AN INTERPRETATION OF FĀṬIMID HISTORY

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The story is told that when the Fāṭimid Caliph al-Mu'izz came to Egypt, and was questioned by the representatives of the *ashrāf* concerning his pedigree and his proofs, he half-drew his sword from his scabbard and said: 'This is my pedigree,' and then scattered gold among them and added: 'And these are my proofs.'[1]

The story is dramatic and amusing, but is self-evidently false. Its purpose is to depict al-Mu'izz as an adventurer–an unscrupulous upstart who had gained power by force and maintained it by corruption. But this is precisely what al-Mu'izz was not, and nothing is less likely than that he would, in this brazen way, have declared himself an impostor.

A much more accurate idea of the image of al-Mu'izz, as seen by his followers and projected to his new subjects, may be found in the poems of Ibn Hāni', his Andalusian panegyrist.[2] The poet, in medieval Islamic courts, often had an important public function. As panegyrist, he praised his patron; as satirist, he abused his enemies. In a society that was sophisticated and literate, but without mass media, poetry could to some extent take their place: the poet devised, for publication and dissemination, versions of events or sketches of personalities which were vivid, memorable–and slanted. He was the propagandist, or, as we might now say, the public relations officer and image-maker of the ruler, and his compositions can tell us a great deal about the policies and intentions of rulers and sometimes even about the responses of the ruled.

The image of the Fāṭimid Caliph, as portrayed by his aulic poets, is not just that of a successful soldier or politician, but of a great world leader, at once spiritual and imperial. As a victorious dynastic ruler, he represents the emergence of a new power, which is young, fresh and vigorous, in contrast with his effete and degenerate opponents. But that is not all. The Fāṭimid state is not just another principality, carved out of the 'Abbāsid Empire by an ambitious governor or a mutinous soldier. Such adventures had become commonplace; the rise of the Fāṭimids was something new, and their advent marks an era in the history of Egypt and indeed of all Islam.

During the first four centuries of Islam, Egypt went through three major phases, each of which has left its mark in the capital city. During the first phase, for more than two centuries after the Arab conquest, Egypt was a province of an Empire with its capital elsewhere. The administra-

tive centre was Fusṭāṭ, a provincial garrison city set up by the conquerors, conveniently near the desert which was their line of communication with home, and the bureaucratic cadres bequeathed by the previous empire. The rulers of Egypt were governors, appointed by and answerable to the Caliph in the East; her corn fed Arabia; her revenues enriched the imperial treasury.

The second phase began in 254/868, with the arrival in Egypt of Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn. At first a subordinate with strictly limited powers, subject to the authority of his superiors in Baghdād, he succeeded within a few years in creating a virtually independent state—the first in Muslim Egypt. By reducing the drain of revenue to the East and encouraging agriculture and commerce, he accumulated great wealth; with it he built a new capital, the combined fortress, palace and city of al-Qaṭā'i', hard by the site of Fusṭāṭ.

The establishment of the Ṭūlūnid state, and its revival and continuance by subsequent rulers, mark a significant change in the history of medieval Egypt. Ibn Ṭūlūn, the Ikhshīd and Kāfūr were all foreigners in Egypt; their aims were personal or at most dynastic, and were limited in both territorial extent and political content. As Sunnī Muslims, they had no desire to withdraw from the Islamic oecumene headed by the Caliph, still less to challenge the 'Abbāsids for the Caliphate itself. Their aim was to rule Egypt, together with such adjoining countries as could conveniently be added to it, and to do so, if at all possible, with the approval of the Caliph and under his suzerainty. Though they were patrons of the arts and of letters, their rule did not foster any national or cultural renaissance, such as accompanied the emergence of similar principalities in Iran.

Yet, despite these and other limitations, the Ṭūlūnids and Ikhshīdids inaugurated the separate history of Islamic Egypt, pursued recognizably Egyptian policies, and earned strong Egyptian loyalty and support. Under their rule the Nile Valley again became, for the first time since the Ptolemies, the seat of an independent political, military and economic power, with growing influence and importance in the affairs of the whole region.

With the coming of the Fāṭimids in 358/969, the role of Egypt in the Islamic world was vastly increased and totally transformed. The new masters of Egypt were moved by more than personal or dynastic ambition. They were the heads of a great religious movement, which aimed at nothing less than the transformation and renewal of all Islam. As Ismā'īlī Shī'ites, they refused to offer even token submission to the 'Abbāsid Caliphs, whom they denounced as wrongdoers and usurpers; they and they alone were the true Imāms, by descent and by God's choice the sole rightful heads of the whole Islamic community. The Caliphate was therefore theirs by right, and they would take it from the 'Abbāsids as the 'Abbāsids had taken it from the Umayyads.

