibtidāʾ al-dawla*, which covers the history of both the *daʿwa* and the beginnings of the state. Ibn al-Haytham adds significant material that is essential for the analysis of either, but particularly for the recruitment of Ibn al-Haytham himself and the process by which he became an Ismaili *dāʿī*, especially his taking of the oath of covenant at the hands of Abū ʿAbd Allāh,[21] or the preaching techniques of some of the Kutāma sheikhs such as the *dāʿī* Aflaḥ b. Hārūn al-ʿIbānī,[22] Now, with the addition of a more recently identified text by Abū al-ʿAbbās that consists of a letter composed to explain an initiate's fiscal responsibilities and how fulfillment of them gave access to the esoteric knowledge imparted to members by the *daʿwa*, the picture of internal, largely secret ways in which it functioned has become clearer.

A fairly recent study by David Hollenberg[23] focuses on the tactics employed by the early *daʿwa* both to exclude outsiders and yet to maintain and sustain the internal cohesion of the Ismaili community. He reaches the conclusion that access to the special knowledge that membership could grant was the key element. Belonging to the *daʿwa* was a privilege, one

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[19] It is certainly fair to ask if membership in the *daʿwa* conveyed a material benefit in worldly terms as in appointment to government office. An answer is at this point not obvious. We often are not quite sure of a given person's religious affiliation (Ismaili or non-Ismaili) and, in many cases where we do know it, the individual in question was clearly not Ismaili as is so noted in the historical record.

[20] Ibn ʿIdhārī's text *al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa l-Maghrib*, Vol. 1, eds. Georges S. Colin and Évariste Lévi-Provençal (Leiden: Brill, 1948) is, for the period of concern here, almost entirely taken from ʿArib's history. On this and other sources, see the summary review in Walker, "Introduction," 41–45.

[21] Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitāb al-Munāzarāt*, 95–97. On the oath in general, see below.

[22] Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitāb al-Munāzarāt*, Eng. 168–70; Ar. 121–23.

[23] *Beyond the Qurʾān: Early Ismāʿīlī Taʾwīl and the Secrets of the Prophets* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016).

denied to outsiders, and something that set apart a kind of elect body of saints. The Ismailis existed as one component in the new society formed by the Fatimids and yet also remained quite separate as a community of Believers within the broader society of Muslims. The key tool of the *dāʿī*s was *taʾwīl* and *taʾwīlī* knowledge (interpretation and interpretive knowledge), available solely through membership. It involved what Hollenberg calls "the acquisition of a new cognitive world commencing with a 'birth' (i.e. conversion) and followed by the gradual dissemination of a special saving knowledge, the acquisition of which leads to radical transformation of the initiate."[24] The Ismailis were famous for their insistence on a distinction between the outward plain meaning of scripture, law and ritual, and its inner hidden or concealed, often esoteric, implications. The former in Arabic is the *ẓāhir*, the latter, the *bāṭin*. Joining the *daʿwa* meant gaining access to religious understanding which it alone could provide. Adherence to the outward without the inner, the literal devoid of its full hidden meanings, was a recipe for doom and a path into hellfire.

Ismailis were frequently condemned for their advocacy of interpretive understanding the charge being that once they could claim to know the inner meaning, the outer forms ceased to be required of them. If they were to learn what prayer means, then actual prayers were no longer necessary. The imposition of legal acts as stipulated in the law did not then apply, the law having been superseded by its inner reality. However, attribution of such antinomianism, though often made by enemies, has little or no basis historically. Still, by sharply segregating themselves in the manner just described, the Ismailis ran a clear risk of being misunderstood. The Fatimid dilemma was how to manage both at the same time, that is, how to keep the loyalty of followers and adherents of two radically different kinds: ordinary citizens of the empire, on the one hand, and faithful members of an Ismaili community, on the other.

Some aspects of the ways the *daʿwa* functioned have been known to modern scholarship and are explained well, particularly in the works of Halm and Daftary.[25] A key feature was the oath that a new member swore upon conversion to the cause and then entry into the realm of the esoteric *taʾwīl*.

