THE NATURE OF THE FĀṬIMID ACHIEVEMENT

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In the third book of his *Rhetoric* Aristotle speaks of the seer Epimenides, a Cretan whose services had been much in demand some two hundred and fifty years before, and he characterizes the seer's activities in one of the lapidary phrases in which he has few rivals which notes that Epimenides "used to divine, not the future, but only things that were past." More fully: "past but obscure."[1] By elucidating the unknown or forgotten causes of pollution, of painful episodes in the relations between gods and men, between gods and states, Epimenides allowed disturbance to be quieted, impurity to be cleansed, uneasiness to be purged. He established certitude where doubt had wrought its ravages, and we may suspect that he helped legitimize the aspirations of the communities who sought his counsel.

The historian's role is not always alien to such a mission, in fact, under pressure of community ambition and community conscience, it is at times almost frighteningly akin to it, lending itself as it does to the same therapeutic abuse as the diagnoses of the ancient seer. For, to borrow a phrase from the romantic philosopher-poet Novalis (1772–1801), is it not true that faith or certitude, *Glaube*, is "effect of the will on the intellect"?[2] And may this insight not be enlarged to read[3] that frequently even convictions of a theoretical nature are precisely this: impact and effect on the intellect of the individual and, even more so, on the collective will?

It is appropriate to recall this relation between drive and justification, action and supporting ideology in partial explanation of certain weaknesses of the historian's work, especially in periods of incipient or directed change; it is particularly fitting when it comes to examining the nature of a movement and rule such as the Fāṭimid state whose rise was spurred by a sense of its bringing in a new world, of representing and hence creating a new human condition, of the replacing of a worn time texture by a freshly woven and metaphysically superior fabric. Before sinking back to becoming little more than yet another revolution that half failed where it half succeeded, yet another political achievement whose first hour was to be its finest, yet another religious leap ahead that froze in mid-air and left people with the same sempiternal longing for a renaissance that would change them rather than their political situation (hope having failed for an inner recasting through an outward one), in short, before sliding down into the commonplace of age-old experience, the Fāṭimids had been on that divide between the

traditional and the in our sense modern, one might almost say the contemporary, which in 1840 a minor German thinker, writer, and politician, Arnold Ruge (1802–1880), had described with reference to his own days: "The Absolute we reach but in history. . . Not in Christ has the form of religion been perfected, not in Goethe that of poetry, nor in Hegel that of philosophy; so far from being the end of the spirit, they have, quite to the contrary, their greatest honor in the fact that they are the beginning of a new unfolding."[4] Replaced in language more in harmony with our own phraseology: the great achievements are no longer viewed as culminations of what preceded but rather as starting points of progress yet to come.

In 969, an army under Djawhar, in a well-prepared campaign conducted, as it turned out, against practically no resistance, conquered Egypt from the West for Djawhar's master, the Fāṭimid ruler of Ifriqiya, al-Mu'izz, the third successor of the 'Ubaydallāh, who exactly sixty years earlier had dethroned the Aghlabids. The régime established by Djawhar's troops and consolidated four years later by the transfer of the dynasty from Mahdiyya to Cairo was to last for two hundred and two years. It remained throughout the rule of a small minority who were essentially foreigners in Egypt, although the Fāṭimids themselves soon became Egyptianized. It is true that the Fāṭimids, even before entering Egypt, had identified themselves as Arabs and sought support from such Arab "national" feeling as did exist; at the same time, the core of their troops was Berber and, to the end, the core of their soldiery, bond or free, came into Egypt from abroad. Their hold on Ifriqiya and Sicily crumbled in the third generation but without weakening their control over their new power base. Egypt had been ruled by a series of rulers and dynasties of alien extraction but never before had a power system like a nomad tribe struck tent in one country, many hundreds of miles away, and established itself again as permanent settlers in the Nile Valley.

The suggestiveness of events, the acceptance commandeered by the *fait accompli* are such that the *bizarrerie* of the development is lost on us unless we make a special effort to recapture it. To account for the facts is less difficult than might seem at first blush, given the perfection of the centralized administrative machine that would continue in large measure to work with fair effectiveness regardless of the directing hand (and which was, in fact, improved by the Fāṭimids), and given also the discontinuous character of medieval political structures where power was concentrated in a relatively few *amṣār* or fortresses (occasionally, especially in Iran, fortresses were located in the countryside) fanning out with varying strength into the interstitial areas. The conquest of the centres consequently sealed the fate of a country, the possibilities for guerrilla action notwithstanding, which, incidentally, the more thorough cultivation of the Delta provinces would have rendered more difficult to sustain in the tenth century than it had been, for example, during the Egyptian resistance to Achaemenid rule.

To counteract the persuasiveness of the fact, to register protest against injustice incident to a given historical sequence, to indicate their own and their society's dissociation with the ideas and forces that won the past, historians have devoted much of their endeavour to proving history wrong, to demonstrate what ought to have happened and why. But explanation, let alone simple narration of past events, partakes inevitably of the nature of "historiodicy," and in a religious society, of theodicy as well. By contrast, my purpose is neither to accuse nor to defend, neither to convict nor to acquit but to elucidate a number of striking facets of the Fāṭimid and immediate pre-Fāṭimid period with a view to bringing out the lasting accomplishment and to relate whatever cultural results do count with political structure, if indeed a meaningful relation between these two realms can be established or claimed with some probability.

In assessing or even in merely portraying any act, private or public, the decisive elements are the options at the disposal of the agent. These options are never unlimited and hardly ever are they reduced to leave open no more than one course of action. The intellectual and emotional (as well as the social and economic) setting of any particular moment varies in the range it permits to equivalent options and hence to a choice of decisions. At all times the options available are contradictory; that is to say, remedial action, or the condition to be left untouched or remedied, can reasonably be conceived of in obedience to different strains of factors, in response to divergent mental outlooks and so forth. But it is certain that from the vantage point of both the contemporary and the modern observer the fourth century of the Hidjra had more of its share of contradictions, of meaningful and in a sense equivalent options than did

other periods of a firmer political and spiritual grid. The Fāṭimids rose in the psychologically painful circumstances of political insecurity and of intellectual uncertainty and at the point where throughout Arab Islam the disappointment with the realization of the ideal had become too deep to be healed or only suspended by the customary recourse to idealizing myth.

Since remedial action could no longer seriously be expected from above the century became the classical age of conspiracy.

Conspiracy is defined by its extralegal and secretive character; the number of conspirators may vary; more often than not the conspirators themselves form a hierarchy and those most prominent in execution are rarely those most directly responsible for programme and plan. We tend to think of conspiracies as engineered by small, tight-knit groupings whose motivation is the adjustment or replacement of a régime whose inapproachability or whose absolutism allows trickery and violence as a last resort. But major conspiracies will involve a large apparatus of participants–thus for instance, the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew (an illegal action organized by legal authority against the leadership of what threatened to become a constituted extralegal power), the conspiracy of Catiline, the conspiracy of the outlawed National Socialists in Austria leading to the attempted coup of July 25, 1934, and the assassination of the Federal Chancellor. But for being backed by a government beyond the Austrian borders the organization of the outlawed Nazi party could serve as typical example of a conspiracy that, under the surface of official acquiescence, waits the moment of overturn, ready with ideology, personnel, and weapons, riddling the body politic with ambiguities and building altogether a nearly self-sufficient community within the larger community, not to say a state within the state. Such were the Carbonari of the nineteenth century and such were the Fāṭimids, only immensely more powerful because of doctrine, gradation of initiates, international outreach within the *mamlakat al-islām* (lit., "the empire of Islam"), and that peculiar combination of bending to and enlisting local grievance with an inflexible world view that allowed a tapering of truths as of truth and the assumption of any disguise. For stylization, concealment, *taqiyya* (lit., "precaution"), would never frustrate the clearly envisaged ultimate end, but rather enable the leader, with identity protected by mystery and legitimacy guaranteed by faith and verified by persecution, to make use of any and all. Esotericism is retained by the shield of graded initiation, but exclusivism is avoided by potential utilization of any talent, any resentment, any devotion, as well as any confusion, vindictiveness, and the urge to play at mystification.

Although possibly unified at the highest level organizationally and ideologically, the conspiracy was not one; individual groups acted if not for, at any rate by, themselves; the interdependence of political centres–some already in the open, others still underground, and others the concealed organ of an imām become manifest–was never too clear and certainly cannot have been patent to the ordinary initiate even of the higher ranks. So there was to all appearances conspiracy within the conspiracy, conspiracy also against conspiracy, the Sunnī rulers and their dependents enmeshed in semi-secret combat, propaganda, and police action. To the contemporary, initiate and adversary, the world had become one of natural metamorphosis: the merchant across the way might be the head of the Fāṭimid mission, the passer-by a secret messenger, stirrings and quiet would be equally suspect, double identity almost expected, and, to the outsider, the normal insecurity of tomorrow heightened by the uncanny sense of direction and directedness he would ascribe to the heretic, the enveloper, the subverter. And in this he was right: direction and directedness there were; where he might be mistaken was in the estimate of the heretic's power; and by what symptoms and signals was he to diagnose its rise, its extent, its recession?