In preparing the accomplishment of this plan, the Fāṭimids followed very closely on the pattern set by the 'Abbāsids. Like the 'Abbāsids in their early days, they appealed to all those who felt that the community of Islam had taken a wrong path, and they argued that only an Imām of the house of the Prophet could restore it to the true one. Like the 'Abbāsids again, they created a secret mission, to preach their cause and to organize those who adhered to it. The 'Abbāsids had begun by establishing themselves in the remote province of Khurāsān, on the eastern borders of the Empire; the Fāṭimids, using the same tactics, concentrated their missionary and political effort first in the Yemen, and then in North Africa. The 'Abbāsids had harnessed the warlike Khurāsānīs to their purposes; the Fāṭimids mobilized the Berbers. The 'Abbāsids, sweeping westwards from Khurāsān, chose a new central province, Iraq, and built themselves a new capital in Baghdād. The Fāṭimids, advancing eastwards from Tunisia, moved the centre to Egypt, and, near the camps and cantonments of Fusṭāṭ and al-Qaṭā'i', founded a great new imperial metropolis, the city of Cairo. The poet Ibn Hāni', in celebrating the victories of al-Mu'izz in Egypt, looks forward in poetic vision to the next and final stages—the invasion of Iraq, the capture of Baghdād, the advance on the ancient highway to the East.[3]

At this point, however, the resemblance ceases, for the vision was not fulfilled. The 'Abbasid triumph was complete, that of the Fāṭimids only partial. Except for the distant and isolated province of Spain, all Islam submitted to the 'Abbāsids, and even in Spain the Umayyad survivors did not seriously challenge their Caliphate. The Fāṭimids won great victories, and at the time it must have seemed that they were about to engulf the whole world of Islam. But they did not. The 'Abbāsids, defeated and weakened, themselves under the domination of a Shī'ite though not Ismā'īlī dynasty of mayors of the palace, nevertheless managed to hold out in their old capital, and served as a rallying point for all the forces

of Sunnī Islam. In the following century, those forces were immensely strengthened by the advent of the Seljuq Turks and the creation of a new and powerful military empire in the East, the great Sultanate. The reinforcement was religious as well as political. The Seljuq Sultans were devout Sunnis. True, they dominated the Caliphate, but unlike the Shī'ite Būyids whom they replaced, they treated the Caliphs with honour and respect as the supreme religious authority in Sunnī Islam, and their advent greatly increased the prestige and influence of the 'Abbāsid house. The containment of the Fāṭimid danger was not achieved by military and political means alone, though these were essential and in large measure successful. In the *madrasa*, Sunnī Islam created a new and crucial weapon in the struggle for religious unity. In these great colleges, spreading all over the East, the scholars and theologians of the Sunna devised and taught the orthodox answer to the Ismā'īlī intellectual challenge.

Both the 'Abbāsids and the Fāṭimids, in their hour of victory, confronted the dilemma which sooner or later faces all successful rebels–the conflict between the responsibilities of power and the expectations of those who brought them to it. The 'Abbāsids, after a brief attempt to persuade the Muslims that their accession had really brought the promised millennium, chose the path of stability and orthodoxy. The radical doctrines were forgotten, the radical leaders murdered. The messianic epithets became regnal titles, the black banners of revolt became a dynastic livery–even the very word *dawla*, which originally connoted revolution and change, came to mean the dynasty and then the state.[4]

The same problem arose for the victorious Fāṭimids, but in a more complex form, since their victory was slower and incomplete. Sixty years and three unsuccessful attempts intervened between the establishment of the Fāṭimid Caliphate in Tunisia and its extension to Egypt. The further conquest of the Islamic East was never accomplished. The Fāṭimid Caliphs, like the first 'Abbāsids, found that the views and wishes of the missionaries did not always accord with the needs of the state, and from time to time, both in the Tunisian and in the Egyptian phases, there are indications of disagreement and repression within the Ismā'īlī fold–even of secession. But the Fāṭimids, unlike the 'Abbāsids, could not afford to break completely with the mission, since there was still important work for the mission to do. The aim of the Fāṭimids, at least until al-Mustanṣir, was to overthrow and supersede the 'Abbāsid Caliphate–to establish their own Imāmate and their Ismā'īlī faith in the whole world of Islam. For more than a century the activities of the Fāṭimid government in Cairo and of its agents at home and abroad were directed towards this objective.

