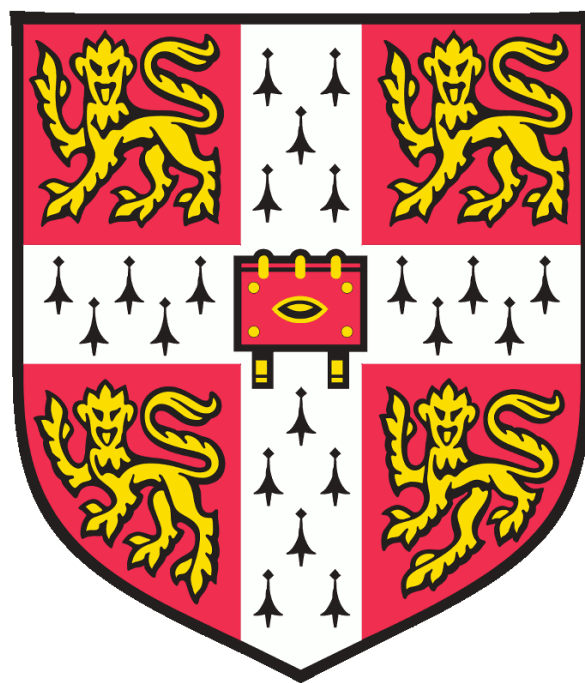


Traditions of Learning in Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya (296-362/909-973):
Networks, Practices, and Institutions



Aslisho Qurboniev

Wolfson College

Department of Middle Eastern Studies

University of Cambridge

This thesis is submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

September 2019

Preface

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Abstract

Traditions of Learning in Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya (296-362/909-973): Networks, Practices, and Institutions

Aslisho Qurboniev

2019

This thesis explores the practices, networks, and institutions of learning (*‘ilm*) in Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya with a focus on the practice of disputation (*munāẓara*) in its scholarly and courtly contexts — in the *majālīs* — and the relationship between the learned elite of Ifrīqiya and the ruling Fāṭimid dynasty. It proposes a rereading of the narrative sources produced by the scholarly community of Qayrawān by using network analyses as well as the memory studies framework. Ranging from chronicles and biographical dictionaries to works of polemics and hagiography, these sources are products of specific historical contexts and agendas. Thus, rather than treating them as repositories of objective facts, the thesis assesses them in dialogue with the context of their production and with other competing narratives.

Taking disputations (*munāẓarāt*) as a case study, two chapters of the thesis look at the culture of disputation and its proponents in Ifrīqiya, namely the scholarly community and the Fāṭimid caliphs and agents of their *da‘wa*, and the narratives of disputations within the context of the rise of the Fāṭimid empire and the geopolitical “game of thrones.” The disputations were chosen with a twofold aim: to draw attention to the shared culture of learning and knowledge production among diverse communities and the relationship between the state and the scholarly elite. As a whole the thesis argues for an increasing formalisation of educational practices and scholarly networks in the fourth/tenth century, which in turn reinforced sectarian boundaries, group identities and loyalties.

Proceeding chronologically, the thesis is developed in parallel with the rise of the Fāṭimid Empire from the land of the Kutāma to Egypt. However, the aim is not to discuss Fāṭimid institutions of learning exclusively, but to show how these institutions operated in the wider political, intellectual, and sectarian contexts. Focusing on both formal and informal institutions and networks this study highlights what has been called the “minimal consensus,” which enabled the Fāṭimids to extend their rule far beyond their small community of believers and the narrow peninsula of al-Mahdiyya. The central contention of the thesis is to draw attention to the shared culture of learning and the cohesion of the society in spite of the narrow perspective of the sources which tend to reflect the concerns of one group, or the other. In this respect, the thesis breaks away from the established tradition in Fāṭimid studies, which focuses on the narratives of the dynasty. It also challenges mainstream treatment of medieval traditions of learning, which has tended to marginalise the Fāṭimids.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the mentorship, encouragement, and moral support of my PhD supervisor Professor Amira Bennison to whom I shall remain indebted. I am grateful to her for encouraging me to focus on the early Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya and especially the great city of Kairouan. She guided me through every stage of the PhD, from the first time I met her in Cambridge to discuss my project to the day I had my viva examination and thereafter. I could not have hoped for a more diligent and caring supervisor. I am also grateful to my examiners, Professor Michael Brett and Dr Andrew Marsham, for examining my thesis and providing constructive feedback and criticism saving me from many embarrassing errors. All remaining shortcomings are my own.

I was also fortunate to have Professor James Montgomery and Professor Shady Hekmat Nasser as my teachers and first year examiners at the University of Cambridge. It was always a joyful experience to study classical Arabic texts with them and their feedback helped me to emerge from the first year of the programme with some confidence. I owe enormous gratitude to Professor Geoffrey Khan, Professor Khaled Fahmy, Dr Esther-Miriam Wagner for teaching me how to read medieval Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic documents. The guidance and support of my master's studies teachers at the Oriental Institute of the University of Oxford, Professor Nicolai Sinai, Professor Christopher Melchert, Dr Talal Al-Azem, and Dr Marie Legendre was indispensable for the start of my PhD. Likewise, I am grateful to my first Arabic teachers at Khorog State University in Tajikistan, Manizha Davlatmirova and Tahmina Marodasenova.

I also wish to thank my teachers at the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) in London, where I completed a two-year Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities. I particularly thank Professor Karim H. Karim, and Dr Farhad Daftary, the co-directors of the IIS at the time, Professor Benjamin Fortna, Professor Wilferd Madelung, Dr Delia Cortese, Dr Shainool Jiwa, Dr Laila Halani and Dr Toby Mayer who extended their support beyond my studies there. Russell Harris generously helped to improve my writing and offered advice on Arabic. I owe gratitude to Dr Gurdofarid Miskinzoda for her teaching and supervising my research during a one-year fellowship at the Shi'i Studies Unit (IIS) in 2014, which gave me time to prepare my PhD research proposal, and for her continuous support and encouragement during my doctoral studies.

This PhD project would not have materialised without the generous Doctoral Scholarship from the IIS, for which I thank the IIS's Board of Directors, especially Dr Aziz Esmail and Dr Farhad Daftary for awarding me the scholarship and for their continuous encouragement and support. Special thanks go to Dr Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, the scholarship coordinator and current Deputy Head of the

Department of Research and Academic Publications at the IIS for help at times of despair. Julia Kolb and Naushin Shariff have always been the first and the most reliable point of contact at the IIS and I thank them sincerely. Similarly, Lucy Cavan at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (FAMES) and Gillian Sanders at Wolfson College made my life easier in this bureaucratic world with supplying countless signatures and stamps. In addition, I thank Wolfson College and FAMES for awarding me travel grants and necessary funding for training and fieldwork.

Many senior and younger colleagues from around the world have set an inspiring example for collegial support and encouragement, to whom I am indebted. The list is extensive, and I will mention only those whose help was crucial during my doctoral studies. I thank Professor Paul Walker and Professor Sumaiya Hamdani for replying to hastily typed emails regarding Fāṭimid history from a student. Their guidance and encouragement were invaluable at the beginning of my research. Professor Maribel Fierro was another guiding light, who always replied to my emails and offered much needed encouragement. I benefitted greatly from the Majlis Conference which she organised with Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) at Casa Árabe in Cordoba in April 2018 and the intensive summer school “The Scholars of al-Andalus III” in the same city in July 2018. For a similar accommodation, I thank Dr Nourhane Ben Azzouna and Dr Rachida Smine for a summer school on Arabic manuscripts in Tunis and a research trip to Kairouan. Dr Philip Wood and Dr Johannes Preiser-Kapeller accommodated my last-minute request to attend a much-needed training on network analysis at the AKU-ISMC in London. Dr Annliese Nef offered invaluable suggestions and criticism on several aspects of my draft chapters and I remain indebted to her for her time as well as her inspiring scholarship on medieval Maghrib.

My thanks go to the kindest librarians Francois Simmons and Miki Jacobs at FAMES (who also trained me as cataloguer); Meg Westbury at Wolfson College Library; Yasmin Faghihi at Cambridge University Library, Rachida Smine at the National Library of Tunisia; Dr Walid Ghali, Dr Wafi Momin, Dr Nurmamadcho Nurmamadchoev, Khadija Lalani, Alex Leach and Shah Hussain at the AKU-ISMC Library in London, for facilitating access to their collections, providing images of manuscripts and their lenience with overdue books on numerous occasions.

My fellow comrades, Javier Albarran, Maroussia Bednarkiewicz, Estrella Samba Campos, Aurora Gonzart, Gennady Kurin, Paula Manstetten, Aman Merali, Aeron O'Connor, Ashfan Ramji and Asma Zubairi read and corrected my drafts or assisted me otherwise in my academic *riḥla*. I am grateful for their friendship. Dr Annabel Keeler read and commented on my writings beyond her call of duty as my college mentor. I always found consolation in her advice and encouragement during our meetings. Otherwise, in Cambridge, I enjoyed the friendship and support of many fellow students in

my field including Raeesah Akhtar, Parwana Fayyaz, Melissa Gatter, Rosie Maxton, Shiva Mihan, Naciem Nikkah, Mohammad Javad Shomali and Rodrigo García Velasco.

I have made many great friends in Cambridge, but it was the friendship of Julia Darmenova, Lyubov Mikhailovna and Dariya that got me through the toughest times of my PhD. I also owe gratitude to my non-medievalist friends in Cambridge, Hogai Aryoubi, Imran Khan, Adrian Laschinger, Ioannis Mastoris, Ian and Yvonne Pinchen, Sam van Noort, Peyman Yamin, Pascal Wichmann and Damir Zhandossov, for friendship and good times. In London I had supportive colleagues and friends like Alijon Alikhonov, Sultonbek Aksakolov, Rafiq Ajani, Gulrukhzor Aknazarova, Gulru Azatshoeva, Dagikhudo Dagiev, Zamira Dildorbekova, Hakim Elnazarov, Shayesteh Ghofrani, Nido Guljon, Gulazor Gulmamadova, Abdulmamad Iloliev, Rumiya Ismatova, Rayhon Jonbekova, Zarangez Karimova, Farah Manji, Otambek Mastibekov, Muzaffar Zoolshoev, who helped me in numerous ways. I thank them and all other friends within and beyond the confines of academia.

Ultimately, I was extremely lucky to have the support of my family throughout my many years of education despite many hardships. Losing both my grandfather Davlatmamad and my grandmother Nazarbegim during my graduate studies was the hardest. My siblings, Qurboni, Shams, Farrukh and Farangis, have been carrying my duties on their shoulders for many years now, while my parents, Sultanshah and Bibigul, endured my absence with stoic patience. I dedicate this thesis to them.

* * *

Table of Contents

Preface ii

Abstract..... iii

Acknowledgements iv

List of Abbreviations ix

List of Figures x

Note on Transliterations, Dates, and Figures..... x

Timeline xi

Introduction..... 1

Historical and Geographical Contexts..... 3

Chapter One. The Rise of the Fāṭimids in Ifrīqiya.....14

Intellectual Life in Qayrawān 24

The Fāṭimid Da‘wa and the Kutāma Awliyā’ 28

Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī and the Genesis of Fāṭimid Institutions 33

The Troubles of the Kutāma..... 38

“New Men” vs the Old “Allies” 42

Chapter Two. The Scholars of Qayrawān and the Formation of their Collective Memory and Identity in the Early Fāṭimid Period..... 49

Militant Asceticism and the Self-representation of the ‘Ulamā’.....56

Ribāṭ and Jihād in the Fāṭimid Period.....61

The Memory of Saḥnūn and the Formation of the Mālikī Community.....66

The Fāṭimid Challenge (or Opportunity?).....70

Transmission of Mālikī Knowledge in Qayrawān.....80

Chapter Three. The Culture of Disputation in Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya: Munāẓara Beyond “Doctrinal Struggle” 89

Munāẓara and the Traditionalists of Qayrawān.....93

The Scholarly Culture of Disputation in Qayrawān in the Late Aghlabid and Early Fāṭimid Period (c. 256-312/870-925)99

Examples of Disputations from Late Aghlabid to Early Fāṭimid Period 111

Fāṭimid-sponsored Disputations..... 119

Perspectives from Ibādī and Jewish Sources125

Chapter Four. Competing Narratives from Early Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya (296-335/909-947)	141
<i>The Authors of the Accounts and their Audiences.....</i>	<i>143</i>
<i>Ibn al-Ḥaddād's Munāẓarāt with the Fāṭimid dā'ī Abu'l-ʿAbbās</i>	<i>149</i>
<i>Munāẓara and the Politics of Writing a Biography.....</i>	<i>154</i>
<i>The Fāṭimid Daʿwa and the Prosopographical Tradition.....</i>	<i>159</i>
<i>The Fāṭimid Daʿwa and the Philosophical Tradition</i>	<i>164</i>
<i>The Writing of the Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt in Times of Turmoil</i>	<i>169</i>
Chapter Five. Imperial Expansion by Pen and Sword	178
<i>Zāhir and Bāṭin: The Dual Aspects of Religion and Fāṭimid Religious Policy.....</i>	<i>180</i>
<i>Religious Knowledge and Authority in al-Manṣūriyya.....</i>	<i>184</i>
<i>Disciplining the Awliyā'</i>	<i>189</i>
<i>The Ismāʿīlī Paradox.....</i>	<i>194</i>
<i>The Majālis of the Imam-Caliph al-Muʿizz.....</i>	<i>197</i>
<i>Defending Fāṭimid Authority and Legitimacy by Intellect: al-Ḥujja, al-Burhān, and</i> <i>Munāẓara in the Majālis.....</i>	<i>205</i>
<i>By Sword and by Knowledge.....</i>	<i>213</i>
Conclusion.....	225
Appendices.....	229
<i>Appendix 1. Bureaucratic Power: A View from Jawdhar's Archive</i>	<i>229</i>
<i>Appendix 2. Transmission of Mālikī Texts in Qayrawān. A Bird's Eye View.....</i>	<i>230</i>
<i>Appendix 3. Network Analysis. Transmission of Texts Over Four Periods</i>	<i>231</i>
<i>Appendix 4. The Evolution of the Fāṭimid Coinage</i>	<i>232</i>
Bibliography.....	234
Online Resources and Software	264

List of Abbreviations

<i>AJISS</i>	<i>American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences</i>
<i>BJMES</i>	<i>British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies</i>
<i>BSMESB</i>	<i>British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>El₂</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Brill Online</i>
<i>El₃</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition. Brill Online</i>
<i>IIS</i>	<i>Institute of Ismaili Studies</i>
<i>IJMES</i>	<i>International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies</i>
<i>ILS</i>	<i>Islamic Law and Society</i>
<i>JAH</i>	<i>Journal of African History</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of American Research Center in Egypt</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Classical Sociology</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JIS</i>	<i>Journal of Islamic Studies</i>
<i>JMIS</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JQS</i>	<i>Journal of Qur'anic Studies</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
<i>MEQ</i>	<i>Muslim Education Quarterly</i>
<i>MMA</i>	<i>Ma'had al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabiyya</i>
<i>REI</i>	<i>Revue des Études Islamiques</i>
<i>RMMM</i>	<i>Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée</i>
<i>RO</i>	<i>Rocznik Orientalistyczny</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
<i>SSR</i>	<i>Shii Studies Review</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

List of Figures

Figure 1. The Transmission of Mālikī texts in Qayrawān from the Aghlabid to Zīrid period..... 67

Figure 2. The Transmission of Saḥnūn's *Mudawwana* and *Mukhtaliṭa*..... 68

Figure 3. Transmission of Knowledge in Qayrawān (184 – 477/800 – 1085) 82

Figure 4. *Riḥla fi ṭalab al-‘ilm*. Andalusī ‘ulamā’ in Ifrīqiya. 86

Figure 5. The *ahl al-naẓar* in Qayrawān based on al-Khushanī’s *Ṭabaqāt ‘ulamā’ Ifrīqiya*.....102

Figure 6. The Network of Saʿīd b. al-Ḥaddād 106

Figure 7. Ibn al-Ḥaddād's Network.107

Figure 8. *Dīnār* of Imām-Caliph al-Muʿizz *li-dīni-llāh*. Miṣr, 969..... 215

Note on Transliterations, Dates, and Figures

I follow the *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition* system for Arabic transliteration, with some modifications such as compound names are written as two separate words: e.g. Abū ‘Abd Allāh. Both Islamic lunar calendar dates (Hijrī, AH) and Gregorian dates (Common Era, CE) are given, in the following format: 296/909. Medieval Arabic sources usually give the AH date, which I converted using the online converter on Islamcity.org rounding it up to the CE year that covers the larger part of the AH year in cases where it was not possible to determine the exact year. Some of the charts are difficult to reproduce and read in print, therefore I recommend the electronic version of the thesis where high resolution images will allow the reader to see the real colours, fonts and details that appear small in print.

Timeline

- 50/670 – foundation of Qayrawān by ‘Uqba b. Nāfi‘ on his first campaign
- 92/711 – beginning of the Muslim conquest of al-Andalus by Ṭāriq b. Ziyād
- 138/756 – establishment of Umayyad Emirate in Spain
- 183/800 – Aghlabid rule begins in Ifrīqiya
- 212/827– Aghlabid conquest of Sicily begins
- 238/853 – Abu ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī reaches the land of the Kutāma
- 239/854 –Saḥnūn b. Sa‘īd dies
- 258/870 – Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn dies
- 293/906 – (Dhu’l-ḥijja/ Sept.-Oct.) Ṭubna falls to Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī followed by Bilizma
- 294/907 – (Sha‘bān/May-June) – Baghāya is taken by Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī
-
- 296/909 – 23 Jumāda II/19 March – Urbus is taken
- 1 Rajab/25.03 al-Shī‘ī enters Raqqāda
 - Ramaḍān/6 June – al-Shī‘ī leaves for Sijilmāsa
 - 6 Dhu’l-ḥijja/26 August – arrives in Sijilmāsa with his troops
 - 7 Dhu’l-ḥijja/27 August – al-Mahdī proclaimed caliph in Sijimāsa
- 297/909 – Ṣafar/Oct Abu’l-‘Abbās orders the execution of Ibn Birdhawn and Hudhayl in Qayrawān
- 297/910 – 20 Rabī‘ II/4 January – al-Mahdī enters Raqqāda
- 298/911 – 15 Jumāda/18 February – execution of *dā‘ī* brothers
- 300/912 –‘Abd al-Raḥmān [III] al-Nāṣir (Umayyad)
- 315/927 – end of Ibn Ḥaḥṣūn’s rebellion in al-Andalus
- 319/931 – Aḥmad b. Ziyād al-Fārisī dies
- 322/934 – al-Qā‘im’s rule begins
- 331/943 –Abū Yazīd al-Nukkārī rises against the Fāṭimids
- 333/945 – a number of Qayrawānī scholars are killed in battle with the Fāṭimid army
- 334/946 – Ibn al-Haytham writes the *Munāẓarāt* around this time
- 335/947 – End of Abū Yazīd’s rebellion– al-Manṣūr’s reign begins
- 336/947 – al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān is appointed judge of Tripoli
- 336/948 – al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-Kalbī is made the governor of Sicily
- 337/948 – al-Manṣūr moves to Sabra al-Manṣūriyya
- 337/948 – al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān is appointed as the supreme judge of the Fāṭimids
- 342/953 – al-Mu‘izz’s caliphate begins
- 358/960 – Jawhar al-Siqillī captures Fez in the Far West
- 358/968 – Abū Khazar and Abū Nūḥ’s unsuccessful rebellion against the Fāṭimids
- 358/969 – Jawhar takes Egypt and founds Cairo
- 369/973 – al-Ustādh Jawdhar dies on the way to Cairo
- 369/973 – Ibn Hāni’ al-Andalusī mysteriously dies on the way to Cairo
- 362/973 – al-Mu‘izz arrives in Cairo
-
- 363/974 – al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān dies in Cairo
- 365/975 – al-Mu‘izz dies in Cairo
- 375/385 – Buluggīn b. Zīrī dies in Ifrīqiya. Zīrids become independent.
- 399/1009 – End of Umayyads of Spain
- 406/1016 – Massacre of the Ismā‘īlīs in Ifrīqiya
- 449/1058 – Banū Hilāl invade Ifrīqiya

Introduction

This thesis is about traditions of learning and knowledge transmission in early Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya (296-363/909-973). It re-examines the consolidation of Mālikī scholars of Ifrīqiya during this period by analysing their scholarly and intellectual networks and the transmission of texts. Through a combination of network analysis and insights from memory studies this study shows how the learned people of Qayrawān constructed their past in response to their immediate concerns. Likewise, the Fāṭimids' institutions of learning will be analysed in the context of the challenge from the *‘ulamā’*. However, unlike previous studies, this thesis attempts to go beyond the narratives that stress struggle and antagonism and the polemics of later times projected onto the early Fāṭimid period. Thus, the contribution of the thesis is not limited to Fāṭimid historiography, but also to our understanding of the formation of Muslim scholarly communities in general and the culture of *munāẓara* or disputation in particular.

The organisation of the thesis is chronological progressing from the Fāṭimid revolution in Ifrīqiya to their departure for Egypt. The outline of the thesis below will be followed by a brief historical background of the rise of the Fāṭimid Empire in Ifrīqiya in the late third/ninth century and a general overview of the early Fāṭimid period. This section surveys the important political events and major continuities and changes during the Fāṭimid period. It thus sets the chronological and geographical scope of the thesis and introduces its main subjects: the caliphs, the rulers, the scholars, and the Kutāma Berbers, who were the principal force behind the revolution, although less often given credit.

Chapter One begins with a short historiographical survey and a discussion of the sources used in this study. It then proceeds to introduce the intellectual life in tenth-century Ifrīqiya, with a focus on its capital Qayrawān. Then it deals with the subject of the Fāṭimid *da‘wa*, the beginning of Fāṭimid Mahdistic movement in Ifrīqiya and the formation of the nascent community of believers, who are called the *awliyā’* or “Allies.”

Chapter Two analyses the activities and the networks of the scholars of Qayrawān in the early Fāṭimid period and how their collective memory and identity was shaped through the transmission of authoritative texts and the compilation of biographical dictionaries. This

chapter also examines the main biographical dictionaries for the scholars of this period in order to re-evaluate the relationship between the *‘ulamā*’ and the Fāṭimid state and the extent to which the rule of this Shī‘ī dynasty affected the transmission of Mālikī legal knowledge in this period. The chapter discusses the ideological strife between the Fāṭimids and the *fuqahā*’ through Fāṭimid polemical sources. The intellectual networks and textual production of Mālikī scholars discussed in this chapter provide a context for Fāṭimid polemics against the *fuqahā*’, but also illustrate the continuity of knowledge transmission from the Aghlabid to the Fāṭimid period.

Chapter Three explores the culture of disputation (*munāẓāra*) in Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya and makes a case for disputation as a venue for engagement and negotiation, as opposed to its reconstruction in polemical narratives. While the narratives of disputations analysed in Chapter Four show how they were used as a vehicle for community building, conducive to the formation of defensive identities, the practice of disputation itself, as illustrated in this chapter, demonstrate its significance as a tool of legitimation for the rulers. These disputations not only legitimised the political order, but also the identities of the social actors. On the other hand, the chapter shows how disputation was common as a method of learning and a scholarly practice, despite the reservations of traditionalist scholars. Finally, in this chapter I argue that the Fāṭimids had an “open attitude” towards disputations and actively encouraged debates, although only fully authorised Fāṭimid *dā’īs* could engage in inter-religious disputations. Taken together, Chapter Two and Three help to integrate the Fāṭimids into the larger cultural and political context of the medieval Mediterranean and the wider Islamic world, by focusing on the continuity of learning traditions from the late Aghlabid and early Fāṭimid period in Ifrīqiya.

Chapter Four, briefly revisits the Fāṭimid revolution and the events that involved religious scholars and Fāṭimid *dā’īs*. It analyses the disputations that took place in this period and offer a fresh interpretation of the *munāẓarāt* between the *dā’īs* and the scholars of Qayrawān. The focus of the chapter is, however, on the way these disputations were written down and transmitted during the Fāṭimid period as part of the biographical and hagiographical tradition in Fāṭimid as well as Mālikī sources as a vehicle for community building and identity formation. More broadly, these cases illustrate how historiography was

shaped by the dynastic “game of thrones” and “geopolitics” as well as religious polemics and clashing epistemological viewpoints. It also complements Chapter Two and Three by demonstrating how the account of *munāẓarāt* are purposeful reconstructions of the past and how they may relate to the actual events.

Chapter Five discusses the consolidation of Fāṭimid traditions of learning in al-Manṣūriyya, when the dynasty reached the peak of its strength and confidence and set eye on conquering a large part of the Islamic world. These circumstances, as argued in this chapter, reshaped the Fāṭimid caliphate’s relationship with the non-Ismā‘īlī population. The chapter shows how the Fāṭimid esoteric interpretation of the religion corresponded to reality, the way it was used and reinterpreted to fit their universalist and expansionist imperial project and how their educational efforts were directed to reach these aims.

Historical and Geographical Contexts

During the third/ninth century Ifrīqiya was ruled by the Aghlabid dynasty (c. 280-296/893-909) on behalf of the ‘Abbāsid caliphs of Baghdād until it was overthrown by Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī (d. 298/911), a Shī‘ī *dā‘ī* (the one who summons, from *da‘wa* – cause, mission)¹ from the East, who mobilised an army of Kutāma Berber tribesmen of Kabylia (north-eastern Algeria), after preaching among them for about sixteen years.² He rallied the Kutāma in the name of a

¹ From the root *d-‘w* (دعو) – to call, to invite; hence, summoning to the true faith, i.e. joining the Fāṭimid cause. In the context of this study, *da‘wa* refers to the Fāṭimid movement in both religious and political senses. The *da‘wa* was administered hierarchically and culminated in the person of the imam-caliph. The agents of the *da‘wa* were called *dā‘īs*. For an accessible introduction, see Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 56-70. See also, Marius Canard, “Da‘wa,” *EI2*; Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

² Abū ‘Abd Allāh was initiated into the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa* in his native Kūfa by the chief Ismā‘īlī *dā‘ī* of Irāq Ḥamdān Qarmāṭ (d. after 286/999). Then he joined the Yemenī mission under the head *dā‘ī* Ibn Ḥawshab, known as Mansūr al-Yaman (d. 302/915), before joining a group of Kutāma Berber pilgrims heading to North Africa, in what appears to have been a spontaneous adventure, arriving there in Rabī‘ I 280/June 893. It is more likely, however, that his trip had, in fact, been carefully planned and the ground had already been prepared. Judging by the immediate gains in the Maghrib, one can readily accept that Abū ‘Abd Allāh owed his success to the activities of at least two preceding Ismā‘īlī *dā‘īs* among the Kutāma Berbers in the Lesser Kabylia region (modern Algeria). See, Paul E. Walker, “Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī,” *EI3*. Since Ḥamdān’s movement was the first organised Ismā‘īlī movement, the label Qarmāṭī was used both for his followers and for other Ismā‘īlīs, despite the fact that he split his movement from the nascent Fāṭimid organisation in 285/899. On him, see, W. Madelung, “Ḥamdān Karmāṭ,” *EI2*. Further, for the circumstances of Abū ‘Abd Allāh’s departure to Maghrib, see, Shainool Jiwa, “The Initial Destination of the Fatimid Caliphate: The Yemen or the Maghrib?”, *Bulletin (BSMES)* 13, 1 (1986): 15–26. See, Abū Ḥanīfa al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ al-da‘wa*; tr. Hamid Haji, *Founding the*

messianic figure, ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī, who was rescued from imprisonment in Sijilmāsa (southern Morocco) and installed as the first Fāṭimid imam-caliph. The successful mission of Abū ‘Abd Allāh culminated in proclaiming the caliphate of al-Mahdī in Ifrīqiya soon after the defeat of the Aghlabids. The Fāṭimid caliphate existed for over 260 years until 566/1171 after moving its capital to Egypt in 358/973, but the scope of the present study is limited to the Ifrīqiyan period (296-363/909-973).³

The Fāṭimid imam-caliphs traced their lineage to the Prophet Muḥammad through his daughter Fāṭima, and his cousin and son-in-law ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (40/661), who is recognised as the fourth “rightly-guided” caliph by all Muslims. For his supporters, however, who became known as “the party of ‘Alī” (*shī‘at ‘Alī*), or simply Shī‘a, ‘Alī was the only

Fatimid State: The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 42–44, 108–109. According to al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, these two *dā‘īs*, namely Abū Sufyān and al-Ḥulwānī, arrived 135 years before Abū Abd Allāh, yet he managed to meet their direct disciples and al-Ḥulwānī’s widow (see, the account of meeting two students of al-Ḥulwānī in Mecca, in his *Iftitāḥ al-da‘wa*, 48). As Paul Walker rightly objects, this cannot be correct. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, while aware of the long gap, nevertheless wanted to link the origin of the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa* in the Maghrib to Ja‘far al-Šādiq – the pre-eminent Shī‘ī imam who died about 150 years ago. See, Paul E. Walker and Wilferd Madelung, *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shii Witness: an edition and English translation of Ibn al-Haytham’s Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 26, note 52.

³ Sources and book-length studies that cover the early period include the following: al-Yamānī, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad, *Sīrat Ja‘far al-Ḥājib*, edited by Wladimir Ivanow, *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts*, University of Egypt, 4 (1936): 107–33; Eng. tr. Wladimir Ivanow, *Ismā‘īlī Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 184–223; Farhat Dachraoui, *Le califat fatimide au Maghreb (295-365 H./909-975 J.C.): Histoire politique et institutions* (Tunis: Société Tunisienne de Distribution, 1981); The detailed narrative history by Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids*, tr. M. Bonner (Leiden; New York: E.J.Brill, 1996); al-Naysābūrī, *Kitāb istitār al-imām*, ed. V. Ivanow, *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Egyptian University*, vol 4 (1936; published 1939): 89–133; tr. V. Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, 157–183; al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ al-da‘wa*; tr. Hamid Haji, *Founding the Fatimid State: The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Ja‘far b. al-Aswad Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, ed. and tr. Paul E. Walker and Wilferd Madelung, *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shii Witness: an edition and English translation of Ibn al-Haytham’s Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Abū ‘Alī Maṣṣūr al-‘Azīzī al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*, ed. and tr. H. Haji, *Inside the Immaculate Portal: A History from the Fatimid Archives* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012); Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids: The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Fourth Century of the Hijra, Tenth Century Ce* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 2001); idem, the most up to date history of the dynasty as a “single story” from beginning to the end, *The Fatimid Empire* (Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 2017); Daftary and Jiwa (eds.), *The Fatimid Caliphate: Diversity of Traditions* (London: I.B Tauris, 2018). In addition, the following two monographs on the history of the dynasties preceding and following the Fāṭimids in Ifrīqiya are indispensable: Mohamed Talbi, *L’Émirat Aghlabide, 184-296, 800-909, Histoire Politique* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1966); Hady Roger Idris, *La Berbérie orientale sous les Zirides* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1962); as well as the recent rich volume on the Aghlabid dynasty edited by G. Anderson, C. Fenwick, and M. Rosser-Owen (eds.), *The Aghlabids and Their Neighbors: Art and Material Culture in Ninth-Century North Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

legitimate successor to the Prophet. Abū ‘Abd Allāh, the leader of the Fāṭimid revolution, was simply known as al-Shī‘ī (“the Shī‘ī”). They were later called Ismā‘īlīs — a label that is adopted by the community today — because they supported the imams from the lineage of Ismā‘īl, the oldest son of the sixth Shī‘ī imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (148/765). The supporters of this particular line of succession were among the most unswerving challengers of ‘Abbāsīd rule and mounted several unsuccessful uprisings in Irāq and Syria. Fleeing from the persecution of the Abbāsids, ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī travelled from Salamiyya (Syria) to Egypt disguised as a merchant, but soon Egypt too became dangerous. Avoiding persecution in the Aghlabid territories, he made a long journey through the southern desert route to Sijilmāsa in southern Morocco from where he continued corresponding with Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī who was patiently waiting for his victory from 292/905 to 296/909. Eventually he was imprisoned by the local ruler of the Midrārid family but was soon rescued by Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī after he secured victory over the Aghlabids. This remarkably detailed tale of al-Mahdī’s persecution, imprisonment, and enthronement, romantic as it is, was told by an eyewitness, al-Mahdī’s loyal servant Ja‘far as preserved in his *Sīrat Ja‘far al-Ḥājib*.⁴

The geographical term Ifrīqiya (Latin: *Africa*) was varyingly applied to the territory roughly corresponding to modern Tunisia, western Libya (including Ṭarābulus) and eastern Algeria (as far as Ṭubna and Bijāya).⁵ Medieval writers understandably differed in how they defined Ifrīqiya, because of shifting administrative and political boundaries. To overcome the “confusion” of medieval authors, modern scholars have sometimes opted for an anachronistic adoption of “late antique Roman categories,”⁶ which runs the risk of reification of geographical boundaries. The adoption of modern terms such as “North Africa” — a French colonial construction — is equally problematic.⁷ Indeed, a “vague conception” of Ifrīqiya, or the Maghrib, may serve better to reflect the medieval realities and perception of borders at the time. Thus, in order to stay closer to the primary sources and to avoid anachronisms this thesis adopts medieval Arabic categories. However, the scope of this thesis is mostly limited to the

⁴ Al-Yamānī, *Sīrat Ja‘far al-Ḥājib*; Eng. tr. W. Ivanow, *Isma‘ili Tradition*, 184-223. See also, Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi*, 91-95.

⁵ For a survey of the etymology and the use of the term in Arabic geographical works, see, Talbi, “Ifrīqiya,” *EI*2.

⁶ Ramzi Rouighi, *The Making of a Mediterranean Emirate* (Philadelphia, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 1-5.

⁷ See Rouighi’s criticism, *The Making of a Mediterranean Emirate*, 1-4.

capital cities — the intellectual and political hubs of Ifrīqiya during the late Aghlabid and early Fāṭimid periods, namely Qayrawān, al-Mahdiyya and al-Manṣūriyya. Like the *dāʿīs*, many learned ascetic men travelled and taught in rural areas among the Berbers or took residence in the frontier outposts (*ribāṭ*), or smaller provincial towns, but their intellectual networks inevitably connected them to the main centres of learning in the Maghrib, and first and foremost to Qayrawān.⁸

Famously founded as an Arab military encampment in the year 50/670, Qayrawān had grown into a large city of about 50,000 inhabitants by the late Aghlabid period (296/909),⁹ whereas al-Mahdiyya was built as a fortified Fāṭimid city, initially as a governmental quarter for the Fāṭimid caliph, his close followers and the caliphal guard. Besides the need for a defensible capital, the existence of the ancient Phoenician harbour made the narrow peninsula on the Mediterranean sea an ideal location for al-Mahdī.¹⁰ Al-Manṣūriyya, the second Fāṭimid capital was founded in 335/946 by al-Manṣūr after he defeated the rebellion of Abū Yazīd¹¹ and served as caliphal residence also housing the Kutāma army thereafter.¹² Naturally, these cities were the centres of the intellectual activities endorsed and sponsored by the state. The caliphs likewise invited talented people like al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān¹³ (d. 363/974) to the capital where they were tasked with furthering the Fāṭimid *daʿwa*. While the newly

⁸ For a general historical survey, see, Talbi, "Qayrawān," *EI2*. Recent studies on intellectual and material history of Qayrawān include the following volumes edited by Tunisian scholar Najmeddine Hentati (ed.), *Dirāsāt fī tārikh al-Qayrawān* (Tunis: al-Maṭbaʿāt al-Rasmiyya li'l-Jumhūriyyat al-Tūnisiyya, 2009); idem (ed.), *Ishāmāt al-Qayrawān al-ʿilmiyya wa'l-taqniyya* (Tunis, al-Maṭbaʿāt al-Rasmiyya li'l-Jumhūriyyat al-Tūnisiyya, 2011); idem (ed.), *Dirāsāt ḥadāriyya ḥawla al-Qayrawān*, 2nd ed. (Tunis: al-Maṭbaʿāt al-Rasmiyya li'l-Jumhūriyyat al-Tūnisiyya, 2015).

⁹ Various estimates range from 36,000 to 80,000 inhabitants. See, Abdullah Ali al-Zaidan, "The People of Qayrawan: The Demographic and Social Composition of the Population of a Maghribi City during the First 250 Years of Its Existence, on the Basis of Medieval Arabic Chronicles and Inscriptions" (PhD Thesis, University of Leeds, 1978), 90ff.

¹⁰ See, Talbi, "al-Mahdiyya," *EI2*; Halm, *Empire*, pp. 214-21.

¹¹ Abū Yazīd Makhlad b. Kaydād al-Nukkārī, an Ibādī leader, led the largest uprising (331-335/943-947) against the Fāṭimid rule during the reign of al-Qāʾim and briefly managed to gain the support of the Qayrawānī elite, some of whom personally took part in the battle against the Fāṭimid troops. On him see, Samuel M. Stern, "Abū Yazīd Makhlad b. Kaydād al-Nukkārī," *EI2*.

¹² Talbi, "Ṣabra or al-Manṣūriyya," *EI2*; Halm, *Empire*, 342-46.

¹³ Al-Qāḍī Abū Ḥanīfa l-Nuʿmān b. Muḥammad b. Manṣūr b. Aḥmad b. Ḥayyūn al-Tamīmī joined the Fāṭimid *daʿwa* from the very beginning, having been born in a Shīʿī family. He joined al-Mahdī's service around 311/923. See Ismail K. Poonawala, "The Chronology of al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān's Works," *Arabica* 65 (2018), 95.

founded Fāṭimid cities attracted many, Qayrawān retained its position as a centre of learning throughout the period, where, for instance, the famous physician and historian Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Jazzār (d. 369/979),¹⁴ and the Fāṭimid *dā‘ī* Ibn al-Haytham¹⁵ (d. after 342/953) continued to live.

Three centuries on from the Arab-Islamic conquest the population of the Maghrib was by and large comprised of various Berber tribes, who spoke Berber languages.¹⁶ Arabs and other ethnic groups from the Muslim East were settled in towns, where they imported the varieties of interpretations of Islam prevalent in their place of origin. At the end of the 3rd/9th century, most of the Berbers were living in the rural and mountainous areas and adhered to various Khārījī doctrines. The religious and intellectual life of the urban settlements was a major vehicle for the “Arabisation” of the native population in contrast to the limited penetration of Arabic language into the rural areas.¹⁷ While the town-dwelling Latin-speaking Christianised Berbers (*afāriqa*)¹⁸ seem to have gradually lost their language, the vast majority of Berbers, despite accepting Islam, largely remained Berber-speaking.¹⁹ As for their “Islamisation,” the Berbers’ “nominal acceptance” of Islam during the first centuries of the Arab conquest has typically been interpreted as mere “submission” to the Arab rule,²⁰ as the initial meaning of the Arabic term for “adopting Islam” (*aslama; islām*, lit. submission)

¹⁴ H.R. Idris, “Ibn al-Djazzār,” *EI2*.

¹⁵ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ja‘far b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Aswad b. al-Haytham, one of the earliest learned members of the *da‘wa* and the author of the important early source, the *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*.

¹⁶ For the existence of “different varieties of the Berber [language]” in medieval period, see Mohamed Meouak, *La langue berbère au Maghreb médiéval: textes, contextes, analyses* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 405. It is worth noting that although modern Berber languages are not always mutually understandable, “they are all recognisably Berber.” See, M. Brett and E. Fentress, *The Berbers* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 4.

¹⁷ For instance, 14,000 Kutāma families settled in Manṣūriyya, according to Idrīs Imād al-Dīn, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, partial ed. Muḥammad al-Ya‘lāwī as *Tārīkh al-Khulafā’ al-Fāṭimiyyīn bi’l-Maghrib: al-Qism al-khāṣṣ min Kitāb Uyūn al-akhbār* (Beirut, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1985), 5, 315, as cited in Halm, *Empire*, 355.

¹⁸ It is not clear whether the term “*afāriq/afāriqa*” (sing. *ifrīqī*) was used to refer to the Christianized and Romanized population of Ifrīqiya alone, or to the descendants of Roman settlers as well. On this, see, F. Dachraoui, *Khilāfat al-Fāṭimiyya bi’l-Maghrib*, tr. Hammādī al-Sāhili (Tunis: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1994), 39.

¹⁹ Roger le Tourneau, “North Africa to the Sixteenth Century,” in P. M Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam*, v. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 214–15. See also, Halm, *Empire*, 99.

²⁰ Brett, “Arab Conquest and Rise of Islam in North Africa,” in J. D Fage (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 512; Eduardo M. Manzano, “The Iberian Peninsula and North Africa,” in Chase Robinson (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of Islam Volume 1: The Formation of the Islamic World Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 590.

indicates. As Brett observes, “Islam for the Berber of the 8th century was fundamentally the question of membership and non-membership of the ruling community of the faithful [...] rather than organising the life of the community” around the tenets of Islam.²¹ However, by the end of the 3rd/9th century the Berbers had already embraced the empowering spirit of “[the Islam] of the conquest”,²² above all egalitarian Khārijism and Messianic beliefs, of which the latter played a key role in the Fāṭimid and Almohad revolutions.²³ However, it should be emphasised that all phases and aspects of Islamisation (and Arabisation) with all their complexities cannot be reduced into one or two labels. As recent studies have shown, it was a much longer process which was brought about in stages that included multiple social and political factors, beginning with the early conquests, and continuing with fiscal and land reforms and demographic and linguistic shifts until the 12th century CE.²⁴ Finally, local appropriation of Arab-Islamic cultural norms, as well as Islamic ideals, whether legalistic, pietistic, puritan, millenarian and mystical varied vastly across the Maghrib and al-Andalus, especially in the rural areas, in order for them to qualify sufficiently “Islamic” to an observer.

During this *da‘wa* – movement period Abū ‘Abd Allāh consolidated his position among the Kutāma and prepared the ground for overthrowing the Aghlabids. His activities among the Kutāma, such as designing teaching sessions (*majālis*), preparing the *dā‘īs* and organising the tribesmen provided a blueprint for the organisation of Ismā‘īlī learning under the future Fāṭimid state. Importantly, Abū ‘Abd Allāh’s campaign weakened the Aghlabids’ control over the Qayrawānī elite forcing the rulers to concede more power to the *fuqahā’* (jurists). Thus, the possibility of a Shī‘ī ruling dynasty was looming on the horizon for over a

²¹ Brett, “The Islamisation of Morocco from the Arabs to the Almoravids,” *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, (Aldershot: Routledge, 1999), 59, 61. See also, Halm, *Empire*, 98.

²² Brett, “The Islamisation,” 67.

²³ For the *mahdism* of the Almohads, see Amira K. Bennison, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 66–68. Vincent Cornell, however, questions Ibn Khaldūn’s assertion that “the motive force” of the Almohad movement was only the Maṣmūda ‘*aṣabiyya*. The “origins [of the heads of the Almohad da‘wa] clearly indicate that the movement, while indeed drawing to a great extent on the support of High Atlas Masmuda Berbers, was not based solely on tribal ties, but was intended to project a more widespread appeal.” Cornell, “Understanding Is the Mother of Ability: Responsibility and Action in the Doctrine of Ibn Tūmart,” *SI* 66 (1987): 71–103, 88.

²⁴ See Cyrille Aillet, “Islamisation et arabisation dans le monde musulman médiéval: une introduction au cas de l’Occident musulman (viie-xiie siècle),” and the rest of the articles in Dominique Valerian (ed.), *Islamisation et arabisation de l’Occident musulman médiéval (viie-xiie siècle)*. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2011. (Online edition).

decade, which explains the initial preparedness of the Qayrawānī civilian elite to cooperate with the new authorities.²⁵

The Fāṭimid caliphate was established on Friday 21 Rabīʿ II 297/7 January 910 with the proclamation of the caliphate of ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī bi-llāh (r. 297-323/910-934) in Raqqāda, al-ʿAbbāsiyya²⁶ and Qayrawān.²⁷ The Qayrawānī jurists (*fuqahāʾ*), the informal representative of the urban population, rejected rallying behind the remaining members of the Aghlabid house after the last ruler Ziyādat Allāh fled Ifrīqiya and reluctantly went out to greet the new ruler. A Shīʿī caliphate began to function fully in Ifrīqiya: Shīʿī judges were appointed in all cities; rituals not conforming to Shīʿī tradition were banned in the mosques and dissemination of religious knowledge was allegedly taken under control. These measures angered the Madīnan (Mālikī) *fuqahāʾ*, a group that followed the *madhhab* (school of law) of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796), which was, in turn, based on the “established practice of the people of Madīna” (*ʿamal ahl al-Madīna*).²⁸ They lost their influence and social power, but gained a unifying cause in the form of resistance to Fāṭimid pressure, which secured their internal cohesion and group identity. The ʿIrāqīs (Ḥanafīs),²⁹ who had lost the patronage of the Aghlabids, found it easier

²⁵ Al-Nuʿmān goes even further and claims that the Aghlabid ruler Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad and one of the Aghlabid clans (al-Sālimiyyūn) favoured Shīʿism. See, *Iftitāḥ*, 64. Furthermore, he relates Ibrāhīm’s departure to Sicily in 290/902-3 to the rise of the Fāṭimid movement in the Maghrib.

²⁶ Al-ʿAbbāsiyya, the old Aghlabid palace city named in honour of the ʿAbbāsids of Baghdād, commonly referred to as al-Qaṣr al-Qadīm (the Old Palace) or Qaṣr al-Aghālība (the Aghlabid Palace). The existence of several gates, baths, a market and inns suggests that it had a considerable population. Among several scholars, the famous historian of Qayrawān Abūʾl-ʿArab al-Tamīmī (d. 333/945) was also born there. See, H. H. Abdul-Wahab, “al-Abbāsiyya,” *El*2.

²⁷ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Iftitāḥ*, 208.

²⁸ Yasin Dutton, *The Origins of Islamic Law: The Qurʾan, the Muwaṭṭaʾ and Madīnan ʿAmal* (Richmond, Surrey, 1999), 33.

²⁹ The Mālikīs were known as the Madīnan (*al-Madaniyyūn*, *ahl al-Madīna*) after the home city of the school’s eponymous founder, Mālik b. Anas. Likewise, the Ḥanafīs were called the ʿIrāqīs (*al-ʿIrāqiyyūn* or *ahl al-ʿIrāq*) because of the ʿIrāqī origin of their eponymous founder Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767).

to ally themselves with the new rulers while many formally converted.³⁰ A few who openly defied the rulers were harshly punished.³¹

The harshness of the early days of the caliphate had an enduring effect on the Qayrawānīs. The early fragile state did not tolerate dissent. Even the leaders of the revolution were not spared: the *dā'i* brothers Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'i and Abu'l-'Abbās (d. 298/911) and their close associates were suspected of preparing a coup and were executed after one year.³² These violent beginnings shocked the remaining relatives of the departed Aghlabid ruler, who revolted and occupied the Old Palace killing a number of Kutāma tribesmen.³³ This led to the persecution and imprisonment of the last members of the Aghlabid family, who would remain imprisoned until the time of al-Manṣūr bi-llāh (r. 334-341/947-953).³⁴ Another uprising in which 700 Kutāma men were reportedly killed was blamed on the *fuqahā'* of Qayrawān, though, apparently, there was no evidence to prove their involvement.³⁵ Although al-Mahdī refrained from punishing specific people at first, the ill-feeling generated led to the execution of some scholars later on. The *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt 'ulamā' Ifrīqiya* of al-Khushanī and the *Kitāb al-Miḥan* of Abu'l-'Arab al-Tamīmī document several cases of local learned men who were punished for allegedly protesting against Fāṭimid religious policies, although Abu'l-'Arab's list is surprisingly short, listing only eight people imprisoned or beaten at the order of the first two

³⁰ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Tamīmī Abu'l-'Arab and Muḥammad b. Ḥārith al-Khushanī, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt 'Ulamā' Ifrīqiya*, ed. Mohammed Ben Cheneb, *Classes des Savants de l'Ifrīqiya*, vols. 51-52 (Paris: E. Leroux, 1915)(Subsequent notes for both authors will refer to this edition). See the section on the scholars who accepted the Fāṭimid authority (The authors of the *ṭabaqāt* use the verb *tasharraqa* i.e. "Easternised" in the sense of "they accepted the doctrine of the Easterners" for those who apparently converted.)

³¹ The most notable example is the beheading and crucifixion of two jurists Ibn Birdhawn and Abū Hudhayl in the year of the revolution (297/909), on which more will be said later. The incident is reported by the contemporary Andalusian chronicler 'Arīb b. Sa'd as copied in Ibn 'Idhārī, al-Marrākushī, Abū'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, *Kitāb al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa'l-Maghrib*, ed. R. Dozy (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1948), 1:152-53; al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 215-16; *Munāẓarāt*, 165-6 (Arabic text, 118).

³² Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāh*, 221. Al-Nu'mān's official account of the events blames the older brother Abu'l-'Abbās as the instigator of the treason in an attempt to rehabilitate Abū 'Abd Allāh. The real reason for this paradoxical turn of events is unknown, but from the account of al-Nu'mān, it can be gathered that al-Mahdī feared Abū 'Abd Allāh's influence over the Kutāma and suspected him of treason. One of the points of disagreement between them appears to have been al-Mahdī's policies towards the Kutāma. However, a more crucial disagreement seems to have stemmed from al-Mahdī's lineage as will be discussed below.

³³ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāh*, 223-24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 224.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

Fāṭimid judges without any comment on the rulers. Otherwise, both sources are limited to the first decade of Fāṭimid rule.³⁶ The Mālikī tradition later used these stories as a justification for the support of some Qayrawānī jurists Abū Yazīd al-Nukkārī's rebellion during the reign of al-Mahdī's successor.

The twenty-four-year reign of 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī was the formative period in the history of the Fāṭimid state in North Africa during which the institutions and the doctrines of the future empire took shape. During the first decade of al-Mahdī's reign, in which he wrested the rest of the territory from the hand of the 'Abbāsīd governors and suppressed successive rebellions in major towns of Ifrīqiya and Sicily, dissent was often quashed with a heavy hand. The Andalusian chronicler 'Arīb b. Sa'd, for instance, records extraordinary brutality of the Kutāma during their subjugation of the Eastern Maghrib and suppressing a revolt by a group of their fellow tribesmen who, disappointed with the Fāṭimid Mahdī, declared a young boy to be their awaited Mahdī.³⁷ Like other perpetrators, the "counter-Mahdī" was paraded around the city and publicly executed.³⁸ Proclamations of victory were read in the mosques of Ifrīqiya, every time a rebellion was suppressed.

After a turbulent decade, al-Mahdī built his fortified capital al-Mahdiyya around 306/918-19 and took up residence there in 308/921. The treasury, the mint and the headquarters of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* also moved there which may have further relaxed control over the jurists in Qayrawān.³⁹ During the reign of al-Mahdī and his successor al-Qā'im bi-amri-llāh, the Central Maghrib, Egypt, Sicily and coastal Christian towns of Spain were raided, which strengthened the Fāṭimids' position in the region, but internal rebellions, especially the one led by Abū Yazīd al-Nukkārī,⁴⁰ shook the caliphate to its foundations.

Eventually, the third Fāṭimid caliph Ismā'īl al-Manṣūr managed to defeat Abū Yazīd and restore order (hence his honorific appellation al-Manṣūr bi-llāh — Victorious through God), conceding more religious freedom to the Mālikī scholars of Qayrawān who had welcomed Abū

³⁶ Abu'l-'Arab, *Kitāb al-Miḥan*, 362-63.

³⁷ Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, 156-174; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, ed. N.M. Fawwāz and H. K. Fawwāz (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004), 28:68. See also Halm, *Empire*, 168-76.

³⁸ Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, 169.

³⁹ Halm, *Empire*, 214-21, 219.

⁴⁰ Stern, "Abū Yazīd"; al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāh*, 231-32; Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, 1:205, 228-32.

Yazīd to the city.⁴¹ His decisive victory against the Khārijī rebellion and his leniency towards the Sunnī *‘ulamā’* earned him the reputation of a “good caliph” and acceptance by his Ifrīqiyan subjects. For the first time, the Fāṭimids allowed the *fuqahā’* to teach law according to the school of Mālīk and Abū Ḥanīfa, who, in return, agreed to tolerate the establishment of a separate *ḥalqa* (study circle) for the school of Ja‘far al-Šādiq for the Ismā‘īlīs in the congregational mosque of Qayrawān.⁴² With this and with building his new capital near to Qayrawān, al-Manšūr again brought the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa* to the centre of public life. Al-Manšūr is thus praised for “upholding the *sharī‘a*” and reversing the policies of his predecessors by Sunnī authors,⁴³ including Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār and Ibn Rizām, who otherwise had nothing good to say about the Fāṭimids.⁴⁴

Al-Mu‘izz li-dīni-llāh (r. 341–365/953–975) managed to keep Ifrīqiya in peace, while effectively expanding the domain of his caliphate.⁴⁵ He pursued his father’s policy of tolerance towards the Sunnī subjects, but at the same time he led the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa* without fearing a backlash from the populace. In line with his imperial ambitions, al-Mu‘izz was the first Fāṭimid caliph “to have concerned himself with the Ismaili *da‘wa* outside Fāṭimid dominions”⁴⁶ thus seeking a rapprochement with dissident or quasi-Ismā‘īlī communities.⁴⁷ In the meantime, Fāṭimid forces under the command of Jawhar al-Siqillī (the Sicilian) asserted control over the Far Maghrib (present day Morocco) defeating the Umayyads’ allies — the Zanāta tribal confederation in 347/958 near Tāhart and capturing Fās (Fez) in 249/960. The

⁴¹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāh*, 230–32.

⁴² ‘Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥamadhānī, *Tathbūt dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān (Beirūt: Dār al-‘Arabiyya, 1966), vol. 2, 603.

⁴³ Farhat Dachraoui, “al-Manšūr Bi’llāh,” *EL*2.

⁴⁴ These reports probably echo the Qayrawānī elites’ eventual reconciliation with al-Manšūr after siding with Abū Yazīd. Although the anti-Fāṭimid Ibn Rizām reports that it took only four years for al-Manšūr to return to the ways of his father. Quoted in Ibn Nadīm, *The Fihrist: A 10th Century AD of Islamic Culture*, ed. and tr. Bayard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 467.

⁴⁵ Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 156. An accessible account of al-Mu‘izz’s reign and campaigns is offered by al-Maqrīzī in *Itti‘āz al-ḥunafā*, now available in English translation with copious annotations by Shainool Jiwa as *Towards a Shi‘i Mediterranean Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009). A general portrait of him in Sunnī historiography can be found in Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a‘yān wa anbā’ abnā’ al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dār Šādir, 1977), 5:224–28.

⁴⁶ Farhad Daftary, “The Ismaili *Da‘wa* and the Fatimid *Dawla*,” in F. Daftary, *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies: A Historical Introduction to an Islamic Community* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 66–67.

⁴⁷ Sumaiya Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State: The Path to Fatimid Statehood* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 61–63.

successful military campaign in Calabria and the destruction of an Umayyad fleet by Fāṭimid navy forced the Byzantines and the Umayyads of Cordoba to seek a truce with al-Mu‘izz.⁴⁸ Meanwhile preparations for the conquest of Egypt had become a priority.

In 358/969 Jawhar took Egypt without a battle, and Fāṭimid rule was finally established there. Jawhar founded the future capital of the Fāṭimid Empire, which he named al-Manṣūriyya after the Ifrīqiyan capital.⁴⁹ In 362/973 al-Mu‘izz finally moved to Egypt with his family and the Ismā‘īlī notables to the newly founded city, which was renamed in his honour al-Qāhira al-Mu‘izziyya (The Victorious One of al-Mu‘izz: Cairo) arriving there on 7 Ramaḍān 362/10 June 973.⁵⁰ Al-Mu‘izz trusted the governorship of Ifrīqiya to the loyal Buluggīn b. Zīrī b. Manād (375/985), a chieftain of Ṣanhāja Berbers, and carried his treasure, library and even “the coffins of his predecessors” to Egypt. One of the most powerful men in the empire after al-Mu‘izz, the eunuch Jawdhar died in Ajdābiya (Libya) on the journey to Egypt.⁵¹ Nine months later, on 29 Jumāda II 363/27 March 974, the chief *dā‘ī* of the Ifrīqiyan period and the most important Ismā‘īlī jurist of all times, al-Qāḍī Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān died in Cairo and al-Mu‘izz personally led his funeral prayers, just like he did for Jawdhar.⁵² The 44 years old imam-caliph died one year later on Rabī‘ II 365/December 975.⁵³ The Ifrīqiyan phase of the dynasty thus ended with the transfer of the seat of the caliphate and the centre of the *da‘wa* to Cairo, and with the demise of its most important figures. After the death of Buluggīn b. Zīrī b. Manād, the loyal client of the dynasty in 375/985 Ifrīqiya became de facto independent, although remained under Fāṭimid suzerainty for almost another century.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ In this and other events of importance during al-Mu‘izz’s reign, see Jiwa, *Towards a Shi‘i Mediterranean Empire*, 11-22.

⁴⁹ According to Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 1: 16, Jawhar’s expedition to Egypt was financed by “a thousand loads of money,” a sum that “no dynasty today would be able” to surpass. See ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, tr. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols, 2nd Edition (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).

⁵⁰ Jiwa, *Shi‘i Mediterranean Empire*, 21. It had initially been called al-Manṣūriyya, like the Ifrīqiyan capital of the Fāṭimids.

⁵¹ Hamid Haji, *Inside the Immaculate Portal*, 10-11.

⁵² Poonawala, “The Chronology of al-Qāḍī l-Nu‘mān’s Works,” 99.

⁵³ Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 163; and 156–163, for the conquest of Egypt and the transfer.

⁵⁴ Michael Brett, “The Diplomacy of Empire: Fatimids and Zirids, 990–1062,” *BSOAS* 78, 1 (February 2015): 149–59, 151.

Chapter One

The Rise of the Fāṭimids in Ifrīqiya

This chapter presents a review of the primary sources for early Fāṭimid history and the state of Fāṭimid historiography to set the ground for the present study. It also offers a brief overview of intellectual life in the city of Qayrawān at the time of the Fāṭimid revolution and evaluates the role of the Kutāma Berbers in the rise of the Fāṭimid Empire and the evolution of Fāṭimid statehood and doctrines. The last sections situate the Fāṭimid caliphate in the wider context of the rise of Berber powers, on the one hand, and the Islamisation of North Africa and the development of Islamic state and society on the other. Overall, this chapter sets the stage for the discussions of scholarly culture, the practice of disputation, and institutions of learning in the following chapters.

Fāṭimid rule in Ifrīqiya may be divided roughly into three stages: the campaign, the consolidation of rule and the expansion of the caliphate, culminating in the relocation of the capital to Egypt. The reign of the first two caliphs was in many ways the continuation of the revolutionary period. The first caliph al-Mahdī bi-llāh continued the harsher policies of the revolutionary period concerning control of the Sunnī population. For instance, teaching law according to Medinan and Irāqī *madhhabs* (schools of law) was restricted to private spaces, such as private mosques, specific quarters, and houses. The discontent and uprisings peaked with the Khārijī revolt under his successor al-Qā'im. The third caliph, al-Manṣūr consolidated the caliphate and pursued a policy of rapprochement with the Sunnī population, which guaranteed considerable religious freedom. It was during the reign of his son al-Mu'izz, that the Fāṭimids gained the confidence to grant significant freedom to their non-Isma'īlī subjects and to take the first steps towards the formation of a Mediterranean empire.

While the topic of this study is not a reappraisal of early Fāṭimid statehood, it is useful to evaluate the Fāṭimid vision of governance to understand the role of the state in facilitating, prioritising, or censoring learning and scholarship. For instance, the policies of the state vis-à-vis the non-Shī'ī learned class were constantly evolving as it grew in strength, when it

reached the height of its power, and when its power diminished later on. Likewise, their changing relationship with their loyal supporters, the Kutāma Berbers had important implications for other supporters of the dynasty. Throughout the period, the Kutāma made up the bulk of the army and the followers of the imams. They were also expected to contribute by their knowledge to the grand project of the dynasty as one can glean from the *Kitāb al-majālīs* of al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān. Thus, despite a significant gap in historical records, the interdependence of the Fāṭimid *dawla* and their subjects will be given importance in the context of this study.

Primary sources for this study are Arabic chronicles, biographical dictionaries, doctrinal works and polemics, legal texts, documents and letters mainly preserved in literary sources. While most of the studies on the Fāṭimid history and doctrines have been driven by the “discovery” of new sources and the publication of texts, this thesis is mainly based on mostly well-known but also on some less-known sources, from Ismā‘īlī, Mālikī and Ibādī traditions. These sources, however, have rarely been mined for the history of learning traditions, practices, and institutions of knowledge under the Fāṭimids — the subject of this thesis.

The earliest biographical and historiographical works from the late Aghlabid – early Fāṭimid period are Abu’l-‘Arab and al-Khushanī’s *Ṭabaqāt ‘ulamā’ Ifrīqiya*¹ and al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *Iftitāḥ al-da‘wa*,² both of which were widely used by later chroniclers. The recently discovered *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt* of the Ismā‘īlī *dā‘ī* Ibn al-Haytham is another important source that sheds light on the most obscure period of the Fāṭimid history, namely the revolutionary years. Most importantly, it gives insight into the complex relationship between senior members of *da‘wa*, the leaders of the revolution, and the Qayrawānī jurists, from a unique perspective. It also provides valuable examples of scholarly discussions and disputations, details of curriculum and personal library as well as the social network of Ibn al-Haytham. The

¹ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Tamīmī Abū al-‘Arab and Muḥammad b. Ḥārith al-Khushanī, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt ‘Ulamā’ Ifrīqiya*, ed. M. Ben Cheneb, *Classes des Savants de l’Ifriqiya*, vols. 51-52 (Paris: E. Leroux, 1915). See n. 18, n. 30 above.

² Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ al-da‘wa*; tr. Hamid Haji, *Founding the Fatimid State: The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006). For this work, see Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismā‘īlī Literature* (Malibu: Undena Press, 1977), 58-59.

details of discussions between the novice Ibn al-Haytham and the senior *dāʿī*-brothers is also a unique account of the proselytising activities of the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs*.

As Talbi remarked, the Fāṭimid period “was like a golden age for the historiography of Ifrīqiya without any doubt,” but unfortunately few of the original works have been preserved by later generations.³ Notably, the works of the Qayrawānī physician Ibn al-Jazzār, *K. Maghāzī Ifrīqiya*, his *K. Akhbār al-dawla* on the history of the Fāṭimid dynasty, and *K. al-Taʿrīf bi saḥīḥ al-ṭārīkh* — a ten-volume historiographical and hagiographical work, would have provided a distinct perspective. These works are only quoted in the works of 5th/11th-century historians, just like the works of another Shīʿī author of this period, Ibrāhīm b. Qāsim al-Raḳīq (d. after 418/1027-28) *Tārīkh Ifrīqiya waʿl-Maghrib*.⁴ The most crucial non-Ismaʿīlī chronicle is perhaps that of the Andalusian ʿArīb b. Saʿd (370/980) preserved in Ibn Idhārī’s *al-Bayān al-mughrib*,⁵ which compliments the contemporary Ismaʿīlī sources. For the Ifrīqiyān period, the *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* of the Yemenite Ṭayyibī-Ismaʿīlī *dāʿī* Idrīs Imād al-Dīn (d. 843/1468) is equally valuable.⁶

Fortunately, some of the Fāṭimid chronicles, documents and letters, mainly from the later period, were available to Mamlūk-era historians who extensively quoted from them. For instance, al-Maqrīzī’s (d. 845/1442) *Kitāb al-Mawāʿiẓ waʿl-iʿtibār* commonly known as *al-Khiṭaṭ*⁷ and his *Kitāb Ittiʿāẓ al-ḥunafāʾ bi-akhbār al-aʿimma al-Fāṭimiyyīn al-khulafāʾ*⁸ — the most important dedicated history of the Fāṭimid dynasty from the medieval period — preserve the important chronicles of al-Musabbihī (d. 420/1029), Zūlāq (d. 386/996) and

³ Talbi, *L’Émirat Aghlabide*, 10.

⁴ For a brief survey of the relevant sources for the late Aghlabid period, see, Talbi, *L’Emirate aghlabide*, 9–15. (Arabic tr: 13-20).

⁵ Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Kitāb al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus waʿl-Maghrib*. See n. 29 above.

⁶ Idrīs Imād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, partial ed. Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī as *Tārīkh al-Khulafāʾ al-Fāṭimiyyīn biʿl-Maghrib: al-Qism al-khāṣṣ min Kitāb ʿUyūn al-akhbār* (Beirut, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1985).

⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad. *Kitāb al-Mawāʿiẓ waʿl-iʿtibār bi dhikr al-khiṭaṭ waʿl-āthār*, 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1998).

⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ al-ḥunafāʾ bi-akhbār al-aʿimma al-Fāṭimiyyūn al-khulafāʾ*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn Shayyāl, 3 vols. (Cairo: Lajnat Ihyāʾ al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1967-1973); Partial English tr. Shainool Jiwa, *Towards a Shiʿi Mediterranean Empire: Fatimid Egypt and the founding of Cairo: the reign of the Imam-caliph al-Muʿizz from Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī’s Ittiʿāẓ al-ḥunafāʾ bi-akhbār al-aʿimma al-Fāṭimiyyīn al-khulafāʾ* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

others.⁹ It may have been due to growing Sunnī sectarianism that the sources which were readily available in the post-Fāṭimid period did not survive the 9th/15th century, perhaps with a few exceptions.¹⁰

Overall, studies on medieval Ifrīqiya in general and on the Fāṭimid period in particular have suffered from relying on extremely biased primary sources from the later period. Medieval authors often relied on polemical primary sources commissioned by rival claimants to the caliphate, the ‘Abbāsids of Baghdād and the Umayyads of al-Andalus. While these sources do not discard the revolutionary nature of the movement, they portray Fāṭimid rule as a *miḥna* (trial) or outright conspiracy against the religion of Islam.¹¹ The writings of the hostile medieval pro-Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd historians, and following them the bulk of later Sunnī historiography, view the Fāṭimid period from this perspective.¹² Largely due to these sources, and partly because Sunnī Islam eventually became the dominant form of Islam, modern scholarship also tends to emphasise the marginality of Shī‘ī Islam and the Fāṭimid dynasty, strongly implying that the dynasty was somehow an interruption in the course of Islamic history.¹³

⁹ Ayman Fuad Sayyid, “Reconstructing Lost Ancient Texts – Sources of Egyptian History as Examples,” *Editing Islamic Manuscripts* (London: al-Furqān, 2017), 355-59.

¹⁰ Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and Its Sources* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 152–156. Fozia Bora’s works demonstrate that Fāṭimid books were in circulation long after the fall of the dynasty. “Mamluk Representations of Late Fatimid Egypt: the Survival of Fatimid-Era Historiography in Ibn al-Furāt’s *Ta’rīkh al-duwal wa’l-mulūk* (History of Dynasties and Kings),” (DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2010).

¹¹ Notable exceptions are, of course, Ibn Khaldūn and his student al-Maqrīzī among a few others. Despite his lack of sympathy for the Fāṭimids doctrines, Ibn Khaldūn managed to overcome the previous bias in Arabic annals, which singled out the Fāṭimids as usurpers and marginal pretenders, or just “evil,” viewing them, on the one hand, as a Shī‘ī dynasty alongside the ‘Abbāsids and Idrīsids in his *Kitāb al-Ibar*, despite their mutually exclusive claims and animosity, and as an Arab dynasty along with the ‘Abbāsīd and Umayyad houses, on the other (*Muqaddimah*, 1:319). For this see, Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn: An Essay in Interpretation* (London: Frank Class, 1982), 22-24, 23. For the analytical importance of these classifications, see Ibrahim Chabbouh, “Ibn Khaldūn’s Classification of Eras in Islamic History and Other Matters,” *Editing Islamic Manuscripts on Social Sciences and Humanities* (London: Al-Furqān, 2017), 43-57.

¹² That being said, the grandeur of the Fāṭimid caliphate and the significance of its establishment is usually acknowledged. See, Sumayia Hamdani, “From Da‘wa to Dawla: al-Qadi al-Nu‘man’s *Ẓāhirī* Construction of Fatimid Legitimacy” (PhD Thesis, Princeton University, 1995), 10-15. Also, some Egyptian historians of the period viewed the Fāṭimids from a fairly neutral point of view. See Fozia Bora, *Writing History in the Medieval Islamic World: The Value of Chronicles as Archives* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

¹³ Scholars of Ismā‘īlī studies attribute this mainly to reliance on Sunnī sources that “constructed Shi‘ism as heresy.” See Sumaiya Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, xvi, 137, notes 10-11. Likewise, Brett traces the origin of this “understanding of the Fatimid project as the vain attempt of a divergent minority to rule over the

One common awkward result of this —to give an example — has been the description of early medieval Qayrawān anachronistically as a Sunnī capital of learning projecting later notions of *madhhab* (lit. way, path, a school of thought, but most commonly to a legal methodology and legal school) back onto 3rd/ 9th century Ifrīqiya. It is clear that the term “Sunnī” (*ahl al-sunna*) and even ‘*ulamā*’ (or *ahl al-‘ilm*) meant only “traditionalists” in the early period, as opposed to the “people of personal opinion” (*ahl al-ra’y*) and “speculative rationalists” (*ahl al-naẓar*). Al-Khushanī’s *ṭabaqāt*, which distinguishes the ‘Irāqīs (Ḥanafīs) from the *ahl al-sunna*, is a case in point.¹⁴ The earliest sources confirm that these groups were all represented in Qayrawān as were the Shī‘īs and various Khārijī groups.

The problems with the sources of Fāṭimid history and with the use of partisan sources in writing narrative history have been pointed out and discussed by John Wansbrough,¹⁵ Michael Brett,¹⁶ Farhad Daftary, Paul Walker and Wilferd Madelung,¹⁷ Sumaiya Hamdani,¹⁸ and recently by Fozia Bora.¹⁹ For instance, the diversity and fluidity of affiliation that is characteristic of the early period are rarely acknowledged in the reports and deliberately ignored in the case of later biographical dictionaries (*ṭabaqāt*). On this basis, the presence of

consensual majority of Muslims” to “Arab generalists of the post-Fāṭimid period, beginning with Ibn al-Athīr [in his *Kitāb al-kāmil fī l-ta’rīkh*].” *The Fatimid Empire*, 6. For further assessments of Orientalist and modern scholarship on Ismā‘īlism, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 1-33; idem, *Ismaili Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 84-98; idem, “The Study of the Ismailis: Phases and Issues,” in Daftary and Miskinzoda (eds.) *The Study of Shi‘i Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 47-65; idem, “Sunnī Perceptions of the Ismailis: Medieval Perspectives,” in Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (ed.), *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 13-26. Walker discusses the pitfalls of modern studies on the Fāṭimids in his comprehensive overview, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*, especially in the “Introduction,” 1-14, and highlights the progresses made in Chapter 9 titled “Modern Studies,” 186-202; The most recent developments are reviewed in Khalil Andani’s useful survey, “A Survey of Ismaili Studies Part 1: Early Ismailism and Fāṭimid Ismailism,” *Religion Compass* 10/8 (2016): 191–206. Brett’s review in *The Fāṭimid Empire*, 3-12, is the most up to date and authoritative appraisal of the scholarship on the Fāṭimids. Finally, Andani’s forthcoming article critically evaluates modern academic studies of the Fāṭimids and Ismā‘īlism in, “Isma‘īliyya and Ismailism: From Polemical Portrayals to Academic Inquiry,” in Majid Daneshgar and Aaron Hughes (eds.), *Deconstructing Islamic Studies* (Cambridge, MA: The Ilex Foundation and The Center for Hellenic Studies with Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁴ This of course does not mean that the ‘Irāqīs did not consider their group as *ahl al-sunna*.

¹⁵ John Wansbrough, “On Recomposing the Islamic History of North Africa: A Review Article” *JRAS* 2 (1969), 161-170.

¹⁶ Brett, “The Realm of the Imām: The Fāṭimids in the Tenth Century,” *BSOAS* 59, 3 (1996): 431–49; *Rise*, 11.

¹⁷ Walker (with W. Madelung), *The Advent of the Fatimids*; idem, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*.

¹⁸ Sumaiya Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*.

¹⁹ Fozia Bora, *Writing History in the Medieval Islamic World: The Value of Chronicles as Archives* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

the rationalists (*ahl al-naẓar*), Ḥanafīs and Shīʿīs is significantly underestimated. The growth of this tendency can be observed from the earlier sources such as Abū al-ʿArab (d. 332/944) and al-Khushanī's (d. 370/981?) *Ṭabaqāt ʿulamāʾ Ifrīqiya wa-Tūnis* to later sources, such as al-Mālikī's (d. c. 967/1081) *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*,²⁰ ʿIyāḍ's (d. 544/1149) *Tartīb al-madārik*,²¹ Ibn Idhārī's *al-Bayān al-mughrib* and al-Dabbāgh (d. 696/1295) and Ibn Nājī's (d. 837/1433), *Maʿālim al-īmān*.²² These sources unsurprisingly viewed the Mālikī tradition as normative, and the presence of the other groups as a deviation from the norm, i.e. "Sunnī orthodoxy," a view that remained unchallenged in modern scholarship for a long time.

Similarly, pietistic opposition on the part of scholars towards the rulers is taken at face value in modern scholarship. For instance, the alleged struggle between the traditionalists and the "Muʿtazilī" *amīrs* of Ifrīqiya, interpreted in light of the ʿAbbāsīd *miḥna*,²³ itself a famous myth developed by the traditionalists of Baghdād, can be best understood as a later construction.²⁴ In post-Fāṭimid historiography, the Fāṭimids take the role of unjust rulers and tyrants, previously ascribed to the Aghlabids. This view arises in part on the basis of the exaggerated grievance of the members of the pro-Umayyad Qayrawānī learned class in the Fāṭimid period, who certainly felt marginalised by the Fāṭimids.²⁵ Later Mālikī reports of abuse and forced conversions during the early Fāṭimid period, however, as Madelung observes, are likely deliberate fabrications in an attempt to justify the Mālikīs' involvement in the massacre of Ismāʿīlī communities in the Maghrib.²⁶ One could compare these narratives with ʿAbbāsīd

²⁰ Al-Mālikī, Abū Bakr. *Kitāb Riyāḍ al-nufūs fī ṭabaqāt ʿulamāʾ al-Qayrawān wa Ifrīqiya*, ed. Bashīr al-Bakkūsh, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1981-83).

²¹ ʿIyāḍ, *Madārik*, 28.

²² Al-Dabbāgh, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān and Ibn Nājī, Abū'l-Qāsim b. ʿĪsā. *Maʿālim al-īmān fī maʿrifat ahl al-Qayrawān*, ed. Ibrāhīm Shabbūḥ, 4 vols. (Cairo: Makatabat al-Khānjī 1968).

²³ The *miḥna*, usually rendered as "inquisition," was a trial procedure that the ʿAbbāsīd caliph al-Maʾmūn (d. 218/833) and two of his successors adopted (between 833 and 846) in order to impose the doctrine of the createdness of the Qurʾān on the scholars. See Hinds, "Miḥna," *EL2*; and John P Turner, *Inquisition in Early Islam: The Competition for Political and Religious Authority in the Abbasid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

²⁴ Wansbrough, "On Recomposing the Islamic History of North Africa," 166.

²⁵ See, al-Khushanī's separate chapter on the persecuted scholars is one example. Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 227-33; Abū'l-ʿArab, *Kitāb al-miḥan*, ed. Yaḥyā Wahīb al-Jabūrī, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2006) - on the inquisition of the ʿulamāʾ from the early Islamic period until the Aghlabid period.

²⁶ Madelung, "The Religious Policy of the Fatimids toward their Sunnī Subjects in the Maghrib," in M. Barrucand (ed.), *L'Egypte Fatimide son art et son histoire* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999), 100.

narratives that amplified the injustices of the Umayyads, especially the event of Karbalā', to justify the massacre of the entire Umayyad family.²⁷

This pattern of power struggles between the rulers and the scholarly elite continued when the Shī'ī Fāṭimids replaced the Aghlabids. However, unlike the Aghlabid *amīrs*, the Fāṭimid imam-caliphs laid claim to a religious authority sanctioned by God and inspired knowledge, which superseded the acquired knowledge of the *ʿulamā'*. To assert their power, the Fāṭimids enforced Shī'ī elements of ritual practice, such as introducing the Shī'ī formula of *adhān* (call to prayer), adding the name of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 44/661) to the *khuṭba* (Friday sermon), abrogating the supplementary prayers, especially the *tarāwīḥ* (communal prayers during the nights of Ramaḍān) as an innovation of the second caliph 'Umar b. Khaṭṭāb (23/644), which fuelled the hostility.²⁸ It was the ritual aspect of the Shī'ī impositions, rather than the political claims of the Fāṭimids that provoked the *fuqahā'* of Qayrawān the most.²⁹ One might well suspect that for the local *fuqahā'*, the issue of Fāṭimid legitimacy at this time was of a secondary importance.³⁰

The Fāṭimids' view of religious knowledge, more specifically the role and authority of the imams as sole interpreters of religion, seems to have had important implications for the formation of their scholarly class as well: unlike the Sunnī scholars, the members of the *da'wa*

²⁷ See Antoine Borrut, "The Future of the Past," in Andrew Marsham and Alain George (eds.), *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam: Perspectives on Umayyad Elites* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 10.

²⁸ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 27; Halm, *Empire*, 243.

²⁹ See, for instance, Halm, *Empire*, 243; Brett, *Rise*, 152-58. Although fully acknowledging the bias, Halm seems to generally agree with H. Monès and H. R. Idris's previous readings of the Mālikī *miḥna* narratives, especially Abū Bakr al-Mālikī's hagiographical work the *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*. See Idris, "Contribution à l'histoire de l'Ifriqiya: tableau de la vie intellectuelle et administrative à Kairouan sous les Aglabites et les Fatimites (4 premiers siècles de l'Hégire) d'après le *Riyāḍ en Nufūs* de Abū Bakr El Mālikī." *REI* 9 (1935), Cahier 1, 144-52; idem, *REI* 10 (1936), 72-88; Monès, "Le Malikisme et l'échec des Fatimides en Ifrīqiya," *Les Études d'orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal*, vol. 1 (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962), 197-220. Maribel Fierro, in her recent article, argues that the Mālikī jurists' reaction to the imposition of Fāṭimid rituals led to the consolidation of Mālikism in North Africa. See, Fierro, "Sacrifice, Circumcision and the Ruler in the Medieval Islamic West: The Ismaili-Fatimid Legacy," in Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (ed.), *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 147-70.

³⁰ By contrast, there are numerous efforts by their pro-'Abbāsīd adversaries to disprove the Fāṭimid's 'Alid lineage. See Shainool Jiwa, "The Baghdād Manifesto (402/1011): A Re-Examination of Fatimid-Abbasid Rivalry," in Daftary and Jiwa (eds.), *The Fatimid Caliphate: Diversity of Traditions*, (I.B. Tauris: London, 2018), 22-79. Similarly, as Konrad Hirschler notes about the Ayyūbid Syria, "Since the establishment of the Fāṭimid caliphate in Egypt in the fourth/tenth century the literature aimed against this dynasty had become a well-established genre." *Medieval Arabic Historiography: Authors as Actors* (London: Routledge, 2006), 11.

took no interest in compiling a *ṭabaqāt* of their masters and famous predecessors and contemporaneous peers, for they did not derive their prestige and authority from belonging to the scholarly tradition, but from the Ismāʿīlī Imam of the time.³¹ Instead, the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* suggested a broader learning curriculum at the expense of Mālikī and Ḥanafī jurisprudence.³² The challenge that Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī teaching and propaganda presented to the Mālikī *ʿulamāʾ*, however, is usually given less importance than their use of power in enforcing Shīʿī law and practices. It is rather their soft power that proved effective on many occasions to win the support of the notables among various groups. Nevertheless, it is clear from both the polemical accounts of the Mālikīs and the works of Ismāʿīlī authors, such as the works of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān that claims to knowledge and having a valid methodology were a central point of contention between the various rival groups and this was regularly tested through disputations.³³

Among the sources that have not been fully exploited for the study of the social and cultural history of Ifrīqiya are the manuscripts belonging to the collection of the so-called “Ancient Library” (*al-Maktaba al-ʿatīqa*) preserved in Raqqāda (Tunisia). Despite being considered “the oldest known Arabic manuscript collection surviving to our days,” much of the content of the library is unaccounted for even in major bibliographic works such as Fuat Sezgin’s *Geschichte*.³⁴ All we know about the collection is thanks to the preliminary surveys of Muḥammad al-Bahālī al-Nayyāl, Ibrahim Chabbouh, Joseph Schacht, Mourad Rammaḥ and

³¹ This contention is also supported by Maribel Fierro’s discussion of the similarity between the Fāṭimids and the early Almohads, where she relates the tradition of writing biographical dictionaries to the Sunnitization of the latter. See Fierro, “The Almohads and The Fatimids” in Bruce D. Craig (ed.), *Ismaili and Fatimid Studies in Honor of Paul E. Walker* (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2010), 165-166; idem, “Why and How Do Religious Scholars Write about Themselves? The Case of the Islamic West in the Fourth/Tenth Century”, *Mélanges de L’Université Saint-Joseph* LVIII (2005): 419, n. 64. For a more focused discussion on this, see Chapter Three, below.

³² For a general overview of Fāṭimid learning, see the only available survey by Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*; and for a more focused treatment of the Fāṭimid institutions of learning, see Walker, “Fāṭimid Institutions of Learning,” *JARCE* 34 (1997): 179-200.

³³ See, for instance, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Risāla dhāt al-bayān fī radd ʿalā ibn Qutayba*, ed. and tr. Avraham Hakim, as *The Epistle of the Eloquent Clarification Concerning the Refutation of Ibn Qutayba* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 18–19.

³⁴ Miklos Muranyi, introduction (in Arabic, “Tamḥīd”) to his *al-Maktaba al-ʿatīqa biʾl-Qayrawān* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 2018), 7-9 (German title: *Beiträge*). According to Muranyi, Sezgin relied on the ancient inventory, which although testifies to the existence of a “mosque library,” does not reflect the surviving collection “at all.” Ibid., 9.

Miklos Muranyi.³⁵ Until recently, the collection has received little attention outside of Tunisia, with a few exceptions, partly because of the problems of access and lack of a catalogue. Preserving manuscripts that were copied, transmitted and taught from the late Aghlabid through the Fāṭimid period, the collection may offer unique insight into the practices of learning and knowledge transmission, book and text production, the development of learning methods, the evolution of the Arabic script, and the vibrant intellectual traditions of the period. To be sure, according to the few available descriptions and catalogues mentioned above, the collection mostly consists of Qur'ānic codices, works of *tafṣīr* (Qur'ānic exegesis) and Mālikī *fiqh* (jurisprudence),³⁶ and a few works of theological polemics. However, since the preservation and cataloguing of the collection still needs to be completed, it is possible that further research may still yield surprising results.³⁷

Muranyi's bio-bibliographical survey of the manuscript collection from the "mosque-library" of Qayrawān lists 18 authors and transmitters between Mālik and Saḥnūn, 36 names from Saḥnūn's generation (3rd/9th century), 30 names for the Fāṭimid period (4th/10th century) and only 10 names from the Zīrid period (before the year 449/1057).³⁸ However, this division is

³⁵ These are the only available surveys of the collection: Ibrahim Chabbouh, "Sijill qadīm li-maktabat jāmi' al-Qayrawān," *MMA* 2 (1956): 339-73; Muḥammad al-Bahālī al-Nayyāl, *al-Maktabah al-'athariyya bi'l-Qayrawān* (Tunis: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1963); Joseph Schacht, "On Some Manuscripts in the Libraries of Kairouan and Tunis," *Arabica*, 14, Fasc. 3 (October, 1967): 225-258; Miklos Muranyi, *Materialen zur mālikischen Rechtsliteratur*, (Wiesbaden, 1984); idem, "Geniza or Ḥubus: Some Observations on the Library of the Great Mosque in Qayrawān," *JSAI* 42 (2015): 183-200; Mourad Rammah, "Maktaba al-Qayrawān al-'atīqa wa subul ṣiyanatuhā," *MMA*, 41 (May, 1997), pp. 291-312; François Déroche, "A Note on the Medieval Inventory of the Manuscripts Kept in the Great Mosque of Kairouan," in Robert Kerr and Thomas Milo (eds.), *Writings and Writing: Investigations in Islamic Text and Script in Honour of Dr. Januarius Justus Witkam* (Cambridge: UK, Archetype, 2013), 67-86.

³⁶ A more precise and accurate definition of the term, especially for the early period is given by M. Cooperson: "*fiqh*: interpretive skill; the ability to discern the right course of action in ritual and legal matters; formal text-based jurisprudence." *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophet in the Age of Ma'mūn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xx.