Once it was realized–but by then the Fāṭimids no longer ruled–that the sectarians had nowhere and never, except at specific points of concentration, constituted a numerical majority, it could also be understood that they had been advancing as long as the greater certainty had been theirs, the firmer and the more enthusiastic theirs faith, the unquestioned knowledge that they were the bringers of a better truth and hence a better world, a conviction half accepted by those to be defeated and ruled before the battle ever was joined. The return of certainty to the adversary, the holder of the older version of Islam, the member of the *umma*, "community," of the Rightly-Guided Caliph, the faithful whose Commander, the Shadow of God on Earth and vice-gerent of His Elect, resided in the heart of the world and the central clime in Baghdād, did not unconvince the Fāṭimids' follower, did not shake his

conviction of his inalienable right to victory over the 'Abbāsid impostor, but in the battle of certainties the realities of numbers and resources blended in, and the needs of the ruler of Egypt would clash at times with the mission of the universal imam.

It is perhaps arguable whether the ideological conflicts underlying or accompanying the transition from 'Umayyad to 'Abbāsid rule—Mediterranean orientation, dominance of Arabism, "pragmatic" use of Islam v. orientation inward and eastward, equalization of political influence as between Arabs and Iranians, rulership to be vested in the family of the Prophet and justified by Islamization of public life—presented themselves to the uncommitted as competing options between two complete, normative images of the universe; it may be considered certain that choosing between "orthodoxy" or loyalism and entering the ranks of the Khāridjites entailed nothing of the kind considering the absence, in Khāridjism, of any ambition to construe a comprehensive rival view of the world. By contrast, Ismā'īlism represented a genuine alternative, philosophically complete, politically propelled by a reasoned and intolerant exclusivism, an imperial and, within the *dār al-Islām*, "domain of Islam," openly imperialistic aspiration and the nuclear organization to realize it. The adversary to be displaced was divided, politically weak, with this weakness attributable to its lapse from religious purity and correctness, tainted by success and tainted, too, by the opprobrium of having left apparently unexploited the chances implicit in its power to achieve a higher degree of collective sanctification. The caliphate drifted, always on the edge of bankruptcy, its power dwindling to a myth that was being used by military groups recruited from populations as yet only incompletely integrated in the faith and civilization of Islam. The Berber troops of the Fāṭimids were hardly superior in cultural sophistication to Dailamites and Turks but they were removed from direct contact with the disillusioned poor and the precariously surviving intelligentsia of Syria and Iraq, and there was a purposefulness about the Ismā'īlī leadership, a harmony between idea and action which was to be restored to the Sunnī world only in the course of the eleventh century thanks to Ḥanbalī intransigence, Shāfi'ī theological consolidation, and Seljuq political backing—coincident with and perhaps psychologically linked to the incipient senescence of Fāṭimism under Mustanṣir.

The shrilly advertised Arabism of the Fāṭimid propaganda would sharpen the option for some; for Eastern Shi'ism and Eastern political realities of the tenth century were largely under Iranian auspices, which left the more self-consciously Arab section of those troubled with another decision to make, another set of loyalties to adjust. Sunnī revival and the passing of the Iranian dominance coincided, a coincidence all the more noteworthy as the great intellectuals as well as the great statesmen to whom the victory of the revival was owed were of Iranian descent and mother tongue.

Social mobility may no doubt be described, but not defined, as a situation of increased options and of increased chances of success of "opting out" of a given nexus of social relationships, but it must be added that the possibility and therewith the compulsion to take up such options is to be considered comparable with a *farḍ kifāya*, "community obligation," even though the contemporary tends to see the commotion in terms of individual doctrines and although the collective difficulties are suffered through individually in countless modifications. Two separable phenomena must be identified as such. One is the alteration of the position within (or the insertion into) the larger unit of a well-defined outgroup. A collective decision lifted the Dailamites and hence potentially every Dailamī into a (near-) central point of the socio-political structure. Circumstances beyond anybody's control, including the rulers', offered compelling opportunities to an overseas merchant class. Without indulging in a determinism that assimilates human to termite society the shortcut formula may be used that this cluster of causalities known as opportunity, quickly legitimized by the pressure of at least psychological needs, induced a certain number of appropriately disposed and appropriately located individuals or small groups to rise to the challenge and "institutionalize" the meeting of the need by something approximating to the formation of a new "class" complete with special attitudes, mores, symbols, and myths. To the individual and his immediate environment the "option" is unsettling; it may be so also to society in the short run, but with the process completed and the new "estate" accepted into the scheme of the wonted its stabilizing effect becomes unmistakable. That processes of decline and disintegration may be similarly described must not be overlooked; the individual affected, though, is less likely to see the decisions he faces as "options."

Quite different the other variant: the possibility for the individual to transfer from one social unit to another, from one jurisdiction to another, from one status to another, mostly by allying himself

with another focus of power. The disintegration of the centralized caliphal state in fractioning repressive authority offered "ways out" of impasses as well as vantage points for new starts. Internationalization of the Muslim community and in fact freedom of movement throughout the Muslim domain for any of its denizens had gone hand in hand with the failing of 'Abbāsid authority. The *mamlakat al-Islām* was, except for its fringes, a vast self-contained complex of lands, in its inner life and perpetuation almost independent of its shifting distribution among a varying number of political masters. Groupings were fluid as concentration points emerged and were submerged again, and the movements of the kaleidoscope traced the outlines of ever labile configurations; the dependence on one's subcommunity, the harshest obstacle to mobility, was eroded; and survival as often as not would hinge on the exploitation of uncertainty rather than on finding shelter behind the walls of the traditional setting and in the statistical safety of the herd.

The propaganda of the Ismā'īlīs, flamboyant in its intellectual boldness and political success, promised safety in a reconstituted universal community, along with a spiritual and economic *seizachtheia*, "cancellation of debts," and the hope for a time of different texture. Here was the risk of the moment: adventurous service for the truth and the reward of an eternity almost certain to begin before the hour of death.

The assumption of a more active rôle by nomadic units, often indispensable as their armed protectors in the service of the settled, their permanent displacement over wide distances (Kutāma from Ifriqiya into Egypt, Banū Hilāl from the edges of Egypt into the Maghreb, Turkish tribes from Central Asia into the Fertile Crescent), in a number of cases their usurping of power: these developments resulted, from the point of view of the sedentary and the townsman which it is difficult for the modern observer of Islamic civilization to repudiate, in a deepening of uncertainties, in fateful fears, in the precarious triumphs of political maneuvering, but hardly in an additional "option." One had to become accustomed to tribal rulership in urban concentrations: the Mirdāsids, the 'Uqaylids, the Al-Djarrāḥ in southern Palestine were factors for the fruitland to reckon with and, by the standards of the times, of respectable stability.

After rather more than a hundred years the Byzantine border was beginning to move eastward again. The deterioration of the caliphate, the frailty of the defenses in the marches, the intricacies of "international" politics within the *dār al-Islām* permitted a newly aggressive Byzantium to advance. The whittling away at their westernmost bastions dismayed the Muslim population of the interior but did not impress it sufficiently to force a change of direction on their rulers. Nor for that matter did it put an end to travel and trade or cultural exchanges, the borderlines being both traversed by the merchant and circumvented by the use of the sea lanes.

It is remarkable that the faltering on the Byzantine borders followed shortly on the consolidation of Muslim political self-consciousness as this is expressed in the concept of the *mamlakat al-Islām*, the center of the civilized world and hence *eo ipso* its most civilized and unquestionably normative part. The Muslim had become aware of his particularity: in his mores, and their theological foundation and summation as an ethics and in his approaches and procedures. Heightened awareness had engendered a greater sense of distance from the alien, and more especially of the alien outside the *mamlaka*. Value judgment came more readily to mind and tongue and after the long process of observing, borrowing, refraining from the tempting identification of the bizarre with the inferior, not to say the evil, and of the habitual with reason and virtue, Muslim society now came to adopt the psychological routine of the Ancients who had felt equally absolutist about themselves and those outside the pale of their civilization. Islam had come to be perceived as the only adequate expression of full humanity; it ennobled the barbarian; it was the first step in bringing him into the commonwealth of men.[3] Whatever its measure of justification, the vitalistic function of this self-appraisal in compensating for the loss of political *Schlagkraft* is obvious, and no less obvious than the temptation to restore by an *iṣlāḥ*, "restitutional reform," of the political community under a divinely guided leader the balance between power and inner worth, to repel the unbeliever, expand the domain of the faith now known to have become as well the domain of the highest form of societal living.