These activities were not always pursued with equal vigour. There were times when the Fāṭimids were distracted by other problems–unrest in the provinces, trouble on the Mediterranean or Byzantine frontiers–and found it expedient to reach a *modus vivendi* with their rivals in the East. But their ultimate objective, necessarily, was still the establishment of the universal Ismā'īlī Imāmate.

The Fāṭimid Caliphate thus represents a phenomenon which was new though not unique in history–a regime at once imperial and revolutionary. Within his own domains, the Fāṭimid Caliph was a sovereign–the supreme ruler of a vast empire which he sought to extend by conventional military and political means. Its centre was Egypt; its provinces at its peak included North Africa, Sicily, Palestine, Syria, the Red Sea coast of Africa, the Yemen, and, of special importance, the Ḥidjāz, possession of which conferred great prestige on a Muslim ruler and enabled him to use the potent weapon of the pilgrimage to his advantage.

His capital city, Cairo, was the thriving centre of this vast realm. The tribute of empire now flowed into Egypt, not out of it. The material prosperity of the country was sustained by a flourishing agriculture and an extensive commerce; the opportunities of Cairo attracted men of talent and ambition from all over the Fāṭimid domains and beyond. Policy and circumstance combined to encourage a great flowering of intellectual and artistic life.

But the Caliph was not only an imperial sovereign. He was also the Ismā'īlī Imam, the spiritual head of the faithful wherever they were, the embodiment of God's purpose and guidance on earth. As such, he was the dedicated enemy of the existing order in the East, the hope and refuge of those who sought to overthrow it. All over the 'Abbāsid realms, he commanded a great army of missionaries, agents and followers, elaborately and secretly organized under the supreme direction of the Chief Missionary *(Dā'ī 'l-du'āt)* in Cairo. It is significant that the Chief Missionary himself was almost invariably an Easterner, with personal experience of service in the Mission.

One of the greatest of them, al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, has left a fascinating autobiographical work describing his adventures as a Fāṭimid missionary in Persia, as a political emissary in Iraq, and as Chief Missionary in Cairo.[5]

In traditional Islamic states, the business of government was carried on by two main groups, known as the men of the sword *(arbāb al-suyūf)* and the men of the pen *(arbāb al-aqlām)*. The former were the armed forces, the latter the civilian bureaucrats. Their relative importance and influence varied according to the type of regime, but the two together were commonly agreed to be the twin pillars of the state. The Fāṭimids, for the first time in Islamic history, added a third–the Mission. In the Sunnī Caliphate, the professional men of religion had stood aside from the state, neither serving it nor accepting its direction. The Fāṭimids organized them into a third branch of government, with its own functions, structure, and hierarchy, under the direction of the Chief Missionary and the ultimate authority of the Caliph in his capacity as Imam. The Fāṭimids thus created something previously unknown to Islam–an institutional church. Their example was followed by some later rulers, who found in this new relationship between religion and the state a powerful reinforcement of their authority.

The work of the Mission had many different facets. It was known as the *da'wa*, and in classical Arabic usage is perhaps sufficiently described by that richly associative word. In modern categories and terminology, some elaboration of the different functions of the *da'wa* might be useful.

One of these was what we nowadays call ideology–the organized and exclusive system of ideas adopted and propagated by a movement or a regime. Generally speaking, Islamic regimes had no ideology other than Islam itself–and that in the broadest and most tolerant definition. Muslim governments took care not to impose, or even espouse, any intellectual orthodoxy, but to allow, within reasonable limits, the co-existence of diverse opinions. The oft-cited *ḥadīth Ikhtilāfu ummatī raḥma'*, difference of opinion within my community is part of God's mercy, accurately reflects traditional Islamic attitudes and practice. The 'Abbāsids used a radical religious ideology to gain power, but swiftly abandoned it when they had done so. Their one attempt to impose an official creed on the Islamic community was a total failure, and it is significant that the Mu'tazilī doctrine which they sponsored is one of the few major religious trends in Islam to have completely disappeared.

The Fāṭimids did not abandon their distinctive doctrines, but on the contrary gave them a central importance in their whole political system. Ismā'īlī theology provided the basis on which the Fāṭimids rested their claim to the Caliphate and denied that of the 'Abbāsids. As long as the 'Abbāsids survived, the Fāṭimids were engaged in a religious–i.e., an ideological conflict, in which doctrine was one of their most powerful weapons. In a sense, they were caught in a vicious circle. Because of their initial failure to win over all Islam, they were obliged to maintain their ideological challenge; yet, by so doing, they isolated themselves from the central consensus of Islam, and thus ensured their own ultimate defeat and disappearance.