³⁷ The most comprehensive list of the manuscripts in the "Ancient Library" collection was published in the short introductory study of al-Nayyāl (1963) followed by a list prepared by Schacht (1967) and the more detailed study-survey by Muranyi (1997) cited below. An extant medieval handlist (dated 693/1294) ("Sijill qadīm"), which is rare of its kind, was published by Shabbūḥ (see above). Also, an internal computerised handlist exist for the use of the librarians.

³⁸ Miklos Muranyi, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Ḥadīth- und Rechtsgelehrsamkeit der Mālikiyya in Nordafrika bis zum 5. Jh. d.H.: bio-bibliographische Notizen aus der Moscheebibliothek von Qairawān* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997), 148-59. Although published more than twenty years ago, this is the most complete survey of the collection we have to date.

not entirely accurate. Some scholars from the generation of Saḥnūn's students listed by Muranyi (nos. XLVII-LIV) also lived into the Fāṭimid period; some of them were active transmitters and debaters and were also respected for their seniority and association with Saḥnūn. Saʿīd b. al-Ḥaddād (d. 302/915), for instance, rose to prominence only in the Fāṭimid period, because of his debating skills. Likewise, some of the scholars of the Zīrid period, notably Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Qābisī (324/936 – 403/1012) spent their formative years under the Fāṭimid rule. Overall, surviving records from this collection attest that the Fāṭimid period was the peak of learning and knowledge transmission for the scholars of Ifrīqiya during the first five centuries of Islam.

Apart from Muranyi, few scholars have endeavoured to utilise this collection for the study of the history of learning and the transmission of knowledge in Qayrawān. However, in his meticulous study of the manuscripts, Muranyi rarely attempts to interpret the findings or relate his research to the broader context of learning beyond the circle of the jurists, thus inviting further research towards the reconstruction of the history of learning in Qayrawān.³⁹ This study has benefitted from his reconstruction of the transmission of the surviving Mālikī texts from the “Ancient Library,” although the conclusions may differ.

Generally, one must admit that the number of relevant sources is limited to the biographical dictionaries and sparse documentary evidence from manuscripts, such as written permission to transmit (*ijāza*), certificates of audition (*samāʿāt*, sing. *samāʿ*), studying/reading (*qirāʿāt*, sing. *qirāʿa*), notes of transmission (*riwāyāt*, sing. *riwāya*), endowment (*waqf/taḥbīs*), ownership (*tamlīk*) and other marginal notes, many of which still await reconstruction. Doctrinal works commissioned by the Fāṭimid state are of limited use in reconstructing specific learning practices and intellectual activities of the scholars in Qayrawān, although they are useful in understanding the political and intellectual milieu. That being said, these sources can complement each other in surprising ways. For example, the Fāṭimid *majālis* may describe a session of reading or debate to illustrate a doctrinal point, while Mālikī sources tend to focus on the transmission of texts. Therefore, the present study

³⁹ See Jonathan E. Brockopp's review article “Literary Genealogies from the Mosque-Library of Kairouan,” in *ILS* 6, 3 (1999), 393-402.

draws on both types of sources, as well as documents preserved within literary sources, coinage, and epigraphic evidence.

With respect to the organisation of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*, in addition to work mentioned above, we have two comparable treatises for the instruction of the *dāʿīs*. The first one is al-Nuʿmān's *Kitāb al-Himma*⁴⁰ which was probably written early in his career and included a section on the code of conduct for the *dāʿīs*. The second treatise, al-Naysābūrī's *al-Risāla al-mūjaza*⁴¹ is from the early Egyptian period (circa 365-386/975-1021), was most likely inspired by the first one, and indicates the existence of a self-conscious and organised *daʿwa*. In addition, al-Nuʿmān's *Kitāb al-Majālis wa'l-musāyarāt* offers the most intimate understanding of the organisation, form, and content of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*.⁴²

It is worth noting that the *Kitāb al-Majālis*, and other works by the members of the Fāṭimid *daʿwa*, are often dismissed as fanciful elaborations for the use of the believers, by early scholars, and the more esoteric works deemed as devoid of "historical truth," "facts" and characterised as superstitious fiction.⁴³ Naturally, the relevance of cosmology and esotericism in the works of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* to the Fāṭimid universalist project has rarely been seriously considered. The last chapter of this thesis will make an argument for this based on the materials taught at the *majālis al-daʿwa* in the Ifrīqiyan period.

Intellectual Life in Qayrawān

The importance of Qayrawān as a centre of learning and knowledge transmission grew significantly during the Aghlabid period (3rd/9th century) owing to its economic growth and the patronage of an independent powerful state.⁴⁴ The population of Qayrawān grew to at least 36,000, which made it the biggest and the most ethnically diverse settlement in the Maghrib

⁴⁰ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Kitāb al-Himma fī ādāb atbāʿ al-aʿimma*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn, (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1948). Unlike other works by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, this work is not dated. Hamdani and Poonawala concluded that it may be one of the earlier works composed during the reign of al-Mahdī. See Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 114; Poonawala, "The Chronology," 104-5.

⁴¹ Al-Naysābūrī, *al-Risāla al-mūjaza al-kāfiya fī ādāb al-duʿāt*, ed. and tr. V. Klemm and P. Walker as *A Code of Conduct: A Treatise on the Etiquette of the Fatimid Ismaili Mission* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

⁴² Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Kitāb al-majālis wa-al-musāyarāt*, ed. al-Ḥabīb Faqī, Ibrāhīm Shabbūh, and Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī, 2nd ed. (Bayrūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1997), 124.

⁴³ Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, 1-25.

⁴⁴ Anderson et al (eds.), *The Aghlabids and Their Neighbors*, ch. 1.

at the time.⁴⁵ The Eastern geographer and historian al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 292/905) described the diversity of the population of Qayrawān as “a mixture of Quraysh, and all other Arab tribes (*buṭūn al-‘arab*) such as Muḍar, Rabī‘a and Qaḥṭān, some non-Arab groups (*aṣṇāf al-‘ajam*) from Khurāsān and those from the army who arrived there with the ‘Abbāsīd governors (*‘ummāl Banī Hāshim*) as well as other non-Arabs such as the Berbers (*‘ajam al-balad al-barbar*), the Greeks (*al-rūm*) and the like.”⁴⁶ The population included a significant number of Christians and Jews, as well as Ibādīs, Ṣufrīs, Shī‘īs and other groups representing an array of Islamic schools of thoughts.

The intellectual scene of Qayrawān in the late third/ninth century was dominated by intense polemics and animosity between rationalist theologians and traditionalists, which had important implications for learning practices. The rationalists were the practitioners of *kalām* (dialectical theology), who “relied on the tools from Greek philosophy” in their argumentation.⁴⁷ Despite the limited evidence for the presence of Mu‘tazilī theologians in the Maghrib, the *ahl al-naẓar* are identifiable with them.⁴⁸ Most of them followed the so-called ‘Irāqī school of jurisprudence, which was adopted by the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs of Baghdād as well as by their governors in Ifrīqiya — the Aghlabid family, who also favoured their theological positions.⁴⁹ The traditionalists, who were identified with and gave precedence to the practice of the people of Medina over Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) in determining the correct *sunna*,⁵⁰ later developed a strong Mālikī identity with the emphasis that Saḥnūn b. Sa‘īd and his students put on the teaching of Mālik b. Anas.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Al-Zaidan, “The People of Qayrawan,” 90–97.

⁴⁶ Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya‘qūbī, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. Muḥammad Amīn Ḍannāwī, 1st. ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 2002), 187 (my translation). For a new English translation and commentary on this work, see Matthew S. Gordon, Chase F. Robinson, Everett K. Rowson and Michael Fishbein (eds.), *The Works of Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya‘qūbī* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), vol. 1. Al-Ya‘qūbī probably refers to the distinct ethnic composition (Iranian, Syrian and Iraqī fighters) of the ‘Abbāsīd troops (*jund*) who mainly relied on non-Arab troop during and after the revolution. See Halm, *Empire*, 98–101.

⁴⁷ Turner, *Inquisition*, 3.

⁴⁸ Mu‘tazilī presence in the Maghrib is said to go back to the mid second/eighth century. See, Gregor Schwarb, “Mu‘tazilism in the Age of Averroes,” *Warburg Institute Colloquia* 16 (2011), 280, note 140.

⁴⁹ The Aghlabid family were ‘Abbāsīd governors and followed their official doctrines. Their support of the Ḥanafī jurists, however, was not always consistent. See, Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law: 9th–10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 39.

⁵⁰ On the Madīnan ‘amal, see Dutton, *Origins of Islamic Law*, especially ch. 3, 32–52.

⁵¹ Talbi, “Saḥnūn,” *El2*.

The theological questions that divided the rationalist Ḥanafis and the traditionalist Mālikīs were the same as in the East, such as the attributes of God and the createdness of God's speech— the Qur'ān. Another major disagreement, which is central to the theories about learning in this period, was whether there were other sources of knowledge or truth in addition to the Qur'ān and the recently compiled *ḥadīth*. The traditionalists insisted that the only true source of knowledge was the revealed truth, i.e. the Qur'ān. Next in importance to the Qur'ān, the practice of the Prophet and his companions, who followed his example and the people of Medina — the city of the Prophet— should be followed closely. The rationalists, however, permitted rational investigation, something the traditionalists rejected as innovation in religion (*bid'a*) and nothing more than personal whim (*hawā*, pl. *ahwā'*). Hence, the traditionalists pejoratively labelled the rationalists and dialecticians as *ahl al-bid'a* (innovators) and *ahl al-ahwā'* (people of whims). Following this principle, the early traditionalists, most notably Mālik and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 240/855), refused to engage in disputation to avoid the risk of resorting to personal opinion and speculation. Some traditionalists of Qayrawān went as far as refusing to greet the rationalists, let alone studying with them.⁵² This was by far the thorniest issue that divided the '*ulamā*' before the Fāṭimid period.

Our sources on these debates are mostly compiled by the followers of the Madīnan (or Mālikī) school, which became the dominant *madhhab* by the end of the Fāṭimid rule (ca. 439/1048), despite the fact that prior to the Fāṭimid takeover it was only one competing factions among others in Qayrawān,⁵³ and despite the fact that the advent of the new regime evidently did not work in their favour.⁵⁴ In retrospect, the Maghribī-Mālikī historiographical

⁵² Abū al-'Arab, *Ṭabaqāt 'ulamā' Ifriqiyyah wa-Tūnis*, ed. 'Alī. Shābbī, and Na'im Ḥasan al-Yāfi (Tūnis, 1968), 129; al-Qāḍī Abu'l-Faḍl 'Iyāḍ, *Tartīb al-madārik wa taqrīb al-masālik fī ma'rifat a'lām madhhab Mālik*, ed. Aḥmad Bakīr Maḥmūd, 5 vols. (Beirut, 1968); Selection: *Tarājim Aghlabiyya mustakharaja min Madārik al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ*, (henceforth: *Madārik*) ed. M. Ṭalbi (Tunis: Publication de l'Universite de Tunis, 1968), 28.

⁵³ For a discussion of intra-religious polemics in pre-Fāṭimid Qayrawān, see Camilla Adang, "Intra- and Interreligious Controversies in 3rd/9th Century Qayrawān: The Polemics of Muhammad b. Saḥnūn," *JSAI* 36 (2009), 281–309.

⁵⁴ N. Cottart, "Mālikiyya," *El2*.

tradition viewed the triumph of this school as a natural course of events, while largely relegating the Fāṭimid “interlude” to the realm of “the calamities of history.”⁵⁵

By the end of the Aghlabid period, religious scholarship in Ifrīqiya reached a high stage of development on a par with other centres of learning in the Islamic world. Qayrawān had become an indisputable centre of religious scholarship in the Maghrib. Not only was Ifrīqiya not peripheral to the development of Islamic sciences, in some cases it was central to the transmission of religious scholarship, especially Mālikism to al-Andalus and the Islamic West. However, when it comes to philosophical sciences and theology Ifrīqiya was behind the rest of the Islamic world, even al-Andalus, which, otherwise, was closely linked to the intellectual milieu of Ifrīqiya.

The succeeding Fāṭimid period has been described as “one of great economic prosperity” for Ifrīqiya,⁵⁶ although it is generally viewed as a period of decline and stagnation for religious scholarship in Ifrīqiya as compared to the previous century.⁵⁷ This cannot be further from the truth as the Fāṭimid period saw the definite consolidation of Mālikism in North Africa, not least because of knowledge production and transmission. The achievements of the Fāṭimids in this period have otherwise been overshadowed by their glorious “Egyptian phase” and thus often overlooked, especially by scholars who are less familiar with the Islamic West. This view is, of course, helped by the fact that the Fāṭimid cities in Ifrīqiya were partially, or entirely, destroyed in the following centuries. Thus, a reassessment of intellectual life in

⁵⁵ The information on the religious conflicts in the 3rd-4th/9th-10th centuries Qayrawān is mostly derived from Mālikī sources. See Madelung and Walker, *The Advent*, 18-19.

⁵⁶ Brett, “Ifrīqiya as a Market for Saharan Trade from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century A.D.,” *JAH* 10, 3 (1969): 348, 347-364.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, Cottart, “Mālikiyya”; Ben Hamada, *al-Madāris al-kalāmiyya*, 31. Mohamed Talbi, in his survey article in the *EI*2, “al-Ḳayrawān,” states that the reign of the Fāṭimids was not “favourable” to Qayrawān as a Sunnī centre of learning, although otherwise, he admitted that “it suffered little,” prosperity was maintained, and the infrastructure improved in some respects, with the building of water canals. Then, following a long-held belief, he maintained that the region suffered after the capital was moved to Egypt and the destruction of the city was brought about by the raid of the Banū Hilāl in 449/1057 sent by the Fāṭimids, a position thoroughly debunked by Michael Brett in a number of studies. See, Brett, “Fatimid Historiography: A Case Study – the Quarrel with the Zirids, 1048-58” *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds*, ed. by Morgan, D.O., ed., (1982): 47-59; “The Flood of the Dam and the Sons of the New Moon,” *Mélanges offerts à Mohamed Talbi* (1993): 55-67; “The Way of the Nomad,” *BSOAS* 58 (1995): 251-69; “The Mīm the ‘Ayn and the Making of Ismā‘ilism,” *BSOAS* 57 (1994), 25-39; “The Realm of the Imām: the Fāṭimids in the Tenth Century,” *BSOAS* 59 (1996): 431-449; see Brett, *Ibn Khaldūn and the Medieval Maghrib*, *passim*.

Qayrawān and the two other capital cities of the period, al-Mahdiyya and al-Manṣūriyya, based on all available material is needed to offer a more balanced view.

With regards to developments in learning and teaching practices, above all the systematisation of teaching and transmission of knowledge, and the formation of a self-conscious learned class were signs of a highly developed medieval Muslim society. Mālikī and Ismāʿīlī *fiqh* was further systematised during the Fāṭimid period, notably by Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī and al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān respectively. In this period, scholars on both sides produced pedagogical treatises. We have two extant treatises, one from the late Aghlabid period by Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn and another from the Fāṭimid period by Abuʿl-Ḥasan al-Qābisī (d. 403/1012), as evidence of the Qayrawānī scholars’ early interest in standardising and systematising learning practices. Likewise, they composed textbooks and codified the corpus of foundational texts of the Mālikī school of law as well as manuals on disputations (*ādāb al-baḥth*). Overall, the continuity of knowledge transmission, confirmed by both material and narrative evidence, challenges the prevalent narrative that emphasises the disruption caused by the arrival of the Fāṭimids.

The Fāṭimid *Daʿwa* and the Kutāma *Awliyāʾ*

*To solve all the problems which the situation presented to them [during the African period], Fāṭimid caliphs could rely only on a fairly restricted number of supporters, apart from the Kutāma, who were not always tractable, and on their own political skill and their energy. It is a wonder that they succeeded.*⁵⁸

Marius Canard

As these remarks by Marius Canard imply, the alliance between the “egalitarian” Kutāma Berbers of the Maghrib and the “elitist” Shīʿī Fāṭimids have long been considered fortuitous, almost improbable, in Orientalist scholarship.⁵⁹ Highlighting the perception of the Fāṭimids as non-native intruders from the outside also takes away the agency of the Kutāma and other Berber peoples as Islamising nations who saw themselves at the centre of Islam, in this case

⁵⁸ Marius Canard, “Fāṭimids,” *EL*2.

⁵⁹ See, for instance, Georges Marçais, *La Berbérie musulmane et l'Orient au moyen âge* (Casablanca, Afrique Orient, 1991), 131.

the Fatimid *daʿwa*, and its vehicles. Many centuries after Ibn Khaldūn, their contribution has yet to be assessed fully.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I evaluate the role of the Kutāma⁶⁰ in the evolution of the early Fāṭimid state into an Islamic empire with a focus on the development of the institutions of the *daʿwa* and *dawla*. I will focus on what can be called the “Kutāma problem” of the Fāṭimid state, a paradoxical situation with the nascent believers — followers of the charismatic *dāʿī* Abū ʿAbd Allāh, whose crucial support for the dynasty could not be dispensed with, while their religious needs, i.e. the perpetuation of the cause that they had joined initially, had to be sustained through continual teaching and preaching. This also included the official recognition of their position as the *awliyāʾ* (allies, friends, followers) of the caliphs through public pronouncements. No less important, their economic and political demands also constituted a substantial burden for the dynasty. Despite obvious economic benefit, high status, and state protection, the Kutāma were at times unhappy with the Fāṭimid caliphs’ pacts with other powerful clans, notably their rivals — the Sanhāja. Moreover, the mutual antagonism of the Kutāma and the locals of Ifrīqiya (and later Egypt) was a constant cause of concern for the Fāṭimid state. The “Kutāma problem” partly stemmed from a tension between the accepted vision of the Islamic caliphate and the political organisation and customs of the Berber society, such as a disagreement over the organisation of the Kutāma within the newly founded Fāṭimid state during the build-up to the infamous execution of Abū ʿAbd Allāh, his brother and his key allies, followed by numerous riots and revolts by the Kutāma.⁶¹ I hope to explain why these most loyal followers of the imams were gradually excluded from power.

The revolution of the year 296/909 that brought the Fāṭimids to power in North Africa has been described as a watershed moment for the unification of North Africa under Islamic rule⁶² and the rise of Berber tribalism as a revolutionary force capable of forming empires, “not simply rebellion.”⁶³ The Kutāma Berbers were the force behind these transformations,

⁶⁰ René Basset, “Kutāma,” *EI2*. The ancestors of the Kutāma were probably the “Ucutumani of the mountains in the Late Classical Period.” Brett, *Rise*, 85. See also, Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, 63, 93; Brett, *The Fāṭimid Empire*, 38-40.

⁶¹ Halm, *Empire*, 159-176.

⁶² Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, 94;

⁶³ Brett, *The Fatimid Empire*, 301; idem, *Rise*, 111.

inspired by the revolutionary doctrine of the Mahdī, the expected messiah, and led by a Shīʿī missionary from the East. The adventure of the Kutāma people and the Eastern missionary Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī was among the historical events that informed Ibn Khaldūn’s theory of the formation of dynastic states, as well as his theory of the permanent conflict between rural and urban societies, as presented in his *Muqaddima*.

Opposition to the early Islamic empire in North Africa was neither unprecedented nor unique to this part of the world.⁶⁴ Records of Berber revolts go back to Roman times when tribes from African frontiers rose against Roman domination, and the Khārijī rebellions of the mid-second/eighth century, to name but two.⁶⁵ During the early Arab-Islamic conquest including the Aghlabid rule (800 to 909) with their capital near Qayrawān, the relationship between the conquering Arab army and the tribal Berbers did not significantly differ from the Roman and Byzantine period. In Brett’s words “they remained a law unto themselves, excluded from the civilisation which presided over them.”⁶⁶ While the Romans had co-opted the tribal chiefs and to some extent incorporated the Berber peripheries of their empire administratively, the clientele relationship faded away with the Vandal conquest (429-440) and the disappearance of effective control over the provinces.⁶⁷ The Byzantine conquest of 530 CE, which replaced Latin with Greek supposedly further alienated the natives, who were bilingual in Latin. Furthermore, the value of the city decreased, cities were abandoned, and tribal society revitalised. Only Byzantine forts and churches represented urbanity. Old towns were reduced to villages, often deserted, but also destroyed on purpose to prevent the Romans from returning to them.⁶⁸

After almost two centuries of the Arab-Muslim “colonisation of the Maghreb,” Berbers gradually embraced Islam in its various forms, yet the relationship between the conquerors and the native Berber population still resembled the Byzantine “encastellation,” rather than

⁶⁴ Berber opposition to Islamic empire can be seen as a “nativistic movement.” See Mercedes García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform: Mahdīs of the Muslim West*, tr. Martin Beagles (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 25-26.

⁶⁵ Brett and Fentress, 63, 67-70, 87-88.

⁶⁶ Brett, *Rise*, 84; for an overview, see idem, 81-84.

⁶⁷ Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, 76; For the Romanisation of North Africa, see Fentress, “Romanizing the Berbers” *Past & Present* 190 (Feb 2006), 3-33.

⁶⁸ Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, 79-80.

the Roman “integration.”⁶⁹ More recent studies emphasise the slowness and gradualness of the processes of Islamisation and Arabisation in North Africa, as well as the continuity of pre-Islamic cultures, religions and languages.⁷⁰ It would take another seven hundred years until they achieve recognition as a “true people” alongside the Arabs, Greeks, Persians and Romans in the Arabic literary tradition in the form of the monumental history of Ibn Khaldūn, who also stressed the contribution of the Berbers to civilisation highlighting the fact that they were the native population of North Africa.⁷¹

During the Aghlabid period, tribal Berbers were still feared and excluded from the garrison towns (*amṣār*) settled by the Arab army (*jund*) and the emerging educated Islamised society. By contrast, the Fāṭimid *daʿwa* convinced the Kutāma Berbers to re-enact the advent of the first Muslim community, the Emigrants (*muhājirūn*) joined by Ifrīqiyan Supporters (*anṣār*), which they accepted enthusiastically.⁷² That the Kutāma were recruited to the cause of a new movement and actively participated in the creation of the state after willingly submitting themselves to the authority of the new prophet-like missionary, forsaking their tribal structure, and forming a society that was not unlike the early Muslim community of believers, is a view that dominates modern scholarship. The sources, too, are generally muted about the aspirations of the Islamising Berbers and their perspective as they began to see themselves as Muslim believers in the early period. It is, thus, for the first time during the Fāṭimid period that the Berbers saw a more prominent role for them to play on a much bigger stage.⁷³ As Amira Bennison puts it

⁶⁹ Ibid., 92; also, see ch. 2.

⁷⁰ See the forthcoming study by Amira Bennison, “Islam, the Maghrib, and the Medieval Mediterranean World, c. 700-1500 CE,” forthcoming; Corisande Fenwick, “From Africa to Ifrīqiya: Settlement and Society in Early Medieval North Africa (650-800),” *al-Masāq* 25: 1 (2013): 9-33; Dominique Valérian (ed.), *Islamisation et arabisation de l’Occident musulman médiéval (vii-xiie siècle)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011).

⁷¹ Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, 1.

⁷² For articulations of the position of the Fāṭimid state vis-à-vis the Kutāma, see two sermons by the Fāṭimid caliphs al-Qāʾim and al-Manṣūr, ed. and tr. Paul Walker, *Orations of the Fāṭimid Caliphs: Festival Sermons of the Ismaili Imams* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 57-58, 6-7 (translation: 93-94), 26-27 (translation: 117-118).

⁷³ It is known that native Africans took part in Roman administration, too, but Islamisation provided unprecedented opportunities, as Brett argues. See also, García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, 75-76.

For the first time, a Berber-backed movement aspired to rule the entire Islamic world, rather than create a local alternative to the religious and political formations of the Middle East or accept the sovereignty of distant caliphs.⁷⁴

The Kutāma's role in the Fāṭimid state was not only as warriors, governors, administrators, judges, and commanders, but also as a privileged community of believers, which was necessary for the projection of Fāṭimid power and authority. Still, the Berbers' adherence to "heretical" movements, presumably including the Fāṭimid *da'wa*, according to Shatzmiller, "represented a form of [Berber] resistance to Islamic and Arab acculturation."⁷⁵ The Fāṭimid-Kutāma revolution, therefore, probably can be more securely called a native revolution than the 'Abbāsīd Revolution in the East.⁷⁶ Whatever the main drive may have been, this was a defining stage in the evolution of the Berber society from stateless, or "pre-state political communities," to borrow Lapidus's phrase, to state formation.⁷⁷ It was also the beginning of a new era of imperial expansion and Islamisation in North Africa, which started with the active role of the Kutāma in the revolution and state-building, breaking with the Late Antiquity pattern — (i.e. the exclusion of the Berbers from "civilisation"),⁷⁸ the inclusion of the Kutāma in the Fāṭimid *dawla* and their settlement in major towns, such as Raqqāda, Qayrawān, al-Mahdiyya, al-Manṣūriyya, and later in al-Qāhira. In sum, the Fāṭimid revolution was a culmination of Berber movements and represents a shift from the ancient patterns that persisted through until the Aghlabid period, although the foundations were laid by earlier

⁷⁴ Bennison, "Islam, the Maghrib, and the Medieval Mediterranean World, c. 700-1500 CE," forthcoming.

⁷⁵ Maya Shatzmiller, *The Berbers and the Islamic State: The Marinid Experience in Pre-Protectorate Morocco* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2000), xvii.

⁷⁶ In the following centuries, the Kutāma adventure would be replicated by the Sanhāja Almoravids, and the Masmūda, the power behind the Almohad movement, namely the first Berber empires. Bennison, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires*; García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, ch. 2.

⁷⁷ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 304. Although the Fāṭimids took over the Aghlabid state, as Brett notes, it was the first time "stateless Berber people like the Kutama" were mobilised to form an empire. Brett, *Approaching African History* (Woodbridge, UK, James Currey, 2013, 156-57.

⁷⁸ Under the Aghlabids, for instance, the old system was kept in place. Garrison towns mostly populated by Arabs, various migrants, elements of the army and scholars with the exclusion of the Berbers. See Brett, *Rise*, 84.

Khārijī rebellions and messianic movements, local Berber Muslim polities such as the Rustamids of Tāhart and the Idrīsids.⁷⁹

Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī and the Genesis of Fātimid Institutions

Following al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s official account of the Fātimid revolution in the Maghrib, Muslim historians attribute Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī’s success to his skills in persuasion and his relative superiority in religious knowledge. Al-Nu‘mān’s account of the beginning of the *da‘wa*, which is based on Abū ‘Abd Allāh’s now lost *sīra*, as well as Ibn al-Haytham’s eye-witness account, offer ample details about the ways in which he won over the Kutāma. Capitalising on their resentment towards the urbanised Arabs’ opulent lifestyle, Abū ‘Abd Allāh also adopted the simple life of a Berber, and despite his unquestionable charisma and authority, the Kutāma referred to him as *al-sayyid* (chief), a tribal notion that merely signified “the first among equals.”⁸⁰

Abū ‘Abd Allāh was styled *al-Sayyid* (the Master) among the Kutāma, just as the Arabs call *al-Sayyid* anyone who holds authority among them or is of a noble descent. Abū ‘Abd Allāh introduced this custom according to tradition prevalent in the east. He called the said Ibrāhīm, when the latter came to him, *al-Sayyid al-Ṣaghīr* (the Little Master). (Ibrāhīm) was also known as al-Hawwārī.⁸¹

The fact that a Berber man was also ranked next to Abū ‘Abd Allāh points to Abū ‘Abd Allāh’s successful appeal to tribal notions of authority. His strategy of rewarding devoted members of the movement and punishing dissenters also proved effective in asserting control over diverse clans. Most importantly, however, he understood the importance of training local *dā‘īs*, and giving them authority over their kinsmen, thus encouraging them to join the *da‘wa* and learn

⁷⁹ Brett, *Approaching African History*, 150-51, 156-57; García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, 65. “The tribe of the Kutāma was another Berber people willing to turn itself into God’s chosen people, in accordance with its model and in revolt against official representatives of the state regime.” For the Idrīsids, see *ibid.*, 34ff.

⁸⁰ On the “*sayyid*” and other notions of authority in early Islamic Maghrib, see Adam R. Gaiser, *Muslims, Scholars, Soldiers: The Origin and Elaboration of the Ibāḍī Imamate Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21-24, 143.

⁸¹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 46; Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, 1:151. Abū ‘Abd Allāh appointed this Ibrāhīm al-Hawwārī, who was also known as al-Yamānī because of the supposed Yemeni origin of the Hawwāra Berbers to whom he belonged, as the governor of Tāhart after the Rustamid imamate was overthrown.

the tenets of the faith. It is in Īkjān, Abū ‘Abd Allāh’s base, which he designated as his initial abode of emigration (*dār al-hijra*), similar to the journey of the Prophet Muḥammad to Madīna, and established regular *majālis* for the instruction of the *dā’īs* and other believers:

Abū ‘Abd Allāh despatched *dā’īs* to the tribes and himself conducted instructional sessions (*majālis*), sitting in session every day for the believers, relating ḥadīth to them and giving them explanations. He ordered the *dā’īs* to do the same. The believers became sincere in their intent, their understanding increased and their condition became sound.⁸²

Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī’s *majālis* must have resembled similar sessions of preaching and instruction elsewhere in the Islamic world, such as the ones he himself attended in the Yemen. It is conceivable that al-Nu‘mān, a secondary source, projected the systematic and regular *da‘wa* instruction of his time onto the revolutionary period. Nevertheless, it was for the first time that a system of instruction for the believers as potential activists for the movement was launched.⁸³ The same model was later followed by Ibn Tūmart, the founder of the Almohad movement, who preached that all believers should take responsibility in fulfilling the Prophetic mission of “the enjoining of good and the forbidding of evil.”⁸⁴

According to al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī’s strategy was rather simple: both the religious message and promise of wealth produced the desired mobilising effect on the Kutāma. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān naturally praises the pious motivations of the Abū ‘Abd Allāh’s followers, and scorns the worldly incentives, such as wealth and prestige, that attracted part of the followers, but explains this as basic human nature.⁸⁵ It is also inevitable, because the believers were to repeat the experience of the Prophet, face hypocrisy and treason, only to emerge victorious. One also has to bear in mind that in telling the story of the Kutāma al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān also had to explain the troubles of the revolutionary years that led to the downfall of the leaders of the revolution.

Abū ‘Abd Allāh exploited the tribal structure and ethos of the Kutāma, but also gradually introduced Eastern and Islamic norms and notions. Respecting elders and following

⁸² Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 115. On the foundation of Tāzrūt and the *dār al-hijra*, see *ibid.*, 81-100.

⁸³ These activities are discussed by Halm, “The Ismā‘īli Oath of Allegiance (*‘ahd*) and the Sessions of Wisdom (*majālis al-ḥikma*) in Fatimid Times,” in Daftary (ed.). *Medieval Ismā‘īli History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 91-115; *idem*, *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning*, 17-27.

⁸⁴ Cornell, “Understanding Is the Mother of Ability,” 89.

⁸⁵ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 100-103.

and defending (as well as reserving the right to publish) one's kinsmen in all matters were the unwritten code of the Kutāma Berbers like other tribal peoples. However, during his years among the Kutāma, the *dā'ī* propagated Islamic notions of authority based on religious knowledge, which would allow one to bypass the tribal hierarchy. As al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān depicts the Islamising efforts of Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī, he appointed his trusted *dā'īs* and commanders as the head of a community.

(Abū 'Abd Allāh) divided the Kutāma into seven sections. He assigned troops for each section and appointed a commander over it. He appointed in every locality a *dā'ī*. He called the commanders and the *dā'īs* 'elders' (*mashāyikh*), even those who had not attained old age.⁸⁶

He also taught the Kutāma that spiritual brotherhood among those who adhere to the same religion is the same as the bond of kinship and instructed his followers to treat each other as brothers and to help each other.⁸⁷ This measure, which appears to capitalise on tribal egalitarian way of life, may have upset the tribal hierarchy in place.⁸⁸ Thus, while Abū 'Abd Allāh was determined to organise the Kutāma according to his vision, he still paid lip service to their tribal customs, such as respecting the authority of the chiefs (*shuyūkh*), on occasions. For example, he gave the elders, the privilege of keeping the Imam's share of the booty, who then had to reluctantly surrender it to him, when he passed by Īkjān.⁸⁹ These anecdotes, in al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's view, show the Kutāma's lack of Islamisation, rebelliousness and laxness with regards to Islamic law and the rules of an orderly society. However, they tell little or nothing about their understanding of Islam, and their own perception of their role within the movement, whether this understanding was based on pre-Islamic tribal customs, or on quasi-Khārijī notions of communal authority. The fact that Abū 'Abd Allāh was known by the pre-Islamic Arabian tribal rank *sayyid*, which signified his position as "the first among equals,"⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibid., 104.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 103, 107.

⁸⁸ Annliese Nef, "La délégation politique dans l'Occident fatimide avant 973," *RMMM* 139 (2016) [Online], para. 17.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 46. See note 80, above.

shows the Kutāma's specific notion of authority, which unsurprisingly clashed with the absolutist authority of the Mahdī.⁹¹

In other words, Abū 'Abd Allāh adapted his message to the notions of authority that had already taken root among the Islamising Kutāma society. Moreover, he exploited their tribalism, internal feuds, defiance, and aversion to authority to mobilise the Kutāma.⁹² He achieved a spectacular victory against the demoralised Aghlabids, who had lost even the support of the local Arab population as the threat came close.

In this context, it is useful be reminded of the impression that the pious and determined Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī and the Kutāma made on the people of Ifrīqiya. A curious anecdote related by Ibn al-Jazzār from the Fāṭimid court physician Ishāq al-Isrā'īlī (d. circa 344/955), illustrate this point:

When Abū 'Abd Allāh, the *dā'i* of al-Mahdī, reached Raqqāda, he sought me and drew me close to him. He had a stone in his kidneys, and I treated him with a medicine which contained burnt scorpions. One day I was sitting with a group of Kutāma men, who asked me about types of diseases, but whatever I answered they did not grasp my words. So, I said to them: "You are [like] cattle (*baqar*) and have nothing in common with humans except the name." This incident was reported to Abū 'Abd Allāh, and when I [next] visited him he said: "You treat our faithful brethren (*ikhwānanā al-mu'minīn*) from Kutāma the way you should not. By God, the Generous, were you not excused because of your ignorance about their rights and the extent of their knowledge of [religious] truth and the proponents of the truth (*ahl al-ḥaqq*), I would surely cut off your head." Ishāq told me: "I saw a man who was serious in his purpose and had no time for joking. (lit. *wa laysa li'l-hazl 'indahū sūq*)."⁹³

Ishāq al-Isrā'īlī quote reveals the condescending way the people of urban centres of Ifrīqiya might have looked at the Kutāma tribe members, as well as Abū 'Abd Allāh's determination to keep the tribal spirit of his pietistic movement alive.

⁹¹ See also a discussion of this tension within "the Khaldūnian framework" in Bennison, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires*, 7.

⁹² Brett, *Fatimid Empire*, 30.

⁹³ Ibn al-Jazzār, *Akhbār al-dawla*, (now lost), cited in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, Aḥmad b. Qāsim, *Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1965), 480. One could translate the last sentence more idiomatically as "he had no sense of humour," however, Ishāq's contrasting of the serious Abū 'Abd Allāh with Ziyādat Allāh, whom he describes as undignified and uncharismatic, makes it clear that he rather admired the former's character.

Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān also paints an idealised picture of the revolutionary movement, praising Abū ‘Abd Allāh for his piety that had earned him the respect and obedience of the otherwise unruly tribesmen. He was able to impose Islamic rules and punish any transgression relates al-Nu‘mān praising his reforms among the Kutāma. Of course, as with other Islamising movements, the best way to idealise the beginning of the *da‘wa* was to draw parallels with the early days of Islam and the imagined piety and harmony of the nascent community of believers.⁹⁴ It served to legitimise the Fāṭimid *dawla* and to encourage his contemporary audience to perfect their faith in it.

No doubt relying on the first-hand account by Abū ‘Abd Allāh, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān also emphasises the contribution of women to the *da‘wa*. Among them is the wife of Yaḥyā b. Yūsuf known as Ibn al-Aṣamm al-Ijjānī⁹⁵ — a companion of the early *dā‘ī* among the Kutāma, al-Ḥulwānī. Al-Nu‘mān mentions that al-Ijjānī taught his wife Shī‘ī doctrines before he died. She later delivered the money that her husband had put aside for the cause of the *da‘wa* to the state and took part in the struggles of the revolution like many other women:

There were other women like her whose account would only lengthen this book. They attended instructional sessions (*majālis*) and listened to words of wisdom. There were some old women, who followed these sessions and rose to the rank of *dā‘īs* (*ḥadd al-da‘wa*). Among them were Umm Mūsā, daughter of al-Ḥulwānī whom we have mentioned before, and other old women of the Kutāma. They also rendered services to the believers, looked after the sick and treated the wounded with devotion and insight, because these women, as well as the men whom we have mentioned before, listened to admonishment and wisdom, and were strengthened with education and right conduct.⁹⁶

This extraordinary level of mobilisation and involvement of women in religious learning and even in the *da‘wa* during the revolutionary period must relate to the status of women in the indigenous North African society.⁹⁷ However, it is worth noting that the sources continue to

⁹⁴ Drawing parallels between the «beginning of the *da‘wa*» and the beginning of Islam is common in al-Nu‘mān's narrative such as on page 221-22 of the *Iftitāḥ*.

⁹⁵ His *niṣba* suggests that he belongs to the Ijjān branch of the Kutāma (or the town of Īkjān).

⁹⁶ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 108.

⁹⁷ For a discussion on the status of women among the Berbers of North Africa, see, Bennison, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires*, 154-164.

inform us about sessions of instructions for women in the Fāṭimid period both in Ifrīqiya and Egypt.

The Troubles of the Kutāma

One year after the foundation of the caliphate, al-Mahdī ordered the assassination of the top revolutionaries Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī and his brother Abu’l-‘Abbās al-Makhṭūm (d. 298/911)⁹⁸ along with the Kutāma chiefs Abū Mūsā and Abū Zākī allegedly for plotting a coup against him.⁹⁹ The discontent of the Kutāma and their doubts about the Mahdī are mentioned as the main factors that led to these events.¹⁰⁰ The most senior Kutāma, *shaykh al-mashā’ikh* (chief of the chiefs) Abū Mūsā Hārūn was first to confront the Mahdī and express doubts about his identity, which led to his immediate execution. The fact that Fāṭimid historiography blamed this misfortune on Abu’l-‘Abbās is paradoxical.¹⁰¹ He was the only person who knew the Imam in person prior to the revolution and made a passionate case for his imamate during his debates with the jurists of Qayrawān.¹⁰² It is, therefore, more plausible that Abū ‘Abd Allāh and the Kutāma leaders, who had been together for eighteen years must have brought down Abu’l-‘Abbās with them, rather than the other way around.¹⁰³ Moreover, it was Abū ‘Abd Allāh’s long-term dedication to the Ismā‘īlī mission, the way he understood it, that put him at odds with

⁹⁸ For the role of the brothers in establishing the Fāṭimid state and the events that lead to their execution, see, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ al-da‘wa*; Walker, *The Advent*, 1-59.

⁹⁹ The *Iftitāḥ* and the *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt* portray Abū Mūsā Hārūn b. Yūnus al-Azāyī al-Masālī (d. 298/911) as a jealous and power-greedy man, whose prime concern was to maintain his status in relation to the imam and his subordinates. He was known as “shaykh of shaykhs” (*shaykh al-mashā’ikh*) — the highest rank amongst the Kutāma. On him see, *Iftitāḥ*, 57, 97, 216-7; Walker, *The Advent*, 3, note 4; Ibn al-Haytham, *al-Munāẓarāt*, index. Abū Zākī Tammām b. Mu‘ārik al-Ijjānī (d. 298/911) a young Kutāma leader was also accused of conspiracy and executed by his uncle Abū Māknūn b. Ḍubāra, the head of the Ījjāna branch of the Kutāma and the governor of Tripoli at the time, at al-Mahdī’s demand. On him see, Walker’s note in *The Advent*, 3-4, note 4; *Munāẓarāt*, index.

¹⁰⁰ The main sources are al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *Iftitāḥ*, 213-22; Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, 1: 163-164. The event is discussed in Halm, *Empire*, 159-63; Brett, *Rise*, 107-11; Walker, *The Advent*, 31-37.

¹⁰¹ See, for instance, Idrīs Imād al-Dīn, *Zahr al-Ma‘ānī*, 68-70 (tr. Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, 261-62).

¹⁰² Al-Yamānī, *Sīrat Ja‘far al-Ḥājib*, Arabic text published in *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Egyptian University*, 1936 (1939): 107-133; tr. W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, 184-223, 207.

¹⁰³ Walker also questions these accusations and suggests that Abu’l-‘Abbās “at most may have encouraged his brother in the aim of preserving his effective control over the Kutāma.” See his introduction to *The Advent*, 40. Thus, Abū ‘Abd Allāh’s attempt to pacify the Kutāma by suggesting that the leadership of the tribesmen should be left to him may have been a reason for his execution.

al-Mahdī, when the latter declared that he was a biological descendant of ‘Abd Allāh, the older son of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, rather than Ismā‘īl, his younger son. A letter that al-Mahdī sent to the members of the *da‘wa* in the Yemen, with whom Abū ‘Abd Allāh was affiliated and was even known as al-Ṣan‘ānī (from the town of San‘ā’ in Yemen),¹⁰⁴ helps to see the events in Ifrīqiya against the wider canvas of doctrinal development within the movement.

The letter, which is deemed authentic by most historians, exposes what may have been a plausible reason for the quarrel between Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī and al-Mahdī, namely the *dā‘ī*’s failure to reconcile the original doctrine with al-Mahdī’s lineage.¹⁰⁵ It reveals that in contrast with an Ismā‘īlī doctrine that Abū ‘Abd Allāh had preached, namely the belief in the imamate of Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl b. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq and the appearance of a descendant of Ismā‘īl as a Mahdī, ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī had claimed the imamate for himself while tracing his lineage not to Ismā‘īl b. Ja‘far as per the so-called “orthodox” early Ismā‘īlī doctrine, but to ‘Abd Allāh, the oldest son of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. Abū ‘Abd Allāh’s doctrine, was precisely the one that al-Mahdī set to refute in his letter to the Yemenī *da‘wa*.¹⁰⁶

The letter was first brought to light by Husayn al-Hamdani and subsequently analysed by Abbas Hamdani and François de Blois in their 1983 article.¹⁰⁷ This discussion is mostly outside the scope of the present thesis, but in so far as it provides a doctrinal context for changes in Fāṭimid policies, and because it must have played a role in Abū ‘Abd Allāh’s execution, it remains pertinent. We know Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī had preached about a Mahdī from the lineage of Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl and was sent to the Maghrib by the champions of the Ismā‘īlī line, not other sons of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. The *dā‘ī* declares this in his discussions with Ibn al-Haytham preserved in the latter’s recently discovered *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, where he

¹⁰⁴ Walker, *The Advent*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ The letter was preserved in Ja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman’s *Kitāb al-Farā’id wa ḥudūd al-dīn* in the author’s paraphrase and was first published and translated by Husayn al-Hamdani under the title *On the Genealogy of Fatimid Caliphs (Statement on Mahdī’s communication to the Yemen on the hidden and esoteric names of his predecessors)* (Cairo: Publication of the American University of Cairo, School of Oriental Studies, 1958).

¹⁰⁶ al-Hamdani, *On the Genealogy of Fatimid Caliphs*, 13 (Arabic text, 10); Madelung, “Das Imamāt in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre,” *Der Islam* 37 (1961): 53ff.; translated into English by Patricia Crone, “The Imamate in Early Ismaili Doctrine,” *SSR* 2 (2018): 72ff. for pre-Fāṭimid doctrines, and 66-67 (translation: 84-85) for al-Mahdī’s reforms.

¹⁰⁷ Abbas Hamdani and François de Blois. “A Re-Examination of al-Mahdī’s Letter to the Yemenites on the Genealogy of the Fatimid Caliphs,” *JRAS* 2 (1983): 173-207.

reveals the identity of the expected Mahdī as Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar and denies the possibility that he would be called otherwise.¹⁰⁸ This explains the elimination of the *dāʿī* and his loyal supporters, the revolt of the Kutāma and their proclamation of a pretender as Mahdī, as well as al-Mahdī’s apologetic letter to the Yemen.¹⁰⁹ Unsurprisingly, as mentioned above, the later Ismāʿīlī narrative put the blame entirely on individual Kutāma chiefs and the *dāʿī*’s brother.¹¹⁰

Despite belonging to almost the same period as the majority of Ismāʿīlī sources, Ibn al-Haytham’s *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt* not only exonerates the two brothers and the above mentioned Kutāma chiefs Abū Mūsā and Abū Zākī, but also invokes the memory of the “shaykh of the community” Aflaḥ b. Hārūn (310/922), the first Kutāma judge of Raqqāda among other Kutāma learned men, women and *dāʿīs*:

We were together with the shaykhs of the Kutāma, their *dāʿīs*, learned men, and the devotees of religion among their men [...] There was no duly authorised *dāʿī* [*dāʿī muṭlaq*] among them but I learned from him with the permission of the shaykh Abū Mūsā. I harvested from their fruits both the exterior [*ẓāhir*] and the interior [*bāṭin*], and there was not one of them who did not stay with me and visit my home. And whatever I may forget, I shall never forget the *dāʿī* of Malūsa, the shaykh of the community and their legal authority, Aflaḥ b. Hārūn al-ʿIbānī. He combined his activity as *dāʿī* [*daʿwa*] with the sciences of the religious law [*ʿulūm al-fiqh*], and he reached back to the time of Abū Maʿshar and al-Ḥulwānī, and transmitted on their authority from al-Ḥalabī. I frequently met him and visited him. He stayed with me many times and copied many books on law, traditions, and the virtues and speeches of our master and our lord, the Commander of the Faithful, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 56 (translation: 107). On the importance of al-Mahdī’s genealogy to the quarrel in the Maghrib, i.e. the *dāʿī* and the Kutāma’s doubts about al-Mahdī and the alleged conspiracy against him, see the following studies: Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, 27-45; Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids*, 111-116, 127-32; Madeung, “Das Imamat,” 43-135 (translation: 62-155); Halm, *Empire*, 154-59 (“Family Trees,” followed by “The Conspiracy of the Dāʿīs”); Hamdani and de Blois, “A Re-Examination,” 173-207.

¹⁰⁹ Later, the genealogy of al-Mahdī was reversed by his successors, possibly even by himself in an attempt to unite the Ismāʿīlī movement.

¹¹⁰ An early study by Prince Peter Hagop Mamour, *Polemics on the Origin of the Fatimi Caliphs* (Karachi, Indus Publications, 1934; Reprinted, 1979), 106-114, takes this as a more believable account. See, esp. the section titled “Correct details concerning Obeydallah.”

¹¹¹ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 168 (Arabic text: 12—21); Followed by verses from the Qurʾān describing the bliss of the paradise: 56:28-33, 88:14, 37:45-46, 18:31.

¹¹² Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 168-68 (Arabic text: 121-22), notes 180-82.

This *Munāẓarāt* leaves no doubt that Ibn al-Haytham belonged to the inner circles of the *dāʿīs* and had an outstanding relationship with the Kutāma chiefs, whom he portrays as very devoted to the Fāṭimid cause. However, his account, in my view, provides a subtle counter narrative to the account of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, ʿArīb (Ibn Idhārī) and ʿAbd al-Jabbār, who emphasise the conspiracy of the Kutāma and the involvement of one or both of the *dāʿīs*. Ibn al-Haytham, instead vaguely blames the “remnants of the men of the Aghlabids” for ensuing troubles but makes no mention of the Kutāma conspiracy and revolts. Overall, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, Ibn al-Haytham’s account written after 334/946 may indicate the return of the Kutāma to the centre ground of inter-*daʿwa* politics due to their crucial role in defeating Abū Yazīd.

This execution of the *dāʿīs*, followed by that of the Kutāma chiefs, confirms al-Mahdī’s determination to eliminate the threat of the tribal leaders and the charismatic *dāʿīs*.¹¹³ It may also be significant that he almost immediately sent several influential *dāʿīs* away from the capital. Instead, the elements of the Aghlabid dynasty were incorporated into the state, most importantly, the black and white (Ṣaqālība) slave soldiers, a policy that enraged the Kutāma. In the course of the growth of Fāṭimid administration and its bureaucratization, the recruitment of the Ṣaqālība, the Sanhāja Berbers and various Arab clans proved effective. This “differentiation of the field of power,” as Bourdieu (d. 2002) would have called it, probably saved the Fāṭimid state from immediate collapse.¹¹⁴

The riots of the unruly Kutāma against the Fāṭimids continued under al-Mahdī and his successors. Their disobedience also came in the form of violence towards the population of the cities that they conquered, notably Fustāṭ and Damascus, which in turn provoked hostility towards them and their masters — the Fāṭimids. Thus, while the Fāṭimid state was seen as a Kutāma state, and the Fāṭimid dynasty continuously emphasised and praised them

¹¹³ On this see Brett, *Fatimid Empire*, 26-37, 36; For more detailed discussion, see idem, *Rise*, 107-116, where Brett discussed the execution of the *dāʿīs* in the context of doubts about al-Mahdī’s genealogy.

¹¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, “From the King’s House to the Reason of State: A Model of the Genesis of the Bureaucratic Field,” *Constellations Volume 11*, No 1 (2004), 16-36, 33. Bourdieu talks about the bureaucratisation of dynastic state and the dissolution of the “king” into “the impersonal network of a long chain of mandated plenipotentiaries who are answerable to a superior from whom they receive their authority and their power.” Obviously, the Fāṭimid dynastic state was still in infancy and the chain of command was not long, but this logic underpinned many of the upcoming developments.

for their devotion, paradoxically, they also presented a significant threat to the Fāṭimids. Al-Mahdī perceived this threat from the very early days of his rule and kept the Kutāma at bay by effectively limiting their access to power and financial resources, as well as by depriving them of strong leadership. However, the memory of Abū ‘Abd Allāh had to be revived and kept alive in Fāṭimid historiography to repair a broken bond between the dynasty and the Kutāma who continued to be an important military resource.

“New Men” vs the Old “Allies”

Despite Kutāma’s rebellions against the dynasty and the treason of tribal leaders on several occasions, the Kutāma remained loyal to the dynasty and fought for its cause for decades. It is, therefore, puzzling why these highly valued followers of the dynasty, not least because of the glorious past that gave them their identity as the *awliyā’* — “allies” and unmatched prestige, rarely rose to positions of power when other alternatives became available. Given their initial disobedience and the later dissatisfaction of al-Mu‘izz with the Kutāma, although expressed occasionally and only in private communications (such as in private letters and *majālis*), it is understandable why scholars sometimes describe the Fāṭimid-Kutāma alliance as a “necessary evil.”¹¹⁵ The preference given to the Slavs, Arabs (Banū Abī Khinzīr, Banū Ḥamdūn, Kalbids of Sicily) and even the Sanhāja Zīrids, suggest that the Kutāma were deliberately excluded from power, although the decision to delegate power to the Zīrids may be seen as a result of the Fāṭimids’ overdependence on the Kutāma during the move to Egypt.¹¹⁶ The insights of two thinkers, Ibn Khaldūn and Bourdieu, who incidentally shared an interest in Berber tribal societies and theorised the evolution of dynastic authority and the role of the clients of the dynasty, offered insights that may apply to this case.¹¹⁷ Although six centuries apart, Bourdieu and Ibn Khaldūn’s theories overlap and complement each other.

¹¹⁵ On this see, Ibrahim Jadla, “Les Fatimides et les Kutāma: une alliance stratégique ou un mal nécessaire?” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Moyen-Age* 115, 1 (2003), 503-512.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 511.

¹¹⁷ Jo Van Steenberghe, Patrick Wing, and Kristof D’hulster’s two-part article “The Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate?” provides us with a comparative case from a later period. See, *History Compass* 14, no. 11 (2016): 549–69.

According to Ibn Khaldūn, the Kutāma fully submitted to the Fāṭimid dynasty because of their firm belief in the latter's religious ideology and their kingship or claim to authority. He saw it as natural for the Kutāma to rise against the weakened rule of the Arabs, but it was the religious message of the Fāṭimid *daʿwa*, that gave confidence and direction to the Kutāma *ʿaṣabiyya* or group solidarity.¹¹⁸ Modern scholars also agree: combining messianism and charismatic authority, Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism happened to be an ideology that suited the purpose and disposition of the rebellious Berber tribesmen.¹¹⁹

In the five-stage cycle of a dynastic state, or after three generations,¹²⁰ according to Ibn Khaldūn, the group feeling of tribal groups inevitably weakens after they take up residence in cities. Therefore, the dynasty would have to either rely on fresh reinforcements from the same tribe, rely on other “uncorrupted” tribes, or perish. The Fāṭimids continued to rely on the Kutāma even after departing to Egypt. However, according to Ibn Khaldūn, they became increasingly dependent on other groups whose *ʿaṣabiyya* was apparently stronger, namely the Sanhāja Zīrids, and later on the Turks and Daylamites, and even Armenians. Delegating authority to a subordinate dynasty with stronger *ʿaṣabiyya* would inevitably prove fatal for any dynasty; the Zīrids, Būyids and Seljūq Turks all eventually sidelined the great Arab dynasties, argued Ibn Khaldūn.¹²¹ It is questionable whether the rise of the Sanhāja necessarily followed from the Kutāma's loss of their tribal solidarity during their stay in Ifrīqiya. Because they continued to be seen as outsiders, “pejoratively” labelled as *mashāriqa*¹²² (i.e. followers of Fāṭimid-Ismāʿīlī *madhhab*, literally, Easternised) in Ifrīqiya and *maghāriba* (Westerners) in Egypt, it inevitably contributed to their internal coherence, group identity and solidarity.

¹¹⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 1:413; See also the section on the genealogy of the Fāṭimids at the beginning of the *Muqaddima* where Ibn Khaldūn discusses Abū ʿAbd Allāh's activities amongst the Kutāma, *ibid.*, 1:41-47. On how Fāṭimid religious claim complemented Berber tribal *ʿaṣabiyya*, see, *Muqaddimah*, 1:318-19; and a relevant discussion of Mahdism and Shīʿism in Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn: An Essay*, 90-92.

For a modern assessment of this theory, in light of Max Weber's assessment of tribal warrior groups in Islam, see Nehemia Levtzion, “Aspects of Islamization: Weber's Observations on Islam Reconsidered,” in Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schuchter (eds.), *Max Weber and Islam* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 159.

¹¹⁹ Wansbrough, “On Recomposing the Islamic History of North Africa,” 168; Brett, “The Realm of the Imam,” 449; *Rise*, 86; *idem*, *Fāṭimid Empire*, 30-31.

¹²⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 1:343-46, 353-55.

¹²¹ *Muqaddima*, 1: 284-6; 314.

¹²² Allaoua Amara, “Les Fatimides et le Maghreb central: littoralisation de la dynastie et modes de contrôle des territoires,” *RMMM* 139 (2016) [Online].

Thus, in Ibn Khaldūn's theory, the Kutāma are the main supporters of the movement and the beneficiaries of the *dawla*. Of course, for Ibn Khaldūn, developments such as delegation of authority to "clients," the emergence of powerful bureaucrats and distribution of power were signs of corruption and the dynasty's decline of power and authority. Even modern scholars of early Islamic history tend to view decentralisation of power, or delegation of authority, as a sign of weakening that leads to the disintegration of empires.¹²³ However, Ibn Khaldūn's analysis of the evolution of dynastic states, particularly the role that he prescribed for tribal groups is useful for our understanding of the role of the Kutāma in the evolution of the Fāṭimid state.

Bourdieu's theoretical framework, which also assesses the role of "the clients of the dynasty," (although limited to the European context of his case study), helps to understand the dynamics of the relationships between the Fāṭimid dynasty and the Kutāma better.¹²⁴ Bourdieu aimed "to pinpoint the logic of the historical process which governed the crystallisation of this historical reality that is the state, first in its dynastic and then in its bureaucratic form," and "to construct a model of this process, more precisely, a model of the transition from the dynastic state to the bureaucratic state." More specifically, as the title of his article suggests, he saw the transition "from the state reduced to the household of the king to the state constituted as a field of forces and a field of struggles oriented towards the monopoly of the legitimate manipulation of public goods."¹²⁵ My aim is not to argue for the transition of the Fāṭimid dynastic state to a bureaucratic state, but rather to understand the logic that underpinned the dynamics of similar processes in the evolution of the Fāṭimid state.

The evolution of dynastic states described by Bourdieu overlaps with Ibn Khaldūn's cycles, as it also captures the power dynamic between the rulers of the dynasty, their clients, dynastic rivals (members of the caliphal family) and the "new men" (Latin: *homines novi*) namely the functionaries of the state and those delegated with power, who do not belong to the dynasty.

¹²³ Annliese Nef, "La délégation politique dans l'Occident fatimide avant 973," *RMMM* 139 (2016) [Online]. Nef challenges previous assumptions about the implications of power delegations by the Fāṭimid caliphs.

¹²⁴ Bourdieu, "From the King's House to the Reason of State," 16-36.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

One encounters thus, almost universally, a tripartite division of power, with, alongside *the king*, the *king's brothers* (in the broad sense), dynastic rivals whose authority rests on the dynastic principle of the house, and the *king's ministers*, typically *homines novi*, “new men” recruited for their competency. One can say, at the cost of some simplification, that the king needs ministers to limit and control the power of his brothers and that, conversely, he can use his brothers to limit and control the power of his ministers.¹²⁶

Let us see how Bourdieu’s “tripartite division of power” applies to the Fāṭimid state. The imam-caliph and his heir apparent (*walī al-aḥd*) exclude the extended family (*aḥl al-qaṣr* or “inhabitants of the palace” i.e. “the king’s brothers”) from power. They are isolated from politics and practically put under house arrest and surveillance.¹²⁷ Instead the *homines novi* or “new men” who included non-Ismāʿīlīs from Arab, Berber and Slav backgrounds were delegated with substantial power and authority by the imam-caliph. So far this theory explains the logic of excluding the caliph’s relatives from power, but since Bourdieu’s case study is the early modern European state, his theory does not account for large groups of tribal supporters of North African dynasties. Nevertheless, one could argue that the same logic that applies to the potential challenge from the “king’s brothers” also applies to charismatic tribal leaders, who could weaken his rule by breaking away or withdrawing their support.

The Kutāma chiefs were close to the imam-caliph and often appointed as deputies to the main officials. Based on their position as the clients (*mawālī*) of the dynasty, they were even declared as “part of the family” based on a Prophetic *ḥadīth* about Salmān al-Fārisī and another *ḥadīth* from Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq who also told his Shīʿa: “You are like family to me.”¹²⁸ Thus, like the “king’s brothers” the Kutāma also had a legitimate entitlement to the dynastic power and wealth by virtue of their loyalty and service, although, unlike the “king’s brothers,” they could not have a legitimate claim to the caliphal throne. Nevertheless, tribal leaders could not be entrusted with so much power and autonomy that could pose a threat to the dynasty. Most

¹²⁶ Bourdieu, “From the King’s House,” 22.

¹²⁷ This is vividly documented in the letters of al-Manṣūr to his *ḥājib* Jawdhar, whose duties included spying on the extended family of the caliph. See al-Jawdhārī, *Inside the immaculate portal: a history from early Fatimid archives: a new edition and English translation of Manṣūr al-ʿAzīzī al-Jawdhārī’s biography of al-Ustādh Jawdhar, the Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*, tr. Hamid Haji (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012; henceforth: *Sīrat*), 58 (Arabic text, 46). *Sīrat*, 42-54 (translation: 55-64).

¹²⁸ Al-Nuʿmān, *Majālis*, 52.

powerful positions were often given to new-comers, “slaves,” and even non-Muslims, effectively preventing the Kutāma from controlling the dynasty.¹²⁹ Like the imam-caliph’s relatives, their challenge was neutralised through the recruitment of competent functionaries of the state, “new men” who did not have any claim to the dynastic state, instead they owed everything to it.¹³⁰

In early (modern) bureaucratic states, Bourdieu observed that while state functionaries were deprived of reproducing themselves in the same way as royal families do, their mode of reproduction, which was not based on blood and birth, but rather “bound up with the school system and therefore with competency and merit” eventually undermined the dynastic mode.¹³¹ The school system was, of course, a much later development, but we already have the case of powerful bureaucrats who eventually undermined the caliphs in the later Fāṭimid period (just like with the ‘Abbāsids).

“Dynastic bureaucrats,” such as the dynasty of judges descended from al-Nu‘mān, managed to reproduce their clans in a similar manner to the caliphal family, but it is their competence and loyalty to the dynasty that increasingly became a determining factor in their appointment, not their lineage.¹³² Michael Brett suggests that this principal change from administration through “the agency of the household” to sophisticated bureaucratic administration took place with the birth of the Fāṭimid “Wazirate” — the promotion of Ya‘qūb b. Killis to the rank of *wazīr* — rightly contrasting Ibn Killis’s background and experience with the Ṣaqaḷiba (sing. Saqlabī, Slavs) servants of al-Mu‘izz.¹³³ Nevertheless, the Ifrīqiyan period of the Fāṭimids could be considered the beginning of a tendency which culminated in the establishment of the Mamlūk dynasty in Egypt. For instance, the most powerful position in the early Fāṭimid caliphate was held by the Saqlabī al-Ustādh Jawdhar, who succeeded al-Mahdī’s chamberlain (*ḥājib*) Ja‘far. The Ṣaqaḷiba were usually captured during raids in the Byzantium territories in the Balkan and sold in North Africa, and many passed to Fāṭimid

¹²⁹ A similar system existed under the ‘Abbāsids. The Aghlabids, too, used the black guard (*‘abīd*) as a counterbalance to the Arab army (*jund*). See Brett, *Fatimid Empire*, 43.

¹³⁰ Bourdieu characterised this as “master-faithful servant relationship.” “From the King’s House,” 24.

¹³¹ Bourdieu, “From the King’s House,” 25.

¹³² Brett, for instance, has argued that the “new man,” Ya‘qūb b. Killis won the competition against the powerful clan of Banū Nu‘mān, who recovered their position only after his death. *Rise*, 370-74.

¹³³ Brett, *Rise*, 340-41.

possession from the Aghlabids. Ja‘far’s *Sīra* recorded how the first Slav remembered by his *niṣba* — al-Īkjānī, entered the service of al-Mahdī, as a personal servant, in Sijilmāsa, where Ja‘far first received the title *ḥājib*.¹³⁴ However, Jawdhar was not merely a *ḥājib*, but as his title (*al-ustādh*) “the Master” suggest, a high-ranking manumitted slave who also had other powerful slaves (*mamlūks*) under his command.¹³⁵ In effect, as Dachraoui argued, his privileges and responsibilities made his position comparable to that of a vizier, especially after he moved to al-Manṣūriyya.¹³⁶

This perspective is helpful in explaining the evolution of the Fāṭimid dynastic state and the development of its institutions. Likewise, it helps to understand the Fāṭimids’ final decline, which is usually explained either in terms of their doctrinal inadequacy and failure to convert the population, or their defeat by the majoritarian and institutionalised Sunnism,¹³⁷ rather than as a result of the evolution of the medieval Islamic state, namely the bureaucratisation and delegation of authority epitomised by powerful Fāṭimid ministers of their Egyptian period. This, and the maturation of Muslim learned elite, multiplication and crystallisation of diverse Islamic doctrines and above all the growth of the Muslim population, eventually, and indeed, as Fowden noted, paradoxically, meant that it was no longer possible

¹³⁴ This slave was presented to al-Mahdī by Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī, thus confirming the presence of Slavs in his service from early on. This Slav must have defected from the Aghlabids, or have been taken as a prisoner, when Abū ‘Abd Allāh conquered Īkjān, as the *niṣba* suggests. *Sīrat Ja‘far al-Ḥājib*, 216-17. Ivanow, however, doubted that the ceremony in which al-Mahdī was proclaimed caliph and Ja‘far became his chamberlain actually took place in Sijilmāsa and not in Raqqāda. See, *ibid.*, the footnotes on pages 218-219.

¹³⁵ The title “*ustādh*,” which was also euphemistically applied to eunuchs, later evolved into “*ustādh-[al]-dār*,” a slave “who looked after the sultan’s personal expenditure, supervised the royal kitchens and domestic staff, etc.” under the Mamlūks. Jawdhar’s role was very similar in the beginning, but later he reached the rank of a vizier in every other aspect but title, under the imam-caliph and his heir apparent. See Floréal Sanagustin, “Ustādh,” *El2*.

¹³⁶ Dachraoui, *al-Khilāfa al-Fātimiyya*, 453. Except that, according to Dachraoui, despite his elevated position, he was not able to make independent decisions. However, the impression of a pious servant that one gets from his archives (*Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*) should not be taken literally. It is mostly al-Mu‘izz’s letters that allow us to see the extent of Jawdhar’s power.

¹³⁷ Gary Leiser, in “The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisūn 495-647/1101-1249” (PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1976), for instance, linked the fall of the Fāṭimids to the “restoration” of Sunnism in Egypt through the rise of *madrasa* colleges of law, a theory which has only recently been challenged. See Luke Yarbrough, “The Madrasas and Non-Muslims in Thirteenth-Century Egypt: A Reassessment,” in Elisheva Baumgarten, Ruth Mazo Karras, and Katelyn Mesler (eds.), *Entangled Histories: Knowledge, Authority, and Jewish Culture in the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 93-112.

to unite the entire Muslim world under the divine authority of one single man.¹³⁸ In other words, Sunnī or Shīʿī, the caliphate as a late antique mode of universal authority could no longer be sustained.

¹³⁸ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 165. The rise and fall of the Islamic “world Empire” as a consequence of the maturation of Islamic society and the resultant “Islamic Commonwealth” is discussed in idem, 138-68, esp. 160-68.

Chapter Two

The Scholars of Qayrawān and the Formation of their Collective Memory and Identity in the Early Fāṭimid Period

*There are three types of knowledge (‘ilm),
and everything else is superfluous:
a clear verse [of the Qur’ān] (āya muḥkama),
or an authentic tradition (sunna qā’ima)
or a just division of inheritance (farīḍa ‘ādila).*

(A rare ḥadīth narrated by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ziyād (the judge of Ifrīqiya and a principal narrator from the generation of *tābi‘ūn* in Ifrīqiya).¹

The aim of this chapter is twofold: first, it will examine the scholarly practices of the *ahl al-‘ilm* (“people of learning” in a broad sense) of Qayrawān and their strategies of safeguarding their continuity and coherence as a social group. Secondly, it will reappraise the impact of the Fāṭimid rule on their life, as well as on the reconstruction of their collective past, identity, and memory.² I will argue that the memory of the scholarly community in Qayrawān and their social and intellectual networks were interdependent. Moreover, their remembrance of the

¹ Abu’l-‘Arab, *Ṭabaqāt*, 27. *Tābi‘ūn* (sing. *tābi‘*, or *tābi‘ī*, lit. Successors) refers to the generation that follows the Companions (*Ṣaḥāba*) of the Prophet and played a key role as narrators of traditions in the formation of various Islamic disciplines. See, Susan A. Sectorsky, “Tābi‘ūn,” *EL*2.

² I follow Maurice Halbwachs’ definition of “collective memory” as shared and interdependent memories of group members, which are socially dynamic rather than static: “Each individual memory represents a point of view on the collective memory. This point of view changes, depending on the place I occupy, and the place I occupy changes depending on the relations I pursue with other milieus.” See Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (1997 [1950 posthumous], 94-95), cited in Sarah Gensburger, “Halbwachs’ Studies in Collective Memory: A Founding Text for Contemporary ‘Memory Studies’?” *JCS* 16, 4 (1 November 2016): 401. “Each collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time.” Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 84. Contrasting history and collective memory of social groups, Halbwachs notes: “Each of these groups has a history. Persons and events are distinguished. What strikes us about this memory, however, is that resemblances are paramount. When it considers its own past, the group feels strongly that it has remained the same and becomes conscious of its identity through time.” *The Collective Memory*, 85. On the relationship between the present and the construction of the past: “everything seems to indicate that the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present.” Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 39-40; and elsewhere, in idem, for his “sociological theory of memory.”

recent past was dynamically reconstructed and modified in order to respond to their present. To show the social functions of learning practices, I survey available biographical and historical sources from the period, although my focus will be on scholarly networks formed through teacher-student relationships and networks formed through the transmission of texts (*riwāya*). Analysing the networks and the collective memory of the scholars will also contribute to my second objective, the reappraisal of the relationship between the Ismāʿīlī Fāṭimids and the *ʿulamāʾ* of Qayrawān, which is perceived to be mutually antagonistic.³ This perception, evidenced by a general consensus among scholars, is based on the memory of the Qayrawānī *fuqahāʾ*, which was, as will be discussed, political and rhetorical in nature and so was textualized and archived in the form of polemical and apologetic literature of later periods. This is both embodied and exemplified by anti-Fāṭimid creedal statements on manuscripts and tombstones from the Zīrid period.⁴ Contrary to the established narrative, this thesis argues that the early Fāṭimid period was one of crucial developments for the *ʿulamāʾ* of Ifrīqiya, the majority of whom consolidated as “Mālikīs” through the transmission of foundational texts of their *madhhab* that linked their intellectual/textual and imaginary networks back to Mālik b. Anas.

Despite the abundance of information about the *ʿulamāʾ* — the learned people — in medieval Muslim society, modern historians struggle with defining them as one group, for they “seem to cut across almost every possible classification of groups in Islamic society, playing a multiplicity of political, social and cultural roles.”⁵ The *ʿulamāʾ* are thus often

³ H. R. Idris, F. Dachraoui, M. Talbi made pioneering contributions to the field and to our understating of both the scholars of Ifrīqiya and the Fāṭimid dynasty. Likewise, the works of M. Yalaoui, H. Halm, W. Madelung, M. Brett, P. Walker, S. Hamdani exemplify a balanced use of both Ismāʿīlī and Sunnī sources. Nevertheless, their work mostly follows the scholars of the earlier generation in terms of approach and methods. Admittedly, the field of Fāṭimid studies has benefitted less than other fields within the broader field of medieval Islamic history from the recent surge in using interdisciplinary methods.

⁴ See, Lotfi Abdeljaoud, “Les relations entre les Zirides et les Fatimides à la lumière des documents épigraphiques,” *RMMM* 139 (2016): 147–66.

⁵ Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*, Revised Edition (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991), 187–208, 187; For a survey of this diversity, see, Hayyim J. Cohen, “The Economic Background and the Secular Occupations of Muslim Jurisprudents and Traditionists in the Classical Period of Islam: (Until the Middle of the Eleventh Century)”, *JESHO* 13, 1 (1970): 16, 43ff; See also, Roy P. Mottahedeh’s review of Richard W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History* [review], *JAOS* 95 (1975), 491–495; Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 142–44.

grouped under various names, such as “cultural elite,” “civilian elite,” “scholarly/or learned class,” “patricians” or “religious scholars” in modern historiography. Biographical dictionaries also classify the *‘ulamā* according to their fields of practice and expertise (Qur’ān reciters, jurists, ḥadīth scholars, etc), professional activities (judges, physicians, scribes, etc), and, perhaps most commonly, according to their *madhāhib* (schools of law).⁶ For third-fourth/ninth-tenth century Ifrīqiya, the term *‘ulamā* and *ahl al-‘ilm* can be defined as “religious scholars” — the transmitters of traditions and Islamic law, according to a narrower definition of knowledge in terms of religious doctrines and *fiqh*. Nevertheless, literal reading of biographical dictionaries that celebrate one group may only provide a very narrow perspective on the types of connections and learning that existed, deliberately suppressing much more complex relationships within society. Thus, it is not always possible to grasp the interdependence and mutual influence of the *‘ulamā* as a group and their position in society as individuals. This is because biographical dictionaries are primarily commemorative compilations of a community, rather than comprehensive external archives. This tension between memory and history informs my interpretation of the sources.

As mentioned, the scholarly networks of the *ahl al-‘ilm* in fourth/tenth-century Ifrīqiya have not been analysed critically within the Fāṭimid historical context. Instead, they are often represented through the lenses of post-Fāṭimid authors whose remembrance of the Fāṭimid period was shaped by the religio-political framework of their own period, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter through the case of Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s disputations and his remembrance by the Mālikī community. Importantly, narratives of confident and relentless opposition to political power, especially a “heretical” Shī‘ī dynasty, prevailed in the Mālikī construction of their communal past, thus downplaying the heterogeneity and internal conflict within the larger group in order to fit into ideals of their posterity.

Thus, the overarching theoretical framework for the discussions of this chapter is informed by recent advances in the field of memory studies. The activities of scholars, compilation of biographical and hagiographical works, production and transmission of texts, writing of local histories, visitations of tombs and *ribāṭs* are examples of creating and reviving

⁶ Of course, compiling biographical dictionaries became common for all types of professions and groups. Needless to say, groups such as poets, secretaries, boon-companions, ministers, physicians and others often included *‘ulamā*.

the collective memory. These activities evolve around genealogies, literary or otherwise, that sustain an imagined link with the recent past, as well as with the “the time of origin.”⁷ Perhaps the notions of “generational memory” and “biographical memory,” which pertain to the recent past, are more illuminating for our case because we are mainly dealing with memory spanning three-four generations.⁸ At some point, these type of memories may turn into “tradition” and “myth” or indeed history, but before that stage these memories will grow, evolve, change, and invite participation from all members of the group.⁹ We observe this in the examples of evolving “oral histories,” hearsay, self-narratives, biographies, forging genealogies and chains of transmission, within different communities. The reconstruction and transmission of the past memory involves “depositing” these memories in physical objects, places, cities, public spaces, persons and ideas, which Pierre Nora termed *les lieux de mémoire*, or “places of memory.”¹⁰ Finally, memory and forgetting are both connected to power, which is why they are instrumentalised both by the powerful and the oppressed.¹¹

The last point brings us to the recognition that the dichotomy between collective memory and history, emphasised by Halbwachs and Nora, may be a false one, for this “ignores the political or intentional dimensions of both collective memory and history.”¹² In other words, like historical memory, collective memory, too, is purposefully “identity forming” and deployed as “a strategy for group solidarity and mobilization through constant suppression and selection.”¹³ This interconnectedness of memory and history, orality and textuality becomes even more visible once one delves into the medieval commemorative texts produced

⁷ “The genealogy is a form that that bridges the gap between the present and the time of origin, legitimizing a current order or aspiration by providing an unbroken link with the very beginning.” Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 35.

⁸ Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 36-37.

⁹ Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 34-41, 48-49.

¹⁰ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”, *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7–24, 13; Assmann, cited in Isidora Stanković, “Spaces of memory – ‘The Presence of Absence’: Cultural Memory and Oblivion Mechanisms,” *Культура/Culture* 8 (2014): 87-94, 91. Also see the English edition of Pierre Nora’s voluminous work, Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, eds., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, tr. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹¹ Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 53-56.

¹² Patrick J. Leary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 12.

¹³ Leary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 12.

by medieval biographers like Abu'l-ʿArab, al-Khushanī and al-Mālikī, which constitute, we should recognise, the collective memory of Qayrawān. These insights will inform my discussion of the sources.

In addition, to overcome the partisan perspective of the sources (whether they are Sunnī or Shīʿī) and get closer to the history of learning traditions, “as they were,” perhaps it is helpful to view medieval scholarly communities as “communities of practice”. These are defined by their “mutual engagement,” “joint enterprise” and “shared repertoire,” rather than by their ideologies, allegiances, social networks, and other forms of belonging.¹⁴ The positive “connotations of peaceful coexistence, mutual support, or interpersonal allegiance are not assumed” to exist within communities of practice,¹⁵ which allows us to apply it to such a heterogeneous group as the *ʿulamāʾ*. Indeed, tensions, disagreements and conflict are common among communities of practice.

“Textual communities,” whether the “text” or body of texts in question is the Qurʾān, or ḥadīth, or Mālikī foundational texts, are also “communities of practice” according to the above definition.¹⁶ This conceptualisation, namely shifting the focus from ideational and relational understanding of communities and their formation¹⁷ to the shared practices of knowledge transmission and disputation allows for the appreciation of inter-*madhhab* relations and influences, which are often unimagined. As Snijders observes, “[m]any studies have focused exclusively on texts that were produced as a form of ‘community maintenance’, which were taken at face value as a reflection of ‘the’ identity of ‘the’ community.” In fact, as she notes, these texts are precisely written to forge among the “inherently heterogenous” community a coherence that it lacked.¹⁸ Finally, moving away from the definition of

¹⁴ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 72-85, esp. 73-74.

¹⁵ Ibid., 76-77.

¹⁶ On this, see Tjamke Snijders, “Communal Learning and Communal Identities in Medieval Studies: Consensus, Conflict, and the Community of Practice,” in Long, Micol, Tjamke Snijders, and Steven Vanderputten (eds.), *Horizontal Learning in the High Middle Ages: Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Transfer in Religious Communities* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 42-43.

¹⁷ Relational approach focuses on the “observable connections between members of a social group” such as marriage and kinship ties, while ideationalists “study the tools that were crucial to form a collective identity: the objects, texts, speech acts, and practices that enabled a group of people to experience itself as one.” Snijders, “Communal Learning,” 19.

¹⁸ Snijders, “Communal Learning,” 43. I will analyse two such cases to illustrate this point in Chapter Four.

“community” as necessarily uniform, stable and “consensus-based” to “community of practice” also allows one to explore the social significance of “horizontal learning” in the struggle to bolster communal identities.¹⁹ It is hoped that this new reappraisal of the early Fāṭimid period, complemented by network analysis methods and insights from memory studies, will further our understanding of the consolidation of the (Mālikī) ‘*ulamā*’ in Ifrīqiya in the course of their struggle for authority, legitimacy and self-preservation within the context of the Fāṭimid empire and their own struggle for control and legitimacy.

The main sources for the history of the ‘*ulamā*’ in Ifrīqiya are naturally the biographical dictionaries (*kutub al-ṭabaqāt*). The earliest biographical dictionaries of Ifrīqiya are the works of Abu’l-‘Arab Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Tamīm b. Tammām al-Tamīmī (d. 333/945) and Muḥammad b. Ḥārith al-Khushanī (d. 371/981-82) (preserved together as *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt ‘ulamā’ Ifrīqiya* (The Book of the Ranks of the ‘Ulamā’ of Ifrīqiya), the earliest surviving work of its kind in the Maghrib. Abu’l-‘Arab’s *Ṭabaqāt* covers the intellectual genealogies of the scholars of Ifrīqiya until the generation of Saḥnūn b. Sa‘īd (d. 239/854). Al-Khushanī continues the work of his teacher providing the biographies until the early Fāṭimid period. He completed the book in al-Andalus, where he kept inquiring about the state of learning in Ifrīqiya, adding the latest information to his records. Al-Khushanī’s *Ṭabaqāt* was compiled at the request of his patron, the Umayyad crown prince al-Hakam II.²⁰ The interest of the Umayyad caliphate in the conditions of the ‘*ulamā*’ in Ifrīqiya in the context of the bitter rivalry between the Umayyads and the Fāṭimids may have encouraged this undertaking. To al-Khushanī’s credit, his account appears as a fair attempt at documentation if not an exhaustive survey of the scholars of Ifrīqiya in the early Fāṭimid period regardless of their *madhhab* affiliation, and relatively free from fantastical stories and hagiography compared to accounts composed after his.

The first author, Abu’l-‘Arab, was from a respected Arab lineage. His grandfather Tammām came from a military background and had been the governor of Tunis.²¹ Abu’l-‘Arab, however, joined the learning circles of the scholars of Qayrawān as a youth against the wishes

¹⁹ Snijders, “Communal Learning,” 45.

²⁰ On this see Chapter Four.

²¹ For his rebellion against the ruler of Ifrīqiya in the year 183/799, which paved the way for the rise of the Aghlabid dynasty, see Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, 1: 81–83,

of his aristocratic family, who hoped he would not abandon the family tradition and pursue a career in military. An anecdote about his early interest in joining the learning circle of Muḥammad b. Salām highlights the fact that, unlike the *umarā'* (sing. *amīr*, commander), the *'ulamā'* were woven into the fabric of urban Muslim society. Nevertheless, they were increasingly recognised as a social group with distinct characteristics.²² Moreover, as the anecdote shows, attributes such as clothing signalled the prestige of the learned group in Qayrawān, which was obvious to the young Abu'l-'Arab. The *'ulamā'* were often wealthy and belonged to influential, well-connected families “with established traditions of learning,” but it was not uncommon for those with moderate means to be included in their ranks.²³ Thus, anyone could merit recognition as a member of the group, as long as they participated in knowledge transmission and were part of scholarly networks through established modes of interaction, such as *ṣuḥba* (studying with a master over a period) and *riḥla* (travel in pursuit of knowledge).

The *'ulamā'* can thus be conceived as a diverse group of people in terms of ethnicity, origin, age and *madhhab*, but united by the shared practice of learning — pursuing or transmitting religious knowledge (*'ilm*), which makes them one community of practice. This conception of the scholarly community is nicely depicted by the Arabic phrase *ahl al-'ilm* regardless of one's *madhhab* affiliation and whether they even physically studied in the same circles. Of course, various religious communities differed in many aspects, had different relationships with the political power evolving in different direction, but because of their “shared repertoire” it was inevitable that their interests would align with other groups. Also, as long as elements of their practice remained recognisably similar, they were part of one community of practice. One can further consider Mālikī jurists and knowledge transmitters, the *ahl al-naẓār wa'l-munāẓara* (rationalists-dialecticians) and Fāṭimid *dā'īs* (preachers), as communities of practice defined by: their joint enterprise (maintaining the prestige of the practitioners, negotiating their position with broader social contexts, mutual accountability and so on); mutual engagement (study circles, *majālis*, *ribāṭ*, transmission of texts, patronage,

²² For this story, see Ben Chaneb, “Introduction”, *Classes Des Savants de l'Ifriqīya*, viii-ix.

²³ Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 106.

networks, endowments); and repertoire (Mālikī *fiqh*, foundational legal texts, theological doctrines, imamate doctrine, cosmology, narratives, Shīʿī ḥadīth and so on).²⁴

This chapter will demonstrate that the period of Fāṭimid rule in Ifrīqiya was a highly productive period for the *fuqahāʾ* of Qayrawān, who transmitted *fiqh* to numerous students. I will argue that the efforts of Mālikī scholars from the Aghlabid period was amplified by the transmission of their works and the construction of their memory by the following generation active during the Fāṭimid period. Moreover, the Fāṭimid period witnessed a surge in the cultivation and celebration of the ideals and practices of piety and militant asceticism among the Mālikī community, which found itself on the defensive. It is in part thanks to this spirit, that, when Fāṭimid rule ended in Ifrīqiya, Mālikism had already become the dominant tradition in both urban centres and frontier *ribāṭs*, which had already been a common space for networking and knowledge transmission among ascetics and scholars. The eventual triumph of Mālikism, of course, sustained the narratives of defiance, pious self-sacrifice and heroism in their collective memory and historiography. Overall, this chapter will survey the major factors that played a role in the consolidation of the Mālikī communal memory and identity without drawing a sharp line between the collective memory of the scholars of Qayrawān and what could objectively be considered as history, while acknowledging that both history and memory are created in a context and both are later reconstructions of the past.

Militant Asceticism and the Self-representation of the *ʿUlamāʾ*

The earliest memories of the Muslim community in the Maghrib are linked to conquests (*futūḥāt*), “martyrdom” and guarding the frontiers (*ribāṭ*). The self-representation of the scholars of Ifrīqiya is therefore dominated by the memory of the Arab-Islamic conquest — fighting in the path of God (*jihād fī sabīli-llāh*).²⁵ Like Abuʾl-ʿArab, many scholars came from the families of Arab and Khurāsānī troops who entered Ifrīqiya as part of conquering Muslim

²⁴ Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 73ff.