Such redress would not preclude but rather would encourage and render secure that resumption of large-scale contacts and commercial exchanges with southwestern Europe which is one of the hallmarks of the time and to whose success the Fāṭimids were to owe not the least part of their economic strength. Once again: these were not so much a further set of options but uncertainties

springing from the contradictions of the inner and outer scene, and opportunities for action, inhibitory or outward pushing.

The orthodox world, the world of Baghdād is crumbling; the 'Abbāsids belong to the past; the Fāṭimids are young; through them youth returns to the empire that has aged along with Time itself. But Time gives itself in servitude to the new dynasty to be rejuvenated with it.[6] The immobilism of the orthodox tradition is castigated; it is about to be overtaken by the initiating élan of the adherents of the truth, that full truth that had been brought to light by the Lord and through 'Alī and was now being brought to life through his descendants, the Fāṭimids. The traditions compete; but the option is not between relative freedom on the side of the aggressor and suffocating drabness on that of the incumbent. The freshness comes not from the content of the tradition to be established but from the fervour of its adoption, the enthusiasm that the forcible renewal of Islam arouses in the converted. For the new order is no less absolutist than the old, it is, in fact, more stridently sure of itself and of its right to be imposed on all those who would truly be faithful. Esotericism on the one hand and the living presence of a superhuman guide and ruler, made for a measure of flexibility; the structure of the doctrine rendered it pervious to the emanationist strain of ancient philosophy; the artifice of its insertion into Islam invited speculation and gave room to reason to manœuvre where in Sunnism tradition had ratified solutions and thereby foreclosed problems;[7] the universal validity of the new order would appeal to the universal in man, to that rationality that set him apart from the beasts and enabled him to recognize truth against all obfuscation and to spin out and render explicit the subordinate insights latent in revelation as represented by the imām, the embodiment of the divinity, the active intellect.

But the new truth is, in fact, the old. Truth cannot but be old; what makes it new is its unveiling, the tearing away of the webs of falsehood and error that over time have come to mark it, so it may not only be seen again, but apprehended and experienced in its unsullied wholeness and holiness, sanctifying the beholder and inspiring him with invincible, self-sacrificing, and self-redeeming enthusiasm—for he has found his place, his place and his meaning, linked as he is, through an act of personal allegiance to his imām, to the godhead and the universe in which He has chosen to make Himself manifest.

The new displaces the old only in the sense that a more recent book, by taking in what its predecessors had to say and by saying it more lucidly, more fully, and less subject to misunderstanding, will displace them.[8] Therefore, the authenticated old must stand. As any other Muslim prince could have stated, the Fāṭimid ruler of Egypt declared: "Whereas it is part of our noble qualities to remove innovations and obliterate their traces, prevent their continuance and insist on prohibiting them," it is incumbent on him to see to it "that the ancient treaties accorded to [the Christians] be preserved" and "to guard those of the People of Protection who are included in the zone of our kingdom and so to treat them as to cover them with the cloak of compassion and mercy."[9]

Cognition, thus, is or means to be essentially recognition, construction, reconstruction, reform, return—although it may well be return to a state that never was even though it ought to have been—unless of course the manifestation of the imam and his acceding to the power that was his due had so altered the texture of things that what once had been hidden and incapable of fulfillment would now be allowed to mature to glorious perfection.

So Ismā'īlism obliged the believer to decide between two truths, at least between two representations of the truth, of which only one could be right. Ismā'īlism invited all to the great wager of which Ghazzālī and Pascal were to speak. Indeed, it did not invite to it, it was itself that wager, and it claimed that it was winning the stakes, that, in fact, it had already won.

Acceptance of the Ismā'īlī alternative did not necessarily entail a break with the thought processes of the greater community. Argument from authority was retained; it was only penultimate authority that was replaced. The autonomy of community consensus was subjected to limitation by the higher certainty of the imām's decision; in practice (as could perhaps not have been foreseen) the permanent minority status of the Ismā'īlī, compelled by circumstances to remain an élite, prevented too much of an effective change to occur. More thoroughgoing, the community of cultural expectations remained. The prior in time preserved its aura of the higher in rank and purer in virtue; antecedent continued to be confused with precedent and precedent continued to prejudge—in descriptive science no less than in literature, precisely as in theology or law. Authoritative form tended to carry authoritative content; content

was acceptable only in forms strictly coordinated to it. *Adab*, to rely once again on the convenient though untranslatable Arabic term, a blend of a style of life with one of sensibility, a style of presentation with an uncommitted ethical position, a style of psychological analysis with an apparent encyclopaedic readiness to absorb reality which, however, is easily revealed as a desire of anthological paring of selected segments, *adab*, generous only in word and imagery, reducing history to anecdote and motif to serve as purveyor of clichés (but also, perhaps precisely because its teeth had been pulled and it had been made to look contemporary, as a very effective vehicle of the Iranian tradition)–this *adab* as a force of perception and transformation of any and all reality was to remain as a common ground for the cultured of any persuasion.[10] What had been with Djāḥiẓ the instrument to master an all too rich outer world had, barely a generation later, become with Ibn Qutayba a technique of inventorizing, registering, and classifying. On occasions, new materials–ocean travel, later journeying into Asia and the European South-East–were admitted; but their very admission created a genre whose rules and whose content soon became as binding on subsequent writers as earlier literary vehicles for communicating a widened horizon had become the moment their authors had risen to general recognition.[11] The anchylosis that had set in about the time the Qarmatians had come into the open was not to be healed by the Fāṭimids.[12] The prevalence of *adab* was not to be challenged. The community of style repaired breaches not otherwise to be bridged, preserved contacts not otherwise to be maintained. Neither side understood itself through history; neither side found its absolutism impeded by the sharpened self-perception springing from a sense of history.[13] The past was in essence the present that had gone, the future (once the "change of texture" had taken place) a long series of presents–the past offered instruction precisely because of the essential identity of its people with those seeking instruction today. *Adab* and living in a world of the "now and always" maintained a *communauté des évidences*[14] throughout Arab Islam so intimate it would not be disturbed by hate or fear.

The Fāṭimids would have been the last to claim that their regime had decided all the options for all who came under their sway. For one thing, the dynasty displayed a curious indifference to conversion. Realizing as they must have done that displacement of Sunnism by their own beliefs would be impossible to achieve, the régime confined itself to securing Ismā'īli leadership at court and appointments at the higher and highest levels (but by no means reserving those to its coreligionists), and to establishing a centre of Ismā'īlī theological and legal training in the teaching-mosque of al-Azhar. For another, in transferring its aspiration from vision, utopia, and yearning to the complicated realities of Egypt (and Syria), the Fāṭimids were not capable of removing the antitheses, the problematical alternatives, and thereby of creating a climate in which the virulence of options would abate. Within the sect, within the strata won over to the regime, certain difficulties did indeed appear resolved; thus the altercation between (Hellenizing) philosophy and (anti-philosophical) religion ceased within Ismā'īlism when philosophy was allowed to do the fullest possible ancillary service in a manner suggestive of genuine integration of neo-Platonic into Islamic thinking, that is, as Islam was understood by the régime. As far as Egypt was concerned the nomad threat–one can hardly speak of a nomad alternative–was eliminated, it is true at the heavy expense of the Muslim West. Religious fervour revived, at times excessively, so, from the point of view of internal peace and progress, repression of the non-Ismā'īli together with forceful solicitation of adherence to the doctrine of the rulers would occur at intervals after the conquering generation had passed away but tend to repeat more rarely as the dynasty entered on its fifth reign. In comparison, however, with the naive fervor of Seljuq Syria and the aggressive religious energy that had animated the Fāṭimid beginnings in North Africa and was to renew itself (though for the most part under different auspices) after the Crusaders had been established in the Holy Land for some thirty or forty years, the intrusiveness of the state religion was rather restrained and the régime did not strive to consolidate by arousing fanaticism and then playing up to it.

What the Fāṭimids did in fact accomplish in terms of the problems or options whose removal their accession had promised or seemed to portend may be described under four (interconnected) heads:

(*1*) The takeover of the Fāṭimids in Egypt bears a curious resemblance to the Glorious Revolution of 1688: a foreign monarch, invited and at any rate welcomed by an important section of the population, displaces without bloodshed a disliked régime. The principal dividing line

between the two governments, in England as well as in Egypt, is denominational. In both cases a protracted period of "cabal" and conspiracy precedes and prepares for the dynastic change and is in large measure brought to a close by occupation (dethronement) undertaken from abroad. Historical analogies must not be pressed; it would be easy to point to such differences as the continued political activity, both open and conspiratorial, which the displaced Stuarts were able to muster in France and in Scotland for a considerable time over against the absence of any significant move by a neighbouring foreign government to offer an operational base for overthrowing the Fāṭimids.