It was, however, some time before that defeat became apparent. While the struggle continued, the Fāṭimids accorded prime importance to the formulation and elaboration of their creed. First in North Africa and then in Egypt, a series of distinguished theologians wrote what became the classical works of Ismā'īlī literature. Most of the authors had served in the Mission; some like Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī and al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, had been its chiefs.[6]

The process was not without difficulty. Already at the beginning of the Fāṭimid Caliphate, in North Africa, the Imām as ruler proved different from the Imām as claimant. The needs of government required some changes of approach, and the adoption, in the words of a modern Ismā'īlī scholar, of 'a graver and more conservative attitude towards the then existing institutions of Islam'.[7] Within the Mission itself, there were disputes between radicals and conservatives, between the revealers and the preservers of the esoteric mysteries. Sometimes their disputes were no more than arguments between colleagues; sometimes they led to defections, schism, and even conflict.

Until the death of al-Mustanṣir, these defections were of minor importance, and the main body of Ismā'īlīs remained faithful to the reigning Fāṭimid Caliph and to the officially sponsored Ismā'īlī creed.

It was not enough merely to formulate ideology; there was also the more practical business of disseminating it. In this respect, the Mission performed many tasks which a modern observer, depending on his point of observation, might classify as education or propaganda. In Cairo,

the Fāṭimids founded great libraries and colleges among whose purposes was the training of missionaries to go out into the field, and the further instruction of those converts whom they sent home for this purpose. Many eager aspirants came to Cairo from Sunnī lands in the East, to imbibe wisdom at the fountainhead, and then return to their own countries as exponents of the Ismā'īlī message and workers for the Fāṭimid cause. One such was the Persian poet and philosopher Nāṣir-i Khusraw. A convert to Ismailism, he went to Egypt in 439/1047, and returned to preach the faith in Iran and Central Asia, where he won a considerable following. Another was the redoubtable Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, the founder of the order of the Assassins. Converted by a Fāṭimid agent in Iran, he went to Egypt in 471/1078, and stayed there for about three years.

The Ismā'īlī message had considerable appeal, to many different elements in the population. It was a time of great upheavals in the Islamic world—of economic change, political disruption and intellectual malaise. As in late Umayyad times, there were many who felt that the Islamic community had gone astray and that a new leader, with a new message, was needed to restore it to the true path. There was a withdrawal of consent from the existing order, a loss of confidence in hitherto accepted answers. The 'Abbāsid Caliphate, and with it the Sunnī order, seemed to be breaking up; some new principle of unity and authority was required to save Islam and the Muslims from destruction.

To many it seemed that the Ismā'īlīs could offer such a principle—a design for a new and just world order, under the Imām. To the devout, the doubtful and the discontented alike, the Ismā'īlī missionaries brought a message of comfort and hope, appropriate to the needs of each; for the pious, a deep, spiritual faith, sustained by the example of the suffering of the Imāms and the self-sacrifice of their followers; for the intellectual, a comprehensive explanation of the universe, synthetizing the data of revelation and philosophy, science and mysticism; for the rebellious, a well-organized and widespread movement, supported by a rich and powerful ruler far away, and offering a seductive prospective of radical change. One of the important functions of the missionaries, where conditions were favorable, was what one might now call subversion.

In the nature of things, secret activities such as subversion, especially when successful, leave few traces for the historian to examine. There are, however, some scraps of information, from here and there, which throw light on the work of the Fāṭimid emissaries. Pieced together, and compared with other evidence, they suggest that the operations of the Mission were centrally directed and were part of a grand strategy, the ultimate aim of which was to destroy the Sunnī Caliphate and establish the Fāṭimid Imāmate in its place.

This grand strategy can be discerned over a vast area, in which the imperial purposes of the Fāṭimid state and the universal aims of the Ismā'īlī faith met and merged. Fāṭimid statesmen and soldiers harried the rulers and realms of the Sunnī world; Ismā'īlī authors and missionaries attacked the loyalty of their subjects. And at the same time, Cairo waged a form of what modern strategists call economic warfare, in which the Egyptian or Tunisian merchant, the Ismā'īlī missionary, and the Fāṭimid diplomat all had their different but associated parts.