²⁵ *Jihād* – in the sense of “holy war.” See, for instance, the tradition that includes ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ziyād in its chain of transmission: “*Jihād* will be stopped in all lands, except for one place in the Maghrib, which is called Ifrīqiya.” Abuʾl-ʿArab, *Ṭabaqāt*, 4.

armies. Unsurprisingly, Prophetic traditions about Ifrīqiya also highlight the virtue of the armies sent to the Maghrib. According to one such tradition reported by Abu'l-ʿArab in the section “on the virtues of Ifrīqiya”, the Prophet told his companions: “You will mobilise armies and the best among them will be the army of the Maghrib.”²⁶ The inclusion of these traditions, which had become part of the collective memory, through the books of *ṭabaqāt* and *akhbār* (histories) served to highlight the place of Ifrīqiya within the grand narrative of Islam. In turn, Ifrīqiya with its frontiers and cities, importantly Qayrawān, became the locus of the “collective thought” of the scholars and the believers of Ifrīqiya.²⁷

The collective self-representation of the scholars of Qayrawān in the early Fāṭimid period is perhaps best portrayed in Abu'l-ʿArab’s *Ṭabaqāt*. It begins with a conventional introductory chapter mentioning the virtues of the province of Ifrīqiya according to Prophetic *ḥadīth*. The first Prophetic tradition, which Abu'l-ʿArab reports from several narrators, promises: “People of my community from Ifrīqiya will rise on the Day of Resurrection with their faces brighter than the full moon.”²⁸ These traditions praise and give credit to the virtuous Muslim settlers of Ifrīqiya who arrived for *ribāṭ*, and *jihād*. *Ribāṭ*, in this context, means “being ready for combat,” and “prolonged presence on the frontier” (*mulāzamat al-thaghr*).²⁹ There were among them “the companions of the Prophet and those who came with the companions during their campaigns,” and the followers (*tābiʿīn*) who are mentioned before the *ʿulamāʾ* and *fuqahāʾ* “generation after generation.”³⁰

The self-representation of the scholars was thus linked to the commemoration of the earliest Eastern settlers or immigrants, namely the conquering Arabs, and specifically the learned people amongst them. This memory and its recollection in a narrative form not only

²⁶ Abu'l-ʿArab, *Ṭabaqāt*, 11.

²⁷ Since places participate in the stability of material things themselves, some similar procedure is a primary condition of memory itself: the collective thought of the group of believers has the best chance of immobilizing itself and enduring when it concentrates on places, sealing itself within their confines and moulding its character to theirs. Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, 156 (*La mémoire collective*, 165)

²⁸ Abu'l-ʿArab, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1-2.

²⁹ In this context, in the sense of “being ready for combat,” and “prolonged presence on the frontier” (*mulāzamat al-thaghr*). On *ribāṭ*, see the survey article by J. Chabbi, and Nasser Rabbat. “Ribāṭ”, *El2*. Also see, Christophe Picard and Antoine Borrut, “Râbata, Ribât, Râbita: Une Institution à Reconsidérer”, in *Chrétiens et Musulmans En Méditerranée Médiévale (VIIIe-XIIIe Siècle)* (Poitiers: Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale, 2003), 33–66.

³⁰ Abu'l-ʿArab, *Ṭabaqāt*, 11-12.

perpetuated the identity of the community, but also defined its culture, as the members subsequently adopted the goals and values of the *ṭabaqāt* in their actions and self-narratives.³¹ As I hope to demonstrate, re-enacting and performing this memory became a defining trait of the community in their endeavour to consolidate and assert their position in Fāṭimid society.

While the Western Maghrib was still not a place where many learned people could be found, the Ifrīqiya had already formed a separate regional identity to distinguish themselves from the people of the Mashriq (including Egypt) and al-Andalus. The earliest migrant scholars and jurists were the links between Ifrīqiya and the East, the pious companions, and the Messenger of Allāh, bound together through chains of transmissions, kinship, and master-disciple relationships. All these connections are affirmed by the *ṭabaqāt* works that classify this community according to ranks establishing individual scholar's standing. Overall, this effort aimed at representing (and branding) an exclusive community that emerged from the interconnected network of individuals.

Abu'l-ʿArab and al-Khushanī's biographical dictionaries are among the sources of a more detailed book of *ṭabaqāt* by a later Qayrawānī author Abū Bakr al-Mālikī (d. after 464/1072 or 484/1091),³² entitled *Kitāb Riyāḍ al-nufūṣ fī ṭabaqāt ʿulamāʾ al-Qayrawān wa Ifrīqiya wa-zuhhādihim wa-nussākihim wa-siyar min akhbārihim wa-faḍāʾilihim wa-awṣāfihim* (Garden of the Souls on Generations of the Scholars of Qayrawān and the Pious Men and Ascetics Among Them: Anecdotes from their Lives, Their Virtues, and Praises).³³ It was written a century later, long after the Fāṭimid caliphs moved to Egypt and reflects the way the mature Mālikī scholarly community of Qayrawān remembered the legacy of their forebears. However,

³¹ Taking narratives seriously, some scholars have suggested a “narrative approach” as a “counterweight to the so-called logical positivist paradigm.” On this, and the relationship between narrative and human motivation, see Yoshihisa Kashima, “Culture Narrative and Human Motivation,” in D. Munro et al (eds.) *Motivation and Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 27.

³² Abū Bakr ʿAbd Allāh b Abī ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Mālikī was born in Qayrawān in early fifth/eleventh century and was one of the scholars who continued to live in Qayrawān after its destruction (449/1057). This and the age of a Sicilian student who studied with him in Ifrīqiya contradict earlier dates given for al-Mālikī's death by Ibn Nājī and Dabbāgh. Moreover, based on internal evidence in the *Riyāḍ* he must have been alive during the Norman conquest of Sicily (between 464/1072 and 484/1091). See Bakkūsh's introduction to *Riyāḍ*, 20-22.

³³ It has also been attributed to his father. Unlike previous scholars, Bakkūsh concluded that Abū Bakr is the author of the current recension of the work, although he may have cited from his father's book. See, Bakkūsh's introduction to his edition of the *Riyāḍ al-nufūṣ*.

unlike al-Khushanī, he did not include the *mashāriqa* or the Ismāʿīlī converts who were associated with the “accursed ‘Ubaydids,” as he refers to the Fāṭimids by the derogatory appellation. The memory of Fāṭimid rule over Ifrīqiya had acquired extra political expediency because of the tension between the weakened Fāṭimid Empire and their Zīrid vassals, who had shifted their allegiance towards the ‘Abbāsids of Baghdād by 441/1049-50. The Mālikī ‘*ulamā*’ appear to have played the role of a fifth column in the ideological rivalry between the Fāṭimids and the ‘Abbāsids after the former moved to Egypt.³⁴

Al-Mālikī’s own family background and his nickname itself is a testimony to the “Mālikisation” of Ifrīqiya. His father, who may have compiled part of the *Riyāḍ*, had visited the Mashriq between 403 and 408 (1012-1018) and had been a student of the famous Mālikī jurist al-Qābisī, and composed his hagiography. It was al-Qābisī who changed his nickname from “al-Shāfiʿī” to “al-Mālikī,” which reflects the zeal of the Mālikīs and the consolidation of their group identity. Unlike his father, Abū Bakr did not travel to the Mashriq, but visited and spent some time in Sicily.³⁵ He later grieved about the defeat of Muslims by the Normans:

Then, because of the sins of the people [of Sicily], God wished that the enemy overwhelmed them. We pray for God’s (Exalted be He) mercy, safety and security of those Muslims who remained there, and likewise for [enabling] their counterattack on their enemy.³⁶

Needless to say, he does not appear to take the blame as an inhabitant of Qayrawān for the destruction of his own hometown during his lifetime, although the surviving parts of the book may have been written before the Hilālī invasion of Qayrawān.

A salient characteristic of al-Mālikī’s compilation, as is reflected in the title of the book, is the emphasis on moral prerequisites, asceticism, devotion and performative aspects of belonging to the community, such as residing in the *ribāṭs*, frequenting other scholars for knowledge and blessing (*duʿā* and *baraka*), actively avoiding the rulers and enduring persecution. The emergence and development of these topoi in Islamic biographical literature

³⁴ Idris, *La berbérie orientale*, 1: 172-203. Despite ongoing tensions with Cairo, up until AH 441/1049-50 Zīrid *dīnārs* were minted in the name of the Fāṭimid caliphs in al-Mahdiyya and Sabra al-Manṣūriyya. First, from 429-40/1047-49 “al-Manṣūriyya” was dropped from “Sabra al-Manṣūriyya” on the mint. On this, see Idris, *La berbérie*, 190; Lotfi Abdeljaoud documents the gradual nature of the “rupture” through epigraphic evidence in “Les relations entre les Zirides et les Fatimides,” 147–66.

³⁵ Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2: 198.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1: 273.

have received some scholarly attention.³⁷ The following review aims to contribute to this discussion by examining their role in forming and reinforcing the communal identity of the scholars of Qayrawān in the Fāṭimid period.

As an example, one ascetic, Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan b. Naṣr al-Sūsī (d. 341/952), is reported to have confronted the Fāṭimid prince Ṭāhir, the caliph al-Manṣūr’s paternal cousin, and his companions for allegedly coming to the place of *ribāṭ*, the Castle of Ṭāriq in Sūsa, with *muskir* (wine or other intoxicating drink) and other “means of entertainment.” He sent people to tell the Fāṭimid prince: “You have brought illegal items to the Muslim place of *ribāṭ* and one of their frontiers (*ribāṭ al-Muslimīn wa-thaḡhr min thughūrihim*). Leave, or we will fight you until you leave.”³⁸ The prince was forced to leave after spending a night in the place built near the Castle.

In another episode, this ascetic man excuses himself from visiting al-Manṣūr, who passed by Sūsa after defeating Abū Yazīd. The ascetic refuses to go with Jawhar, the caliph’s famous servant. Al-Manṣūr sends Jawhar back to tell the shaykh: “[The caliph] is grieved that you cannot join his company; he sends you his regards and asks you to pray for him.” He replies: “Tell him, may God correct you and your judges for the sake of all Muslims. And he did not say anything more than this,” – end of story.³⁹ This is the basic template for depicting the relationship between pious men and rulers. Elsewhere, the biographies combine the ideals of piety, asceticism, standing guard at the frontiers, avoiding and denouncing rulers, especially the Fāṭimids, in order to create individual profiles and a collective portrait of the pious men of Ifrīqiya.

The concern of these hagiographies, or “sacred biographies” to use Thomas Heffernan’s term, was not to provide historically accurate details, a sense that “*ta’rīkh*” or “*akhbār*,” the Arabic words for “history,” entailed. The purpose was rather to write from the

³⁷ See Nelly Amri, for an analysis of the ideals of piety and *ribāṭ* through al-Mālikī’s *Riyāḍ*, “Ribāṭ et idéal de sainteté à Kairouan et sur le littoral Ifrīqiyen du iie/viiiie au iv,” in *Islamisation et arabisation*, 331–68. See also, Feryal Salem, *The Emergence of Early Sufi Piety and Sunnī Scholasticism: ‘Abdallāh b. Al-Mubārak and the Formation of Sunni Identity in the Second Islamic Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Yunus Yaldiz, “The Afterlife in Mind: Piety and Renunciatory Practice in the 2nd/8th- and early 3rd/9th-Century Books of Renunciation (*Kutub al-Zuhd*)” (PhD Thesis, Utrecht University, 2016).

³⁸ Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:401.

³⁹ Ibid., 2:401–03, 403.

perspective of a believer for the believers,⁴⁰ “to establish a paradigm of righteous behaviour for a community that is already predisposed to the saint’s example.”⁴¹ Al-Mālikī’s *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, of course, belongs to this genre. While he draws on primary sources by Abu’l-‘Arab and al-Khushanī,⁴² al-Mālikī gravitates towards legends of martyrdom, defiance, and heroic sacrifice, no doubt incorporating a great deal of popular legends and gossip to the previous authors’ texts.⁴³ These narratives are not only a reflection of pious aspiration or a record of them, but in their perpetuity and popularity they are also a manifesto, a motivation for future ascetics to follow the path of these exemplary scholars. In the following section, however, we try to get closer to these pietistic practices described and valorised in these texts and their significance beyond narrative and memory.

Ribāṭ and Jihād in the Fāṭimid Period

In the early medieval period, Muslim piety and asceticism manifested in two main formats: opposition to worldly powers (keeping them in check)⁴⁴ and participation in guarding the frontiers (*ribāṭ*) and *jihād*, which at the same time meant both renouncing the comforts of this world and fulfilling a religious obligation. Qur’ān reciters and saintly Muslim men with knowledge of the tradition are known to have participated in battles as early as the first Umayyad campaigns against Byzantium (99/717-18), and, as is widely reported, thereafter.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 15-16.

⁴¹ Omid Safi, “Power and Politics of Knowledge: Negotiating Political Ideology and Religious Orthodoxy in Seljūq Iran” (PhD Thesis, Duke University, 2000), 337-38; idem, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press), 2006.

⁴² On the distinction between “primary sources” and “compiled works,” see Ayman Fuad Sayyid, “Reconstructing Lost Ancient,” 348-49.

⁴³ David J. Wasserstein demonstrates the value of paying attention to folklore with a case study, “A Jonah Theme in the Biography of Ibn Tūmart,” in J. W. Meri and F. Daftary (eds.), *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 232-49. For an introduction to the role of gossip in bonding between social groups, and how “gossip usually focuses on wrongdoings,” see Yuval Noah Harari, *A Brief History of Humankind: Sapiens* (New York: Harper, 2015), ch. 2.

⁴⁴ The Mālikī ‘ulamā’s opposition to power has been regularly highlighted in modern scholarship, such as, Idris, “Contribution a l’Histoire de l’Ifrikiya,” *REI* (1935): 1: 144-52; idem, *REI* (1936), 66-88; Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 56; Talbi, *L’Émirat aghlabide*, 131-64; Hussein Monès, “Le Malikisme et l’échec des Fatimides en Ifriqiya,” 197-220.

⁴⁵ Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 98.

The Prophet Muḥammad is, of course, seen as the ultimate model. The activity of renunciant Muslim men was first likened to, then distinguished from Christian militant monasticism (*rahbāniyya*) in early Muslim writings until the image of militant ascetic Muslim men doing *jihad* on the frontiers became fixed in the minds of people.⁴⁶ Performing the religious duty of *jihād* in the frontiers (*thughūr*, sing. *thaghr*) was also associated with a “claim to authority for a religious scholar at the expense of — and even in defiance of — the authority of the imam/caliph,”⁴⁷ which explains why this ascetic practice may have thrived in Fāṭimid and post-Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya. More so, it continued to be a productive motif and occupied the imagination of many hagiographers like Abū Bakr al-Mālikī.

Although the activities of militant scholars in the coastal forts (*quṣūr*) in late Aghlabid and Fāṭimid period Ifrīqiya had mostly symbolic value, given that there was hardly any threat from the Mediterranean Sea, it was nevertheless important for their claim to piety and devotion to Islam. Therefore, militant asceticism, that is the dual values of *zuhd* (asceticism) and *jihād*, constitute a central thread that binds fact and fiction together in Abū Bakr al-Mālikī’s biographical dictionary *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*. We know, for instance, that the military function of the frontier castles (*quṣūr*), where *ribāṭ* was performed, is questionable.⁴⁸ Moreover, the *thughūr*, or frontiers of *jihād* had already been moved to Sicily under the Aghlabids and further to Calabria under the Fāṭimids. The Aghlabids who sponsored these institutions (though not exclusively) to sustain ascetic scholars and Qur’ān reciters, no doubt

⁴⁶ On this see, Thomas Sizgorich, “Sanctified Violence: Monotheist Militancy as the Tie That Bound Christian Rome and Islam,” *JAAR* 77, 4 (Dec., 2009): 895-921, 909; Christian Sahner, “The Monasticism of My Community Is Jihad’: A Debate on Asceticism, Sex, and Warfare in Early Islam,” *Arabica* 64 (2017): 149-183.

⁴⁷ Bonner, *Jihad*, 115. For the importance of *jihad/ribāṭ* ideology in post-Fāṭimid Maghrib, see Amira K. Bennison, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires*, 238-41, where she notes the relevance of Fāṭimid experience for the rise of militant Mālikism of the Almoravids.

⁴⁸ Faouzi Mahfoudh, “Qaṣr al-Ṭūb: un ribāṭ du Sahel tunisien, cadre géographique ethistorique,” *Africa* 17 (1999): 119-20; As he rightly points out, most of the information concerning the *ribāṭs* does not come from chronicles, but rather from the *ṭabaqāt* works, the purpose of which was to list the deeds and itineraries of pious men. For example, information regarding the *ribāṭ* of Qaṣr al-Ṭūb is absent from most chronicles and major geographical works. Ibid., 104-108. See also, Néji Djelloul “A propos d’un toponyme de la région de Sfax: Qaṣr Ziad”, *La dynamique économique à Sfax entre le passé et le présent* (Sfax: Association de Sauvegarde de la Medina de Sfax, 1993), 9-45; Michael Bonner attributes this lack of military character to the absence of enemy threat, *Jihad in Islamic History*, 108; Cf. Christophe Picard, *Sea of the Caliphs: The Mediterranean in the Medieval Islamic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018).

also benefitted from directing their energy towards a foreign enemy.⁴⁹ It is generally accepted that the Fāṭimids were not interested in sustaining the coastal castles, neither as defence facilities nor as hospices for militant *‘ulamā’*,⁵⁰ but there is little evidence to confirm that they actively dismantled them,⁵¹ or that they did not build similar facilities on the coast.⁵² The conversion of some of the frontier castles to shipbuilding facilities under the Fāṭimids may have actually followed the decline of *ribāṭs* in the late Aghlabid period.⁵³ Even in Sicilian frontiers, which was the abode of *jihād* or war (*dār al-ḥarb*) par excellence, the state of *ribāṭs* seems to have been far from the ideal that Muslim writers portrayed. Ibn Ḥawqal (active in 4th/10th century), the famous Eastern traveller who visited Sicily in 363/973-4, expressed disgust at the state of the coastal *ribāṭs* in Sicily, which he described as filled with “hypocrites” and “corrupted” people who lived in a miserable situation and begged for alms.⁵⁴ It must be said that Ibn Ḥawqal also criticised Sicilian Muslims for the corruptness of their faith, practice and way of life in general, especially attacking their obsession with building private mosques and primary schools (*makātib*, sing. *maktab*).⁵⁵

His disillusionment, as William Granara suggests, may have been due to his high expectations about the much romanticised *thaghr*,⁵⁶ but one cannot entirely rule out that this pro-Fāṭimid visitor had already formed an opinion about the type of people who resided in these *ribāṭs* before visiting Sicily.⁵⁷ Even when describing the well-funded *ribāṭs* of Ifrīqiya,

⁴⁹ Brett, *Rise*, 80. Similarly, the *jihād* efforts of the Aghlabids, notably the conquest of Sicily, has been understood as a response to internal conflicts. See William Granara, *Narrating Muslim Sicily: War and Peace in the Medieval Mediterranean World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 8-9. While the Sicilian campaign bolstered the Aghlabid dynasty, it still did not help Saḥnūn’s condemnation of Sicilian *jihād*, partly because of his animosity towards Asad b. al-Furāt, the leader of the campaign. Ibid., 91-98.

⁵⁰ Mahfoudh, “Qaṣr al-Ṭūb”, 114. Mahfoudh lists 15 « men of *ribāṭ*” who lived during the Fāṭimid period.

⁵¹ Nelly Amri, “Ribāṭ et idéal de sainteté.” Cf. Ahmed El Bahi, “Les Ribāṭs Aghlabides: Un Problème d’identification,” *The Aghlabids and Their Neighbors*, 337.

⁵² El Bahi observes that the Fāṭimids avoided the term *ribāṭ* and used the term *maḥris* to refer to both the *ribāṭs* and other military structures. This confirms that *ribāṭ* (verbal noun, “doing *ribāṭ*”) was used to refer to the ascetic practice, not to a building. See El Bahi, “Al-Maḥris fī al-‘aṣr al-wasīṭ bayna al-Mashriq wa’l-Maghrib.” *Revue Tunisienne d’Histoire Militaire* 3 (2011): 4-14, esp. 11ff.

⁵³ On this, see Nelly Amri, “Ribāṭ et idéal de sainteté.”

⁵⁴ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, ed. J. E. Kramers (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1938), 121.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 126-31.

⁵⁶ Granara, *Narrating Muslim Sicily*, 41-43.

⁵⁷ André Miquel, “Ibn Ḥawqal,” *El2*; Jean-Charles Ducène, “Ibn Ḥawqal,” *El3*; Ibn Ḥawqal may have been a Fāṭimid *dā’ī*, although this long-held hypothesis has been challenged to some extent by Chefik T. Bencheikroun, “Requiem

such as the famous *ribāṭs* of Monastir and Shaqāniş, as “the two great castles on the sea coast for the purpose of *ribāṭ* and worshipping (*‘ibāda*), which have numerous endowments (*awqāf kathīra*) in Ifrīqiya and receive alms from all lands,”⁵⁸ Ibn Ḥawqal merely points out their reliance on pious endowments (*awqāf*, sing. *waqf*) and alms (*sadaqāt*, sing. *sadaqa*). Without giving any importance to the pious activities in the coastal forts, Ibn Ḥawqal notes that “people of Ifrīqiya come [to Monastir] once a year, bring with them the most sumptuous food and stay there for some days before dispersing to their homes,” while “another group of people is based at Shanāqis for fishing.”⁵⁹ Thus, one would assume, for Ibn Ḥawqal *ribāṭ* was neither ascetic nor pious. However, in contrast to the aforementioned *ribāṭs*, which had become centres of popular ascetic practices in Ifrīqiya and Sicily, Ibn Ḥawqal makes positive remarks about the *ribāṭ* in Sala (Salé, Morocco) where “up to 100 thousand *murābiṭs* gather at a time to guard against the Barghawāta,”⁶⁰ and the *ribāṭ* led by the ruler of Sicily, as part of the Fāṭimid *jihād* against the Byzantines.⁶¹ It is therefore likely that his sentiments were symptomatic of Fāṭimid distaste for popular (Sunnī–*‘ammī*) ascetic religiosity.⁶²

In al-Mālikī’s narrative, however, *ribāt* is presented as a vital matter for all Muslims, devotedly performed by ascetic scholars. Even the famous Qayrawānī physician, Ibn al-Jazzār, is said to have “annually performed *rābiṭa* at the coast [fort] of Monastir on the shore of the Byzantine Sea (*al-bahr al-Rūmī*), which is a place of *murābiṭa* known for its *baraka* (blessing), where he would stay during the days of the midsummer [heat] and then return to Ifrīqiya [i.e.

por Ibn Ḥawqal: Sur l’hypothèse de l’espion fatimide,” *Journal Asiatique* 304.2 (2016): 193-211. Based on the versions of the text composed earlier than the “pro-Fāṭimid” manuscripts, Benchekroun concludes that the latter were modified by some pro-Fāṭimid sympathiser, whereas, Samuel M. Stern had considered the former “disfigured by anti-Isma‘īlī reviser.” See Stern, *Studies in Early Isma‘īlism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), 214, n. 38. More detailed studies of the content and the context, such as his attitude towards the *ribāṭ*, may lead to a more nuanced conclusion than simply being pro-Fāṭimid or anti-Fāṭimid.

⁵⁸ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, 72-73. This explanatory comment may have been made by a later person since it does not appear in the oldest manuscript preserved at Topkapi Palace. This would make sense, because Ibn Ḥawqal seems to be reluctant to acknowledge the religious status of the *ribāṭs* within Fāṭimid territories.

⁵⁹ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, 73. It appears that the visitation of the *ribāṭs* was a seasonal activity during the Fāṭimid period. See also, Nelly Amri, *al-Walāya wa’l-mujtama‘: musāhama fi’l-tārīkh al-dīnī wa’l-ijtimā‘ī li-Ifrīqiya fi ‘ahd al-Hafsī*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2006), 99.

⁶⁰ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, 81

⁶¹ Ibid., 126-27.

⁶² Alex Metcalfe also attributes Ibn Ḥawqal’s negative remarks about the *ribāṭs* of Sicily to his pro-Fāṭimid position. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 61.

Qayrawān).⁶³ Thus, it is understandably difficult to determine whether the wealthy physician was escaping the summer heat of Qayrawān for the pleasant breeze of the Mediterranean shore, or whether he was genuinely seeking *baraka* in the sacred place of *ribāṭ* and its pious dwellers, and taking part in the pious pastime himself.⁶⁴ Whatever the case may be, the Fāṭimids' alleged dismantling or repurposing of the castles was interpreted as just another display of hostility towards the *‘ulamā’*.⁶⁵

As we are revising our reading of the sources, I propose that Abū Bakr al-Mālikī's account should be read as an account of late 5th/11th century Mālikī sentiments towards the Fāṭimid past. Of course, one should also not forget that al-Mālikī's aim was not to record historical facts, but to commemorate the ascetics and pious men of Qayrawān and Ifrīqiya by mentioning their “virtues” (*faḍā’il*) and “praises” (*awṣāf*). This is reflected in the title of his book, no doubt making use of only those qualities which he and his readers considered as “praise”. Thus, he projected common pious ideals, such as renouncing the world and worldly powers, on the past, but with an extra anti-Fāṭimid flavour of his own time. As for the “factuality” of these accounts, al-Mālikī can be useful only if read with extreme caution.

In Abū Bakr al-Mālikī's lifetime, we see the rise of militant Shī‘aphobia and the growth of Mālikī hagiographies. His father had already compiled two hagiographies (*manāqib*) for his teachers al-Qābisī and Muḥriz b. Khalaf (d. 413/1022), who must have been a major source and influence on Abū Bakr. Another important influence was his master ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ajdābī⁶⁶ (d. 432/1040), who composed hagiographies of four militant ascetics who had joined Abū Yazīd in his fight against the Fāṭimids. Two of them, Rabī‘ al-Qaṭṭān and Mamsī, fell into battle in the same year (334/945). The other two, al-Sibā‘ī (d. 356/967) and Ibn Naṣrūn (d.

⁶³ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*, 481. See also, al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:403.

⁶⁴ Similar questions may be raised, for instance, about the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*), and whether every Muslim who has undertaken it has done so for purely religious reasons. To put it differently, can the sacred be separated from the prophane attraction of prestige and social capital associated with the *ḥajj* at all?

⁶⁵ See, for instance, *Riyāḍ*, 2: 222, 260; Heinz Halm, who otherwise acknowledges al-Mālikī's bias, relies on these tales to maintain that the Fāṭimids showed active hostility towards the ascetics. *Empire*, 221-233.

⁶⁶ For his biography, see al-Dabbāgh, *Ma‘ālim*, 3:170; Muranyi, *Beitraige*, 299 (Arabic tr. *al-Maktaba al-‘atīqa*, 314). A certificate of audition written by his teacher for al-Mālikī exists in the Raqqāda manuscript collection. Idem., *al-Maktaba al-‘atīqa*, 314.

340/951) survived and apparently both died in Qayrawān.⁶⁷ Al-Ajdābī's work has not reached us, but quotes from this and similar accounts make up al-Mālikī's compilation. This is the generation that passed down the collective memory of the early Fāṭimid period to Abū Bakr al-Mālikī's generation. Therefore, it is a challenge to reconstruct the real circumstances of the encounters between the Fāṭimid elite and the *fuqahā'*. One could surmise that any positive exchange would not have made it into his compilation. On the other hand, stories, hagiographies, texts and written networks were deployed to construct the image of venerated heroes, who became "sites of communal memory."

The Memory of Saḥnūn and the Formation of the Mālikī Community

Saḥnūn was a venerated teacher who succeeded in passing on the teaching of the scholars of Medina (and Egypt) to a large number of students in Qayrawān and al-Andalus.⁶⁸ The number of his disciples is reported to have reached seven hundred, most likely an arbitrary estimation, if not a symbolic number, but a sure testimony to the special position accorded to him by later generations.⁶⁹ He is credited for the triumph of Mālikism in Ifrīqiya through his students, who disseminated his recension of Mālik b. Anas's *fiqh*, titled *al-Mudawwana* and *al-Mukḥṭalita*.⁷⁰ The transmission of these works, accompanied by an emerging textual tradition went back to Saḥnūn through his closest associates and numerous disciples, including his son, also a prolific scholar, Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn (d. 256/870). However, it is reasonable to suggest that the portrait of Saḥnūn is as much a later construction as the *Mudawwana* is the product of efforts

⁶⁷ Muranyi, *Beitraige*, 299 (Arabic tr. 313-14); Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:469-506. Ibn Naṣrūn's tombstone exist in Qayrawān but it contains no anti-Fāṭimid pronouncements. See Roy-Poinsott, 1:250, no. 138, cited in, Muranyi, *al-Maktaba al-ʿatīqa*, 314.

⁶⁸ Brockopp, "Contradictory Evidence and the Exemplary Scholar: The Lives of Sahnun b. Saʿid (d. 854)", *IJMES* 43, 1 (February 2011): 128. For his biographies, see Abū'l-ʿArab, *Ṭabaqāt*, 101-104; al-Khushanī, 227, 238; al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 1:345-375; ʿIyāḍ, *Madārik*, 86-136.

⁶⁹ Talbi, "Saḥnūn", *El2*; Manuela Marín, "Ifriqiya Et Al-Andalus, À Propos De La Transmission Des Sciences Islamiques Aux Premiers Siècles De l'Islam," *Revue De l'Occident Musulman Et De La Méditerranée* 40, 1 (1985): 45-53.

⁷⁰ For a survey of modern studies and classical sources on Saḥnūn's life, see, Brockopp, "Saḥnūn b. Saʿid (d. 240/854)", in O. Arabi et al. (eds.), *Islamic Legal Thought: A Compendium of Muslim Jurists* (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 66, notes 1, 3.

that transcend several generations of scholars.⁷¹ As the graph below shows these efforts were particularly intense during the Fāṭimid period (See Figure 1).

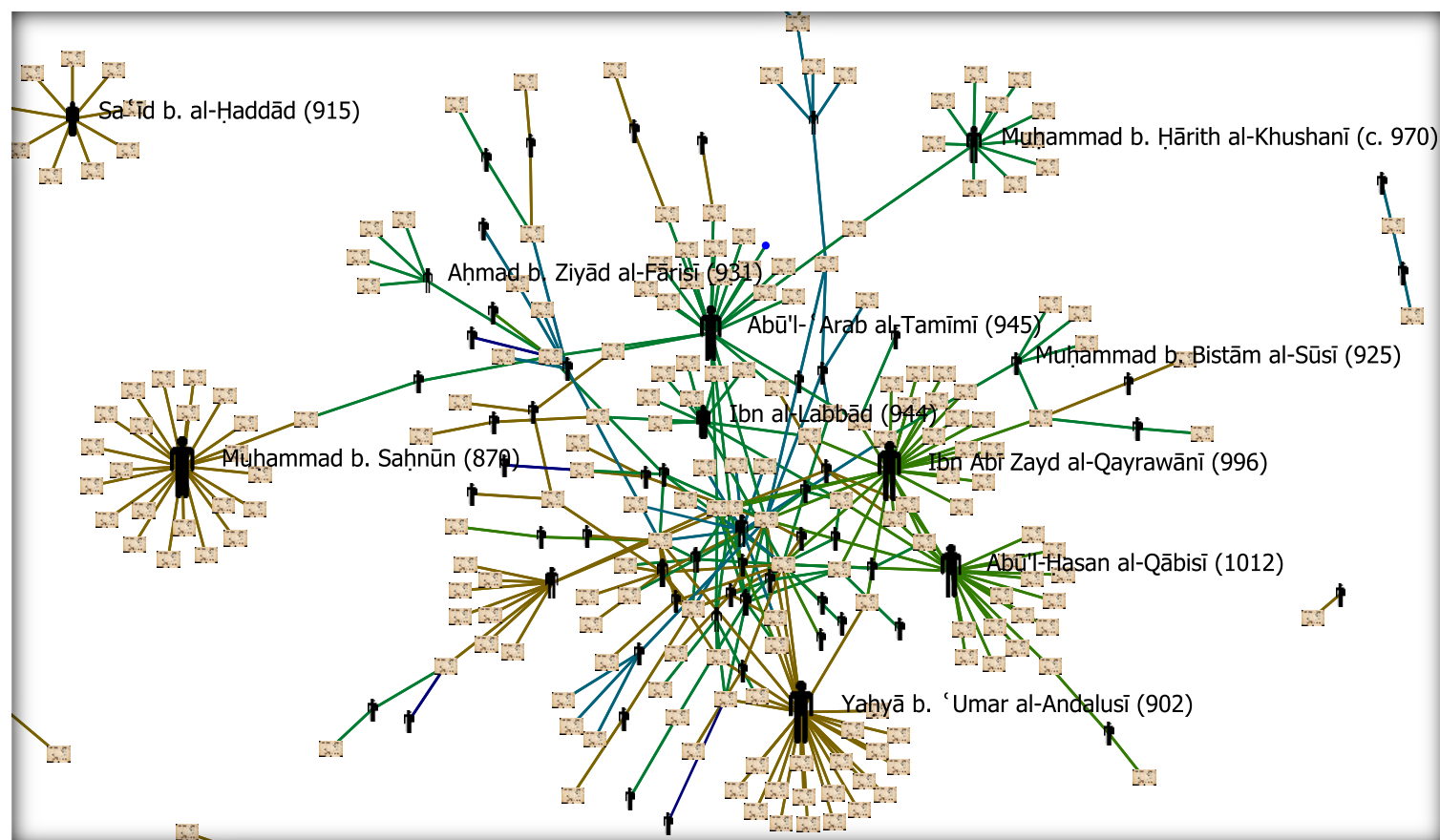


Figure 1. The Transmission of Mālikī texts in Qayrawān from the Aghlabid to Zīrid period

This chart analyses Mālikī networks of knowledge transmission in Qayrawān and identifies the most prolific scholars. Note the frequency of the dark green lines – transmission of *fiqh*, *ḥadīth* and other Mālikī books during the Fāṭimid, period. Blue lines – early Aghlabid period, brown lines – late Aghlabid period and light green lines correspond to the Zīrid period. See Appendix 3.

Recent scholarship, especially the works of M. Talbi, N. Hentati, M. Muranyi and J. Brockopp have emphasised the importance of Saḥnūn's oeuvre in consolidating Mālikism in North Africa and al-Andalus.⁷² The five oldest fragments preserved in the library of the Great Mosque of Qayrawān are also from the *Mudawwana*, one of them written during Saḥnūn's lifetime.⁷³ It is difficult to explain, however, without considering the intellectual and political context, why and how this book, a revised compilation of Mālik's legal opinions transmitted through his Egyptian student Ibn al-Qāsim (d. 191/807), should surpass the efforts of all other

⁷¹ Brockopp, "Literary Genealogies From the Mosque-Library of Kairouan," *ILS* 6, 3 (October 1999): 393–402, 394.

⁷² Miklos Muranyi, *Die Rechtsbücher Des Qairawāners Saḥnūn b. Sa'īd: Entstehungsgeschichte Und Werküberlieferung* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999); Brockopp, *Muhammad's Heirs: The Rise of Muslim Scholarly Communities, 622–950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); idem, "Contradictory Evidence," 115–32; idem, "Saḥnūn b. Sa'īd (d. 240/854)."

⁷³ Brockopp, *Muhammad's Heirs*, 200. While dating the final compilation of *Mudawwana* to the third/ninth century is a subject of debate, it is evident that in the Fāṭimid period the work received its final shape, whence Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī collected everything that was left out of *Mudawwana* in his *Kitāb al-Nawādir wa'l-ziyādāt*.

legal schools and jurists in North Africa and al-Andalus. The answer is often sought either in the legal texts themselves (what made them so outstanding) or in the Aghlabid context (what made it such a brilliant environment for legal studies), with credit given to Saḥnūn as a great jurist. The heroic image of Saḥnūn, created by later generations as a prodigious and exemplary champion of Mālikī school, I argue, was less due to his activity as a strict judge, or as a champion of the population against the Aghlabids, than due to the consolidation of the Mālikī *madhhab*, which crystallised during the Fāṭimid period. As the network of knowledge transmission (Figure 1), based on records from biographical dictionaries and manuscripts demonstrates both the production and transmission of texts, especially the *Mudawwana* of Saḥnūn, significantly intensified in the Fatimid period. (Figure 2)

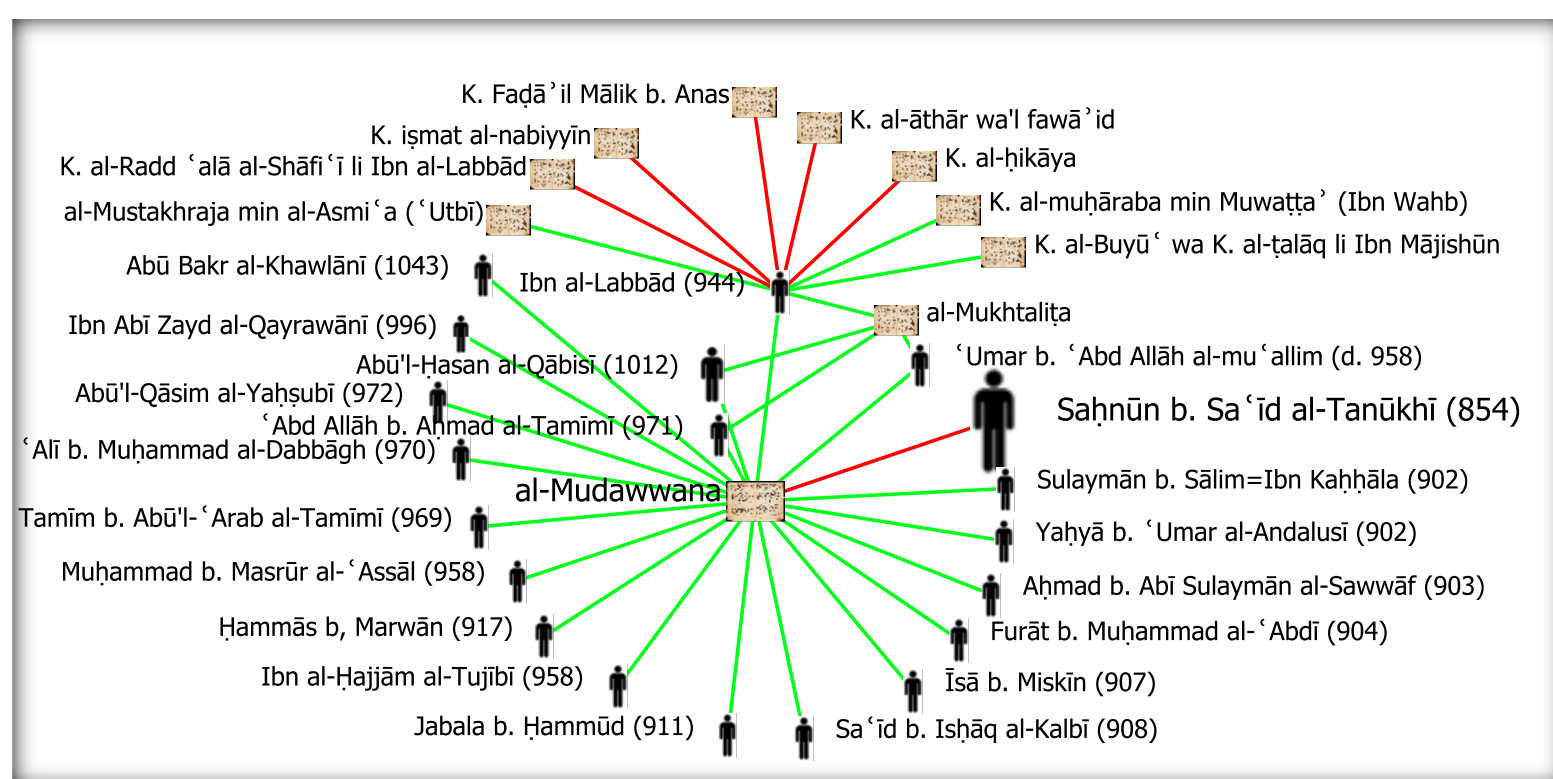


Figure 2. The Transmission of Saḥnūn's *Mudawwana* and *Mukhtalifa*

The scholars of Qayrawān, many of whom were Saḥnūn's students, remembered Saḥnūn as a staunch defender of Mālikī *madhhab* in the context of bitter revenge and humiliation from the ʿIrāqīs in late Aghlabid period. Only a handful of the students and contemporaries of Saḥnūn, who had memories of him, reached the early Fāṭimid period and transmitted eyewitness accounts alongside his emerging hagiography to a new generation of Mālikīs, who, almost sixty years after his death, began to compile the stories of his virtues (*manāqib*).⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Abu'l-ʿArab, *Ṭabaqāt*, 102. Here, Abu'l-ʿArab mentions his compilation titled "On the Virtues [of Saḥnūn] and his Character as a Judge."

The concept *lieux de mémoire*, thus, can explain the emergence of the collective memory in Qayrawān centred on the figure of Saḥnūn among later generations of scholars. The “sites of memory”, as opposed to “environments of memory” (*milieux de mémoire*) are not directly connected with the real context; rather, as in our case, they are collective (and nostalgic) memory of later generations, who were mostly removed from Saḥnūn’s Qayrawān in time or space, or both. Whether they wrote about Qayrawān from al-Andalus, like al-Khushanī, or wrote after the decline of Qayrawān, like Abū Bakr al-Mālikī, they found in the figure of Saḥnūn a metaphorical “site of history” where they could deposit⁷⁵ their diverse values and ideals.⁷⁶ Subsequently, as Brockopp notes, these and similar stories are reported as historical facts in modern scholarship.⁷⁷ My attempt is, of course, not to downplay the crucial role of the historical Saḥnūn and his teaching, but rather to interpret the hagiographic accounts elaborated by Ifrīqīyan scholars in the Fāṭimid period. Thus, to repeat Jan Assmann’s oft-quoted remark on “mnemohistory”, I am as much interested in pre-Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya “as such,” as I am interested in the way it was “remembered” by different social groups.⁷⁸ Since this “remembrance” or “reconstruction of the past” was inevitably embedded in their present, as Habswachs postulated,⁷⁹ it is the “remembered” part that matters for our understanding of their experience in Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya.

To properly appreciate the concerns of the scholars of Qayrawān, and the motivations behind their “individual,” “collective” or “historical” memories one has to understand the pressing concerns and challenges that they faced in this particular period. As Leary reminds us, memory is political by nature and that “the political and intentional dimension of memory

⁷⁵ Therefore, the term “deposits of history” may suits our purpose better.

⁷⁶ Brockopp’s portrayal of Saḥnūn as an exemplary individual with an appeal to diverse audiences supports my contention. Brockopp, “Contradictory Evidence,” 127. On broader understanding of “sites of memory” to include metaphorical “sites” such as events, people and so on, see, Andrzej Szpociński, “Sites and Non-Sites of Memory”, *Teksty drugie: Memory and Place* 1 (2016): 245-54, 249; Stanković, “Spaces of memory,” 87-94. Also, compare the notion of remembering Qayrawān as “the city of Saḥnūn” with “Descartes c’est la France.” See, François Azouvi, “Descartes”, in Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Vol. 3, Symbols* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), ch. 14, 483.

⁷⁷ Brockopp, “Contradictory Evidence”, 127.

⁷⁸ Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 9. More generally, on the relationship between memory and power, written culture and identity formation, see Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 15-111. For early Islamic context, see Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: L’espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides* (v. 72-193/692-809) (Leiden : Brill, 2010).

⁷⁹ Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, 39-40.

cannot be ignored.⁸⁰ The most important political change in Ifrīqiya since the time of Saḥnūn was the Shīʿī Fāṭimids' takeover of the Aghlabid state, which challenged the *fuqahā*'s authority as "heirs to the Prophet." This case is conspicuously political. Thus, the formation of the memory and identity of the Mālikīs must be examined against this background and the following section will assess the nature and extent of the Fāṭimid challenge.

The Fāṭimid Challenge (or Opportunity?)

There is little doubt that the Fāṭimid imam-caliphs strived to wrestle the claim to religious knowledge from the hands of the (Sunnī) jurists to secure their authority at home and spread its influence beyond the realm of the caliphate. The Fāṭimids' view of their mission and their political venture resulted in distinct learning traditions as a challenge to the established traditionist approach to knowledge, which handed religious authority to the *fuqahā*.

In the past few years, several studies have examined the lasting, yet long neglected impact of Fāṭimid-Ismāʿīlī thought on various intellectual strands in North Africa, al-Andalus and other regions.⁸¹ Despite the destruction of much of the material heritage from the Fāṭimid period, including the famous royal palaces in all three capital cities, the enduring Fāṭimid influence of Fāṭimid art and architecture have been recognised more than their influence on the character of Muslim religious and intellectual life.⁸² This has also to do with the fact that many of the ambitious institutions that the Fāṭimids initiated did not survive the Fāṭimid state due to their association with the dynasty and their learning traditions, in addition to the obvious lack of patronage. In what follows I explore the Fāṭimid approach to learning/knowledge (*ʿilm*), which dictated their relationship with the learned community in Ifrīqiya and other regions under their control.

From the early days of the *daʿwa* in North Africa, the Fāṭimid imam-caliphs viewed the *fuqahā*' as their main rival claimants to religious knowledge. It is, thus, not surprising that

⁸⁰ Leary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 12.

⁸¹ Such as recent books by Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn Al-ʿArabi and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); David Hollenberg, *Beyond the Quran: Early Ismaili Taʿwil and the Secrets of the Prophets* (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2016); Jamel, A. Velji, *An Apocalyptic History of the Early Fatimid Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, *Walāyah in the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī Tradition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2017).

⁸² Some notable exceptions are the works of Mohammed Yalaoui, *al-Adab bi-Ifrīqīya fī al-ʿahd al-Fāṭimī*: 296-365 H (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986); Khālīd b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Qāḍī, *al-Ḥayāt al-ʿilmiyya fī Miṣr al-Fāṭimiyya* (Beirut: al-Dār al-ʿArabiyya l-il-Mawsūʿāt, 2008).

the Fāṭimids sought to delegitimise the *fuqahā'* as their charismatic authority and messianic claims clashed with the latter's claims to be the "guarantors" of the "tradition" and the possessors of religious knowledge.⁸³ The focus of the initial *da'wa* among the Kutāma was on the utopian doctrine of the Maḥdī, but this alone could not guarantee long term success. Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī perceptively introduced rituals and symbolism centred around the doctrine to build the community and give it its identity.⁸⁴ However, more importantly, as described in the previous chapter, he introduced an hierarchy of knowledge which unlike the existing paradigms of (scholastic) learning, was meant to be accessible to the tribesmen and tribeswomen. The *majālis al-ḥikma*, in theory, were open to people with any level of knowledge. Reinforced by performative elements such as making a covenant (*'ahd* or *mīthāq*) and paying initiation fees (*najwā*), a nascent community of believers, in Fāṭimid terminology the *awliyā'*, emerged to form the backbone of the Fāṭimid caliphate.

The success of Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī's *majālis al-ḥikma* in his *dār al-ḥijra* in Tāzrūt was perceived as a serious threat, which provoked the pro-Aghlabid local commanders of Mīla, Saṭīf and Bilizma (towns in Lesser Kabylia) to consider arranging a debate between Abū 'Abd Allāh and the *fuqahā'*.⁸⁵ This, however, was avoided, probably because both sides realised that a military confrontation was inevitable. According to our sources though, the pro-Aghlabid coalition feared that the local Berber *fuqahā'* were no match for the sophisticated Eastern *dā'ī*.⁸⁶ This perspective, of course, comes from pro-Fāṭimid chronicles and *sīras*, importantly from al-Nu'mān's *Iftitāḥ*. Considering that depicting one's adversaries as intellectually weak is a common trope, this may have not been the real reason behind rejecting the public disputation, if it was proposed at all. The significance of this information rather lies in the way disputations were seen as a way to negotiate authority in order to prevent military conflicts. As the context of the talks between the two sides suggests, Abū 'Abd

⁸³ On the rivalry between the "invented tradition" of the Maḥdī and the "tradition" preserved by the *'ulamā'*, see García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, 23-24.

⁸⁴ See, Velji's research on this, *An Apocalyptic History*, 22-41.

⁸⁵ Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 16. See al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 77-86. Al-Nuwayrī also quotes al-Nu'mān fully in his *Nihāya*, 28:51-52.

⁸⁶ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 79; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, 28:51-52.

Allāh al-Shīʿī and his allies were already beating the drums of war and had no interest in negotiations knowing that they had the upper hand.⁸⁷

Following the revolution, most of our sources agree that the Mālikī jurists came under increasing pressure. Ibn al-Haytham, who was close to the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* does not hide his contempt for the jurists of Qayrawān, especially the Mālikīs.⁸⁸ However, despite the ban imposed on teaching in public until the time of al-Manṣūr, the transmission of *fiqhī* knowledge in Ifrīqiya continued, arguably with greater success than ever before, as will be illustrated below.

After the *fuqahāʾ* were granted freedom to teach law according to their *madhhab*, al-Manṣūr tried to prevent them from wielding political influence. In his polemical treatise directed at his adversaries, al-Manṣūr tries several lines of argument to prove the impossibility of entrusting *fuqahāʾ* with the task of choosing an imam for the *umma* (Muslim community). One of the serious problems that he found with them was the absurdity of the idea of choosing a leader by consensus, for it would not be practical to seek every possible *faqīh* in the Muslim world for their vote on a particular candidate. Neither was restricting the consensus to the *fuqahāʾ* of one particular region logical, al-Manṣūr argued.⁸⁹

If the *fuqahāʾ* of all religious factions, such as the Muʿtazila, the Khawārij, the Ḥashwiyya, the Shiʿa, and others, as well as the followers of Mālik, Abū Ḥanīfa and others do not assemble in one body which would settle their differences and which would be fit for designating an imam, they would not be worthy of being called *fuqahāʾ*.⁹⁰

The core of al-Manṣūr's polemical treatise is the shortcoming and defectiveness of the *fuqahāʾ*'s method and their lack of sufficient authority vis-à-vis the rightful Fāṭimid imam. The treatise is no doubt addressed to the *fuqahāʾ* of Qayrawān.

They argued by claiming that the choosing of the imam goes to the jurists. We mentioned previously, however, that jurists were in disagreement with each other concerning this

⁸⁷ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Iftitāḥ*, 77-89.

⁸⁸ Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, 166.

⁸⁹ Al-Manṣūr bi-llāh, *Tathbūt al-imāma*, ed. Sami Makarem as *The Shiʿi Imamate: A Fatimid Interpretation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 82. The attribution of the work to al-Manṣūr is doubtful, but its polemical stance against the jurists fits well with other early works of the *daʿwa*.

⁹⁰ Al-Manṣūr, *Tathbūt al-imāma*, 80.

question. Since they were in disagreement, how could it be that such a question be in their hands when their so-called jurists of contending religious factions did not recognise the others?⁹¹

The argument is, however, theological, and not juridical. In other words, al-Manṣūr refuted the *‘ulamā*’s claim to knowledge, not the legal principle of consensus, with which al-Nu‘mān was tasked in the years following the “rapprochement.”

Similar arguments were made by Abū ‘Abd Allāh and Abū’l-‘Abbās about forty years earlier and would be repeated in the treatises of *dā’īs* from the Egyptian period, such as al-Sijistānī (circa 4th/10th century) and al-Naysābūrī (circa 4th-5th/10th-11th century). Even much later, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāh, the Iranian *dā’ī*, who founded the Ismā‘īlī state of Alamūt, argued for “the single authoritative sanctioned teacher (*mu‘allim-i ṣādiq*) of the Shī‘īs [...] against the multiplicity of religious scholars (*‘ulamā*).”⁹²

Closer contact and debates, of which we know only by mentions and allusions, between the Fāṭimid *dā’īs* and the Mālikī and Ḥanafī jurists in al-Manṣūriyya, near the booming centre of Mālikī learning — Qayrawān also resulted in a range of polemical works by the supreme judge al-Nu‘mān. None of these books seem to be extant, but the titles are mentioned in al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s later works, which confirm that they were mostly concerned with the topic of imamate and the refutation of Sunnī and Khārijī interpretations of Islam.⁹³

Did the Fāṭimids hence try to put an end to *fiqh*-centred learning altogether? The answer is no because beginning with al-Manṣūr the Fāṭimids began to elaborate their own school of jurisprudence. As Madelung observes, knowledge of the religious law was “most important” in al-Manṣūr’s view.⁹⁴ However, only the Fāṭimid imams could have a perfect knowledge of the law, unlike the jurists who were dependent on faulty principles, such as *qiyās* (reasoning by analogy), *ra’y* (informed opinion), *ijmā’* (consensus) *ijtihād* (jurisprudential interpretation), *istiḥsān* (juristic preference), *naẓar* (speculative [legal] reasoning), or *istidlāl*

⁹¹ Ibid. 119.

⁹² Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 341.

⁹³ See Poonawala, “The Chronology,” 115-20.

⁹⁴ Wilferd Madelung, “A Treatise on the Imamate of the Fatimid Caliph al-Manṣūr bi-Allāh,” in Chase F. Robinson (ed.), *Texts, Documents, and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D.S. Richards* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 69-78, 75.

(indictive reasoning).⁹⁵ The principle of *taqlīd* (legal conformism) too, according to al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, becomes automatically invalid, partly because legal authorities like Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Shāfi‘ī issued their opinion based on the above principles, and partly because their verdicts kept changing depending on the case and the context, even within their lifetime. Al-Shāfi‘ī even explicitly forbade his followers from adopting his legal opinion.⁹⁶ Imitating the Shī‘ī imams, al-Nu‘mān clarifies, is different from imitating the jurists, because

the imams are the custodians of the secret knowledge of the revelation. The knowledge they pass on from one generation to the next and they do not resort to *ra’y*, *ijtihād*, *qiyas*, or *istiḥsān*.⁹⁷

Thus, the Fāṭimid *dā’īs* claimed access to perfect knowledge, mediated by the infallible Ismā‘īlī imam — the only rightful legatee of Prophetic knowledge. To this end, al-Manṣūr composed a book, which Madelung identified as “the first official Fatimid legal code.”⁹⁸ He also composed another book on the subject of his imamate, which he claimed was an original work filled “with exoteric and esoteric knowledge and conclusive proofs” directed at the Ismā‘īlī community, rather than the Sunnīs.⁹⁹

Al-Manṣūr initiated a rapprochement with the Mālikīs and even a circle for teaching Shī‘ī law in the great mosque of Qayrawān, but *fiqhī* polemic only intensified. Engaging with other *madhhabs* was inevitable. Not long after al-Manṣūr’s death, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān composed his *Kitāb Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib* in which he refuted the principles of Sunnī

⁹⁵ On this see al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s polemical treatise devoted to the refutation these principles, *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib*, ed. and tr. Devin J. Stewart, as *Disagreements of the Jurists: A Manual of Islamic Legal Theory* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2015), the editor’s introduction and Poonawala’s analyses of the subject in the context of the evolution of al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s legal theory. Poonawala, “The Evolution of al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s Theory of Ismaili Jurisprudence as Reflected in the Chronology of his Works on Jurisprudence,” in by F. Daftary and G. Miskinzoda, *The Study of Shi‘i Islam: History, Theology and Law* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014) 295-351, esp. 303-41.

⁹⁶ Poonawala, “The Evolution,” 316. The influence of al-Shāfi‘ī and his students who rejected *taqlīd* was crucial on Qayrawānī Mālikīs, some of whom adopted his views, such as Ibn al-Ḥaddād. See, Chapter Four.

⁹⁷ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, cited in Poonawala, “The Evolution,” 317.

⁹⁸ Madelung, “A Treatise on the Imamate,” 70-71; Maribel Fierro, “Codifying the Law: The Case of Medieval Islamic West,” in John Hudson Ana Rodríguez (eds.), *Diverging Paths?: The Shapes of Power and Institutions in Medieval Christendom and Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 105.

⁹⁹ Al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*, 58 (Arabic text, 46). This reference must be to the *Tathbīt al-imāma* attributed to al-Manṣūr, cited above. See also, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, ed. A. A. Fayzee, 48.

jurisprudence for being indeterminate and lacking legitimacy.¹⁰⁰ Following the same principles, a couple of years later he composed his comprehensive legal manual, the *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*,¹⁰¹ with which he singlehandedly founded the Fāṭimid jurisprudence and rejected Sunnī legal epistemologies.¹⁰² Thus, in the opening of his *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān declares most of the [Sunnī] jurists misguided:¹⁰³

Arguments and opinions proliferated, schools (*madhāhib*) and subjective opinions (*ahwā’*) have disagreed, doctrines (*aqāwīl*) have been forged, and the community (*umma*) has divided into sects (*firaq*) and factions (*ashyā’*), most of the tradition (*sunna*) has fallen into oblivion and discontinued, while innovations have appeared and grown. So, each misguided sect has taken a leader from among the ignorant, and by his [i.e. that leader’s] word made permissible what is forbidden (*ḥarām*) and forbidden what is permitted (*ḥalāl*), imitating and following his command without any evidence either from the Book (Qur’ān) or the Tradition (*sunna*), or from the consensus (*ijmā’*) of the imams and the community [...]¹⁰⁴

Describing the state of affairs as disastrous, al-Nu‘mān makes a case for his ambitious project, the *Da‘ā’im al-Islām* or *The Pillars of Islam*, the official code of the Fāṭimid caliphate. Despite the disagreements, as Poonawala observes, the *Da‘ā’im* was oriented towards the reconciliation of the Fāṭimid *madhhab* with Mālikism.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, as an exoteric work, it provided a legal framework that was “adaptable to the universal claims of the Fāṭimids.”¹⁰⁶

On the other hand, the Ismā‘īlī cosmology and the interpretation of the Jewish and Christian religious traditions and Greek philosophy also served the purpose of redefining the

¹⁰⁰ See Husain Qutbuddin, “Fāṭimid Legal Exegesis of the Qur’an: The Interpretive Strategies Used by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974) in His “*Da‘ā’im al-Islām*,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 12 (2010):109-146, 131. For the *Kitāb Ikhtilāf ‘uṣūl al-madhāhib*, see note 94 above.

¹⁰¹ Full title: *Da‘ā’im al-Islām wa dhikr al-ḥalāl wa’l-ḥarām wa’l-qaḍāyā wa’l-aḥkām* (The Pillars of Islam on What is Permitted and What is Forbidden and about Legal Cases and Ordinances), ed. Asaf A. A. Fyzee, 2 vols, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1951-1960). English tr. Ismail K. H. Poonawala, as *The Pillars of Islam*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002-2004).

¹⁰² Qutbuddin, “Fāṭimid Legal Exegesis of the Qur’an,” 109-46.

¹⁰³ It is worth pointing out that no such blatant attack on Ismā‘īlī jurists is found in the work of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, the most prominent Mālikī jurists, which probably indicates al-Nu‘mān’s position of power.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, 1:1.

¹⁰⁵ Ismail K. Poonawala, “Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān and Ismā‘īlī Jurisprudence,” in Daftary (ed.), *Medieval Isma‘ili History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 129.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

hierarchy of knowledge, proposing an entirely new framework.¹⁰⁷ The Ifrīqiyan works of another important Fāṭimid *dāʿī* Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 346/957), also follow the caliph al-Manṣūr’s approach closely. Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr was the son of the famous Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī* Ibn Ḥawshab al-Kūfī, who had sent Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī to the Maghrib. Given that Jaʿfar arrived in al-Mahdiyya during the caliphate of al-Qāʾim and served both al-Manṣūr and al-Muʿizz, his works must reflect the vision of the imams and the evolution of the Fāṭimid tenor of learning. If al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān faulted the *fuqahāʾ* for their legal epistemology, Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr attacked on the doctrinal front. From his interpretation of Biblical traditions, it appears that the jurists had come to be seen as the main rivals of the Fāṭimids.¹⁰⁸

And there have been no trials on the friends of God [*awliyāʾ Allāh*] as severe as those which the jurists (*aṣḥāb al-raʾy wa-l-qiyās*) afflicted upon them, with the charges that the prophets (*rusul*) lied, and their rejection of the legatees, and the establishment of the pharaonic rule. But the legatees held fast to the heritage of the prophets. And while the Pharaohs arose, people composed works with their legal theory and opinions *trying to extinguish the light of God* in what they composed and in their speech, *but God refuses but to perfect His light, despite the hatred of the unbelievers* (Qurʾān 9:34).¹⁰⁹

This cycle of trial under illegitimate and oppressive Pharaonic rule, concealment of the true Imams and spreading of their *dāʿīs* until the Imam of the Time (*imām al-zamān*) makes himself manifest continues with each Prophet (*nāṭiq*). There is a place for the imams, their close followers, the *dāʿīs*, the ʿAbbāsids, the *fuqahāʾ*, and the rival Shīʿī claimants in Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr’s reading of the stories of ancient Prophets.¹¹⁰

The confrontation of the proto-Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* with the jurists in the pre-Fāṭimid period is worth noting. For instance, in an earlier work by Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr, the *Kitāb al-ʿālim waʾl ghulām*, the young Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī* Ṣāliḥ presses the Muʿtazilī theologian Abū Mālik to

¹⁰⁷ See David Hollenberg, “Interpretation after the End of Days: the Fatimid-Ismaʿili Taʾwil (Interpretation) of Jaʿfar ibn Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 960),” (PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2006).

¹⁰⁸ Hollenberg, however, believes that Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr was attacking “corrupt jurists of any period,” when he uses the term “*qiyāsiya*” – associated with the Ḥanafīs – because the Fāṭimids could not have singled out the Ḥanafīs for attack instead of the uncooperative Mālikīs of Qayrawān. See, “Interpretation,” 315, note 81.

¹⁰⁹ Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *Sarāʾir wa asrār al-nuṭaqāʾ*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1984), 152, (tr. Hollenberg, “Interpretation,” 315).

¹¹⁰ See, for instance, the interpretation of the story of Joseph, Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr, *Sarāʾir wa asrār al-nuṭaqāʾ*, 149-153.

concede that the *fuqahā* are to be blamed for their endorsement of illegitimate non-Shīʿī rulers:

‘Then what do you say,’ Ṣāliḥ asked him, ‘about those who murder God’s just witnesses and His guide; what is their ultimate fate (14:30) or that of those who help them?’

‘In the Fire (14:30),’ responded Abū Mālīk, ‘along with whoever has blackened a flag or filled an inkwell for them!’¹¹¹

‘But what do all your religious scholars (*fuqahā*) say about that?’ Ṣāliḥ asked him.

‘They all pray for God’s mercy for the murdered one,’ said Abū Mālīk, ‘but they don’t see the sin of the murderer!’

‘Now, as for the person who willingly obeys the murderer,’ Ṣāliḥ asked him, ‘isn’t he an accomplice in the blood of the murdered victim?’

‘By God, of course he is!’ exclaimed Abū Mālīk. ‘For he is the murderer’s associate and even worse than him.’

‘His association with the murderer is obvious, because of his helping him. But how does he become even worse than him?’ Ṣāliḥ asked him.

‘Were it not for the *opinions passed down and circulated by the legal scholars* [*riwāyāt al-fuqahā*],’ Abū Mālīk responded, the oppressors could not maintain their dominion over the foolish ones.’¹¹²

This passage is taken from the extensive debate between the boy and the learned theologian — ironically called ‘Abd al-Jabbār Abū Mālīk,¹¹³ in which Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr depicts the early Ismāʿīlī worldview through a unique literary style, which is influenced first and foremost by the Islamic practice of *munāẓara*. Thus, the work is valuable not only for the history of early Ismāʿīlī approaches to learning but also for the insights it provides into pedagogical

¹¹¹ An obvious reference to the ‘Abbāsīd’s black banners, precisely, those who rise in their support, or write in their defence.

¹¹² Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-ʿĀlim waʾl-ghulām*, ed. and tr. James W. Morris, as *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 166–67 (Arabic text, 89–90).

¹¹³ As Morris suggests, the choice of this made-up name that literally means “servant of the oppressor, father of the king” is deliberate to highlight the political role of the scholastic theologians in ‘defending the ‘official’ ideologies’ and religious policies of the ‘Abbāsīds and other rulers. *The Master and the Disciple*, 194, note 141. (Note: The more common Arabic word for “king” – *malik* is “shortened from *mālīk* or *malīk*.” See, Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 4266).

techniques, methods of persuasion and argumentation and the teaching formats of the pre-Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*.

The political nature of the early Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* is unmistakable in this discussion at the end of the book when the young *dāʿī* convinces Abū Mālīk that the *fuqahāʾ* are complicit in the crimes of the oppressors. According to James W. Morris, this work subordinates the religious and political aims of the *daʿwa* to its spiritual end, that is attaining true knowledge and self-development.¹¹⁴ Hamdani also agrees with this view and attributes the emphasis on faith and knowledge in the *Kitāb al-ʿālim waʾl-ghulām* to the period of concealment of the Ismāʿīlī imams.¹¹⁵ In my view, however, there is a discernible political subtext characteristic of early Shīʿī intellectual activism, which this work shares with Ismāʿīlī Neo-Platonists and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. Such as in the following passage where, criticising the complicity of Muslim scholars in the oppression of “the friends of God”, the boy takes the scholar to task:

You have illuminated their falsehood with your indifference to truth. And *the despised ones* (4:75; 34:31-33) were deceived by your actions and those who resemble you among the so-called “knowers” [ʿulamāʾ] For they said: “*We have a model (to imitate)* in them (60:4, 6) since they are the legal scholars [*fuqahāʾ*] of the community.” So they have gone astray due to all of you (scholars), just as you all went astray due to the oppressors [...] Would any of you be satisfied to see his own child killed or was expelled from their home or possession without any right?

‘None of us would be satisfied with that!’ Abū Mālīk exclaimed. ‘If any one of us had his child killed or was expelled from his property, he would become outraged, and his people would be outraged for him, so they would not be satisfied until he was satisfied.’

‘*Surely God and His Messenger are more deserving* (9:62) that you all should be outraged and angry for him,’ Ṣāliḥ answered him, ‘when *His* viceroy (*khalīfa*) was killed and His friend (*walī*) was removed from the earth?’

‘Indeed, it is hard for us that they should kill *God’s friend* among us or *remove him from his earth* (14:13),’ said Abū Mālīk. ‘But (His friends) have decided to absent themselves from us, while the oppressors are unjustly dominating us.’

¹¹⁴ Morris, “Introduction,” *The Master and the Disciple*, 1-60, 16.

¹¹⁵ Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 13.

‘If you were all to help the *friends of God*, then they would win out,’ Ṣāliḥ answered him. ‘And if you were to abandon *His enemies* (6:112; 60:1, etc.) then they would not be victorious.’¹¹⁶

Again, while the book may not be the political manifesto of a rebellious Shī‘ī group, the author explicitly seeks to mobilise his readers to the cause of the “friends of God,” while also acknowledging that the imams were in concealment. Later on, Ja‘far b. Maṣṣūr himself became one of the scholars who joined the Fāṭimid court in Ifrīqiya to serve them with his knowledge.

The early Fāṭimid writings are full of refutations of their opponents.¹¹⁷ Though the Mālikīs jurists were not necessarily singled out for criticism, because unlike the Ḥanafīs they were less cooperative with the Fāṭimid state, they increasingly identified with opposition to their rule, with supporting their opponents and defying their policies. The Mālikīs’ insistence on the night prayers of Ramaḍān (*ṣalāt al-tarawīḥ*), a practice banned by the Fāṭimids as an innovation of the second caliph ‘Umar b. Khaṭṭāb, making it “a symbol of Sunnism,” is just one example.¹¹⁸ The Ḥanafīs, on the other hand, are believed to have converted to Ismā‘īlism in large numbers leaving the ‘Irāqī school with no followers in Ifrīqiya.¹¹⁹ While their wholesale adoption of Fāṭimid doctrines and rituals is probably exaggerated, it is nevertheless conceivable that in their compliance with Fāṭimid policies, the Ḥanafīs gradually discontinued the transmission of their legal works and theological doctrines, which diminished their numbers and influence. For all these reasons, they lacked the unifying symbols and causes that the Mālikīs clung to in order to demarcate and preserve the boundaries of their community.¹²⁰ As will be demonstrated below, continuous transmission of legal knowledge in Ifrīqiya and the compilation of biographical and hagiographical works was paramount to the consolidation of Mālikism as the native school of the entire Maghrib.

¹¹⁶ Ja‘far b. Maṣṣūr, *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām*, 167-168 (Arabic text, 91-92).

¹¹⁷ Walker, “Ismaili Polemics Against Opponents in the Early Fatimid Period,” in Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (ed.), *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World*, 27.

¹¹⁸ Fierro, “Sacrifice, Circumcision and the Ruler in the Medieval Islamic West: 151-52.

¹¹⁹ Madelung, “The Religious Policy of the Fatimids,” 98; Walker, *The Advent*, 20.

¹²⁰ See Fierro’s perceptive observations in “Sacrifice, Circumcision and the Ruler in the Medieval Islamic West,” 152-53.

Transmission of Mālikī Knowledge in Qayrawān

Thanks to recent research some quantitative data can be used to view scholarly activity and the production and transmission of religious texts in Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya in historical perspective, specifically, to compare it with the previous and subsequent century. The data shows a steady rise in transmitting Mālikī texts, which led to the domination of the Mālikī *madhhab* in the Maghrib. Interestingly, this period is equally productive for the Fāṭimid *daʿwa*, especially for the development of *fiqh* and compiling memoirs, which is comparable to their much longer and more prosperous Egyptian period.¹²¹ The intensity of text production and transmission is particularly noticeable during the caliphate of al-Manṣūr and al-Muʿizz, for both the *fuqahāʾ* and the *dāʿīs*, owing to the growing stability and confidence of the Fāṭimid caliphate.

As noted above, manuscript evidence suggests that the Fāṭimid period was one of maturation and consolidation for the Mālikī *fuqahāʾ*.¹²² Some brilliant representatives of the Mālikī *madhhab*, such as Ibn al-Labbād, Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī and Abuʾl-Ḥasan al-Qābisī flourished under Fāṭimid rule (Appendix 3). Likewise, the earliest biographical compilation of the representatives of Mālikī *madhhab* go back to the Fāṭimid period. For other branches of knowledge as well, such as medicine, the Fāṭimid period was equally productive, which indicates an overall favourable political and economic stability. Naturally, many physicians, scholars and poets found patronage at the Fāṭimid court, such as the Jewish philosopher and physician Ishāq b. Sulaymān al-Isrāʾīlī, who had emigrated to Qayrawān in late Aghlabid period, established contact with Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī upon his arrival and later became a court physician for al-Mahdī.¹²³ His student, Ibn al-Jazzār (d. 369/979), the author of many medical treatises was the most prominent physician of the early Fāṭimid period. He lived in Qayrawān and is said to have refused Fāṭimid patronage as a general pious principle.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, he was a close friend of the imam-caliph al-Muʿizz’s uncle Abī Ṭālib and “visited

¹²¹ Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*, 133-39, 180-85.

¹²² Muranyi, *Beiträge*, 148-59. Although published more than twenty years ago, this is the most complete survey of the collection we have to date.

¹²³ Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*, 178; Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, 480. Ibn al-Jazzār, *Zād al-musāfir wa qūt al-ḥāẓir*, ed. Maḥmūd Suwaysī et al. (Tunis: Orbis, 1999), vol. 1, 7.

¹²⁴ Our primary source, the Andalūsī Ibn Juljul, claims that Ibn al-Jazzār “intended to emigrate to al-Andalus, but did not manage.” Ibn Juljul, *Ṭabaqāt al-atibbāʾ waʾl-falāsifa*, ed. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid, 2nd ed. (Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1985) 88-91. There he relates the story of how Ibn al-Jazzār politely returned al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān’s gift of money and robe for treating his son. The same story is quoted in Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, 481.

him every Friday.”¹²⁵ Thus, Ibn Juljul may have exaggerated about his dissociation from the Fāṭimids, particularly in light of the fact that he authored a history of the Fāṭimid dynasty titled *Akḥbār al-dawla*, which is now lost, but quotations from it survive in many other works.¹²⁶

A recent work that helps to put the literary production from ninth-century Qayrawān in its historical context is Brockopp’s study of the rise of scholarly communities, which focuses on the Mālikī *fuqahā’*. Brockopp’s analysis of the transmission of texts is illuminating. Despite accepting the narrative of Mālikī resistance to the Fāṭimids, as one can surmise from his brief remarks on the period, his conclusions that “Kairouan was left to flourish on its own” is acceptable. This study however falls short of covering the Fāṭimid period in any detail despite the author’s intention to cover the rise of Muslim scholars during the period (1-338/622-950). The formation of the scholarly community in Qayrawān in the Fāṭimid period is not discussed at all, except for a paragraph in which the author expresses surprise at that uninterrupted transmission of Mālikī texts in Qayrawān:

Interestingly, many of the Kairouan manuscripts, including those of Ibn Abd al-Hakam’s books, were actually produced during the Fatimid period, demonstrating that the Fatimids respected the independence of the scholarly community, or perhaps that scholars were not directly dependent on government sponsorship.¹²⁷

This remark also touches upon another important issue, the question of state patronage, which is not discussed further.¹²⁸ This dissertation is not a place to rectify this important lacuna, but it will make an argument for the consolidation of the scholarly community in Qayrawān in the early Fāṭimid period.

Available evidence shows that the Fāṭimids retained the Aghlabid pattern of dealing with the *fuqahā’*. The major difference was, of course, the Fāṭimids’ Ismā‘īlī doctrine, that targeted the Sunnī authorities in *fiqh*, first of all, Mālik b. Anas, opposing them with the Shī‘ī

¹²⁵ Ibn Juljul, *Ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*, 89. According to Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, *Uyūn al-anbā’*, 481: “on Fridays.”

¹²⁶ Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*, 178; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, *Uyūn al-anbā’*, 481-82.

¹²⁷ Brockopp, *Muhammad’s Heirs*, 178.

¹²⁸ The Aghlabids are often given credit for their patronage of the *‘ulamā’*, who then supposedly sought patronage in al-Andalus in the Fāṭimid period. As can be seen with the Qayrawānī *‘ulamā’*, their situation does not seem to change with the coming of the Fāṭimids.

imams. The Shī‘ī view of religious knowledge and authority was unacceptable for the *fuqahā’* due to its ostensible disregard for the established knowledge paradigm, which was paramount to the formation of Muslim scholarly class — namely, accepting religious knowledge transmitted by any pious and trustworthy Muslim, not just the descendants of the Prophet. I will return to this question in the next chapters, in the analyses of the debates between Ibn al-Ḥaddād and the *dā‘īs*, and the memoirs of Ibn al-Haytham (*K. al-Munāẓarāt*), which, similar to the treatise attributed to the imam-caliph al-Manṣūr (*Tathbīt al-imāma*), stress the mutual exclusiveness of the claims of the ‘*ulamā’* of the “commonalty” (‘*ulamā’ al-‘amma*) and the Shī‘ī imams to knowledge. Despite this disagreement which is often expressed in polemical terms, there is little evidence that the Fāṭimid rulers actively prevented the transmission of Mālikī *fiqhī* knowledge in Ifrīqiya. In fact, manuscript notes and Mālikī biographical dictionaries prove the opposite: transmission of knowledge in Qayrawān continued with unprecedented intensity during the Fāṭimid period (Figure 3).

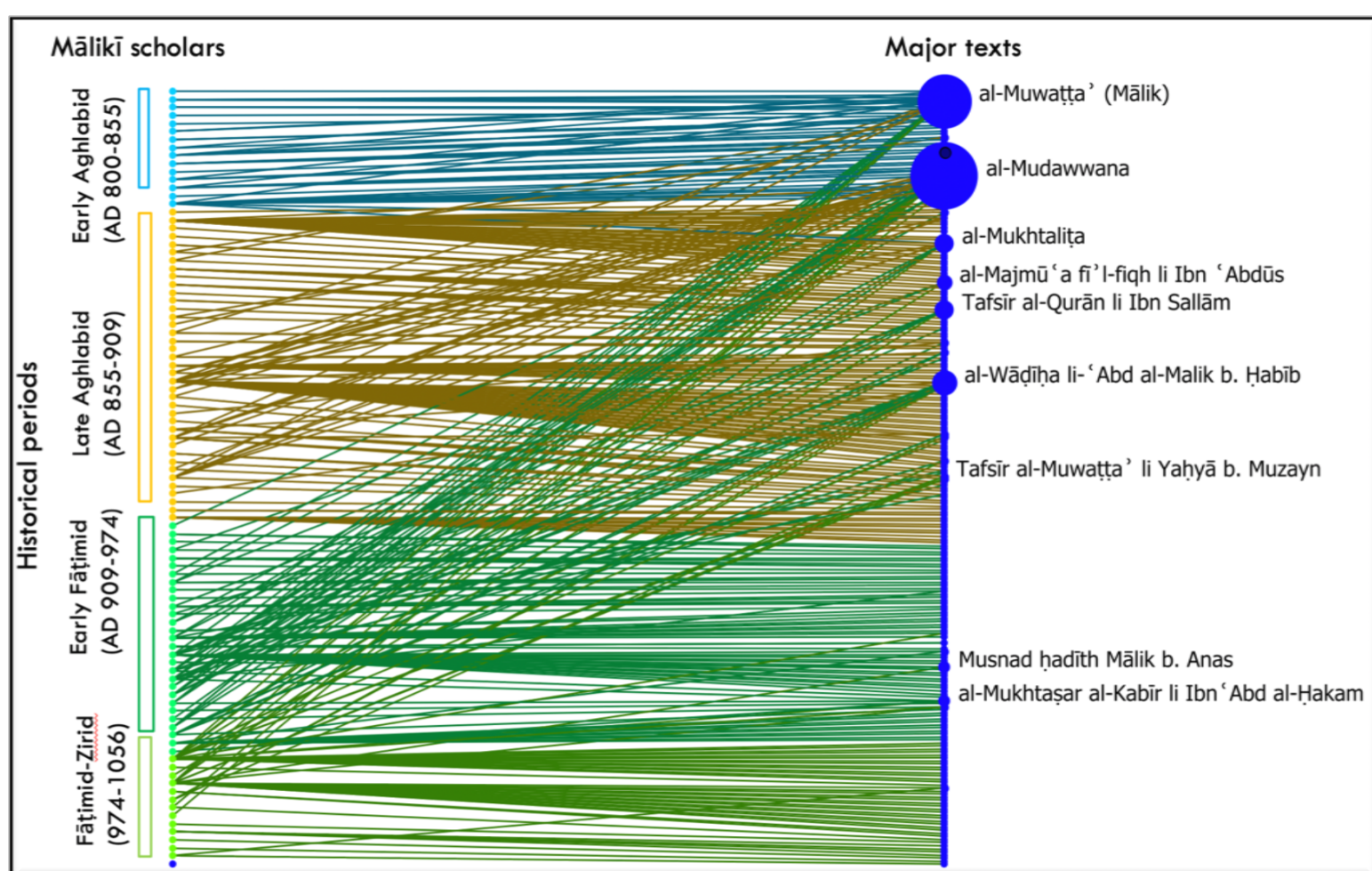


Figure 3. Transmission of Knowledge in Qayrawān (184 – 477/800 – 1085)

This chart is based on surviving records of transmission (*riwāya*) in biographical dictionaries and manuscripts. The green nodes and links represent the activity of Mālikī religious scholars under the Fāṭimids (AD 909-974). It demonstrates the intensity of the transmission of Saḥnūn’s work in this period. Sources: *al-Khushanī, Ṭabaqāt*; *Iyād, Madārik*; *Muranyi, Beiträge*. See also Appendix 2.

Biographical records, as Muranyi's study of the Qayrawān ancient collection confirms, are largely corroborated by notes of transmission on the manuscripts. Not only do these results demonstrate that it is precisely during the Fāṭimid period that, based on the popularity of his *al-Mudawanna* among the generation born after 296/909, Saḥnūn was fully established as the foremost Mālikī authority, but also that the Mālikī school itself was also consolidated in this period. What are the implications of these findings for our understanding of the Fāṭimid position vis-à-vis the *ʿulamāʾ*?

As illustrated in the case of *ribāṭ*, later *ṭabaqāt* work provides examples of hostile Fāṭimid policies, some of which will be analysed in more detail below. However, it is worth noting here that much of the alleged Fāṭimid pressure on the *ahl al-ʿilm* was already part of the Andalusī Umayyad propaganda in the fourth/tenth century.¹²⁹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, for instance, reports al-Muʿizz's refutation of these claims in his *Kitāb al-Majālis* verbatim.¹³⁰ Data extracted from historical and biographical dictionaries confirms al-Muʿizz's claims, especially the basis for his remarks about the superiority of Ifrīqiyan scholars over Andalusīs. In fact, it appears that this issue was a matter of competition between the Fāṭimids and their rivals, as reported by al-Nuʿmān:

In a section of this letter [from the Umayyad al-Nāṣir to al-Muʿizz], it was claimed that [al-Nāṣir] lets the people of different sects choose whatever they prefer for themselves and never gets in anyone's way; that this is the reason many people were drawn to him and chose to settle in his city.¹³¹

Al-Muʿizz, however, attributed this to the Umayyads' hedonistic lifestyle rather than their patronage of knowledge:

¹²⁹ One Egyptian poet and traditionist named Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad (d. 385/995), a descendant of the Umayyad Marwān I b. al-Ḥakam, the founder of the Marwānid dynasty, was arrested in Qayrawān at the beginning of al-Muʿizz's reign (343/954) and imprisoned in the Dār al-Bahr prison-castle of al-Mahdiyya for three years and seven months before he finally arrived in al-Andalus and was honoured by al-Ḥakam II. It is obvious, that his Umayyad lineage, rather than his literary or scholarly activities, must have played a role in his imprisonment. See, Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Tārīkh*, 117-19.

¹³⁰ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Majālis*, 174-75.

¹³¹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Majālis*, 174.

As for what he mentioned about those who emigrated to his country, we do not know anyone who went there for knowledge transmission or religion. No one went there except for the things that he [i.e. al-Nāṣir] made lawful for them, such as drinking wine and committing sins openly. This is because he himself does these things openly.¹³²

To refute the Umayyad al-Nāṣir's accusation of the Fāṭimids persecuting the Mālikīs in Ifrīqiya, al-Mu'izz proudly points out the popularity of Qayrawān as a major centre of learning for Mālikīs:

This ignorant [al-Nāṣir] does not see that his religious authorities (*a'imma*), who claim to be the scholars (*fuqahā'*) of his city, have received their knowledge for the most part from those who are in Ifrīqiya. The books of [the Ifrīqiyans] are to this day in their hands. Anyone who happens to visit [Ifrīqiya] studies with them, to an extent that they would study with anyone [in Ifrīqiya] who does not mind them.¹³³

These polemical positions tell us less about reality, than about contrasting paradigms of knowledge: one vision based on the authority of the *'ulamā'*, another on the authority of an infallible imam. The main point that we should take from this polemical exchange is that patronage of scholars and cultivating favourable scholarly milieu had become a matter of dynastic pride and prestige for the rival caliphates. The quantitative data of an increasing number of itinerant scholars to and from al-Andalus confirms that al-Nāṣir had good reasons for his claims, but it also shows that the Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya had become an important centre of learning, not just a conduit for knowledge transmission between the Mashriq and al-Andalus (see [Figure 4](#)).

A survey of most popular *riḥla* destinations for Andalusī scholars demonstrates that the number of Mālikī scholars journeying to Qayrawān and other cities in Ifrīqiya considerably

¹³² Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Majālis*, 175. Accusation of wine-drinking, adultery and homosexuality are common slurs on both sides of the Mediterranean. The pro-Fāṭimid Abu'l-Khayr was also accused of these, when he was executed in Cordoba during al-Ḥakam's reign. Fathī Zaghrūt notes that Fāṭimid Qayrawān was somewhat conservative in comparison to Cordoba, Fās and Ceuta, perhaps due to the influence of its traditionalist *fuqahā'* who categorically opposed music and singing. Zaghrūt, *al-'Alāqāt bayn al-Umawīyyīn wa'l-Fāṭimiyyīn fī'l-Andalus wa'l-shimāl al-Ifrīqī 300-350h*. (Cairo: Dār al-Tawāzī' wa'l-Nashr al-Islāmiyya, 2006), 354-56. However, a depiction of the caliph al-Manṣūr in the company of a musician, according to Brett, suggests otherwise. *The Fatimid Empire*, 63.

¹³³ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Majālis*, 174.

increased during the Fāṭimid period.¹³⁴ (Figure 4) This rise is, of course, partly related to the general increase of the Muslim population of al-Andalus, as is attested by the rise of *riḥlas* to Egypt and the Hijāz, especially after they came under Fāṭimid dominion. The rise and fall of the Andalusīs' *riḥla* to Egypt follows the "curve of Muslim names" in Egypt according to Richard Bulliet's classic study.¹³⁵ Likewise, the decline of the curve in the fifth/eleventh century mirrors the decline of the "population curve" in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as Maxim Romanov's "biographical curve" which is based on his computational survey of al-Dhahabī's *Tārīkh al-Islām*.¹³⁶ Quantitative studies are still insufficient to explain complex phenomena like conversion, and the paucity of information usually does not allow to allow to reconstruct the activities of the itinerant scholars and the period of their stay. Nevertheless, these preliminary results strongly suggest that despite political turbulence Fāṭimid rule did not prevent the Andalusīs from visiting and joining the learning circles of Ifrīqiya.

¹³⁴ I am using data from "Prosopografía de los ulemas de al-Andalus (PUA)" by María Luisa Ávila et al (Online).

¹³⁵ However, there is a decline in Muslim names in Ifrīqiya at the beginning of the Fāṭimid rule, not explained by Bulliet, which probably reflects the bias of the Mālikī *ṭabaqāt*. See Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 74-76.

¹³⁶ Maxim Romanov, "Computational Reading of Arabic Biographical Collections with Special Reference to Preaching in the Sunnī World (661-1300 CE)" (PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 2013), 125-27.