(2) Self-assurance, prodded by the desire to keep the initiative wherever possible, allowed exploitation of the geo-political potential. The disruption of the international trade route passing through Iraq in consequence of the disintegration of the caliphate gave Egypt an unsought opportunity to become focus and *entrepôt* of the India (and China) commerce. The rise of the first Italian seafaring city-states led, as early as 973, to regularized relations between Egypt and Amalfi. In 996, if not sooner, the Amalfitanis have a house as their trading center in Cairo. Various incidents and the unpopularity of European merchants notwithstanding, the connection with Italy and (re-christianized) Sicily was never to break. In 1137 Roger II, the patron of Idrīsī, promised Salerno to obtain for her the same "most-favoured nation" treatment (i. e., a reduction of customs duties) in Alexandria that the Sicilians enjoyed. In 1143 a commercial treaty was concluded between Egypt and Roger—this listing of events to serve merely as arbitrarily chosen markings. Domination of the eastern Mediterranean would pass from the Fāṭimids to the Italians but Egypt's openness to international exchanges was not affected. Openness to trade did not, however, entail openness to the trader, on whom restrictive supervision continued throughout our period and beyond; remarkable, when viewed in conjunction with subsequent times, the frequent presence in Italy of Fāṭimid subjects. Egyptian control of the Yemen, which was to outlast Fāṭimid rule, was made possible by the political ascendancy of the Ismā'īlī in that country but it was sustained by Egyptian interests which had essentially little or nothing to do with the religious affiliation of the governing classes in either area. Under Fāṭimid protection, at any rate unimpeded by their or any other contemporary and immediately following régime, Jewish houses tied India to North Africa in fairly large-scale operations with the Egyptian government deriving a considerable income from customs and additional economic and intellectual benefits, important though less easily specified, from the very fact of their country's central position in international activity. The frequent tensions obtaining with Byzantium failed to curtail either exchanges of goods or the adoption of "stylistic" features of rulership. Besides, the web of interests in which the riverain powers of the eastern and central mediterranean were enmeshed was too complex to allow any of them to sustain consistent and unambiguous policies in their mutual relations. For all this, the cosmopolitanism of the Fāṭimids loses nothing of its level and quality. Rather does it leave the observer wondering why, outside perhaps of the Jewish community, those intense contacts had so slight an effect on the cultural achievement—once exception has been made for the stimulation admitted from Byzantium.

(3) The charging of life with religious tension and fervour, at least in the circles belonging to or immediately affected by the regime, reached a climax under the third Fāṭimid, al-Ḥākim (996–1021), and afterwards slowly decreased—a process halted and even temporarily reversed under al-Mustanṣir (1036–1094) but on the whole proving beyond the manipulative power of the Ismā'īlī leadership. The precise point when the exhaustion of the *baraka*, "blessing," began may be argued; Ḥākim no doubt "used up" much more than his due; the exodus of the extremists responsible for the establishment of the Druze community was favourable to domestic consolidation but did drain off and compromised to some extent the "sacrality" of the dynasty. With the elimination of Nizār from Mustanṣir's succession and the violent split between Nizārīs and Musta'lians on Mustanṣir's death one feels the *baraka* evaporating or, rather, the specifically religious focus moving away with the Nizāriyya into northern Syria and Iran. The official desacralization of rulership pronounced when al-Ḥāfiẓ was deposed as regent by the vizier Abū 'Alī Aḥmad b. al-Afḍal, nicknamed Kutayfāt, in 1131, which left the Fāṭimid régime on the same spiritual plane as any other Muslim government and undercut the special sense in which the dynasty had been legitimate in its own and its adherents' view, could not be recalled on the resumption of power by al-Ḥāfiẓ a few months later, even though Ḥāfiẓ himself and his successors did insist on their legitimacy as imāms. One is reminded of the parallel step taken in 1230 by the Almohad prince, al-Ma'mūn, who attempted to

save his dynasty by removing the sectarian basis of its legitimacy and whose renunciation of Ibn Tūmart's theological doctrine although revoked by his successor could never be repaired. The parallel may be carried over into relative chronology: between Ḥāfiẓ's announcement and the final deposition of the Fāṭimids forty years were to elapse; the end of the Almohads, in 1269, came thirty-nine years after Ma'mūn had severed his power from its religious foundation.[15] Less relevant is the affinity between Fāṭimiyya and Mu'tazila whose defeat was consummated by the resurgence of Sunnism in the twelfth century. Its decline which had been sealed as early as the tenth, influential latecomers like Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) not to the contrary, does not appear to have affected standing and self-confidence of the Fāṭimids whose kinship with the Mu'tazila had been noted by Muqaddasī (writing ca. 985) when the dynasty's star had still been rising.[16]

(4) Within their domain the Fāṭimids brought conspiracy under control by monopolizing it. The relation between the Fāṭimid state of Egypt and the Fāṭimid branch of the Ismā'īlīyya and its other branches on the other, is strangely reminiscent of the relation between the Government of the USSR and the Communist Party, and the Communist International (in its several forms as Comintern, Cominform, etc.) and the Communist parties in the various countries.

The life of Egypt as a political community and the life of the Ismā'īli sect are integrated yet separate. Without control of the state the sect would not have been able to use Egypt openly as its operating basis or to enjoy that freedom in developing its organization and in making it as effective abroad as only backing by a great power would permit. But the sect's structure did not coincide with that of the state. Nor can the missionaries and their hierarchy outside the borders of Egypt or of Egyptian held territory (Syria, the Yemen, parts of North Africa, and the Ḥidjāz) be identified as functionaries of the Egyptian state. Nevertheless it remains true that as the imām of the Ismā'īlī the ruler of Egypt did exercise a considerable influence on the other Sevener Movements and that he could hardly have done so without the means and the prestige his control of Egypt had given him. Resistance to him was due as much to intrasectarian dispute as to the desire for independence from Egypt, and in case of conflict between the interests of the metropolitan country and the international sect the Fāṭimid princes had to opt for the interests of their power base precisely as Russia has, on numerous occasions, been compelled to put her interests as a country above her interests in the Communist International, and precisely like the Russian did the Fāṭimid régime bend every effort to keep the double apparatus both coordinate and apart, with the result that the "party organization" long survived Fāṭimid rule on the Nile.

The Fāṭimid caliph was thus the apex of two converging hierarchies, the sect and the state, in some ways comparable with the position of Stalin, in others, with that of the Pope when the Papal State still existed as a major political reality, and with that of the Byzantine emperor.[17] But the Fāṭimid caliph has one more property (and hence, function) for which neither Stalin nor the Papacy nor the Byzantine concept of the emperor furnishes a parallel. He partakes of the attributes of divinity. He is descended from the Prophet through Fāṭima; the quality of imām has been transmitted to him by a series of appointments, *naṣṣ*, from father to son, theoretically in an unbroken sequence of primogenitures. There is thus no power to whom he could possibly be beholden, no human contemporary who would be his equal–not merely in respect of rank but of substance. Faith, *islām*, in the Ismā'īlī view is incomplete without belief in the imām; without him the Muslim religion could be neither correct nor perfect; he is *ḥudjdjat Allāh*, the proof of Allāh, on earth, that is to say, his existence is and provides the testimony for God's veracity in His Revelation.

He is the Guarantor of the Faith not merely in the sense in which the Byzantine emperor is believed to be chosen by the Lord and entrusted with the protection of orthodoxy and the orthodox Church, but in that more delicate and comprehensive sense that his presence is both necessary and sufficient evidence of the existence of God, of His plan for the world, and of the supreme truth of Islam (rightly understood). From the point of view of the official (neo-Platonizing) philosophy, the imām is the active intellect, *al-'aql al-fa''āl*, the first emanation of the universal intellect, or else the univeral intellect itself, and hence creator; in less abstract terms, he is the living emanation of the godhead, Who, to the Ismā'īlī, is beyond attribute. His power is by its or his very nature illimited; he not only maintains but is the order of the world and of religion, which role or function his lineage will continue to hold and perform to the end of time. The person of the caliph is thus the hub of the religious, political, and intellectual universe of his believers. The state, Islam, the

world depend on the effective presence in his person of divine representation. It can be readily imagined what psychological hurts must have come before, what bottomless emptiness must have remained after, Hāfiẓ rejected for himself and his succession the character of imām, insisting merely on rights as an Islamic ruler.

Legitimism is an intrinsic necessity entailing an authoritative ordering of truth that, however, because of the availability of decisive guidance by a living imām, was able to avoid the early immobilism that the system would effect. At the same time, the material content of the truth was not to be indiscriminately divulged. The higher the grade of the initiate the more philosophical, unspecific, pared to the structure would the truth appear. Hard to maintain would be the distinction between levels of verity and different verities, between different verities and a deprecatory reflex evoked by the unreservedly accessible segments and maskings of truth. The scepticism of which the adversaries accused the *duʿāt* ("missionaries," pl. of *dāʿī*) may well have existed as a realization that disguises have only pragmatic value, are readily interchangeable, and that the lower formulations of truth as directed to the less perfect had but instrumental importance.