The pattern of rivalry between the powers that dominated the eastern and the western or Mediterranean halves of the Middle East is an ancient one, which long antedated and survived the Fāṭimid-'Abbāsid confrontation. The western power might be called Egyptian, Hittite, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Fāṭimid, Mamlūk or Ottoman; the Eastern, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, 'Abbāsid, Seljuq, Mongol or Ṣafavid. The names, forms, characters, even locations of these rival powers varied greatly; so too did the circumstances and results of their rivalries. Yet through the variety, certain geographical constants may be discerned.

One of these is the competition between the two trade routes leading to the further east—the one from Egypt through the Red Sea, the other from Iraq and Iran through the Persian Gulf. To some extent these have been complementary, each serving a different area. But in times of great power conflict, they have often represented alternative opportunities, and inspired opposing ambitions. Rival powers in the Middle East have an obvious interest in controlling at least one and preferably both of these routes, and in blocking what they cannot control.

The Fāṭimid rulers of Cairo appear to have been well aware of the importance of these matters, and to have devised policies for dealing with them. As far as is known, there is no direct or explicit evidence on Fāṭimid eastern strategy. The evidence we have is indirect and inferential, but persuasive. One aspect is Fāṭimid activity in

the Red Sea, the domination of which was vital to their larger plans. Their aim, clearly, was to control both the African and the Arabian shores and the southern exit; in this they were, for a while, largely successful. On the African side, they developed the great seaport of 'Aydhāb, as a centre for the eastern trade and a rival to Baṣra and Ubulla. On the Arabian side, the Yemen was the country where the Fāṭimid cause had gained its first major success, and the area remained one of prime concern to them–the scene of considerable religious and political effort. Even today, the Yemen contains one of the only two surviving Ismā'īlī communities in the Arab world; the other is in Syria. The Fāṭimid interest in the Yemen, without ideological complications, was maintained by their Sunnī successors in Egypt, the Ayyūbids and the Mamlūks, no doubt for some of the same reasons.[8]

In the letters sent by the Caliph al-Mustanṣir to the Ismā'īlī ruler of the Yemen, the Caliph expresses his satisfaction with the work of the Mission in southern Arabia, and suggests its extension eastwards. 'Umān was a suitable area for attention–and in al-Aḥsā representatives of the cause were already at work.[9] The interest in this area was not new. It was here that the Carmathians had set up their famous republic, described by the pro-Fāṭimid travellers Ibn Ḥawqal and Nāṣir-i Khusraw.[10] In another passage, Ibn Ḥawqal tells how the Balūchī brigands of southern Iran, who terrorised the roads of 'all Kermān, the steppes of Sijistān, and the borders of Fārs,' had belonged to the Fāṭimid mission, as part of the mission-district *(djazīra)* of Khurāsān.[11] The Carmathians in Eastern Arabia harassed the land communications of Iraq with Arabia and Syria; the brigands and pirates of Kermān and the Balūchī coasts harassed both the land and sea routes from Iraq to India. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that, while protecting their own communications through the Red Sea, the Fāṭimids were trying to disrupt those of their rivals in the East.

Fāṭimid interest was not limited to the routes to India; it extended to India itself. Ismā'īlī missionaries, from an early date, were active at the two main points of entry into India, by land and sea, from the Middle East–by the North West frontier, and in the ports of the western seaboard. On the coast of Sind, and in the inland city of Multān, the Ismā'īlīs made great efforts and were even able to gain power at certain times. The traveller al-Muqaddasī, who visited Multān in 375/985-6, records that the bidding-prayer was recited in the name of the Fāṭimid Caliph, that they followed his orders in matters of faith and law, and that messengers and gifts went regularly to Egypt.[12] Small communities of Ismā'īlīs are still to be found in North Western Pakistan, in Afghanistan, in the Pamir, in eastern Iran – strung out along the trans-Asian highways. On the Gujerati coast, Fāṭimid commercial activities were accompanied by a vigorous religious propaganda, and the planting of what in time became the great Ismā'īlī community of India. It is perhaps significant that these Ismā'īlīs are still known as Bohra, a Gujerati word meaning merchant. Again, the inference is strong that the Fāṭimids were concerned both to strengthen their own position and to weaken and dominate that of their rivals.[13]

This does not of course mean that the Fāṭimid state engaged directly in commerce, or that the *da'wa* itself was a trading organization[14]–the connection between mission and trade, between ideological and economic penetration, is rarely quite so obvious. It is not unlikely, however, that the Fāṭimids were aware of that connection, and tried in various ways to make use of it. Two facts may be mentioned here–the prominence of North Africans among the eastern traders, and the role of qāḍīs as officially recognized representatives of the merchants.[15]

The high water mark of Fāṭimid expansion came in the years 446–451/1057–9, when a Turkish general in Iraq called Arslān al-Basāsīrī went over to the Fāṭimid side and proclaimed the Fāṭimid Caliph first in Mosul and then, for a year, in Baghdad itself. Despite the efforts of the Chief Missionary, however, the Fāṭimid government was unable to provide effective support, and the strongly Sunni Seljuqs drove al-Basāsīrī out of Baghdād. The Ghaznavid ruler in the East had already opted for Sunnism, to which he brought powerful reinforcement. The Ismā'īlīs of Multān were crushed–those of Persia and Iraq subjected to both repression and counter-propaganda.