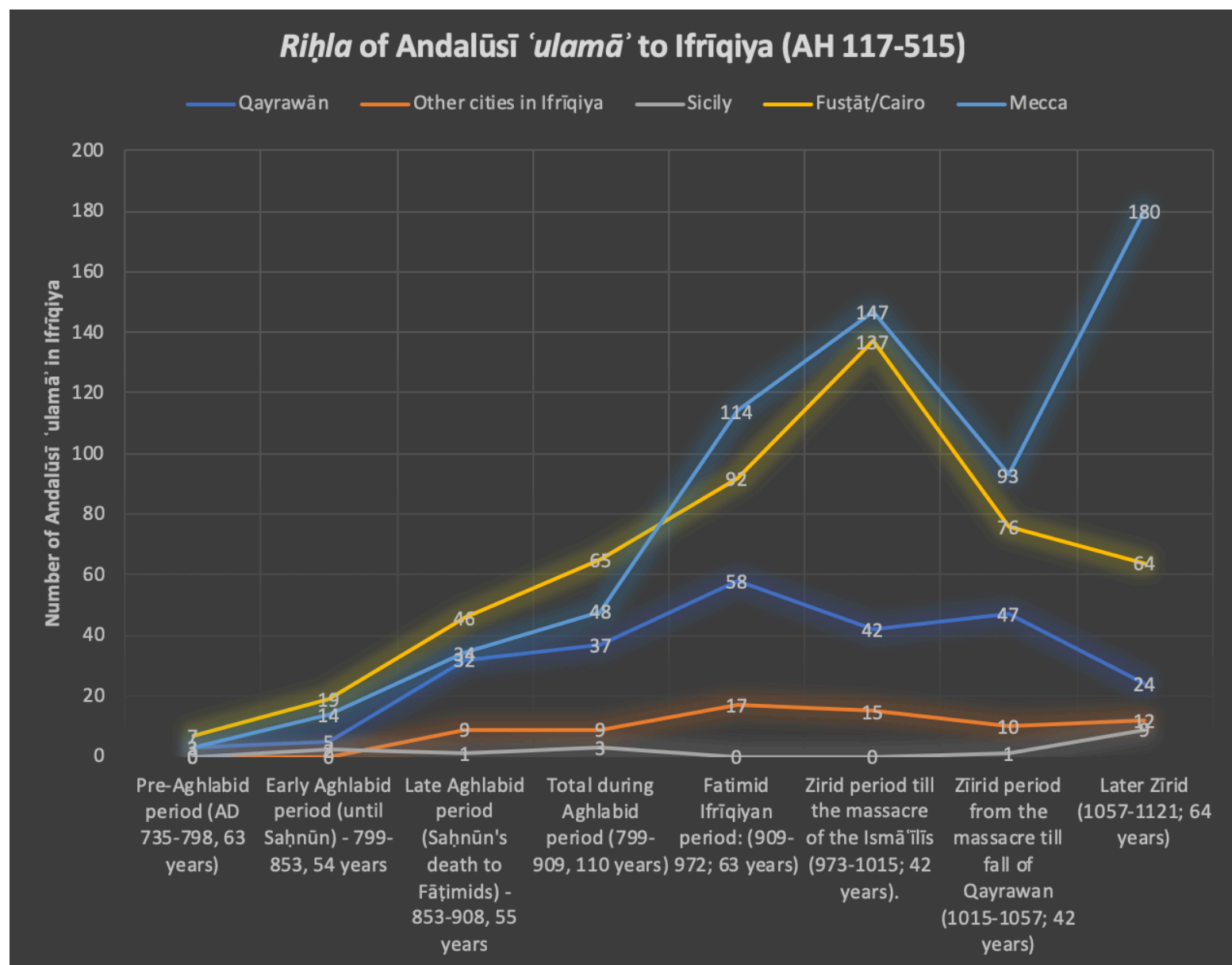


Figure 4. *Rihla fī ṭalab al-‘ilm. Andalusī ‘ulamā’ in Ifrīqiya.*

The chart provides an overview of Andalusī “visiting scholars” in Ifrīqiya in relation to other major destinations for *rihla*. The data comes from “*Prosopografía de los ulemas de al-Andalus (PUA)*” by María Luisa Ávila et al. Available at <https://www.eea.csic.es/pua/index.php>

The transmission and spread of Mālikī *fiqh*, including Saḥnūn's works, also highlights the fact that Mālikī jurisprudence flourished particularly during the Fāṭimid period, a fact that calls into question the established view about the nature of the repressive policies of the Fāṭimids with regard to the *fuqahā’* of Qayrawān.¹³⁷ In fact, the Fāṭimid measures, even if truthfully reported, mainly appear as a symbolic assertion of Shī‘ī rule, such as banning teaching according to non-Shī‘ī schools in the main mosques, or adding the Shī‘ī formula to the *adhān* (call to prayer). Most studies cite the enforcement of Shī‘ī elements in ritual practices as an example of harsh policies towards the population, especially its representatives — the *fuqahā’*. Likewise, the disagreement of jurists over questions of method and ritual practice has

¹³⁷ See, for instance, Talbi, “Kairouan”, *EI*2. Modern scholarship is generally suspicious of the traditional Mālikī account of the so-called Fāṭimid *miḥna*. Nevertheless, scholars accept that Fāṭimids indeed suppressed Mālikī teachings at least until al-Manṣūr’s “concessions.” See Madelung, “The Religious Policy of the Fatimids,” 907-114.

often been interpreted as a reason behind hostility and mutual intolerance.¹³⁸ One scholar writes: “Among the most important differences between Mālikī and Shī‘ī *fiqh* concerns the prayer of the two festivals [of Islam]: the Shī‘ī say “Allāhu Akbar” after reciting al-Fātiḥa and the *sūra*, and the Mālikīs say it before.”¹³⁹ While these disagreements are often cited as a cause of mutual intolerance, there is very little historical evidence to support claims about active hostility.¹⁴⁰

There is, however, another critical dimension of Fāṭimid-Ismā‘īlī ideology, which must have truly troubled the *fuqahā’*. The Ismā‘īlī imams claimed exclusive authority over Prophetic traditions and the interpretation of religion. The *fuqahā’* also claimed authority that they constructed through writing and knowledge transmission as “the heirs of the Prophet, a powerful claim that political rulers, such as the Aghlabids, had to reckon with.”¹⁴¹ Unlike the Aghlabid *amīrs*, the Ismā‘īlī imam-caliphs did not derive their legitimacy from the *fuqahā’*; instead, they blamed them for conspiring against the legitimate heirs of the Prophet and lending support to ‘Abbāsīd usurpers.¹⁴² Thus, the Fāṭimids’ claim to legitimacy did not depend on the *fuqahā’*.¹⁴³ It is instructive to point out that the Zīrid rulers later had to choose between the Mālikī *fuqahā’* and the Fāṭimids as sources of legitimacy and they chose the *fuqahā’*.¹⁴⁴ This was the emerging model of the relationship between religious scholars and rulers with a

¹³⁸ See, for instance, Idris, *La berbérie orientale* (Arabic tr., 1991, 2: 350-58).

¹³⁹ Idris., (Arabic tr. vol. 2, p. 357). On the other hand, the Ismā‘īlī *fiqh* agreed on many points with Mālikī *fiqh*. It is also worth noting that the prominent jurist Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī apparently agreed with the Shī‘ī position on determining the beginning of a lunar month, i.e. by calculating, not by sighting the crescent moon. Ibid., 358.

¹⁴⁰ For instance, there is no evidence that Fāṭimid rule created an obstacle for the prominent Ibn Abī Zayd who lived and taught in Qayrawān, although later biographical dictionaries paint him with the same brush. On this see, Sayeed S. Rahman, “The Legal and Theological Thought of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (310-386 A.H./922-996 C.E.)” (PhD Thesis, Yale University, 2009).

¹⁴¹ On this, see Brockopp, *Muhammad’s Heirs*, 140–41, where he gives the ‘Abbāsīd “inquisition” as an example.

¹⁴² See, for instance, the contemporary Ja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-‘ālim wa’l-ghulām*, 167-168 (Arabic text, 91-92).

¹⁴³ Following F. Dachraoui, “al-Nu‘mān,” *El2*, Maribel Fierro argues that unlike the Sunnī judge, who was the spokesperson of the public, the Fāṭimid judge was the mouthpiece of the caliph. I suspect that the independence of the Sunnī judges and the total dependence of Ismā‘īlī judges on the caliphs is exaggerated. It seems, in practice their relationship with the ruler was more or less similar, although, in theory, they differ fundamentally. Fierro, “Codifying the Law,” 109; idem, “Why and How Do Religious Scholars Write about Themselves?” 409–11.

¹⁴⁴ For their “special relationship,” see, Michael Brett, “The Diplomacy of Empire: Fatimids and Zirids, 990–1062,” *BSOAS* 78, 1 (February 2015): 149–59.

military background in Islamic societies, which was theorised *a posteriori* by al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058).¹⁴⁵

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrated that the period of Fāṭimid rule in Ifrīqiya was a highly productive period for the *fuqahā'* of Qayrawān, who actively taught *fiqh* to an increasing number of students. The efforts of scholars from the generation of Saḥnūn b. Sa'īd and his son Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn were amplified by the transmission of their works as well as by the construction of their memory by the following generation active in Fāṭimid Qayrawān. In addition, ideals and practices of piety and militant asceticism were cultivated and valorised in order to form a resistance identity for the Mālikī community, which found itself on the defensive.¹⁴⁶ Thanks to these efforts, when Fāṭimid rule ended in Ifrīqiya, Mālikism had already become the dominant tradition in both urban centres and frontier *ribāṭs*, which also played a role as centres of learning and networking (as hospices, not as a defence facilities). This eventual triumph also sustained the narratives of defiance, martyrdom, heroism and self-sacrifice in biographical dictionaries, often bordering on fiction, yet used as the main source for our understanding of the social and intellectual life of the '*ulamā'*' during the Fāṭimid period. That being said, my emphasis on memory has been not so much in order to draw the line between the collective memory of the scholars of Qayrawān and what could be considered as history, but rather to highlight the fact that both history and memory are created in a context and both are later reconstructions of the past.

¹⁴⁵ Marshal Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilisation*, 3 vols. (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2: 55–57.

¹⁴⁶ On *resistance identities*, as a type of identity formation by marginalised communities in response to perceived threat and distrust, see Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997) 6ff.

Chapter Three

The Culture of Disputation in Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya: *Munāẓara* Beyond “Doctrinal Struggle”

I asked Abu'l-‘Abbās b. Zurzur:

Tell me, what improves memory?

He said: As if you do not know?

I do not know, I said. Then, he answered:

Study by night and disputation by day.¹

Abu'l-‘Abbās b. Zurzur

(a Ḥanafī jurist from Qayrawān)

The aim of this chapter is primarily to examine the significance and social functions of the practice of disputation (*munāẓara*, pl. *munāẓarāt*) in Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya. Building on the discussions of the primary sources and the social context in the previous chapter, I aim to reassess the long-established scholarly position on the relationship between the Fāṭimids and the learned elite of Ifrīqiya, especially the traditionalist and ascetic religious scholars by focusing on the practice of disputation as recorded in surviving accounts of disputations.² Disputations are chosen not only because they are the most representative of partisan narratives, but also because they reflect a shared format of cultural and educational exchange between these groups, a common mode of participation, as well as an occasion for political legitimation.

Most studies emphasise hostility and the power struggle between the Fāṭimid rulers and the *fuqahā'* of Qayrawān, whether in the form of active or passive resistance, ruling out alternative modes of coexistence between the loosely defined group of *'ulamā'* and the ruling elite and the followers of the Fāṭimid *da'wa*. This view, as demonstrated in the previous

¹ *al-dars bi'l-layl wa'l-munāẓara bi'l-nahār*. Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 190.

² As previously noted, traditionalist scholars are identified as *ahl al-sunna* (people of tradition) in contemporaneous sources and later understood as the founders of Mālikism in the Maghrib and al-Andalus.

chapter, mainly resulted from polemical sources that go back to the Zīrid period. The anti-Fāṭimid climate arguably incentivised the *‘ulamā’* to produce accounts that vilified the Fāṭimids as tyrants and unbelievers. Moreover, to make the positive hero stand out, narratives tend to exaggerate the anti-hero. Consequently, historians have overemphasised the religio-ideological strife and hostility and neglected interdependence and coexistence.

I aim to correct this interpretation by exploring the relationship between the practice of *munāẓara* and social and political realities, as well as the place of *munāẓara* among other scholarly practices. As far as written accounts go, *munāẓarāt* often became an instrument in the hands of polemicists who aimed to highlight tension and confrontation, as will be illustrated in the following chapter. Within the general aim of my project – which is the appraisal of the *‘ulamā’* – I examine the significance of holding, writing, and disseminating the *munāẓarāt* to the learned elite and what they hoped to achieve.

It is worth remembering that the social world of the scholars was diverse and shaped by competition over positions, ranks and honours. While political powers controlled some of these – such as salaried positions and proximity to the court – most of a scholar’s cultural capital was generated and accumulated through participation and networking.³ Engaging in *munāẓara* was one way to come to the forefront and enhance one’s social status among scholars, either by gaining proximity to the court, or in some cases – such as in the case of Ibn al-Ḥaddād – by defying the ruler’s court. The rulers, for their part, offered social capital to the scholars in exchange for their endorsement of the rulers by participation. Thus, the case of the *ahl al-munāẓara* (disputationists) provides a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of scholarly interactions in Qayrawān and sheds light on new aspects of Fāṭimid policy towards the learned elite.

Studies that emphasise the “doctrinal struggle” (*al-ṣirāʿ al-madhhabī*) and exceptional hostility between the scholars of Qayrawān and the Fāṭimid dynasty also tend to explain

³ Michael Chamberlain, for instance, suggested the concepts of *fitna* (discord) and “arena of contest” to grasp the culture of competition and struggle in the late medieval Damascus. Although Chamberlain’s focus is on the post-madrasa period, his emphasis on the role of informal networks and personal nature of teacher-student relations is particularly valid for our period. Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

historical events such as the Fāṭimids' move to Egypt, as a consequence of this confrontation.⁴ A chapter in Halm's *The Empire of the Mahdi* is, for instance, titled "Resistance and Persecution" which is entirely based on Abū Bakr al-Mālikī's *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, a hagiographical compilation that purposely vilified the Fāṭimids and exaggerated the plight of the Mālikīs under "the accursed 'Ubaydids."⁵ To be sure, Halm's approach to the sources is much more sceptical than most scholars. He does acknowledge the problems with the *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, one of his main sources, such as the obvious lack of evidence for the claims about the murder and imprisonment of the 'ulamā' after the revolution.⁶ Nevertheless, he follows the same narrative of Fāṭimid *miḥna* and the 'ulamā's' hatred and defiance for their rule:

The Mālikī 'ulamā' endured the rule of the Shi'ites only with much gnashing of teeth. Quite a few of them emigrated to Spain or Egypt; one man, who did not want to abandon his family, preferred to spend the rest of his life herding cattle, of course with the Book of God in his cowherd's pouch. Abū Bakr al-Mālikī's *Garden of the Souls* is imbued with hatred for the heretical dynasty, whose rule is presented as a divine trial (*fitna*) for the true believers. Laments over the martyrs who were tortured or who lost their lives in the persecution take up a large part of the book.⁷

The reality was, in fact, a lot more complex than how it was portrayed a century after the Fāṭimids departure to Egypt. Most martyrs listed by al-Mālikī were rebels, as was the case of al-Sidri, cited in Halm, and not all of them were necessarily scholars.⁸ Halm's inclusion of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's *munāẓarāt* with the Fāṭimid *dā'īs* in his chapter on the persecution and resistance of the 'ulamā' is a case in point, which leaves out any possibility for compromise and consensus.

Accepting these polemical narratives uncritically also led to an impression that the Fāṭimid rule negatively affected the transmission of Mālikī law in Ifrīqiya and forced many

⁴ *fa kānat al-miḥan wa'l-ṣirā'āt allatī intahat bi-khurūj al-Fāṭimiyyīn ilā Miṣr* – "It was the trials and the confrontations that led to the departure of the Fāṭimids to Egypt." See Ben Hamada, *al-Madāris al-kalāmiyya*, 302.

⁵ Halm, *Empire*, 239-47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁷ Halm, *Empire*, 239-40.

⁸ Halm, *Empire*, 246. See al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:269ff; Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, 1:187.

scholars to flee the realm, as Halm writes above.⁹ All of this is, of course, based on the Maghribī-Mālikī historiographical tradition that portrayed the triumph of their school as a natural course of events, and largely relegated the “‘Ubaydid” “interlude” to the realm of “the calamities of history.” More critical reading and contextualisation of the primary sources helps to dispel this impression.¹⁰

As stated in the previous chapter, one of the primary challenges that a student of the learning traditions in the Fāṭimid period is faced with is the lack of sufficient documentary sources and reliable contemporary accounts. The *ṭabaqāt* are unique sources of information about the learned elite, but they are deliberately partisan, tendentious, and selective. The accounts of disputations preserved in the *ṭabaqāt* also serve the purpose of praising one group and highlighting their brilliance. Examining the accounts of disputations in Mālikī, Ismāʿīlī, Ibāḍī and Jewish sources helps to see through different perspectives on a shared practice. Approaching the *majālis al-munāẓara* as a shared space between the political and learned elite representing diverse and often opposing religious communities, enables us to move beyond the partisan positions emphasised in the narratives.

Thus, this chapter explores the development of the culture of disputation within the historical context of early Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya, the diversity of the participants of disputations and their motives, as well as the plurality of the *majālis al-munāẓara* in terms of their format, content, and purpose. The format of *munāẓara* often depended on the subject, purpose, and the occasion. Sometimes *munāẓara* resembled a friendly discussion, where one of the sides was more willing to accept the position of the opponent, though often one was obliged to defend his corner. These aspects also depended on the intended function and the context of the disputation, ranging between competition for rank and positions and legitimation of the political power and authority. The chapter will first discuss the practice of disputation prevalent among scholars in Qayrawān and then move on to the discussion of courtly and

⁹ See, for instance, N. Cottart, “Mālikiyya” *EI2*; Ben Hamada, *al-Madāris al-kalāmiyya*, 31. Mohamed Talbi, too, in his survey article “al-Ḳayrawān,” in the *EI2*, states that the reign of the Fāṭimids was not “favourable” to Qayrawān as a Sunnī centre of learning, although otherwise, he admitted that “it suffered little.”

¹⁰ For critical reviews of North African historiography, see Wansbrough, “On Recomposing the Islamic History of North Africa: A Review Article” in *JRAS* 2 (1969): 161-170; Brett, “The Realm of the Imām: The Fāṭimids in the Tenth Century,” *BSOAS* 59, 3 (1996): 431-49; idem, *The Rise of the Fatimids*, 11; Madelung and Walker, *The Advent*, 18-19; and the relevant sections in Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*.

“state-sponsored” disputations organised by the Fāṭimid rulers, which attracted diverse groups, in order to show the continuity of the practice of disputation across time and space.

***Munāẓara* and the Traditionalists of Qayrawān**

The *munāẓara* was arguably the highest form of scholarly exchange in the premodern Islamic world, both the most formal and the most public. It was primarily a theological, juridical or literary debate between prominent members of two opposing schools of thought (or religious doctrine) in public places or at private houses with the aims of determining the truth, finding the best possible solution to a juridical question, also exposing charlatans and establishing the best scholar or the finest poet.¹¹ Like the disputation between the Mālikī Ibn al-Ḥaddād and the Ismāʿīlī Abu'l-ʿAbbās, *munāẓarāt* often took place in the presence of a political authority.¹² However, private discussions between like-minded scholars were also called *munāẓarāt*, which comes from the same root as the word *naẓar* (نظر – *n-ẓ-r*) — speculative reasoning — whose verbal form *nāẓara* (ناظر) indicates a dialogue or debate between two parties, such as that between the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* and Ibn al-Haytham.¹³

The culture of dialogue and dialectic, of course, existed among many different medieval religious communities, including the Jews and Christians of the Islamic world and Christian Europe, even before their first encounter with the Aristotelian tradition following the ʿAbbāsids’ translation movement in the late eighth and ninth centuries.¹⁴ Inter-religious disputations were not rare, either, given the mobility of scholars among communities around the Mediterranean and beyond. In Walter E. Young’s words, “if one feature above all others marks the intellectual landscape of the Near East in Late Antiquity and early Islam, it is

¹¹ Ewald Wagner, “Munāẓara,” *EI2*. Also, see George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 110.

¹² Wagner, “Munāẓara.”

¹³ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 110.

¹⁴ Mohammad S. A. Widigdo, “Aristotelian Dialectic, Medieval *Jadal*, and Medieval Scholastic Disputation,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 35, 4 (October 2018): 9-10; Young, *The Dialectical Forge*, 24; Sarah Stroumsa, “Early Muslim and Jewish Kalām: The Enterprise of Reasoned Discourse,” in *Rationalisation of Religion: Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, edited by Christoph Marksches and Yohanan Friedmann (Jerusalem and Berlin: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and de Gruyter, 2019), 202-23. For the contribution of Greek Aristotelianism to the formation of late antique cultures, see Garth Fowden, *Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), ch. 5.

dialectical debate.”¹⁵ It is thus within this cultural context that the disputations discussed in this chapter took place and were reconstructed as narratives.

In medieval Qayrawān, rationalist theologians (*ahl al-naẓar*) were the leading proponents of disputations, while the permissibility of reason and logic was a matter of disagreement among traditionalists (*ahl al-sunna*), who avoided engaging in rational debates even within private circles.¹⁶ The term traditionalist, however, should not be confused with “ḥadīth folks,” Marshall Hodgson’s term for narrators of Prophetic tradition, for the proponents of *ḥadīth* in this period happen to be “anti-traditionalist,” as Hodgson had convincingly argued.¹⁷ The example of *ḥadīth* “enthusiast” Ibn al-Ḥaddād and his conflict with the traditionalists of Qayrawān is a case in point.

The importance of the *munāẓara* as a method of learning and inquiry in the context of Ifrīqiya has rarely been discussed in Western scholarship. The aims and the significance of the disputations, when held at the courts of the rulers, differed from similar disputations that took place elsewhere due to the political weight of the ruler’s verdict. Court disputations, thus, appear as an instrument of propaganda and influence and one that is directed at the learned elite of society, with an understanding of its religious and ethnic diversity. Therefore, they are sometimes portrayed as a form of intimidation arranged by the powerful. Theological disputations are not exempted from suspicion. Siding with the many deprecators of medieval *mutakallimūn* (*kalām* theologians), Sarah Stroumsa casts doubt on the well-intendedness of these medieval theologians whose *majālis*, she hints, were not as egalitarian as one may think.¹⁸ Some court disputations, however, are seen as literary games that led to little more than the amusement of the patron.

In any case, one aspect of medieval disputations is relevant for both types: they were the arena of contest where disputants competed for patronage, recognition, fame, and other

¹⁵ Walter E. Young, *The Dialectical Forge: Juridical Disputation and the Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 19-20.

¹⁶ For a discussion of this term, see Melchert, *The Formation*, 2-3. For another definition of “traditionalists” (*ahl al-sunna*) and their “lack of interest” in theological questions and disputations, see ‘Abd al-Majīd Ben Hamada, *al-Madāris al-kalāmiyya bi-Ifrīqiya ilā ẓuhūr al-Ash‘ariyya* (Tunis: Dār al-‘arab, 1986), 23-24.

¹⁷ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:63-66.

¹⁸ Sarah Stroumsa, “Ibn al-al-Rāwandī’s *sū ādāb al-mujādala*: the Role of Bad Manners in Medieval Disputations,” in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, 66–83.

forms of symbolic capital.¹⁹ This is arguably the most significant relationship between the *majālis al-munāẓarāt* and social reality (this applies to public, semi-public and any other *munāẓarāt* with an audience). In the following sections, I will argue that far from being a venue solely for displaying hostility and disagreement, the medieval Islamicate disputations were a place to negotiate dissent and diversity, where all parties could actively search for consensus and alliance.

Studies of the culture of disputation in the medieval Maghrib mostly focus on the polemical aspect of the practice. This is true of both western scholarship and scholarship in the Arabic language. The Fāṭimid disputations, too, are mainly viewed as an instrument of the Fāṭimid *daʿwa*. Relying on one-sided sources, scholars often place the practice of *munāẓara* and *jadal* in the realm of “doctrinal struggle” and “defending the *sunna*” or “one’s school.” Only recently have scholars of the Maghrib begun to take a more critical approach to the study of hagiographies. However, the grand narratives still rest on previous interpretations of the sources as the following assessment of the two major primary sources show:

Al-Khushanī’s (d. 361/971) *Ṭabaqāt ‘ulamā’ Ifrīqiya* contains evidence about the Mālikīs’ use of dialectics (*jadal*) in defence of their school (*madhhab*). It preserves some sessions of disputations (*majālis al-munāẓara*) that took place first between them and the Muʿtazilis and then between them and the Ismāʿīlis. To this, Abū Bakr al-Mālikī’s (d. c. 5th/11th century) *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* [...] adds the accounts of the struggle of the Sunnīs against their opponents and the suppression and massacre at the hand of the Ismāʿīlis, as they imposed their *madhhab* on them. It also contains some *majālis al-munāẓara* that took place between the Sunnīs and the Ismāʿīlis.²⁰

Both of these sources provide accounts of the practice of disputation, but their purpose is different. Al-Khushanī’s *ṭabaqāt* is relatively free of exaggerations, less concerned with piety as a prerequisite for being considered a scholar and more interested in actual learning networks and practices, whereas al-Mālikī’s compilation is purposely hagiographical,

¹⁹ Even in literary *munāẓara* and its precursors in Arabic poetry, the participants of the *munāẓara* compete for honours and precedence. See Wagner, “Munāẓara,” *EL*2. See also, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, “The Essay and Debate (Al-Risāla and Al-Munāẓara)” in Roger Allen and D. S. Richards (eds.), *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 134–44.

²⁰ Ben Hamada, *al-Madāris al-kalāmiyya*, 12.

as well as partisan, as its title indicates. Thus, in al-Khushanī's account *munāẓara* is a common scholarly practice, but for Abū Bakr al-Mālikī it is an instrument of religious polemics (*dhabb 'an al-madhhab*). Despite this, Ben Ḥamada puts them in one category, to which he also adds Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ's *Tartīb al-madārik* and Ibn al-Ḥaddād's *Kitāb al-Istiwā*, a theological treatise.²¹ Indeed, medieval Mālikī authors gave importance to the accounts of religious polemics by Mālikī scholars. It is, however, problematic to describe these debates as part of a continuous struggle between traditionalist Mālikīs and sectarian innovators of various types which, in retrospect, led to the triumph of Mālikism.

It is true that many anecdotes cited in various partisan sources and biographical dictionaries promote this exact triumphalist narrative, which excludes cooperation, co-dependency and mutual influence in a shared intellectual and cultural milieu. From a wider theoretical perspective, too, disputations are seen as an arena of competition for power and scarce resources between the professional class.²² The present study does not aim to reject these aspects but instead hopes to show the diversity of the contexts and the aims of disputations. Disputations took place at homes, mosques, courts, and any other place where two learned people could be found together. They were part of learning and teaching exercises in theological, juridical and literary circles, a scholarly and courtly pastime, and occasionally encounters that involved people with political power with severe consequences for those involved.

As stated, traditionalist scholars of Qayrawān frowned upon theological disputations. According to an amusing anecdote reported in the biography of Asad b. al-Furāt (d. 213/828), the conqueror of Sicily and the chief judge of the Aghlabids, he had physically assaulted Sulaymān al-Farrā', "the head of the Mu'tazila in Qayrawān," and had thrown him out of his

²¹ Ben Ḥamada published part of this short work attributed to Ibn al-Ḥaddād as an appendix to his *al-Madāris al-kalāmiyya*, 309-19.

²² Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*. Chamberlain's critical study that applied sociological theories to medieval learning practices dealt with post-Fāṭimid Damascus, but the implications of this study are equally relevant to the early period as he argued for an informal and personal, rather than professional and institutionalised nature of medieval learning. See also, Luke Yarbough, "Introduction," *The Sword of Ambition: Bureaucratic Rivalry in Medieval Egypt* (New York,: New York University Press, 2016), xviii-xxxii; idem, "The Madrasa and the Non-Muslims of Thirteenth-Century Egypt: A Reassessment" in Elisheva Baumgarten, Ruth Mazo Karras, and Katelyn Mesler (eds.) *Entangled Histories: Knowledge, Authority, and Jewish Culture in the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 93-112.

session (*majlis*) for raising a theological question.²³ The biographers may have fabricated this anecdote in order to clear Asad from the accusation that he himself adhered to the Mu‘tazilī creed, which denied that the Qur’ān was uncreated and co-eternal with the divine.²⁴ Nonetheless, it captures the hostile attitude of Mālikī traditionalists to rational speculation, which had developed over generations.²⁵ The appointment of Saḥnūn b. Sa‘īd to the judgeship of Qayrawān (234-240/849-854) is often cited as a watershed event in this regard, as he reportedly banned theological circles from the Great Mosque and objected to their disputations.²⁶ His son Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn (d. 256/870), although known for his disputations, also cautioned against debating with a more skilled opponent who could make a stronger case for his falsehood and so prevail over the truth.²⁷

The study of philosophy and logic was, thus, equally controversial. Prior to the Fātimid takeover of Qayrawān, Ibn al-Haytham was almost deprived of his inheritance by the Mālikī judge Ḥimās²⁸ for possessing books of Greek philosophy, as well as Shī‘ī books.²⁹ The fact that Ibn al-Haytham had a Jewish teacher of logic named Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Khurāsānī was also used against him in the court, in addition to accusations of his belief in the createdness of the Qur’ān and his Shī‘ī beliefs, such as the doctrine of *rafḍ* (denouncing).³⁰ The createdness of the Qur’ān (*khalq al-Qur’ān*) was the creed of most ‘Irāqī (Ḥanafī) scholars with whom Ibn al-Haytham studied. The doctrine of *rafḍ* – that is denouncing the first two rightly-guided caliphs

²³ Abu’l-‘Arab, *Ṭabaqāt*, 82; al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *Madārik*, 63, 357. See also Talbi, “Theological Polemics at Qayrawān during the 3rd/9th Century,” *RO*, T. XLIII (1984), 152. The eponymous authority of the Mālikī school, Mālik b. Anas, is himself said to have discouraged religious debate and even asking questions; see Adang, “Controversies,” 289. See also Schacht, “Mālik b. Anas.”

²⁴ The story is related under the subheading “On the ranking of Asad in knowledge, virtue and *sunna*”: ‘Iyāḍ, *Madārik*, 62-64. See also, al-Mālikī, *Riḍāḍ*, 1: 181; Ibn Nāǧī and al-Dabbāgh, *Ma‘ālim al-īmān*, vol. 2, 18.

²⁵ Only later after Muslim philosophers and theologians put dialectics and disputations at the service of Islamic jurisprudence did they follow suit. On this see Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 8, 107f; Stewart, *Disagreements of the Jurists*, xxii.

²⁶ ‘Iyāḍ, *Madārik*, 104.

²⁷ Adang, “Controversies,” 300. As Adang observes, there is no reason to doubt whether the debate actually took place. More significant is to note that the biographical dictionaries portray him as a reluctant participant, as is the case with Ibn al-Ḥaddād.

²⁸ Ḥimās b. Marwān, a student of Saḥnūn, who was appointed to the judgeship of Qayrawān in 290/903 but quitted the job in protest the same year (or in 295/907).

²⁹ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 73-74 (tr. 125-26).

³⁰ For Ibn al-Haytham’s teachers and education, see *Munāẓarāt*, 60 (tr. 112, note 78).

Abū Bakr and ‘Umar – was apparently introduced to Ibn al-Haytham by one of his teachers, Muḥammad al-Kūfī, who had come to Qayrawān from Sicily.

Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/998), the foremost Mālikī scholar in Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya, viewed both the culture of disputation and the Greek sciences as un-Islamic, for the promotion of which he blamed the ‘Abbāsids of Baghdad.

When [the Greek books] reached [Yaḥyā b. Khalid, the Barmakid vizier of the ‘Abbāsids,] he gathered all the philosophers and heretics [to study them]. One of the books that came out of this collection was the *Book of Logic*. Few people ever applied themselves to the study of this book and were saved from heresy (*zandaqa*). Then Yaḥyā established in his house disputations and dialectical argumentation on matters that should not [be discussed], and every adherent of a religion began to discuss his religion and raise objections against it, relying on himself [alone, i.e. disregarding revelation].³¹

According to Dimitri Gutas, the Mālikīs, as a pro-Umayyad group, opposed the Greek sciences and disputation mainly due to their association with “the hated ‘Abbāsids.” Moreover, he argues, the ‘Abbāsid inquisition of traditionist scholars, known as the *miḥna* (trial), played a major role in polarising religious and rational sciences.³²

However, Ibn Abī Zayd’s denunciation of the ‘Abbāsids was not only an apologetic defence of the fallen Umayyad dynasty; the passage also reveals that he was concerned about methods of disputation that undermined the authority of transmitted religious knowledge at a time of formidable contemporary challenges to the Mālikī community, especially the traditionalists, under the Fāṭimids.³³ Like the ‘Abbāsids of Baghdād, the Fāṭimids were open

³¹ Quoted in al-Suyūṭī, *Sawn al-manṭiq wa-l-kalām ‘an fann al-manṭiq wa-l-kalām*, ed. by ‘Alī Samī al-Nashshār (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1947), 7-8 (passage partially tr. Gutas, in *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 157). This remark is probably from his *Kitāb al-Nahy ‘an al-Jadal*, which is apparently lost. His informant was apparently the Andalusian Abū ‘Umar Aḥmad b. Sa’dī (d. after 1018), who expressed shock and disapproval after attending two sessions of inter-religious rational disputations in tenth-century Baghdād and related his experience to Ibn Abī Zayd. See Michael Cook, “Ibn Sa’dī on Truth-Blindness,” *JSAI* 33 (2007):169-178; Yossef Soffer, “The Theological *Majlis* and Religious Otherness in Medieval Islam,” in Katell Berthelot et al (eds.), *The Quest for a Common Humanity: Human Dignity and Otherness in the Religious Traditions of the Mediterranean*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011) 219-35. Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī’s anti-rationalist stance is also clear from his *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘*. Ibn Abī Zayd, *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘*. (Beirut and Tunis: Mu’assat al-Risāla and Maktabat al-‘atīqa, 1982), 47, 125.

³² Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 156-57, 161.

³³ In fact, the contemporary Umayyads of Spain also “imitated” the ‘Abbāsids and the older Umayyad dynasty in importing the Greek sciences to al-Andalus: see al-Dhahabī, as quoted in al-Suyūṭī, *Sawn al-Manṭiq*, 12.

to both intra- and interreligious disputations. Both al-Manṣūr and al-Mu‘izz, the Fāṭimid imam-caliphs who ruled during Ibn Abī Zayd’s lifetime, endorsed such disputations. Imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz even encouraged his followers to debate with him during his audiences. Likewise, he organised disputations with followers of other faiths.³⁴ That said, the ‘Abbāsīd *miḥna* was significant in spurring passive resistance among the traditionalists of Ifrīqiya,³⁵ whose narratives of defiance, persecution, and perseverance bolstered their collective identity, as their promotion of Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s disputations will show.

The Scholarly Culture of Disputation in Qayrawān in the Late Aghlabid and Early Fāṭimid Period (c. 256-312/870-925)

While the origin of the *munāẓarāt* in the Maghrib is undoubtedly linked to the spread of *kalām* (dialectic argumentation) from the Islamic East, the culture of dialogue and dialectic existed among the religious communities of the Mediterranean region, before the Muslim conquest and the rise of *kalām*.³⁶ Many examples of inter-religious disputations have survived from late antiquity and early Islamic period.³⁷ Indeed, some scholars have sought the origin of *kalām* in

³⁴ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 107: al-Manṣūr advised his son al-Mu‘izz to question everything before accepting anything. See also, Cohen and Somekh “Interreligious Majālis in Early Fatimid Egypt,” in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, 128-36; Walker, “Fatimid Institutions of Learning,” *JARCE* 34 (1997): 181. To be sure, there were Mālikīs who were known for their disputations in *fiqh* and *kalām* (rational theology) even among the teachers of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī; yet the biographers are usually quick to point out that there was nothing controversial about their disputations: see, for instance, Ibn Abī Zayd, *al-Jāmi‘*, 25-26.

³⁵ Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 161-63.

³⁶ See Chapter Four. On the origin of *kalām*, see Alexander Treiger, “Origins of Kalām,” in S. Schmidtke, *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ch. 2 (Published online, 2014). For this, and a comparative analysis of medieval scholastic disputation and *jadal*, see Widigdo, “Aristotelian Dialectic,” 1–24; Young, *The Dialectical Forge*, 24.

³⁷ For an example of Christian-Muslim disputations and the significance of non-Muslim perspective, see Krisztina Szilágyi, “The Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias” in Samuel Noble and Alexander Treiger (ed.) *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World (700-1700): An Anthology of Sources* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014), 90-111; idem, “Christian Learning about Islam in the Early ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate: The Muslim Sources of the Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias” in Jens Scheiner and Damien Janos (ed.) *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdad, 750-1000 C.E.* (Princeton, 2014), 267-342. For the earliest examples of the genre in Syriac, see Barbara Roggema, “The Disputation between a monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab notable,” in David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1 (600-1500), (Leiden: 2009), 268-73; idem, “The Debate between Patriarch John and an emir of the Mhaggrāyē: A Reconsideration of the earliest Christian-Muslim Debate,” in Martin Tamcke (ed.), *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Age* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2007), 21-39.

inter-religious polemics.³⁸ After Aristotelian dialectic was adopted by the cultures of these regions, it was put to use for polemical as well as didactic purposes until its institutionalisation in the form of medieval scholastic disputation and Islamic juridical disputation (*jadāl*).³⁹ It is also worth noting that many of the earliest rationalist theologians were from Jewish or Christian origins, and in the case of Sulaymān al-Farrā', the leading *mutakallim* of Qayrawān, allegedly from a Manichean background.⁴⁰

Thus, by the early fourth/tenth century, Muslim learned men in the Maghrib were familiar with the methods of *munāẓara* and *kalām* in theological polemics.⁴¹ As mentioned, the origin of disputation culture in the Maghrib is linked to the spread of Mu'tazilī ideas in the second-third/eighth-ninth centuries.⁴² As mentioned the practice of disputation and rational argumentation was seen as an innovation and generally frowned upon by the traditionalist scholars of Qayrawān, to the extent that later Mālikīs had to take a clear stance against their extreme traditionalism in the early period.⁴³ For instance, the Andalusī Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1070), who clearly denounced theological disputations, at the same time lamented the Mālikīs' neglect for legal argumentation:⁴⁴

The early Muslims (*al-salaf*) — may God be pleased with them — forbade arguing about God (Exalted be His praise), his attributes and his names. However, they were in consensus

³⁸ See Treiger's "Origins of Kalām" for a review of these positions.

³⁹ For this and for a comparative analysis of medieval scholastic disputation and *jadāl*, see Widigo, "Aristotelian Dialectic," 1-24. For scholastic disputation, see Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). For Islamic dialectical disputation theory, see Young, *The Dialectical Forge*.

⁴⁰ Talbi, "Theological Polemics," 154-56. This remark by Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī in his *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn* (cited in Talbi) should be treated cautiously, as it was common to accuse non-Arab Muslims and recent converts of adhering to the (non-Islamic) beliefs of their ancestors. See, for example, 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 225.

⁴¹ Turner, *Inquisition*, 3. I also use the term "dialectical theology" that Turner adopts for '*kalām*', and theologians for "*mutakallimūn*," unless I specify they are Mu'tazila.

⁴² Belqasem al-Wanīsī, *Juhūd 'ulamā' al-Mālikīyya fī nashr al-madhhab al-Ash'arī bi-Tūnis* (Tunis: Sadim, 2016), 80.

⁴³ The political nature of this debate and the seriousness of the consequences cannot be appreciated without considering the facts that the Aghlabid dynasty in Ifrīqiya adhered to Mu'tazilī doctrines. The reverse was the case in al-Andalus where Mālikī traditionalism was supported by the Umayyads.

⁴⁴ *bāb mā tukrahu fīhi al-munāẓara wa'l-jidāl wa'l-mirā'* (chapter on what disputation, debating and arguing about that is reprehensible). Abī 'Umar b. Yūsuf Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi' bayān al-'ilm wa faḍlih*, ed. Abu'l-Ashbāl al-Zahīrī, (Dammam, Dār al-Ḥaramayn li'l-ṭibā'a, 1994), 2: 928-952; followed by a chapter on permissible argumentation, 953-974; and a chapter on the rejection of *taqlid* (blind imitation), 975-997.

about the permissibility of argumentation and disputation in *fiqh*, because it is a branch of science that requires these methods in order to derive the rules (*furūʿ*) from the root principles (*uṣūl*), which is not the case with the doctrines of the faith (*iʿtiqādāt*).⁴⁵

Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr was much more receptive to al-Shāfiʿī’s new legal methodology than the traditionalist Mālikīs of Ifrīqiya one century before him. After refusing to take part in theological debates for about a generation, the scholars who emulated Mālik b. Anas’s alleged aversion to theological debates finally gave in to the pressure from the *ahl al-naẓar waʿl-munāẓara* (those who engage in speculative reasoning and disputations) and gradually adopted their methods of argumentation.⁴⁶ This corresponds to the generation of Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn (d. 256/870), who is also identified as one of the first proto-Mālikīs, who became known for engaging in disputations.⁴⁷

As the main centres of *kalām* were in ʿIrāq, the Ḥanafīs (at this period called ʿIrāqīs or Kūfans on this account) were its leading practitioners in Ifrīqiya. However, strict social boundaries between legal scholars did not exist in the early period and many scholars studied in the same circles. Tension and confrontations among the scholars of Qayrawān were also on the basis of creed, rather than *fiqh*. Disagreements over theological questions such as the createdness of the Qurʾān, predestination and so on had serious consequences. Whereas disagreements over *fiqhī* issues such as the permissibility of *nabīdh*,⁴⁸ although it had serious social implications, did not imply *takfīr* (declaring someone an unbeliever).⁴⁹

Mentions of theological and juridical disputations in biographical dictionaries, our main sources, are abundant. Handbooks that set the rules and etiquette (or ethics) for disputations (*ādāb al-munāẓara*) begin to appear in the records from the time of Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn. In fact, Ibn Saḥnūn’s work titled *Kitāb mā yajibū ʿalā al-mutanāẓirīn min ḥusn al-*

⁴⁵ Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Jamīʿ al-bayān*, 929.

⁴⁶ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 107f; Ben Hamada, *al-Madāris al-kalāmiyya*, 42. The controversy, of course, continued in the following centuries, but the gradual acceptance of the Ashʿarī theology by the jurists legitimised these methods further. See Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 8; Stewart, *Disagreements of the Jurists*, xxii.

⁴⁷ Ben Hamada, *al-Madāris al-kalāmiyya*, 42-43.

⁴⁸ “a comprehensive designation for intoxicating drinks, several kinds of which were produced in early Arabia, such as *asmīzr* (from barley), *bit* (from honey, [...] or from spelt), *fadhīkh* (from different kinds of dates).” P. Heine, “Nabīdh,” *EL*2.

⁴⁹ Talbi, *al-Širāʿ al-lāhūtī biʾl-Qayrawān ayyām Aghālība* (184-296/800-909): *taḥqīq thalātha makḥṭūṭāt min maktabaṭ al-Qayrawān al-athariyya* (Tunis: Sotumediast, 2017), 17-24.

adab (The Book of Good Etiquettes for Dialecticians) predates the earliest known eastern Islamic works of this genre by Ibn al-Rāwandī (circa 4th/10th century) and al-Fārābī (d. 350/961). Although none of these works are extant, it is clear that Ibn Ṣaḥnūn's was a pioneering work in systematising juridical disputations – as was another work of his on primary education which has been preserved.⁵⁰ There is no doubt that his work on the rules of conduct for dialecticians responded to the growing significance of the practice of *munāẓara* in Ifrīqiya. In short, the disputation was a conspicuous feature of medieval Muslim (and non-Muslim) scholarly culture.

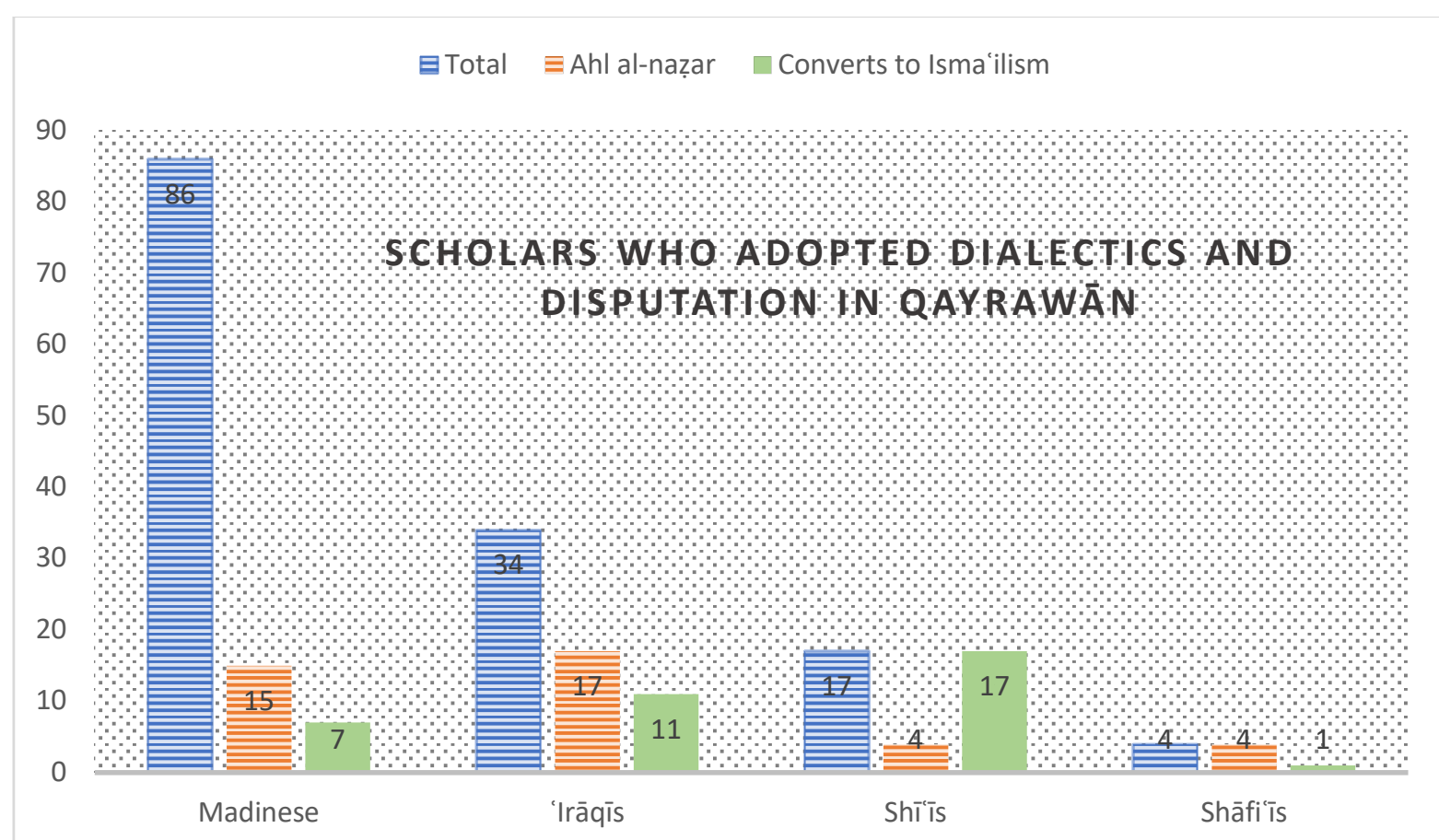


Figure 5. The *ahl al-naẓar* in Qayrawān based on al-Khushanī's *Ṭabaqāt 'ulamā' Ifrīqiya*.

For al-Khushanī people who engaged in disputations were a separate category and included both dialectical theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and jurists. He groups them under the title "Those who adopted rational speculation and dialectical disputations."

Notwithstanding Muḥammad b. Ṣaḥnūn's contribution, and despite the larger number of Madīnan scholars, only about 15 scholars are listed among the *ahl al-munāẓara*. (See Figure 5)

⁵⁰ On Ibn Ṣaḥnūn and his works, see G. Lecomte, "Muḥammad b. Ṣaḥnūn," *El2*. Ibn Ṣaḥnūn's *Kitāb Ādab al-mu'allimīn wa 'l-muta'allimīn* (The Rules of Conduct for Primary Schoolteachers and Students) has been edited by Ḥ.H. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (Tunis, 1930) = "The Book of rules of Conduct for Teachers," tr. Michael Fishbein, in *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought: A Compendium of Parallel English-Arabic Texts*, ed. Bradley Cook (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2010), 1-20.

By contrast, half of the ‘Irāqīs and almost all of the Shāfi‘īs were known for disputations, but surprisingly only four people of those named among the converts to Ismā‘īlism were known for *munāẓara* or *naẓar*. It is also worth noting that the Fāṭimid converts were not recruited from amongst the scholars who were known for disputations. Instead, those who are listed among the converts by al-Khushanī were trained in jurisprudence and were appointed as judges, secretaries of the court and so on. This, however, was not a new trend. During the Aghlabid period, too, people who were known for rational speculation and disputation were rarely appointed as judges or secretaries to the judges. This justifies al-Khushanī’s division between two communities of practice: dialecticians and jurists. In addition, scholars who showed an interest in serving as judges, secretaries, and market inspectors under the Fāṭimids, either had to pledge allegiance to the *da‘wa*, or were recruited from among the converts, as it appeared to al-Khushanī.

One of the earliest sources that informs us of scholarly culture in Ifrīqiya and the relationship of the ‘*ulamā*’ with the political authority (*al-sultān*), with exceptional attention to the culture of disputation, is the above-mentioned Muḥammad b. Ḥārith al-Khushanī whose biographical dictionary has already been mentioned. He is a Qayrawānī in Cordoba, who knew Ifrīqiya intimately, because he spent his youth there studying with the jurists and speaking to the elderly storytellers in his neighbourhood, before his departure to al-Andalus. It is worth quoting the Andalusian Ibn al-Faraḍī’s (d. 403/1013) entry on him in full because his personal and intellectual connection to Ifrīqiya provides a relevant context for his account of learning and knowledge transmission in Qayrawān, as well as an illustration.

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Khushanī was from Qayrawān, he was known as Abū ‘Abd Allāh. He studied with Aḥmad b. Ziyād and Aḥmad b. Naṣr in Qayrawān where he also took part in juridical disputations. He studied with a number of Ifrīqiyān authorities. He came to al-Andalus as a youth in the year [3]12 [AD 924]. In Cordoba, he studied with ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ayman, Qāsim b. Aṣṣbagh, Aḥmad b. ‘Ubāda, Muḥammad b. ‘Umar b. Lubāba, Aḥmad b. Ziyād and al-Ḥasan b. Sa‘d and other shaykhs of Cordoba. He was an expert in *fiqh* and issuing legal opinions. He was in charge of the advisory council and was judicious.

Abū Marwān ‘Ubayd Allāh b. al-Walīd al-Mu‘ayṭī related to me from Aḥmad b. ‘Ubāda al-Ru‘aynī: “I saw Muḥammad b. Ḥārith in Qayrawān in the year [3]11 in the *majlis* of Aḥmad b.

Naṣr. He blazed like fire during the *munāẓāra*." Abū Marwān also told me: Muḥammad b. Ḥārith was skilled in making oils and was involved in a number of fine crafts."

He was an eloquent poet despite his grammatical mistakes. Ibn Ḥārith moved for some time between frontier cities but eventually settled in Cordoba. He compiled many books for the Commander of the Faithful [al-Ḥakam II] al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh, may God have mercy on him. I was told that he wrote for him a hundred volumes. He also compiled a biographical compilation about the scholars of al-Andalus. Anything that we have quoted from him in this book is copied from that book. He died (May God have mercy on him) in Cordoba on 17 Ṣafar 362/9 December 971 and was buried in a designated tomb.⁵¹

It is clear from this account, as from al-Khushanī's own biographical dictionary, that he was trained in juridical disputations and was attached to a group of scholars in Qayrawān whom he designated as *ahl al-naẓar* and *ahl al-munāẓara wa'l-jadal* (See [Figure 6](#) for al-Khushanī's connection to the scholars of Qayrawān). This diverse group of scholars, mostly his contemporaries and those whom he met in person, merited a special chapter in his biographical dictionary.

Al-Khushanī himself participated in disputations with both the 'Irāqī and Madīnan scholars, although his legal training and affiliation were with the latter. He also distinguished between theological and judicial disputation, often qualifying the latter as unobjectionable. As mentioned above, the *munāẓāra* had become more common among the Madīnan '*ulamā*' after it was introduced by Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn and his students. Because al-Khushanī was trained among these scholars in early Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya, he became an active advocate of disputation and rational investigation and rejected *taqlīd*.⁵²

The context of al-Khushanī's departure from Ifrīqiya also deserves some attention. There is little reason to think that he may have left Ifrīqiya fearing persecution. Judging by his own account, he had left behind a vibrant and active Mālikī scholarly milieu. From the early years of Fāṭimid rule, when he met the aged Ibn al-Ḥaddād and other scholars of his generation as a youth, to his final years in Ifrīqiya, several years after the Fāṭimids' move to al-

⁵¹ 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Tārīkh al-'ulamā' wa'l-ruwāt al-'ilm bi'l-Andalus*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktab Nashr al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1954), 2: 114-15, (biography no. 1400).

⁵² Ibn 'Abd al-Barr also quotes from al-Khushanī's book titled *Akḥbār Saḥnūn b. Sa'īd* an anecdote that to the argue against of strict traditionalism. See, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 2:994.

Mahdiyya – when al-Khushanī attended advanced classes with Aḥmad b. Ziyād and Aḥmad b. Naṣr among others – Mālikī learning circles in Qayrawān appears uninterrupted. However, employment opportunities may have dwindled, due to the nepotism of the close network of the Ḥanafīs and Shīʿīs who had entered government service since the early days of the Fāṭimid caliphate. Seeking the patronage of the Umayyad elite seems to be the most plausible explanation for the departure of al-Khushanī and some other young scholars of his generation to al-Andalus.⁵³

Al-Khushanī's section on the *ahl al-munāẓara* presents Saʿīd b. al-Ḥaddād as a Mālikī master of disputation. His continuous appearance in the account of disputations, the number of his students who were also known for disputation and other contemporary testimonies also confirm that by the time of the arrival of the Fāṭimids his talent as a disputationist was widely acknowledged among the Mālikīs. According to al-Khushanī, Ibn al-Ḥaddād had his own distinct style of disputations which his students adopted (often using the expression *ʿalā maʿānī Saʿīd b. al-Ḥaddād*). One of his students, Ibrāhīm al-Ḍabbī, was brought to trial and executed during the early Fāṭimid period, according to al-Khushanī, at the instigation of some of his old [ʿIrāqī] enemies. At least two of his students, al-Qamūdī and ʿAlī b. Maṣṣūr al-Ṣaffār, converted to Shīʿism.⁵⁴

⁵³ See a list of these “foreigners” (*al-ghurabāʾ*) in Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Tārīkh al-ʿulamāʾ*, 2: 112-120.

⁵⁴ Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 217.

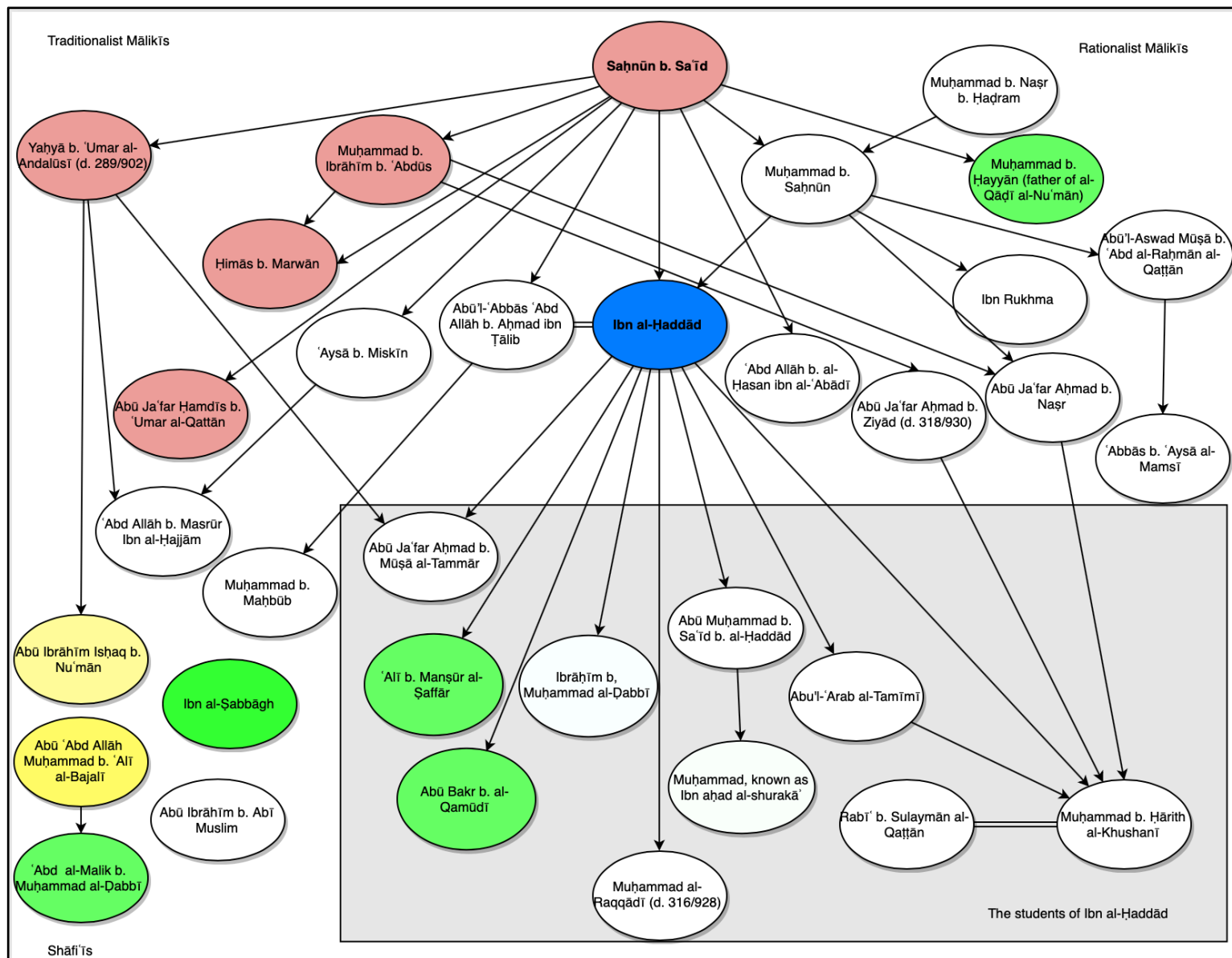


Figure 6. The Network of Sa'īd b. al-Ḥaddād

Note: Ibn al-Ḥaddād was a Mālikī master of disputation, a practice that was generally avoided by the Mālikīs. The chart does not include the Irāqīs but includes the Shāfi'īs of Qayrawān. The information is only from al-Khushanī's *Ṭabaqāt*, thus it represents this particular perspective. (red – traditionalists, yellow – Shāfi'īs, green – Shī'ī converts, white – ahl al-munāẓarā in Ibn al-Ḥaddād's circle.

Despite this setback, the school of Mālik continued to gain strength during the Fāṭimid period and al-Khushanī reports another young scholar known as Muḥammad al-Raqqādī (d. 316/928) who took up disputation and followed the method of Sa'īd b. al-Ḥaddād despite never studying with him.⁵⁵ This confirms that disputation culture continued to evolve within Mālikī circles in the early Fāṭimid period, in parallel with Fāṭimid practices. (Figure 6)

⁵⁵ *Ṭabaqāt*, 217. This scholar drowned in the sea in the year 316/928 on his journey to Egypt as a trading agent for the owner of the ship Mu'min al-Ballūqī.

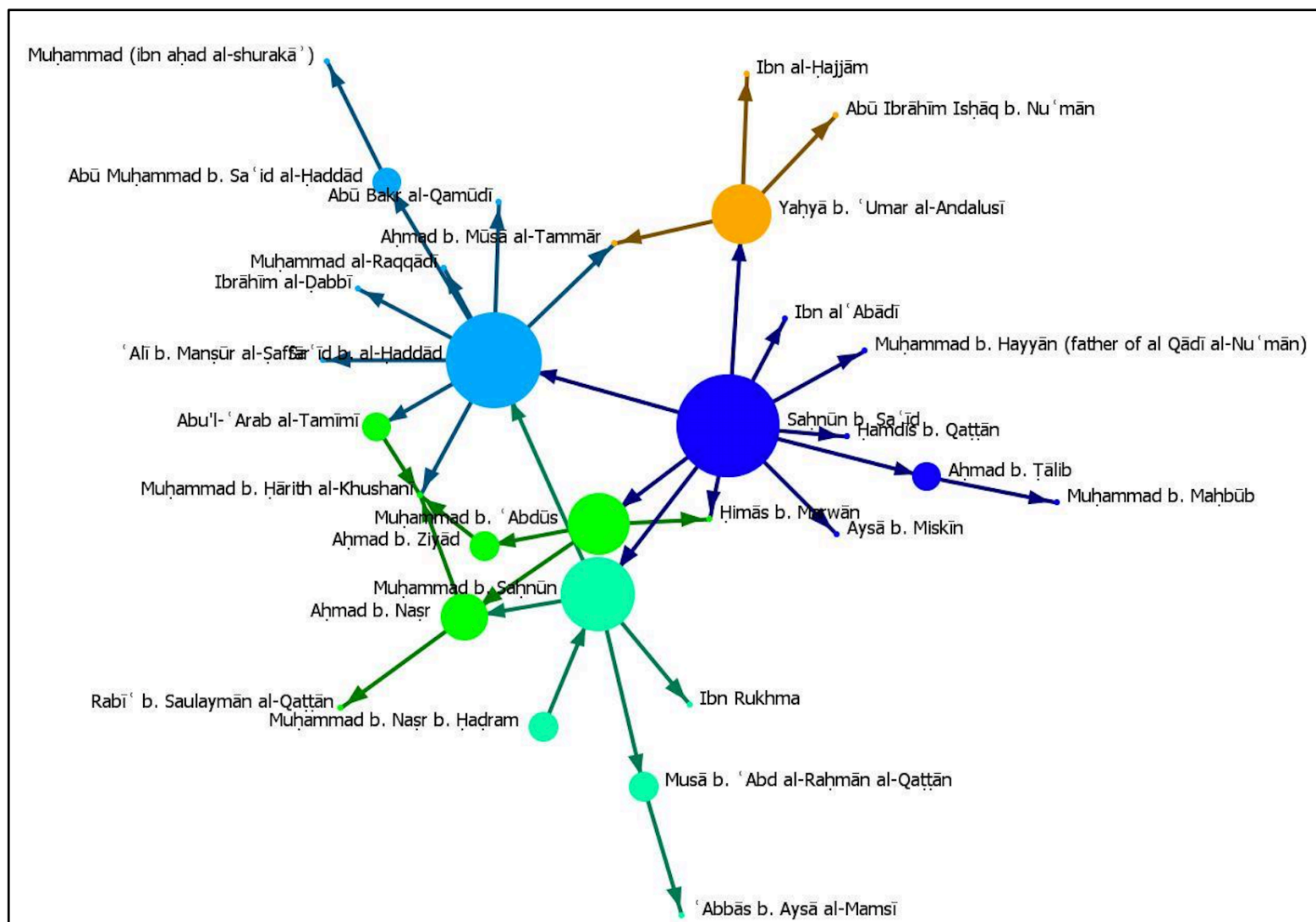


Figure 7. *Ibn al-Haddād's network.*

This figure is a computerized visualisation of the hand-drawn network in Figure 6. The arrows represent teaching-student relations. The algorithm calculates the centrality of the nodes as authorities, or sources of information. Thus, more prominent authorities in these circles appear as bigger nodes (have higher degree).

As the analysis of the network of the *ahl al-naẓar wa'l-munāẓara* connected with Saʿīd b. al-Haddād illustrates, his popularity among them matched the popularity of Saḥnūn among the transmitters of *fiqh* in Qayrawān. (Figure 7) Moreover, he was the link between the generation of his teachers Saḥnūn and his prolific son, Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn, and the generation of young students in the early Fāṭimid period, among them Abu'l-ʿArab and al-Khushanī.

It should be emphasised that Ibn al-Haddād was not wealthy, had not travelled in pursuit of knowledge, was not an expert in *fiqh*, and similar to many who took an interest in rational speculations (*naẓar*) and *munāẓara*, he did not hold any salaried post in Qayrawān. Moreover his rejection of *taqlīd* (legal conformism) and preference for *ḥadīth* and *naẓar* (deliberation) under the influence of al-Shāfiʿī had placed him in the opposite camp against fellow students of Saḥnūn. This is noteworthy, because a picture of exclusive traditionalist camp, familiar from the context of Baghdād one century ago, begins to emerge. It was this

group, that had the highest potential to consolidate a coherent group identity largely thanks to its emphasis on following traditions and transmitting texts.⁵⁶ By contrast, the *ahl al-naẓar wa'l-munāẓara* did not have a similar sense of purpose and unity among their rank, despite their significant numbers and mostly enjoying the patronage of the Aghlabid and Fāṭimid states.

Al-Shāfi'ī's method attracted those Mālikīs who were disillusioned with their peers' unswerving insistence on giving preference to Mālik's opinion over others, including the Prophetic traditions. In an anecdote related by Abū Ibrāhīm Ishāq b. Nu'mān, another Mālikī from Qayrawān who accepted al-Shāfi'ī's method during his travels to the Ḥijāz, a Baghdādī scholar reproaches him for giving preference to the verdict of Mālik over *ḥadīth*: "O people of the Maghrib, your faces have become ugly. You are opposing the words of the Prophet with those of Mālik."⁵⁷

However, neither *ḥadīth* nor rational speculation (*naẓar*) was acceptable to the majority of the traditionalists of Qayrawān. They considered any use of personal opinion, for instance, the Ḥanafīs' application of *ra'y* (learned opinion) in jurisprudence, erroneous.⁵⁸ For them, as Ahmed El-Shamsy observes, "as a method of debate, *ra'y* was incompatible with a view of the law as a stable path that one must simply follow."⁵⁹ Thus, the very method of debate and argumentation was considered suspect and even dangerous by Mālik b. Anas and his followers, and was decisively rejected in favour of the principle of *taqlīd* (legal conformism).⁶⁰ Ibn al-Ḥaddād rejected *taqlīd*, while they took pride in it.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Makdisi has shown the similarities between the Mālikīs and the Ḥanbalīs in, "‘Ṭabaqāt’ – Biography: Law and Orthodoxy in Classical Islam," *Islamic Studies* 32, 4 (1993): 371–96.

⁵⁷ Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 214.

⁵⁸ That being said, scholars have noted that even Saḥnūn and Mālik could be seen as giving a personal opinion from a traditionalist perspective. See, Melchert, *The Formation*, 163; Majid Khadduri, "Translator's Introduction," *al-Risāla fi 'uṣūl al-fiqh: Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 2003), 7; Schacht, 'Mālik b. Anas' in *EL2*.

⁵⁹ El-Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28.

⁶⁰ On the contrary, al-Shāfi'ī regarded "the sacralisation of communal practice," i.e. giving precedence to the practice (*amal*) of the Medinans, as dangerous and arbitrary. See, El-Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law*, 5.

⁶¹ As El-Shamsy demonstrates, the "‘amal of Medina "could be followed only based on the principle of *taqlīd*. *The Canonization of Islamic Law*, 64–65, 185f.

Most people are led to *taqlīd* only by the defect of [their] intellects (*naqṣ al-ʿuqūl*) and by the lowness of [their] ambitions (*danāʿat al-himam*). How is it possible for someone like me, to whom God has given intelligence, to follow the opinion of any of the scholars blindly, with no clear argument (*bilā ḥujja ṣāhira*)?⁶²

This is precisely how the Shāfiʿīs defined the term *taqlīd*: “the acceptance of a position without evidence.”⁶³ It is very likely that following this view made Ibn al-Ḥaddād unpopular among his fellow Mālikīs. This position was clearly at odds with the method that his teacher Saḥnūn had adopted. Ignoring Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s disagreement with fellow Mālikīs, Melchert takes his view as a reflection of the general position of Ifrīqiyan Mālikīs. In his view “Ibn al-Ḥaddād had in mind not the inflexible Mālikīyah, however, but the local Kufans.”⁶⁴ This, however, seems to contradict Melchert’s own judgment that the Mālikīs were first to borrow “the weapon of personal authority from their rationalist adversaries long before the traditionalists of Iraq,” and to contrast their “reliance on the heroic jurisprudent of Medina” to the Ḥanafīs’ “reliance on a vague Kufan school.”⁶⁵ The biographical dictionaries also confirm that the Mālikīs of Qayrawān emphasised their adherence to Mālik’s method far more often than the Ḥanafīs to that of Abū Ḥanīfa. In other words, Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s position reflected a general opposition to the “personalisation” of the schools of law in this period. He seems to have rejected the traditionalist Mālikī method on the same grounds as al-Shāfiʿī.⁶⁶ According to Abū ʿAlī b. Abū Saʿīd, quoted in Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ’s (d. 544/1149) *Tartīb al-Madārik*

[Ibn al-Ḥaddād] accompanied Saḥnūn early in his life and studied with him, but eventually adopted al-Shāfiʿī’s method (*madhhab*), although without conforming to his [legal] opinions (*min dūn taqlīd*), even disagreeing with him on many questions based on reasoning and

⁶² Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 149; al-Mālikī, *Riḡāḍ*, 64.

⁶³ El Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law*, 65.

⁶⁴ Melchert, *The Formation*, 163.

⁶⁵ Melchert, *The Formation*, 39. Wael Hallaq rightly identifies Ibn al-Ḥaddād as exceptionally independent-minded among conformist Mālikīs, although, it must be noted that Ibn al-Ḥaddād was more of a theologian and traditionist, than a jurist. Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 59. For different modes of *taqlīd* among various schools, see, *ibid.*, 86-120.

⁶⁶ Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law*, 44–68. Although Ibn al-Ḥaddād did not travel to ʿIrāq like al-Shāfiʿī, his debates with the Ḥanafīs of Qayrawān must have prompted him to reach a compromise between rigid traditionalism of Mālikīs and the arbitrariness of *raʿy*. It is also noteworthy that he perceived the importance of the *ḥadīth*, which also points to al-Shāfiʿī’s influence.

argumentation.⁶⁷ He used to call [Saḥnūn's] *al-Mudawwana* "the head spinner" (*al-mudawwima*) and criticised parts of it. Following this, the students of Saḥnūn abandoned him and instigated the judge Ibn Ṭālib against him.⁶⁸

However, al-Khushanī, who otherwise did not hesitate to include unflattering information about the Mālikīs, did not mention Ibn al-Ḥaddād's Shāfi'ī leanings. Both Abu'l-'Arab and al-Khushanī included Ibn al-Ḥaddād in the Mālikī *ṭabaqāt*, without hinting at his inclination towards the *madhhab* of al-Shāfi'ī and his criticism of the *Mudawwana*. On the other hand, Abū Bakr al-Mālikī, who was equally partisan and followed al-Khushanī closely in portraying Ibn al-Ḥaddād as an exemplary Mālikī in his *Riyāḍ*, does mention his departure from the teachings of Saḥnūn and adoption of al-Shāfi'ī's method.⁶⁹ Al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, "a convinced and militant Mālikī,"⁷⁰ reports the above passage, but then dismisses it as "unconvincing."

There is, however, more evidence for Ibn al-Ḥaddād's frustration with his Qayrawānī colleagues. His letter to Ibrāhīm b. Yaḥyā al-Muzanī (d. 264/878), a prominent student of al-Shāfi'ī in Egypt, which al-Khushanī relates on the authority of Aḥmad b. Mūsā al-Tammār, a student of Ibn al-Ḥaddād, reveals the latter's dissatisfaction with the scholarly milieu of Qayrawān:

My home is far from the gathering places of the scholars and I do not find in the place where I am any educated man whom I could ask for help, not a single person, who could collaborate with me with his reflections and to whom I could submit what appears to me as a solution to a question. The supporters of error have grown in number, and an empire of ignorance has triumphed [here]. I have tried to embark on performing what God has made obligatory for me: the pilgrimage to his sacred house [Ka'ba], then to go to each region, where there is a scholar who knows the truth, who would give me his sincere opinion while I give him mine, and whom I could ask for guidance. But obstacles came between me and my desire and

⁶⁷ This is also the position of al-Shāfi'ī and his prominent disciple al-Muzanī, to whom Ibn al-Ḥaddād had sent his commentary on al-Shāfi'ī's work, and he allegedly conceded. See Stewart, *Disagreements of the Jurists*, 69–71, 358 (n. 34).

⁶⁸ Al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, *Madārik*, 352; According to al-Dabbāgh, he called the *Mudawwana* "*mudawwada*" (worm-eaten), see, *Ma'ālim*, 2: 295. There may be some truth to this story as Ibn Khaldūn also stated that the structure of Saḥnūn's book was so confusing that people called it "*Mudawwanah-and-Mukhtalītah* (the messed up, confused one)." See Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 1:15.

⁶⁹ Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:64.

⁷⁰ See the encyclopaedia entry on him by Talbi, "'Iyāḍ b. Mūsā," *El2*.

stopped me before I reached my aim. So, after carefully examining the *Dīwān* [presumably, the *Risāla*] of Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī I found what I had mentioned.⁷¹

His disillusionment with staunch traditionalism and his interest in *naẓar* explains why he may have been attracted to the “semi-rationalist” al-Shāfiʿī, who steered “a middle course between reason and traditionalism”⁷² in opposition to both *ʿamal Madīna* and *taqlid*.⁷³

Likewise, other scholars who were not committed to strict traditionalism, especially the Ḥanafīs, were open to new ideas, including Muʿtazilī and Shīʿī thought.⁷⁴ In fact, one might attribute the extinction of the Ḥanafī school in Ifrīqiya to the absence of fervent traditionalism, among the jurists of this school. Some of the Mālikīs, especially young scholars joined the new dynasty’s service, including two of Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s students. Of course, in al-Khushanī’s account, the reasons for the conversions were other than genuine conviction. Needless to say, this would have been as difficult to ascertain then as it is now. However, these points support my contention that there no evidence of forcible conversions and imposition of faith on individual scholars in early Fāṭimid Qayrawān. Likewise, punishment was reserved for exceptional cases of defying the government’s authority and the symbols of state power and not for doctrinal divergence.

Examples of Disputations from Late Aghlabid to Early Fāṭimid Period

Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s *munāẓarāt* with the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* will be the subject of the next chapter (Chapter Four), but it is worth situating them within the wider context of disputation culture in Aghlabid and Fāṭimid Qayrawān. The disputations took place at the Old Palace (al-Qaṣr al-Qadīm) of the Aghlabids, which the *dāʿīs* had turned into their headquarters, in the presence of a group of scholars from Qayrawān.⁷⁵ This is also where the disputations were held in the Aghlabid period, showing the continuity into the Fāṭimid era in terms of disputation culture.

⁷¹ Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 150.

⁷² Josef E. Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The Risāla of Muḥammad abn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 299. On the other hand, like al-Shāfiʿī, Ibn al-Ḥaddād takes a strictly anti-Muʿtazilī position on predestination and divine knowledge. See, *ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 273-74.

⁷⁴ As we see, our primary source, al-Khushanī, also belonged to the circles of the *ahl al-munāẓara*.

⁷⁵ See al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 199-210; al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:75ff.

The aged Ibn al-Ḥaddād visited the palace at the invitation of the *dāʿī* Abū ʿAbd Allāh, although, according to Abū Bakr al-Mālikī, he was also encouraged by the Ḥanafī Ibn ʿAbdūn:

A group from Qayrawān went out to meet [Abū ʿAbd Allāh] al-Shīʿī — may God curse him — amongst them Abū ʿUthmān [Saʿīd Ibn al-Ḥaddād], Ḥimās and Ibn ʿAbdūn. There was an ill feeling between Abū ʿUthmān and Ibn ʿAbdūn because he [Ibn ʿAbdūn] had put him in jail before.⁷⁶ Then Ibn ʿAbdūn said to Abū ʿUthmān: “Come forward, O Abū ʿUthmān,” but he did not reply. Then he said: “Come forward, this is not the time for bitterness when your language is the sword of Allāh and your heart is his treasure.” Clearly, Ibn ʿAbdūn meant nothing but to incite him to challenge the Shīʿī.⁷⁷

According to this anecdote, the Ḥanafī *faqīh* was seeking an alliance with his bitter enemies — the Mālikīs — against the Fāṭimids. However, according to Ibn al-Haytham, Ibn ʿAbdūn was held in high esteem by the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* and openly took pride in his Shīʿī student Ibn al-Haytham.⁷⁸ His close relationship with the Shīʿīs of Qayrawān and his old grudges against the Mālikīs, as well as the considerable number of Ḥanafī converts, supports Ibn al-Haytham’s claim. Like Ibn ʿAbdūn, he also wanted to see a debate between Ibn al-Ḥaddād and the *dāʿīs*.⁷⁹ Thus, the Fāṭimid *dāʿī* Abu’l-ʿAbbās arranged the disputations with the scholars of Qayrawān. There was no higher arbiter between them, because he himself was in charge.

As will be discussed in Chapter Four, Mālikī hagiographical tradition took hold of these debates and the original context was erased over time. In all probability, the account of the debates presented in the *ṭabaqāt*, at least in its original composition must have reflected the accepted format of the debates. However, accounts of disputations were often written not as faithful minutes of the event, but rather as narratives constructed to elevate one side of the debate, and to insert the narrator into the centre of the stage. Even in cases when they were recorded close in time to the actual debates and were expected to be seen by some of the eyewitnesses, still one-sided narratives prevailed.

⁷⁶ Ibn ʿAbdūn, who was appointed the judge of Qayrawān (275—280/893—893) under the Aghlabids, treated the Mālikīs very harshly and imprisoned many of them. His successor, the Mālikī Ḥisām b. Miskīn was equally harsh in his treatment of the Ḥanafīs (280—289/9893-902 in office).

⁷⁷ Al-Mālikī, 2:75.

⁷⁸ Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, 161.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 122.

Nevertheless, textual evidence suggests that much of the format and content of the *munāẓarāt* between Ibn al-Ḥaddād and the *dā'īs* should be taken as close to what actually took place in the disputations. The survival of a quote from these well-known disputations in Ibn al-Haytham's *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, as shown below, also supports their authenticity.⁸⁰ In this respect, these disputations are remarkable illustrations of disputation culture, which continued to develop in learning circles and courts of Idrīqiya. Thus, only analysing these competing narratives within their socio-political and cultural context allows to circumvent the partisan bias.

However, it is clear from the content of these accounts of disputations that each party has adjusted the way the arguments are presented, and the conclusions reached in their accounts. Importantly, the counterarguments of the opponents, both in the case of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's debate with the Mu'tazilis and with the Ismā'īlis, are muted. Ibn al-Ḥaddād, for instance, shows how his *reductio ad absurdum* arguments easily reduce his Mu'tazilī opponents to silence at the Aghlabid court. However, when the *dā'īs* challenge him with this type of argument, in his account, he readily anticipates them and confronts the *dā'īs* with sound proofs from the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions. Whenever there is further disagreement over the interpretation, Ibn al-Ḥaddād resorts to his expert knowledge of Arabic grammar, which he often puts to use in order to show the weaknesses of his opponents.

In a disputation with the Mu'tazilī theologian Ibn al-Ashajj (d. 286/899), for instance, Ibn al-Ḥaddād is shown to have easily demonstrated the absurdity of his claim that Irāqī jurists are superior to the Ḥijāzīs.⁸¹ According to al-Mālikī, he had many disputations with the Ḥanafis of Qayrawān, from which he quotes just one session as proof of his excellence in debating. The debate between him and Ibn al-Ashajj, which he personally narrated, illustrates the procedure of a public *munāẓara* in the presence of authority:

[Ibn al-Ḥaddād] said: Then the question of whether God spoke to Moses or not was considered. I asked: "From whom did Moses hear the speech?" Ibn al-Ashajj said, "From the tree." I asked, "From its leaves, or its fibre?" Abū 'Uthmān [Ibn al-Ḥaddād] said: "By God, not a single person from among those present knew what was in my mind, as far as I could see,

⁸⁰ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 123; al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 202. See the end of this section for the quotes.

⁸¹ Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:83-85.

apart from the *amīr* [Ibrāhīm]. Then he [i.e. Ibrāhīm] rose and said to Ibn al-Ashajj, “Stop, woe unto you!” fearing that he might answer the question and his execution becomes obligatory [by law].” Abū ‘Uthmān was asked: “What did you have in mind — may God make you prosperous?” He said: “Since anyone who maintained that [the speech] came from the tree and clearly pronounced this, indeed he declared [his] disbelief and claimed, that God (the Blessed and Sublime) did not speak to Moses and that He did not bestow his speech on him.”⁸²

As in the previous disputations with Abū’l-‘Abbās, the ruler is an active participant in the debate. Although the prince realised the strength of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's position, he still did not concede a defeat and suggested agreeing to an intermediary position:

Then the *amīr* turned towards me and said, “I will give you the same answer that I gave to Ibn Ṭālib:⁸³ I do not say it [God’s speech] is created or uncreated.” He [Ibn al-Ḥaddād] said, “I asked him: ‘Why?’ He said: ‘Because God (the Sublime) said ‘my speech’, but never said it was created or uncreated.’” Then I said to him, “What if someone maintained the same view about [God’s] knowledge (*‘ilm*), and applied the same principle since God (Exalted is He) never said his knowledge was created or uncreated?” He [Ibrāhīm] said: “By God, if someone said that to me I would have split him with my sword.” Then I said to him: “For what reason?” He said: “Because, if [God’s knowledge] was created, then He would have had to be ignorant (*jāhil*) before he created knowledge since the opposite of knowledge is ignorance.” Then I took him up on this and said to him: “Similarly, it is not possible to say that [God’s] speech was created, for if it were, He would have to be described with the opposite of it, which is dumbness. Thus, what is true in the case of knowledge, the same is true in the case of speech. Yet another proof: Knowledge belongs to no more than two categories. It is either an attribute or an action from God (the Almighty and Sublime) and whoever doubted its createdness is an unbeliever. As for God’s knowledge, it is His power, and whoever was in doubt not knowing if it was created or uncreated, he is an unbeliever, too. Likewise, [God’s] speech is not outside these two categories.”⁸⁴

It is not reported whether Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad had an answer to Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s final argument. He declared the outcome of the *munāẓara* a “stalemate” and made the following

⁸² Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 71–72.

⁸³ “Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Ṭālib, Mālikī judge, executed by the Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad in 275/888. See, al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 1:375–377.

⁸⁴ Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 72.

pronouncement: “I will tell you what I used to tell Ibn Ṭālib: You do not force me to accept your *madhhab*, and I will not force my *madhhab* on to you.” This negotiation of authority and boundaries, which had taken place before in a disputation with Ibn Ṭālib, seems to have been an important function of the court disputations. An almost identical conclusion was reached later in a debate between the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs* and Ibn al-Ḥaddād, which will be discussed below.

Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s disputation with the *dāʿīs* followed a similar format, but the topics were centred on the question of the superiority of the Fāṭimid imams. The *dāʿīs* based their arguments on Shīʿī traditions and the Qurʾān to assert the authority of the Shīʿī imams. Ibn al-Ḥaddād also used arguments mostly from the Qurʾān and Prophetic traditions, which he upheld against the Fāṭimid imam’s claim to authority. For instance, in the third session, Abu’l-ʿAbbās invoked the Qurʾānic verse about Moses seeking knowledge from Khidr⁸⁵ and argued that even Moses who was a Prophet needed Khidr as an inspired guide who was more knowledgeable than the prophet.⁸⁶ As in most of the arguments, the *dāʿī* was making a case for the authority of the Ismāʿīlī imams and their inspired knowledge counterposing it to the authority of the jurists. However, Ibn al-Ḥaddād accused him of belittling the prophecy of Moses and suggesting that it was incomplete, even after God chose him as his Messenger and bestowed on him his speech and prophethood.⁸⁷

The writing down and immediate circulation of these debates, as will be analysed in the following chapter, ensured that the topics of the debate and the main arguments of the two sides were later copied and survived within biographical dictionaries. Predictably, the surviving Ismāʿīlī report claims that the *dāʿīs* dominated and won the disputations, while the Mālikī reports claim the opposite. What is instructive, however, is the conclusion of the debate, which illustrates their function as a way to negotiate diversity of interpretations. The concluding pronouncements by both sides suggest that the outcome was a draw, similar to the *munāẓara* with the Aghlabid ruler. With a very slight variation, both Ibn al-Haytham and al-Khushanī relate a similar ending to a debate on the superiority of Alī b. Abī Ṭālib over other companions of the Prophet:

⁸⁵ Qurʾān, 18:66

⁸⁶ The story of Khidr and Mūsā is a recurrent theme in Ismāʿīlī doctrines of the later period and Khidr is often equated with the Ismāʿīlī imams or put in the same category.