The Ismaili oath of allegiance is reasonably well documented. All persons who joined the *daʿwa* swore such an oath and to the covenant it entailed.

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[24] The picture Hollenberg is thinking of applies more precisely to North Africa in the first half of the tenth century, although it is not inappropriate for later periods as well. However, conditions did change somewhat and there are alternative theories of *taʾwīl* among a different set of Ismaili authorities. But, for the present purpose, what happened in those early decades prior to the conquest and move to Egypt is especially relevant.

[25] In particular Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs,* and Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi*. Each of them has, however, also contributed a number of smaller studies that remain pertinent for a full review of this topic.

The basic level was that of the novice, the *mustajīb*, the one seeking answers. The ceremony itself is described as solemn and certainly not lightly undertaken. The *dāʿī* administering the oath had to ascertain carefully and surely the sound and sincere purpose of the new adept. There were ritual steps: citation of Qurʾanic precedence, extirpation of previous beliefs, fasting and prayer. Al-Naysābūrī, a leading *dāʿī* in the time of al-Ḥākim (r. 396–421/996–1021), explained the process as follows:[26]

> … when he 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 *dāʿī* 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*.[27] 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, 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 …

Note in particular the requirement of secrecy. A person given answers – that is, the novice – is not to divulge those answers to anyone "not worthy of them."

Yet another example of the oath follows:[28]

> The *dāʿī* shall say to the person to whom he administers the *ʿahd*: You impose on yourself God's oath (*ʿahd*), compact (*mīthāq*) and obligation

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[26] al-Naysābūrī, *Mūjaza al-kāfiya. A Code of Conduct: The* Mūjaza al-kāfiya *of al-Naysābūrī,* ed. and trans. Verena Klemm and Paul E. Walker (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), Eng. 61; Ar., 46–47.

[27] The italics used here and below are mine for emphasis.

[28] Al-Maqrīzī (*Khiṭaṭ* (*al-maʿruf biʾl-mawāʿiz waʾl-iʿtibār biʾdhikr al-khitat waʾl-āthār*), ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid, 5 vols. (London: al-Furqān, 2002–04), 2: 318–20 gives us a version of the Ismaili oath that he has taken from the work of Akhū Muḥsin. On this, see Heinz Halm. "The Ismaʿili Oath of Allegiance (*ʿahd*) and The Session of Wisdom (*majālis al-ḥikma*) in Fatimid Times," in *Mediaeval Ismaʿili History and Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94–96. Al-Maqrīzī calls this section of his work "A description of the oath that is taken from the one summoned." The following translation is by Halm as it appears in that article.

(*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 [*dāʿī* or *ḥujja*[29]] who dwells in this city as representative of the Lord of truth, the imam for whom –as you know – I declare myself …. 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 (*ṣāḥib al-amr*) 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 ….

Then the *dāʿī* 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 … 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 ... 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. … so may there be on you the same curse of God with which He cursed 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. God will demand of you [as atonement] that you carry out the *ḥajj* to His holy shrine thirty times as a necessary vow, and that you do so barefoot … all your wives, including those whom you will marry up to the hour of your death, will be divorced definitively …. Everything you own as regards family, property and the like, is forbidden to you ….

I am the one who has you swear to your imam and your *ḥujja*, and you are the one who swears to them. If you now intend or plan or contemplate anything that runs counter to what I have enjoined on you and what I have

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[29] *Ḥujja* in this context is a technical term for one of the highest ranks in the *daʿwa*, not the Imam but at the next lower level in the hierarchy. Normally the sources say that there are twelve *ḥujja*s, each in charge of a different territory.

had you swear, this oath lies bindingly established for you from the first to the last word; God will accept nothing but its complete fulfillment and the compliance with what you have covenanted with me. Say: Yes! – And he says: Yes!