The Fāṭimids failed to complete the 'Abbāsid pattern of advance–from the periphery to the centre, from revolt to empire. They followed, however, at an accelerated pace, on the 'Abbāsid road to ruin. The 'Abbāsid Caliphate, with all its troubles, lasted for half a millennium; the Fāṭimid Caliphate was terminated by Saladin after barely half that time.

What went wrong? In the present state of knowledge, it is not possible to offer more than

the most tentative of answers. The fall of empires, the failure of ideologies, are subjects of the greatest complexity, and the historian at his peril attempts to unravel the tangled web of interacting causes, symptoms and effects. Some phenomena–they should not be more closely defined than that–can however be enumerated, as having some bearing on the failure of the Fāṭimid bid for leadership and power.

One such phenomenon was the espousal and retention, by the Fāṭimid regime, of a religious system that was basically alien and ultimately unacceptable to Sunnī Muslims. The Ismā'īlī creed, as elaborated by the Fāṭimid theologians, represents a very high level of intellectual and spiritual achievement; it was however remote from what had become the main stream of Islamic belief and thought, and, with the Sunnī revival of the 11th and 12th centuries, its final rejection became certain. That rejection also involved the regime that was inextricably associated with it.

In their foreign adventures, the Fāṭimids scored many successes. In one crucial area, however, they suffered repeated and disastrous setbacks–in Syria. Here, on their doorstep, they encountered their greatest difficulties–difficulties which contributed in no small measure to their final failure. Despite the pro-Shi'ite and even pro-Ismā'īlī sympathies of sections of the population, the Fāṭimids were never able to establish themselves really firmly in Syria. Their troubles began with their arrival, when their forces advancing from Egypt to Syria had to cope with Bedouin assailants in Palestine, dissident Carmathian raiders from Arabia, the adventurer Alptekin in Damascus and the volatile Ḥamdānids in the North. In the pacification of Syria, their successes were temporary, their troubles recurring. Already fully stretched in dealing with local opponents, they had to face major threats from outside–the Byzantines, the Turks, and finally the Crusaders. It was in Syria that the great Fāṭimid drive to the East was delayed and halted; in Syria, too, that a new force emerged which finally destroyed them.

The Fāṭimids were unfortunate in that their rule in Egypt coincided with great changes in other parts of the world–on the one side the revival of Christian power, which manifested itself in the Byzantine offensives, the reconquest of much of Spain and Sicily, and the coming of the Crusaders to the East; on the other the migration of the steppe peoples, which brought the Turks to Iraq and then to Syria, and created a new power and a new order in South West Asia. In the looming contest between Islam and Christendom, there was no room for a schismatic division on the Muslim side. The Fāṭimids were in decline, their faith was on the wane. The Turks and their associates were the new great power in Islam, the Sunnī revival the new moral force. Between them, they gave to the Muslim peoples the strength to hold and repel the Crusaders from the West, and the endurance to survive the far more terrible invasion, still to come, of the Mongols from the East.

These misadventures abroad no doubt contributed to the growing troubles at home in Egypt. While factional strife led the government of the country into a vicious circle of disorder and tyranny, economic upheavals culminated in a series of disastrous famines, which, according to the chroniclers, reduced the people to eating cats and dogs. Finally, in 466/1073, an able soldier, Badr al-Djamālī, established an authoritarian regime which restored order and some measure of prosperity. He assumed the title of *Amīr al-Djuyūsh*, the Commander of armies.