J. L. Borges' (born 1899) description of 'Umar Khayyām may have been closer to tracing one of the ingredients of the atmosphere in which the Ismāʿīli leaders lived than the Argentine writer may ever have suspected. "He is an atheist, but is well able to interpret in the orthodox manner the most exacting passage of the Koran, since every cultured man is a theologian, and since, in order to be one, faith is not indispensable."[18] But another ingredient is the unqualified fervour, the immeasurable depth of the reverence felt for the imām, and the absolute commitment to the "cause," to Ismāʿīlism as such, to the quintessence of revealed certainty, beyond which no man can or ever will reach. It has been observed that for the Egyptians the imām was less an object of veneration than for the foreign believer of whose reaction we have testimony from the hand of a leading Persian *dāʿī* of the eleventh century with which even we, after so many centuries, can empathize without effort.[19]

The ceremonial surrounding every public and semi-public appearance of the imām reflects this sense of awe before the supranatural and is designed to fortify and to preserve it. Less than other sacred rulers did the Fāṭimid caliph fall victim to the tendency to remove the all-too-holy, all-too dangerously potent from exposure, or the community from frequent exposure to it; but the danger did exist and the situation of the "active intellect" passing his regnal years as a virtual prisoner was to occur more than once. That it could be avoided or overcome was, however, due to skill and circumstance rather than to the system itself. Perhaps it was their saving that they had to combine universal aspirations and the precariousness of minority status, and had to accept an element of apartheid which even their panegyrists made no effort to conceal. Or an element of vulnerability? Or a situation in which a subject as the member of the indestructible religious majority would feel superior as well as awed? Where the Ismāʿīli Ibn Hānīʾ the Andalusian (d. 973) could say (and be berated as blasphemer):

> In this prince of the faithful in his audience hall
> I have recognized Inspiration and Revelation.
> When he shows himself riding amid his train
> I recognize among his pursuivants Gabriel–;

the caliph had to acknowledge with benevolence the ambivalent praise of 'Umāra al-Yamanī (1121–1175):

> In generosity their deeds are deeds of the Sunna
> even though they differ with me in the creed of the Shīʿa.[20]

The Fāṭimiyya was carried forward in the indescribably religious exaltation of its origins by the certainty that theirs was the mission to establish the universal dominion of truth on earth, that their imām was destined to become the spiritual as well as the secular guide of mankind. Translated into practical politics this meant the obligation to fight and conquer existing power systems.[21] Their true legitimation was from God, but to the outside, as yet untouched by the insight of the initiates, a more "conventional" legitimacy had to be maintained: the justification of their universal mission by descent from Ismāʿīl, the first-born son of the sixth imam, Djaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, recognized as imām by all, and through him from both 'Ali and Muḥammad. This universalism manifested itself on the political plane as imperialism; on the social or domestic plane (with the *dār al-Islām* viewed as an indivisible unit in which nations take the place of classes), as Arabism; on the intellectual, as syncretism. This triple correspondence according to sphere of effectiveness of one and the same drive to unify the known (and, as a first stage, the Muslim) world is the true

hallmark of Ismā'īli universalism. Every political move, every integrative pronouncement must be assessed in terms of this fundamental, God-given aim: a human universe directed by divine inspiration, led by Arabs and led in Arab style, in which an authoritative teaching would gather up all truth–which *if* such must be eternal *a parte ante* as *a parte post*.

The Koranic revelation and Greek philosophy, whatever thought motif would by fitting in with the axiomatics of the Fāṭimiyya-Ismā'īliyya have its own verity confirmed, must or might with justice be woven into the doctrinal system of the initiates.[22] The outlook is prefigured in the words of Saint Augustine: "The true Christian will wherever he finds it recognize truth as belonging to his Lord."[23] Is this to postulate the identity of all verity? The oneness of *al-ḥikma 'l-khālida*? Or is it to insist on the irrelevancy, the *Wesenlosigkeit*, of the differences between divergent claims to truth, between diverging truths themselves once they are viewed with the eye of the initiate.?[24]

The tolerance for the ultimately incompatible went so far as to legitimize an intense concern with astrology from which the location of the present within the cyclical movement of the universe and hence, within it, of history, was expected. The world evolves in cycles of time, recurrent constellations accompanying the recurrence of events, the periodic manifestation of Revelation in Prophecy, the rise and decline of empires. The study of the stars was important to the Fāṭimiyya (as to all the Ismā'īli groups) on epistemological grounds as it provided a key to the particularization of universal process; but it was equally important as a scientific means to read off from the heavens the fate of the aging political structures of the time, and in fact to ascertain the very date when the law of the cycle would yield up their adversaries to the universal empire of the new *dawla*, lit., "dynasty," whose rise was cosmically preordained and inevitable and yet seemed contingent on a supreme effort to be expended against the foredoomed–Umayyads in Spain, 'Abbāsids in Baghdad, and Christians wherever, but first of all in Byzantium.

As little as the Calvinists were rendered inactive by their doctrine of election, as little were the Fāṭimids prepared to wait passively for the cosmically needful to occur.[25] An overwhelming religious experience, the veritable root of their communal existence, was helped into secular realization by philosophical assumptions and the consequent alliance between a rationalistic and an illuminationist dynamism. That much of this dynamism was directed against the Christians, rather than Christianity per se, that indeed the determination to stimulate the *djihād*, "holy war," against them was one of the motive forces that secured for them popular acclaim and response, must be underlined especially in view of their ability, not belied by certain episodes of persecution, to use to best advantage of dynasty, sect, and state–if the three may, from the Fāṭimid point of view, be separated–precisely their Christian (and Jewish) subjects. Nor must we be misled by their anti-Byzantine pronouncements, backed up though they were with frequent hostilities, into overlooking the unhesitating manner in which the Fāṭimids borrowed, to mention merely one significant cultural-political area, from Byzantine court ceremonial.[26]

The Arab emphasis seems to conflict with the image the Assassins and their Ismā'īli descendants have created in the Western and perhaps also in the average Muslim mind. But this image is anachronistic, induced and fortified as it is by the hold the later Nizāriyya obtained on the imagination of the contemporaries of both faiths. In nomenclature, attire, and pronouncements the Fāṭimids identified with the Arabs and, the admission of non-Arab influences notwithstanding, with the Arab elements in Muslim civilization. Their *tādj*, not a crown on the Persian nor a diadem on the Hellenistic model, is a peculiarly rolled turban, its form described by the expressions "rolling of majesty" or "Arab rolling," which carry the same meaning, the *shaddat al-waqār* deriving from the *ḥadīth* which has the turban stand for "majesty, or dignity, for the Muslim and glory and power for the Arab."[27]

Consistent with their universalism and clearly in accordance with the older Muslim concept, the Fāṭimids' lasting success and perhaps already their victory over the Egypt of the Ikhshidids was based on their ability to build and maintain a pluralistic community, unless it be more accurate to speak of a pluralism of communities under one administration. A distinction is in order. The military strength of the dynasty consisted in a variety of "national" army groups–Berber, Negro (Zandj), Armenian, Turkish, etc. The lack of discipline and the rivalries among these groups were the decisive weakness of the dynasty which achieved only for relatively short periods a genuine balance among their power instruments or a constructive, if brutal, supremacy of one of them. Minor civil wars in the capital, occasionally leading

to large-scale destruction, could not be prevented. Besides, the tension between the native civilians and the foreign, though often "naturalized," soldiery goes like a *basso ostinato* through the Fāṭimid age, albeit a tension occasionally neutralized for varying stretches of time.

This "pluralism" within the governmental machinery, with indigenous and largely Sunnī Muslims in the judiciary, and indigenous and largely Christian officials in the financial and clerical bureaux, is by no means distinctive of the Fāṭimid regime, and the dynasty handled its problems no better and no worse than did other regimes in the *dār al-Islām*. Where the Fāṭimids were more successful, due to their detachment from the Sunnī majority and because of their indifference to the nature of religious deviation from their own beliefs, was in the treatment of the *ahl al-kitāb*, "people whose religion is based on a revealed book," which, at the time of the Fāṭimids' arrival, one has to envision as sizable communities (the Christians presumably still constituting a majority or just beginning to lose this status). The educated Jew was bilingual, speaking Arabic and Hebrew; the internationalism of Egyptian Jewry was conspicuous; effective contacts, almost amounting to a symbiosis, extended through Palestine into Iraq and through North Africa into Spain. The uneducated Christian, especially of the rural districts, spoke Coptic; the population in Cairo and Fusṭāṭ and the intelligentsia had become Arabicized but in large measure still preserved the inherited tongue.