⁸⁷ Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 206

[Ibn al-Ḥaddād said:]

[O master,] you have taken over many cities and our city is the greatest of them all. Reports about you say that you have not imposed your *madhhab* on anyone who is following another *madhhab*. Then, behave with us the same way as you have behaved with others.” At this point, one of his companions urged him against us. [Abu’l-‘Abbās] replied by quoting what Shu‘ayb said [in the Qur’ān]: “If some of you believe the message I bring and others do not, then be patient till God judges between us. He is the best of all judges” [7:87]. Then we parted.⁸⁸

In Ibn al-Haytham’s version, too, Ibn al-Ḥaddād makes the same request about not imposing the Shī‘ī *madhhab* on the non-Shī‘īs of Qayrawān. But in this version the respondent is Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī:

“There is no compulsion in religion” [2:256]. Then he told me [i.e. Ibn al-Haytham], “Let them be. You will debate with them and dazzle them. I will merely say what Shu‘ayb said, “And a party of you and those who believe in the message I have been sent with and a party which does not believe. Therefore, be patient until God judges between us; He is the best of judges” [7:87].”⁸⁹

Ibn al-Ḥaddād also reports that in his last session with Abu’l-‘Abbās he felt a great deal of agreement between them, although he was disappointed overall.⁹⁰ The striking similarity between the accounts of disputations between Ibn al-Ḥaddād with the Aghlabid amīr and the Fāṭimid *dā‘īs*, which is corroborated by the Ismā‘īlī version strongly suggests that court disputation was a platform to negotiate diversity and disagreements between the rulers and the subjects.

The resultant inter-community narratives were necessarily polemical. While Ibn al-Ḥaddād could not claim that he had humiliated or silenced his powerful opponents, he still boasted of making a brave stand against the *dā‘ī* in defence of his *madhhab*, which he wrote down and distributed among his students. Given that the idea of speaking to power and

⁸⁸ Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 202, end of the first session.

⁸⁹ Ibn al-Haytham reports that he also took part in the disputations. See, *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, 123 (Walker’s translation). Al-Khushanī, however, attributes it to Abu’l-‘Abbās in his first session of disputation with Ibn al-Ḥaddād, rather than to Abū ‘Abd Allāh, as in Ibn al-Ḥaytham’s account. See above.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 208.

rejecting worldly authority was considered a pious act among scholars, his publication was designed to make an impression on his peers. Despite the depiction of *munāẓarāt* as a part of the *miḥna* in polemical literature, from the rulers perspective, they served to decrease tension in order to avoid violent opposition rather than to increase pressure on the opposition.

Fāṭimid Qayrawān was home to people of diverse persuasions like most cities in the Islamic world during its first four centuries. Disputation sessions brought these diverse people together in one place, to debate intellectual questions pertaining to law, theology and philosophy. Al-Khushanī reports that the judge Ibn Ṭālib's juridical disputations were open to non-Mālikīs, for which his colleague Ibn al-Ḥaddād criticised him:

Hishām b. al-ʿIrāqī followed the Kūfans' doctrine and specialised in their legal questions. It was related to me that he was one of those people Ibn Ṭālib gathered in his sessions for disputation. Saʿīd b. al-Ḥaddād told him to abandon the one who has set out to discuss legal cases with you, when to each of his cases you have an opposite [ruling] from your own [school].⁹¹

This Ibn Ṭālib, who served two terms as the judge of Qayrawān under the Aghlabids was among the few prominent students of Saḥnūn, who were also known for dialectics and disputations. He used to host sessions of disputations at his house, where, according to al-Khushanī, the participants probably stayed overnight.⁹² Ibn al-Ḥaddād's rebuke probably implies that legal questions were meant to be discussed within the circles of one school (*madhhab*). This is probably why the Shīʿīs of Qayrawān attended the teaching circles of the scholars who belonged to any of the two dominant schools, although there is evidence that they preferred the ʿIrāqī circles.⁹³ In debate circles, however, as the anecdote captures, the presence of people with divergent views was expected.

Ibn al-Ḥaddād, moreover, was a theologian. He did not shy away from debates with adherents of all schools in Qayrawān. His criticism of Ibn Ṭālib's welcoming of al-ʿIrāqī probably shows his disapproval of turning juridical *munāẓarāt* into polemical debates. The presence of a variety of theological schools, especially the strong position of the ʿIrāqīs, whose control of the judiciary made the Mālikīs vulnerable, meant a great deal of freedom for others

⁹¹ Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 190.

⁹² al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 198.

⁹³ See Ibn al-Haytham's report in the *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, 59-60 (tr.112-113), and note 75-76.

groups including the Shīʿīs. Ibn al-Haytham reports that during the judgeship of al-Ṣadīnī (289-290/903-903) he and his friends openly challenged Saʿīd b. al-Ḥaddād about the traditionalists position on the creation of the Qurʾān.⁹⁴ Given the presence of non-Muslims, notably Jewish learned men in late Aghlabid and early Fāṭimid Qayrawān, it is possible that they also took part in theological debates.⁹⁵ Ibn al-Ḥaddād participated in dialectical disputations with participants of other schools, which is why he was sought for by the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* after the revolution.⁹⁶

A curious case of this diversity is the presence of the Andalusian Ibn Masarra al-Jabalī (d. 319/931) in one of the *majālis* attended by the young al-Khushanī. Ibn Masarra, who returned to al-Andalus after performing the pilgrimage and staying in Ifrīqiya for some time, later became known for his controversial philosophical and esoteric doctrines. Stroumsa linked the presence of “Fāṭimid Neo-Platonic thought” as well as “the Jewish elements in Ibn Masarra’s work” to his stay in the “Jewish-Ismaili milieu in North Africa.”⁹⁷ However, following Miguel Asín Palacios, she relied only on Ibn ʿIdhārī’s mention of Ibn Masarra’s presence at Aḥmad b. Naṣr’s (d. 317/929) *majlis* without citing the original source — al-Khushanī, whose entry on his teacher is more detailed.⁹⁸ Al-Khushanī, who was present in this *majlis*, reported

⁹⁴ Ibn al-Ḥaddād ignores the provocation from the young Ibn al-Haytham and his companions to enter a debate. One of his companions was a young Jewish man Ibn Danqas al-Isrāʾīlī, who appears to have remained neutral in their meeting with Ibn al-Ḥaddād. The other two were Shīʿīs, one of them probably the future Fāṭimid judge al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān b. Ḥayyūn. See, Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 70-71 (translation, 123-25).

⁹⁵ See Stern and Cohen below. See also Ibn al-Haytham’s reference to his Jewish teacher and his Jewish friend, Yūsuf b. Danqas al-Isrāʾīlī. *Munāẓarāt*, 60 (tr. 112), 71-72 (tr. 124-25).

⁹⁶ See Chapter Four.

⁹⁷ Stroumsa, “Ibn Massarra and the Beginning of Mystical Thought in al-Andalus,” in Peter Schäfer (ed.), *Mystical approaches to God. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (München, Oldenbourg, 2006), 97–112

110. See also Stroumsa and Sivri, “The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra and His *Epistle on Contemplation*,” *JSAI* 36 (2009): 214-15.

⁹⁸ Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 159-60. Stroumsa quotes Ibn ʿIdhārī’s mention that Ibn Masarra studied “with the *faqīh* Aḥmad b. Naṣr [sic] b. Ziyād.” She gives Aḥmad b. Naṣr’s date of death as a terminus ante quem for Ibn Masarra’s stay in Qayrawān, but according to Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ and Ibn ʿIdhārī Aḥmad b. Ziyād died in 317/929 and not in 307/920 as she writes. Ibn Masarra is addressed by Aḥmad b. Naṣr as “young man” (*yā shāb*), which suggests an earlier date for this encounter. It is possible that the author or one of the sources confused Aḥmad b. Naṣr b. Ziyād, who was from a Berber origin, with either Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. Ziyād al-Fārisī (d. 319/931), or Aḥmad b. Naṣr al-Dāwūdī, who is also mistakenly thought to have died in AH 307. See Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ’s entry on both in *Tarājim Aghlabiyya*, 366-370. (Note that both Stroumsa and Asín Palacios give the names of Aḥmad’s father incorrectly as Naṣār and Nāṣir). See, Miguel Asín Palacios, *Abenmasarra y su escuela. Orígenes de la filosofía hispano-musulmana* (Madrid:

that he did not know Ibn Masarra before this point, but he impressed him as a learned, albeit reclusive, young scholar. Later in al-Andalus, he observed that people were divided over Ibn Masarra, some considering him a leading scholar and ascetic and some accusing him of innovation on account of some of his doctrines.⁹⁹ It is probable that Ibn Masarra also met Fāṭimid *dāʿīs*, Jewish scholars and rationalist theologians in Qayrawān during his stay as he probably did during his travels in the East. Ibn al-Haytham's knowledge of pseudo-Empedocles' doctrines, which, he argued, were reconcilable with the idea of prophecy, also confirms the shared intellectual milieu between the Ismāʿīlīs and Ibn Masarra.¹⁰⁰ Given the hostility that awaited him in al-Andalus, it is probable that he had sought more like-minded people in Qayrawān, and the *majālis al-munāẓara* where one could expect this diversity.¹⁰¹

Fāṭimid-sponsored Disputations

Modern scholarship on Fāṭimid learning traditions links the Fāṭimid practice of *munāẓara* to the *daʿwa* organisation. Paul Walker had categorised the *munāẓara* as a "Fāṭimid institution of learning"¹⁰² in an article with references to surviving accounts of disputations by Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* and at least one vizier. The main function of this institution, according to Walker, was "teaching and propagating doctrine."¹⁰³ Similarly, Sumaiya Hamdani sees *munāẓara* as a method to test the knowledge and disposition of those who offered their support to the Fāṭimids and their *daʿwa*, as well as a "part of the Fāṭimid effort at outreach," towards those who were likely to resist.¹⁰⁴ Thus, *munāẓara* is generally seen as an essential strategy of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*, usually conducted in private and only occasionally in public, because doctrinal matters were never shared publicly. Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs* did not make public appearances and did not preach, notes Halm in his brief survey of Fāṭimid learning traditions. The *dāʿīs* instead

Imprenta Ibérica, 1914); English translation: *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Masarra and his Followers*, tr. Elmer H. Douglas and Howard W. Yoder (Leiden 1978), 36.

⁹⁹ Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Tārīkh al-ʿulamāʾ*, 2: 41-42.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 89-91 (tr. 138-40); cf. Miguel Asín Palacios, *Abenmasarra y su escuela*, ch. 4-5.

¹⁰¹ See the introductory article by R. Arnaldez, "Ibn Masarra," *El2*. Stroumsa, Sivri and Michael Ebstein all stress the similarity between Ismāʿīlī thought and Ibn Masarra's ideas. See, for instance, Ebstein, "Ibn Masarra," *El3*.

¹⁰² Walker, "Fāṭimid Institutions," 180-82.

¹⁰³ Walker, *Advent*, 28.

¹⁰⁴ Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 10, 37. Halm, *Empire*, 240-42.

addressed people separately, with the aim of arousing their interest in Ismāʿīlī teachings and initiating them into the *daʿwa*.¹⁰⁵ Among numerous reports describing proselyting activities of Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs*, there is the testimony of the famous Persian philosopher Abū ʿAlī ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037) whose father and brother professed Ismāʿīlī faith despite ongoing persecution of the state: “My father was one of the Ismailis. He and my brother had accepted their special doctrine of the Soul and the Intellect. They sometimes talked about it while I was listening. I understood what they were saying, but did not agree with them.”¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, the philosophical outlook of his Ismāʿīlī family left an enduring influence on Ibn Sīnā and through him on the entire Islamic world.

On the other hand, asserting the centrality of debating and disputation to the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*, Sumayia Hamdani has observed that Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs* partially inspired the “trickster” character in Islamic literature, most famously in the *Maqāmāt* of al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī.¹⁰⁷ This is not an improbable case scenario and some elaboration helps to see the connection between this genre and the practice of *munāẓara*.

It is known that literary *munāẓara* had its roots in the ancient cultures of the Fertile Crescent and Arabia and later evolved around themes that became relevant in the early Islamic Empires, such as the superiority of Arabs, Persians, and so on. While it is not clear whether the popular genre of Arabic literature, the *maqāma*, drew on real *munāẓarāt* or the stories of the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs*, albeit from a negative perspective, as Hamdani notes,¹⁰⁸ some basic commonalities should be mentioned. These points will also suggest that disputation and debate was a common way of exchanging and testing knowledge in medieval Islamic society, both at higher and lower levels. The *maqāmāt* were but one reflection of this widely shared

¹⁰⁵ Halm, *Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, 18. In written polemics, too, as Walker observes in his most recent survey of Ismāʿīlī polemical writings against their opponents, the *dāʿīs* usually refrain from discussing esoteric matters. Walker, “Ismaili Polemics Against Opponents in the Early Fatimid Period” in Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World*, 27–50, 50.

¹⁰⁶ Halm’s translation, *Fatimids and Their Traditions*, 51.

¹⁰⁷ Hamdani, “The Dialectic of Power: Sunnī-Shīʿī Debates in Tenth-Century North Africa” *SI* 90 (2000): 6. For the *maqāma* (pl. *maqāmāt*) genre, see C. Brockelmann and Ch. Pellat’s survey article in *EI*2; Devin Stewart, in Roger Allen and D. S. Richards (eds.) “The Maqāma,” in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 145–58. In addition to these, see James T. Monroe, *The Art of Badīʿ az-Zamān al-Hamadhānī as Picaresque Narrative* (Beirut: The American University of Beirut Press, 1983).

¹⁰⁸ Hamdani, “The Dialectic of Power,” 6.

culture. As Stewart notes, the *maqāma*, which literally means “a standing” is semantically the opposite of *majlis* (lit. place of seating, commonly translated as “audience” or “session”), “may initially have been the ironic inversion of the term *majlis*,”¹⁰⁹ yet eventually they came to convey the same idea. An important difference is a connotation of debating (or standing up to someone?), and in this sense, the *maqāma* combines both *majlis* and *munāẓara*. It should not be surprising if the creator of the *maqāma* genre Badī‘ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 398/1008), who himself seems to have converted after coming into contact with the Ismā‘īlīs in Jurjān (Gurgān, modern Iran), drew inspiration from the sessions of the *dā‘īs* that he may have attended.¹¹⁰ (Also, it should be noted that the *munāẓarāt* or *majālis* of Sa‘īd b. al-Ḥaddād with the Fāṭimid *dā‘īs* and similar debates are also referred to as *maqāmāt*, i.e. “making a stand for” religion and so on).¹¹¹

Two other significant pieces of evidence for the centrality of dialogue and disputation in the early Fāṭimid-Ismā‘īlī movement should be mentioned. The first one is the famous account of the *munāẓarāt* between the Iranian *dā‘ī* Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca. 322/933-4) and the famous physician Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā’ al-Rāzī (d. 313/925 or 323/932) preserved in the *Kitāb A‘lām al-nubuwwa*.¹¹² The second – and the one that is directly relevant to the context of Ifrīqiya and probably was known to Ibn al-Haytham – is the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* of the Fāṭimid *dā‘ī* Ja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 346/957).¹¹³ We also know of the Qarmaṭī-Ismā‘īlī *dā‘ī* and Neo-Platonist philosopher al-Nasafī (d. 333/945-46), who challenged the Sunnī ‘*ulamā*’ at the Sāmānid court in Bukhārā (modern Uzbekistan) to a public debate, which

¹⁰⁹ Stewart, “The Maqāma,” 149.

¹¹⁰ Monroe suggested that Badī‘ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī was a convert to Shī‘ism, specifically Ismā‘īlism, at the time of writing the *Maqāmāt*. According to Monroe, both his *Maqāmāt* and his *Rasā’il* (collection of letters) bear Ismā‘īlī influence. See Monroe, *Art of Badī‘ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī*, 52-63, 164, 171-75.

¹¹¹ *wa kānat li-Abū ‘Uthmān maqāmāt karīma wa mawāqif maḥmuda fī al-da‘ī‘an al-Islām wa al-dhabb ‘an al-sunna* – “Abū ‘Uthmān had noble stances and praiseworthy positions in defending Islam and the tradition.” See al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 199; also see in al-Mālikī: *wa kānat lahu maqāmāt fī’l-dīn ma’a kafarat al-māriqīn* – “he had stances/confrontations for religion against the heretical unbelievers, *Riyāḍ*, 2:75. For a reverse case, i.e. the influence of the *maqāma* genre on the rise of the narrative *majālis*, see the case of Elias of Nisibis’ *Kitāb al-majālis*. Nikolai N. Seleznyov, “Seven Sessions or Just a Letter? Observations on the Structure of the Disputations between Elias, Metropolitan of Nisibis, and the Vizier Abū l-Qāsim al-Maghribī,” *Scrinium* 14 (2018): 445.

¹¹² These philosophical debates that took places in three different *majālis* are discussed by L. E. Goodman in “Rāzī vs Rāzī – Philosophy in the Majlis,” in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, 84-107.

¹¹³ Edited and translated by James Morris as *The Master and the Disciple*. See Bibliography of primary sources.

he apparently lost.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, his Transoxianian followers continued their activities, as Ibn Sīnā recalls in his biography, cited above. The trope of public defeat, which was no doubt a later rationalisation meant to justify al-Nasafī's execution and the persecution of his followers in some Sunnī sources, even though the sources tend to give an impression that *munāẓara* was a risky venture. Overall, these observations point to the emergence of literary dialogues and disputations that reflected the prominence of the culture of disputations in the tenth century throughout the Islamic world, to which the Ismā'īlī *dā'īs* contributed.

The omnipresence of the *majālis al-munāẓara* at both courtly level (semi-public) and mosques and private houses attests to shared standards and understandings of knowledge among various strata of society. The *majālis* facilitated the emergence and codification of these common standards throughout the early medieval period. Reflecting (or imitating) scholarly culture, disputations took place at the courts, as they took place in private between scholars who were not competing for positions.¹¹⁵ Rather than competing for social status, benefits and recognition, they practiced to sharpen their arguments, so that they could use these skills elsewhere, during their travels in pursuit of knowledge, or at the court of a potential patron. The rulers saw obvious benefits in holding scholarly *majālis* with the participation of the elite, such as projecting prestige and legitimacy. While recorded examples are few and far between, what we have in the sources proves that the Fāṭimids tried and succeeded in attracting scholars through their institutions and patronage as well as holding more combative disputations.

Paul Walker identifies only a few records and mentions of *munāẓara* held by the Fāṭimid caliphs and viziers, which leads him to conclude that the later Fāṭimids did not sponsor disputation in order to avoid confrontation. His short survey includes the famous public disputations organised by the revolutionary *dā'īs* in the early Ifrīqiyan period, the

¹¹⁴ Patricia Crone and Luke Treadwell, "A New Text on Ismailism at the Samanid Court" in D. Donald Sidney Richards and Chase F. Robinson, *Texts, Documents, and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D.S. Richards* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 61.

¹¹⁵ "*Munāẓara* became so popular that it became, [in Tāhā al-Ḥājirī's words], "an intellectual passion." Sometimes it was not held because of difference of opinion or hostility to a school of thought (*aḥad al-madhāhib*), but rather for the sake of practice, and the desire to practice it [i.e. disputation]. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Sayyid Khalīfa, *Fann al-munāẓara: dirāsa fī taṭawwur fann al-munāẓara ḥattā nihāya al-ṣr al-abbāsī al-awwal* (al-Iskandariyya: Dār al-Wafā', 2013) 49.

disputations organised by Ibn Killis¹¹⁶ and another public *munāẓara* between scholars who gathered before al-Ḥakim bi-amri-llāh in his Dār al-ʿIlm (House of Knowledge).¹¹⁷ Walker highlights the confrontational and polemical nature of disputations and emphasises the interest of the ruler, as exemplified in the case of the early disputations in Qayrawān, but finds no other case to confirm that the Fāṭimids sustained this interest throughout their rule in Ifrīqiya.¹¹⁸ This lack of textual evidence, according to Walker, suggests that the Fāṭimid caliphs and *dāʿīs* abandoned the practice of disputation in favour of a more amicable coexistence and interaction with those who did not share their beliefs.

This assumption, however, can be considered only if we restrict the definition of *munāẓara* to inter-faith or intra-faith polemics. There is evidence that *munāẓara* as a form of argumentation did take place in the *majālis al-ḥikma* and was encouraged by the caliphs, as will be discussed in the section on the *Majālis* of al-Muʿizz in Chapter Five. Likewise, a large group of Qayrawānī scholars, the *ahl al-naẓar* were interested in *munāẓara* and there is no reason to assume that other groups including Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* did not take part in these.¹¹⁹ There is also little reason to believe that political insecurity would deter the Fāṭimids from holding polemical *munāẓarāt* at their court at the height of their power, especially during the reign of al-Muʿizz. The acceptance of Fāṭimid authority, however, meant that the caliphs and chief *dāʿīs* would not participate in equal disputations, but instead have them debate with each other, thereby reinforcing the state's authority. The following examples from Ibādī sources, not considered by Walker illustrate this point.

These disputations involve Ibādī rebel-scholars Abū Nūḥ Saʿīd b. Zanghīl and Abū Khazar Yaghlā b. Zaltāf al-Wisyānī (d. 380/990) and took place at Fāṭimid caliphal court in al-

¹¹⁶ Abu'l-Faraj Ya'qūb b. Yūsuf (318-391/930-991) was a Jew born in Baghdād, who converted to Islam after entering the service of Abu'l-Misk Kāfūr (r. 355-7/966-8) in Egypt. Apparently, he joined the Fāṭimid *da'wa* there and travelled to Ifrīqiya to join al-Muʿizz's service before returning with him back to Egypt. According to one source, his conversion to Islam took place after he joined al-Muʿizz. (See the reference in Cohen and Somekh, "In the Court of Ya'qūb ibn Killis: a Fragment from the Cairo Geniza," *JQR* 80, 3-4 (1990), 283-314, 284). He is considered as the first Fāṭimid vizier. See M. Canard, "Ibn Killis," *EL* 2. It is possible that he was also responsible for organising the *munāẓarāt* between the Ibādī shaykhs and the scholars at the Fāṭimid court recorded in the *Sīyar* of Abū Zakariyyā' (see below).

¹¹⁷ Walker, "Fāṭimid Institutions," 180-82. For the Dār al-ʿilm, see idem, 189-93.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 181.

¹¹⁹ Walker notes: "Of course, *munāẓarāt* may have been held at a lower level but few seem to have been recorded." "Fāṭimid Institutions," 182.

Manṣūriyya. The accounts are preserved in the first part of the earliest Ibādī work of *ṣiyar* and *ṭabaqāt* attributed to shaykh Abū Zakariyyā' al-Warjalānī (d. after 470/1078).¹²⁰ Abū Zakariyyā's account, which is also reproduced in al-Darjīnī, is a tribute to the Ibādī community leaders, whom he praises for their diplomacy with al-Mu'izz and ensuring the safety of their Ibādī followers. While it is not known to what extent these debates are historical, they do in fact corroborate other evidence about al-Mu'izz's diplomacy with the Ibādī opposition to secure their compliance. Thus, the accounts of disputations from the Ibādī sources, should be treated as an illustration of the function of the *munāẓarāt* as a space to negotiate legitimacy and the acceptance of Fāṭimid authority by these groups. Court disputations amongst them whereby the Fāṭimid imam-caliph plays the role of an arbiter symbolised the prestige of the dynasty and embodied its broad acceptance by learned people, just like other rituals and ceremonies that involved the public.

If the Fāṭimids did indeed abandon the practice of *munāẓara*, did the dominance of Mālikī traditionalism in Qayrawān have anything to do with this? Did the Fāṭimids try to distance themselves from the philosophers and theologians in response to the criticism of their detractors?¹²¹ *Munāẓara* was not only seen as dangerous by the traditionalists from a religious standpoint but also, as Saḥnūn's measure against the polemicists shows, it was perceived as a threat to social order. Nevertheless, the number of *ahl al-nāẓar wa'l-munāẓara* – that is speculative and rationalist theologians – and disputationists among both the 'Irāqīs and the Madīnan scholars was growing, which attests to the proliferation of the culture of *munāẓara* in Ifrīqiya. It is noteworthy that the *ahl al-naẓar* do not seem to have entered a competition with the traditionalists over positions. Few people who accepted positions of judge, secretary, notary from the Fāṭimids were at the same time known for disputations. Moreover, it may suggest that the *munāẓara* was not adopted solely for the practical need to

¹²⁰ Abū Zakariyyā' Yaḥyā b. Abī Bakr al-Warjalānī, *Kitāb Siyar al-a'imma wa akhbārihim*, ed. Ismā'īl al-'Arabī, 2nd ed., (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1982); French tr. Émile Masqueray, *La chronique d'Abou Zakaria*, (Algiers, 1878).

¹²¹ Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, for instance, accused the Fāṭimid *dā'īs* of adopting philosophical teachings, as he also emphasised the parallel between Fāṭimid positions on the companions of the Prophet and that of Ibn al-Rāwandī, who was considered a *zindīq* and other Mu'tazilīs who took a similar view. 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 2, 222, 224, 232.

defend one's school, but rather because it was increasingly seen as a necessary qualification for a scholar.

Was the aim of disputations to find the truth, or to find an agreement, or rather to refute an opponent? It is obvious in the *munāẓarāt* of Ibn al-Haytham and the *dāʿīs* that he attempted to challenge them in order to bring the most out of them, as he was advised by Abū Zākī, who was familiar with the methods of the *dāʿī*. They disagreed over various points, but since they both accepted the fundamental doctrines of the Shīʿa, the rest of the disagreements were cast aside as secondary. There are also several clues that suggest that both parties in the debate between Ibn al-Ḥaddād and Abu'l-ʿAbbās had certain expectations about an ideal outcome, namely arriving at a minimal consensus if not coming to a common ground. For instance, Ibn al-Ḥaddād regrets not finding the *dāʿī* agreeable at all, the same way as the *dāʿī* condemns his opponent for “corruption” and being biased against the Shīʿa.¹²² That both side will blame each other for the failure to come to a common ground should neither be surprising nor important. For, it is the acceptance of disputations as a medium to engage with one another that constitute the minimum consensus. The following examples will illustrate how the *munāẓarāt* continued to be held under the patronage of al-Muʿizz and later his successors in Egypt.

Perspectives from Ibāḍī and Jewish Sources

Ibāḍī sources from the Maghrib provide a perspective that is quite different from the Fāṭimid and Mālikī sources. Ibāḍī historiography generally sought to incorporate Ibāḍism into the grand narrative of Islamic history and to legitimise Ibāḍī “orthodoxy” over other offshoots of Khārijism, most importantly the Nukkārī branch. The Ibāḍī prosopographical tradition, namely the Ibāḍī books of *siyar* and *ṭabaqāt*, preserve some unique information that is generally omitted from the standard histories of the Fāṭimids. This concerns firstly the details about the relationship between the Fāṭimids and the Ibāḍīs, and secondly about Ibāḍī scholars and the place of the Fāṭimids in the elaboration of the Ibāḍī tradition and their collective memory.

¹²² Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 210.

The Fāṭimid period, which begins with the destruction of the Ibāḍī state of Tāhart is a period of "political and religious marginalisation" for the Ibāḍīs of the Maghrib.¹²³ The earliest Ibāḍī prosopographical work attributed to Abū Zakariyyā' Yaḥyā b. Abī Bakr al-Wārjalānī (d. after 470/1078), *Kitāb Siyar al-a'imma wa akhbārihim* is a product of this period.¹²⁴ According to Paul Love, "the *Kitāb al-sīra* used the stories of individuals, whether as sources of memory or paragons of religious knowledge from both the recent and distant past, as crucial components in a project to preserve the Ibāḍī community and its collective memory through the formation and maintenance of a 'written network.'"¹²⁵ Despite the attribution of the work to the eleventh-century author, the composition of the text, as Love suggests must be considered an ongoing process that both predates Abū Zakariyyā' and continues after him.¹²⁶ A product of a similar process is the *ṭabaqāt* of Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Saʿīd al-Darjīnī (d. mid 7th/13th century), which contains Abū Zakariyyā's *Siyar*.¹²⁷ The Ibāḍī heroes of the Fāṭimid period, according to the *Siyar*, are Shaykh Abū Khazar and Abū Nūḥ Saʿīd b. Zanghīl, the leaders of the failed Ibāḍī rebellion (358/969) against the Fāṭimids.¹²⁸ Without going further into the plight of the Ibāḍī communities of the Maghrib at this point, we turn to the place of disputations in the works mentioned above.

¹²³ Paul Mitchell Love, "Writing a Network, Constructing a Tradition: Ibāḍī Prosopography in Medieval Northern Africa (11th-16th c.)" (PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 2016), 47.

¹²⁴ Abū Zakariyyā' Yaḥyā b. Abī Bakr al-Wārjalānī, *Kitāb Siyar al-a'imma wa akhbārihim*, ed. Ismāʿīl al-ʿArabī, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1982)

¹²⁵ Love, "Writing a Network," 49. Love's thesis provides an overview of the development of the Ibāḍī prosopography over several centuries and argues for the centrality of this tradition to the consolidation and survival of the Ibāḍī communities in the Maghrib.

¹²⁶ Love, 51.

¹²⁷ Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Saʿīd al-Darjīnī, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-mashāyikh bi'l-Maghrib*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ṭallāy, 2 vols. (Constantine: n.p., 1974). For the place of this work in the Ibāḍī prosopographical tradition, see Paul Love, "Writing a Network," ch. 3. Since the Ibāḍī prosopographic works are not separate sources, most of my references will be to the earliest of them – the *Siyar* of Abū Zakariyyā'. On this see Paul Love: "Each of these works references its predecessor(s) and draws heavily on those earlier narratives. As a result, modern historians often cite two or more of these works as evidence of an event when in reality they are referring to the same narrative tradition recycled, revised, and augmented over several centuries." "Writing a Network," 24. Also see Martin H. Custers, *Al-Ibadiyya. A Bibliography: Second, Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2017).

¹²⁸ For this rebellion and a discussion of the relationship between al-Muʿizz and the Ibāḍī Wahbī community, see Virginie Prevost, "La révolte de Bāḡāya (358/969): le dernier soulèvement des ibāḍītes maghrébīns," *JNES* 65, 3 (2006): 197-206.

The Ibādī authors offer a perspective that the Mālīkīs lacked or consciously erased over time: they remained a struggling faction who had to strike deals with various powers and were mainly concerned with community organisation at the local level.¹²⁹ For the Ibādīs, the *munāẓārāt* of their *shaykhs* were not only a display of erudition and command of religious knowledge on par with the sages of the urban centres of Ifrīqiya and Egypt but also an occasion for negotiating their own place in Islamic society. This contrast with the Mālīkī portrayals of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's debate with the Fāṭimid *dā'īs* is striking. Not only is the Fāṭimid imam-caliph not portrayed as a heretic, he is also depicted as a just, wise and learned judge. The figure of a Jewish sage at the court (in Zawīla) probably represent an outsider at whose expense Abū Nūḥ impresses the Muslim group and gains their favour:

Abū Tamīm [al-Mu'izz] used to gather scholars of different sects who would stand before him and debate with each other, and he would judge between them. Thus, the status of Shaykh Abū Nūḥ — may God be pleased with him — improved because of his knowledge, fluency, proficiency, eloquence, and his knowledge of the arts of refuting the opponents (*funūn al-radd 'alā al-mukhālifīn*). Hence, Abū Tamīm had said about him: "Sa'īd is a heroic disputant."¹³⁰

Disputations of Abū Nūḥ - may God be pleased with him — before Abū Tamīm:

It has reached us that Abū Tamīm used to invite Abū Nūḥ - may God be pleased with him — so that he debated with the opponents at his court. One time, he invited him [to his *majlis*] and told him: "O Abū Sa'īd, ask whatever question comes to your mind." Abū Nūḥ said: "I started by asking: What is the evidence that there is a creator for the created [world]?" Those present in the *majlis* remained silent for a while, then came forth with responses. They presented many different versions but fell short of agreeing on a definite answer. Abū Tamīm told them: "Answer to Ibn Zanghīl in a manner that he understands" which meant he was not satisfied with their reply. I saw in Abū Tamīm's face his eagerness to reply to the question himself, but he hesitated to intervene because of his extreme politeness and excellent character. I said to him: If our Lord wishes to honour his flock with an answer, he can do so.

¹²⁹ For comparison, the Ismā'īlīs and Qarmāṭians, succeeded in establishing various states up until the Mongol conquest.

¹³⁰ Abū Zakariyyā', *Siyar*, 225. Al-Darjīnī's version slightly differs: "Abū Tamīm used to gather scholars of different sects (*fīraq*) before him for disputations in different sciences. Abū Nūḥ was a champion among them [...] Abū Tamīm continuously praised him, acted generously towards him and favoured his answers in disputation." Al-Darjīnī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 13.

Then I saw a smile and signs of relief in his face, and he said: O Saʿīd, this questioner should be asked: “Explain your question in order to deserve a response to it.” His explanation will contain the answer to his question: the product (*ṣanʿa*) itself is the evidence for the maker (*ṣāniʿ*).”

Abū Nūḥ — may God be pleased with him — said: I related this answer to our shaykh Abū Khazar — may God be pleased with him — and he was impressed and said: This is a satisfying answer.

The positive depiction of the Fāṭimid imam-caliph al-Muʿizz in the anecdotes related by Abū Nūḥ is remarkable given the Ibāḍīs’ negative view of the Fāṭimids as heretics. Moreover, they held them responsible for the fall of the Rustamid state of Tāhart among other “crimes” against the Ibāḍīs, not to mention the historical memory of the first civil war. Yet, the depiction of al-Muʿizz in these accounts is surprisingly positive.

It should also be remembered that Abū Nūḥ was complicit in Abū Khazar’s unsuccessful rebellion against the Fāṭimids and personally wrote a letter to the Umayyads asking for help. The letter was intercepted, the rebellion was defeated, and Abū Khazar went into hiding in the mountains. Abū Nūḥ was captured and paraded through all the towns on the route followed by al-Muʿizz’s army to al-Manṣūriyya, where Abū Nūḥ was thrown in jail waiting for his execution.¹³¹ Only due to his intelligence and shrewdness, according to the *Siyar*, did he narrowly escape being discovered as the author of the treacherous letter to the Umayyads. When he was questioned before al-Muʿizz about the letter, he gained the latter’s favour by denouncing the Umayyads as the historical enemies of the Kharijites and the “accursed tree” mentioned in the Qurʾān.¹³² Given this context, one might give some historicity to the account despite emerging from a milieu where textualization was still minimal.

During the final years of the Ifrīqiyan period, al-Muʿizz diverted all efforts towards the Egyptian campaign and sought peaceful solutions on other fronts. Buluggin b. Zirī b. Manād, who was to govern Ifrīqiya after al-Muʿizz’s departure, played a role in releasing Abū Nūḥ from jail, which may also suggest that this deal was part of a policy of conciliation towards the Berber tribes of the Maghrib. According to Abū Nūḥ’s report preserved in the *Siyar*, al-Muʿizz’s

¹³¹ Abū Zakariyyāʾ, *Siyar*, 219.

¹³² Ibid., 222.

favour towards him included a large sum of money from the state treasury, which he donated to the poor.¹³³ Eventually, Abū Nūḥ facilitated the capitulation of his master Abū Khazar, who came out from hiding and joined al-Mu‘izz’s court in al-Manṣūriyya.¹³⁴ In return, Abū Nūḥ secured a guarantee of safety from al-Mu‘izz for the Waḥbī Ibādī communities. Abū Khazar joined al-Mu‘izz in his journey to Egypt, apparently against his will, but was held in high esteem and continued to take part in court disputations.

Abū Nūḥ escaped involuntary exile to Egypt and returned to his family through the help of a well-wisher. A Jewish man close to al-Mu‘izz (probably his court physician) learnt about his reluctance to travel and instructed Abū Nūḥ to prepare a drink from barley which made him appear sick at the time of departure thus saving him from political exile.¹³⁵ It is worth noting that another notable man of the pen, Ibn Hānī’ al-Andalusī (d. 362/973), the most famous panegyrist of the Fāṭimid court, was also reluctant to join al-Mu‘izz immediately on the journey to Egypt, apparently because he wanted to bring his family from Masīla. Whether he was considering joining his previous patrons and close friends, the Banū Ḥamdūn, who fled to al-Andalus breaking away from the Fāṭimids, as an option, is a remote possibility. He died, or was murdered, under mysterious circumstances on his way to Egypt.¹³⁶

Luckily for Abū Nūḥ, provincial courts also cultivated this culture that created space for learned people. Masīla (modern M’sila in Algeria, initially named al-Muḥammadiyya after

¹³³ Ibid., 224.

¹³⁴ Shaykh Abū Khazar went to Egypt with al-Mu‘izz and continued to take part in his court disputations. After al-Mu‘izz died, he lost the patronage of his successor until a Mu‘tazili scholar came from the East and bested all local scholars. Abū Khazar was invited to debate with him and defeat him after which he secured the caliph’s patronage. Abū Zakariyyā’, *Siyar*, 233ff; al-Darjīnī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 141-43. His colleague Abu Nūḥ continued to appear in the *majālīs* in Ifrīqiya. See Darjīnī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 143ff. He continued his *munāẓarāt* under the Zīrid al-Manṣūr. On one occasion, a *munāẓara* between a man from the *ahl al-da‘wa* (Waḥbī Ibādīs) and a Nukkārī turned into a fight (p. 149).

¹³⁵ Abū Zakariyyā’, *Siyar*, 229. Physicians tend to be Jewish or Christians. Al-Mu‘izz’s court physician was Mūsā b. al-‘Izār (or al-‘Āzār) al-Isrā’īlī, who dedicated a medical book on decoction titled *al-Kitāb al-Mu‘izzī fī’l-ṭabīkh*. His descendants also served the Fāṭimids, one of whom apparently converted to Islam. See Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a, *‘Uyūn al-anbā’*, 545. Abū Bakr al-Mālīkī relates a story that Mūsā b. al-‘Izār allegedly shared with al-Mu‘izz in private about how the ascetic al-Sibā’ī miraculously recovered the sight of his blind daughter after all the sciences known to the physician failed to treat her leukoma.. It is not the only story that involves miracles performed by the saints, and prayers answered by God, sometimes to protect someone from being persecuted by the Fāṭimids. Al-Mālīkī, *Riyād*, 501-502.

¹³⁶ See below.

the founder al-Qā'im bi-amri-llāh in 315/927),¹³⁷ was one of these provincial capitals and the seat of the Andalusī clan of a Yemeni origin — the Banū Ḥamdūn, who were loyal to the Fāṭimids throughout the Ifrīqiyan period before switching allegiance to the Umayyads in 360/971. Several decades after its construction by the Fāṭimid commander 'Alī b. Ḥamdūn in 315/927 it developed into a strategically important provincial town. Its ambitious ruler Ja'far b. 'Alī b. Ḥamdūn (d. 372-983), the foster-brother of the imam-caliph al-Mu'izz, who was also brought up with the family of the imam-caliph in al-Mahdiyya "maintained a literary court frequented by numerous poets and scholars."¹³⁸ Ibn Hānī' who joined Ja'far b. 'Alī soon after his arrival from al-Andalus in 347/958 and remained at his court for about five years, praised their *majlis* in his *Dīwān* comparing the Zāb to 'Irāq.¹³⁹ The alleged grandeur and prosperity of these princely courts should be understood as proportionate to their provincial status and short-lived success. Nonetheless, their role in the Islamisation and Arabisation of the Berber hinterland cannot be overlooked. What makes the stories of these itinerant rural leaders relevant to the subject of this study is their illustration of the accommodating policy of the Fāṭimids during the imamate of al-Mu'izz. As always, court disputation continued to play a role of public diplomacy, but in comparison to the revolutionary years, the Fāṭimids' role had shifted from one of defence to arbiter, even in the eyes of their adversaries.

Abū Nūḥ, who managed to "gain precedence over all other scholars" at the Fāṭimid and Zīrid courts, thanks to his eloquence and disputation skills, found similar opportunity at the court of the Ibāḍī Berber dynasty of Zawīla in the Fezzan (present-day Zwīla in southern

¹³⁷ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, 28:70.

¹³⁸ Dachraoui, "Masīla," *EL2*. Also, note the close friendship between Ja'far b. 'Alī and al-Ustādh Jawdhar. H. Haji, "A Distinguished Slave Eunuch of the Early Fatimid Period," in Omar Alī-de-Unzaga (ed.) *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 268.

¹³⁹ On him, see the introductory article by F. Dachraoui, "Ibn Hānī' al-Andalusī," *EL2*; M. Yalaoui, *Un poète chi'ite d'Occident au IV^e/X^e siècle, Ibn Hānī al-Andalusī* (Tunis: Publications de l'Université de Tunis, 1976). Ibn Hānī's outstanding relationship with the Banū Ḥamdūn was obviously strengthened by their Yemeni 'aṣabiyya (having common Yemeni origin) as is evident in his panegyric poems for Ja'far. As Dachraoui notes, the Yemeni origin of the family must have also reinforced the loyalty of this powerful family to the Fāṭimids, which was vital for the latter's control of Central Maghrib. Despite this, and despite the longstanding service of the family to the Fāṭimids, their relationship deteriorated in large part due to Zanāta-Sanhāja rivalry in which Ja'far sided with the Zanāta, clients of the Umayyads, against the Fāṭimids. See Dachraoui, "Masīla" *EL2*.

Libya) — the Banū Khaṭṭāb. Zawīla was not only a prosperous town on the trans-Saharan slave trade route but was also an important centre of Ibāḍī learning.¹⁴⁰

It has reached us that Abū Nūḥ entered Zawīla in the company of ‘Abd Allāh b. Zūratīn al-Wisyānī, when the ruler [of Zawīla] at the time was Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who showed towards him enormous respect and held him in the highest regard. It is said that one day he was sitting in the *majlis* of Ibn Khaṭṭāb and there was a Jewish man called Halbā at his court, who claimed to be a scholar (*ḥibr*). Abū Nūḥ approached him jokingly: "Jewish man, I will ask you three questions. If you answer them, then you are [truly] Ḥalbā, but if you fail then, you are *khalbā* (probably خلباء – foolish, not خلبى).¹⁴¹ **The first one:** a man cuts his own throat and severs it; when did he kill himself? When he was alive or when he died? **The second:** A person who is on board a ship by which means can he attain rest and quiescence, which is not possible under that condition otherwise? **The third:** A man shoots an arrow at another man. Then, the shooter dies before the man who was shot. Did he kill him when he was alive, or when he was dead?" The Jewish man was astonished and could not think of an answer. Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: Honour us, with your answer, O master! "Sure — he answered. The one who cut his throat and severed it killed himself when he was dead by what he did when he was alive. The one who was on board a ship is bound to have two types of motions: his own movement, which is acquired (*iktisābiyya*) and the movement of the ship, which is necessitated (*iḍṭirāriyya*). Only if both of these movements were acquired, then he would have been able to attain rest by stopping them. As for the archer, he also killed the one who was shot, at the time when he was already dead through what he did when he was alive, just like in the first case."¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ According to al-Ya‘qūbī, who travelled to the Maghrib in late Aghlabid period, "the inhabitants of the town were Ibāḍī Muslims, all of whom performed the pilgrimage [to Mecca] and many were transmitters [of knowledge]" and "there were mixtures of Kūfans, Basrans and Khurāsānian." See, al-Ya‘qūbī, *al-Buldān*, 183. It should be noted, however, that in new English translation of the *Kitāb al-Buldān* the sentence is left incomplete due to ambiguity of the writing. See, *The Works of al-Ya‘qūbī*, 1:182. Knut S. Vikør, "Zawīla," *El2*. The Fāṭimids' corps of black guards also originated from Zawīla, after which the city gates (Bāb Zuwayla) in al-Mahdiyya and al-Qāhira were named. Recent archaeological research confirms the prominence of Zawīla (or Zuwīla) as a hub for Ibāḍī refugees, as well as its relative prosperity in this part of the Sahara. See David Mattingly and Martin Sterry, "Zuwila and Fazzan in the Seventh to Tenth Centuries: The Emergence of a New Trading Center," *The Aghlabids and Their Neighbors*, 551-72.

¹⁴¹ The *Siyar* of Abū Zakariyyā’ has a different set of words: The Jewish man was called Ḥalī, and the opposite word is *jālī* (exposed).

¹⁴² Abū Zakariyyā’, *Siyar*, 247-48; al-Darjīnī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 156.

Court disputations, such as the one quoted here were initiated by rulers, in order to bring scholars close to the court and develop allegiance from the ruled population. Abū Khazar's allegedly involuntary affiliation with the Fāṭimid court is a case in point, which was justified by the authors of the Ibādī *ṭabaqāt* as a lesser evil. The treatment of Abū Nūḥ was similar to that of his master Abū Khazar. Despite the actual context of his debates at the court of the Fāṭimid al-Mu'izz, and al-Manṣūr b. Buluggīn in al-Manṣuriyya, and at the court of Ibn Khaṭṭāb in Zawīla, the tradition maintained that the real purpose of his debates was to prove the superiority of his religion, or its defence — an age-old topos.¹⁴³ What was the function of this narrative for later Ibādī shaykhs-biographers? Highlighting resistance and defiance in face of oppression are important strategies of constructing “defensive” communal identities, as modern sociologists have theorised.¹⁴⁴ These narratives form on the basis of perceived or real oppression and marginalisation, whether it is the case of Christian monks, or Zoroastrian *mowbeds* at 'Abbāsīd court, or the Ibādī *shaykhs* at the Fāṭimid court. A striking resemblance of the *munāẓarāt* of Abū Nūḥ and Abū Khazar with the Zoroastrian narratives of disputations at Muslim courts is worth noting: in both cases they do not attack the “ruling religion.”¹⁴⁵ Instead, they seem to assert their legitimacy and claims to truth at the expense of other “minorities,” such as the Manicheans (*zanādiqa*, sing. *zindiq/zandīk*)¹⁴⁶ in the disputation of a Zoroastrian *mowbed* at the court of the 'Abbāsīd al-Ma'mūn, and the Jews and the Mu'tazila in the case of the Ibādī debates at al-Mu'izz's court.¹⁴⁷ In reality, these disputations must have served the same purpose as they did for Ibn al-Ḥaddād and the early Fāṭimid *dā'īs*, which was to negotiate the terms of mutual coexistence. If this was a survival strategy, it did not work well for the Zoroastrians, since, as Sahner notes, “Zoroastrianism seems to have disappeared

¹⁴³ *Siyar*, 248.

¹⁴⁴ Manuel Castells identifies three types of “identity building processes,” namely top-down “legitimizing identities,” defensive “resistance identities,” and pro-active “project identities.” See Castells, *The Power of Identity*, 6-12.

¹⁴⁵ For an example Zoroastrian debates, see Sahner, “A Zoroastrian Dispute in the Caliph's Court: The *Gizistag Abālīš* in its Early Islamic Context,” *Iranian Studies* 52: 1-2 (2019): 78.

¹⁴⁶ The term generally came to denote “heretical dualist” or simply “heretic” or dualist,” and “the opposite of orthodoxy” in Islamic context. See Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, translated from German by John O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 487-99.

¹⁴⁷ For comparison, see Sahner, “A Zoroastrian Dispute.”

faster and more thoroughly than other religions across the Islamic Middle East.”¹⁴⁸ However, this pragmatic compliance seems to have worked for the Ibāḍī communities of Ifrīqiya in more than one case. As Savage-Smith has argued, the survival of Ibāḍism in eastern and central Maghrib owed much to their alliance with the Muhallabids,¹⁴⁹ the ‘Abbāsīd governors in Ifrīqiya, despite the former’s fundamental opposition to caliphal authority.¹⁵⁰ Rulers, of course, used it as a way to legitimise the social order, as well as the identity of the social actors, even if by playing them against each other. This is perhaps similar to the case of early interreligious disputations at Muslim courts,¹⁵¹ and likely in the cases discussed here.

As noted above, a few decades earlier Ismā‘īlī *dā‘īs* in the East, apparently operating independently, engaged in public disputations at the Sāmānīd court in Bukhārā and the Ziyārid court in Rayy, under the auspices of sympathetic rulers. One of them was the Neo-Platonist *dā‘ī*, al-Nasafī, who according to two sources, Ibn al-Nadīm and Niẓām al-Mulk, took part in court disputations with the jurists, was defeated, then executed.¹⁵² However, the third source, al-Tha‘ālibī (d. 429/1038), who also accused the Ismā‘īlīs of hiding their evil doctrine instead of proclaiming it openly, does not report the disputations, while stresses that the *dā‘ī*’s demand for a public disputation was ignored and that he was swiftly executed:

When he was addressed on the subject of his doctrine, he asked for a disputation (about it).

“If the proof goes against me I shall repent of my doctrine and abandon my view”, he said. But

¹⁴⁸ “A Zoroastrian Dispute,” 78.

¹⁴⁹ The Muhallabids, were an administrative clan descended from Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra, also had a remarkable history of navigating political (and geographical) landscaping serving as governors to the Umayyads then ‘Abbāsīds, “shifting apparently exchanged their Ibāḍī for Hāshimite leanings in the meantime,” and supporting dissidents including anti-‘Abbāsīd Shī‘īs at times. See Crone, “Muhallabids,” *EI*2.

¹⁵⁰ Elizabeth Savage, “Survival through Alliance: The Establishment of the Ibadiyya,” *BSMESB*, vol. 17, 1 (1990), 5-15, esp. 13-15. Van Ess also discusses the Ibāḍī communities’ various strategies of dealing with the Umayyad and Abbāsīd empires in “Ibāḍī Identity and Imperial Politics in Early Islam,” *Kleine Schriften by Josef van Ess*, ed. by Hinrich Biesterfeldt (Leiden: Brill, 2018) 1:2056-70.

¹⁵¹ Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 1:492; Sahner, “A Zoroastrian Dispute,” 76.

¹⁵² On these *dā‘īs*, see Stern, “The Early Ismā‘īlī Missionaries in North-West Persia and in Khurāsān and Transoxania,” *Studies*, 189-233.

he (al-Ḥamīd)¹⁵³ did not dispute with him. He asked the jurists what he should do with him, and their response was that he should be killed. So he was killed and crucified.¹⁵⁴

Crone and Treadwell conjectured that al-Thaʿālibī's emphasis on the pernicious secretiveness of the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs* even despite enjoying the patronage of the ruler, must have been his main motivation for not reporting the disputation, noting the apparent problem.

Al-Thaʿālibī's only problem here is that the Ismailis do seem to have relaxed their precautionary measures under official patronage, for the missionary Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī engaged in a public disputation with the arch-heretical philosopher Abū Bakr al-Rāzī under the auspices of Mardāwīj (or an earlier governor) in Rayy, and both Ibn al-Nadīm and Niẓām al-Mulk associate the Ismailis with public disputations at the Sāmānid court, as we have seen. It is presumably because he wants to stress their secretive nature that al-Thaʿālibī denies that a public disputation took place.¹⁵⁵

Whether the *dāʿīs* discussed their “secret doctrines” at these public debates is a different question,¹⁵⁶ but here one should suspect that al-Thaʿālibī may also have had another reason – one more relevant to the implication of holding an equal debate with the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs*. It is very telling that he may have refrained from repeating the convenient trope of a heretic losing a public debate, exposing his wickedness, and thus deserving just punishment. In my view, it suggests that, as argued above, giving platform for public disputations had a legitimising role and al-Thaʿālibī would rather deny this legitimacy and recognition to the “arch heretics.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Al-Ḥamīd (alias Nūḥ b. Naṣr, the son and successor of the converted Samānid amīr Naṣr b. Aḥmad (r. 301–331/914–43), who cracked down on the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿwa*, but did not end it completely. Crone and Treadwell, “A New Text”, 42. See further, Niẓām al-Mulk, *Siyar al-Mulūk (Siyāsat-nāmeḥ)*, ed. H. Darke, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjuma wa Nashr, 1976), 282–311, esp. 299–306.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Thaʿālibī, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad, *Ādāb al-mulūk*, J. al-ʿAṭiyya, ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), 168–172, cited in P. Crone and L. Treadwell, “A New Text on Ismailism”, 40.

¹⁵⁵ Crone and Treadwell, “A New Text”, 61.

¹⁵⁶ As Halm correctly observes, public disputations were not a place to discuss esoteric doctrines. See Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, 18, also ch. 4–5.

¹⁵⁷ For another example of denying this measure of equality to Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs*, see the Omid Safi, “Power and Politics of Knowledge,” 341–46, where in a hagiographical story about the “wondrous deeds” of the Sūfī saint Abū Naṣr Aḥmad-I Jām (Zhanda Pīl) (d. 536/1141), the saint refuses to debate with the Ismāʿīlī scholar and lets his servant answer his questions. The story is, indeed, as Safi notes, mythical, but it reflects the relationship between the saints and the rulers. For our purpose, it reveals that debating with the ones with “bad religion” (*bad-dīnān*) did not fit the Seljūq narrative. They ought to be humiliated, made to repent, or be killed.

Indeed, participating in debates and engaging with the opponents signals the existence of, or disposition towards what Annliese Nef calls “minimal consensus,” which, in the case of the Fāṭimids is defined by compromising the hard lines of the Ismā‘īlī doctrines. This consensus, according to Nef enabled the Fāṭimids to delegate authority to non-Ismā‘īlīs and in turn allowed the non-Ismā‘īlīs to see themselves as part of a legitimate order based on a shared “categories of understanding the social world.”¹⁵⁸

La réussite de la révolution fatimide réside précisément en la définition d'un consensus minimal qui va bien au-delà de l'ismaélisme stricto sensu, non sans avoir des liens avec ce dernier. Or, cette définition se joue essentiellement pendant la phase maghrébine de l'histoire fatimide.¹⁵⁹

As will be argued in the following chapter, the Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlī interpretation of the *ẓāhir* (exoteric) and *bāṭin* (esoteric) aspects of the faith also accommodated this compromise on doctrinal level.¹⁶⁰

Court disputations took a more systematic and institutionalised form in early Fāṭimid Cairo under the patronage of the state. Already in al-Manṣūriyya, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān reports that al-Mu‘izz used to participate regularly in the *ḥalaqāt al-munāẓara*¹⁶¹ on Fridays presumably with a diverse audience, before sitting in a session with the Ismā‘īlī believers.¹⁶² The context of imperial ambition and expansion, internal and external threats, as well as fierce ideological rivalries is relevant to the discussion of the continuities and changes in the practice of court disputation. Sufficient evidence for the continuation of these debates come from well-known Muslim chronicles, preserved most importantly in al-Maqrīzī’s works, but also from Ibādī, Christian and Jewish sources.¹⁶³ The debates in Egypt also involved the Jewish

¹⁵⁸ Nef, “La délégation politique dans l’Occident fatimide avant 973” [Online].

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter Five.

¹⁶¹ Sing. *ḥalqa*

¹⁶² Al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 504.

¹⁶³ The Egyptian Christian bishop, Sāwīrus b Muqaffa‘ is reported to have bested a Jewish man named Mūsā, a friend of the vizier Ibn Killis in presence of al-Mu‘izz. Ibn Khallikān also mentions the Friday *majālis* of Ibn Killis, while al-Maqrīzī’s is the most detailed and significant report about Ibn Killis’s regular sessions of disputations in the *Khīṭaṭ*, also supported by a Genizah fragment. See Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 6: 27-35; Mark R. Cohen and Sasson Somekh, “In the Court of Ya‘qūb Ibn Killis: A Fragment from the Cairo Genizah,” *JQR* 80, 3/4 (Jan. - Apr., 1990), 283-314.

and Christian learned elite, the main representatives of the subject minorities in the newly conquered land. Moreover, the court debates were replicated and institutionalised by the influential Fāṭimid vizier Ibn Killis, which were primarily directed at attracting the learned elite of Cairo, as described in al-Maqrīzī's *Khīṭaṭ*:

He arranged for clerks and physicians to be present at his house. There he also arranged special places for scholars (*‘ulamā’*), littérateurs (*udabā’*), poets (*shu‘arā’*), jurists (*fuqahā’*), theologians (*mutakallimūn*), and artisans. He authored books on *fiqh* and *qirā’āt* (readings of the Qur’ān). He also set up a *majlis* at his house that he appeared every Tuesday. It was attended by jurists, theologians and disputationists (*ahl al-jadal*) who would debate with each other before him (*yunāẓirūna bayna yadayhi*)¹⁶⁴ He provided salaries for all of them. He wrote a book on *fiqh* and established a regular *majlis* that took place every Tuesday. Jurists, a group of theologians, and disputationists attended it and participated in disputations (*wa tajrī baynahum al-munāẓarāt*). He would also give a lecture on Fridays where he read his own compositions to people. It was attended by judges, jurists, Qur’ān reciters, grammarians, traditionists, prominent scholars and notaries. At the end of the reading sessions, the poets would rise to recite their panegyric poetry to him. He also organised banquets for the jurists in the month of Ramaḍān. His book of jurisprudence was based on what he had heard and learnt from al-Mu‘izz li-dīni-llāh and his son al-‘Azīz bi-llāh. This book is arranged according to the chapters of *fiqh*, and it is half the size of the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.¹⁶⁵ I owned this book and had acquainted myself with its contents: it was a book on Ismā‘īlī jurisprudence. He read this book to the public, in the presence of the elite and the commonality, including the jurists, judges and writers. Legal opinions were issued in accordance with this book, and it was taught at the Old Mosque [of ‘Amr]. Al-‘Azīz bi-llāh established monthly salaries for a group of jurists who attended the vizier's *majlis* regularly. Then he ordered to construct a house by the side of the Azhar mosque. On Fridays, following the prayer, they [i.e. the jurists] formed study circles there until the time of the afternoon prayer. They also received an annual stipend from the funds of the vizier. Their number was thirty-five. Al-‘Azīz bi-llāh bestowed robes of honour

¹⁶⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 3:11.

¹⁶⁵ The most revered Sunnī canonical collection of *ḥadīth* by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870). See further, Ch. Melchert, “al-Bukhārī,” *EL*3.

upon them during the Eid al-Fitr and ordered that they be carried on mules [around the city].¹⁶⁶

As this excerpt shows, the various ambitious endeavours of the powerful vizier were fully mandated by the caliphs and were in no way his own side interests. It appears that the collaboration between the imam-caliph and the vizier was the continuation of that between al-Mu‘izz and al-Nu‘mān, which clearly positioned him as a “competitor” for the powerful descendants of al-Nu‘mān.¹⁶⁷ The personal nature of the projects, as well as the source of the funding reflects the nature of patronage in medieval period. Institutions were, as such, established and funded by individuals and not the medieval “state.” Therefore, the minimalist approach to the Fāṭimid institutions of learning – which implies the lack of a serious and sustained effort to create enduring institutions by the Fāṭimid dynastic state – is not fully convincing.¹⁶⁸ In fact, similar conclusions, which are based on limited textual evidence, neglect the evolution of many of these institutions and the transformation of their physical and institutional structure, as well as their long-lasting influence in North Africa and the wider Islamic world, especially Egypt, most thoroughly documented by al-Maqrīzī.

This account of al-Maqrīzī about Ibn Killis's disputations is supported by a Geniza fragment that refers to one of these sessions. This tenth-century fragment, which comes from the preamble to a Jewish apologetic text, informs us that the author was present in the *majlis* of “the most illustrious vizier (*al-wazīr al-ajall*) Ya‘qūb ibn Yūsuf [Ibn Killis]” with other Rabbinic and Karaite Jews.¹⁶⁹ A number of theologians, philosophers and physicians, who regularly attended his *majālis*, were also present in this session of religious discussion (*majlis al-kalām ‘alā sharā’i’*), and vilified a Jewish text in Arabic translation, which to the author’s regret caused a great embarrassment to the Jews.¹⁷⁰ When a later Karaite commentator Abū

¹⁶⁶ *Khiṭaṭ*, 4:161-62. The event is reported with various degree of detail in several places in the *Khiṭaṭ*. Al-Maqrīzī considered it the equivalent of a *madrassa* with which modern scholars agree. See Halm, *Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, 43-44; Walker, “Fatimid Institutions,” 186-87.

¹⁶⁷ Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, 43. Ultimately, al-Nu‘mān’s well-established sons outlived Ibn Killis and thus won the competition. See, Brett, *Rise*, 369-74.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Walker, “Fāṭimid Institutions,” 179-220. Halm’s approach, on the other hand, can be described as maximalist. Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*.

¹⁶⁹ Cohen and Somekh, “In the Court of Ya‘qūb Ibn Killis,” 283-314.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 291-92. Al-Maqrīzī also credits Ibn Killis with establishing the first known state-sponsored teaching of law (*iqamat dars min qibal al-sultān*), that is the precursor or rather an alternative to the *madrassa* in Egypt, first at

‘Alī Yefet b. al-Baṣrī – a contemporary of the caliph al-Ḥākim (386-411/996-1021) who lived in Jerusalem – condemned sessions of religious debates as threatening to the integrity of the Jewish community of ancient Chaldea, he used a similar formulation, “*majālis al-naẓar fī dhikr al-madhāhib*”.¹⁷¹ No doubt, as Stern noted, Yefet b. al-Baṣrī reads the Book of Daniel, on which he comments, as if it referred to the concerns of his own age, that is to the Fāṭimid *majālis al-naẓar*.¹⁷²

This further suggests that the anxiety of Jewish scholars only increased during “the heyday of the Fāṭimid empire.”¹⁷³ These anxieties, caused by real or perceived attacks on a particular religion, were usually cited as a justification for written disputations or polemical works. Therefore, these accounts provide little ground for assuming that Ibn Killis intentionally disparaged the beliefs of his former co-religionists.¹⁷⁴ The scholars who brought this fragment to light, however, emphasised this aspect of the *majālis*. Following Cohen and Somekh, Stroumsa too, viewed the main purpose of these debates as polemical, even designed to humiliate the Jews, and broadly argued for the “bad manners” problem within theological circles.¹⁷⁵

In my view, despite inevitable personal biases in polemical accounts, the pattern that emerges from these early Fāṭimid disputations is consistent with their political and ideological orientation during the early period. In addition to raising the prestige of the court and imposing the authority of the state as an arbiter among the elite of the subject population, they also aimed to engage them in the Ismā‘īlī interpretation of religion, which raised the Ismā‘īlī *ta’wīl* above the exoteric meaning of the scripture, including that of the *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book, i.e. Jews and Christians). One may further suspect that the Fāṭimids also

al-Azhar mosque, then at his home. It is possible that these *majālis* are identical. *Khiṭaṭ*, 4: 198-99. Al-Maqrīzī also adds: “There they would read the books of law according to their [i.e. Ismā‘īlī] law. Similar sessions were organised at the mosque of ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ in the town of Fuṣṭāṭ of Egypt in order to read the vizier’s book [on law]. Later, al-Ḥākim *bi amr Allāh* built the Dār al-‘Ilm, as was mention in the relevant section of this book.” Al-Maqrīzī also reports that when *da‘wa* activities were resumed after a period of suspension, “the *dā‘īs* sat in the great mosque [of al-Azhar] for *munāẓara*.” *Itti‘āz al-ḥunafā’*, 2:175.

¹⁷¹ Samuel Stern “Fāṭimid Propaganda Among Jews,” *Studies*, 84-95, 95.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 87, 95.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Cohen and Somekh, “In the Court,” 297-99.

¹⁷⁵ Sarah Stroumsa, “Ibn Rāwandī’s *sū’ adab al-mujādala*,” 63-83, 71.

wanted to indirectly equate the Sunnī exoteric (*ẓāhirī*) religion with that of the *ahl al-kitāb*, as some *dāʿīs* would maintain in their polemics. Naturally, anti-Fāṭimid authors also accused the Fāṭimids of reducing the status of non-Shīʿī population to that of the *ahl al-dhimma* (protected people, i.e. Jews and Christians).¹⁷⁶ In reality, as Stern concluded, there was “absolutely no sign of an attitude towards other religions that could be characterized as deviating in principle from the common opinion of Islam.”¹⁷⁷

In medieval Islamic societies, the rulers used the disputation sessions to attract and engage the heads of religious communities and the elite for diplomatic purposes, which in some cases proved highly successful, as in the case of the Fāṭimids.¹⁷⁸ The participants of the disputations also saw these sessions as an occasion for negotiating their positions and vying for patronage and protection, thus, mutually beneficial. The educational aspect of Ibn Killis's initiatives was equally significant to the Fāṭimid state as evidenced by the large endowment stipulated for attending his *majlis*. These activities also had conceivable impact on the development of Fāṭimid institutions of learning in al-Qāhira, notably the Dār al-ʿIlm.

Modern scholarship has generally taken a sceptical view of the impact of Fāṭimid learning traditions on broader Islamic learning. Part of this is to do with emphasis on the Shīʿī identity of this caliphate, and hence, with its supposed marginal position in the history of Islamic civilisation in general.¹⁷⁹ Secondly, and specifically concerning scholarship on medieval Muslim learning, the assumption that the arrival of the *madrasas* in Egypt, although “delayed” because of the Fāṭimids, eventually “restored” Sunnī Islam and obliterated the

¹⁷⁶ *fī ḥālat shadīda min al-ihtidām waʾl-tasattur ka-ʾannahum dhimma* (in a condition of severe oppression and concealment, as if they were *dhimma*). See ʿIyāḍ, *Madārik*, ed. Aḥmad Maḥmūd Bakīr (Beirut: Dār al-hadātha, 1967), 3:318, cited in Ben Hamadah (ed.) *Kitāb al-radd ʿalā Shāfiʿī* (Tunis: Dār al-ʿarab lʾil-ṭibāʿa, 1986), 16.

¹⁷⁷ Stern, “Fāṭimid Propaganda,” 95.

¹⁷⁸ On the success of the Fāṭimid propaganda tactics among the Jews, see Stern, “Fāṭimid propaganda,” 91-95. Richard Bulliet’s “curve of Muslim names” also peaks during the Fāṭimid rule in Ifrīqiya, then in Egypt, which he interprets as a consequence of the Fāṭimids orientation towards the native population or “late converts.” See Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in Medieval Period*, 92-103.

¹⁷⁹ Moreover, as Sumaiya Hamdani argues, the Fāṭimid dynasty was often portrayed not as a genuine (project of) Islamic universalist empire, but rather as an outcome of the fragmentation of the Islamic-ʿAbbāsīd Empire. Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, xv-xxiii. For instance, Fowden remarks: “The [ʿAbbāsīd] caliphate was still further undermined, and such symbolic unity as the *umma* had retained was shattered, when in the course of the tenth century rival dynasts – the Umayyads in Spain, and the Ismaili Shiite dynasty that ruled Egypt, the Fatimids – adopted the title “Caliph” for themselves.” *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 164-65.

legacy of the Fāṭimids also contributed to this view. By focusing on the early Ifrīqīyan phase and the continuity of Fāṭimid Ifrīqīyan practices and institutions in Egypt, however, this chapter has explored the evolution of the culture of disputation within the historical context of the transformation of the regional Fāṭimid state to an Islamic empire in order to show the plurality and diversity of the participants, their positions and motives, in the *majālis al-munāẓara*, which our sources tend to suppress. It has also drawn attention to critical, but understudied social aspects of the practice of disputation, such as professional competition for rank and positions, community building, legitimation of the political power, diplomacy, negotiation of authority, and communal boundaries.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Christian *munāẓarāt* show similar tendencies as evidenced by preserved examples of confessional debates. See, for instance, “The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi,” in Alphonse Mingana (ed.) and J. Rendel Harris (author of the introduction), *Woodbrooke studies: Christian documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1928), 2: 1-162.

Chapter Four

Competing Narratives from Early Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya (296-335/909-947)

This chapter contextualises two accounts of disputations from the early Fāṭimid period in North Africa (296-362/909-973) and their subsequent inclusion in biographical literature. Far from being objective accounts of polemical exchanges — as they are often treated in modern scholarship — these narratives reflect the uncertainties of their authors and readers during a particular time of religious and political turmoil within the Muslim Mediterranean. Moreover, in their attempts to advance their own status through these writings, these authors made broader claims for the factions with which they were affiliated, in order to crystallise and legitimise competing political and religious identities.

The first and best known is an account of disputations between the local Mālikī scholar Saʿīd ibn al-Ḥaddād and the newly-arrived Fāṭimid *dāʿī* Abu'l-ʿAbbās. However, the earliest version of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's narrative is preserved in the Mālikī biographical dictionary of Muḥammad b. Ḥārith al-Khushanī, completed many years later in al-Andalus and apparently at the request of his patron, the Umayyad crown prince al-Ḥakam II (r. 349-365/961-976).¹ The second is an account by the Fāṭimid *dāʿī* Ibn al-Haytham of disputations and discussions with the abovementioned *dāʿī* Abu'l-ʿAbbās and his brother, the leader of the Fāṭimid revolution Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī, both of whom were subsequently executed for plotting against al-Mahdī.² This account, too, is temporally distant from the events it describes, since Ibn al-Haytham wrote it down almost forty years later, during the final year of Abū

*Part of this chapter has been accepted for publication as an article in a special issue of *The Medieval Globe* 5.2. (2019) titled *Medieval Sicily, al-Andalus and the Maghrib: Writing in Times of Turmoil*, edited by Nicola Carpentieri and Carol Symes (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019): 59-86.

¹ Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 199-210; later versions in al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:57-115; and ʿIyāḍ, *Madārik*, 351-63. The debates are translated to French by M. Ben Cheneb in his edition and translation of the *Ṭabaqāt* as *Classes des Savants*. To my knowledge no full English translation of the debates exist. Sumaiya Hamdani offers a summary of the four debates in English in her book *Between Revolution and State: The Path to Fatimid Statehood*, annotated edition (London, 2006), 37-46.

² See Dachraoui, *Khilāfat al-Fāṭimiyya*, 187-191. Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Bayān*, 163-65.

Yazīd's rebellion (331-335/943-947) which almost toppled the Fāṭimids. I accordingly place these disputations and their documentation in the wider context of inter-Islamic political and religious rivalries: among the Fāṭimids of al-Mahdiyya, the Umayyads of Cordoba, and the 'Abbāsids of Baghdād (on the one hand) and then within ideologically charged controversies over logic and philosophy (on the other).

The disputations central to my argument took place immediately following Abū 'Abd Allāh's conquest of the last Aghlabid stronghold at Qayrawān (Kairouan, Tunisia) but before the enthronement of al-Mahdī in January 910 (297). During this period, Abu'l-'Abbās, brother of the revolutionary leader, acted as the interim ruler of Ifrīqiya and challenged the local scholars, the majority of whom followed the Mālikī and Ḥanafī *madhhabs*, to religious debates. Both of our authors, one Mālikī and one Shī'ī, had therefore witnessed these turbulent events. Ibn al-Ḥaddād may have written his account not long after the disputations took place, presumably before Abu'l-'Abbās and his brother were charged with treason and executed by al-Mahdī one year after his enthronement. Perhaps for this very reason, the brothers' fellow *dā'ī* Ibn al-Haytham did not write about his association with them until many years later, during another turbulent time: the rebellion of Abū Yazīd al-Nukkārī, who led an uprising of Ibādī Berbers against the Fāṭimids in 331/943 and captured most of the Fāṭimid territories, including Qayrawān, before his forces were defeated in 334/946 near al-Mahdiyya. After recapturing Qayrawān, the crown prince Abū Ṭāhir Ismā'īl (crowned as al-Manṣūr bi-llāh) pardoned the Mālikī scholars and all those who had sided with the rebels, thus putting an end to their fragile allegiance with the Ibādīs — a political move that one may see as a “divide and rule” principle. In addition, he gave them considerable religious freedoms, which was seen as a reversal of his predecessors' policy. In his turn, the *dā'ī* Ibn al-Haytham may have responded to aftermath of the restoration of Fāṭimid rule, in 335/947, by writing a memoir that glorified himself and his fellow disputants, including Abu'l-'Abbās and Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī, whose memories could not have been celebrated after their execution in 298/911.

During this period, the Umayyads of Córdoba, the ideological rivals of the Fāṭimids in the Islamic West, posed as the protectors of the Mālikīs and used their negative experiences under Shī'ī rule to discredit the Fāṭimids. At the height of this Umayyad – Fāṭimid rivalry, the circulation of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's *munāẓarāt* proved useful as part of the Umayyads' anti-Fāṭimid

propaganda. Ibn al-Ḥaddād had already been included in Abu'l-ʿArab's *Kitāb al-Miḥan* (Book of Trials), where he was depicted as a victim of a purge under the pro-ʿAbbāsīd Aghlabids; but it was al-Khushanī's biographical dictionary, produced for the Umayyads in al-Andalus, which made Ibn al-Ḥaddād's disputations famous.³ Al-Khushanī had studied with both Ibn al-Ḥaddād and Abu'l-ʿArab in Qayrawān, and it is probable that the polemical climate at the Córdoba court encouraged him to include a separate chapter on Mālikī polemicists, of whom Ibn al-Ḥaddād was by far the best representative, due to his confrontation with the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs*.⁴

The Authors of the Accounts and their Audiences

Abū ʿUthmān Saʿīd b. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥaddād al-Ghassānī was a student of Saḥnūn b. Saʿīd and apparently one of the few Mālikīs who took an interest in disputations at the time. He lived all his life in Qayrawān and did not have the means to travel in pursuit of knowledge, except for a short visit to Tripoli (modern Libya).⁵ According to al-Khushanī's biography of him, he was a prolific writer who authored books on rational theology and jurisprudence, and was also an expert in Arabic grammar and in disputation — his main area of interest. However, he was not an expert in *fiqh*, and similar to many who took an interest in rational speculations (*naẓar*) and *munāẓara*, he did not hold any salaried post in Qayrawān. His rejection of *taqlīd* (legal conformism) and preference for *ḥadīth* and *naẓar* under the influence of al-Shāfiʿī reportedly created discord between him and other students of Saḥnūn. A few fragments attributed to him survive in the manuscript collection of the Great Mosque of Qayrawān, and these generally confirm the information given in the biographical dictionaries (*ṭabaqāt*).⁶ Ibn al-Ḥaddād became wealthy in old age after receiving an inheritance from one

³ Abu'l-ʿArab al-Tamīmī, *Miḥan*, 360; Pellat, "al-Khushanī," *IE*2.

⁴ Modern scholars too, sometimes claim that Ibn al-Ḥaddād was "the leader of the Mālikīs" at the time, then the leadership passed from him to Ibn al-Labbād and then to Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī. See, for instance, Ben Hamadah (ed.), *Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā al-Shāfiʿī*, 10-11.

⁵ For biographical entries on him, see al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 148-51; al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:57-115; ʿIyāḍ, *Madārik*, 351-63; al-Dabbāgh, *Maʿālim*, 2:295-315.

⁶ On the fragments, see Muranyi, *Beiträge*, 156-58; Schacht, "On Some Manuscripts," 225-58.

of his relatives, who passed away in Sicily. He was in his seventies in 296/909 when he took part in the debates with the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* that raised his prestige among the Mālikīs.

His debate with Abu'l-ʿAbbās, as noted above, is preserved in al-Khushanī's *Ṭabaqāt*, in his "section on the traditionalists and other scholars in Qayrawān who adopted *naẓar* [rational speculations] and adorned themselves with *jadāl* [dialectics]." Divided into four sessions (*majālis*) of debate, it is the largest entry in the section and quotes verbatim from the account written by Ibn al-Ḥaddād. This same account was later copied into other biographical dictionaries, such as the *Kitāb Riyāḍ al-nufūs* of al-Mālikī, *Tartīb al-madārik* of Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ *Maʿālim al-īman* of al-Dabbāgh and the collection of Ibn Nājī.⁷ As I have already noted, the anti-Fāṭimid milieu of Umayyad Córdoba, where al-Khushanī was writing, explains the importance that he assigned to Ibn al-Ḥaddād's disputations. Similar anti-Fāṭimid hostility also prevailed in Qayrawān after the Zīrid dynasty's (972-1148) acceptance of Mālikism, when Abū Bakr al-Mālikī would portray the Fāṭimids as archetypal tyrants and heretics in his commemoration of previous scholars in Qayrawān, the *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*.

In contrast to Ibn al-Haytham's *Munāẓarāt*, which appears to have enjoyed a very limited reception, the account of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's disputations, circulated widely in Mālikī circles for centuries, as noted above. Ibn al-Haytham's work was probably intended for a small group of readers, if not one person. Ibn al-Ḥaddād, for his part, had sought publicity, which he achieved by dispersing his account among his colleagues in Qayrawān. After his death, moreover, al-Khushanī had made use of it to bolster the Umayyad prince al-Ḥakam, whose father ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir had declared his caliphate in 316/929 and who was thus in competition with the two other caliphates. The wider audience of al-Khushanī was the learned elite of al-Andalus and Ifrīqiya, who continued to copy the debates of Ibn al-Ḥaddād, while Ibn al-Haytham's work remained within closed Ismāʿīlī circles.

Abū ʿAbd Allāh Jaʿfar b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Aswad ibn al-Haytham a much younger contemporary of Ibn al-Ḥaddād, belonged to the minority Shīʿa group of Qayrawān,

⁷ Needless to say, some of the sources that these authors copied from have not reached us. Unlike al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, later authors Dabbāgh and Ibn Nājī, for instance, relied on a shorter abridgement of the *Riyāḍ al-Nufūs* by Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī. (Bakkūsh, *Riyāḍ al-Nufūs*, 27m) and did not have access to the longer version. On the other hand, they quote from Musā al-Qaṭṭān, who was a companion of Ibn al-Ḥaddād and had engaged with the *dāʿīs* (See, al-Dabbāgh, *Maʿālim al-īmān*, vol. 2:298ff). According to this version both Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī and his brother Abu'l-ʿAbbās debate with the Mālikīs.

who had had to conceal their faith during the Aghlabid period. Ibn al-Haytham's education began with the study of the Qur'ān, the Arabic language, disputation (*jadāl*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) with his Zaydī father, who died in 285/898 before he reached puberty. His father was evidently a learned man who, according to Ibn al-Haytham, "possessed many books and was competent in various areas of language, uncommon words, disputation, and jurisprudence."⁸ It was under his father's influence that he took a special interest in disputation and "the books of the ancients," including Aristotle's *Logic* (*Kitāb al-Manṭiq*), among many other works by Aristotle and Plato.⁹ Like other Shī'īs he studied in the circles of the 'Irāqīs (Ḥanafīs) of Qayrawān and was affiliated with them, but also studied Shī'ī doctrines separately.¹⁰

Ibn al-Haytham's description of his education and curricula is extremely valuable, because very little is known about the education and training of the *dā'īs*. He reveals the identity of his teachers, the content of discussions, the methods of teaching and studying. His self-study method, for instance, included memorising ten legal cases according to the school of Abū Ḥanīfa and five topics in disputation, in addition to several topics in theology a day.¹¹ Later he studied *fiqh* with the most prominent Ḥanafī jurists of Qayrawān, Ibn 'Abdūn¹² (d. 297/910) and Ibn Ma'mar¹³ (d. 303/915-916), both of whom were on good terms with the Twelver and Zaydī Shī'īs of Qayrawān — the latter even officially joined the Fāṭimid *da'wa* after the Fāṭimids took Qayrawān. He also learnt *ḥadīth* from traditionists but mostly associated with those known for theology (*kalām*). Later he started to study logic with a capable Jewish teacher named Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Khurāsānī and stopped visiting his other teachers until his next master Muḥammad al-Kūfī al-Hamadānī¹⁴ (d. 310/922-923) arrived in Qayrawān from Sicily. The master's knowledge in *fiqh* and disputation attracted Ibn al-Haytham to him, but his real strength lay in his knowledge of the Shī'ī doctrines. Al-Kūfī convinced him all the subjects that he had learnt were only necessary insofar as they led one

⁸ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 59 (tr., 111).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 60-61 (tr. pp. 112-13).

¹¹ Ibid., 59-60 (tr. pp. 111-12).

¹² For Ibn 'Abdūn, see, al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 187-190.

¹³ Ibn Iḍḥārī, *al-Bayān* 1: 173, for obituary note and conversion. For the Shī'ī sympathies of his father Ma'mar b. Maṣṣūr see, al-Khushanī, *Tābaqāt*, 112-113, 193.

¹⁴ This Shī'ī jurist was later appointed *khaṭīb* in the mosque of Qayrawān. He was apparently from Hamadān as his *niṣba* suggests. See, Ibn Iḍḥārī, 1: 88, for obituary note, and P. Walker, *The Advent*, 112, n. 78.

to the topic of imamate.¹⁵ (Ibn Haytham probably emphasised this remark because the topic of Imamate indeed had become the single most important topic for the Fāṭimid caliphate and its agents).

His association with al-Kūfī resulted in his full conversion from being a nominal Shīʿī to an informed and convinced Ismāʿīlī Shīʿī.¹⁶ As Ibn al-Haytham asserts in his account, he began to study the theological problems concerning the imamate according to the Shīʿī books and altogether abandoned the study of other subjects, such as the *fiqh* of Abū Ḥanīfa.¹⁷ Ibn al-Haytham's education culminated in the study of Shīʿī *fiqh*, which he took up after his teacher al-Kūfī revealed the identity of other learned Shīʿīs of Qayrawān to him and they gave him access to their books. He did not stop attending the sessions of Ibn ʿAbdūn for subjects other than *fiqh*, which likely continued until the latter's death in the year following the revolution. Overall, it appears that he studied philosophy on his own, as many did, but found the abovementioned Jewish tutor for logic. It is safe to assume that he was not the only person who took an interest in similar subjects in Qayrawān.

Ibn al-Haytham's training in rational theology, philosophy and logic, as well as jurisprudence, made him a competent debater. His remarks in one of the sessions on logic make it clear that trained and skilful disputants were familiar with logical argumentation:

Substance, quantity, quality, relationship, where, when, position, possession, action, and affection are the ten categories that form species and definitions. When the speaker has understood them, he will not mix up the discourse, as do the speakers engaged in disputation (*ahl al-jadal*) who in their discourse jumble together definition and delimitation, and the specific and the general.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, (pp. 60-61, tr., 115).

¹⁶ See, *Munāẓarāt*, 61ff. It should be noted, that formally the Shīʿīs of Qayrawān could study law only according to the *madhhab* of Abū Ḥanīfa or Mālik as teaching Shīʿī law was forbidden under the Aghlabids.

¹⁷ *Munāẓarāt*, 61-62.

¹⁸ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 144 (Walker and Madelung's translation). I suspect Ibn al-Haytham refers to those debaters who engage in disputation without familiarising themselves with the principles of logical argumentation. Also, it could have been the theologians that Ibn al-Haytham attacks here, for they are the ones that use dialectics in order to win the arguments, whereas dialectics is devised to attain probability. On this account al-Fārābī also criticises Ibn al-Rāwandī; see Stroumsa, 80-81. That being said, Ibn al-Rāwandī was not criticised for not mastering dialectics, but for abusing it.

His knowledge of logic and deductive reasoning comes of course from the books of Aristotle whom he calls *ṣāhib al-mantiq* (the Master of Logic). Ibn al-Haytham mentions Aristotle's *Analytica Priora* and the *Book of Logic* attributed to him which were probably in wide circulation among people interested in disputations. It is also clear that he advocates the study of logic and philosophy and invokes the memory of Abu'l-'Abbās to emphasise the importance of these disciplines.

As he writes in his memoirs, the *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, he became close to Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī, the leader of the Fāṭimid revolution, and his brother Abu'l-'Abbās thanks to his education and devotion to their cause. It is not difficult to imagine that he must have regarded their tragic execution in 298/911 as a great personal loss, which also explains why he commemorated them later in life.¹⁹ Not much else is known about him, apart from what he recounts in the *Munāẓarāt*,²⁰ where he mentions his journey to al-Andalus as one of the two Fāṭimid ambassadors who visited the rebel Ibn Ḥafṣūn (d. 306/918), who rose against the Umayyads in 880 and declared allegiance to the Fāṭimids after 297/910.²¹ According to Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 775/1374), who does not know the name of these two ambassadors, they even took part in many of Ibn Ḥafṣūn's military campaigns before he sent them back.²² Some years later, Ibn al-Haytham faced serious troubles during a mission to the Western Maghrib, for which he blamed the governor of Tāhart (Tiaret, in modern Algeria), Masāla b. Ḥabūs, and his sister.²³ A few other sources mention Ibn al-Haytham as a high-ranking Fāṭimid *dā'ī* who was entrusted with important missions but, for reasons about which one can only speculate, he was not offered a position as a judge, in accordance with his initial training, and does not appear at the Fāṭimid court in al-Mahdiyya, nor in al-Manṣūriyya.