The regime of Badr al-Djamālī and his successors in the same office saved the Fatimid state from collapse, and postponed the end of the dynasty for nearly a century. At first, the new order retained and indeed revived the universal claims and aims of the Fāṭimid Caliphate. In the inscriptions of Badr al-Djamālī, in addition to his military and political titles, he is styled guardian of the qāḍīs of the Muslims *(Kāfil quḍāt al-Muslimīn)* and guide of the *dā'is* of the Believers *(Hādī du'āt al-Mu'minīn)*, symbolising his control of the religious as well as the military and bureaucratic establishments. He is even credited with the authorship of an Ismā'īlī book.[16] Responding to the challenge of the Seljuq power in the East, he pursued an active policy in Syria, Arabia and elsewhere, using both religious and worldly weapons. The published *Sidjills* of al-Mustanṣir, most of which belong to this period, show how this policy was applied in the Yemen, which became a centre for Fāṭimid activities in Arabia and even in India.[17]

But the cause was lost. In Syria the Fāṭimid armies suffered repeated defeats; in Arabia, Fāṭimid influence was finally brought to an end. Badr's son and successor, al-Afḍal, in effect renounced the claims of the Fāṭimid Caliphate to the universal leadership of Islam. On the death of al-Mustanṣir in 487/1094, the *Amīr al-Djuyūsh* made a choice of successor which was rejected

by the Ismā'īlīs of the East, now infused with a new revolutionary fervour under the leadership of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ. After the death of al-Āmir in 525/1130, even those Ismā'īlīs, chiefly in the Yemen, who had remained faithful to the Cairo Caliphate refused to recognize his successor. The divergence between the state and revolution, which had begun to appear from early Fāṭimid times, was now complete. The ruler of Egypt, perhaps intentionally had alienated the militant Ismā'īlīs in the lands under Sunnī rule, and dissociated the interests and policies of the Egyptian state from their radical doctrines and terrorist actions. The Fāṭimids still had some time to reign, and much to accomplish; but the great adventure, with its opportunities, its excitements and its heavy price, was over.

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Notes

1 Ibn Khallikān, *Kitāb Wafayāt al-a'yān*, Būlāq 1275, ii, 326–7; cf. ibid., ii, 135; Abu'l-Maḥāsin ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-Nudjūm al-zāhira*, iv, Cairo 1352/1933, 77. Ibn Khallikān, who cites the story from the *K. al-Duwal al-munqaṭi'a*, rejects it as false on the ground that 'Abdallah ibn Ṭabāṭabā, the 'Alid who is supposed to have questioned al-Mu'izz, was already dead at the time when al-Mu'izz arrived in Egypt. For a discussion of the legend see P. H. Mamour, *Polemics on the origin of the Fatimi Caliphs*, London 1934, 180–3.

2 For an evaluation, see M. Canard, « L'Impérialisme des *Fāṭimides* et leur propagande », in *Annales de l'Institut d'Études Orientales* (Algiers), vi (1942–1947), 150–93. See further *EI*² (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition), s. v. "Ibn Hāni" (by F. Dachraoui).

3 Ibn Hani', *Diwān*, ed. Zāhid 'Alī, Cairo 1356, 408; cf. Canard, 185.

4 See *EI*², s. v. "Dawla" (by F. Rosenthal); B. Lewis, "The regnal titles of the first 'Abbāsid Caliphs", in *Dr. Zakir Husain Presentation Volume*, New Delhi 1968, 13–22; idem, "Some Islamic terms for Revolution" (in the press).

5 *Sirat al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din* . . ., ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn, Cairo 1949. On the Fāṭimid *da'wa* see further M. Canard, op. cit.; W. Ivanow, "The organization of the Fatimid propaganda", in *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, xv (1939), 1–35; A. E. Bertels, *Nasir-i Khosrov i Ismailizm*, Moscow 1959 (Persian translation, Tehran 1968); B. Lewis, *The Assassins*, London 1967; Ḥasan al-Bāshā, *Al-Funūn al-Islāmiyya* . . ., ii, Cairo 1966, 507–11; *EI*², s. vv. "Dā'ī" (by M. G. S. Hodgson) and "Da'wa" (by M. Canard), where further references are given.

6 On this literature, see W. Ivanow, *Ismaili literature, a bibliographical survey*, second edition, Tehran 1963. The major Ismā'īlī bibliography, known as *Fihrist al-Madjdū'*, was edited by Alinaqi Monzavi, Tehran 1960.

7 H. Hamdani, "Some unknown Ismā'īlī authors and their works", in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1933), 365. On the conflicts within Ismā'īlism, see further S. M. Stern, "Heterodox Ismailism at the time of al-Mu'izz", in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, xvii (1955), 10–33; W. Madelung, "Das Imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre", in *Der Islam*, xxvii (1961), 43–135.

8 On Fāṭimid activities in the Yemen, see Ḥusayn al-Hamdani, in association with Ḥasan Sulaymān Maḥmūd al-Djuhanī, *Al-Ṣulayḥiyyūn wa'l-ḥuraka al-Fāṭimiyya fi'l-Yaman* (268–625), Cairo n. d. (preface dated 1955).