From these examples, it is relatively easy to see that the oath served two main purposes. One was to ensure the absolute loyalty of each new member or adherent and the other was to guard and protect and thus control access to the esoteric knowledge imparted in the course of the daʿwa'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."

A second and perhaps most important benefit of membership thus concerns access to the esoteric knowledge, to the taʾwīl. But it did not come automatically with membership or with the oath of covenant. Pledging loyalty to the imam of the time was only a first step. Payment of dues and impositions made by a person's dāʿī were also essential. The one was linked and dependent on the other. 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 daʿwa. The newly uncovered text of a letter by Abū al-ʿAbbās makes that plain. As he explains to the addressee:

When my brother, Abū ʿAbdallāh, informed you in regard to what is required of you in respect to God's Guardian [i.e. the Imam], the person who renders that offering out of the goodness of his own self, God will

cleanse thereby his spirit and purify his money, and thus it will be lawful for his *dāʿī* and mentor to reveal to him the interpretive (*taʾwīlī*) sciences and make known to him the truths hidden from the enemies of God's religion.[30]

I will hereafter explain to you some of what God made obligatory on the believers with respect to turning over their monies to God's Guardian in order that, since God has proscribed alms for him as a means to keep him above the filth of the community, he expends it solely for the amelioration of things in general. So do not let it enter your mind that this is a trick your *dāʿī* perpetrates in order to take your money or the money of anyone else. God forbid that! But 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 the physical hierarchy. The surface of the law is that by which it is determined, fixed and set, leading thereby to those [the imams and the *dāʿī*s] who are the causes of salvation and through whom there is the ascent to the abode of the Return.[31]

The *dāʿī* orders paying, for each one of these ranks, a specific amount as a test and does not tolerate any holding back from that. Thus the believer's paying his obligatory due a second and third time is an initiative on his part in accordance with his good will, however little or great it is.[32]

The believer, if he pays out what is required of him one time, he has purified himself since fulfilling that constitutes his purification. If he pays out a second time, God doubles his reward and his *dāʿī* knows the goodness of his intention and firmness of his certainty. … if he pays his obligation three times, his position with God's guardian rises, as does his status with his *dāʿī*, and he achieves a rank among the ranks of religion.[33]

With the payment [one makes] without having been 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 [dāʿī] and mentor to reveal to him the interpretive (taʾwīlī) sciences* and make known to him the truths hidden from the enemies of God's religion.[34]

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[30] Abū al-ʿAbbās, *Mafātīḥ al-niʿma*, 81.
[31] Abū al-ʿAbbās, *Mafātīḥ al-niʿma,* 81–82.
[32] Abū al-ʿAbbās, *Mafātīḥ al-niʿma*, 94–95.
[33] Abū al-ʿAbbās, *Mafātīḥ al-niʿma*, 93.
[34] Abū al-ʿAbbās, *Mafātīḥ al-niʿma*, 81.

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 fulfils the necessary obligation, by his fulfilment of which he distinguishes himself from the people of outward meaning [Sunni Muslims and other non-Ismailis] 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.[35]

When the *dāʿī* 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.[36]

If he gives what he is ordered to give by his *dāʿī* 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.[37]

God orders him [the *dāʿī*] 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*.[38]

There are several critically important issues that this text makes clear, but the main one is that basic membership among the Ismaili Shiʿa is earned by payment of various kinds and degrees of dues, such as *zakāt* and *ṣadaqa*. Elsewhere there are citations of dues of a different kind including the *fitra* tax and a fee for presence at a confidential discourse, the *najwa*. This principle is obvious and fairly common for Muslims in general; these fees are Qurʾanic. The

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35   Abū al-ʿAbbās, *Mafātīḥ al-niʿma*, 92.
36   Abū al-ʿAbbās, *Mafātīḥ al-niʿma*, 87.
37   Abū al-ʿAbbās, *Mafātīḥ al-niʿma*, 83.
38   Abū al-ʿAbbās, *Mafātīḥ al-niʿma*, 85–86. Emphasis mine.