¹⁹ On the execution of the *dā'īs*, see Walker, *Advent*, 31-41.

²⁰ See Walker's summary in the "Introduction," 51-54.

²¹ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 2 (translation at 63-64). For a general context, see Halm, *Empire*, 280; for Ibn Ḥafṣūn, see Tibi, "Umar b. Ḥafṣūn"; for Ibn al-Haytham's mission and the political influence of the Fāṭimids in al-Andalus, see Virgilio Martínez Enamorado, "Fatimid Ambassadors in Bobastro: Changing Religious and Political Allegiances in the Islamic West," *JESHO* 52, 2 (2009): 267-300.

267-300. Similarly, the Umayyads supported anti-Fāṭimid rebellions. For example, they sent a fleet with soldiers, weapons, and supplies to support Abū Yazīd in the year 946, but the fleet returned after learning about the rebel's first major defeat at Mahdiyya. See, Idris Imad al-Din, *Uyūn*, 385-86.

²² Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *A'māl al-A'lām*, ed. Sayyid Kasrāwī Ḥasan, 2 vols (Beirut, n.d.), 2:32.

²³ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 2 (tr. 64). Walker notes the possibility that the reference is to al-Mahdī's crack-down on the *dā'īs* in 309/921-22 (ibid., n. 3).

Ibn al-Haytham's *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt* was later included in a large compilation of Ṭayyibī Ismāʿīlī works, the *Kitāb al-Azhār*, by Ḥasan b. Nūḥ al-Bharūchī (d. 1533): an Indian Ismāʿīlī who studied with leading Ṭayyibī scholars in Yemen.²⁴ But although the memoir was included in Poonawala's *Bibliography of Ismāʿīlī Literature* (1977),²⁵ it was not accessible to scholars until it was edited and translated by Wilferd Madelung and Paul Walker in 2001.²⁶ Only three quotations from the *Munāẓarāt* were previously known from the *Uyūn al-akhbār* of the Ṭayyibī chief *dāʿī* and historian Idrīs Imād al-Dīn (d. 872/1468), which were published in Samuel M. Stern's posthumous *Studies in Early Ismāʿīlism* (1983).²⁷

Who, then, was the intended audience, and why did Ibn al-Haytham choose to style his book in the form of *munāẓara*? Given the political and polemical context one may suppose that this work was addressed to both the opponents and the supporters of the *daʿwa*. However, this seems unlikely. Although Ibn al-Haytham was personally involved in two political missions against the Umayyads and was in constant contact with the scholars of Qayrawān, his *Munāẓarāt* is a work that was intended for a reader or readers within the *daʿwa*, because the subject matter was too delicate to share with outsiders.

The book is not only an account of his debates, but a significant part of it contains his autobiography and his account of the events that happened in Qayrawān before the Fāṭimid revolution. The author sets out to highlight the educational nature of his interaction with the prodigious *dāʿīs*, recreating the settings of the discussions and giving details of them. Once doctrinal matters have been discussed and the oath has been taken, he begins laying out intellectual matters. It appears that the genre was deemed suitable to depict a scholarly interaction between a teacher and a student, or two people of the same rank, but perhaps, most importantly, it was the method of choice for the *dāʿīs* for teaching as well as proselytising, a group to which both the author and the leading actors of the accounts belonged. However, the overall context of the *daʿwa*, the involvement of the Mālikīs, and many other references to

²⁴ See Walker's "Introduction" to the *Munāẓarāt*, 45-51.

²⁵ Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 34-35, 181; Adam Gacek, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London: Islamic Publications, 1984-1985), 37-40; Daftary, *Ismaili Literature*, 110, 117; de Blois, *Arabic, Persian, and Gujarati Manuscripts*, 145-50.

²⁶ *The Advent of the Fatimids*. See Bibliography.

²⁷ Stern, *Studies*, 100-104.

debates make it clear that Ibn al-Haytham associated *munāẓara* culture with the *dā'īs* and the choice of the format and the title was not accidental.

In the absence of detailed descriptions of instruction methods from the early period, Ibn al-Haytham's account sheds some light on the format of a scholarly session between an advanced student and a *shaykh* — often referred to in the biographical dictionaries, but rarely elaborated on. The sessions with Abu'l-ʿAbbās are particularly interesting, for he was more interested in a scholarly discussion and testing Ibn al-Haytham's strength in different disciplines, while the sessions with the *dā'ī* Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī are presented as standard “*daʿwa* sessions.” Thus, while these sessions involve elements of interrogation and argumentation, they can be called *munāẓara* only in the broadest sense of the term. In the session with Abu'l-ʿAbbās, Ibn al-Haytham reports on all the disciplines he mastered during his education, which was common when a new student arrived in a scholar's session. For instance, when he discusses the book of logic, which he had in front of him and answered questions from it. As was customary with *qirāʾāt* (reading, studying) sessions, Abu'l-ʿAbbās corrected him in one place, where the transcriber had apparently made a mistake, but some of his objections were challenged by Ibn al-Haytham, which Abu'l-ʿAbbās left unanswered. Overall, they convey a sense of what a regular “supervision” session, or a private *majlis al-naẓar* or *munāẓara* may have proceeded.

Ibn al-Ḥaddād's *Munāẓarāt* with the Fāṭimid *dā'ī* Abu'l-ʿAbbās

Already, by mid-ninth century, the clandestine proto-Ismāʿīlī movement was capable of “conducting intensive *daʿwa* activity through a network of *dā'īs*,”²⁸ although, the existence of such a unified movement in this period, is a subject of debate among scholars.²⁹ The secret nature of this organisation and its teachings was preserved even after the establishment of the Fāṭimid caliphate.³⁰ Perhaps for this reason, the Ismāʿīlī *dā'īs* were not public preachers, but

²⁸ Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 98.

²⁹ See, for instance, Brett, *The Fatimid Empire* (pp. 5-6), where he problematises this notion, which he views as a Fāṭimid sectarian narrative.

³⁰ Marshall Hodgson maintained that the need for *taqiyya* (dissimulation) led to the development of the notion of protecting true knowledge from non-initiates “even under an Ismāʿīlī government.” *The Venture of Islam*, 1:380-81.

rather skilful disputants well versed in religious discipline and philosophy. Heinz Halm makes a valid observation about the formal resemblance of the word *munāẓir* (disputant) with the word *mukāsir* (breaker), the lowest rank in the hierarchy of the Fāṭimid *daʿwa*, who “had the task of ‘working on’ the pupil and disputing with him until all his arguments were refuted.”³¹ In several cases, these disputations resulted in the conversion of rulers to the Fāṭimid-Ismāʿīlī cause.³² After assuming power in Qayrawān, the *dāʿīs* and their local associates also challenged local scholars to debate over the most fundamental disagreements, which resulted in many “conversions.” This function of disputations in general, and the *munāẓarāt*, in particular, has been highlighted by many modern scholars.³³ What has been less discussed is the function and significance of the *munāẓarāt* narratives as texts, and the motivations behind their composition and circulation: the focus of this chapter.

According to Ibn al-Ḥaddād account preserved in al-Khushanī’s pro-Umayyad compilation, in the early days of Fāṭimid rule in Ifrīqiya, he had been summoned to the Old Palace of the Aghlabids, which had been turned into the headquarters of the new rulers, to take part in a disputation session.³⁴ The central topic of this and subsequent debates was the superiority of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib to other companions of the Prophet Muḥammad and, by implication, the imams descended from him, according to Shīʿī beliefs. These disputations were certainly politically motivated, as the *dāʿīs* were preparing the urban elite for the arrival of the new ruler, ʿAbd Allāh al-Maḥdī, who had been imprisoned in far-away Sijilmāsa (Morocco) before he was rescued by Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī. The initiator of the disputations, as we have observed, was the *dāʿī* Abuʾl-ʿAbbās, his older brother, who had been appointed

³¹ Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, 58.

³² See Hamdani, “The Dialectic of Power,” 6. Similarly, *dāʿī* al-Muʿayyad (d. 470/1078) converts the Būyid ruler of Fars, Abū Kālījār; *dāʿī* Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī converts the governor of Rayy Aḥmad b. ʿAlī (r. 307-312/919-924); *dāʿī* al-Nasafī converts the Sāmānid emir Naṣr II b. Aḥmad (r. 301-331/914-943) through effective disputations: see Klemm, *Memoirs of a Mission*, 26–44, 29, 134n8.

³³ Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 112, 127; Madelung, “The Religious Policy of the Fatimids,” 98; Halm, *Empire*, 240-42; idem, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions*, 56-70; Walker, *Advent*, 26-32; Hamdani, “The Dialectic of Power,” 5-21.

³⁴ Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 199ff.

Abū ‘Abd Allāh’s deputy when he departed for Sijilmāsa.³⁵ Evidently, during his interim rule in Qayrawān, Abu’l-‘Abbās hoped to convince the local scholars of al-Mahdī’s legitimacy.³⁶

The aged man agreed to appear before the antagonistic *dā’ī* at the risk of losing his life, in order “to defend the tradition (*sunna*),” as al-Khushanī put it.³⁷ This “tradition” was the Māliki or Madīnan *madhhab*, which had come under threat by the Shī‘ī claim that only the imams from the Prophet lineage had the authority to interpret the sacred law. The Fāṭimids thus imposed Shī‘ī law on the population and banned ruling or practicing according to other schools of law. Those who protested against the new regime were allegedly persecuted. Nevertheless, Ibn al-Ḥaddād continued to attend disputations with Abu’l-‘Abbās and was left unharmed. He then wrote down his account of these debating sessions, no doubt a stylised version of it, and circulated the booklet among a group of his students in Qayrawān, a version of which was preserved by al-Khushanī. There is no reason to doubt his regular attendance at the debates and the formal procedures that he describes. That being said, there were reasons to be fearful as tension built up. The Shī‘īs and Ḥanafīs of Qayrawān who resented the Mālikīs seized the opportunity to vilify the latter as the enemies of the Shī‘a, which led to the brutal execution and crucifixion of two Mālikī jurists, Abū Hudhayl and Ibn Birdhawn, who was a student of Ibn al-Ḥaddād and was accused of “pro-Umayyad propaganda.”³⁸ This incident happened in the month of Ṣafar 297/October-November 909 only about two months before the arrival of Abū Abd Allāh with al-Mahdī, which undoubtedly traumatised the Mālikīs.

Ibn al-Ḥaddād was only one of the many people who took part in debates with the *dā’īs* — as it appears, without any pressure.³⁹ Nevertheless, his own account stresses his reluctance to visit the *dā’ī*’s residence, which is a common trope.

³⁵ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 192.

³⁶ Ibid. “He [i.e. Abu’l-‘Abbās] debated with them on the imamate and on judicial opinions in which they opposed the *ahl al-bayt*, and he silenced them. They were amazed at his proficiency.

³⁷ Al-Khushanī. 199.

³⁸ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 165-6, nn. 175-6 (Arabic text, 118). Ibn al-Haytham, of course, reports that their execution was justified, but Ibn ‘Idhārī reports that this excessive brutality angered Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī who was not in Qayrawān at the time. Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, ed. Reinhart Dozy, 1:152-53. Al-Khushanī’s report in *Ṭabaqāt*, 215-16, makes it clear that the hostility between the ‘Irāqīs and Madīnan scholars played a role in their misfortune. Moreover, according to al-Khushanī, Abū Hudhayl’s sentence was 500 lashes, but he was mistakenly killed instead of his friend, who was then executed, too. See, also Madelung discussion of this incident in “The Religious Policy of the Fatimids,” 99.

³⁹ See Walker’s useful discussion of these disputations in *Advent*, 26-31.

Abu'l-ʿAbbās sent an envoy and I came to see him at the palace of Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad b. Aghlab,⁴⁰ where he was surrounded by his most prominent companions. I was accompanied by Mūsā al-Qaṭṭān.⁴¹ I greeted him and took a seat. Previously, all the people of our country, I mean the scholars (*ahl al-ʿilm*), had visited him without being sent for. Then I said to him: “There were people before you [i.e. the Aghlabids] in this palace and God knows, and our friends here know, that I never frequented kings, nor did I visit any of them without being summoned.”⁴²

In his account of the second session, he again notes the presence of other scholars but comments on their inability to answer a very basic question, thus enhancing his own status:

When I entered his place at the second session, he [Abu'l-ʿAbbās] turned to the Medinan [Mālikī] and ʿIrāqī [Ḥanafī] [scholars], asking them “what is the sunna?” Someone mumbled: “The sunna is the sunna;” and none of them knew what else to say. So, he turned towards me and said: “I heard that you stress your belief in the Book [i.e. the Qurʾān] and the sunna, so, what is the sunna?” I replied: “The sunna has three aspects.” He said: “Tell us.” I said: “Conforming to whatever the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) commanded, refraining from what he forbade, and imitating what he did.”⁴³

Later, Ibn al-Ḥaddād not only presents himself as the sole competent defender of tradition against the Fāṭimids, he also stresses the compliance of the rival ʿIrāqīs, who apparently sided with the new rulers.

[In the third session,] I entered and he [Abu'l-ʿAbbās] seated me near to himself. At that moment he was telling a man from among the ʿIrāqīs: “The teacher (*muʿallim*) will always be more knowledgeable than the student (*mutaʿallim*).” The ʿIrāqī said: “Yes, it is so” and those present were not uttering a word. I said: “Is anything left to say? Shall I speak?” He continued pressing the same point: “Is it not the case that the student will always need the teacher?” and the ʿIrāqī approved again. Then I knew that his aim was nothing but to stress the inferiority of

⁴⁰ The Aghlabid amīr (r. 875-902) who founded the Raqqāda palace city and was known for holding disputations.

⁴¹ Abu'l-Aswad Mūsā b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, also a student of Saḥnūn and a companion of Ibn al-Ḥaddād. See al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 159.

⁴² Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 199-200. For al-Mālikī's version of these disputations, see *Riyāḍ*, 2:76-96. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 202.

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq [in knowledge,] because he had once consulted ‘Alī about the share of an inheritance to which a grandmother was entitled.⁴⁴

Here, the *dāʿī* was persuading the scholars to accept that, if the fourth caliph ‘Alī was superior to Abū Bakr, as a teacher is to a student, then he was the rightful successor to the Prophet, as the Shīʿa claimed, and not Abū Bakr. Ibn al-Ḥaddād boasts that he saw through the *dāʿī*’s tactics every time and refuted his arguments.

In describing the fourth session, Ibn al-Ḥaddād admits that the *dāʿī* was “closer to fairness, as if he was debating with me from a standpoint other than his own.” Despite this statement, Ibn al-Ḥaddād tells his readers that the disputations were not productive.

When I heard the words of a man who declared false what was obvious and deviated from the truth, I thought it was reasonable to avoid debating with him. This is because I argued against him neither with a rational argument nor analogical reasoning, but rather confronted him with the Book of God, the deeds of his Prophet, and the consensus of the Muslims. He, however, questioned me over and over and repeated himself without a definite proof or a clear demonstration. We seek refuge in God from confusion in religion and ask Him for support and direction as to the right course.⁴⁵

The account of these disputations thus captures the uneasy relationship between the Fāṭimids and the scholars of Qayrawān, and also glorifies the reputation of the aged Ibn al-Ḥaddād as the sole defender of the *sunna*: or at least this is how his Umayyad-employed Mālikī biographer wanted to depict him.

Meanwhile, the Fāṭimid *dāʿī* Ibn al-Haytham, according to his own memoirs, had been attending private *munāẓarāt* — discussions — with the *dāʿīs*, as well as attending their debates with local scholars, including Ibn al-Ḥaddād. But, as I have stressed, he wrote these memoirs almost forty years later, after the defeat of the rebel Abū Yazīd, which opened the doors for changes in Fāṭimid policies favourable to the Mālikīs of Qayrawān. This must have had a destabilising effect on *dāʿīs* like Ibn al-Haytham, who had made enemies among the Mālikīs, and so galvanised him to circulate his own narrative of the events that had taken place decades before.⁴⁶ It would have been intended to refute the Mālikī narratives of early Fāṭimid

⁴⁴ Ibid., 203-4. Al-Mālikī, *Riḡāḡ*, 2:87.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 210.

⁴⁶ These reforms are discussed in Madelung, “The Religious Policy of the Fatimids,” 97-104.

munāẓarāt as coercive or persecutory, such as according to one Mālikī report the Fāṭimids “forced people to accept their beliefs through disputation (*munāẓara*) and argumentation.”⁴⁷ Indeed, both sides agreed that the main objective of the debates was to convert undecided Qayrawānī scholars and to humiliate defiant opponents. However, according to Ibn al-Ḥaddād, neither side had actually conceded defeat; rather, both had agreed to disagree. This, in itself, appears to have upset Ibn al-Haytham, who boasts that he had actually refuted Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s written version, which “was dispersed among [Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s] companions.”⁴⁸

In his memoirs, moreover, Ibn al-Haytham mentions only one of the debates which took place between the *dāʿī* Abū ‘Abd Allāh and Ibn al-Ḥaddād.⁴⁹ Instead, he ascribes much more importance to his own discussions with these eminent Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs*, not only to commemorate his fallen revolutionary heroes but also to highlight — at a safe temporal distance, under a new caliph — his association with them.⁵⁰ His own separate account of the same debates between the *dāʿīs* and Ibn al-Ḥaddād, which he mentions in his memoirs, is lost, but it seems to have been known to Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. circa 414/1023) who quoted it in his *al-Imtāʿ wa-l-muʾānasa*, in order to exemplify the futility of disputations.⁵¹ However, the parties actually involved in the debates, namely Ibn al-Ḥaddād and the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs*, both celebrated these disputations as a historical moment of brilliance, a wrestling match to be proud of, if not a total triumph over the opponent.

***Munāẓara* and the Politics of Writing a Biography**

In Mālikī biographical dictionaries, Ibn al-Ḥaddād is compared to none other than the famous traditionist Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, who had endured interrogations during the ‘Abbāsīd *miḥna*,

⁴⁷ *ajbarū al-nāsa ‘alā madhhabihim bi ṭarīq al-munāẓara wa iqāmat al-ḥujja*, al-Dabbāgh and Ibn Nājī, *Ma‘ālim*, 2:298. This late report is of course based on the earlier rhetorical constructions of the early Fāṭimid history by such staunch opponent of the Fāṭimids, who supported Abū Yazīd against them, such as Abū l-‘Arab, al-Sibāʿī and others. See, for instance, the accounts preserved by these figures in al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:469ff.

⁴⁸ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 123.

⁴⁹ See *Munāẓarāt*, 123.

⁵⁰ It is known that “an individual constructs a narrative such that he or she is the main protagonist, or subject [...] in the self-narrative.” Yoshihisa Kashima, “Culture Narrative and Human Motivation,” in D. Munro et al (eds.) *Motivation and Culture*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 16-30, 23.

⁵¹ Al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Imtāʿ*, 195; see Walker, *Advent*, 54-55.

due to his defiance of Aghlabid and especially Fāṭimid “tyranny.”⁵² However, an important difference is that the latter is depicted as being strictly opposed to *munāẓara*, which he considered to be an illicit innovation. While Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal “consistently refused to respond to theological questions on rationalistic terms” during the inquisition,⁵³ Ibn al-Ḥaddād eagerly engaged in disputations, albeit unwillingly in those with the *dāʿī*.⁵⁴ He also refuted his colleagues’ legal conformism (*taqlīd*) and criticised his teacher Saḥnūn’s compilation of Mālikī jurisprudence, the *Mudawwana*.⁵⁵ These disagreements apparently led his fellow Mālikīs to desert him and turned the judge Ibn Ṭālib against him.⁵⁶ Thus, in writing up and disseminating his *munazārāt*, he was making a case for disputation as a legitimate method, at least in instances when the fate of the Mālikī tradition and the prestige of the group were at stake.

For the next generation of Mālikīs, as a result, Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s disputations with the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī* Abu’l-‘Abbās made him a hero of the Qayrawān *miḥna* as Mālikī identity and collective memory coalesced under continued Fāṭimid rule. As a poet from Qayrawān commemorated, “Was he not the tongue of the Muslims and their sword when they were tricked by the people of error and unbelief?”⁵⁷ Later Mālikī biographers presented the *munāẓarāt* of Ibn al-Ḥaddād as the highest point in his long career. According to ‘Iyāḍ, for instance, disputation led to his prominence and his “winning the hearts of the people” (*mālat ilayhi qulūb al-‘āmma*).⁵⁸ The reports of his debates also served to exemplify the resilience of Mālikī scholars under political pressure from hostile rulers. They were copiously quoted in

⁵² For his complete hagiography, see al-Dabbāgh, *Ma‘ālim*, 2:298.

⁵³ Soffer, “The Theological *Majlis*,” 231. For the record, as Melchert points out, the discussions of the traditionalist circles were called *mudhākara*, where they engaged in “friendly” ḥadīth recitation contests. Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law*, 20–22.

⁵⁴ Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s reconciliation of dialectics and Mālikī traditionalism anticipated the approach of Ibn ‘Aqīl (d. 1119), the Ḥanbalī jurist and master of disputation in eleventh-century Baghdād, who adopted *munāẓara* for legal argumentations. In other words, Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s shift towards Shāfi‘ī methodology, by allowing personal judgment and accepting the authority of the *ḥadīth*, anticipated this later compromise between rigid traditionalism and rationalism. See Makdisi, “The Scholastic Method,” 650ff; Lapidus, *A History*, 82–90.

⁵⁵ Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 149; ‘Iyāḍ, *Madārik*, 352.

⁵⁶ ‘Iyāḍ, *Madārik*, 352. Al-Khushanī reports that Ibn Ṭālib had his own circle of *munāẓara* at his home. He was jailed twice by ‘Irāqī judges, the second time by order of Ibn ‘Abdūn, Ibn al-Haytham’s teacher. For Ibn Ṭālib’s biography, see Ibn Nājī, *Ma‘ālim al-īmān*, vol. 2, 159–174.

⁵⁷ Sahl al-Warrāq, quoted in al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:115; For Sahl al-Warrāq, see *Riyāḍ*, 2:489–94.

⁵⁸ ‘Iyāḍ, *Madārik*, 71.

biographical dictionaries in order to glorify this staunch defender of the Mālikī tradition and to celebrate and legitimise their own status.

However, those aspects of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's thought and his career, that did not conform to the Mālikī image of their collective past, as they reconstructed it in the Fāṭimid period, were gradually erased from their collective memory.⁵⁹ His challenges to the doctrines of various schools and sects, his critical commentary on others' works, and his rejection of Mālikī traditionalism and legal conformism (*taqlīd*, for which Saḥnūn's associates censured him) are not emphasised. His biographers, although generously praising him for his piety, admit that his popularity was mainly due to his debates with the Ismā'īlīs rather than his scholarly pedigree. By traditional standards, for example, "he had spent little time collecting written traditions and transmitting [them]."⁶⁰ Ibn al-Ḥaddād's apparent Shāfi'ī leanings also did not help to advance his reputation among his Mālikī contemporaries.⁶¹ Is it plausible, then, that Ibn al-Ḥaddād's preference for rational investigations (*naẓar*) and disputations (*munāẓara*) was the reason for his neglect in transmitting the opinions of Mālik and other authorities, which constituted legal texts?⁶² Was this another reason for the discord between himself and the other students of Saḥnūn? Given Ibn al-Ḥaddād's ambiguous position, then, it is not surprising that only his debates in later life, which rehabilitated his Mālikī reputation, are prominently emphasised in the biographical dictionaries.

Al-Khushanī, who wrote about forty years after Ibn al-Ḥaddād's death, quoted his *munāẓarāt* with the Fāṭimid *dā'īs* in full, probably from the account that was written and circulated by the author (i.e. Ibn al-Ḥaddād). Ibn al-Ḥaddād was just one scholar amongst many who debated with the Fāṭimids *dā'īs*, and the outcome of his debate does not seem to

⁵⁹ On the "reconstruction of the past," selectivity of individual memory, and relationship between continual reproduction of memory and the perpetuation of identity, see M. Halbwach, *On Collective Memory*, 46-51.

⁶⁰ Al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 148: "*kāna qalīl al-ishtighāl bi-jam' al-kutub wa bi-l-riwāya.*"

⁶¹ Ibn al-Ḥaddād apparently wrote a short commentary on al-Shāfi'ī and sent it to his prominent student Abū Ibrāhīm Ismā'īl b. Yaḥyā al-Muzanī (d. 878) in Egypt, which is then cited as his refutation of al-Shāfi'ī by Mālikīs. However, in the introductory passage of this letter quoted by al-Khushanī Ibn al-Ḥaddād complains about the intellectual climate in Qayrawān. He was close to the Shāfi'īs of Qayrawān and was considered as inclined towards their *madhhab*. For the quote, see al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 150. Also, note the inherent resentment of the Mālikīs towards the Shāfi'īs, which led to clashes in Egypt, for instance. See, Abu'l-'Arab, *Kitāb al-Miḥan*, 337-38; Bennison, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires*, 229.

⁶² al-Dabbāgh, *Ma'ālīm*, 295.

have made any impact at the time, as one can judge by the course of the events. The Fāṭimids gradually imposed what they believed to be the correct practice in the domains of law and ritual. The importance of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's disputations begins with their transmission and reception first in Ifrīqiya and then in al-Andalus, which must have been received well by the Mālikī Umayyads and their supporters. Similarly, about 150 years after the time of the disputations, Abū Bakr al-Mālikī lionises Ibn al-Ḥaddād as a defender of the tradition against the Fāṭimids. In my view, al-Mālikī's account is the first hagiography of Ibn al-Ḥaddād in a series of similar compilations over subsequent centuries. Similarly, for later biographers like Qaḍī 'Iyāḍ and al-Dabbāgh Ibn al-Ḥaddād is no less than Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, in his heroic "defence of the *sunna*" in the face of grave danger. (Even in modern Salafī narratives, Ibn al-Ḥaddād joins the list of staunch defenders of Sunnī traditionalism). A classical text of this kind is the apocryphal *Kitāb al-Ḥayda* attributed to al-Kinānī, which according to Josef van Ess belongs to a mode of Ḥanbalī historiography which celebrates heroes (the other mode celebrates martyrs).⁶³ Similar to al-Kinānī, the author of the *Kitāb al-Ḥayda*, a marginal local figure, the aged Ibn al-Ḥaddād became a symbol of Mālikī resistance to the Fāṭimids,⁶⁴ a Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal of their own, a figure that the Qayrawānīs had known about and drew inspiration from.⁶⁵

The way that Ibn al-Ḥaddād's disputations with rationalist theologians and the Ismā'īlīs are presented in the Mālikī *ṭabaqāt* also illustrates the function of these biographical dictionaries as promoting a "traditionalist mode of argument for the legitimate authority" of a legal school.⁶⁶ As George Makdisi wrote, the function of the *ṭabaqāt* was "to distinguish between those who had the necessary knowledge to be qualified as authoritative, and those

⁶³ Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 3, 502-8 (referred to in El Omari, "Kitāb al-Ḥayda: the Historical Significance of an Apocryphal Text" in Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman (ed.) *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture and Religion*, 423.

⁶⁴ However, al-Ḥaddād's "marginality" should be related only to his training in *fiqh*. He evidently studied some law like most learned people, but this would not make him an expert. Nevertheless, he played an essential role in boosting the morals of the Mālikīs when they faced unprecedented challenges in the aftermath of the Fāṭimid revolution.

⁶⁵ I discuss cultural memory and reconstruction of the past in ch. 2. For the construction of Ibn Ḥanbal's biography as "pious fiction," see M. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 107-153.

⁶⁶ Stewart, in *Disagreement of the Jurists*, xxii. See also Turner, *Inquisition*, 140-150.

who did not,” aimed at empowering “a certain group of scholars to the exclusion of others.”⁶⁷ Thus, despite the fact that Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s personal record was not unproblematic from a traditionalist standpoint, the biographers managed to adorn it with hagiographical details and incorporate it into their narratives. However, even the record of the debates was problematic, since it revealed that the sessions were conducted on more equal terms than Mālikī biographers were ready to admit.

On the one hand, they describe *munāẓarāt* as part of the *miḥna* that the Fāṭimids exerted upon the ‘*ulamā*’ of Qayrawān. In support of this, they report that the sessions were administered unjustly and that it was clear from the outset that the Fāṭimids were not ready to accept the views of their opponents, but only to harass them.⁶⁸ On the other hand, celebrated accounts of these and other debates between the Mālikī scholars and the *dā’īs* suggest that the ‘*ulamā*’ of Qayrawān themselves viewed the *munāẓarāt* sessions as an opportunity “to defend” the religion of God against the “heretics”: in other words, this was a suitable response to the *miḥna* and an opportunity to negotiate the status of the tradition and its bearers, the *ahl al-‘ilm* (religious scholars).⁶⁹

Furthermore, as George Makdisi observed, it was precisely the ‘Abbāsīd *miḥna* that provided the rationale for the traditionalists’ compilation of the *ṭabaqāt*, which was to defy government control, and “to exclude the Rationalist theologians.”⁷⁰ He also pointed out “the rise of theological Rationalism in the form of Mu‘tazilism” and the “influx of foreign religious and philosophical influences into Islam,” which coincided with the rise of *ṭabaqāt* in the second/eighth century, as potential stimuli for the rise of the *ṭabaqāt*.⁷¹ However, there was always more at stake than the question of “orthodoxy,” “authoritative knowledge” and “legitimate authority.” Imagining and legitimising a given scholarly community and promoting its social and political interests was one of the functions of the biographical dictionaries. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Ibn al-Ḥaddād should be applauded and

⁶⁷ Makdisi, “*Ṭabaqāt* – Biography,” 392.

⁶⁸ al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ-al-Nufūs*, 2:60.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2: 75.

⁷⁰ Makdisi, “*Ṭabaqāt*” – Biography,” 392.

⁷¹ Ibid., 374-75.

remembered by the tradition for his *munāẓarāt* — even though that very tradition did not endorse disputations.

The Fāṭimid *Daʿwa* and the Prosopographical Tradition

The fact that the class of Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs* flourished under the patronage of the Fāṭimid Empire for over two hundred and sixty years and did not to compile a single work of *ṭabaqāt*-history/prosopography of their colleagues, teachers and famous predecessors is puzzling. This absence of the genre cannot be due to the lack of scholarly networks and learned community, as was the case, for instance, for the Idrīsīd Maghrib.⁷² Indeed, Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī scholars and *dāʿīs* were numerous, urbanised and otherwise prolific. Unlike *ṭabaqāt*, the writing of *sīra* – biography of one revered individual, an imam, a *dāʿī*, or master was common, which may indicate that the class of learned people who subscribed to Fāṭimid teachings did not come to view themselves and their role in production and transmitting knowledge in the same way as the Sunnī *ʿulamāʾ* did.⁷³ As Maribel Fierro rightly observes

Biographical dictionaries of specialists in the different branches of religious knowledge are an indispensable element in the religious and intellectual life of Sunni societies. In a Sunni context, the transmission and preservation of religious knowledge are not formally institutionalised or hierarchised, and the state is not responsible for the creation of religious elites or legal experts. Lacking institutional mechanisms, one of the ways in which the *ʿulamāʾ* articulated both their existence as a group and their relationship with state and society was the writing of biographical dictionaries in which the memory of the members of such groups, their knowledge, their teaching networks and their political and social practices were preserved. Biographical dictionaries of religious scholars were written by the religious scholars themselves, not only for use within their own circles, but also to remind the rulers of their crucial social role.⁷⁴

As for the Ismāʿīlīs, according to Fierro, the dependency of the scholars on the authoritative and infallible imam-caliph, and, thus, the lack of a need for a “democratic” and horizontal (my words) consensus about the legitimacy of a jurist, or a scholar dispensed with the need for

⁷² Fierro, “Why and How Do Religious Scholars Write about Themselves?” 416-17.

⁷³ Ibid., 418-19; Fierro, “Codifying the Law,” 110.

⁷⁴ Fierro, “Codifying the Law,” 109. See also, Makdisi, “‘Ṭabaqāt’ – Biography.”

biographical dictionaries.⁷⁵ This is a valid argument, which rests on previous assumptions about the function of the *ṭabaqāt*, that is “to identify the authoritative scholars,” as argued by Makdisi,⁷⁶ but in itself insufficient to explain the lack of any effort in this direction. Similarly, this does not explain the absence of *ṭabaqāt* for other groups during the same period, such as five centuries of inactivity for Ḥanafī jurists, and seven centuries for Twelver Shīʿīs, among others.⁷⁷ For Makdisi, who emphasised that Ḥanbalīs and Mālikīs, both staunch traditionalist groups, sustained continuous interest in compiling *ṭabaqāt* beginning with the late third/eighth and early fourth/ninth centuries respectively, this was an indication of a close link between “Traditionalism” and *ṭabaqāt* genre.⁷⁸ Narrowing the function of the *ṭabaqāt* to determining authority and competence of scholars, Makdisi also downplayed the interest of other groups in compiling biographical dictionaries, including *kalām* theologians, poets, Qurʾān reciters and others. Conversely, Tarif Khalidi dismissed the primacy of *ḥadīth* and concerns of authenticity and authority and included a wider range of “literary interests,” such as pre-Islamic “genealogy and chain of poetic transmission,” early Islamic “short biographies” of the companions of the Prophet, the *ʿulamāʾ* and other prominent people, and only lastly the “lists of [*ḥadīth*] transmitters” as the precursors to biographical dictionaries.⁷⁹

Wadad al-Qadi also argues that the self-consciousness of the *ʿulamāʾ* as a class, their exclusive role in knowledge transmission and their exclusion from political histories — namely chronicles played a key role in the development of the *ṭabaqāt* genre.⁸⁰ If we accept this argument, then the reason the *dāʿīs* did not compose *ṭabaqāt* is because they felt connected to the state and not necessarily in opposition to it? However, it is obvious from the writings of the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* that they indeed conceived themselves as a group with elaborated rules of initiation and hierarchy. Despite their multifaceted roles and involvement in non-

⁷⁵ Fierro, “Codifying the Law,” 109.

⁷⁶ Makdisi, “‘Ṭabaqāt’ – Biography.”

⁷⁷ Ibid., 383-85.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 388-89.

⁷⁹ Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 205. This view is also endorsed by M. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The heirs of the prophets in the age of al-Maʾmūn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

⁸⁰ Wadad al-Qadi, “Biographical Dictionaries as the Scholars’ Alternative History of the Muslim Community,” in Gerhard Endress (ed.), *Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopaedic Activities in Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 23-75.

scholarly activities, such as political and diplomatic missions, they were also externally identified as *dā'ī* (pl. *du'āt*) for several centuries. Thus, is it more plausible to suggest that the Fāṭimids view of knowledge and their lack of interest in the systematic transmission of narrations and in scholastic approach to traditional Islamic sciences made the composition of *ṭabaqāt* works somehow pointless? A remark from imam-caliph al-Manṣūr reveals the Fāṭimid stance:

We have seen *you classify people into categories* (*ṭabaqāt*); yet, he [i.e. Abū Bakr] was not in any category that entitles him to be known by any virtue, be it religious or worldly.⁸¹

It is evident that al-Manṣūr bi-llāh associated compiling *ṭabaqāt* and claiming religious authority on behalf of the scholarly community with the (Sunnī) jurists: “The consensus of the partisans of one faction on a person or a group of people does not give them the right to impose their will.”⁸² Even though compiling biographical dictionaries in itself seemed like a harmless activity, challenging the caliphate on behalf of an imagined community scattered “from Samarqand to al-Andalus,” as al-Manṣūr put it, was objectionable in his view. Therefore, al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, too, marshalled Shī'ī *ḥadīth* against “those individuals who claimed to represent and speak for the majority.”⁸³

These political considerations aside, one might agree with Lokhandwala, that it was the distinct “attitude of the Ismailis towards the Sunna of the Prophet [that] spared them from the laborious occupation” of *ḥadīth* criticism.⁸⁴ However, as Hamdani rightly observes, this was not a matter of convenience, but because of the Fāṭimids different approach to religious knowledge, namely their preference for the Qur'ān and its authoritative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) by the Ismā'īlī imams.⁸⁵ Even in the field of Qur'ānic exegesis, the Ismā'īlīs did not follow the scholastic approach, even in later centuries, perhaps with the notable exception of the quasi-Isma'īlī theologian – ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī.⁸⁶ Incidentally, Hamdani also provides an answer to the question why the Ismā'īlī scholars did not compose their own *ṭabaqāt*:

⁸¹ *Tathbīt al-imāma*, 26 (Arabic text, 15). I have slightly modified Makarem's translation. Emphasis is mine.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 119 (Arabic text, 124).

⁸³ Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 84. See, al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, 1: 95-98.

⁸⁴ S.T. Lokhandwala cited in Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 85.

⁸⁵ Hamdani, *Between Revolution*, 85-86.

⁸⁶ ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Tafsīr al-Shahrastānī al-musammā mafātīh al-asrār wa maṣābih al-abrār*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī Ādharshab, 2 vols (Tehran: Mirās-i maktūb, 2008).

Unlike Sunni legal schools, which increasingly granted Prophetic *ḥadīths* a privileged status (and likewise to their compilers, historians, biographers, philologists, etc), Ismaili *usul* attempts to restore the primacy of the Qur'an as a source of guidance.⁸⁷

As Hamdani further observes, the Ismā'īlīs gave preference to allegorical interpretation over philological and historical interpretation, which is “truer to the metahistorical and homilitic nature of the Qur'anic discourse” (*sic*).⁸⁸ Therefore, the elaborate “science of *ḥadīth*” becomes largely irrelevant and so does the “science of *rijāl*” or the methods of establishing trustworthy narrators. Thus, if the *raison d'être* of the *ṭabaqāt* works was to establish the legitimacy of a *madhhab*, by legitimising the representatives of that *madhhab*, as argued by Makdisi and Stewart (above), the whole enterprise would have seemed irrelevant within the Ismā'īlī paradigm, because there is always a shortcut to the ultimate source of knowledge through the Present Imam.

However, we have also pointed out the social functions of the *ṭabaqāt*, which has most convincingly been argued by Michael Cooperson in his *Classical Arabic Biography*, where he draws a sharper line between history (*tārīkh*, *akhbār*) and biography (*tarājim*, *ṭabaqāt*). Cooperson, emphasises the function of biography in bolstering the claims of various social groups to “heirship of the prophet,” among them the '*ulamā*' and draws attention to “the power of biography in creating and sustaining of communities of faith.”⁸⁹ Thus, for the Ismā'īlīs, only the imams were the rightful claimant to the heirship of the Prophet, whose biographies and deeds probably took precedence over that of the *dā'īs* and scholars.

It is worth noting that Nizārī Ismā'īlīs do not have religious clergy, to the present day, unlike Twelver Shī'īs, and unlike Bohra Ismā'īlīs, whose Imam went into concealment (*satr*) delegating religious knowledge to scholars and *dā'īs*. Thus, free from the conundrum of negotiating with the authoritative Imam, the Ṭayyibī Ismā'īlī *dā'īs* focused on transmitting the intellectual tradition that originated with the Fātimids for centuries. Nevertheless, the *dā'īs*' inability to consider modifying the authoritative law formulated by al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān up to the present day inevitably created rift within the community with progressive members

⁸⁷ Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 85.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 86.

⁸⁹ Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 106.

calling for legal reforms.⁹⁰ As for the Nizārīs, the presence and the authority of the Imam have made the clergy redundant, even inconvenient, unless working under the direct supervision of the Imam.

What was the implication of these two different approaches to religious tradition and revelation? As argued above, the intellectual current behind the rise of the Fāṭimid dynasty in North Africa, “Shī‘ī politico-intellectual activism” had already recognised Sunnī traditionalism as its doctrinal nemesis.⁹¹ On the other hand, the early Fāṭimid state had an inherent internal tension between its own scholarly class, the “semi-independent” activists (*dā‘īs*), and the Ismā‘īlī imams’ claim to superior knowledge. The head of the *da‘wa*, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān devotes many sessions to explain to followers how “the knowledge of the Imams” could be channelled through the agents of the *da‘wa*. In other words, while the Imams were supposed to be the legatees of the Prophet for Islamic knowledge, the scholars and *dā‘īs* were the ones who actually composed doctrinal and exegetical works for the *da‘wa*. Writing about the Fāṭimid period, Bar-Asher notes that “in Ismaili Shi‘ism [the authority to interpret the text] was implicitly delegated to preachers (*du‘āt*) despite the Imam’s presence.”⁹² The heads of the *da‘wa* were responsible for the content and quality of the works produced by the agents of the *da‘wa*, who were in turn accountable to the imam-caliph. This “vertical” model contrasts with the “horizontal” character of Mālikī knowledge transmission and group identity with individuals connected across society and generations. The class of independent religious scholars (*‘ulamā’*, or *fuqahā’* of the *‘amma* - commonality), however, were theoretically redundant in Ismā‘īlism.⁹³

The Fāṭimids also rejected the established approaches to religious knowledge and learning practices in Qayrawān, which were centred on the transmission of narrations, as superfluous. The Fāṭimid experiences in Ifrīqiya saw the dynasty and its learned class first

⁹⁰ Poonawala, “The Evolution,” 295, 341.

⁹¹ I use the term “Sunnī” here in a sense that it was used in 3rd/9th – century Ifrīqiya, referring to traditionalists “Medinese” scholars with the exclusion of the “Irāqīs” and speculative theologians.

⁹² Bar-Asher, “Outlines of Early Ismaili-Fatimid Qur’an Exegesis,” in Sajjad Rizvi and Annabel Keeler, eds., *The Spirit and the Letter: Approaches to the Esoteric Interpretation of the Qur’an*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2016), 193.

⁹³ Fierro: “The Isma‘īlī caliph, on the contrary, was an infallible imām and as such his knowledge of the law could not be surpassed. In other words, at least theoretically, in Isma‘īlism there was no need for jurists or interpreters of the law.” “Codifying the Law,” 109, also 114.

reject, then provide an alternative to the *fiqh*-centred learning paradigm of Mālikī traditionalists, which culminated in attempts to codify the law, and put an end to the “disagreement,” once and for all.⁹⁴ What was the alternative hierarchy of knowledge and society that the Fāṭimids envisioned if they scorned *fiqh*-centred learning? The Fāṭimids, of course, gave preference to allegorical interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of the sacred sources of religion, the science of the *bāṭin*, only upholding a practical corpus of the *ẓāhir* needed for the functioning of the society.⁹⁵

The Fāṭimid *Da’wa* and the Philosophical Tradition

It is important to examine some key Fāṭimid sources to explore the relationship between the Fāṭimid *da’wa* and the *fuqahā’*, the philosophical and rational subjects in the *da’wa* curriculum and the inter-*da’wa* dynamics. The career of the Maghribī *dā’ī* Ibn al-Haytham and his *Kitāb al-munāẓarāt* is a suitable choice in this regards for this case study for several reasons. Apart from being an eye-witness to the formation of the Fāṭimid state in Ifrīqiya and his seniority in the *da’wa*, he was a native of Qayrawān and lived there until the end of his life, except perhaps for the civil war period. He was also close to the revolutionary *dā’īs* and the Ḥanafis of Qayrawān, whose members were linked to the Aghlabid government. Most importantly because he apparently did not hold any official position in the government, his account should balance the works of al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān and Ja‘far b. Manṣūr, which represent the official position of the Fāṭimid caliphate. We learn from the chronicles that a surprisingly substantial number of *dā’īs* were purged on a number of occasions.⁹⁶ Here, in Ibn al-Haytham’s person, we find a sympathiser, if not a spokesperson for this group.

Apart from Shī‘ī esotericism, the early Ismā‘īlī *dā’īs* took an interest in philosophy and logic, which at the time were limited to the texts translated from Greek. Studying the so-called ancient sciences (*‘ulūm al-awā’il*), namely the works of Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Ptolemy, and Galen was fairly common for educated Muslims. The Ismā‘īlī *dā’īs*, however, made a

⁹⁴ See al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, introduction to his *Da‘ā’im al-islām*, 1; Fierro, “Codifying the Law,” 112.

⁹⁵ On this, generally see, Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*; Fierro, “Codifying the Law.” It is worthwhile to note that because they faced similar challenges from the religious elites, the Almohad caliphs also came up with similar to the Fāṭimids solutions. See, *ibid.*, 112-118.

⁹⁶ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān*; al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ*, cited above.

distinctive contribution in the reception of philosophy in the Islamic world. For instance, the authors of the encyclopaedic *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Epistles of the Brethren of Purity), who are often identified as Ismā'īlīs, may have even included the three hidden Ismā'īlī Imams, as maintained by Abbas Hamdani. Proposing an earlier dating for the *Rasā'il*, Hamdani contended that “the Brethren of Purity were a group of intellectuals working as a think-tank for the Fāṭimid Da'wa and preaching an activist philosophy of change needed in the Muslim world.”⁹⁷

Other scholars consider this view as “extreme” and suggest AD 970s as a more probable date for the composition of the *Rasā'il*.⁹⁸ While the Ismā'īlī authors of the post-Fāṭimid period appropriated them as their own heritage and maintained their pre-Fāṭimid origin, the questions of dating and authorship of the *Rasā'il* have not yet been fully resolved.⁹⁹ Their link to the Fāṭimid *da'wa* has also been challenged, for instance, by Madelung who asserted that, rejecting the claim of 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī, “the Ismailis in Basra recognised an Imam residing in concealment in Khurāsān,” who summoned the Brethren of Purity “to seek to restore Islam and purge it from its corrupted state by studying Qur'ānic revelation in the light of the teaching of the ancient philosophers.”¹⁰⁰ Whatever the case may be, a similar spirit

⁹⁷ Abbas Hamdani, “Brethren of Purity, a Secret Society for the Establishment of the Fāṭimid Caliphate: New Evidence for the Early Dating of their Encyclopaedia,” in M. Barrucand (ed.), *L'Egypte Fatimide: son art et son histoire*, 73-82, 81. See also, Abbas Hamdani, “Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and the Brethren of Purity,” *IJMES* (1978): 354-53. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār talks about al-Zanjānī and his group in Basra, who according to Hamdani were involved in the Fāṭimid *da'wa*.

⁹⁸ Godefroid de Callataÿ, *Ikhwan al-Safa: A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam* (Oxford:Oneworld, 2005), 10. For a more detailed discussion and references, see, Ebstein's *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-'Arabī and the Ismā'īlī Tradition*, 28-32; Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 234-47.

⁹⁹ Hamdani, “Brethren,” 81; Callataÿ, 3-11. For a more recent and detailed exposition of the arguments for and against the Ismā'īlī connection of the *Rasā'il*, as well as more detailed bibliography, see the article by Liana Saif, “Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's Religious Reform and Magic: Beyond the Isma'ili Hypothesis,” *JIS* (2018), 1-38, where she argues for an “occultist” and more ecumenical commitment of the authors of the *Rasā'il*, “which is consonant with Zaydi and Ibadi attitudes toward the contentious issues of imamate, caliphate, and *wilāya/walāya*” (35-36). Overall, Saif declares the arguments for Ismā'īlī authorship and content of the *Rasā'il* “unconvincing” in favour of a non-sectarian “Third Way” (*al-sunna al-thālitha*), 4-5.

¹⁰⁰ Madelung, “The Theology of the Founder Imam of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā',” *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread*, Booklet of the Conference at the IIS organised by Orkhan Mir-Kasymov, 19-21 October 2016.

can be discerned in the discussions of Ibn al-Haytham, who also places the ancient philosophers among “the followers of the prophets” and monotheists.¹⁰¹

The influence of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ and the broader Neo-Platonism in al-Andalus, and on the thought of a propagator of “philosophical esotericism” — Ibn Masarra has been a subject of a recent detailed study by Michael Ebstein.¹⁰² According to Ebstein, “although Ibn Masarra was by no means a Shī‘ī sympathiser or an Ismā‘īlī, the similarities between his Neoplatonic writings and those produced in the Ismā‘īlī Shī‘ī milieu may account for the persecution of his followers and for his negative image in most mediaeval Arabic sources.”¹⁰³ Other similar currents were branded as branded as “*bāṭinī*” movements and suppressed by the Umayyads. Even much later, during the reign of the Umayyad al-Ḥakam II (r. 350-366/961-978) a man named Abu’l-Khayr, was accused of espousing radical Shī‘ī beliefs and propagating the cause of the Fāṭimids by a large number of Mālikī *fuqahā’* in Cordoba, and crucified.¹⁰⁴ As mentioned, Ibn al-Haytham also had been on a mission to al-Andalus and directly took part in the anti-Umayyad campaigns of Ibn Ḥafṣūn, but unfortunately, the account of his adventures in al-Andalus has not been preserved. On the other hand, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Ibn Masarra spent ample time in Fāṭimid Qayrawān, which perhaps explains where he may have been influenced by Ismā‘īlī thought. Overall, despite the paucity of information, it is now plausible to assume that both the Brethren of Purity and Ismā‘īlī Neo-Platonism were very much present in the intellectual life of Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya. This is significant because, as discussed above, it highlights the contrast with the Mālikī *fuqahā’* of Qayrawān, who were extremely hostile to philosophy, logic, and to dialectical disputations.

As for the Fāṭimids, it is generally thought that the *da‘wa* officially endorsed so-called “philosophical Ismā‘īlism” only after moving to Egypt, apparently in an attempt to appeal to

¹⁰¹ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 138-139 (tr.). It is also noteworthy that Ibn al-Haytham considered the Ṣabians of Ḥarrān among the ‘people of law.’ See, *ibid.*, 140.

¹⁰² Ebstein’s *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Ismā‘īlī Tradition* is the most detailed work on the influence of the Ikhwān and Ismā‘īlī Neo-Platonism on philosophical and mystical thought in al-Andalus, specifically on Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-‘Arabī. For a description of Ibn Masarra as “the Neo-Platonic mystic-philosopher”, see, *idem*, 51-53.

¹⁰³ Ebstein, “Ibn Masarra,” *EI*3.

¹⁰⁴ Abu’l-Aṣbagh ‘Īsā b. Sahl al-Asadī (d. 486/1093, *al-A‘lām bi-nawāzil al-aḥkām*, cited in Fathī Zaghrūt, *al-‘Alāqāt bayn al-Umawīyyīn wa’l-Fāṭimīyyīn fi’l-Andalus wa’l-shimāl al-Ifrīqī 300-350h*. (Cairo: Dār al-Tawāzī‘ wa’l-Nashr al-Islāmiyya, 2006), 432-37.

the more philosophically oriented followers in the East.¹⁰⁵ Far less is known about the reception of philosophical thought, particularly Neo-Platonism, during the Ifrīqiyān period, except for some disapproving remarks by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān about the Eastern *dā‘īs*’ philosophical doctrines,¹⁰⁶ Thus, one must surmise that the philosophical tradition of the East, which according to some scholars played an essential role in the genesis of the Fāṭimid state,¹⁰⁷ was not explicitly endorsed by the Fāṭimid court throughout the Ifrīqiyān period.¹⁰⁸ Al-Nu‘mān’s reports, however, should be treated with caution because of his probable bias against philosophy. From what he reports in the *Majālis*, it appears that al-Mu‘izz did not dismiss the philosophical arguments of the eastern *dā‘īs* without engaging with them, although al-Nu‘mān interprets his scrutiny of these ideas as rejection. In fact, it appears that al-Mu‘izz’s was attacking pseudo-philosophers.

Looking at the works of other *dā‘īs* active in Ifrīqiya, particularly Ja‘far b. Maṣṣūr and to some extent Ibn al-Haytham, reveals that the Iranian *dā‘īs* were not the only group interested in bringing philosophy and religion together. Philosophy was not new in Ifrīqiya.¹⁰⁹ The adoption of philosophical teachings, therefore, should not be seen merely as a result of pressure from the Eastern *dā‘īs*, with whom the caliphate was in constant contact, but more correctly as a result of the development of earlier doctrines within the intellectual milieu of Ifrīqiya.¹¹⁰ An extensive study by Ebstein, which argued for affinities and links between philosophical and mystical thought in al-Andalus and Fāṭimid-Ismā‘īlī doctrines and mission,

¹⁰⁵ Daftary, “The Ismaili Da‘wa Outside the Fatimid Dawla” in M. Barrucand (ed.), *L’Egypte Fatimide*, 29-43, 32, 40; H. Halm, *Empire*, 297; Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*, 34. In a later article, however, Daftary notes that “the Neoplatonized Ismaili cosmology, developed in the Iranian lands, was endorsed by the central headquarters of the Ismaili *da‘wa* in North Africa in the time of the Fatimid caliph-imam (953-975) replacing the earlier mythological cosmology of the Ismailis.” See his “Intellectual Life among the Ismailis: An Overview”, in F. Daftary (ed.), *Intellectual Traditions in Islam* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2000), 97.

¹⁰⁶ See al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 134-135, 374 where al-Mu‘izz disapproves of some philosophising *dā‘īs*.

¹⁰⁷ Abbas Hamdani, “Brethren of Purity, a Secret Society for the Establishment of the Fāṭimid Caliphate: New Evidence for the Early Dating of their Encyclopaedia,” in *L’Egypt Fatimide*, 73-82, 81.

¹⁰⁸ Halm, *Empire*, 297.

¹⁰⁹ Ishāq b. ‘Imrān (d. 296/908), a Baghdādī Muslim physician, is said to have been the first person to introduce philosophy to Ifrīqiya during the reign of Ziyādat Allāh b. Aghlab, who had invited him to Ifrīqiya, but eventually killed and crucified him “on the same trunk” as Ibrāhīm al-Fazārī, the ‘Irāqī rationalist who was accused of *ta‘ṭīl* (denying God’s attributes). See Ibn Juljul, *Ṭabaqāt al-atibbā’*, 84-87. For Ibrāhīm al-Fazārī, see, idem, p. 87.n. 22; and, al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 220.

¹¹⁰ David Hollenberg, “Interpretations,” 335.

also concluded that “Ismā‘īlīs in North Africa seem to have taken an interest in Neo-Platonic philosophy long before its official adoption by Fāṭimid caliph-*imām* al-Mu‘izz in the third quarter of the tenth century.”¹¹¹ One can generally agree with Ebstein’s thesis that Neo-Platonic ideas had gained a strong foothold among many other groups, especially those with an esoteric and philosophical outlook, and that Ismā‘īlī thought played an influential role in the development of mystical and philosophical traditions in North Africa and al-Andalus.¹¹² What sets the Fāṭimid *dā‘īs* in Ifrīqiya apart from the Eastern Ismā‘īlī Neo-Platonists is the existence of the Fāṭimid *dawla* and a politically active and relevant Ismā‘īlī imam.¹¹³ Thus, all interpretations of religion, whether philosophical or cosmological had to serve the political agenda of the state.

The Ismā‘īlī *dā‘īs* accommodated the Greek disciplines of philosophy and logic within their overarching universalist framework of knowledge. Despite the tension between the increasing need for adapting to the prevalent Islamic knowledge paradigm and accommodating the authoritative teaching of the Imams, as well as navigating sectarian politics, the *dā‘īs* ensured the survival of the philosophical and esoteric teachings that inspired their movement. In addition, the recognition of the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* dimensions of knowledge allowed the *dā‘īs* to accept the validity of philosophy and individual reason while upholding the ultimate authority of revelation and the Ismā‘īlī imams. The persistence of this worldview within the early Fāṭimid intellectual programme can be observed in the specific case of logical reasoning and dialectical disputation (*munāẓara*), as is evident from Ibn al-Haytham’s

¹¹¹ Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 238. Ebstein, asserts that “Ismā‘īlīs played a crucial role in forming the distinctive type of Neoplatonism,” were “instrumental in passing Neoplatonic materials from the eastern parts of the Islamic world to the west” and that “during the 10th century, Neoplatonic philosophy was widespread among the Ismā‘īlīs of North Africa and Egypt and that, during that time, it was even officially adopted by the Fāṭimī Empire.” See, idem, 75-76. A number of scholars also support this hypothesis. See, idem, 76, notes 149-150.

¹¹² On the Ismā‘īlī Neo-Platonism’s influence on Jewish and Muslim mystical thought in North Africa and al-Andalus, see M. Ebstein, “The Word of God and the Divine Will: Ismā‘īlī Traces in Andalusī Mysticism,” *JSAI* 39 (2012), 247-302.

¹¹³ See, Hollenberg, “The End of Times,” 334-335. This meant that the interpretation of ancient Greek philosophy had to be adjusted and approved by the Imam of the time, which is why we may be dealing with two philosophising schools, one of the Eastern Ismā‘īlī *dā‘īs* and one of the Western *dā‘īs*. See Hollenberg, “The Empire Strikes Back: Fatimid Ismaili *Ta’wīl* (Allegories) and the Mysteries of the Ancient Greeks,” in Daftary and Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi‘i Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 135-47.

account of his debates and discussions with the leaders of the Fāṭimid revolution in Ifrīqiya.¹¹⁴ Therefore, a new interpretation of his motivations for writing the account of his discussions with the fallen Eastern *dāʿīs*, needs to take this context into account.

The Writing of the *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt* in Times of Turmoil

The first disputations staged by the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* made a strong impression on the scholars of Qayrawān, but there is little evidence that similar provocative tactics continued. Sumaiya Hamdani argues that the Fāṭimid state became increasingly concerned with translating Ismāʿīlī doctrines into a “working framework in a Sunni setting,” a necessity that gave rise to the flourishing career of the “legal-minded” *dāʿī* al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān.¹¹⁵ In fact, though, this was not a sudden departure from the old messianic doctrines that had emphasised the role of the Mahdī-Qāʾim as the “lord of resurrection” and “the last imam and speaker [*nāṭiq*],” but a reform that began with al-Mahdī himself, partly in order to control the unrealistic expectations of his followers.¹¹⁶ Many *dāʿīs* were reportedly executed for upholding controversial doctrines, such as believing in the divinity of the imam-caliph and abandoning the *sharīʿa* — the notorious *ghuluww* tendencies.¹¹⁷ Instead, the imamate was no longer to be understood as an awaited event but as a “permanent institution” — a major departure from previous messianic beliefs and in line with the Weberian notion of the “routinization of charisma.”¹¹⁸ This doctrinal turn towards institutionalisation was naturally reflected in teaching and curricula, as well. Esoteric doctrines were taught in private sessions to the

¹¹⁴ For the role of the brothers in establishing the Fāṭimid state and the events that lead to their execution, see, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Ifṭitāḥ al-daʿwa*, ed. and tr. H. Haji, *Founding the Fāṭimid State: The Rise of the Fāṭimid Empire* (London and New York, 2006); P. Walker, *The Advent*, 1-59.

¹¹⁵ Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 53. Walker also observes that the *munāẓara* appears to have lost its importance after the revolutionary period with the exception of the vizier Ibn Killis’s *munāẓarāt*: Walker, “Fatimid Institutions,” 180-182.

¹¹⁶ See Madelung, “Das Imamat,” 53ff. (translation: 72ff.) for pre-Fāṭimid doctrines, and 66-67 (translation: 84-85) for al-Mahdī’s reforms.

¹¹⁷ Halm, *Empire*, 247-50. *Ghuluww* (lit. to transgress a boundary) was a pejorative term to denote Shīʿī tendencies to exaggerate about the qualities and powers of Shīʿī imams, such as attributing divinity and supernatural qualities to the imams. For an introduction and bibliography for *ghuluww* and *ghulāt* (lit. the immoderates, those who maintain these extreme Shīʿī views,” see Sean W. Anthony, “Ghulāt (extremist Shīʿīs),” *EI3*.

¹¹⁸ Madelung, “Das Imamat,” 58 (translation: 77). For “routinization of charisma”, see Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1:246-49.

faithful Ismāʿīlīs, while lectures in law were delivered to the public in the mosques of Qayrawān and al-Mahdiyya.

It is against this shift in state policies and new pressures on the *dāʿīs* that Ibn al-Haytham's nostalgic recollection of the early disputations should be analysed. During the reign of the first two caliphs, the Fāṭimid state had apparently pursued more aggressive policies towards non-Ismāʿīlī subjects and imposed some restrictions on the activities of the Qayrawānī jurists. Some militant scholars, who resented the Fāṭimids' enforcement of Shīʿī traditions, joined the rebellion of Abū Yazīd and several were killed in battle. However, after the third caliph al-Manṣūr bi-llāh (r. 946-953) defeated the rebels and restored Fāṭimid rule, he conceded that non-Ismāʿīlīs would not be obliged to perform Shīʿī rituals.¹¹⁹ The activities of the *dāʿīs* were curbed, the exclusive claim of the Fāṭimid imams to knowledge was also downplayed, and the jurists of Qayrawān were allowed to transmit traditions and teach law according to their own schools.¹²⁰ Al-Manṣūr, who also composed a legal compendium, arranged for a teaching circle (*ḥalqa*), ostensibly for the study of Shīʿī law, in the Great Mosque of Qayrawān.¹²¹ Information on this, probably originating in Qayrawān, comes from an anti-Fāṭimid source, the treatise *Tathbīt dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* by the Muʿtazilī judge ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 416/1025).

Ismāʿīl [al-Manṣūr bi-llāh] approached the jurists (*fuqahāʾ*) so that they let him have a study circle (*ḥalqa*) in the mosque dedicated to [the study of law according to] Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad [al-Sadiq]¹²² for his followers (*aṣḥāb*). A group [of them] sat there not mixing with the jurists, and in their circles they were talking about Plato, Ptolemy, and Aristotle. Then people said: “Those are heretics, unbelievers and enemies of the prophets, so what makes this the circle of Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad [al-Ṣādiq]?”¹²³

¹¹⁹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Iftitāḥ*, 233.

¹²⁰ Madelung, “A Treatise on the Imamate,” 69-78, 77. ʿAbd al-Jabbār also admits the leniency of al-Manṣūr towards the Sunnis and reports that he stopped the activities of the *dāʿīs* in *Tathbīt*, 2:602.

¹²¹ The mosque referenced in the quotation below must be the Great Mosque of Qayrawān since such negotiations would have been unnecessary in al-Mahdiyya or al-Manṣūriyya. But such a negotiation would have taken place after restoring Qayrawān to the Fāṭimids in 946.

¹²² The last Shīʿī Imam recognised by both Twelvers and Ismaili Shīʿīs, a major authority in Shīʿī jurisprudence. On him, see Hodgson, “Djaʿfar al-Sādik”; and Robert Gleave, “Jaʿfar al-Sadeq ii. Teachings.” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, XIV/4, 351-356.

¹²³ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 2:603.

While it is difficult to take this report at face value, it is not entirely inconceivable that the *ḥalqa* was not exclusively for the teaching of law and that some enthusiastic *dāʿīs* may have discussed philosophical and esoteric doctrines there. ‘Abd al-Jabbār, who wrote in Baghdād or Rayy (Ray, Iran), did not hesitate to relate fictitious material in order to discredit the Fāṭimids, yet, some of the details he offers had some foundation in reality.¹²⁴ Therefore, one must also be cautious not to discard the “elements of truth” in anti-Fāṭimid “travesties,” as Stern has characterised them.¹²⁵

In fact, the *Munāẓarāt* of Ibn al-Haytham places the ancient philosophers among “the followers of the prophets” and monotheists.¹²⁶ It is also known that al-Manṣūr was familiar with the works of the Greek sages; as was the prolific *dāʿī* Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, whose *Kitāb al-fatarāt waʿl-qirānāt*, written during the time of al-Muʿizz, exhibits clear Neo-Platonic influence.¹²⁷ Since the philosophically-oriented Ibn al-Haytham was the most prominent *dāʿī* in Qayrawān at the time, it is likely that he took part in these teaching sessions at the mosque.¹²⁸ The rest of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s slanderous report support this hypothesis:

Ismāʿīl [al-Manṣūr bi-llāh] had a brother named Yūsuf, who was studying books [of traditions] and inquiring of scholars [about religious knowledge]. He was a virtuous man and used to say: “We are the descendants of the Prophet, but we do not exalt anyone but the philosophers — the enemies of the prophets. Our *dāʿīs* are all but lowly liars, who commit all kind of shameful things. If we were the descendants of the prophets and if we loved the prophets our situation would have been different.” Then he would name the *dāʿīs* one by one and whatever they were

¹²⁴ The bulk of his account comes from the well-known anti-Fāṭimid treatise of Ibn Rizām (c. 10th century), quoted in Ibn al-Nadīm’s *Fihrist* (completed in 987) and extensively used by another anti-Ismāʿīlī author, the Damascene Akhū Muḥsin (c. 10th century), whose account is preserved in later sources. For anti-Ismāʿīlī writings in ‘Abbāsīd sources, see Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 7-10. For a recent study on the subject of ‘Abbāsīd propaganda, see Shainool Jiwa, “The Baghdād Manifesto (402/1011): A Re-Examination of Fatimid-Abbasid Rivalry,” in Farhad Daftary and Shainool Jiwa (eds.), *The Fatimid Caliphate: Diversity of Traditions*, (I.B. Tauris: London, 2018), 22–79. For the Baghdādī theologian, see Stern, “‘Abd al-Djabbār.”

¹²⁵ Stern, “The ‘Book of the Highest Initiation’,” 58, 64. See also Madelung, “Das Imamāt,” 61, 112-14 (translation: 80, 128-30), where he describes the anti-Ismāʿīlī works along similar lines.

¹²⁶ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 88-90 (translation at 138-40).

¹²⁷ Hollenberg, “The Empire Strikes Back,” 136. The other “Neo-Platonic” Ismāʿīlī text identified by Hollenberg is *al-Risāla al-mudhhiba*, although its date and author is not known.

¹²⁸ Halm suggests that the *dāʿīs* of Qayrawān may have been discussing the books of Iranian *dāʿīs* who mixed Ismāʿīlī doctrines with Neo-Platonic philosophy. See, *Empire*, 369.

involved in. Among them [the *dā'īs*] was Abu'l-Aswad and he was the one coupling with his daughter.¹²⁹

Although the name is slightly distorted here, it is possible to identify this Abu'l-Aswad with Ibn al-Haytham, who was known in non-Ismā'īlī sources as Ibn al-Aswad.¹³⁰ The authenticity of this anecdote is, of course, very problematic. Earlier, in the same chapter, 'Abd al-Jabbār repeats the well-known trope that, according to the Ismā'īlī doctrines, the restrictions of the sacred law will be lifted from those who reach the seventh (highest) level of initiation (i.e. *al-balāgh al-sābi'*): “One is not prevented from [intercourse with] his mother, or daughter, or sister, nor from wine, pork, fornication, sodomy, usury; no other thing is forbidden, of course.” Among those who reach the highest level of initiation, “sharing wives is just like sharing food,” claims 'Abd al-Jabbār, who relates these practices to their adherence to Plato's teachings, thus adding a fresh accusation to the common tropes of transgression and immorality.¹³¹

¹²⁹ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 2:603.

¹³⁰ However, it is common that a “son of Aswad” may name his first child after his father and take Abu'l-Aswad (father of Aswad) as his *kunya* according to a recommended custom (*sunna*). Walker, *Advent*, 54-55, identifies three other references to Ibn al-Haytham in non-Ismā'īlī sources: one in Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's *al-Imtā' wa'l mu'ānasa* (3:195), where he reports a debate that took place between Ibn al-Haytham and Ibn al-Ḥaddād, on the authority of Ibn al-Baqqāl – possibly the Ifrīqiyan poet who was apparently one of the two people to have been approached by the unfortunate Fāṭimid *dā'ī* of Ifrīqiya, who was then killed. See H. R. Idris in *Berberie Orientale* (vol. 1: 67; Ar. tr. 1: 103). The two other known references are in an anti-Fāṭimid poem by the Maghribī poet al-Fazarī and a biography of a Mālikī shaykh in Abū Bakr al-Mālikī's *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*. Ibn al-Baqqāl, who is mentioned in three other places (according to the index in the Beirut edition) of volume three of the *Imtā' wa'l mu'ānasa*. On page 213, he is mentioned along with certain Abū Aḥmad b. al-Haytham as someone recruited (?) by al-Muhallabī (?) (*al-Imtā'*, 213); In another place, al-Tawḥīdī challenges him about his *madhhab*, i.e. *kalām* and he gives an explanation (p. 190); following that on p. 195 he relates the debate between Ibn al-Haytham and 'Uthmān b. Khālid (al-Ḥaddād, according to Paul Walker). Like the previous examples in this section (the 40th night) al-Tawḥīdī intends to prove the futility of disputations and polemics. In what Ibn al-Baqqāl relates from this Ibn al-Haytham, he and his opponent agree to disagree similar to the conclusion reached in one of the disputations between Ibn al-Ḥaddād and one of the *dā'īs* as related in the two other sources, namely the *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt* of Ibn al-Ḥaytham and the *Ṭabaqāt al-'ulamā'* of al-Khushanī. It needs, however, further investigation whether Abu al-Aswad – the *dā'ī* is meant here. It seems 'Abd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh al-Makkī (the alleged founder of Ismā'īlism) was also named Ibn Aswad *mawlā* Ban Makhzūm in Tūsī's list, which makes the conflation of these two individuals possible. See Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, 128, note 1.

¹³¹ See 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 2:596. On *balāgh* (initiation into Ismā'īlī faith after the convert has taken the oath (*'ahd al-mithāq*)), see Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 129.

While most of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s reports of Fāṭimid debauchery are fantasies,¹³² some of his disparaging remarks emerged from specific polemical contexts.¹³³ As such, despite the twisted nature of these accounts, they can confirm the basic information given by other authors from a completely different perspective. In this case, too, the core material can be found in the Fāṭimid sources, such as the *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*, where details of the conflict between al-Manṣūr and his brothers and uncles are revealed.¹³⁴ The accusation of *ibāḥa* (*ibāhat al-maḥārim*, “permitting the forbidden”),¹³⁵ too, is supported by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s report on al-Mahdī’s punishment of a group of his followers who “renegaded, considered as lawful what is prohibited and denied the exoteric [norms] (*al-ẓāhir*).”¹³⁶ This scandal, which according to Ibn Idhārī’s source involved drinking wine and eating pork during Ramadan, led to the execution and imprisonment of about two hundred men from Qayrawān, Beja, and Tunis in the year 921 (or 922).¹³⁷

Ibn al-Haytham may have been one of the *dā‘īs* who came under criticism from Yūsuf (d. 362/973), the imam-caliph al-Manṣūr’s brother, who accused them of betraying the mission of the Prophet by associating themselves with the philosophers. Since the caliph himself was apparently interested in the works of ancient philosophers, these criticisms of his brother must have been aimed at his policies. We know, from the *Munāẓarāt*, that Ibn al-Haytham

¹³² See al-Maqrīzī’s criticism of pro-‘Abbāsīd authors in his *Itti‘āz al-ḥunafā’*, tr. Shainool Jiwa as *Towards a Shi‘i Mediterranean Empire*, 212-13.

¹³³ For instance, Madelung suggests that accusations of unbelief, of disregarding the religious law and cursing the Prophet and his companion, were spread by the *fuqahā’* (jurists) of Qayrawān in order to justify their support for the Ibādī rebel Abū Yazīd against the Fāṭimids. See Madelung, “The Religious Policy of the Fatimids,” 97-104, 102. See, for instance, a similar tale about al-Mahdī’s permission to Ismā‘īlī convert in Ifrīqiya to do all the forbidden things, told by al-Sibā‘ī (356/966-67), a participant of Abū Yazīd’s rebellion against the Fāṭimids, in al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 505.

¹³⁴ Al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat*, 44-54 (tr. 55-64).

¹³⁵ The official Fāṭimid *da‘wa* explicitly distanced itself from certain antinomian teachings that could have been interpreted as abrogation of the law by their opponents. On this, see Madelung, “Ibāḥa.” Nevertheless, these accusations are commonly used to discredit and delegitimise them. ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s comments, too, reflect these common ideological tropes that were also used the Qarmāṭians: see Brett, *The Fatimid Empire*, 47-48.

¹³⁶ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 229. Al-Nu‘mān’s report here, and in his conversations with the Ismā‘īlī believers in the *Majālis*, confirm that this tendency amongst the *dā‘īs* was a great concern for the state. As we see, their adversaries used these incidents to discredit the Fāṭimids.

¹³⁷ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, 1:185-186. Ibn ‘Idhārī’s main source for this period is the Andalusian historian ‘Arīb al-Qurṭubī (d. 980), whose anti-Fāṭimid bias should be noted. For the polemical nature of “these accusations of *ibāḥa* or antinomianism against the Ismailis” see Daftary’s remark in *Ismaili Literature*, 18.

possessed books on the Greek sciences, spoke favourably of the philosophers, and showed off his knowledge of logic in his discussions with Abu'l-‘Abbās. If Ibn al-Haytham was one of the accused, then he may have written the somewhat apologetic *Munāẓarāt* in this climate. It is also possible that he was involved in other dangerous controversies which may have contributed to his downfall. But whether his association with “unorthodox” doctrines played a role in this can only be surmised, because he does not elaborate on these misfortunes apart from vague, but significant allusions in his memoirs.¹³⁸

The *Munāẓarāt* was probably completed after the defeat of Abū Yazīd’s rebellion and the restoration of Fāṭimid control over Qayrawān in Muḥarram 335/August 946, as Walker has argued. He has further suggested that it was written before al-Manṣūr’s official pronouncement as caliph in Muḥarram 336/August 947 since he is not mentioned in the book by his throne name but only as “the son of the Imam.”¹³⁹ Thus, the dates of composition fall within the year between the death of the second Fāṭimid caliph al-Qā’im in 335/946 and al-Manṣūr’s enthronement in 336/947 — which correspond to the dates of the measures instituted by al-Manṣūr during his stay in Qayrawān from August till October 946, when he left it in pursuit of Abū Yazīd. In light of this information, one could conjecture the following: Ibn al-Haytham belonged to the circle of rationalist-minded *dā’īs* who, like their colleagues in the Muslim East, mixed speculative methods with revelation, perhaps under the patronage of the caliph al-Manṣūr, whose interest in the ancient philosophers is known.¹⁴⁰ In this context, the concerns of a more conservative group may have been represented by the caliph’s brother Yūsuf, who had other reasons to oppose the policies of his brother and later his nephew al-Mu‘izz.¹⁴¹ The refusal of his brothers and uncles to accept his authority was a source of constant worry for the imam-caliph. As several confidential letters from al-Manṣūr to Ustādh Jawdhar and the heir apparent al-Mu‘izz show, the hostility between al-Manṣūr and his close relatives

¹³⁸ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 2-3 (tr. 63-64), 124-25 (tr. 171-72).

¹³⁹ Walker, *Advent*, 48-49, 174n191, 127 (tr. 174). One could think of another possible, yet remote, explanation for Ibn al-Haytham’s use of “the son of the Imam.” Given the challenge to al-Manṣūr’s succession from his uncles and brothers, one could suppose that Ibn al-Haytham may have favoured other claimants.

¹⁴⁰ See, for instance, al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat*, 30 (Arabic text, 14-15), where al-Manṣūr invokes Galen (Jālīnūs) in one of his letters to Jawdhar the eunuch, to give him a piece of advice regarding his harsh treatment of his subordinates.

¹⁴¹ For the internal opposition to the imamate of al-Manṣūr and his successor al-Mu‘izz, see *Sīrat*, 44-54 (translation at 55-64). According to this source, the complaints of al-Manṣūr’s relatives began after he returned to al-Mahdiyya in March-April 948 (ibid.).

reached a point at which he was forced to put them under house arrest in the two palaces of al-Mahdiyya and to forbid them to mingle with traders and go out to the market.¹⁴² The letters show that al-Manṣūr faced serious challenges from his brothers and uncles, whom he calls “donkeys” “apes and swine” and even “the Cursed Tree of the Qur’ān” (*shajarat al-mal’ūna fi’l-Qur’ān*), a curse normally reserved for the Umayyads:

Know, o my son, that the Cursed Tree of the Qur’an applied to the Umayyads yesterday, and that today it applies to the sons of your two ancestors, al-Mahdī bi-llāh and al-Qā’im bi-amri-llāh. The Umayyad’s deserved this appellation because of their hostility to your ancestor, The Messenger of God, and to his legatee, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, may God’s blessings be upon him both. Similarly (the sons of your two ancestors) deserve this appellation because of their hostility towards God and the friends of God, and because they refused to acknowledge our excellence and denied our right.”¹⁴³

Al-Manṣūr feared that the dispute would hurt the Fāṭimid *da‘wa* and weaken the faith of the followers in their legitimacy and doctrines. Thus, he did not leave the accusations and criticisms unanswered. He asked Jawdhar to keep the “residents of the castle” under a close watch. Al-Manṣūr hoped that the book that he wrote on the matter of his legitimacy would make a strong impact on the believers and recommending it to his heir apparent:

I will send you a book¹⁴⁴ which I have composed about this matter, which no one else has composed before me and which I have not yet made public. I wished, by writing this book, to guide the believers and strengthen their hearts by putting an end to doubts in their minds. I have filled it with exoteric as well as esoteric knowledge and conclusive proofs which will please you and delight you and will be useful for you without ever coming to an end, because most calamities which afflict the weak and unfortunate believers proceed only from the likes of these apes and swine.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*, 55–64, (Arabic text, 42–54); See, Halm’s discussion of Jawdhar’s potential hand in securing al-Manṣūr’s designation. *Empire*, 310–311.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 57–58 (Arabic text, 42, H. Haji’s translation).

¹⁴⁴ This book is apparently lost, but the surviving *Tathbīt al-imāma*, although directed at non-Ismā‘īlī adversaries, should be read in this context. Particularly, the section on the claimants from among the people who have blood relation to the Prophet. See, *Tathbīt al-imāma*, edited and translated by Sami Makarem (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 93–120; See also, H. Haji, *Inside the Immaculate Portal*, 58, n. 120.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat* (tr. *Inside the Immaculate Portal*), 58 (Arabic text, 46).

However, from the perspective that ‘Abd al-Jabbār attributed to al-Manṣūr’s brother, associating the dynasty with philosophy would have opened the Fāṭimids to criticism and jeopardised its rapprochement with the religious scholars of Qayrawān. Thus, this criticism may have echoed a broader attempt on the part of the ruling elite to control the *dā’īs*. The Fāṭimid state continuously tried to bring the *dā’īs* under the control of the military and bureaucratic class. As Madelung notes, “al-Manṣūr sought to limit the activity of the *da’wa* and to prevent it from spreading extremist claims, attributing supernatural qualities to the Fāṭimid caliphs which might scandalise their Sunnī subjects.”¹⁴⁶ In clear opposition to this, in the *Munāẓarāt*, Ibn al-Haytham repeatedly emphasises the need to support the members of the *da’wa* and the danger of humiliating them in front of a hostile public, lest it damage the reputation of the state and the *da’wa*.¹⁴⁷ Perhaps this was an attempt to write something similar to the *ṭabaqāt* of the (Sunnī) ‘*ulamā*’: for just as the ‘*ulamā*’ positioned themselves against the rulers and measured their virtue according to their opposition to political power and their refusal to be co-opted by it, so the Ismā‘īlī *dā’īs* also saw the need to renegotiate their scholarly authority with the ultimate authority of the Imam. Accordingly, Ibn al-Haytham makes a case for the recognition and protection of the *dā’īs* in his *Munāẓarāt*, which was probably addressed to someone in a higher position.¹⁴⁸

Finally, as Thomas Heffernan noted, the composition of hagiographical texts, which includes a large part of the source material analysed in this thesis, is directly linked to the authors’ anticipation of “acceptance” by the community of believers.¹⁴⁹ These narratives reflected the “normative values” of the time and were written “to promote social cohesion” among their audiences, by establishing a textual connection between them and the pious men

¹⁴⁶ Madelung, “A Treatise on the Imamate,” 77.

¹⁴⁷ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 115-17 (tr.162-64). It is, however, clear that in this part of the *Munāẓarāt*, Ibn al-Haytham clearly talks about the virtue of the Kutāma, highlighting their connection with the *dā’īs* and al-Mahdī. Perhaps, the Kutāma’s heroic defence of the Fāṭimid caliphate during Abū Yazīd’s assault, explains Ibn al-Haytham’s very “pro-Kutāma” narrative.

¹⁴⁸ In this respect, it is unlike the works by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān and al-Naysābūrī, who represented the views of the state and prescribed rules of conduct for the *dā’īs*. See Bibliography section, al-Nu‘mān, *Kitāb al-Himma*; al-Naysābūrī, *al-Risāla al-Mūjaza*.

¹⁴⁹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 18-20.

of their past.¹⁵⁰ Whether it is self-narrative, as in the case of the *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, or hagiography, as is the case with the *ṭabaqāt*, the composition, reception and approbation of these texts was part of the social construction of the traditions.¹⁵¹

To recap, the disputations analysed in this chapter were written down in narratives of defiance and hagiography, triggered by the personal traumas experienced by their authors but also in response to broader religious and political issues. They both participated in the rhetorical battles ongoing between two opposing worldviews in early Islamic thought, traditionalism, and rationalism, as well as in the “game of thrones” among the Fāṭimid, Umayyad, and ‘Abbāsīd caliphates, and other smaller ambitious clans. The immediate context of their composition and transmission was the turbulent rise of the Fāṭimids in North Africa. The disputations took place in the year of revolution, and were written down and transmitted in subsequent decades, during the reign of the first two caliphs as was discussed.

On the one hand, the Fāṭimid pressure presented a serious challenge to the integrity of the Qayrawānī ‘*ulamā*’, who found an unlikely hero in the person of the dissident polemicist Ibn al-Ḥaddād. Only with the advent of the Fāṭimids does he seem to have identified with the increasingly marginalised traditionalists and been accepted among them. Thereafter, he was gradually accorded the status of defender of the Mālikī tradition, due to the increasing ideological value of his disputations. On the other hand, Ibn al-Haytham’s *munāẓarāt* with Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī and Abu’l-‘Abbās, and his memories of other *dā‘īs*, especially the Kutāma *dā‘īs*, were written down during a similar time of uncertainty for a group of *dā‘īs* and perhaps the Kutāma *awliyā*’ who may have feared the state’s rapprochement with the antagonistic *fuqahā*’ of Qayrawān. Therefore, the *Munāẓarāt* of Ibn al-Haytham not only commemorates the virtues of his colleagues but also speaks of the vices of his adversaries,¹⁵² voicing the anxieties of his group during a turbulent period in Fāṭimid history.

¹⁵⁰ On the relationship between the hagiographers and their audiences see, Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 18. See, also O. Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge*, 129-31.

¹⁵¹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 16; Kashima, “Culture Narrative and Human Motivation,” 16-30, 23.

¹⁵² He never fails to name his opponents and to underline their animosity towards the Shī‘īs of Qayrawān in the account of his discussions with the *dā‘īs* – the *Munāẓarāt*.

Chapter Five

Imperial Expansion by Pen and Sword

گفتا «بدهم داروی با حجت و برهان،
لیکن بنهم مهری محکم به لبّت بر.

He said: "I will give you a remedy, [for your weak soul],
with proof and demonstration.
But I will also seal your lips."

Nāṣir-i Khusraw¹

This chapter examines the development of Fāṭimid traditions of knowledge between the years 335/947 and 362/973, from the recovery of the Fāṭimid state from the turmoil of Abū Yazīd's rebellion to the moving of the seat of the Empire to Cairo. The main objective of the chapter is to demonstrate the link between the Fāṭimid Empire's universalist project and the Ismā'īlī approach to knowledge; importantly, the hermeneutical interpretation of the revelation and the place of the *majālis al-ḥikma* in the context of the expanding Fāṭimid Empire.

The focus of the chapter will be the activities at the Fāṭimid court in the palace city of al-Manṣūriyya, where its founder, the caliph al-Manṣūr, and his successor, al-Mu'izz, implemented their vision for a universal empire with the help of their chief judge and prolific scholar, al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān.² It was al-Manṣūr, the first Fāṭimid imam-caliph born in Ifrīqiya, who changed, and in some cases, reversed, previous Fāṭimid policies concerning the non-

¹ Nāṣir-i-Khusraw, *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāṣir-i Khisraw-i Qubādiyānī*, ed. Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzādeh et al, 4th edition (Tehrān: Chāpkhāneh-i Sipehr, 1976), 176. The famous Persian Fāṭimid *dā'i* Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. 481/1088) who visited and stayed in Fāṭimid Cairo, describes his meeting and making a covenant with an unnamed gatekeeper, who initiated him to the secret knowledge of the *da'wa*, in a long allegorical poem, which is quite illuminating in its demonstration of how the *bāṭin* made sense to the initiated believers and how it might have appealed to intellectually curious types of the Muslim world at the time. However, much of it would have been difficult to grasp for a layperson.

² According to Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-'arḍ*, 72, al-Manṣūr moved to Ṣabra al-Manṣūriyya on 27 Shawwāl 337/29 April 949.

Ismāʿīlī population;³ trends which were continued by al-Muʿizz. Finally, the interplay between the Ismāʿīlī esoteric teachings and the Fāṭimid claim to universal rule will be discussed with a contention that these teachings were crucial to Fāṭimid state's legitimacy and projection of power.