9 *Al-Sidjillāt al-Mustanṣiriyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Mun'im Mādjid, Cairo 1954, 168, 176–9, 205. For evaluations of these documents see H. F. al-Hamdānī, "The letters of Al-Mustanṣir bi'llāh", in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, vii (1934), 307–24; idem, *Al-Ṣulayḥiyyūn; 'Abd al-Mun'im Mādjid, Al-Imām al-Mustanṣir bi'llah al-Fāṭimī*, Cairo 1961, especially 101 ff.

10 Ibn Ḥawqal, *Al-Masālik wa'l-mamālik*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, Leiden 1873, 21–2; new edition, *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, ed. J. H. Kramers, Leiden 1938, 25–7; French translation by J. H. Kramers and G. Wiet, *Configuration de la terre*, i, Paris 1964, 24–6. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Sefer Nameh (Safar-Nāma)*, edited with French translation by Ch. Schéfer, Paris 1881, text 82–85; translation 225–33; Kaviani edition, Berlin 1841, 123–7. On Carmathian and Ismā'ili activities in this area see further M. J. de Goeje, *Mémoire sur les Carmathes du Bahrain et les Fatimides*, 2nd edition, Leiden 1886; B. Lewis, *The origins of Ismā'īlism*, Cambridge 1940; W. Madelung, "Fatimiden und Baḥrainqarmaṭen", in *Der Islam*, xxxiv (1958), 34–88; Ḥusayn al-Hamdānī, *Al-Ṣulayḥiyyūn* . . ., 221 ff.

11 *Masālik*, 221; *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, ii, 310; French translation, ii, 304. There is a slight difference between the two versions. On Ismā'īlī use of the term *djazīra* see Lewis, *Assassins*, 48–9.

12 *Aḥsan al-taqāsim*, 2nd ed. by M. J. de Goeje, Leiden 1906, 485. On Fāṭimid activities in India see Asaf A. H. al-Hamdani, *The beginnings of the Ismā'īlī da'wa in northern India*, Cairo 1956, where further sources and studies are cited.

13 On Fatimid policies in East and West see B. Lewis' "The Fatimids and the route to India", in *Revue*

de la Faculté des Sciences Economiques de l'Université d'Istanbul, xi (1949–50), 50–4; ABBAS HAMDANI, "Some considerations on the Fāṭimid Caliphate as a Mediterranean power", in *Atti del III Congresso di Studi Arabi e Islamici (Ravello 1966)*, Naples 1967, 385–96. When the above was written I did not have access to the following works: Muḥammad Djamāl al-Dīn Surūr, *Siyāsat al-Fāṭimiyyīn al-khāridjiyya*, Cairo 1967; 'Abd al-Mun'im Mādjid, *Ẓuhūr khilāfat al-Fāṭimiyyīn wa-suqūṭuhā fi Miṣr*, Cairo 1968.

14 It may however be noted that in a *Sidjill* of al-Mustanṣir, dated Dhu'l-Qa'da 481/Feb. 1089, a *dā'ī* in 'Umān is accused of neglecting his duties and travelling in pursuit of business. الداعى فى النخل والركاض فى طلب التجارة (*Al-Sidjillāt al-Mustanṣiriyya*, 168). This would appear to mean that a reasonable but not excessive concern with commerce is permissible to a *dā'ī*.

15 For Geniza evidence on the trade with India see S. D. GOITEIN "From the Mediterranean to India; documents on the trade to India, South Arabia and East Africa from the eleventh and twelfth centuries", in *Speculum*, xxix (1954), 181–97; idem, "Letters and documents on the India trade in medieval times", in *Islamic Culture*, xxvii (1963), 188–205; idem, *A Mediterranean Society: the Jewish communities of the Arab world as portrayed in the documents of the Cairo Geniza*, i, *Economic foundations*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1967. On the predominance of North African merchants in the India trade, and the role of the qāḍīs see "Letters . . .", 199–200 and 202.

16 W. IVANOW, *Ismaili Literature . . .*, 49; Inscriptions in *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, vii, Cairo 1936, 210, 238, 248, 259 etc.; cf. MAX VAN BERCHEM, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum arabicarum*, i, Egypte, fasc. i, *Le Caire*, Paris 1894, 54 ff. On the significance of these titles see ḤASAN AL-BĀSHĀ, *Al-Funūn al-Islamiyya*, ii, 940–2.

17 See above, notes 9–10.