main distinction at this level in the context of the Ismaili *daʿwa* is who this money goes to. Abū al-ʿAbbās quotes the specific Qurʾanic passage wherein the exact list is given,[39] but in his *taʾwīl* of the verse, each group specified there as a recipient becomes instead some function or rank in the *daʿwa*. These payments thus go to the *daʿwa*. "He [God] ordered the payment of charitable offerings to the people of the *daʿwa* of the interpretation." He then names eight ranks within the *daʿwa* and adds: "These are eight kinds whom God made the pillars of His religion and the treasurers of its science. He made it a duty for the people to know them and obligated them to obey them and ordered that offerings and alms be paid to them and put in their proper place with them, so that those of them who are not an Imam can convey it to the Imam who will expend it for the benefit of religion."

However, although Abū al-ʿAbbās says that these basic payments indicate that the person is no longer an adherent of the *ẓāhir*, more is required for access to the full *taʾwīl*, namely additional payments. "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*." Clearly, therefore, even within the *daʿwa*, there are ranks and distinctions, some members above others with differing degrees of access to knowledge of *taʾwīl*.

Thus, one class or kind of esoteric interpretation refers the outward, the *ẓāhir*, to what it symbolizes inwardly in Ismaili terms, that is, the *bātin*, in this instance nearly always elements of the religious hierarchy who govern membership. Another example from his treatise[40] carefully outlines and explains the esoteric meanings of each rite or ritual of the *ḥajj* (pilgrimage). The final event of which is that: "Your returning to Mecca is your returning to your *dāʿī* [at the close] in order to seek to learn from him what remains that you do not know …."

Whereas much of Islamic allegorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) follows a logical progression from plain text to its meaning, in many examples of Ismaili interpretation, there is nothing of the kind and no evident or obvious connection. An outsider would not and could not know of the relationship and an insider would have to learn about it. That is the key function of the *dāʿī*s; they moderate and dole out, as they judge fit and suitable, this special knowledge. Access to it comes solely by acceptance of and advancement in the *daʿwa*.

[39]   The Qurʾanic verse is 9:60, which mentions the eight categories of person who may receive these charitable offerings.

[40]   Several more examples of *taʾwīl* interpretation from this same source can be found in my article "The Doctrine of Taʾwīl in Fatimid Ismaili Texts," in *Reason, Esotericism and Authority in Early Shiʿism*, eds. Rodrigo Adem and Edmund Hayes (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 137–50.

Conclusions

The central problem raised here concerns more particularly the advent of the Fatimids and the choices they faced in the very creation of a state in a situation where, until it occurred, they had been a religious movement, itself largely underground and revolutionary in character. The dilemma of having to rule a diverse population not loyal to it on the basis of faith and yet hold onto a special segment that was in fact devoted to it religiously, while not unheard of generally, was until then rare in Islam. As noted earlier, the Abbasids apparently did not see any compelling need for a *daʿwa* in their name once they came to power. But that was not the case with the Fatimids who were not to find a firm resolution of the issue in later periods. However, the tensions so evident at the very beginning eventually subsided with the practical experience of governing and the rulers of this dynasty, with a few notable exceptions, were largely regarded as tolerant and inclusive.

The Fatimid state had successfully confronted a double requirement for creating and maintaining a large diverse empire of factions, creeds, sects, schools, tribes and other loyalties. It would not have existed without some unifying policy, a form of governance capable of tying together, over vast territorially distinct units, a population often reluctant to accept any single common set of principles. Yet it managed reasonably well, although with periods of difficulty, and for the most part prospered. It lasted after all for over 250 years, ending only in 567/1171. Naturally its fortunes waxed and waned, but its origin and the foundation on which it came into being appear to have endured. Elements of the earliest policies, both with respect to the non-Ismaili citizens and the more deeply committed Ismailis, were, in part, still there when it finally died long after it began. And, although the empire would disappear, the *daʿwa* itself continued and exists to this day.

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