Two endeavours were at the centre of these developments: one was the creation and patronage of new institutions of learning for promoting the Fāṭimid *daʿwa*; the other was developing a corpus of canonical Shīʿī traditions and a legal *madhab* to rival that of the Sunnīs. The first one was mainly for the followers of the *daʿwa*, the second was meant for the population at large. The consolidation of a (mature) Mālikī scholarly community in Qayrawān, as discussed in Chapter Two was an important catalyst for these developments. The creation of a *ḥalqa* in the mosque of Qayrawān that was dedicated to Shīʿī law, the public instruction of Fāṭimid law in the mosques and the private *majālis al-ḥikma* for Ismāʿīlīs were examples of these developments. These activities, moreover, were sustained by the authoritative writings of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, who represented the imam-caliph, al-Muʿizz, and was entrusted by him to compile what amounted to foundational texts in Ismāʿīlī law, interpretation of the faith (*taʾwīl*) and Fāṭimid historiography, among other disciplines.

In what follows, I demonstrate how their distinct approach to knowledge and religion informed, and at times justified, the Fāṭimids' evolving relationship with their followers and subjects during the Ifrīqiyan period of their rule. I argue that Ismāʿīlī theological and cosmological doctrines were pivotal in Fāṭimids' articulation of their authority and legitimacy. The strength of these doctrines was in the flexibility that they could afford their multifaith imperial subjects. However, the elaborate philosophical teaching of the *daʿwa* ultimately proved to be a weakness for its failure to accommodate the masses. This is a tentative conjecture, but worth considering given the fact that the Fāṭimids insisted on translating the abstract knowledge hierarchy into practice. These questions are explored through reports from al-Muʿizz's court in al-Manṣūriyya, where religion and geopolitics were discussed at the highest level. The last part of the chapter situates the development of the Fāṭimid institutions of learning and public expressions of authority in the context of imperial expansion.

³ For al-Manṣūr's policies, see Madelung, "The Religious Policy of the Fatimids," 97-104.

Ẓāhir and Bāṭin: The Dual Aspects of Religion and Fāṭimid Religious Policy

The distinction between the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*) aspects of religious knowledge is one of the earliest Shīʿī doctrines.⁴ The *bāṭin*, or inner meaning of religion that is the preserve of only a few select believers, is given precedence over the outward practice of the faith, such as prayer and other obligatory practices. It is also because of the need to access the inner meaning of the revelation and its interpretation that the permanent institution of the imamate was justified by early Shīʿī authorities.⁵ The maintenance of the outward aspects of religion and law during the Fāṭimid period was dictated by concerns of legitimation and effective governance in the context of the Empire, but the Fāṭimid approach to religion and religious knowledge did not change fundamentally overtime, maintaining the primacy of the esoteric. The period between the origin of the earliest activist proto-Ismāʿīlī *bāṭinī* movements and the rise of the Fāṭimid state is a period of obscurity.⁶ Nonetheless, looking at the earliest proto-Ismāʿīlī treatises on *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, one can observe a continuity in Fāṭimid-Ismāʿīlī esotericism which goes back to an earlier period.

An example of early Ismāʿīlī doctrine on *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* is the *Kitāb al-rusūm waʾl-izdiwāj waʾl-tartīb* (*The Book of Norms and Complementarity and Ranking*), attributed to the pre-Fāṭimid *dāʿī*, ʿAbdān (d. 286/899).⁷ This attribution to the enigmatic pre-Fāṭimid *dāʿī* is dubious, but it was undoubtedly part of Fāṭimid *daʿwa* literature and, as Walker notes, sheds some light on the practical implication of the *ẓāhir* – *bāṭin* (exoteric – esoteric religion) dichotomy. The *dāʿī* argues that while the observance of exoteric religion is obligatory, it does not take much to acquire knowledge of outward practice. Thus, it cannot be religion in its true sense. Furthermore, if knowledge were equal to the "exterior without the inner meaning," the Prophet would not have commanded "to seek knowledge even in China" or have made seeking knowledge obligatory.⁸ Hence, the command "applies solely to knowledge of the *bāṭin*."⁹

⁴ Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shīʿī Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 79; Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 83-84; idem, *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, 89.

⁵ Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 84-85.

⁶ Ibid., 87ff.

⁷ ʿAbdān Abū Muḥammad, *K. al-Rusūm waʾl-izdiwāj waʾl-tartīb*, ed. and tr. Walker and Madelung, "The Book of Norm, Pairedness and Ranking" in Ali-de-Unzaga (ed.) *Fortresses of the Intellect*, 119-20.

⁸ ʿAbdān, *K. al-Rusūm waʾl-izdiwāj*, 119-20.

⁹ Ibid., 120-21.

Therefore, those Muslims who do not understand the *bāṭin* are no different from the Jews, Christians and the Sabians in their transgressions.¹⁰ The context of this polemic is again to uphold the authority of the *ahl al-bayt* against the claims of the *‘ulamā’* who had declared themselves to be the “heirs of the Prophet.”¹¹ In fact, fighting those who do not accept the *ẓāhir* was made obligatory by God, but when it comes to the “true religion,” God leaves a choice. God’s statements, *There is no compulsion in religion* (Q. 2:256); and: *Would you then coerce the people to become believers?* (Q. 10:99), therefore, refer to the esoteric religion, which is not meant to be imposed on people, argues ‘Abdān.¹² This interpretation of the Qur’ānic verses was used to justify the Fāṭimid’s tolerant religious policies in the post-*fitna* period (after 335/947), which suggests the continuity of this doctrine.¹³ How does this *bāṭinī* doctrine explain Fāṭimid religious policies and their *da‘wa* strategy in Ifrīqiya?

It is perhaps necessary to elaborate on this a little more so to reject the argument that the Fāṭimids were forced to leave Ifrīqiya because of Mālikī pressure, or because of their inability to convert the population. Monès, for instance, argued that the Fāṭimids were frustrated with the resistance of the Mālikīs and seized the opportunity to invade Egypt.¹⁴ This idea resurfaces in various shapes in recent scholarship as well, particularly in works published

¹⁰ ‘Abdān, *Kitāb al-Rusūm wa’l-izdiwāj*, 118.

¹¹ The authenticity of this ḥadīth has been questioned, but whether it can authentically be traced to the Prophet or not is matter of secondary importance. For our purposes, its use in specific contexts is an indication of the self-consciousness of the scholars and their claim to authority vis-à-vis other claimants. See Brockopp’s discussion in *Muhammad’s Heirs*, 20-23.

¹² ‘Abdān, *K. al-Rusūm wa’l-izdiwāj*, (tr. Walker and Madelung), 119-20. Even if this work belongs to non-Fāṭimid Ismā‘ilism (since the Fāṭimid imams are not mentioned in it), it was still a shared doctrine. On the other hand, emphasis on instruction (*ta‘līm*) and arguing against both rationalists and traditionalists, may suggest a Fāṭimid provenance, rather than pre-Fāṭimid belonging to ‘Abdān’s corpus, as Madelung and Walker considered it probable. See, Madelung and Walker, “The *Kitāb al-Rusūm*”, 104.

¹³ The Fāṭimid interpretation of this verse is unlike Sunni exegetical approach, and specifically means tolerating diverse interpretations of the faith, or communities of interpretations. As we see, contrary to what van Ess seems to imply citing H. Halm’s *Die Kalifen von Kairo* (München: C. H. Beck, 2003), pp. 215, 228, 310, this Fāṭimid-Ismā‘ilī interpretation was not without precedence when al-Ḥākim bi-amri-llāh resorted to it to justify his “(short-lived) pro-Sunni measures and the revocation of his reprisals against the Christians.” Van Ess, “Tolerance and Pluralism in Islam,” *Kleine Schriften by Josef van Ess*, vol. 1, 472-99, 478, note 21. For the interpretation of this verse in Fāṭimid context, see al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 116ff, 514ff; idem, *Ta’wīl al-da‘ā’im* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-A‘lamī li’l-Maṭbū‘āt, 2006), 1:59, 147, 151.

¹⁴ Monès, “Le Malekisme”, 197-220, 220. Cf., Dachraoui, “Les Commencements de la Prédication Ismā‘ilienne en Ifrīqiya,” *SI* 20 (1964): 101-102.

in Arabic.¹⁵ Part of the reason for this belief is the fact that the Fāṭimids appear to complain about the state of affairs in Ifrīqiya, and even threaten to abandon it if it was not for the responsibility that they were entrusted with by God.¹⁶ However, they had little reason to expect that Egypt or any other land would be more hospitable. Certainly, Mālikism was as strong and well rooted in Egypt as it was in Ifrīqiya. Moreover, militarily they had to face more formidable enemies such as the Qarmaṭīs and the ‘Abbāsids. One might argue that in the context of the Umayyads’ strengthening their foothold in the Western Maghrib, and Banū Ḥamdūn’s defection, moving to Egypt with the faltering Ikhshīdids (323-358/935-969) might have seemed reasonable. Yet one must not forget that the conquest of Egypt was planned for many years, which shows that expansion was woven into Fāṭimid ideology as a universalist medieval empire. Their conquest of Egypt was probably the exact opposite of the narrative that implies some sort of failure or insecurity: it was, instead, because of their military strength and political confidence that the imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz moved to Egypt.¹⁷

Another more compelling argument is the narrative of a resurgent Mālikism in fifth/eleventh-century Maghrib and al-Andalus. Monès’ impression comes from his literal reading of al-Mālikī’s *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, written long after the departure of the Fāṭimids, as a work of history rather than hagiography. His reference to Fāṭimid sources was limited to *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*, an internal archive of letters that mostly deals with administrative financial matters. In these, al-Mu‘izz often complains about the corruptions and troubles “coming from all directions,”¹⁸ sometimes from his own extended family and subordinates. For example, the context of one letter, cited by Monès as highlighting the turmoil in Ifrīqiya, is Jawdhar’s complaint about the mistreatment of two of his subordinates by another slave named Rayyān al-Saqlabī, who was sent to suppress a rural uprising. Judging by Jawdhar’s archive and the *Kitāb al-Majālis*, the excesses of the Ṣaqlāliba were a recurring issue. In a letter to Jawdhar, al-Mu‘izz felt obliged to justify his entrustment of Rayyān with the mission because it could not have been delayed any further as the behaviour of the imam-caliph’s generals, as well as the

¹⁵ Such as in Ben Hamada, *al-Madāris al-kalāmiyya*, 302.

¹⁶ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 127-28; 364. See also note 2 (p. 364), where the editors note Dachraoui’s claim that the Fāṭimids abandoned Ifrīqiya because of Mālikī resistance.

¹⁷ See Jiwa, *Towards a Shi‘i Mediterranean Empire*, 14-22.

¹⁸ Monès cites *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*, 90 (ed. by Muḥammad K. Ḥusayn), 90-91 (Eng. tr. H. Haji).

populace of Ifrīqiya, seemed to have become unstable. The rural uprising mentioned in the letters was clearly unrelated to the activities of the *‘ulamā* of Qayrawān, as was the dissatisfaction of the Berber population in the Awrās, or further West. Moreover, one cannot extrapolate the dissatisfaction of the entire region from these isolated, if commonplace rural skirmishes. On the contrary, the Fāṭimids appear at the highest point of their power in the region, which allowed them to concentrate their efforts on the conquest of Egypt.¹⁹

Mature Fāṭimid doctrine maintained the difference between the outward (*ẓāhiri*) knowledge of religion and its inner (*bāṭini*) meaning. Accordingly, people were divided into the select elite (*khawāṣṣ*) who had direct access to true knowledge, transmitted by the Fāṭimid imams, and the commoners (*‘awāmm*), who were content with the outward meaning of religion. In practical terms, the latter was obligatory whereas the former was voluntary. Thus, the Fāṭimid policy of not imposing their esoteric beliefs on the masses was fully consistent with the Ismā‘īlī interpretation of the Qur’ān. Moreover, the way to the *bāṭin* was through learning and initiation, which makes the notion that the Fāṭimids failed to convert their subject population inadequate. It was neither practical, nor desirable, for the ruling elite to make the public privy to their esoteric knowledge. The state-sponsored *da‘wa* effort was directed at encouraging the learned and the powerful to accept the political and spiritual authority of the Fāṭimid caliph. Nevertheless, joining the cause was voluntary, and conditional upon making a formal covenant (*akhdh al-‘ahd* or *mīthāq*), which presumed dedication and conviction.²⁰ Further access to Fāṭimid teaching also involved investment on the part of the novice, such as paying a nominal fee to attend the sessions of knowledge, or, *majālis al-ḥikma*, which were turned into regular sessions for the believers (*mu‘minūn*) under al-Manṣūr.²¹

¹⁹ See, for instance, Halm, *Empire*, 403-408; Brett, *The Fāṭimid Empire*, 74-77. Note must be made of the more organised rebellion of the Ibādīs f Jabas Nafūsa led by Shaykh Abū Khazar, which spectacularly failed. Yet, unlike Abū Yazīd, the “Man on the Donkey,” he was forgiven, which is a sure sign of dynastic confidence. The relationship of Abū Khazar with the Fāṭimids was discussed above in Chapter Three.

²⁰ Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 129.

²¹ See Halm, for a general overview of the organisation and function of the *majālis*, *The Fatimids and Their Learning Traditions*, 24-29; Walker, “Fatimid Institutions,” 179-200.

Religious Knowledge and Authority in al-Manṣūriyya

The Silent Dā'īs

When al-Manṣūr founded his new capital near Qayrawān, he recalled al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān from Ṭarāblus (Tripoli, modern Libya) and appointed him to the judgeship of the newly founded town of al-Manṣūriyya. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān recruited some clerks, who were not members of the *da'wa*, as his assistants. He attempted to convert them by “explaining, debating and arguing with them,” but “they insisted on their ignorance [and refused to become Shī'īs],” until he realised that he “could not tolerate seeing them anymore and loathed their company.”²² So, al-Nu'mān petitioned the imam-caliph in order to rid himself of his non-Ismā'īlī adjutants. Al-Manṣūr did not approve of this and advised him to keep the clerks in his service, counselling al-Nu'mān that “the ignorance of stubborn donkeys should not stop you from making them work for you.” As to their punishment for not heeding the Fāṭimid message, it will take place in the hereafter; and “dismissing them will not reduce it.” Eventually, most of these people were “guided by Allāh”, except one person who refused to join the *da'wa*. “There was no heavier burden than tolerating him and a more loathsome sight than looking at him, until, eventually, I got the [imam's] permission to remove him and God relieved me from him” — al-Nu'mān recalled years later.²³ Despite al-Nu'mān's zeal, it is clear that al-Manṣūr's policy was to tolerate religious differences, which was even seen as a reversal of his father and grandfather's policies.²⁴ More than anything, this was a sign of unprecedented dynastic confidence.

Al-Manṣūr's lenient policies with regards to the imposition of Fāṭimid law on the subject population meant granting equal rights to the non-Ismā'īlī population, which created discontent among the members of the *da'wa*.²⁵ These concerns of the followers, presumably the leaders of the Kutāma and some *dā'īs* are addressed in the *Kitāb al-Himma*.²⁶ In the chapter

²² Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Majālis*, 362.

²³ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Majālis*, 362.

²⁴ See, for instance, 'Abd al-Jabbār's *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*.

²⁵ See the Introduction of this thesis for the historical context. See also Madelung, “The Religious Policy of the Fatimids,” 97-104.

²⁶ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *al-Himma*, 86-90.

“On submission and non-objection to the imams when they give positions to people in order to win their hearts [for the cause of the *da‘wa*],” al-Nu‘mān makes a case for Fātimid public relations with references to the Qur’ān and the ḥadīth.²⁷ Citing the Qur’ānic notion of “winning over hearts” or “bringing hearts together” (*al-mu‘allafati qulūbuhum*, Qur’ān: 8:63; 9:60; 3:103), and the example of the Prophet dividing booty among tribal leaders on several occasions in order to win them to his cause, al-Nu‘mān urges followers to put their trust in the imams because “their every action is the will of God and his wisdom.”²⁸ If only they knew — exclaims al-Nu‘mān, that everything the imams do is in the best interest of the followers, and “for their safety and protection.”²⁹ These internal and external challenges made the development of institutions of learning urgent and necessary to explain the doctrines and the ideology of the state to its followers.

During the later phase of Fātimid rule in North Africa, when the caliphate was preoccupied with more distance provinces, the active conversion of subjects was not a priority. Non-Ismā‘īlīs were employed in the judiciary and other posts as the above case illustrates. Ordinary members of the *da‘wa* and unauthorised *dā‘īs* were not allowed to propagate religion, engage in religious debates or behaviour that might irritate non-Shī‘īs. Quoting Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s well known ḥadīth, *be our silent dā‘īs* or *be our dā‘īs without your tongues* (*kūnū lanā du‘āt ṣāmitīn/min dūni alsinatikum*), al-Nu‘mān suggested passive demonstration of piety and righteousness on the part of ordinary members of the *da‘wa* to encourage others to join the *da‘wa*, rather than using the active *da‘wa* strategy reserved for trained and authorised *dā‘īs*.³⁰ In that too, al-Nu‘mān instructed the *dā‘īs* to proceed with extreme caution, gradually “approaching people one by one,” “getting to know them,” “testing them,” “feeding them according to their capacities,” to prevent any potential disaster for themselves and for the *da‘wa*.³¹

²⁷ Ibid., 86.

²⁸ Ibid., 89.

²⁹ Ibid., 89.

³⁰ al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *K. al-Himma*, 136-37. See also al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār fī faḍā’il al-a’imma al-athār*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī, 3 vols., 2nd edition (Qum: Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmiyya, 1431/2010), 3:506. This tradition is included as an authentic ḥadīth in major *Shī‘ī* collections, such as *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2. 76-77, in its second variation. Compare al-Nu‘mān’s precaution against *munāẓara* with Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn’s reservations about debating with a more skilled debater, 34-35.

³¹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *al-Himma*, 137.

Religious instruction had both doctrinal and strategic importance to the Fāṭimid caliphate. According to Shīʿī teachings, the imam is the sole source of religious knowledge and “presumed to be the most learned person in the Muslim community.”³² This was the basis on which Fāṭimid imperial ideology and dynastic legitimacy rested. It was therefore of ideological importance to the state that the followers were knowledgeable about their doctrines, or, at least, were wise enough not to discredit the *daʿwa* by not contradicting the official formulations of the doctrines, or by undermining its universalist and inclusive policy of the state, another concern that comes up frequently in the discourse of the caliph and the *dāʿīs*. Adhering to the esoteric teachings and peacefully co-existing with other non-Ismāʿīlī subjects of the imam-caliphs were two dimensions of the imperial vision, for which al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān’s works were meant to serve as a blueprint.³³

The reign of caliph al-Muʿizz differed from those of his predecessors in several important aspects. First, the bureaucratisation of caliphal authority had attained considerable maturity. This stage is characterised by an increasingly urban lifestyle of the dynastic rulers and their followers and delegation of authority to powerful administrators, a sure sign of weakness according to Ibn Khaldūn, though, in fact, it corresponded to the apex of Fāṭimid power and, indeed, the personal power of the caliph. His own relatives, apart from the heir apparent, were excluded from power, while men of predominantly Slavic origin, the slave-clients of the imam, occupied central positions in imperial administration, such as Ustādh Jawdhar and Jawhar al-Siqillī ([Appendix 1](#)). The delegation of authority also required written laws and codes of conduct for officials to function independently, which is evident from the works of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān.

Furthermore, the administration of the Empire and its bureaucratic practices reached an unprecedented level of formalisation. At the same time, the number of followers who now seemed to have genuinely converted to the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*, or those born to Ismāʿīlī families, increased. As one would expect, the *daʿwa* also attracted many for social and material reasons, in addition to genuine religious conversion. Al-Nuʿmān, for instance, reports that the *majālis al-ḥikma* (sessions of wisdom) were so crowded that people at one end of the room could not

³² Poonawala, “The Evolution,” 307.

³³ For al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān’s projects, see S. Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, esp. “The Zahirī Order”, 113–30, and “Between Zahir and Batin,” 131–34.

hear his voice during the lecture. He was concerned that many of the new initiates had not learned the basics and were not ready for the sessions, but al-Mu'izz ordered that they be continued.³⁴

The expansion of the Fāṭimid Empire under al-Mu'izz necessitated further reforms and the accommodation of various groups into the empire. Although the apparent move from a more esoteric orientation to exoteric religion was necessitated by the need to run the empire, it was not a move from *bāṭin* to *ẓāhir*, rather, it was a reformulation that asserted the superiority of Fāṭimid *bāṭinī* knowledge.³⁵ Moreover, *bāṭin* had now become the *raison d'être* of the *da'wa* organisation, which had developed complex hierarchies to safeguard the "secret knowledge." The secrecy surrounding the *bāṭin* in turn served to maintain and reinforce communal boundaries and the authority of the imams by allowing privileged access to the private spaces of the *da'wa*, rituals of initiation and oath-giving, among other strategies.³⁶ Further doctrinal and practical accommodation had to be made to assert orthopraxy, but only so as to strengthen the claim of the dynasty to universal rule over all Muslims. Al-Nu'mān was tasked with strengthening the ideological basis for the Fāṭimid *dawla* and *da'wa*, in response to growing concerns from both the community of Ismā'īlīs and the broader population. These concerns are listed by al-Nu'mān when he explains the reasons for composing the hagiographies of the Fāṭimid imams, which he envisaged would be continued by his successors.³⁷ The superior knowledge of the imam-caliphs and their unique position as "the gates to knowledge" had to be articulated and propagated through historiography, interpretation of the Quran and the ḥadīth, and state symbols and ceremonies within an imperial framework.

All these matters required the attention of the imam-caliph, who was both in charge of the Empire and at the same time wielded religious and spiritual authority for his followers,

³⁴ Halm, *Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, 29.

³⁵ Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 131-34.

³⁶ The practical significance of secrecy in Fāṭimid and Ismā'īlī thought is discussed in following studies: Velji, *An Apocalyptic History*, 30-31, index; Ebstein, "Secrecy in Ismā'īlī Tradition and in the Mystical Thought of Ibn al-'Arabī," *Journal Asiatique* 298, 2 (2010): 303-43. For a detailed treatment of secrecy in early Shī'ism and its practical and symbolic significance, see Maria M. Dakake. "Hiding in Plain Sight: The Practical and Doctrinal Significance of Secrecy in Shi'ite Islam." *JAAR* 74, no. 2 (2006): 324-55; idem, *Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007).

³⁷ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Majālis*, 44.

and in theory for all those who were seeking the path to salvation.³⁸ The imam-caliph thus had to cater to the worldly concerns and the day to day running of the empire, as well as to provide religious guidance for the community of believers in his capacity as their spiritual authority.

One case that illustrates this dual authority is a well-documented plea by the eunuch al-Ustādh Jawdhar to al-Mu‘izz recorded in nine letters that he sent to the caliph asking him for some specific favour.³⁹ There is no doubt that this favour was of a religious nature. Jawdhar feared he would die without receiving it and kept begging the caliph, but he postponed it to the time of the conquest of Egypt. Jawdhar, a manumitted slave of “Slavic” origin, was al-Mu‘izz’s tutor and confidant to whom he granted the lofty title of *mawlā amīr al-mu‘minīn* (the Client of the Commander of the Faithful). Jawdhar was a personal servant of al-Mahdī, then of al-Qā’im and was entrusted with the highest secret — the designation of his heir apparent Ismā‘īl (al-Manṣūr) upon al-Mahdī’s death, as was the custom.⁴⁰ Thus, as Ivanow noted, “his religious position was quite exceptional.”⁴¹ Despite the highest honours, material wealth and power that he received from al-Mahdī’s successors for his loyalty and service, he was still seeking a blessing or perhaps some ritual initiation that al-Mu‘izz had promised to him. This spiritual connection that was cultivated and ritualised from early on was not only for high ranking followers like Jawdhar, but also for ordinary believers.

In this context, it is worth noting that embracing Islam, especially the Ismā‘īlī faith taught by the imams, offered an extra layer of prestige and security for clients of “Slavic” origin. During the same period, when Jawdhar was petitioning al-Mu‘izz, the imam-caliph had his tutor — Muẓaffar, who “had taught him how to write,” executed along with Qaysar, another Slav, in 349/960. Muẓaffar is said to have cursed the caliph in his native tongue, but scholars,

³⁸ The Fāṭimid outlook was universalist from the beginning of the movement. Various Fāṭimid endeavours, such as the Fāṭimid codification of law were undertaken with a vision to govern an empire with a diverse population. This vision is best articulated in the *amān* (guarantee of safety) document that al-Mu‘izz’s general Jawhar al-Siqillī issued to the populace of Egypt upon the conquest of Egypt in 358/969. For the document and the discussion of the Fāṭimid inclusive policies, albeit focused on the Egyptian period, see Jiwa, “Inclusive Governance,” 157-75.

³⁹ Al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat* (tr. *Inside the Immaculate Portal*), documents no. 5 (p. 92), 8 (pp. 94-95), 14 (p. 100), 25 (pp. 107-08), 29 (p. 109), 32, 33 (p. 112), 39, 41 (pp. 119-20).

⁴⁰ According to the *Sīrat Ja‘far al-Ḥājib*, he took the oath of allegiance from al-Qā’im on the spot, 27-28. See also, *Zahr al-Ma‘ānī*, 72 (tr. 265).

⁴¹ Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, 12.

following Marius Canard, have suggested that it was due to the fact that they had become very powerful and abused their power.⁴² Indeed al-Mu‘izz condemns Muḏaffar as one of those “who went astray and were power-greedy.”⁴³ But, on top of that, al-Mu‘izz accused his tutor of unbelief to fully justify capital punishment:

“I heard him more than once saying things that proved he did not believe a thing about Islam. One day, when someone talked about the Prophet and the beginning of his prophecy, the accursed [i.e. Muḏaffar], may God curse him, said: “This is one of the tricks of the Arabs.” If he did not believe in Islam at all, how could he believe in our imamate and our doctrine?”⁴⁴

The spiritual claims of Fāṭimid imam-caliphs, which were part of the esoteric faith and usually confined to the inner circle of the *da‘wa*, were used by the Mālikī *fuqahā’* to accuse the Fāṭimids of claiming divinity. In response to ideological challenges from their adversaries, and, more so, in order to provide an encompassing religio-political framework for the empire, the imam-caliphs instructed al-Nū‘mān to codify Fāṭimid law, compose books in *tafsīr*, Prophetic tradition and other branches of religious knowledge. The potential adversaries were not just the Mālikī scholars of Qayrawān, but also those who were living in ‘Abbāsīd and Umayyad territories, or acknowledged their authority. Most of the Fāṭimid followers were from Berber tribes, primarily the Kutāma Berbers, whose apparent lack of sophistication in matters of religious knowledge was a source of concern for the *da‘wa*. This is evident throughout various *majālis* that al-Mu‘izz held for his *dā‘īs*, and Kutāma tribal leaders, whom he saw as his representatives within the expanding empire. As an intimate account, al-Qāḍī al-Nū‘mān’s *Kitāb al-Majālis* illustrates al-Mu‘izz’s vision for a learned community of believers within a larger religio-political framework of empire.

Disciplining the *Awliyā’*

One relatively neglected aspect of Fāṭimid history is the organisation and training of the

⁴² His domain came under Jawdhār after his execution. *Sīrat al-Ustādh*, 3, 29n53, 125 (Eng. tr.). Al-Maqrīzī also tells a similar story about cursing in his native tongue in *Khīṭaṭ* and *Itti‘āz*, but Idrīs Imād al-Dīn, who also relates from the *Majālis*, mentions Qaysar’s unruliness as a reason for their execution. See al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, Eng. tr. Jiwa, as *Towards a Shi‘i Mediterranean Empire*, 65-66.

⁴³ Al-Qāḍī al-Nū‘mān, *Majālis*, 401.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 401-3, n. 4.

community of believers even though it was the main aim of the Fāṭimid *daʿwa*. Instead, the primary focus of modern scholarship has been on “the rise of the Fāṭimids” — the revolution and its socio-political and ideological bases; and secondly, on Fāṭimid ideology and state-building efforts, or the transformation of the Fāṭimid movement to the Fāṭimid state. The relationship between the Fāṭimids and their non-Ismāʿīlī subjects, Muslims and non-Muslims, has also received some scholarly attention. However, the dynasty’s relationship with its Kutāma believers has not been treated as a subject of study in its own right, perhaps because they were seen as part of the ruling class, or because their role was seen as only being of military importance. In fact, as the writings of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān and the proclamations of the caliphs indicate, the *awliyāʾ* were seen as crucial to Fāṭimid legitimacy as a movement that resembled the rise of Islam itself.

Thus, the *daʿwa* intended to build a community, which like tribal society had a communal identity, shaped around the idea of their proximity to the imam-caliph, and privileged access to knowledge that raised them above the masses. The messianic impulse was important for the mobilisation of the tribesmen, but this doctrine was soon reshaped by shifting the focus towards the idea of a community, *the followers of the imam*, modelled on the early Muslim community.

Loyalty, discipline and the conduct of the Allies (*awliyāʾ*), who were predominantly Kutāma Berbers, are addressed extensively in the writings of al-Nuʿmān, especially in his *Kitāb al-majālīs* and *Kitāb al-himma fī ādāb atbāʾ al-aʿimma* (The Book of Ambition on the Code of Conduct for the Followers of the Imams).⁴⁵ The *K. al-Himma* is one of the two surviving treatises devoted to the subject of *ādāb* (etiquette) or discipline of the Ismāʿīlī believers.⁴⁶ Unlike the later book, al-Nuʿmān’s treatise is not a code of conduct exclusively for the *dāʿīs* or the *awliyāʾ*, but a general code for all the followers (*atbāʾ*), namely anyone who represented the Fāṭimid government in one way or another:

⁴⁵ The introduction of the book mentions a certain benefactor of al-Nuʿmān, who asks him to write a book on this subject, may have been al-Muʿizz himself, but al-Nuʿmān does not mention his name. Some remarks by al-Muʿizz in the *Majālīs* suggest that he may have preferred to remain anonymous.

⁴⁶ The other book being al-Naysābūrī’s *al-Risāla al-Mūjaza*, edited and translated into English by V. Klemm and P. Walker, *A Code of Conduct*, 6-12, for a short comparative analysis; see the rest of the introduction for more information.

I considered the increasing number of the followers of the imams, which is comprised of their family members (*ahl*), close companions (*dikhla*), retinue (*hasham*) and eminent slaves, slave girls and servants (*khāṣṣat al-‘abīd wa’l-‘imā’ wa’l-khadam*), relatives (*aqārib*), the faithful [Kutāma] followers (*ahl al-diyānāt min al-awliyā’*)⁴⁷, judges, secretaries, administrators, heads of *diwāns*, trustees, governors, tax collectors (*jubāt*), and superintendents (*su‘āt*), military generals from [Kutāma] and "helpers" (*rijāl al-ḥarb min al-awliyā’ wa’l-anṣār*), slave regiments (*ṭabaqāt al-‘abīd*) and soldiers (*ajnād*), builders (*sannā’*), and traders and the merchants (*tujjār*) that take care of their business and work for them, and the population who are under their protection. Every group that I mentioned or did not mention branch out into other subgroups and conduct themselves in a certain way."⁴⁸

Among these diverse groups, only the *awliyā’* are explicitly identified as believers (i.e. Ismā‘īlīs) who have entered the *da‘wa*. It is worth noting, that the term *awliyā’*, which has often been rendered as “the friends of God,”⁴⁹ in the Fāṭimid context should be understood as the “allies/supporters of the imam-caliphs”. Indeed, the term *awliyā’ Allāh* (sing. *walī Allāh*) is reserved for the imam-caliphs. They are the “friends of God,” or “the close ones to God,” (*awliyā’*) the legatees (*awṣiyā’*, sing. *waṣī*) and the “intercessors” (*shufa‘ā’*, sing. *shafī‘*) other terms that reflect their position in Ismā‘īlī theology.⁵⁰ The Kutāma are their “allies” (*awliyā’*) and must be understood as such in Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlī context, following the closest Qur’ānic meaning of the word.⁵¹ The phrase *ahl al-diyānāt* (members of the faith, see the above quote by al-Nu‘mān) is also used, for instance, by Ibn al-Haytham in the *Munāẓarāt*, to refer to the

⁴⁷ The usual formulation is *muhājirūn wa’l-anṣār* (Immigrants and Helpers), but here “*awliyā’*” is used instead of *muhājirūn*. Or, *al-anṣār* is also used to refer to the Kutāma, as both words come as semantical pairs in the Qur’ān (2:120; 9:116; 29:22; 42:31). The Kutāma are called *muhājirūn* not because of their “Eastern origin”, as Jadla suggests, but because of their position as the first members of the Fāṭimid *da‘wa*, those who immigrated first with Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī to the *dār al-hijra* of Ṭāzrūt, then to Ifrīqiya, and then with the imams to al-Mahdiyya and al-Manṣūriyya. Cf. Ibrāhīm Jadla, “Les Fatimides”, 509.

⁴⁸ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Himma*, 36.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 215; Halm, *Empire*, 108-109; as “saintly” and “initiates,” in Halm, *Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, 45. This rendition has been so pervasive that Hamdani understands the *awliyā’* referred to in the beginning of the *Da‘ā’im al-islām* (vol. 1, p. 1) as a reference to the “followers of the imams”, whereas it is clearly a reference to the imams. Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 64.

⁵⁰ For doctrinal context, see Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 84, 134.

⁵¹ It is noteworthy that in the Qur’ān the word *walī* often come with the semantic pair *naṣīr* (supporter, helper, ally), such as in 2:120; 9:116; 29:22; 42:31. The closest translation of the plural form (*awliyā’*) is also “allies,” such as “And indeed, the wrongdoers are allies (*awliyā’*) of one another; but Allah is the protector (*walī*) of the righteous” (45:19; *Sahih International* translation).

Kutāma believers (*ahl al-diyānāt min rijālihīm*).⁵² These phrases (*ahl al-diyānāt*, *awliyā'* and more generally *mu'minūn*, the original appellation of the followers of the Prophet) are reserved for the Kutāma and other Ismā'īlīs, who had formally joined the *da'wa*, in order to distinguish them from the rest of the Muslims.⁵³ Moreover, as the above passage shows, the Kutāma were also distinguished from the "Helpers" (*anṣār*) and accorded the special status of *muhājirūn* (Emigrants), like the first Muslims who emigrated with the Prophet.

Among the pressing concerns of the *da'wa* that resurfaces repeatedly throughout the *Majālis* and the *K. al-Ḥimma*, one that is the reputation of the Fāṭimid *da'wa*. The *awliyā'*'s lack of due religious training and divergence from the official doctrines amidst accusation of heresy from the adversaries are addressed throughout both treatises in numerous places. These concerns of al-Nu'mān were sharply articulated many years later by another *dā'i*, al-Naysābūrī who most probably wrote his treatise as an elaboration of the *K. al-Ḥimma*. In the conclusion of his *al-Risāla al-Mūjaza al-kāfiya fī ādāb al-du'āt* (The Concise and Sufficient Treatise on the Code of Conduct of the *Dā'īs*) al-Naysābūrī states: "If I wished to summarise [the treatise], I could have done so by positing that: the *da'wa* is based on [three] foundations: knowledge (*ilm*), piety (*taqwā*), and leadership (*siyāsa*). These [three] terms encompass all other conditions."⁵⁴ Al-Naysābūrī's postulation correctly captures the aims and concerns of the *da'wa* during the Ifrīqiyan phase too, as one repeatedly finds in al-Nu'mān's work. At the same time, the *K. al-Ḥimma* and the *Majālis* reveal that the *da'wa* was far from the ideal that the Fāṭimid imam-caliphs and al-Nu'mān aspired to achieve.

Weber noted how power and charismatic authority harness discipline and bureaucracy for efficiency and domination.⁵⁵ Hence, "status groups that are attempting to rule over large territories or large organisations," especially through military control, according to Weber, "can maintain effective superiority over their subjects only by means of a very strict internal discipline."⁵⁶ The *awliyā'* were such a "status group" within the Fāṭimid empire and thus their discipline and training, including their education, became a priority, especially

⁵² Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 120 (tr. 168).

⁵³ Brett, *The Fatimid Empire*, 47, 66.

⁵⁴ Al-Naysābūrī, *al-Risāla al-mūjaza*, 70 (my translation).

⁵⁵ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1148-50.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 1149.

during the years building up to the conquest of Egypt. However, unlike the Ṣaḡālība, who were subject to strict discipline, many of the Kutāma believers had become part of the urban population in Fāṭimid cities and had already lost the organisational structure and discipline that had been enforced under Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī. When religious life in society generally came to be dominated by Ismā‘īlism, and the Ismā‘īlī community came to include diverse ethnic groups in an urban context, a process similar to the urbanisation of Arab and Turkic warrior groups in the East, military control gradually gave way to formalised *da‘wa* institutions such as the *majālis al-ḥikma*.⁵⁷

That “Shiism was adopted by a significant segment of the population and not only a small group centred on the Fatimid caliph and his court,” has been convincingly argued by Yaacov Lev and Stewart.⁵⁸ The public manifestation of Fāṭimid Shī‘ism, in Stewart’s words, “the Ismā‘īlī character of Egypt” was reinforced through festivals, ceremonials and rituals, much of which drew on the strength of the large non-Ismā‘īlī Shī‘ī population of Egypt.⁵⁹ Popular elements of Shī‘ism, such as public cursing of the Companions and celebrating the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn were essential for strengthening and maintaining the identity of the Shī‘ī community, although the dynasty rarely exploited this potential to galvanise its Shī‘ī followers. The esoteric interpretation of religion was taught to the faithful in the *majālis al-ḥikma*, the purpose of which was to foster the community’s devotion to the imams (*walāya*), which was one of the seven pillars of Islam according to Ismā‘īlī doctrines. However, probably in an attempt to raise the community of Ismā‘īlī believers above the commonality, the doctrines of the state became increasingly intellectualized, which arguably isolated part of the population. Whether the *bāṭin* was meant to be embraced by the subject population remains a conundrum.

⁵⁷ Yaacov Lev, “The Fāṭimid Imposition of Ismā‘īlism on Egypt,” *ZDMG* 138, no. 2 (1988). Stewart, “Popular Shiism in Medieval Egypt: Vestiges of Medieval Sectarian Polemics in Egyptian Arabic,” *SI* 84 (1996): 35-66.

⁵⁸ Stewart, “Popular Shiism in Medieval Egypt,” 65.

⁵⁹ Ibid; Lev, “The Fāṭimid Imposition,” 323; Stewart, “Popular Shiism in Medieval Egypt,” 35-66.

The Ismāʿīlī Paradox

Writing about the dissemination and popularisation of “salvation religion” from the elite to the masses, Max Weber hinted at the inevitability of the emergence of popular saints or saviours in all religions.⁶⁰ While Weber famously, and perhaps incorrectly, declared that “Islam was never a religion of salvation,”⁶¹ he still correctly identified Muslim “saints” as intermediaries between the divine and the masses, “the veneration of which constituted the real religion of the masses in everyday life.”⁶² Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism, however, while often described as a movement centred on charismatic leadership and the person of the imam, does not seem to lend itself to this type of dissemination or “popularisation.”⁶³ Although messianic figures of the “human-divine saviour” type appealed to the masses, the institutionalised and intellectualised *daʿwa* probably did not. Weber postulated that

[...] as a rule salvation religion changes its character as soon as it has reached lay groups who are not particularly or professionally concerned with the cultivation of intellectualism, and certainly changes its character after it has reached into the deprived social strata to whom intellectualism is both economically and socially inaccessible. One characteristic element of this transformation, a product of the inevitable accommodation to the needs of the masses, may be formulated generally as the emergence of a personal, divine or human-divine saviour as the bearer of salvation, with the additional consequence that the religious relationship to this personage becomes the precondition of salvation.⁶⁴

Historically, the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* recognised hierarchies of access to religious truth, which put the uninitiated commoners at the bottom, from where they might gradually progress to a higher position in the knowledge hierarchy. It appears that this inherent division between the elite and the common people in Ismāʿīlī doctrines, had, in fact, made it somewhat immune to

⁶⁰ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 477-88.

⁶¹ Muhammad Hasan Khalil, “Muslim Scholars and the Fate of the Others,” PhD Diss, University of Michigan, 2007, 9; Levzov, “Aspects of Islamisation,” 153-4.

⁶² Weber, *Economy and Society*, 488. For an application of this theory to Muslim societies, see Ira Lapidus, “The Institutionalization of Early Islamic Societies,” 149-50, where he notes the “profound difference” between rural and urban forms of belief and religious life, as well as the role of the veneration of saints and shrines in disseminating “Islamic identity.”

⁶³ Early modern and more recent history of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī community, provide better-documented cases of tension between local charismatic leaders and the imams’ “institutionalised authority.”

⁶⁴ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 487,

what Weber called “the devolution of salvation religion from privileged to non-privileged strata.”⁶⁵ Besides, in the case of the Fāṭimids, the presence of the imam-caliph who preached or endorsed esoteric, intellectual doctrines inaccessible to the masses, arguably did not allow for the accommodation of religion to the needs of the laity.⁶⁶

Moreover, given the simultaneous opposition of both the urban Sunnī Mālikīs and rural Ibādī Berber population of North Africa to political power, association with the ruling dynasty must have made the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa* un-“popular” by default. During the Fāṭimid period, the cult of ascetic scholars — the *murābiṭūn*, that would play a pivotal role in the rise of the Almoravid dynasty later, enjoyed increasing popular appeal. Although they championed the Mālikism of the scholars of Qayrawān, it was their piety and asceticism that appealed to their Maghribī followers.⁶⁷ The Mālikī *modus operandi*, one could argue, was quite similar to the populism of the “ḥadīth folks”, who had a strong appeal to the lower strata of society.⁶⁸ The appeal of religious movements with a simple and clear message was similarly exploited by the Almohads (*al-muwaḥḥidūn* – the Unitarians) movement, in a way similar to the Fāṭimid *dā‘ī*, Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī.⁶⁹ Finally, the Ibādī *shaykhs* active in Fāṭimid territories and the Sūfī saints also responded to the same need that was left unsatisfied by the increasingly intellectualised Fāṭimid *da‘wa*.⁷⁰ They also enjoyed popular appeal, ironically in the same manner that the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa* had among the Kutāma.⁷¹

With the formation of the Fāṭimid caliphate and the transformation of the charismatic authority, the Ismā‘īlī community within the caliphate was arguably left with little space for popular expressions of religion. The early Fāṭimid movement was built around the figure of a charismatic messiah. The Fāṭimid state attempted to “institutionalise an

⁶⁵ Ibid., 477.

⁶⁶ On this too, see Weber, *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, 99-105. García-Arenal also contrasts Fāṭimid Mahdism with Almoravid legalistic puritanism. *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, 96-98.

⁶⁸ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:389-92.

⁶⁹ Bret and Fentress, *The Berbers*, 105-13.

⁷⁰ It does indeed seem that the majority of the population, as Brett observes, “were either disillusioned with their claims, or indifferent to their pretensions.” Brett, “The Realm,” 437.

⁷¹ For various forms of popular religion in Islamic Maghrib during this period, see Bennison, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires*, ch. 6, 227-75. García-Arenal shows how successive puritanical movements of the Muslim West claimed to reform religion and return to pure belief drawing on similar ideas, motives, and methods. *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, esp. chapter 4 and 5.

uninstitutionaliseable mode of authority” (i.e. the charismatic authority of Shī‘ī imams), to quote Hamid Dabashi, who more generally argued that this exception to the Weberian framework was a source of continuous tension in the history of Shī‘ī Islam.⁷² In other words, in Weber's thought, charisma was personal and thus temporal, whereas institutional order was impersonal and permanent.

The Fāṭimids attempted to perpetuate the charismatic authority of the Prophet and the Shī‘ī imams through institutionalisation. In this process, the official public discourse of the caliphate suppressed popular expressions of faith, such as exaggerations about the status of the Imams and their knowledge of the unseen (*ghayb*)⁷³ (these tendencies are described by Weber as the characteristics of popular religion), as was notoriously maintained by the Druze. Moreover, to maintain a peaceful coexistence by the terms of truces that al-Mu‘izz secured from the heads of various communities, as will be discussed in the next section, the imam-caliph encouraged his followers to be his “silent” rather than “vocal” agents. Confronted with persistent hostile propaganda and misrepresentations of their doctrines, the Fāṭimids had to exercise caution with respect to the public image of the dynasty and its followers, especially when they needed to concentrate all their effort on conquering new lands.⁷⁴ On the downside, every time they cracked down on the “heretics” and “extremists” they lost part of their supporters from among the population.

The above-mentioned Druze movement started by several *dā‘īs* claiming the divinity of the imam-caliph al-Ḥākim bi-amri-llāh (386-411/996-1021) in Cairo is a case in point.⁷⁵ As Walker notes, the Fāṭimid doctrine of the imamate in this period, as formulated by *dā‘ī* al-

⁷² Dabashi, *Authority in Islam*, 119-20. For the Ismā‘īlī imamate, especially for the recent history, see Daryoush Mohammad Poor's critique of Weber. *Authority without Territory: The Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili Imamate*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

⁷³ See al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *al-Himma*, 53.

⁷⁴ On numerous occasions, Fāṭimid caliphs and *dā‘īs* explicitly responded to the accusations of their adversaries. See, for instance, M. K. Ḥusayn's introduction to the *K. al-Himma*, 21ff. The Fāṭimids' sessions of wisdom too, while primarily designed to perpetuate the revolutionary movement of the imams and to establish their authority, at the same time had to control the activities of the believers in response to the hostile propaganda of their competitors.

⁷⁵ On the Druze movements at the time of al-Ḥākim, see M. Hodgson, “Durūz,” *EI2*.

Kirmānī (d. after 411/1021) and his predecessors, was “highly abstract and intellectual.”⁷⁶

However, there was another type of *dāʿī*,

who longed for direct access to the imam and a down-to-earth understanding of religious doctrine. Rather than being told about the universal intellect and a universal soul of a Neoplatonic cosmology, they required real and palpable objects of worship and devotion. The abstractions of al-Kirmānī were probably of little use to them.⁷⁷

Al-Kirmānī and the official Fāṭimid *daʿwa*, of course, disowned these people. The figureheads were killed or forced into hiding and the movement split from the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* and survives to the present as a separate confession. Not all popular beliefs may come into stark conflict with official doctrines in this fashion. However, the inability or reluctance on the part of the central religious authority to adopt, endorse, or otherwise draw on the appeal of these beliefs, inevitably weakened the official religion, which was perhaps an outcome of the Fāṭimid paradox.⁷⁸

The *Majālis* of the Imam-Caliph al-Muʿizz

When it comes to the study of Fāṭimid *daʿwa* networks and knowledge transmission within the *daʿwa*, we have few literary sources, and even less documentary evidence. Unlike the network of Mālikī scholars of Ifrīqiya, for whom we have not only contemporary biographical dictionaries, but also manuscript notes and autographed copies of their works with notes of transmission, the original written production of the *daʿwa* has not survived. Scholars have suggested two primary reasons for this paucity of information: one is that the Fāṭimid archives and libraries in Egypt were destroyed following the end of the dynasty, although this assumption has now been challenged if not disproved by “a range of narrative and more limited documentary evidence” that suggest the opposite.⁷⁹ The second explanation is that the

⁷⁶ Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī: Ismāʿīlī Thought in the Age of al-Ḥākim* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 22.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁸ It is tempting, and perhaps useful, to contrast the Fāṭimid position with regards to popular religion with that of the later Safavids, who were more successful in integrating “popular forms of Islam” into their official doctrines. See Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 243-44; Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3:35.

⁷⁹ Bora, “Did Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Destroy the Fāṭimids’ Books? An Historiographical Inquiry,” *JRAS* 3 (July 2019): 1-19, 19. Daftary, for instance, maintains that the Ayyūbids “systematically destroyed the renowned Fāṭimid libraries in

secret nature of the Fāṭimid *daʿwa* and its teaching precluded the disclosure of the true doctrines of faith to non-initiates and also prevented the wider circulation of esoteric books. Furthermore, it is possible that the names of authors were kept hidden to prevent the exposure of the missionary network in hostile lands. Another reason could be that the *daʿwa* had no interest in preserving the memory and teachings of the *dāʿīs* while the Ismāʿīlī imam was present, partly because the community of the *dāʿīs* was hierarchical, rather than horizontal. Or, perhaps one could suggest that in a hierarchical system the ideological stimulus similar to the one that fostered Sunnī *ṭabaqāt* literature did not exist?

There is, however, little doubt that the Fāṭimid *daʿwa* was well-funded, organised and productive during the late Ifrīqiyan–early Egyptian period. Knowledge production had become a central matter to the empire. Recent discoveries, such as a unique illustrated manuscript from the Fāṭimid period, the *Kitāb Gharāʾib al-funūn wa mulaḥ al-ʿuyūn* (The Book of Curiosities of the Sciences and Marvels for the Eyes),⁸⁰ which have complimented previous understandings of networks of trade and knowledge from the Geniza documents and literary sources, also support this contention. The *Kitāb Gharāʾib al-funūn* was most probably produced by an Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī* and testifies to the existence of established networks of itinerant *dāʿīs* and workshops to produce high quality, detailed maps. As Rapoport and Savage-Smith rightly observe, it would have been impossible to draw most of the maps in the *Kitāb Gharāʾib al-funūn* without first-hand knowledge of the geographies, routes, and structures.⁸¹ However,

Cairo.” Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis*, 5. Nasser Rabat also states: “Fatimid archives were deliberately destroyed and their libraries and artefacts sold off in auction and dispersed among many collectors and merchants...” Rabbat, “Al-Maqrizi’s Connection to the Fāṭimid,” in F. Daftary and G. Miskinzoda, *The Study of Shiʿi Islam: History, Theology and Law* (London and New York, 2014): 67-75, 68. However, similar “auctioning” and “looting” of books from Fāṭimid libraries took place during the crisis of 461/1069. See Walker, “Libraries, Book Collections and the Production of Texts by the Fatimids,” 12. Some books from the Fāṭimid libraries may have made their way into the Ashrāfiyya mosque collection in Damascus. On this, see Konrad Hirschler, *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library: The Ashrāfiyya Library Catalogue* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 125.

⁸⁰ Edited and translated by Y. Rapoport and E. Savage-Smith as *An Eleventh-Century Egyptian Guide to the Universe: The Book of Curiosity* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Their first book-length study of the maps, also by Rapoport and Savage-Smith, as *Lost Maps of the Caliphs: Drawing the World in Eleventh-Century Cairo* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

⁸¹ Rapoport and Savage-Smith, *Lost Maps of the Caliphs*, 101, 111. Al-Maqrīzī reports that one such map of the world was commissioned by al-Muʿizz in al-Manṣūriyya. *Ittiʿāz al-ḥunafāʾ*, cited in Jiwa, *Towards a Shiʿi Mediterranean Empire*.

we do not know even the name of the author, or authors, and despite much valuable information, there is no direct reference to the workshops or the intellectual milieu behind their production. While composed in the first half of the eleventh century in Fāṭimid Egypt, these maps still concentrate on the Western Mediterranean region that was of primary strategic interest to the Fāṭimid empire. In particular, the maps of Sicily and their former capital al-Mahdiyya, which presumably also held symbolic and strategic value for the Fāṭimids of Egypt, testify to the existence of a network of Fāṭimid agents active along these routes which provided the vital intelligence needed to produce these maps. They provide a unique understanding of the Fāṭimid perspective and the way they saw their place in the Mediterranean region as well as in the world at large.⁸²

What does this mean for the networks of knowledge in early Fāṭimid empire? As the editors rightly stress, the Fāṭimid worldview had key influence on the way the world was depicted in these maps, which are as “idiosyncratic” as the dynasty: “It was an exceptional product of an exceptional dynasty and sect, visualizing an unusual sea-based imperial worldview, and an encyclopedic intellectual outlook.”⁸³ It certainly attests to the concentration of knowledge at the imperial capital and the caliphate’s patronage of science and intelligence networks for strategic purposes. Perhaps it required several mapmakers and geographers to collaborate and prepare these maps for the use of the caliphs. Without projecting this evidence for the concentration of knowledge production in Cairo back onto the Ifrīqiyan period of the dynasty, one can still assume that the Fāṭimid court played the role of a hub for numerous *dāʿīs*, itinerant scholars and scientists, many of whom were employed by the state. As will be discussed, the *K. al-Majālīs* of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān provides a wealth of information about the presence of various groups at the Fāṭimid court, their occupations, and their relations to the Fāṭimid mission. The *Kitāb Gharāʾib al-funūn* makes us wonder about this unique intellectual milieu and helps us to envisage how Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* may have been involved in amassing and utilising the vast Fāṭimid libraries. It is reasonable to assume that

⁸² Also, according to Rapoport and Savage-Smith, “the treatise can be viewed as part of a westward shift in the geographical tradition and in the center of gravity in the Islamic world in general.” *Lost Maps of the Caliphs*, 250. Based on these maps, Annliese Nef, also asserts the importance of the Western Mediterranean noting that in Fāṭimid understanding, the “centre de gravité de l’empire islamique” was not confined to Egypt. Nef, “La délégation politique dans l’Occident fatimide avant 973,” [Online].

⁸³ Rapoport and Savage-Smith, *The Lost Maps of the Caliphs*, 253.

the *dāʿīs* must have had direct connection to these intellectual resources and were the primary beneficiaries of the famed royal libraries, although our evidence is mostly indirect.⁸⁴ The *Kitāb al-Majālis*, which is an idiosyncratic work in its own right, allows us to get as close as we can to the intellectual milieu of the Fāṭimid court, to the world of the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs*, their approaches to knowledge and their view of the world, which certainly influenced the production of the remarkable maps. Thus, to get a real sense of the working of the Fāṭimid court in al-Manṣūriyya, one has to turn to this Fāṭimid source, which is perhaps the closest one could get to a Fāṭimid “*daʿwa* archive.”

The *Kitāb al-majālis waʿl musāyarāt*, the full title of which is given as “The Book of Sessions, Excursions, Standings and Authorisations from Imam al-Muʿizz li-dīni-llāh and his ancestors” in the *Fihrist al-Majdūʿ*, the earliest catalogue of Ismāʿīlī literature, is a unique source from the early Fāṭimid period.⁸⁵ It contains numerous anecdotes of historical and doctrinal significance, but also provides a unique glimpse into the Fāṭimid court and the discussions of the imam-caliph with his followers, close companions, ambassadors, and at least in two cases, imprisoned enemies.⁸⁶ It is comparable to Ibn al-Haytham’s *K. al-Munāẓarāt* in that it is an eyewitness account which narrates the encounters of the author with the imams with one significant difference: the *K. al-Munāẓarāt* did not represent the views of the *dawla*. This distinction is significant because it suggests that the Fāṭimid *dawla* did not have full control over the *daʿwa*, as is often assumed in historiography. As was already suggested in the discussion of the *Munāẓarāt* above, it was a work of a *dāʿī*, who was close to

⁸⁴ Paul Walker maintains that, “...a quick answer is that we possess almost no evidence of such a connection [between the Fāṭimid *daʿwa* and their library resources]. There are no examples, in what we have uncovered so far, of *daʿwa* agents making direct use of the royal holdings, no signs of visitation or of having access.” Walker, “Libraries, Book Collections and the Production of Texts by the Fatimids,” 10.

⁸⁵ *Kitāb al-Majālis waʿl-musāyarāt waʿl-mawāqiw waʿl-tawqīʿāt ʿan al-imām al-Muʿizz li-dīni-llāh wa ʿan ābāʾih*. Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 61.

⁸⁶ Early scholars, such as W. Ivanow and S. Stern underestimated the historical significance of the *Majālis* characterising it as a work of hagiography or speculations, but more recent scholarship, notably M. Fierro, H. Halm, P. Walker, M. Brett and S. Hamdani demonstrated the significance of the information it provides. Stern, for instance, stated that much of it [the *Majālis*] is “useless enough,” see, “Heterodox Ismāʿīlism”, in *Studies*, 262. On the contrary, Walker deems it useful enough on the account of the “incidental information ...[about] historical events” and their reception. *Exploring an Islamic Empire*, 138; Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, 16, considered the interpretive efforts in Ismāʿīlī works including the *Majālis* as “wasting time,” on the part of the authors. S. Hamdani offers a contrary view in *Between*, 98. See also, Brett, *The Fatimid Empire*, 9, 69, where he notes: “For the historian the *Majālis* illustrates the operation of government at the personal as well as the institutional level.”

the *dā'i* Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'i, his brother and the Kutāma. Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'i was eventually rehabilitated in al-Nu'mān's official history of the Fāṭimid revolution, by blaming the alleged treason on his brother Abu'l-'Abbās.

As stated above, this may have been in order to reinforce the connection between the Kutāma and the Fāṭimid *da'wa* through his memory. Unlike al-Nu'mān Ibn al-Haytham reveres both brothers and makes no mention of their alleged treason. These features distinguish the *Munāẓarāt* from the *Majālis*, although they both belong to the same genre. There may have been other precursors to the *Majālis* of al-Nu'mān within the Ismā'īlī circles, as there were similar books of *adab* which contained accounts of *majālis*. Nevertheless, al-Nu'mān did not follow the conventions of the genre and added elements that made his work a unique composition. He thus states in the introduction to the *Majālis*:

In this book, I decided to record the wisdom (*ḥikma*), lesson (*fā'ida*), knowledge (*ilm*), and insight (*ma'rifa*) from al-Mu'izz's (God's blessings be upon him) discourse in a *majlis*, or a *maqām* or a *musāyara*; or from what was conveyed to me through verbal (*balāgh*) or written communication (*mukātaba*) or an authorization (*tawqī'*), conveyed not verbatim, but rather the exact meaning of it, nothing more nor less; for one is excused from falling short of conveying the exact wording itself, since it is the gem (*jawhar*), which human being cannot venture to compose, but it is God who originated its creation.⁸⁷

Al-Nu'mān goes on to quote Sufyān al-Thawrī who reported from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq that the speech of the imams is better than a gem since the gem is nothing but stone. Further al-Nu'mān asserts the superiority of al-Mu'izz over all other people and his exceptional knowledge as a descendant of the imams and the Prophet.⁸⁸ Thus, al-Nu'mān's narrative leaves the reader in no doubt that al-Mu'izz is the central figure in the institution of the *da'wa*'s *majlis*. By contrast, the largest collection of the Fāṭimid *majālis* lectures, the *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya* of the 5th/11th century *dā'i* al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. ca. 470/1078) does not attribute the *majālis* to the ruling imam-caliph al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh (r. 427-487/1035-1094),

⁸⁷ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Majālis*, 45.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 45-6.

nor does the author place him at the centre.⁸⁹ Similarly, another contemporary work, al-Malījī's (fl. 5th/11th century) *al-Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, although nominally attributed to the imam-caliph, does not rely on him for *ta'wīl*.⁹⁰ This may indicate that the involvement of the imam-caliphs in formalised *da'wa* instruction had diminished over time, but one cannot be entirely sure, because the authors may have deliberately concealed it. Stepping back from holding *majālis* for the believers may also indicate the gradual disappearance of the ruler from sight, as we observe in other caliphates, such as the early 'Abbāsids. It is, however, possible that the *dā'īs* acted more independently than before, were more numerous, and were more likely to emphasise their role in the much more competitive milieu of Cairo.⁹¹

It should be noted that the *K. al-Majālis* mostly includes anecdotes from al-Mu'izz's audiences (*majālis*), but also other occasions such as *mawāqif* (sing. *mawqif* – a place of stopping) and *musāyarāt* – excursions. The content of the *K. al-Majālis* is thus not limited to the sessions or wisdom, that is to say, the sessions conveyed by al-Mu'izz, nor to the sessions of *ta'wīl*, in which authorised interpretations of the faith was taught to the believers, such as al-Nu'mān's *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im*. It is a chronicle of caliphal activities, written from the perspective of a believer who was no less than the chief architect of Fāṭimid authority and legitimacy. The book is thus neither a compendium of the *majālis* – audiences in various formats, nor a collection of *ḥadīth*, to which he devoted another work titled *Sharḥ al-akhbār fī faḍā'il al-a'imma al-aṭḥār*. It was rather a compilation that also included eyewitness accounts, quotations, and narrations from the four Fāṭimid imam-caliphs, as well as documents, albeit likely in a heavily edited and abridged form. Thus, in a sharp contrast to earlier assumptions mentioned above, the potential of the *Majālis* as an archive has yet to be explored, since the author draws on many written documents at his disposal. There can be no doubt that al-Nu'mān's archival collection was much vaster than al-Ustādh Jawdhar's, and

⁸⁹ Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, *Walāyah in Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī Tradition*, 5-6. Alexandrin also offers valuable analyses of the Ismā'īlī *majālis al-ḥikma* in the 5th/11th century Cairo, as well as Shīrāz through the life and works of the Persian *dā'ī* al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī. See, especially ch. 1.

⁹⁰ See M. K. Ḥusayn's introduction to his edition of *al-Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, 7-17. Ḥusayn, however, was not able to identify the author. It was Stern who identified the author of the collection as Abu'l-Qāsim al-Mālījī, the Chief Qāḍī from 450-452/1058-1060. See, Stern, "Cairo as the Centre of Ismā'īlī Movement," 239-40.

⁹¹ Al-Mu'ayyad's *Sīra* reveals how the *dā'īs* were competing for positions (i.e. lecturers). See Stern, "Cairo as the Centre of Ismā'īlī Movement," 240-47.

contrary to earlier scepticism, what survives in the *Majālis* carries the weight of archival documents.

Perhaps due to the variety and disparity of its sources, as the editors of the *K. al-Majālis* note, there is no apparent logic in the way the book is structured, nor does the author address this in the introduction of the book.⁹² However, it progresses more or less chronologically and divided into chapters (*ajzā'*). Unlike other works of al-Nu'mān, many of which were clearly "reader-centric" in a sense that they were composed with specific audiences in mind, as the instruction of al-Mu'izz quoted below demonstrates, the *Majālis* resembles a compilation of miscellaneous archival material. In a quote, which comes from a note on a manuscript draft presented to al-Mu'izz, he instructs al-Nu'mān to give a clear structure to his work. The *Majālis*, however, as it was acknowledged by the author, was a compilation of wide-ranging materials based on both oral and written sources, and was most likely not intended for dissemination, but perhaps for reading in the *majālis al-ḥikma* in al-Manṣūriyya. The books of law, on the other hand were intended for teaching to the public:

I had composed a book of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) according to the Pure Imams of the House of the Prophet, and I thought it was not advisable to practice according to it, neither was it permissible for me to follow it in issuing legal opinions and judging, nor to adopt it, before its approval by the Imam of the Time. So, I took it to him together with another book that had come to me by chance. This one contained narrations from the People of the House (*ahl al-bayt*). He learnt what was in them and wrote a note (*waqqa'a*) on the book that I had composed: "This book is interesting for the learned and easier to understand for the uneducated. Divide it into sections so that it is simpler and easier to understand for the audience, because the beginner will not start reading a chapter of it, unless his desire to study it has been aroused. It will tire him if it is too long."⁹³

Al-Mu'izz's comments here reflect the general Fāṭimid pedagogy of progressive learning and the desire to reach the masses. The second book, on which he commented angrily, was most probably a work that contained contradictory *ḥadīth* report according to various Shī'ī authorities. Reports that contradicted the official Fāṭimid position would have weakened the Fāṭimid position vis-à-vis their ideological rivals. Works of speculative philosophy, which

⁹² See the introduction to the *Kitāb al-Majālis* by Ibrāhīm Shabbūḥ et al.

⁹³ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Majālis*, 396-7.

were common among the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs* were also allegedly criticised by al-Muʿizz on several occasions, at least in al-Nuʿmān's presentation. Here too, al-Muʿizz reveals that the way some of the *dāʿīs* interpreted the faith, or understood what constituted the Ismāʿīlī belief, contradicted al-Muʿizz's vision, which indicates that the need to codify the Shīʿī *fiqh* and *akhbār/hadīth* also came from inside the *daʿwa*.

The other book that you have sent with it contains twisted things. How could people transmit these things in our name unless they lie intentionally and dare to engage in wickedness? The ignorance of those who do not know better is the cause of what we have been through. God has put us through trial by making us the guardians of ignorant asses. We have always shown kindness towards them by guiding them and keeping their affairs in order so that God ends it well for us and makes us emerge from their midst in the most honourable way. Otherwise, this sort of ambiguity will not lead them to an understanding, and the evil result of their ignorance will come back to us. God has made us sufficient with His favour [towards us] and assisted us with His mercy. As for you, [O Nuʿmān], your position before us is such that you can neither thank God enough for it nor can you carry the burden [of this responsibility] except with help and success from God, which you have obtained through the satisfaction of God — your Lord, and your Master.⁹⁴

Like much of the content of the *Kitāb al-majālis*, which al-Nuʿmān faithfully recorded according to his assertions elsewhere in the book, this anecdote provides a wealth of information about the relationship between al-Muʿizz and al-Nuʿmān, the heterogeneous nature of the Fāṭimid *daʿwa* and the position of the caliphate vis-à-vis its subjects in the post-*fitna* period. The passage is also a telling example of the diversity of thought among the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs* and followers, whom al-Muʿizz and his learned chief *dāʿī* al-Nuʿmān tried to organise and homogenise. On several occasions, al-Muʿizz censures the “unorthodox” doctrines advocated by some of the *dāʿīs*.

The Eastern Islamic world, where the *daʿwa* was most successful, also allowed the *dāʿīs* more freedom. In one audience, a *dāʿī* presented a genealogy of the Fāṭimid Imams that differed from the official Fāṭimid genealogy. He justified it by saying that according to what he had been taught, the imams have seven different names: there are physical (*jismānī*),

⁹⁴ Ibid., 396-7.

mental (*naḥṣānī*), spiritual (*rūḥānī*), natural (*ṭabīʿī*), real (*ḥaqīqī*), manifest (*ẓāhir*) and hidden (*bāṭin*) names for the imams. “[The Imam] was astonished at his words” — reports al-Nuʿmān, which, of course, reveals his own reservations about such unauthorised interpretations.⁹⁵

One of these variant genealogies is preserved in the hitherto unstudied *Kitāb al-Asrār* (Book of Secrets) attributed to al-Mahdī, which contains a pre-Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī cosmological doctrine.⁹⁶ However, unlike al-Mahdī’s letter to the Yemen, this treatise seem to affirm the imamate of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, as per the official Fāṭimid-Ismāʿīlī belief, although he is not mentioned by name.⁹⁷ This small treatise was written during the caliphate of al-Manṣūr, who is praised as a divinely chosen successor of previous imams, but its provenance remains unclear. Nevertheless, it almost certainly dates back to the Fāṭimid period and was circulated in al-Manṣūr’s time, which points to the diversity of doctrines, and possibly political factions, that was problematic from al-Muʿizz’s perspective, as pointed out above.

Defending Fāṭimid Authority and Legitimacy by Intellect: *al-Hujja*, *al-Burhān*, and *Munāẓara* in the *Majālis*

Although Ismāʿīlī doctrines subordinated all interpretations of religion to the authority of the Ismāʿīlī imam, the teachings of the *daʿwa* explicitly encouraged individual inquiry and thinking and advocated reasoning. Before addressing this, let us look at some of the materials that can be described as “the *daʿwa* teachings in practice,” assuming that those anecdotes are based on real *majālis* of the imam-caliphs.

As was shown above, the superiority of Shīʿī imams in knowledge was one of the major components of the doctrine of the Imamate as formulated by al-Manṣūr and al-Qāḍī al-

⁹⁵ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Majālis*, 375.

⁹⁶ *Kitāb al-Asrār*, Ms 1217 (ArI, ZA). See Delia Cortese, *Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts: The Zāhid ʿAlī Collection in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2003), 62. I have transcribed and analysed the oldest known manuscript of the *Kitāb al-asrār*, preserved at the library of the IIS in London (ZA), but did not have access to other copies preserved in private collections.

⁹⁷ *Kitāb al-Asrār*, Ms 1217, f. 18v. Cf. Husayn F. al-Hamdani, *On the Genealogy of Fatimid Caliphs*, 11-13; A. Hamdani and F. de Blois, “A Re-Examination of al-Mahdī’s Letter,” 176-78. While the *K. al-Asrār* does not mention Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq’s successor by name, thus suggesting caution or ambiguity on the part of the author, or even the possibility of the original quotation matching al-Mahdī’s early genealogy, the son of Jaʿfar’s successor is named Muḥammad (b. Ismāʿīl?), which suggests otherwise, in line with the later Fāṭimid position. An extensive study of this work based on all available manuscripts has been undertaken by Prof I. K. Poonawala and a separate study by Prof W. Madelung the publication of which will shed more light on this obscure period.

Nu‘mān. The knowledge of the law was considered important by al-Manṣūr and al-Mu‘izz, as much as the esoteric interpretation of the law and the scripture. There is, however, an emphasis on broader learning, stemming in part from the broad education of the caliph al-Manṣūr and al-Mu‘izz. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, who builds the profile of these two caliphs, unsurprisingly praises Mu‘izz’s excellence in all subjects, but more significantly, on more than one occasion, highlights the novelty of his ideas, surely a sign of inspired knowledge.

For instance, there is a story of al-Mu‘izz asking a leading grammarian to author a book on certain subject in grammar. The grammarian first struggles to understand the caliph’s proposal. When, after a lengthy explanation, he finally understands what the caliph has in mind, he feels enormous pressure: “This is an area that no grammarian had touched upon before, not even the ancient linguists (*aṣḥāb al-lughā al-mutaqaddimīn*).”⁹⁸ He turns to al-Nu‘mān “as if he wanted to excuse himself” from completing the task, but al-Nu‘mān also encourages him to compose a book on the subject:

A certain person told me that he copied a book on the subject of *maqṣūr* and *mamdūd*⁹⁹ from Tha‘lab,¹⁰⁰ the grammarian. I saw what he had put together and I found nothing new in it but what his predecessors had arrived at. (He said) I mentioned this to him (i.e. Tha‘lab) and he said: “Yes, this is how people composed [books], so nothing has come down to us from the sky. Rather, we take other people’s work, improve the structure, put it together and add to it one thing after another.” After this, the grammarian said: “Yes, this is our agreement with the people and we are acting upon it (*kadhālika ‘ahadnā al-nāsa, wa ‘alayhi naḥnu*).” Al-Mu‘izz (peace be upon him) responded: “This is the excuse of inept people. So, do what I have ordered you to do. Truly, there is something in it from professing the unity of God (*min tawḥīd Allāh ‘azza wa jalla*) and demonstrating his wisdom (*ḥikma*) and whatever helps us to understand Him. He (God) will help you from His heavens in whatever we tasked you with, *in shā Allāh*, so that you achieve the goal that we desire (*ḥattā tablagha minhu murādanā*), contrary to what Tha‘lab said. The man said: “I hope I will complete this [task], *in shā Allāh*.” Then he left and the task had overwhelmed him so much that he decided not to undertake it. When he

⁹⁸ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 124.

⁹⁹ Shortened and prolonged nouns ending with ى and ٍ. See, W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1896), 156-159. This book of Tha‘lab is apparently lost. See al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 124, n. 3.

¹⁰⁰ One of the leading Kūfan grammarians (died 291/904). See al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, p. 124n2.

mentioned this to me, I told him: “Had you been well-intended and truly faithful you would have been granted success and guided [by God].”¹⁰¹

This anecdote that al-Nu‘mān relates to emphasise the connection between God and the imams also reveals some points regarding his view of knowledge. First, al-Mu‘izz seems to advocate a holistic view of knowledge that may be comparable with the Ikhwānian worldview in its encyclopaedic approach.¹⁰² Secondly, his encouragement to come up with a new interpretation and formulation of the grammar may also be understood as a challenge to the traditionalists’ view, which emphasised the importance of the transmitted sciences. Al-Nu‘mān then recalls that al-Manṣūr used to instruct him to undertake similar tasks and only with the help of God “the sealed items were unlocked” before him.¹⁰³

The imams are not only the intermediaries for God’s knowledge, but they are also portrayed as experts in religious, philosophical and practical sciences, as was the case with al-Mu‘izz. Al-Nu‘man mentions theology, esoteric sciences, and jurisprudence as the subjects in which al-Mu‘izz was the best expert of his time. As for medicine, geometry, astronomy, philosophy, “the sharpest masters of these fields were under his authority and each one of them dependent on him [al-Mu‘izz] in his [respective] discipline.”¹⁰⁴ This comprehensive knowledge was not received through any formal education, sitting with teachers or travelling in pursuit of knowledge, but rather was a sign of his imamate, “as it was one of the proofs [of the prophecy] of his grandfather Muhammad.”¹⁰⁵ Al-Mu‘izz himself laments that most of the reports about the previous imam-caliphs by their companions concern worldly matters and no one talks about “their virtue and knowledge and the wisdom that God bestowed upon them exclusively.”¹⁰⁶

As the case with the self-doubting grammarian shows, the approval of the imam was merely a formal validation and reassurance to the scholar. It indeed appears that the *dā‘īs* were free to pursue various subjects of inquiry as long as it did not clash with the ideology of

¹⁰¹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 124.

¹⁰² For the encyclopaedism of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*, see de Callatay, *Ikhwan al-Safa*, 59-72. The similarities between Ismā‘īlī thought and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā has been discussed elsewhere, as cited above.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 125.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 139.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 144.

the state. The absence of a biographical dictionary comparable to the works of *ṭabaqāt* deprives us from having a fuller picture of the education and activities of the numerous *dāʿīs* of the Fāṭimid period. But the absence of such a work is also instructive: the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* was not a traditionalist movement and the only legitimate and legitimising authority belonged to the imam-caliph.

The *daʿwa* literature is full of criticism of *ẓāhirī* traditionalism that most obviously targets the *ʿulamāʾ* of Qayrawān, but it appears that Shīʿī traditionalism also came under similar criticism. In one *majlis*, al-Muʿizz discusses “the characteristics of backward people (*mutakhallifīn*),”¹⁰⁷ which are probably identifiable with traditionalists among the Shīʿa as well as the scholars of Qayrawān:

[Al-Muʿizz said:] The words that appear most magnificent to the minds of the ignorant are the words of those whom they do not know or those who lived before them. When they hear the words of someone they know, they will reject it even if every bit of it is wisdom. There was a man who claimed to be knowledgeable and used to be close to the imams. Al-Manṣūr bi-llāh noticed that whenever he [i.e. al-Manṣūr] said something from his own [thought], there was no sign of acceptance in [the man’s] face, but when he related something from his ancestors, he would accept it and show interest in it. One day, in my presence, he was relating to him what was full of wisdom and knowledge beyond description, but he showed no sign of acceptance. Then [al-Manṣūr] told me: Bring me that book so that we see what is [written] there from our ancestors regarding this matter. When I brought the book to him, he drew me close to himself and said: “You have heard what I have just presented to this man, which had no effect on him. I will open the book, and you stay where you are [i.e. by my side] and keep looking at what is in the book and listen to what I recite.” After saying this to me secretly, he opened the book and pretended that he was reading from it, but in fact, he spoke his own words from his mind. [The man] was thrilled with excitement from what he heard. Then al-Manṣūr folded the book and said to me: “Did you see and hear this?” Yes, I said. He said: “Now it is up to you to deal with him.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ *Mutakhallif*, according to Lane’s *Lexicon*, Book I, p. 798, means *those who hold back, or fall short of doing the thing; remaining behind, of after the people, or party, not going with them*. In this context, I have understood “*mutakhallifīn*” as “those reluctant to join the *daʿwa*” and “those who have remained in the past” or simply “backwards” for lack of a better word.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Majālīs*, 126.

Al-Mu‘izz then recounts his conversation with this traditionist:

When [al-Manṣūr] left, I sat with the man and asked him: What do you think about what you heard from that book? He answered: “My Lord, I swear by God, I heard things that I never heard before. Would you mind asking him if he kindly allows his humble servant to copy from it? The more I tried to dissuade him, the more he talked about the value of what he heard saying: “By God, those are words (*kalām*) that suffice a person in a way that he does not need more.” He kept exaggerating and mentioning the excellence of what he heard.¹⁰⁹

Al-Mu‘izz, of course, reproached the man for undermining the authority of the imam of his time, despite knowing well that “God grants to every following imam the excellence, knowledge and wisdom of the previous imam” and even more. “If someone like you holds such beliefs [...] then what about those whom you want to guide, call upon and introduce [to the *da‘wa*?] — al-Mu‘izz said before reporting the conversation to his father, who then made up his mind about the fanatical traditionist.¹¹⁰ With hindsight, one hardly finds similar obsession with the tradition (*ḥadīth*) surprising, especially in the Maghrib. The six major Sunnī canonical *ḥadīth* collections had already been completed in the 3rd/9th century. The earliest compilation of Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*, Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī’s (d. 329/940) *al-Kāfī fī ‘ilm al-dīn* was also completed by the time of al-Manṣūr’s caliphate.¹¹¹ With the accumulation of this vast body of knowledge traditionist scholars established themselves as the custodians of the Prophetic legacy, even as “the heirs to the Prophet,” which could pose a direct threat to the authority of the Fāṭimid imam-caliphs, who claimed to be “the gates of knowledge.” The Fāṭimid “*ḥadīth* projects,” such as al-Nu‘mān’s *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, thus, can also be understood as a compromise, if not a concession of defeat.

Following this instructive anecdote, al-Nu‘mān reveals another important detail about his joint projects with al-Mu‘izz. Al-Nu‘mān authors a book under the supervision and direction of al-Mu‘izz, who greatly approved of the final work, praised it and remarked:

What makes it perfect is the fact that the name of the author is hidden because the common people (*al-‘amma*) are not impressed with anything taught to them unless it is by someone

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 126.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 127.

¹¹¹ Gleave, “Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh: The “Canonical” Imāmī Collections of Akhbār,” *ILS* 8, 3 *Hadith and Fiqh* (2001): 350-382, 352.

who is not their contemporary, or someone whom they do not know. This is because of their lack of judgement and ignorance; otherwise, our intention is nothing but to guide them and to make it right for them. And we shall use all means available to achieve that!¹¹²

The passage also illustrates the logic behind the attribution of books to established religious authorities, previous imams and scholars, and hiding the name of the contemporary author. This, of course, suggests that al-Nu‘mān’s oeuvre may have been larger than we thought, but also points to the likelihood of later attributions. The editors of the *Majālis* understand the *‘amma* in the above passage as a reference to the Mālikīs of Qayrawān, which is a common term generally reserved for the Sunnī masses and used throughout the works of the *da‘wa*.¹¹³ However, because al-Nu‘mān recalls al-Mu‘izz’s approval of the anonymous treatise in relation to the incident with the “reluctant” *dā‘ī*, it is more probable that Shī‘ī traditionists, who were not adhering to the doctrinal principle of giving preference to the Imam of the Time over his predecessors, are meant here. It is also unlikely that al-Mu‘izz wanted to dissociate himself from a *ẓāhirī* work written for the public. It is known that al-Nu‘mān’s *ẓāhirī* work took a more conservative approach and relied mostly on widely accepted Shī‘ī authorities.¹¹⁴ Therefore, in all probability, a work of *ta’wīl* is meant here, but it remains unclear if this reference is to a known work by al-Nu‘mān or another anonymous work mentioned in the sources.

“I Want You to Debate with Me”

“I want you to challenge me on what you hear from me” —al-Mu‘izz says to a group of his followers in a *majlis* — “and tell me what you found doubtful or confusing in it, and I will clarify that for you. Do not take [what I say] submissively (*‘alā al-taslīm*) and accept it wholeheartedly.”¹¹⁵ Argumentation is a powerful tool with which you can demolish your opponents, advised al-Mu‘izz, while also stressing the importance of debating to arrive at certainty and eliminate doubts from the minds of his followers, in other words, indoctrination.

¹¹² Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 127.

¹¹³ Ibid, 127

¹¹⁴ Halm, *Empire*, 371.

¹¹⁵ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 107.

To illustrate his point, he shares the advice of his father regarding the value of debating for learning:

When al-Manṣūr (peace be upon him) taught me something from his knowledge and wisdom, he would ask: "Tell me, what do you think this is about?" Sometimes I would reply: "I do not have an opinion about this. He would say: "Ask about things that are not clear to you." Sometimes, I would not find anything dubious about it, and I would reply: There is nothing confusing in this for me. He would then say: "Ask about it what you fear that our enemy and opposition may ask." Knowledge and Wisdom will not be fixed in the hearts except by arguments (*ḥujja*) and contradiction (*mu'āraḍa*)." Other times, I would say something about the matter and seas of knowledge and wisdom would pour down from him towards me [...]
Follow this example, acquire the wisdom [from me] and increase your knowledge.¹¹⁶

Debate and argumentation in these private *majālis* was obviously intended for learning and understanding. Al-Mu'izz wanted his *dā'īs* and learned followers to learn the methods of disputation, but not so much because he trusted their rational faculties, but rather because he thought they had the right source of knowledge and thus the winning argument (*al-ḥujja*). On the contrary, al-Mu'izz criticised the Mu'tazila, the main proponents of rational disputation in the Islamic world and dismissed their points, asserting that their sole interest was to get a following among people, whereas in reality they had no authority.¹¹⁷

The Prophet said: "The one who seeks knowledge in order to contend with the learned people and to quarrel with the stupid people and to attract attention towards himself, and to claim 'I am your leader,' let him have his seat in Hell!"¹¹⁸

"Leadership does not suit anyone except those who are meant for it," concludes al-Mu'izz.¹¹⁹

***Al-Burhān* — the Manifest Proof**

The *Majālis* of al-Nu'mān also reveal some aspects of the initial engagement of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* with philosophical ideas already present in the Maghrib. It is believed that the Neo-Platonist *dā'īs* of the East gained the upper hand only during the Fāṭimids' Egyptian phase.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 107.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 343-45.

¹¹⁸ This *ḥadīth* is included in both Shī'ī and Sunnī collections. See, al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Majālis*, 345, n. 2.

¹¹⁹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Majālis*, 343-44. See also *K. al-Himma*, 138.

Indeed, al-Nu‘mān happily reminds the readers that al-Mu‘izz was less than impressed with the *dā‘īs* of the East and their free borrowings from philosophical discourse. Nevertheless, given the *dā‘īs*’ interest in disputation and argumentation, these discussions were often brought up in the *majālis*.

In one of the audiences, the topic was “*al-burhān*,” which comes from the title of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* as it was translated by the contemporary al-Farābī (d. 950), Ibn al-Nadīm (c. 995) and the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*.¹²⁰ Given that *al-burhān* is also a Qur’ānic term, it became necessary to define it. “So what is *al-burhān* according to you,” — asked al-Mu‘izz and after hearing al-Nu‘mān’s answer, sent him to do more research on the topic.¹²¹ Al-Nu‘mān began with Arabic dictionaries that define the term as “proof,” “proof and its elucidation,” “explanation,” “sign” and so on. Then he looked at the Qur’ān and found all the instances that *al-burhān* occurs (8 places) and the works of the exegetes (*al-mufasssirūn*) who commented on the relevant verses. This confirmed that Arabic lexicographers’ definitions were in agreement with the interpretations of the exegetes. He included other remote and metaphoric meanings, and added the *bāṭinī* interpretations, but still hesitated to show it to al-Mu‘izz until a suitable occasion presented itself when the imam-caliph was engaged in a debate with some *dā‘īs* who “adhered to the doctrine of the philosophers.”

According to al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān’s narrative, one of them came forward with a book that he had presumably authored titled *Risālat al-burhān*, which “al-Mu‘izz looked at and then threw away” saying: “By God, what a misfortune that someone like the author of these words is related to us and seen as our *dā‘ī*. There is nothing in this treatise about ‘demonstration’ (*al-burhān*) except the title of it.” Then al-Mu‘izz found many other errors in the book, reports al-Nu‘mān. When al-Nu‘mān presented his findings, al-Mu‘izz did not reject it, but pointed out that he is “getting only at the outward layer of its meaning.” Then, al-Nu‘mān, and everyone present, got up and begged al-Mu‘izz to give him the answer. Al-Mu‘izz quoted the famous tradition about the intellect being the most excellent among God’s creation, to which no one could object. Therefore,

¹²⁰ Mario Kozah, *The Birth of Indology*, 90.

¹²¹ Al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 132ff.

whatever is established by the sound and perfect intellect (*al-‘aql al-saḥīḥ al-kāmil*), (to which God testified with this testimony), and testified, attested and decided by it [i.e. intellect], that is the brilliant demonstration (*al-burhān al-munīr*) with its soundness and definiteness.¹²²

Of course, not all intellects are perfect, there are also defective intellects, “but I am not talking about or alluding to them” — continued al-Mu‘izz. According to al-Nu‘mān, who described himself as a passive observer throughout this debate, there were delicate allusions in his discourse from the esoteric sciences, but most people in the *majlis* were far from grasping them: “I think most of them did not understand even the apparent meaning of what he said and did not learn the true meaning of it.” The allusion seems to be to the perfect intellect of the imam, who is the master of all crafts despite not having studied with a master or travelled in pursuit of knowledge.¹²³

These *majālis* are no doubt embellished accounts of real events and are clearly influenced by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s personal concerns, including his positioning himself closest person in rank to the imam-caliph. He makes al-Mu‘izz philosopher-king and the source of divine knowledge and guidance, and the sole legitimate religious authority. As mentioned, the fact that the *Majālis* was written during the last decade of the Ifrīqiyan period makes it one of the most valuable contemporaneous sources for the events leading up to the conquest of Egypt.