The internal life of the communities was intense and relatively little interfered with. Unless pressured by its Sunnī subjects, the government tended to favor the *dhimmī* as an influential yet politically innocuous class with the by-results that assimilation progressed rapidly and that, given the prosperity of most of the Fāṭimid age and the decline of the Jewish communities in Spain and North Africa, Egypt became the centre of intellectual life and Egyptian Jewry partook of the sense of cultural superiority over West and North that was characteristic of the Muslim self-view of the times. Even allowing for the rhetoric customary in official documents this passage in a decree of Ḥāfiẓ retains its significance as a declaration of intention if not more: ". . . the bishop of Mount Sinai . . . and the Christians living there, reported that they enjoyed safety in the shadow of the Ḥāfiẓian empire, and lived quietly in the shadow of its justice; and that they gloried in being contemporaries of that empire and felt honoured by the orders which it issued; . . ."[28] The government's ideal policy is stated in another document, issued it is true only thirteen years before the dethroning of the dynasty. "Whereas it is our opinion that we ought to spread out the cloak of justice and kindness and embrace by our mercy and affection the different religious communities, *al-umam al-mutaghāyira*, and comprise Muslims and non-Muslims in measures aiming at the improvement of conditions, *wa-shumūl al-milli wa'l-dhimmī bi-mā yuṣliḥu minhum al-aḥwāl*, and at fulfilling all that they can hope for in the way of restfulness and safety . . ."[29]

"Infiltration" of Christians in the high levels of administration, not excluding the vizierate, exceeded the customary, although it must be admitted that some of the Fāṭimids' contemporaries in the East such as 'Aḍud al-Dawla and after him, the Seljuqs, also entrusted Christians with the office of vizier.[30] A theorist such as Māwardī admits the legality of a *dhimmī*, lit. "one of the people of the covenant (of protection)", becoming *wazīr al-tanfidh*, i. e., an executive officer *stricto sensu*, but not *wazir al-tafwiḍ*, the ruler's alter ego and plenipotentiary. This position was not undisputed. Ibn aṣ-Ṣayrafī (d. 1147), theorist of the Fāṭimid chancery, denies a *dhimmī* the right to rise to the position of *ra'īs diwān al-rasā'il*, or of vizier, primarily because a *dhimmī's* sincerity and loyalty to his Muslim master cannot be relied upon. As a rule, a Christian or a Jew who was to be appointed vizier in the full sense of the word would have converted to Islam so his nomination would be technically unobjectionable. The only exception is the Armenian Bahrām who under Ḥāfiẓ, and hence during the "desacralized" period of Fāṭimid rule, became *wazir al-sayf*, lit. "vizier of the sword," (1135–1137) and who along with his brother whom he named governor of Qūṣ retained his religion to the end of his life (1140).

It must be conceded that Bahrām's assumption of the vizierate caused rather serious ritual difficulties in view of the part the vizier had traditionally to play in functions involving presence in the mosque etc.[31] It deserves notice that not only was a solution of these problems of etiquette found almost immediately but that Bahrām exercised his function with the surname of *Sayf al-Islām*. (His, incidentally, is not the only instance when a Christian was awarded a *laqab* containing the word al-Islām.)[32]

It would not be correct to claim that in response to favoured treatment Jews and Copts went through a phase of intense intellectual productivity. The

acme of Maimonides falls under the Ayyūbids and the so-called Coptic Renaissance, too, follows rather than accompanies the "Golden Age" of the Fāṭimids. But of at least equal symptomatic significance is the documentation of Christian self-assurance and community pride with which we meet during the Fāṭimid centuries, and not in Egypt alone, a mood that waned only after the ambiguous position of some of the Christian communities during the Mongol advance had radically changed Muslim attitudes.

In the introduction to a Coptic Vocabulary Abū Isḥāq Ibn al-'Assāl (d. ca. 1200) says: (Praise be to God for) He has placed Coptic above all other non-Arab tongues,[33] a saying matched by Bar Hebraeus (d. 1282) who in the Preface to his *Ketūbā de-Šemḥē* thanks the Lord for having led him to the Christian, Syriac language, *kaldāyūtā*.[34] To round out these quotations with one from Upper Mesopotamia reference may be made to the conspicuous self-esteem (that seems to have sat well with an equally conspicuous self-contempt)[35] of such Syriac-speaking monks as Rabban Yūsef Busnāya who experiences miracles happening in his own time as greater than those brought about through Elias as recorded in 3 Kings.[36] The greater the isolation of the community from the surrounding Muslim *umma* the more intact this self-confidence seems to have remained.[37] The important part played by Christians in the administration as well as the significance of *adab* as a basis for internal and "international" connection and linking of communities has already been discussed; so mere mention of the role of the *Stilformen* of official language in providing a "mortar" and a counterweight to the inevitable isolationism of the communities for the life of the Fāṭimid realm will suffice.[38] In emphasizing the advantageous position of the *dhimmī* communities under Fāṭimid rule, the impression must not be created that the period was without interdenominational frictions, without (in terms of the *sharī'a*) unwarranted discrimination, without persecutions, and, more important, without that sense of separateness that is accompanied on both sides by one of intrinsic ranking of the respective social pyramids and by creation of the illusion that the lowliest Muslim is in a non-material way still above the wealthiest and most powerful Christian or Jew, an illusion that approximates reality when the latent power threat is taken into account. In the mid-Eastern situation minorities tend to fare best under minority rule, be this rule one of illimited or limited executive power. Although the ruling group will on occasion have to fall in with popular animosities or even succumb to their contagiousness it is only with the accession to unchecked power of the majority (through whatever technical means) that the situation of the minority becomes so edgy and their amplified participation in public life so irrevocably curtailed by the permanent threat of an oppression legitimized in terms of current assumptions by the weight of numbers and the removal of community walls as to disrupt the unity of the state. One other fact must be remembered when the pluralistic society of Fāṭimid Egypt is appraised: it is amazing, though generally true, how little the isolated groups or communities actually tend to expect, let alone demand, of the great community, and how little detached, let alone benevolent, non-interference is required to win their acceptance of a disadvantaged position and bring about, under otherwise favorable circumstances, their economic and cultural flowering.

By the standards of the times Fāṭimid Egypt was a solidly constructed state, reasonably safe from foreign invasion, rather less subject to crises of violence than Iraq or Persia, although somewhat more vulnerable to famine, famine-induced pestilence, and famine-induced excitability and mob action. With the means at the disposal of any Egyptian government down to modern times the prevention of food crises was neither possible nor to be expected—nor could the prosperous foreign trade forestall or significantly allay them. To the contemporary Fāṭimid Egypt was a great imperial and imperialist power, in many eyes suspect of conspiratorial activities; it was a centre in every sense of the word, bold in its outreach into Europe and toward India, in the judgment of Muqaddasī (in 985) the greatest intellectual capital of Islam clearly surpassing Baghdād.[39] And yet, a comparative tabulation of poets and writers, historians and scientists of Syria and Iraq on the one hand, and of Egypt on the other, would show the Fāṭimids far less endowed than the shifting dynasties of the East. Under the conditions then prevailing the artistic accomplishments required steady financial support, both public and private, and were perfected by masters who typically remained anonymous. The achievements of arts, crafts, and architecture would seem to have been more commensurate with the general sense of well-being and the high repute of Egypt abroad. In fact, the Egyptian influence particularly in the so-called minor arts is likely to have been more pervasive abroad than has hitherto been suspected;

it is worthy of notice that this influence does not seem to have been suspended by the political decline of the dynasty but, quite to the contrary, exerted its greatest force during the period of its weakening and, in complete detachment from its geopolitical source, after its deposition. Withal we are faced by the puzzling phenomenon that an era of high enterprise, economic progressiveness and, in its latter part at least, rising real incomes and improved alimentation was, in the last analysis, less creative, less lastingly influential in the cultural orbit than the Mamlūk period with its rarely subsiding civil discord, its cultural alienation between rulers and ruled, and increasing financial stringency besides.

Impressed though they were with the Fāṭimid regime even its sympathizers would be critical of some aspects of its policies. Ibn Ḥawqal, writing ca. 988, complains that the conquest of Egypt by the *maghāriba*, "Magrebis," has changed matters for the worse: where villages had flourished before their takeover now only ruins and abandoned debris were to be found.[40] In another passage,[41] Ibn Ḥawqal specifically accuses "the accursed Abū 'l-Faradj b. Killis," al-'Azīz's vizier, a convert from Judaism, of having ruined the prosperous textile industry and the export of textiles by unjust imposts and exactions. (Since this industry continued to be of great importance throughout the Fāṭimid period and beyond we may suspect Ibn Ḥawqal of having overstated the case against the vexatious vizier.) To the extent that *adab* infiltrated history and geography we may not readily trust figures (of mosques, baths, inhabitants) considering that in *adab* literature figures are used as symbols and for emphasis and that, besides, the later author is inclined to take over the data from his authorities without controlling them against the realities of his own time. It is only through careful search and collecting of detail[42] that the deficiencies of our sources can be overcome (at least partially).

However this may be we are inescapably faced with this problem: How did it come about that in a fortunate era such as Egypt by and large enjoyed under the Fāṭimids, creativeness failed to respond in the measure that various widely accepted theories or assumptions would lead one to expect? How, to the contrary, do we account for the considerably greater (or, more widely spread in terms of areas of cultural self-realization) creativity displayed by obviously less well governed regions in about the same time? What relation is there altogether between "good" government and "good" administration and cultural productivity? Does public wealth and governmental liberality affect (equally) all fields of cultural endeavour or only those where, as with architecture, achievement depends *also* on opportunity provided by large expenditures? How do standard of living and cultural productivity coordinate? How does political strength abroad and at home affect cultural effort? In the case of the Fāṭimids and their successors it is demonstrable that political strength (abroad and, secondarily, at home) and mercantile prosperity connected, for the decline of the sea trade from the fourteenth century onward undoubtedly corroded every aspect of Mamlūk life. Is there a significant difference between social peace (or dissension) and peace (or war) abroad in their influence on culture?

It would seem that under medieval conditions, at least, foreign wars had no deleterious effect, keeping in mind that invasions by foreigners are obviously a different matter. In fact, this observation may be ill taken for, with certain qualifications, war and not peace was the normal state. Whichever the legal-historical view, for the collectivity (to avoid the term "mankind" which was not an instrument of thought at that time) the long range productivity of ultimate tension would then, as now, outweigh suffering and loss unless destruction became "total" or "genocidal." It can hardly be maintained that the almost constant state of war in which Athens lived during her great age damaged her cultural realizations although in the end it deprived her of the means to complete the Parthenon; nor can it be held that the good government and highly competent administration of the Roman Empire in the second century A. D. accomplished more than a rapidly fading "Silver Age."

The skein of problems thickens as illustrations rise above the threshold. In arresting their train the ancient saying of the Rabbis may be invoked in justification: "The work is not for thee alone to finish; but thou art not free to desist from it."[43] So it cannot be my intention to propose solutions, however tentative, on a world historical or global plane. But reverting to the Fāṭimids it may, I believe, be stated that their political and cultural success was due to their unusual capability to utilize to best advantage for their period and perhaps altogether *all* the groups, classes, communities of their Egypt regardless of race or creed,[44] yet without letting the reins slip from their hands, without letting their policies be directed by the aggressively divergent leanings of the groupings

to which they responded by tying their self-interest to the self-interest of the dynasty, and through it, to that of the country. They may not have treated all alike and as equals one with the other but they dealt with them equitably as equity was then understood. To this the protests of restricted overprivilege bear witness.

That no creative genius was born in their time, that they had no opportunity to act as patrons to an Ibn Khaldūn or an Abū Tammām, can merely be noted and regretted; an explanation would be futile. But all praise is due the Fāṭimids for having known how to induce the communities under their sway to develop their courage of enterprise and to preserve their intellectual élan without damaging that unity of the larger community which hinged on the dynasty's sense of purpose and measure, and its acceptance even by those to whom their rulers' legitimacy could at best have seemed a benevolent fiction.

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Notes

1 III, xvii, 10; tr. J. H. Freese, *Loeb Classical Library* (London, 1926).

2 *Werke*, III, 97; quoted by A. Gehlen, *Der Mensch. Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt* (first published 1940; 6th ed.; Bonn, 1958), p. 331.

3 Going beyond Gehlen's own variation of the doctrine, *ibid.*, p. 332.

4 *Hallesche Jahrbücher für deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst*, 1840, p. 1217; quoted by G. Bauer, *Geschichtlichkeit* (Berlin, 1963), p. 25, from K. Löwith, *Von Hegel bis Nietzsche* (Zürich, 1941), p. 113.

5 Cf. A. Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du siècle XIème* (Paris and The Hague, 1967), pp. 130–131.

6 For illustrations of the antithesis "senescent 'Abbāsids" vs. *dawla bikr* of the Fāṭimids, cf. M. Canard, « *L'impérialisme des Fāṭimides et leur propagande* », AEIO (Algiers), VI (1942–1947), 158–193, at pp. 183–185.

7 Maqrīzī, *Itti'āẓ al-ḥunafā'*, ed. H. Bunz (Leipzig, 1909), p. 78 (bottom), shows Djawhar, the conqueror of Egypt and founder of Cairo, disapproving of the traditional method of determining the end of Ramaḍān, i. e., by observation of the new moon, rather than by astronomical calculation. Similarly, Ḥākim allows Ramaḍān to end at the date established by astronomical computation without waiting for the new moon to have become visible to the naked eye and have its appearance attested before the qāḍī by two reliable witnesses; cf. De L. O'Leary, *A Short History of the Fāṭimid Caliphate* (London and New York, 1923), p. 155; cf. similarly, p. 142, his scientific identification of the prayer hours.

8 For this *topos* in literary prefaces cf. P. Freimark, *Das Vorwort als literarische Form in der arabischen Literatur*, Diss. Münster, 1967, pp. 48–50.

9 S. M. Stern, *Fāṭimid Decrees* (London, 1964), pp. 72 and 40. My quotation combines passages from two decrees, one dated 1150, the other, 1134.

10 R. Paret, « *Contribution à l'étude des milieux culturels dans le Proche-Orient médiéval* », Revue historique, CCXXXV (1966), 47–100, offers, at p. 70, an attractive formulation: « Le savoir-vivre exigeait le savoir, et le savoir n'avait d'autre fin que le savoir-vivre, au sens le plus achevé du mot. »

11 Cf. Miquel, *op. cit.*, p. 64; the typology of encyclopaedism has been attempted by Paret, *op. cit.*

12 For the fact, and for the *kuttāb*'s realization of the decline that occurred between Ibn Khurdādhaba and Qudāma b. Ḏja'far, cf. Paret, *op. cit.*, pp. 67–68.

13 Cf. W. Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, IV, 529, quoted by Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 64 n. 19: „Was der Mensch ist, sagt nur die Geschichte;" cf. also Dilthey, *Schriften*, VIII, 38, and Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 64–65.

14 The expression is R. Escarpit's.

15 The latter event was to be preceded by the revocation, in 1210, of the proclamation of the *qiyāma*, in 1164, by the Nizāriyya of Alamūt (cf. M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins* (The Hague, 1955), pp. 148ff., 217ff.). The disillusionment, or "awaking," seems to be a typical although not always an advertised phenomenon. To the Ṭayyibis, Ḥāfiẓ and his line remained necessarily illegitimate. Ḥāfiẓ's relation to his predecessor had the flaw that he was the first Fāṭimid to succeed to the caliphate not as son but as cousin of his predecessor, not to mention the questionable character of the *naṣṣ* that raised him to the throne. On the complicated developments of the early 1130's, cf. the excellent study by S. M. Stern, "*The Succession to the Fāṭimid Imām al-Āmir, the Claims of the Later Fāṭimids to the Imamate, and the Rise of Ṭayyibi Ismailism*," Oriens, IV (1951), 193–255, esp. pp. 202–210. By way of a *fā'ida* it should be noted that the *sidjill*, preserved by Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā'* (Cairo, 1331–1338/1913–1919), IX, 291ff., in which 'Abd al-Madjīd (i. e., al-Ḥāfiẓ) is proclaimed imām, contains an instance of *praefiguratio*, which will modify my statement (*Studien zum Kulturbild und Selbstverständnis des Islams* (Zürich and Stuttgart, 1969), p. 310), noting the absence of this method from *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*. Such *praefiguratio* by an incident rather than by a text still remains atypical of Muslim interpretive techniques. The relevant passage reads (*Ṣubḥ*, IX, 295[13-16]): anna 'l-amrayn idhā tashābahat min kull al-djihāt, wa-kānat bayna-humā mudad mutaṭāwilāt mutabā'idāt, fa'l-sābiq minhumā yunabbihu bi'l-tālī wa'l-awwal abadan *ramz* (indication, *typos*) 'alā 'l-thānī. In

Stern's abridged translation, *op. cit.*, p. 200: "For events turn out similar in all respects, preceding events support the succeeding ones, and are to be taken as types of them."

16 Cf. Miquel, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

17 So already M. Canard, « Le cérémonial fatimide et le cérémonial byzantin, » *Byzantion*, XXI (1951), 355–420, esp. at pp. 378ff.

18 *A Personal Anthology* (New York, 1967), p. 94.

19 Cf. al-Mu'ayyad fi 'l-Din al-Shirāzī, *Sira*, ed. M. K. Husain (Cairo, 1949), pp. 85–86, the description of the *dā'ī*'s first audience with al-Mustansir. Instructive for concept and self-concept of the Fāṭimid Caliphs is the *Sira* of Djawdhar (d. 973); cf. the Introduction by M. Canard to his translation, *Vie de l'ustadh Jaudhar* (Algiers, 1958), pp. 21–22.

20 Quoted from F. Wüstenfeld, *„Calcaschandi's Geographie und Verwaltung von Ägypten,"* Abhandlungen der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, XXV (1879), 195–196. 'Umāra later was strangled at the command of Saladin for his praise of the Fāṭimids with whose ideology, in the eyes of the Ayyūbid he had identified too unreservedly although always remaining a Sunni.

21 In the first Fāṭimid *khuṭba* that was pronounced in Fusṭāṭ in 969 A. D., the *khaṭīb* Hibatallāh b. Aḥmad, asked the Lord to "unite the *umma* in obedience" to the Fāṭimid caliph and to give into his hands the East and the West of the earth, *mashāriq al-arḍ wa-maghāribahā*, making reference to Qur'ān 21 : 105 (which in turn echoes Ps. 37 : 29). Imploration for effective revival of *djihād* is followed by prayer to bestow victory on the imām's *qitāl al-mushrikīn wa-djihād al-mulḥidīn*, protection on the Muslims and integrity on the marches, etc.; the *khuṭba* is quoted in Maqrizi, *Itti'āẓ*, pp. 75–76.

22 For the period's impregnation with classical material, cf. J. Schacht's analysis of the celebrated dispute between the two physicians, Ibn Buṭlān and Ibn Ridwān, in his study *„Über den Hellenismus in Bagdad und Kairo."* ZDMG, 90 (1936), 520–545, on p. 530.

23 Quisquis bonus verusque Christianus est, Domini sui esse intelligat, ubicumque invenerit veritatem. Quoted by H. Dörries in his Preface, p. 7, to his edition of H. Langerbeck, *Aufsätze zur Gnosis* (Göttingen, 1960).

24 One feels tempted to recall the dictum of Aḥmad Amīn, *Fadjr al-islām*, p. 42[16–17], where he likens the Arab soul to a bee that will take from every flower.

25 It is necessary to insist on the wholly different character of Ibn Khaldūn's concept of the "cyclic" rise and decline of states. And it may be even more necessary (because it is more often implied) to point out that the ancient Greeks before the Stoa did not have any doctrine of "cyclic time." Both Herodotus and Sophocles speak of the *kyklos* of time; but what they have in mind is not anything resembling Eternal Return but "a continuous movement of all things, which may be controlled by regular laws, and yet illustrate the perpetual modification of the world we live in" (J. de Romilly, *Time in Greek Tragedy* [Ithaca, N. Y., 1968], *passim*; the passage is from p. 91.) Regularity, regular alternation (as of day and night), bespeaks order, *kosmos*, but not endless repetition.

26 Cf. Canard, « Le cérémonial fatimide, et le cérémonial byzantin. »

27 Waqār li'l-muslimīn wa-'izz li'l-'Arab, cf. *ibid.*, p. 390.

28 The document was written in 1130; the reference is to the monks of Saint Catherine; cf. Stern, *Fatimid Decrees*, p. 59 (text); p. 91 (trans.).

29 *Ibid.*, p. 76 (trans., p. 78).

30 Cf. Canard, *AIEO*, XII (1954), 84–88.

31 For detail, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 97–100.

32 E. Sivan, « *Notes sur la situation des chrétiens à l'époque ayyūbide* », Revue de l'histoire des religions, CLXXII (1967), 117–130, contains interesting data on the Fāṭimid period as well.

33 Ed. trans. A. Mallon, « *Une école de savants égyptiens*, » MFO, I (1906), 109–131, II (1907), 214–265, at II, 216[3–4] (trans. p. 223).

34 Freimark, *op. cit.*, p. 157. Cf. G. E. von Grunebaum, *Der Islam im Mittelalter* (Zürich und Stuttgart, 1963), p. 460, for Elias of Nisibis (d. after 1049), who displayed the same attitude, as well as other pertinent references.

35 Cf. Jean bar Kalboun, trans. J.-B. Chabot, *ROC*, III (1898), 176–178; for humility, *ibid.*, pp. 178 bis 181.

36 *ROC*, II (1897), 373.

37 For the total engrossment in their own community existence, cf., as one example for many, the passage of Dionysios bar Ṣalībī, quoted by A. Guillaumont, *Les « Kephalaia gnostika » d'Evagre de Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens* (Paris, 1962), pp. 20–21. On a more objective level it may be noted that Arabic terminology shows unexpected reflections of Christian usage; e. g., the Syriac *puššāqō*, "translation *and* explanation, (periphrastic) commentary, interpretation", continues in Christian Arabic where *tafsīr* is used for translation; *'ilm at-tafsīr*, for science of translation; cf., e. g., Athanasios of Qūs (eleventh century) *apud* Mallon, *op. cit.*, I, 115, writing a Coptic-Arabic grammar under the title *Qiladat at-taḥrīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr* (Necklace of reduction for the science of translation); for *puššāqō*, cf. Guillaumont, *op. cit.*, pp. 206, 213, 225.

38 Supporting evidence from all parts of the Muslim world in the High Middle Ages abounds; a treasure trove is Miquel, *op. cit.*, *passim*, note, e. g., the dictum of Shaibānī, p. 91 n. 5.

39 Apud H. A. R. Gibb and J. M. Landau, *Arabische Literaturgeschichte* (Zürich und Stuttgart, 1968), p. 129.

40 *Kitāb ṣūrat al-arḍ*, ed. J. H. Kramers (Leiden, 1938–1939), p. 143; trans. J. H. Kramers and G. Wiet, *Configuration de la Terre* (Beyrouth and Paris, 1964), p. 141.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 153; trans. p. 150.

42 Such as those provided by E. Ashtor for wages and prices in the Fāṭimid, Ayyūbid, and Mamlūk periods; cf., e. g., his « *Essai sur l'alimentation des diverses classes sociales dans l'Orient médiéval.* » Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations (1968), pp. 1017–1053, esp. pp. 1020–1036.

LA SITUATION ECONOMIQUE DU CAIRE ET SES RELATIONS EXTERIEURES AU TEMPS DES FĀTIMIDES (RESUME)

SLIMANE MOSTAFA ZBISS

Les Fāṭimides en quittant Kairouan pour le Caire, qu'ils venaient de fonder, introduisirent sur le sol égyptien une quantité de richesses énormes, presque colossales. Nous savons, en effet, que pendant les trois quarts de siècle qu'ils avaient passés au Maghreb, les Fāṭimides avaient accumulé un trésor d'état et des trésors individuels, lesquels, joints aux trésors laissés par leurs prédécesseurs, les Ikhshīdides, et joints aux ressources intarissables fournies par les multiples communautés vivant dans l'infinité des territoires du monde chiite, donnaient à l'état fāṭimide, sur le plan économique, des fondements d'une solidité à toute épreuve. La publication récente de l'ouvrage d'Al-Qāḍī Zubayr « *Trésors et objets d'art* » nous donne de ces richesses un tableau mirifique. L'énumération des possessions des princes et des princesses, la simple mention des objets, donnés ou reçus en présents, laissent rêveur; bijoux, pierreries, étoffes précieuses, objets produits par les artistes et les artisans les plus experts: broderie, niellage, marqueterie, ciselure etc. ..., tout cela supposait l'existence de structures économiques fort prospères, un artisanat très évolué, un commerce intérieur et extérieur très actif et des ressources agricoles très abondantes.

Artisanat évolué, certes, celui du Caire Fāṭimide le fut éminemment. Capitale nouvelle, au cœur même du Proche-Orient, la nouvelle cité vit affluer dans ses murs, outre les artisans locaux du proche Fusṭāṭ, ceux d'Afrique, de Syrie, d'Iraq et même de Byzance. Les matières premières les plus diverses et les plus rares lui venaient par voie de terre et par voie de mer de l'Occident Musulman, de l'Occident Chrétien, des pays slaves et de Russie. Le Sud et l'Extrême-Orient ne laissaient pas de déverser dans ses dépôts les quantités les plus abondantes des produits les plus rares: pierres et bois précieux, or, ivoire etc. . . . Malgré la parcimonie avec laquelle lui parvenait le bois européen, bon pour les constructions navales, le Caire disposait d'une flotte commerciale, tous les jours plus nombreuse, rapportant des contrées lointaines le matériau nécessaire à ses manufactures, et en redistribuant à l'infini les produits de son artisanat.

L'agriculture, tributaire du Nil, fut favorisée par la fortune des princes qui surent l'employer à multiplier les canaux d'irrigation et les barrages, augmentant ainsi, dans des proportions énormes, le volume des surfaces cultivées.

Une telle prospérité économique devait également supposer des rapports suivis avec le monde extérieur et, surtout, des rapports paisibles. En

effet, nombreux furent les traités commerciaux passés par le Caire avec les pays européens et asiatiques. Pays où transitaient des richesses venant de tous les horizons, l'Egypte hébergeait de nombreuses colonies étrangères qui y étaient installées à demeure pour un négoce fort fructueux. Gênois, Pisans et Vénitiens avaient ainsi d'excellentes raisons d'entretenir avec les autorités du Caire les meilleures relations, d'autant que, subsidiairement, cela leur ouvrait largement les portes de Jérusalem.

La prospérité du Caire fâtimide, ainsi que son ouverture sur le monde extérieur, tout cela devait survivre jusqu'à nos jours et devait contribuer à faire de l'Egypte moderne un pays important.

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