Overall, the *Kitāb al-Majālis* provides the perspective of the ruling elite from al-Manṣūriyya, their concerns and preoccupation as well as practical considerations and theoretical justifications behind Fāṭimid policies. The Fāṭimid institutions of knowledge were thus created as a response to the challenges that the Fāṭimid state faced, as part of the “knowledge” department of what one could call al-Mu‘izz’s “sword and knowledge” strategy.

By Sword and by Knowledge

Fāṭimid politics of knowledge and the development of Fāṭimid institutions of learning in Ifrīqiya cannot be fully understood without the context of imperial expansion and the evolution of Ismā‘īlī doctrines. The competition with rival caliphates and others who

¹²² Ibid., *Majālis*, 136.

¹²³ Ibid., 138-39.

challenged their authority, including the *fuqahā'*, was as crucial to the establishment of Fāṭimid knowledge traditions as the triumphalist doctrine of Ismā'īlism, which viewed the rise of the Fāṭimids as the "triumph of truth over falsehood." Moreover, Fāṭimid claims to knowledge, the "truth" (*al-ḥaqq*) and "proof" (*ḥujja*) needed to be demonstrated, not just proclaimed through public sermons and texts, such as coinage, inscriptions on buildings and so on.¹²⁴ The institutions of *da'wa*, thus evolved in part to respond to this concern of the Fāṭimid *dawla*.

Fāṭimid perspective of their universalist project sharply differs from the one found in non-Fāṭimid sources. An episode widely reported in Sunnī sources describing the imposition of Fāṭimid rule on Egypt exemplifies anti-Fāṭimid narratives:

After the fourth Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz moved to Cairo in the year 973 (362), when he held his first audience, the Egyptian notables asked him about his pedigree. Al-Mu'izz, it is reported, drew his sword from its sheath, and replied: "This is my pedigree!" and, throwing gold pieces to the assembly, he added, "And here is my noble ancestry!" *Se non è vero, è ben trovato*.¹²⁵

In response the notables said: "We hear and obey (*sami'nā wa ata'nā*)."¹²⁶ It is clear that the purpose of the anecdote is to portray al-Mu'izz as a tyrant, or an "unscrupulous upstart who had gained power by force and maintained it by corruption," as Bernard Lewis put it.¹²⁷ Moreover, this echoes another common polemic that the Fāṭimid caliphs were not able to explain the question of their lineage because it was fabricated.¹²⁸ Even less plausible is the idea

¹²⁴ See Walker's discussion of Fāṭimid coinage, inscription, *ṭirāz* (ceremonial clothing) and works of art in *Exploring an Islamic Empire*, 93-110.

¹²⁵ Ibn Zāfir, *Akhbār al-duwal al-munqaṭi'a*, cited by Halm, *Empire*, 159. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 3:82, Ibn Ṭābāṭabā's biography, no. 342), other medieval chroniclers and biographers copied the story in relation with al-Mu'izz or the Imāmī notables of Cairo.

¹²⁶ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 3: 82; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī'l-tārīkh* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2009), 7:78.

¹²⁷ Bernard Lewis, "An Interpretation of Fatimid History," *Colloque internationale sur l'histoire du Caire* (Cairo, 1972), 287.

¹²⁸ Ibn Khallikān reports that a piece of paper with a poem was found by al-Mu'izz's successor, Abū Maṣṣūr Nizār al-'Azīz bi-llāh, when he ascended to the pulpit for a Friday sermon. The poem quoted below challenged him to enumerate his ancestors beyond four generations. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 5:373

إنا سمعنا نسباً منكراً
يتلى على المنبر في الجامع
إن كنت فيما تدعي صادقاً
فاذكر أباً بعد الأب الرابع
وإن ترد تحقيق ما قلته
فانسب لنا نفسك كالطائع
أو فدع الأنساب مستورة
وادخل بنا في النسب الواسع

that al-Mu‘izz would have provided his detractors such a convenient anecdote that portrayed him as an impostor.¹²⁹ Of course, this widely reported story, while invariably mentioning the half-drawn sword and the golden coins, does not say that the coins “bore the names of Muḥammad and ‘Alī” and “the sword was Dhū’l-Fiḡār, the sword of ‘Alī himself,” to which Brett draws our attention.¹³⁰ (Figure 8) Indeed, after six decades of ideological struggle, if there was one question the Fāṭimids were ready to answer, it was the question of their lineage.



Figure 8. *Dīnār of Imām-Caliph al-Mu‘izz li-dīni-llāh. Miṣr, 969.* © Courtesy of the Special Collection of the Institute of Ismā‘īlī Studies, London. (See Appendix 4, *The Evolution of Fāṭimid Coinage*)

Obverse of the coin:

Inner circle: There is no God but God, Muḥammad is the Messenger of God

Middle circle: ‘Alī is the most excellent of trustees and the wazīr who relieves the best envoys of his burden.

فإن أنساب بني هاشم يقصر عنها طمع الطامع

“Another day he ascended to the pulpit and found a piece of paper with the following [poem] written on it:

We have agreed to injustice and oppression,
But not to unbelief and stupidity.
If you were bestowed with the knowledge of the unseen,
Then tell us, who is the writer of this paper?” Ibid., 5: 373-74.

However, Ibn ‘Idhārī quotes a slightly different version of this poem (in a different metre), as being directed at ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī, when he proclaimed his caliphate in Raqqāda. *Bayān*, 1:159. I have not traced whether this piece of propaganda goes back to the Umayyads or the ‘Abbāsids, yet.

¹²⁹ Bernard Lewis, “An Interpretation of Fatimid History,” 287. While one may rightfully doubt the authenticity of this episode of dramatic and undiplomatic show of power, the very idea of it, and the distribution of largesse should not be doubted. It must have indeed played a role in the Fāṭimid conquest of Egypt. Also, it must be recalled that al-Nu‘mān had already justified al-Mu‘izz’s “gift and favour diplomacy” aimed at “winning the hearts of people” as sanctioned by the Qur’ān and the example of the Prophet as mentioned above. See, al-Nu‘mān, *al-Himma*, 86, 89.

¹³⁰ Brett, “The Mīm the ‘Ayn and the Making of Ismā‘īlism,” 35-36; *Rise*, 325-26; idem, “Lingua Franca in the Mediterranean: John Wansbrough and the Historiography of Medieval Egypt,” 10.

*Outer circle: Muḥammad is the Messenger of God. It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to show that it is above all [other] religions, however much the idolaters may hate this. (Q: 9:33)*¹³¹

It is less important whether such an episode involving a sword and gold *dīnārs* did indeed take place, for a sword as the ultimate proof of legitimacy is a common trope, more so if it were the sword of the Prophet. It is, however, useful to contrast this type of rhetoric with how the Fāṭimids actually responded to challenges to their lineage. Both the Dhū'l-fiqār and the coinage were used by the Fāṭimids to bolster their authority and sovereignty, so one would expect al-Mu'izz to make this point in an assembly. In other words, al-Mu'izz could have referred to the symbolic value of the coins and what was struck on them, rather than to their economic value, which may well have been used to silence the opposition. Furthermore, the superior quality of the Fāṭimid *dīnār* had already been used in Fāṭimid propaganda, for instance, in the *amān* proclamation by Jawhar al-Siqillī.¹³² It should be recalled that al-Mu'izz began to reform Fāṭimid coinage upon his becoming caliph in 341/953, both in design, to distinguish the style from the Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd coinage, and in terms of content, importantly, for the first time adding the name of 'Alī as “the Friend of God” (or “the One close to God”) (*walī Allāh*) in the inner margin of the “bullseye pattern” or “concentric circles.”¹³³ That is to say, the reference to the “noble descent” was literally inscribed on the *dīnār*, for the public to see. Thus, he could well have used a gold *dīnār* to illustrate his point. This interpretation fits the polemical and ideological purpose of al-Mu'izz's reform of Fāṭimid coinage as argued by Bierman:

The first example of the Fatimid public text was the display of writing in the format of concentric circles on new coins minted in Ifriqiya. The choice to display writing in this format was a brilliant strategy, one that came to be used not only on coins, but on precious objects and on buildings throughout Fatimid rule, especially in their Cairene capital. What made the choice of the concentric circle format a vehicle useful in supporting Fatimid rule was the referential function of that format. To those who saw the concentric circle format, it was a

¹³¹ Anwar and Bacharach, “Shi'ism and the Early Dinars of the Fāṭimid Imam-Caliph Al-Mu'izz li-dīni-llāh (341–365/952–975)”, 265–66, 271; Brett, “The Mīm the 'Ayn and the Making of Ismā'īlism,” 36.

¹³² al-Maqrīzī, cited in Lev Yacov “The Imposition of Ismailism,” 315.

¹³³ Anwar and Bacharach, “Shi'ism and the Early Dinars,” 265–66. The polemical and ideological purpose of the symbolism of this design in Fāṭimid LLcoinage, writing and architecture, as well as its function as a memory device, was convincingly argued by Irene Bierman, *Writing Signs*, 62–70.

sign of Fatimid rule and law. To Ismaʿilis among them, it was that and more. It was a sign of Ismaʿili ideology.¹³⁴

The content of the legends on the Fāṭimid coins also alluded to and reinforced the Fāṭimid dynastic narrative. The following verse of the Qurʾān (9:33) on al-Muʿizz's *dīnār*, for instance, is a reference to the victory of the Fāṭimids over their enemies, in Ismāʿilī interpretation: *It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to show that it is above all [other] religions, however much the idolaters may hate this.*¹³⁵ Like that of his predecessors, al-Muʿizz's coinage, too, invoked the triumphalist ideas of God-ordained power and glory (*al-qadr li-llāh* and *al-ʿizza li-llāh*) and God's manifest truth (*ḥaqq al-mubīn*) and his proof (*ḥujja*) in line with the official discourse of the Fāṭimid *daʿwa*.¹³⁶ In sum, the Fāṭimids' concern with legitimacy involved elaborate undertakings, and their formal institutions of teaching were among the most important of them. Like the Fāṭimid coins, they were designed with different dimensions with both the Ismāʿilī and non-Ismāʿilī audiences in mind.¹³⁷

Parallel to coinage and other public expressions of Fāṭimid authority and sovereignty (*dawla*), the institutions of the *daʿwa* such as the *majālis al-ḥikma* were also elaborated in al-Manṣūriyya. The court *majālis* were centred on the wisdom of the Fāṭimid imams, especially practical wisdom dispensed by the ruling imam-caliph to his close followers. The readings of, and reflections on, the sayings and deeds of the previous imams also took place in the *majālis*, especially the ones held for believers. It constituted both pious and educational activity for the Shīʿa, based on a recommendation from Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān wished to establish a tradition of recording and connecting the activities of the Fāṭimid imams to the emerging canon of Shīʿī ḥadīth.¹³⁸ The composition of the *K. al-Majālis* was thus a contribution

¹³⁴ Bierman, *Writing Signs*, 62.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 69. (The translation of the Qurʾānic verse is by Abdul Haleem).

¹³⁶ Anwar and Bacharach, "Shīʿism and the Early Dinars", 270; Also, see a discussion of the early Fāṭimid coinage in Jamel A. Velji's *An Apocalyptic History*, 70-71, in relation to the triumphalism of early revolutionary *daʿwa*.

¹³⁷ As Anwar and Bacharach observe: "It is obvious that the Imam-caliph al-Muʿizz li-dīni-llāh succeeded in employing the inscriptions on his "bullseye" dinars for the sake of his caliphate and their introduction was not a random act, but a result of serious thought to have a distinctive design and specific inscriptions." See, "Shīʿism and the Early Dinars", 273.

¹³⁸ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Majālis*, 44. The collection and transmission of the sayings of Shīʿī imams by the followers of the Fāṭimids had already begun before al-Nuʿmān, but this mostly constituted the sayings of early imams and did not include the Fāṭimid imams, especially the ruling caliphs. Al-Muʿizz's complain above reflected this tendency, which al-Nuʿmān hoped to correct.

to this tradition, but for historians of the Fāṭimids it is a repository of eyewitness accounts of the Fāṭimid imam-caliph “in action.”¹³⁹

The *Majālis* portrays the Fāṭimid caliphs, mainly al-Mu‘izz, as they fulfil their roles as the caliphs of the Muslims and the imams of the Ismā‘īlī believers, simultaneously dealing with worldly and doctrinal matters. One *majlis*, which took place at a time when the conquest of the Mashriq had already been planned, illustrates al-Mu‘izz’s action as the supreme commander of the *jihād* and the interpreter of the esoteric dimension of the faith (*ta’wīl*) in conversation with his Kutāma followers.

I heard al-Mu‘izz li-dīni-llāh in a *majlis* where a group of the *awliyā*¹⁴⁰ had assembled before him. He spoke about the affairs of the Mashriq and the preparations of his followers and his hopes that God’s promise [i.e. the conquest of the East] and His revelation of its [exact time] to him is nigh. Then he asked:

“What would our Berber followers reply upon [the conquest] if the following argument was put to them by an opponent: ‘Did David the Prophet not banish you from the land of Mashriq and expel you with the order of God (Exalted be He) and according to his revelation to him? The respondent will be forced to accept this proposition and say: ‘Yes, it is so.’ Then what would he say to the question that will follow: ‘If that is so, then who allowed you to return to a place from where a delegated prophet (*nabīyyun mursulun*) had expelled you with an order sent down from the heaven?’”

One of them replied: "Our entrance in your company, God's greetings be upon you, is our greatest argument since you are the heir to the land of God (Exalted be He) and we are your followers and your friends (*wa naḥnu atbā‘uka wa awliyā’uka*)."

[al-Mu‘izz] said: "What you said is true, but an adversary who has a different opinion about us [i.e. the Fāṭimids] will not be satisfied with this statement and will not take it as a valid argument."

He replied: "Whoever was not satisfied with this statement, our swords were drawn against him."

¹³⁹ Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*, 138.

¹⁴⁰ The term *awliyā*’ (sing. *walī*), which depending on the context can mean allies, clients, patrons, friends, followers, companions, guardians, is usually reserved for the loyal Kutāma followers in Fāṭimid sources. I have chosen to understand it as “allies” and “supporters,” to preserve its Qur’ānic sense.

[al-Mu‘izz] said: “Truly, victory by swords can be achieved by both the rightful (*muḥiqq*) and the false claimant (*mubṭil*), but a victory by truthful argument (*ghalabatu ḥujjati-l-ḥaqqi*) can be achieved only by those who possess it [i.e. the truth]. We want you to be victorious both with your hands and with your tongues, and so you will be *in shā’ Allāh*. Had we guided some beasts they would have followed us, then what else [to expect] from those whom we commanded and placed in a position like yours in relation to us?”

They said: “The Commander of the Believers will teach us and enlighten us about what to say.”¹⁴¹

Al-Mu‘izz here refers to the widely held beliefs about the Eastern origin of certain Berber tribes and that they were among the supporters of Goliath (Jālūt), who were expelled from the Mashriq after his defeat by David (Dāwūd). Ibrāhīm Jadla erroneously claims that, “It was the Fatimid caliphs who, perhaps for political reasons, were the first to create all the parts of the Kutama's fictitious Arab origins.”¹⁴² In fact, recorded references to the “Himyārī origin” of the Kutāma and Sanhāja in Arabic sources are numerous and predate the Fāṭimids by more than a century.¹⁴³ Also, al-Qā’im bi-amri-llāh’s designation of the Kutāma followers as “fils des Muhājirūn et des anṣār” (*sic*) does not imply their connection to the Mashriq, but rather their descent from Fāṭimid revolutionaries in the Maghrib, as elsewhere in Fāṭimid sources.¹⁴⁴ Arab genealogy, whether fictional or real, probably played a more prominent role in the legitimation of the Sanhāja Almoravids, who actually ruled an empire of their own, than in the case of the Kutāma.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, it appears that in this context al-Mu‘izz viewed the mythical link between his followers’ ancestors and the biblical Goliath as an inconvenience that needed to be explained away, or turned into an advantage, as he set to demonstrate.

¹⁴¹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 128-29.

¹⁴² .”“Ce sont les califes fatimides qui, peut-être pour des raisons politiques, ont été les premiers à créer de toutes pièces cette origine arabe fictive des Kutāma.”Jadla, “Les Fatimides et les Kutāma,” 509.

¹⁴³ On this see, Helena de Felipe, “Berber Leadership and Genealogical Legitimacy,” 59-60; idem, “Leyendas árabes sobre el origen de los beréberes”, *Al-Qantara*, 11:2 (1990), pp. 379-96; Harry T. Norris, “Yemenis in Western Sahara”, *JAH* 3, 2, 1961 (1962): 317-22; Shatzmiller, “The Myth of the Berbers’ Origin,” in idem, *The Berbers and the Islamic State*, ch. 2, 19-20.

¹⁴⁴ Jadla, “Les Fatimides et les Kutāma,” 509.

¹⁴⁵ Bennison, *The Almoravid and Almohad*, 24-26, 123-24. According to Morris, Ibn Khaldūn, rejected the Yemenī origin for all Berbers, but still conceded Arab ancestry for Sanhāja and Kutāma. See Norris, “Yemenis in Western Sahara,” 318. Ibn Khaldūn, however, dismisses the idea that they are “descended from Goliath or from Amalekites (‘Amālīq) and emigrated from Syria” as a myth. See, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*, 128, note 5.

Al-Mu‘izz presented his argument by comparing the “expulsion” of the Berbers from the Mashriq to the story of Adam and his expulsion from God’s Garden (*al-janna*), because he was deceived by Satan. Only those descendants of Adam who follow Satan will be banished from the Garden, not all of them. Similarly, the ancestors of the Berbers were banished from the East “for their disobedience, not for their genealogy”. The righteous descendants of the Berbers are thus “entitled to go back to the place whence they came from.”¹⁴⁶

This *majlis* also sheds some light on al-Mu‘izz’s position on the thorny issue of authority and reason in Ismā‘īlī thought, and whether individual believers can use their intellect or remain dependent on the imam. It is known that while Ismā‘īlī thought considers the imams as the ultimate source of religious truth and authority, at the same time, it considers reason “a source for any and all knowledge.”¹⁴⁷ As Walker notes, one solution to this dilemma in Ismā‘īlī thought was to equate the imam with reason or make him “the deputy of intellect” or its physical representation.¹⁴⁸ In the above passage, however, al-Mu‘izz clearly concedes that not everyone will accept his authority, while the authority of reason (even if ultimately tied to the issue of legitimacy and rightful claim) would be accepted by everyone.

This type of discussion is very typical of the *majālis* of al-Mu‘izz, where he often insists on the importance of questioning and argumentation. In this *majlis*, al-Mu‘izz does not stop with presenting the argument, but also anticipates the counterargument and refutes it. Why was Adam forgiven after he repented and Satan was not, while they both disobeyed God and committed sin? — the hypothetical opponent might object. The answer is

because their crime and disobedience are not the same. Adam was deceived and misled by Satan, while Satan was independent, and it was his clear choice. Therefore, they cannot be considered equal [in their crime]. Similarly, the crime and the responsibility of the imams of falsehood (*a’imma al-ḍalāl*) are greater than that of their ignorant followers.¹⁴⁹

With the last point, the discussion organically evolves into the condemnation of the “imams of falsehood,” who are, of course, the Umayyads of Cordoba and their ancestors. Al-Nu‘mān quotes a number of *ḥadīths* and Qur’ānic verses used by al-Mu‘izz to back his argument. This

¹⁴⁶ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Majālis*. 129-30.

¹⁴⁷ Walker, “To What Degree Was Classical Isma‘ili Esotericism Based on Reason as Opposed to Authority?”, 504.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 504-5.

¹⁴⁹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān *Majālis*, 130.

is, in fact, another common feature of the *Majālis*, and the Ismāʿīlī discourse in general. Theoretical discussions often find parallels in mythology, history and then in politics, or vice versa.

The apparent significance of the above passage is al-Muʿizz's attempt to convince the Kutāmā followers to immigrate and settle in Egypt, not as immigrants, but as returnees, based on the myth of an Eastern origin of the Berbers.¹⁵⁰ He also uses this case to highlight the vitality of argumentation as an instrument of the Fāṭimid *daʿwa*. More importantly, al-Muʿizz lays down the guiding principle of the Fāṭimid empire and his *daʿwa* strategy, that was implemented in an exemplary way by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān.¹⁵¹ This principle, which can be described as “sword and knowledge” or “sword and argument”, informed the establishment of educational institutions that accompanied the efforts of the Fāṭimid army. According to an Ismāʿīlī interpretation, *jihād* in the path of God is conducted both “by the sword and by the tongue,” just like the Prophet Ibrāhīm's *jihād* had two dimensions: “fighting the Romans by the sword and fighting his own people with the tongue, such as making compelling arguments against their worship of the idols, and so on as mentioned in the Book of God.”¹⁵² Similarly, the “*jihād* of tongue” was directed against the Muslim community, who had accepted only exoteric aspect of Islam, not the esoteric.

Al-Muʿizz returns to this topic in a *musāyara* where he discusses the significance of Dhū'l-fiqār, a legendary sword that was given to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib by the Prophet. This was an apparent symbolic gesture that pointed to his high status and knowledge, argued al-Muʿizz, because

in the manifest sense (*ẓāhir*) a sword is the tool of victory by hand, while in the esoteric sense (*bāṭin*), knowledge is the tool of victory by tongue and by argument (*ālat al-ghalaba bi'l-lisān wa bi'l-hujja*). Indeed, the Prophet (may God bless him and his progeny and grant them

¹⁵⁰ See also note 2 on page 139. It is known that some people were not willing to emigrate to a hostile land as an invading army.

¹⁵¹ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, of course, was not the only author who contributed to the Fāṭimid-sponsored Ismāʿīlī interpretation of Islam. See Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 31-132 for an extensive list of pre-Fāṭimid and early Fāṭimid *daʿwa* works; idem, 316-22 for the list of anonymous works from the early Fāṭimid period. It was also during this period, as Daftary points out, that “the Ismailis made their seminal contributions to Islamic theology and philosophy in general and to Shiʿi thought in particular.” See Daftary, “Intellectual Life among the Ismailis: An Overview”, 94.

¹⁵² Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Taʾwīl al-daʿāʾim*, vol. 2, ch. 12, *majlis* no. 3, 301.

salvation) distinguished ‘Alī (God's greetings be upon him) alone by granting him from these two what he granted no one else.¹⁵³

Thus, in Fāṭimid interpretation, the possession of the actual Dhū’l-fiqār, as the symbol of the Prophetic authority, and knowledge, as the actual prerequisite for legitimate rule, complemented each other and proved the exclusivity of Fāṭimid authority. It also demonstrates the importance of symbolism in Ismā‘īlī thought and in the articulation of Fāṭimid sovereignty and legitimacy.¹⁵⁴

A similar interpretation can be found in al-Qāḍī Nu‘mān’s *Ta’wīl al-Da‘ā’im*,¹⁵⁵ one of his last works, which was taught in the weekly *majālis al-ḥikma*, or adopted and assembled from such sessions and made into a book with 120 extant chapters titled “majālis.” Here, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān devotes four *majālis* to the esoteric interpretation of the section on *jihād* from his major treatise in jurisprudence, the *Kitāb Da‘ā’im al-Islām*. Elsewhere within these *majālis*, he interprets the exoteric “*jihād* with the sword,” i.e. fighting the infidels or rebels, as “*jihād* with the tongue and argument (*al-ḥujja*).” Accordingly, “fighting” (*qitāl*) is symbolically interpreted as disputation (*munāẓara*), while “killing” (*qatl*) in the esoteric sense equated with “leaving the non-believers in darkness and error,” and so on.¹⁵⁶

In the plain meaning of the law, Muslim transgressors and renegades ought to be fought, like infidels, whereas in the esoteric sense, the people who left the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa* (*da‘wat al-ḥaqq*), should also be confronted by *munāẓara* and by *ḥujja*. If they do not accept the *da‘wa*, then they should also face death, except that “in the esoteric sense, death is to be left in error (*ḍalāla*).”¹⁵⁷ It is worth quoting al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *ta’wīl* of the religious duty of

¹⁵³ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān *Majālis*, 190-91.

¹⁵⁴ The two best studies on the material manifestation of Fāṭimid symbolic art and rituals remain Paula Sanders’ *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), and Irene Bierman’s *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Texts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), although both are concentrated on the Egyptian phase.

¹⁵⁵ (The Allegorical Interpretation of the Pillars of Islam). Alternative titles: *Kitāb Tarbiyat al-mu‘minīn bi-l-tawqīf ‘alā ḥudūd bāṭin ‘ilm al-dīn* ([On the] Education of the Faithful for Acquainting Him with the Ranks of the Inner Meaning of Religion). See Poonawala, “The Chronology,” 146. Al-Nu‘mān refers to this work in the *Majālis*, 458, as *Tarbiyat al-mu‘minīn*.

¹⁵⁶ al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Ta’wīl al-da‘ā’im* 2: 314-345 (*majālis* nos. 6-10).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 2:344. Later Ismā‘īlī *ta’wīl* also equated propagating with *jihād*. See al-Kirmānī, cited in Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, 78.

jihād as an example of how *ta'wīl* worked and what was taught to Ismā'īlī believers in the *majālis al-da'wa*.

The esoteric equal of an apostate (*murtadd*) is the one who joined the truthful *da'wa* and then rejected it and returned to his previous falsehood. The meaning of calling upon someone to repent (*istitāba*) is warning those who left the truth and giving them a chance of returning to it. The [esoteric measure] equal to killing (*qatl*) is to leave the [infidels and apostates] in the error. “Heretics” (*zanādiqa*) are extremist adversaries, thus in esoteric sense “killing them” is to turn away from them. The esoteric meaning of “burning them after killing” is to repudiate them with the proofs of the Friends of God (i.e. the imams), which will overcome them and burn their hearts! This is the end of the section on *jihād* in *Da'ā'im al-Islām* and its interpretation (*ta'wīl*).

Know, O believers, what you have just heard from it. And thank God for this privilege. For not all people have been guided to the faith, nor does everyone, who has been guided to it and has given oath, desires to pursue the knowledge of it and strive towards it.¹⁵⁸

As pointed out above, it may have been at times difficult to see the point of these elaborate interpretations for ordinary believers. Terming this mode of Ismā'īlī *ta'wīl* “symbolic parallelism,” the famous Russian Orientalist and the father of modern Ismā'īlī studies, W. Ivanow once lamented that “generations of learned Ismailis, including a man as really clever as Qāḍī Nu'mān, wasted their time and energy with amazing persistence in tracing such parallelism...”¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, as the above passages show, *ta'wīl* was considered a vital matter for the *da'wa*, and for the imam-caliphs, and was elaborated and taught to the believers. Moreover, recent studies demonstrate that *ta'wīl* was indeed crucial for the Fāṭimids “to consolidate power and build legitimacy,” to create a religious community, as well as to establish an empire.¹⁶⁰ As Velji observes, “the Fatimids’ hermeneutical system [i.e. *ta'wīl*] helped translate their revolutionary aspirations into a successful empire”¹⁶¹ not just through unleashing the apocalyptic potentials of Qur'ānic revelation, but also by distancing from eschatological expectations and focusing on the present imam.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Ta'wīl al-Da'ā'im*, ch. 12, *majlis* no. 10, 344-45.

¹⁵⁹ Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition*, 16.

¹⁶⁰ Velji, *An Apocalyptic History*, 2.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 106.

Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *bāṭinī* interpretation of Islamic rituals, such as prayer, *ḥajj*, and *jihād* demonstrates the relationship between the faith and the empire and how the Ismā‘īlī believers (*mu‘minūn*) ought to make sense of the role of the imam-caliph and their community in the grand scheme of history, cosmic order and the empire.¹⁶³ While *tanzīl* related to the Muslim community at large, the *ta’wīl* related to the affairs and the practice of the believers and their internalisation and understanding of the world. Therefore, the “symbolic parallelism,” made perfect sense to the believers.

The Ismā‘īlī hermeneutical system, however, had its problems on practical level. As Walker rightly observes, the status of the *ta’wīl*, its relationship with *tanzīl* (revelation), and its methods were not entirely clear.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, the emphasis on the *bāṭin* at times opened the prospect of abolishing the *ẓāhir* altogether.¹⁶⁵ While the Ismā‘īlīs were not the only *bāṭinī* group who faced this challenge, during the Fāṭimid period this potential danger (i.e. abrogation of the *ẓāhir*) threatened the legitimacy of the Fāṭimid imam-caliphs as universal Muslim rulers.¹⁶⁶ Once again the strength of the dynasty turns out to be its main weakness.¹⁶⁷

To sum up, Fāṭimid institutions of learning were intrinsically linked to their imperial project. The Fāṭimid Empire of al-Manṣūriyya, especially under al-Mu‘izz, devoted considerable efforts towards aligning the goals of the *da‘wa* with that of the *dawla*. The prospect of ruling over heterogenous communities necessitated the elaboration of the Fāṭimid legal tradition, but it also required strengthening the authority of the dynasty with new challenges in mind. The Ismā‘īlī hermeneutical paradigm allowed to interpret the evolving doctrine of the state to the followers, not least their terms of coexistence with the outsiders – a recurring theme in the *majālis*.

¹⁶³ Velji, *An Apocalyptic History*, chapters 5, 6.

¹⁶⁴ Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, 62-63.

¹⁶⁵ See Walker’s discussion of “the problem of the *bāṭin*” and various theoretical solutions. *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, ch. 4, 62-79.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

¹⁶⁷ As Brett observes, the Ismā‘īlī doctrine of the imamate “gave the [Fāṭimid] dynasty its peculiar strength and endurance,” yet, it is also considered its main weakness. See Brett, “The Realm of the Imam,” 431. Marshall Hodgson, too, had linked the Fāṭimid dynasty’s “prestige and longevity unparalleled in Islamdom in that period” to Ismā‘īlism, but also maintained that “the decline of the Fāṭimid dynasty was tied in with the special paradoxes of Ismā‘īlism itself.” Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2:25, 26.

Conclusion

The central objective of this thesis has been to contextualise and deconstruct the legitimising narratives produced by the *'ulamā'* of Qayrawān and the agents of the Fāṭimid Empire. By doing so, I demonstrated the role of scholarly practices and knowledge transmission in the consolidation of the collective memory and identity of the Mālikī scholars of Ifrīqiya in the context of the rise of the Fāṭimid Empire. On the one hand, I hoped analysis of the practices and the networks of the scholars of Qayrawān will lead to a more nuanced understanding of their relationship with the Fāṭimids. On the other hand, instead of focusing on the activities of one confessional group, such as the Mālikīs, or the Ismā'īlīs – the followers of the Fāṭimid imam-caliphs, I have focused on shared practices, scholarly networks, and institutions of learning, such as the *munāẓarāt* (disputations) and the *majālis* (teaching sessions). I have done so in a deliberate attempt not to follow the narrative frame of my sources, namely biographical dictionaries, autobiographies, and chronicles that tend to focus on one or another group.

Secondly, scholars of the Fāṭimids have long lamented the marginal treatment of the caliphate in modern historiography, outside national histories of modern North African states, and outside the even smaller field of Ismā'īlī Studies. The presentation of the dynasty has thus been mostly problematic, primarily because of reliance on hostile propaganda material promoted by their medieval detractors. This study contributes to scholarship of the past few decades, that filled this lacuna by treating the Fāṭimid empire in its proper historical context of the formation of Islam in late antiquity and the Islamisation of North Africa. Importantly, the story of marginalised confessional communities such as the Ibādīs and the Ismā'īlīs have been given scholarly consideration, in contrast to earlier studies that sometimes entirely relied on the materials produced by their enemies.

This thesis contributes to rectifying this problem by focusing on the shared traditions of knowledge, especially the culture of disputation, with the aim of deconstructing polemical narratives produced by competing groups. Unlike previous studies, which viewed disputations or *munāẓara* primarily as a religious or theological debate, or polemics, this study highlighted those aspects of disputation that were deliberately muted in the narratives and

subsequently neglected by modern readers. One is the heuristic or scholastic aspect of disputation as a method of learning and inquiry which was shared with the rest of the Muslim world. Thus, it has been argued that disputation was a common, if controversial, part of the scholarly culture in Ifrīqiya, not merely an instrument of propaganda, coercion, or polemics. Hence, it has been suggested that one cannot extrapolate antagonism, oppression, or inquisition from the narratives of *munāẓara*. Another aspect, which has been highlighted in the analysis of the disputation culture, is the capacity to provide space for expressing legitimate disagreement and negotiating terms of coexistence, as well as the limits of power, and that of dissent. This aspect is more relevant to public disputations and serves the purpose of legitimation of power. This capacity of court disputations was exploited by the Fāṭimid court like other medieval Islamic courts, and this has been highlighted by drawing attention to court disputations in Ifrīqiya before and after the Fāṭimids.

Biographical dictionaries, or the *ṭabaqāt*, which are often treated as archives of Muslim societies, especially for later period, are indispensable sources for the study of the social history of learning and knowledge transmission. Three such compilations, the *Ṭabaqāt ‘ulamā’ Ifrīqiya* of Abu’l-‘Arab and al-Khushanī and the *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* of al-Mālikī analysed in this thesis, record the lives and memorable qualities of the scholars of Ifrīqiya and trace their intellectual genealogies back to the Prophet of Islam and his companions. But, to what extent do these unique sources of Muslim society function as an archive, the way our modern mind understands the word “archive,” beyond its metaphorical sense? Thus, I have suggested to revise the type of questions that we may put to these sources and argued that biographical dictionaries, at least the ones discussed here, were primarily instruments of community building, purposefully creating and perpetuating the memory of the community to which they belonged. For this purpose, they were in need of a nemesis, as much as they were in need of heroes, and this premise has informed my reading of the Fāṭimid period through this material.

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the scholars of Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya were engaged in similar activities of reconstructing their past, which needed to be asserted in the face of the Fāṭimid challenge to their “heirship to the Prophet.” What they achieved amounted to the Mālikī tradition, one might say despite the Fāṭimid pressure, whose relationship to the religious scholars was admittedly more hostile than indifferent. Nevertheless, earlier

assumptions about the Fāṭimid state's relationship with the Mālikī (Madīnan) scholars needs to be revised in light of the ample documentary evidence from the so called "Ancient Library" of Qayrawān that testifies to the uninterrupted transmission of knowledge by Mālikī scholars during the Fāṭimid period. This has long been known from narrative sources, yet, interpreted in light of sectarian polemics that proliferated in the Zīrid period. This thesis has shown that the Fāṭimids' exclusive claim to religious authority notwithstanding, their rule was a period of impressive productivity for the jurists of Ifrīqiya. Moreover, it was precisely because of the Fāṭimids' polemics against proto-Sunnī legal authorities that the local school of Madīna gradually became the personal school of Mālik in order to answer to the challenge of the Fāṭimid imam.

The production of Mālikī texts under Fāṭimid rule demonstrates that the scholars of Qayrawān did not lose their networks, prestige, or popularity during the Fāṭimid period. Moreover, this suggests that the Fāṭimids' crackdown on the *'ulamā'* is greatly exaggerated in the narrative sources that gravitate towards hagiography and myth. A combination of network and textual analysis used in this study shows how these texts relate to their historical context, and how they sought to commemorate the ideals of exemplary individuals by emphasizing their piety, uprightness, and suffering, rather than reconstructing their lives historically. However, whether any accurate historical representation of a given exemplary or charismatic individual would have been available a generation later is a different question.

If the biographical tradition served as a narrative framework for communal memory, built around chains of transmission and intellectual genealogies, it is the exemplary figures such as Saḥnūn b. Sa'īd and Sa'īd b. al-Ḥaddād who anchored the collective memory of the Mālikī scholars of Ifrīqiya in time and space. For it was Saḥnūn who ensured the continuity of the Mālikī tradition through his authoritative compilation – the *Mudawwana*, which in turn immortalised him. But the remembrance of Saḥnūn also had to do with his defence of the Mālikīs against the rival Ḥanafīs, who would once again align themselves with power with the arrival of the Fāṭimids. This time, it was a student of Saḥnūn, Ibn al-Ḥaddād, who stood up to the Fāṭimid *dā'īs*. Like his teacher Saḥnūn, he would also be commemorated as a defiant hero of the increasingly militant Mālikīs of the Maghrib. In both cases, as was argued, the narratives

tell us more about the immediate concerns of the community of scholars as a group, than about the historical circumstances the narratives purportedly describe.

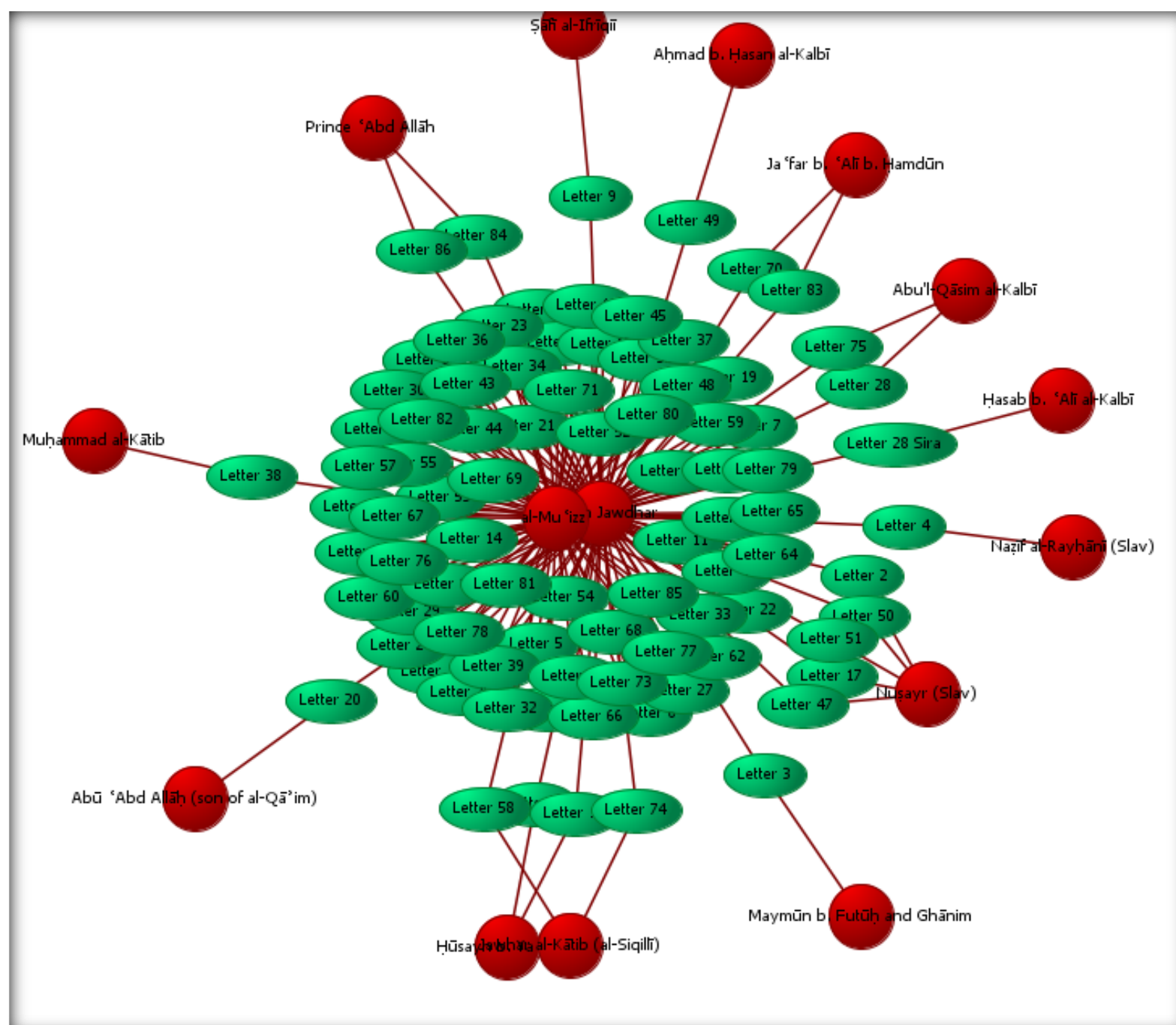
A future avenue for research would be a more focused analysis of the social networks of the scholarly community in Qayrawān from the Aghlabid to the Zīrid period. Network analysis and visualisation often reveals aspects of the bigger picture and processes that are buried in the texts, meaningless to the writers and not obvious to the readers. The network analysis undertaken for this project was limited by a number of factors, not least the time constraint and technical expertise. A future project might allow one to further substantiate the contentions of this thesis.

Illustrating the continuities of learning traditions from the Aghlabid period, through intellectual networks and the late antique practice of disputation, brings us closer to appreciating the Fāṭimids as a universalist empire which had to tailor its messianic and sectarian zeal to accommodate the people over whom they ruled. While they failed to establish a universal empire, or even restore the early Islamic empire, it was this ambition that informed the Fāṭimid worldview and thus their policies vis-à-vis the population. In this case, their deeds may indeed be judged by their intentions.

Finally, the thesis stressed the relevance of Fāṭimid institutions of learning and teaching to their imperial project. Most crucially, the Fāṭimids began to assert their claim to the universal leadership of all Muslims, while strengthening their initial claims to imamate on the basis of their Shīʿī lineage. One practical implication of this was to devote efforts to propagating their doctrine outside of Fāṭimid realm in order to gain political advantage against their rivals, while domestic *daʿwa* efforts concentrated on educating and disciplining the “community of believers” whose devotion served to legitimize the rule of the dynasty. They were the primary consumers of the *bāṭin*, the esoteric knowledge derived through the allegorical interpretation of religion. It was neither conceivable nor desirable to convert everyone to the *bāṭinī* faith, but in order to turn them into imperial subjects, two instruments are repeatedly mentioned as discussed in the last chapter: the sword and the convincing argument. The sword, of course, represented the military might of the Fāṭimid Empire, while the argument was the one made by the *daʿwa* to legitimise the Fāṭimid *dawla*.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Bureaucratic Power: A View from Jawdhar's Archive



Source: al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*. This is an analysis of the letters from al-Ustādh Jawdhar's archive exchanged between him, the imam-caliph al-Mu'izz, the heir apparent and other functionaries. It illustrates the centrality, power, and influence of Jawdhar. However, one must be reminded that this is a perspective that one gets from Jawdhar's personal archives, moreover, selected by his secretary in order to commemorate him.

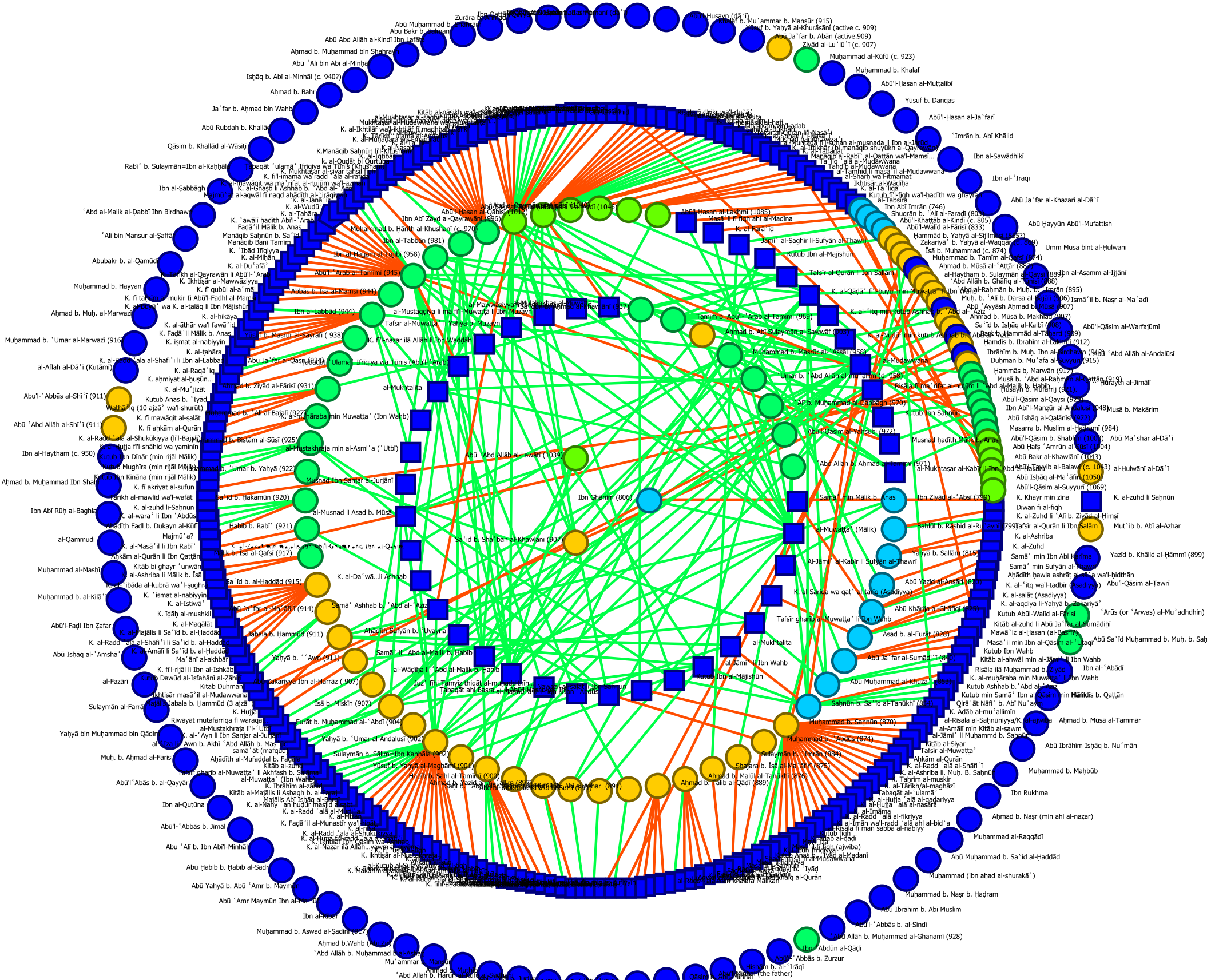
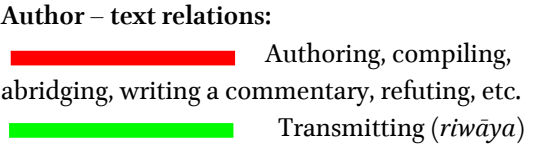
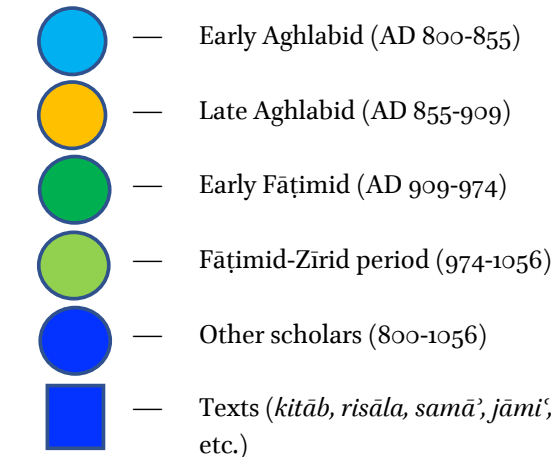
Appendix 2. Transmission of Mālikī Texts in Qayrawān. A Bird’s Eye View

Explanation:

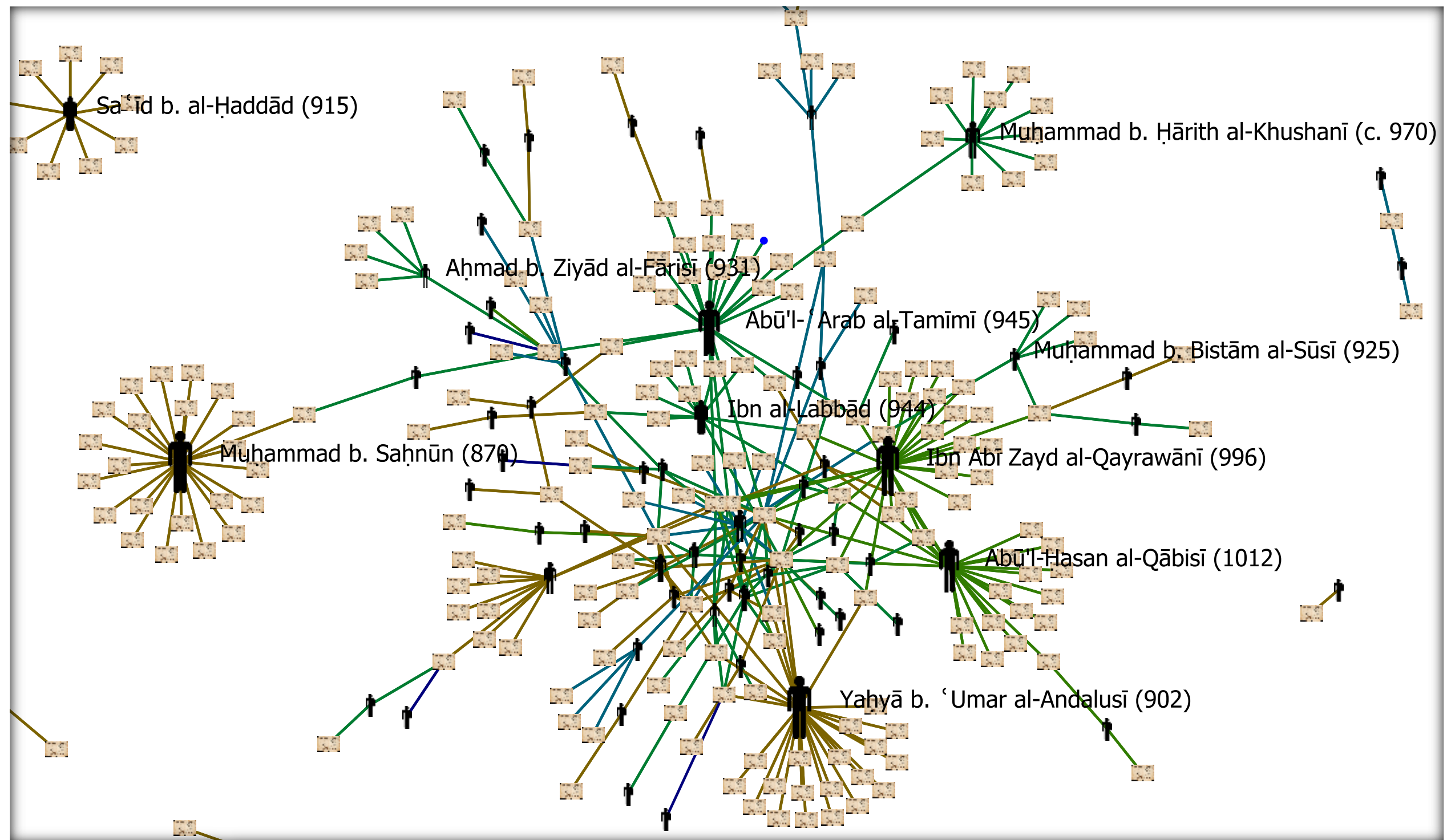
This graph is a visualisation of the network of religious scholars from Qayrawān connected through texts. In other words, when two scholars transmit a common text, a link establishes between them, which in most cases represent their belonging to the school of Mālik b. Anas and his North African students, and their participation in knowledge transmission of this school.

Networks are always incomplete and there is always more hidden information than shown. Moreover, these networks are based on Mālikī biographical dictionaries and reflect a perspective that is generally hostile to the Fāṭimids. Nevertheless, this figure demonstrates that the Mālikī school flourished during the Fāṭimid period. In order to show that Mālikī jurists were not the only group active in Qayrawān I have included Ḥanafī, Shāfi‘ī, Shī‘ī, some Jewish scholars in the circular diagram, although their transmissions are not visualized.

Mālikī Scholars (authors and transmitters) and Texts (nodes in the diagram)



Appendix 3. Network Analysis. Transmission of Texts Over Four Periods.



- This network illustrates links between scholars and texts colour-coded by four periods. There are also other types of connection (teacher-student, kinship, friendship, patronage, etc. – not visualised here) between these scholars, but “written networks” were as important as personal networks for constructing the Mālikī tradition as argued in Chapter Two.
- The position of scholars in this network is measured by “out-degree centrality” which means the number of links emanating from a node normalised by the maximum number of such links. Accordingly, the more “prolific” a scholar is, the bigger he appears in the network.

Appendix 4. The Evolution of the Fāṭimid Coinage. © Special Collection of IIS

1. *Dīnār, Dā'ī Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī. Qayrawān (296/909)*



2. *Dīnār, Imām-Caliph 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī bi-llāh. Qayrawān (299/911-912)*



3. *Dīnār, Imām-Caliph al-Qā'im bi amri-llāh. Al-Mahdiyya (334/945-946)*



4. *Dīnār, Imām-Caliph al-Manṣūr bi-llāh. Al-Manṣūriyya (338/949-950)*



5. *Dīnār, Imām-Caliph al-Mu'izz li-dīni-llāh. Miṣr (358/969)*



6. *Damma in the name of Imām-Caliph al-ʿAzīz bi-llāh. Multān (undated)*



7. *Dīnār, Imām-Caliph al-Ḥākīm bi amri-llāh, al-Qāhira al-maḥrūsa (394/1003-04)*



8. *Dīnār, Imām-Caliph al-Zāhir li-iʿzāz dīni-llāh. Miṣr (421/1030)*



9. *Dīnār, Imām-Caliph al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh. Miṣr (427/1035-36)*



10. *Dīnār, Imām Nizār. al-Iskandariyya (488/1095)*



Bibliography

Primary sources

- ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, al-Qāḍī, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān. Beirut: Dār al-‘Arabiyya, 1966.
- ‘Abdān, Abū Muḥammad. *Kitāb al-Rusūm wa’l-izdiwāj wa’l-tartīb*, ed. and tr. P. Walker and W. Madelung as “The Book of Norm, Pairedness and Ranking.” In Omar Alī-de-Unzaga (ed.), *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011, 119-20.
- Abū-l-‘Arab, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Tamīmī. *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt ‘ulamā’ Ifrīqiya*, ed. and tr. Mohammed Ben Cheneb in *Classes Des Savants de l’Ifriqiya*, vols. 51-52. Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1915.
- Abū-l-‘Arab, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Tamīmī. *Kitāb al-miḥan*, ed. Yaḥyā Waḥīb al-Jabbūrī, 3rd ed. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2006.
- Abū Zakariyā’, Yaḥyā b. Abī Bakr al-Wārjalānī, *Kitāb Siyar al-a’imma wa akhbārihim*, ed. Ismā‘īl al-‘Arabī, second ed. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1982; French tr. Émile Masqueray, *La chronique d’Abou Zakaria*. Algiers: Imprimerie De L’association Ouvriere, 1878.
- al-Dabbāgh, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and Ibn Nājī, Abū’l-Qāsim ibn ‘Īsā. *Ma‘ālim al-īmān fī ma’rifat ahl al-Qayrawān*, ed. Ibrāhīm Shabbūḥ, 4 vols. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1968.
- al-Darjīnī, Abū’l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Sa‘īd. *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-mashāyikh bi’l-Maghrib*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ṭallāy. 2 vols. Constantine: n. p. 1974.
- al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdallāh. *Siyar a’lām al-nubalā’*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūṭ and Muḥammad Nu‘aym al-Arqasūsī, 25 vols. Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1981-1988.
- al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdallāh. *Ta’rīkh al-Islām, wa wafayāt al-mashāhir wa’l-a’lām*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī, 52 vols. Beirut: Dā al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1987-1994.
- Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr. *Jāmi‘ bayān al-‘ilm wa faḍlih*, ed. Abu’l-Ashbāl al-Zahīrī, 2 vols. Dammam, Dār al-Ḥaramayn li’l-Tibā‘a, 1994.
- Ibn Abī ‘Uṣaybi‘a, Aḥmad b. al-Qāsim. *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*, ed. Nizār Rizā. Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1965.
- Ibn al-Athīr, ‘Izz al-Dīn Abu’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī. *al-Kāmil fī’l-ta’rīkh*, ed. S. J. Tornberg, 14 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1867; repr. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1965-67.

- Ibn al-Faraḍī, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad. *Tārīkh al-‘ulamā’ wa’l-ruwāt al-‘ilm bi’l-Andalus*, ed. ‘Izzat al-‘Attār al-Ḥusaynī, 2 vols. Cairo: Maktab Nashr al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1954.
- Ibn Farhūn, Ibrāhīm b. ‘Alī. *al-Dībāj al-mudhahhab fī ma‘rifat a‘yān ‘ulamā’ al-madhhab*, ed. Muḥammad al-Aḥmadī al-Nūr, 2 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Turāth li’l-Ṭab‘ wa’l-Nashr, 1972-1976.
- Ibn Ḥawqal, Abū’l-Qāsim b. ‘Alī al-Nasībī. *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, ed. J. E. Kramers. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1938.
- Ibn al-Haytham, Ja‘far b. al-Aswad. *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, ed. and tr. W. Madelung and P. Walker as *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shi‘i Witness*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.
- Ibn ‘Idhārī, al-Marrākushī, Abū’l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad. *Kitāb al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa’l-Maghrib*, ed. R. Dozy, vol. 1. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1948.
- Ibn al-Jazzār, *Zād al-musāfir wa qūt al-ḥāẓir*, ed. Maḥmūd Suwaysī et al. 2 vols. Tunis: Orbis, 1999.
- Ibn Juljul, Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān. *Ṭabaqāt al-atibbā’ wa’l-falāsifa*, ed. Ayman Fu‘ād Sayyid. 2nd ed. Beirut, Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1985.
- Ibn Khaldūn, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, tr. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967.
- Ibn Khallikān, Abū’l-‘Abbās Shams al-Dīn. *Wafayāt al-a‘yān wa abnā’ al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās, 8 vols. Beirut: Dār Sādir, 1968-77.
- Ibn al-Khaṭīb, Lisān al-Dīn. *A‘māl al-A‘lām*, ed. Sayyid Kasrāwī Ḥasan, 2 vols. Beirut, n.d.
- Ibn al-Labbād, Abū Bakr Muḥammad. *Kitāb al-radd ‘alā al-Shāfi‘ī*, ed. ‘Abd al-Majīd Ben Hamadah. Tunis: Dār al-‘Arab li’l-ṭibā‘a, 1986.
- Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad b. Mukarram. *Lisān al-‘Arab*. (Accessed: 12 September 2019). Available online at www.ejtal.net
- Ibn al-Nadīm, Abū’l-Faraj Muḥammad b. Ishāq. *Al-Fihrist li Ibn al-Nadīm*. Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Istiḳāma, n.d. Eng. tr. Bayard Dodge as *The Fihrist: A 10th Century AD of Islamic Culture*, ed. and tr. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.
- Ibn Rashīq, al-Ḥasan al-Qayrawānī. *Unmūdḥaj al-zamān fī shu‘arā’ al-Qayrawān*, ed. Muḥammad al-‘Arūsī al-Maṭwī and Bashīr al-Bakkūsh. Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li’l-Nashr, 1986.
- Ibn Saḥnūn, Muḥammad. *Kitāb ādāb al-mu‘allimīn*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥusnī ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb, Tunis: al-Shirkat al-Tūnisiyya li-Funūn al-Rasm, 1972 = ‘The Book of rules of Conduct for Teachers,’ tr. Michael Fishbein, in *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought: A Compendium of Parallel English-Arabic Texts*, ed. Bradley Cook. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2010, 1-20.
- Ibn Saḥnūn, Muḥammad. *Kitāb al-ajwiba*, ed. Ḥāmid al-‘Alwānī. Tunis, 2000.
- Idrīs, Imād al-Dīn. *Uyūn al-Akhbār*, partial ed. Muḥammad al-Ya‘lāwī as *Tārīkh al-khulafā’ al-Faṭimiyyīn bi’l-Maghrib: al-Qism al-khāṣṣ min Kitāb ‘Uyun al-akhbār*. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1985.

- Idrīs, Imād al-Dīn. *Zahr al-Ma‘ānī*. Partially edited and translated by W. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*. London: Oxford University Press 1942, 47-80 (Eng. translation: 232-74).
- Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. "The Seventh Epistle on the Propaedeutical Part on the Scientific Arts and What They Aim at." Tr. Rüdiger Arnzen, in *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought: A Compendium of Parallel English-Arabic Texts*, ed. Bradley Cook. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2010, 20-37.
- ‘Iyāḍ, al-Qāḍī Abu’l-Faḍl. *Tartīb al-madārik wa taqrīb al-masālik fī ma‘rifat a’lām madhhab Mālik*, ed. Aḥmad Bakīr Maḥmūd, 5 vols. (Beirut, 1968); Selection: *Tarājim Aghlabiyya mustakharaja min Madārik al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ*, ed. Mohamed Talbi. Tunis: Publication de l’Universite de Tunis, 1968.
- Ja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman. *Kitāb al-‘ālim wa’l ghulām*, ed. and tr. James W. Morris as *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2001.
- Ja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman. *Sarā’ir wa asrār al-nuṭaqā’*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib. Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1984.
- Jāḥiẓ, ‘Amr b. Baḥr al-Baṣrī. *Kitābān lil-Jāḥiẓ: Kitāb al-mu‘allimīn wa-kitāb fī al-radd ‘alā al-mushabbahah*, ed. Ibrahim Geries. ‘Akka: Maktaba wa Maṭba‘at al-Surūjī, 1980.
- al-Jawdhārī, Abū ‘Alī Manṣūr. *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*. English translation by H. Haji: *Inside the Immaculate Portal: a History from Early Fatimid Archives*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2012.
- al-Khushanī, Muḥammad b. Ḥārith b. Asad. *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt ‘Ulamā’ Ifrīqiya*, ed. and tr. Mohammed Ben Cheneb in *Classes des Savants de l’Ifriqiya*. Vol. LI-LII. Paris: E. Leroux, 1915.
- al-Khushanī, Muḥammad b. Ḥārith b. Asad. *Qudāt Qurṭuba wa ‘Ulamā’ Ifrīqiya*. al-Qāhirah and Baghdād : Makatabat al-Muthannā, 1953.
- al-Mahdī bi’llāh, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh. *Kitāb al-Asrār*. The Institute of Ismā‘īlī Studies, The Zahid Ali Collection. MS.1217 (ArI, ZA).
- al-Mālikī, Abū Bakr. *Kitāb Riyāḍ al-Nufūs fī Ṭabaqāt ‘Ulamā’ al-Qayrawān wa Ifrīqiya*, ed. Bashīr al-Bakkūsh, 3 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1981-83.
- al-Malījī, Abu’l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm b. Wahb. *Al-Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1947.
- al-Manṣūr bi-llāh, Abū Ṭāhiir Ismā‘īl. *Tathbūt al-imāma*, ed. Sami Makarem as *The Shi‘i Imamate: A Fatimid Interpretation*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013.
- al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad. *Kitāb al-Mawā’iẓ wa’l-i‘tibār bi dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa’l-āthār*, 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1998.
- al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad. *Itti‘āz al-ḥunafā’ bi-akhbār al-a’imma al-Fāṭimiyyūn al-khulafā’*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn Shayyāl, 3 vols. Cairo: Lajnat Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1967-1973; Partial English

- tr. Shainool Jiwa, *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean empire: Fatimid Egypt and the founding of Cairo: the reign of the Imam-caliph al-Mu'izz from Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī's Itti'āz al-ḥunafā' bi-akhbār al-a'imma al-Fāṭimiyyīn al-khulafā'*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009.
- al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad. *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*, ed. M. Ya'lawī, 8 vols. Beirut, 1991.
- al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh. *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, vols. 1 and 3, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib. Beirut: Dār al-Turāth al-Fāṭimī, 1974-84; vols. 1 and 2, ed. Ḥātim Ḥamīd al-Dīn. Oxford and Bombay, 1975-86.
- al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh. *Sīrat al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-dīn dā'ī al-du'āt*, ed. M. Kāmil Ḥusayn. Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-Miṣrī, 1949.
- al-Naysābūrī, Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm. *Kitāb istitār al-imām*, tr. V. Ivanov, in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*. London: Oxford University Press, 1942, 157-183.
- al-Naysābūrī, Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm. *Kitāb ithbāt al-imāma: A Fatimid Treatise on Leadership in Islam*, ed. and tr. Arzina R. Lalani. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010.
- al-Naysābūrī, Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm. *al-Risāla al-mūjaza al-kāfiya fī ādāb al-du'āt*, ed. and tr. V. Klemm and P. Walker as *A Code of Conduct: A Treatise on the Etiquette of the Fatimid Ismaili Mission*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.
- Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Abū Mu'īn. *Safarnāmeḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Dabīr Siyāqī. Tehran, 1977.
- Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Abū Mu'īn. *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāṣir-i Khisraw-i Qubādiyānī*, ed. Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzādeh et al, 4th edition. Tehrān: Chāpkhāneh-i Sipehr, 1976.
- Nizām al-Mulk. *Siyar al-mulūk (Siyāsāt-nāmeḥ)*, ed. H. Darke, 3rd ed. Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjuma wa Nashr-i Kitāb, 1976.
- al-Nu'mān, al-Qāḍī, Abū Ḥanīfa b. Muḥammad. *Da'ā'im al-islām wa dhikr al-ḥalāl wa'l-ḥarām, wa'l qadāyā wa'l-aḥkām*, ed. Asaf A. A. Fyzee, 2 vols, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1951-1960; English tr. Ismail K. H. Poonawala, as *The Pillars of Islam*, 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002-2004.
- al-Nu'mān, al-Qāḍī, Abū Ḥanīfa b. Muḥammad. *Kitāb al-himma fī ādāb atbā' al-a'imma*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1948.
- al-Nu'mān, al-Qāḍī, Abū Ḥanīfa b. Muḥammad. *Kitāb al-majālis wa'l-musāyarāt*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ya'lawī, Ibrāhīm Shabbūḥ al-Ḥabīb al-Faqī, 2nd edition. Tunis: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1997.
- al-Nu'mān, al-Qāḍī, Abū Ḥanīfa b. Muḥammad. *Sharḥ al-akhbār fī faḍā'il al-a'imma al-athār*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī, 3 vols, 2nd edition. Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmiyya, 1431/2010.

- al-Nu‘mān, al-Qāḍī, Abū Ḥanīfa b. Muḥammad. *Iftitāḥ al-da‘wa*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī. Beirut, 1970. Eng. tr. Hamid Haji, *Founding the Fatimid State: The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006.
- al-Nu‘mān, al-Qāḍī, Abū Ḥanīfa b. Muḥammad. *Ta’wīl al-da‘ā’im*. 2 vols. Beirut: Mu’assasat al-A‘lamī li’l-Maṭbū‘āt, 2006.
- al-Nu‘mān, al-Qāḍī, Abū Ḥanīfa b. Muḥammad. *Kitāb Ikhtilāf ‘uṣūl al-madhāhib*. English tr. Devin J. Stewart. *Disagreement of the Jurists: A Manual of Islamic Legal Theory*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2015.
- al-Nu‘mān, al-Qāḍī, Abū Ḥanīfa b. Muḥammad. *Risāla dhāt al-bayān fī radd ‘alā ibn Qutayba*. Ed. and tr. Avraham Hakim, *The Epistle of the Eloquent Clarification Concerning the Refutation of Ibn Qutayba: Critical Edition with an Introduction*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.
- al-Nuwayrī, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad. *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, ed. N. M. Fawwāz and H. K. Fawwāz, vol. 28. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2004.
- al-Qābisī, Abū’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Khalaf. “A Treatise Detailing the Circumstances of Students and the Rules Governing Teachers and Students (Abridged),” tr. Micahel Fishbein, in *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought: A Compendium of Parallel English-Arabic Texts*, ed. Bradley Cook. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2010, 38-74.
- al-Qalqashandī, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad. *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā fī ṣinā‘at al-inshā’*. Cairo, 1912-1938.
- al-Qayrawānī, Ibn Abī Zayd. *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘*. Beirut and Tunis: Mu’assasat al-Risāla and Maktabat al-‘Atīqa, 1982.
- Saḥnūn b. Sa‘īd al-Tanūkhī. *Al-Mudawwana al-kubrā*, 16 vols. in 6. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.
- al-Sam‘ānī, ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad. *Adab al-implā’ wa-al-istimlā’*, ed. Max Weisweiler. Leiden: Brill, 1952.
- al-Shāfi‘ī, Muḥammad b. Idrīs. *al-Risāla fī ‘uṣūl al-fiqh: Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence*, tr. Majid. Khadduri. 2nd ed. Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 2003.
- al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn Abu-l-Faḍl. *Sawn al-mantiq wa-l-kalām ‘an fann al-mantiq wa-l-kalām*, ed. by ‘Alī Sami al-Nashshār. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1947.
- al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Hayyān. *Kitāb al-Imtā‘ wa-l-mu’anāsa*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad al-Zayn, 3 vols. Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, n.d.
- al-Tha‘ālibī, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad. *Ādāb al-mulūk*, ed. by Jalīl al-‘Aṭiyya. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990.

al-Yamānī, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad. *Sīrat Jaʿfar al-Ḥājib*, Arabic text edited by W. Ivanow, *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Egyptian University*, 1936 (1939), 107-133; English tr. W. Ivanow, in *Ismaʿīlī Tradition Concerning The Rise of the Fatimids*. London: Oxford University Press, 1942, 184-223.

al-Yaʿqūbī, Ibn Wāḍiḥ. *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. Muḥammad Amīn Ḍannāwī, 1st. ed. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2002; English translation: *The Works of Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī*, edited by Matthew S. Gordon, Chase F. Robinson, Everett K. Rowson and Michael Fishbein, vol. 1. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Secondary Literature

- Abdeljaoud, Lotfi. "Les relations entre les Zirides et les Fatimides à la lumière des documents épigraphiques." *RMMM* 139 (2016): 147–66.
- Abdul-Wahab, Hasan H. "al-Abbāsiyya." *EI*2.
- Abun-Nasr, Jamil M. *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Adang, Camilla. "Intra- and Interreligious Controversies in 3rd/9th Century Qayrawān: The Polemics of Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn," *JSAL*, 36 (2009): 281-309.
- Ailett, Cyrille. "Islamisation et arabisation dans le monde musulman médiéval: une introduction au cas de l'Occident musulman (vii^e-xii^e siècle)." In D. Valerian (ed.), *Islamisation et arabisation de l'Occident musulman médiéval (vii-xiie siècle)*. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2011, 7-34. [Online] (Accessed 1 September 2019). Available <https://books.openedition.org/psorbonne/2498>
- Akyeampong, Emmanuel and Gates, Henry Louis Jr. (eds.) *Dictionary of African Biography*, 6 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Al-Azmeh, Aziz. "Muslim Genealogies of Knowledge," *History of Religions* 31, 4 (1992): 403-11.
- Al-Azmeh, Aziz. *Ibn Khaldūn: An Essay in Interpretation*. London: Frank Class, 1982.
- Alexandrin, Elizabeth R. *Walāyah in the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī Tradition*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017.
- Amara, Allaoua. "Les Fatimides et le Maghreb central: littoralisation de la dynastie et modes de contrôle des territoires," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* [Online], 139 (June 2016). (Accessed 13 August 2019), Available at <http://journals.openedition.org/remmm/9460>
- Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali et al (eds.) *Esoterisme Shi'ite, ses racines et ses prolongements*, Bilingual edition. Turnhout : Brepols, 2016.

- Amri, Nelly. "Ribāṭ et idéal de sainteté à Kairouan et sur le littoral Ifrīqiyyen du iie/viiiie au iv." In Dominique Valérian (ed.), *Islamisation et arabisation de l'Occident musulman médiéval (viiiie-xiiiie siècle)*. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2015, 331–68 [Online]. (Accessed: 13 August 2019). Available at <https://books.openedition.org/psorbonne/2525?lang=en#ftn207>
- Amri, Nelly. *al-Walāya wa'l-mujtama': musāhama fī'l-tārīkh al-dīnī wa'l-ijtimā'ī li-Ifriqiya fī 'ahd al-Hafsī*. 2nd edition. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2006.
- Andani, Khalil. "A Survey of Ismaili Studies Part 1: Early Ismailism and Fāṭimid Ismailism," *Religion Compass* 10/8 (2016): 191–206, doi: 10.1111/rec3.12205.
- Andani, Khalil. "A Survey of Ismaili Studies Part 2: Post-Fatimid and Modern Ismailism, Religion Compass," *Religion Compass* 10/11 (2016): 269-82, doi: 10.1111/rec3.12222.
- Andani, Khalil. "Isma'iliyya and Ismailism: From Polemical Portrayals to Academic Inquiry." In Majid Daneshgar and Aaron Hughes (eds.), *Deconstructing Islamic Studies* Cambridge, Mass.: The Ilex Foundation and The Center for Hellenic Studies with Harvard University Press, forthcoming.
- Anderson, Glaire D., Corisande Fenwick, and Mariam Rosser-Owen (eds.). *The Aghlabids and Their Neighbors: Art and Material Culture in Ninth-Century North Africa*. Leiden: Brill, 2017. Available online: <https://doi-org.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/10.1163/9789004356047>
- Anwar, Sherif and Jere L. Bacharach. "Shi'ism and the Early Dinars of the Fāṭimid Imam-caliph al-Mu'izz li-dīn Allāh (341–365/952–975): An Analytic Overview", *Al-Masāq* 22, no. 3 (December 2010): 259-278.
- Arnaldez, R. "Ibn Masarra." *El2*.
- Arjomand, Said Amir. "The Law, Agency, and Policy in Medieval Islamic Society: Development of the Institutions of Learning from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41 (1999): 263-93.
- Assmann, Jan. *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Moses in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Assmann, Jan. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Auchterlonie, Paul. *Arabic Biographical Dictionaries: A Summary Guide and Bibliography*. Durham: Middle East Librarians Committee, 1987.
- Azouvi, François. "Descartes." In Pierre Nora Lawrence D. Kritzman (eds.). *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past. Vol 3, Symbols*. English tr. Arthur Goldhammer. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998, 483–522.

- Bakar, Osman. *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study in Islamic Philosophies of Science*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1998.
- Basset, René. "Kutāma." *El2*.
- BenAicha, Hedi. "Mosques as Libraries in Islamic Civilization, 700-1400 A.D.," *Journal of Library History* (1974-1987) 21, 2 (1986): 253-60.
- Bencheikroun, Chefik T. "Requem por Ibn Ḥawqal: Sur l'hypothèse de l'espion fatimide." *Journal Asiatique* 304.2 (2016):193-211
- Ben Hamada, ‘Abd al-Majīd. *al-Madāris al-kalāmiyya bi'l-Ifriqiya ilā zuhūr al-Ash‘ariyya*, Tunis: Dār al-‘Arab, 1986.
- Bennison, Amira K. *The Great Caliphs: The Golden Age of the 'Abbasid Empire*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009.
- Bennison, Amira K and Maria Angeles Gallego (eds.). "Religious Minorities under the Almohads: an introduction," *JMIS*, Special Issue, *Religious Minorities under the Almohads* 2 (2010): 143-154.
- Bennison, Amira K. *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.
- Bennison, Amira K. "Islam, the Maghrib, and the Medieval Mediterranean World, c. 700-1500 CE," forthcoming.
- Berkey, Jonathan. *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Berkey, Jonathan. "Tradition, Innovation and the Social Construction of Knowledge in the Medieval Islamic Near East." *Past and Present* 146 (1995): 38-65.
- Berthelot, Katell, and Matthias Morgenstern (eds). *The Quest for a Common Humanity: Human Dignity and Otherness in the Religious Traditions of the Mediterranean*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- Bierman, Irene. *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Texts*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998.
- Bloom, Jonathan. "The Origins of Fatimid Art." *Muqarnas* 3 (1985): 20-38.
- Bonner, Michael. *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Bora, Fozia. "Mamluk Representations of Late Fatimid Egypt: the Survival of Fatimid-Era Historiography in Ibn al-Furāt's *Ta'riḫ al-duwal wa'l-mulūk* (History of Dynasties and Kings)." DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2010.
- Bora, Fozia. "Did Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Destroy the Fāṭimids' Books? An Historiographical Enquiry," *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* (July, 2014): 1-19.
- Bora, Fozia. *Writing History in the Medieval Islamic World: The Value of Chronicles as Archives*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2017.

- Borrut, Antoine. *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides* (v. 72-193/692-809). Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Borrut, Antoine. "The Future of the Past." In Andrew Marsham and Alain George (eds.), *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam: Perspectives on Umayyad Elites*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Borrut, Antoine and Christophe Picard. "Râbata, Ribât, Râbita: Une Institution à Reconsidérer." In *Chrétiens et Musulmans En Méditerranée Médiévale (VIIIe-XIIIe Siècle)*. Poitiers: Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale, 2003, 33–66.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital." In John G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986, 241–258.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "From the King's House to the Reason of State: A Model of the Genesis of the Bureaucratic Field," *Constellations Volume 11*, 1 (2004), 16-36. (Originally published in French: "De la maison du roi à la raison d'Etat: un modèle de la genèse du champ bureaucratique," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 118 (June 1997), 55–68.
- Brockopp, Jonathan E. "Literary Genealogies from the Mosque-Library of Kairouan." *ILS* 6, 3 (1999): 393-402.
- Brockopp, Jonathan E. "Contradictory Evidence and the Exemplary Scholar: The Lives of Sahnun b. Sa'īd (d. 854)", *IJMES* 43, 1 (February 2011): 115-132.
- Brockopp, Jonathan E. "Saḥnūn b. Sa'īd (d. 240/854)." In Oussama Arabi et al (eds.) *Islamic Legal Thought: A Compendium of Muslim Jurists*. Leiden: Brill, 2013: 65-85.
- Brockopp, Jonathan E. *Muhammad's Heirs: The Rise of Muslim Scholarly Communities*, 622–950. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Brett, Michael. "Ifriqiya as a Market for Saharan Trade from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century A.D." *JAS* 10, 3 (1969): 347–64; Reprinted in M. Brett, *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, no. II. Aldershot: Routledge, 1999.
- Brett, Michael. "Fatimid Historiography: A Case Study –the Quarrel with the Zirids, 1048-58." In Morgan, D.O. (ed.). *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds*. London: SOAS, 1982; Reprinted, M. Brett, *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, no. VIII. Aldershot: Routledge, 1999.
- Brett, Michael. "The Islamisation of Morocco from the Arabs to the Almoravids." *Morocco, Journal of the Society for Moroccan Studies* 2. London, Frank Cass, 1992, 57-71; Reprinted, M. Brett, *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, no I. Aldershot: Routledge, 1999.

- Brett, Michael. "The Flood of the Dam and the Sons of the New Moon." *Mélanges offerts à Mohamed Talbi* (1993): 55-67; Reprinted, M. Brett, *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, no IX. Aldershot: Routledge, 1999.
- Brett, Michael. "The Mīm the 'Ayn and the Making of Ismā'īlism." *BSOAS* 57 (1994): 25-39; Reprinted, M. Brett, *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, no III. Aldershot: Routledge, 1999.
- Brett, Michael. "The Way of the Nomad." *BSOAS* 58 (1995): 251-69; Reprinted, M. Brett, *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, no 10. Aldershot: Routledge, 1999.
- Brett, Michael. "The Realm of the Imām: The Faṭīmids in the Tenth Century," *BSOAS, University of London* 59, 3 (1996): 431-49; Reprinted, M. Brett, *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, no IV. Aldershot: Routledge, 1999.
- Brett, Michael. *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghreb*. Aldershot: Routledge, 1999.
- Brett, Michael. "Lingua Franca in the Mediterranean: John Wansbrough and the Historiography of Medieval Egypt." In Hugh Kennedy (ed.), *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950-1800)*. Leiden: Brill, 2001, 1-11.
- Brett, Michael. *The Rise of the Fatimids: The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Fourth Century of the Hijra, Tenth Century CE*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
- Brett, Michael. "Arab Conquest and Rise of Islam in North Africa." In J. D. Fage (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa, Vol. 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 490-555.
- Brett, Michael. *The Fatimid Empire*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.
- Brett, Michael and Elizabeth Fentress. *The Berbers*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- Brocklemann, Carl. *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur (GAL)*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Brocklemann, Carl. with Charles Pallet. "Maqāma." *EI2*.
- Bulliet, Richard W. "A Quantitative Approach to Medieval Muslim Biographical Dictionaries," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 13, 2 (1970): 195-211.
- Bulliet, Richard W. *The Patricians of Nishapur: a Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972.
- Bulliet, Richard W. *Conversion to Islam in Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Bulliet, Richard W. "The Age Structure of Medieval Islamic Education," *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983): 105-17.
- Bulliet, Richard W. *Islam: The View from the Edge*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- Canard, Marius. "Fāṭimids." *EI2*.
- Canard, Marius. "Ibn Killis." *EI2*.

- Chabbouh, Ibrahim. "Ibn Khaldūn's Classification of Eras in Islamic History and Other Matters," *Editing Islamic Manuscripts on Social Sciences and Humanities*. Conference Series by Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation. London: Al-Furqān, 2017, 41-82.
- Chabbouh, Ibrahim. "Sijill qadīm li-maktabat jāmi' al-Qayrawān." *MMA* 2 (1956): 339-73
- Chamberlain, Michael. *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Cohen, Hayyim J. "The Economic Background and the Secular Occupations of Muslim Jurisprudents and Traditionists in the Classical Period of Islam: (Until the Middle of the Eleventh Century)", *JESHO* 13, 1 (1970): 16-61.
- Cohen, R. Mark and Somekh, Sasson. "Interreligious Majālis in Early Fatimid Egypt." In *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, edited by Hawa Lazarus-Yafeh et. al. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999, 128-36.
- Cohen, R. Mark and Somekh. "In the Court of Ya'qūb ibn Killis: a Fragment from the Cairo Geniza." *JQR* 80 (1990), 283-314.
- Cottart, N. "Mālikiyya," *EI*2.
- de Callatay, Godefroid. *Ikhwan al-Safa: A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2005.
- Cook, Bradley J, and Fathī Ḥasan Malkāwī (eds). *Classical foundations of Islamic educational thought: a compendium of parallel English-Arabic texts*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2010.
- Cook, Michael. "Ibn Sa'dī on Truth-Blindness." *JSAI* 33 (2007): 169-178.
- Cooperson, Michael. *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mūn*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Cornell, Vincent J. "Understanding Is the Mother of Ability: Responsibility and Action in the Doctrine of Ibn Tūmart." *Studia Islamica*, 66 (1987): 71-103
- Cortese, Delia. "Voices of the silent majority: the transmission of Sunni learning in Fātimī Egypt." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012): 345-465.
- Cortese, Delia. *Ismaili and Other Arabic Manuscripts: A Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies*. London, 2000.
- Cortese, Delia. *Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts: The Zāhid 'Alī Collection in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003.
- Crone, "Muhallabids," *EI*2.

- Crone, Patricia, and Treadwell, Luke. "A New Text on Ismailism at the Samanid Court." In *Texts, Documents, and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D.S. Richards*, ed. D. Donald Sidney Richards and Chase F. Robinson. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- Custers, Martin H. *Al-Ibadiyya. A Bibliography: Second, Revised and Enlarged Edition*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2017.
- Dachraoui, Farhat. "Contribution à l'histoire des Fatimides en Ifrīqiya." *Arabica*, 8 (1961): 189-203.
- Dachraoui, « Les Commencements de la Prédication Ismā'īlienne en Ifrīqiya," *Studia Islamica* 20 (1964): 89-102.
- Dachraoui, Farhat. *Le Califat Fatimide au Maghreb (295-365 H./909-975 J.C.): Histoire politique et institutions*. Tunis: Société Tunisienne de Distribution, 1981; Arabic tr. Hammādī al-Sāḥilī, *Khilāfat al-Fāṭimiyya bi'l-Maghrib*. Tunis: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1994.
- Dachraoui, Farhat. "Ibn Hānī' al-Andalusī." *EI*2.
- Dachraoui, Farhat. "Masīla." *EI*2.
- Dachraoui, Farhat. "al-Manṣūr Bi'llāh." *EI*2.
- Daftary, Farhad. *Medieval Isma'ili History and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Daftary, Farhad. *A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.
- Daftary, Farhad. "Intellectual Life among the Ismailis: An Overview", in idem., *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*. London, I.B. Tauris, 2000, 87-111.
- Daftary, Farhad and Josef W. Meri (eds.) *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003.
- Daftary, Farhad. *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2004.
- Daftary, Farhad. *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies: A Historical Introduction to an Islamic Community*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005.
- Daftary, Farhad. *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Daftary, Farhad. "Sunnī Perceptions of the Ismailis: Medieval Perspectives." In Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (ed.), *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2020, 13-26.
- Daftary, Farhad and Shainool Jiwa (eds.). *The Fatimid Caliphate: Diversity of Traditions*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2018.
- Dakake, Maria M. *Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007.

- Dakake, Maria M. "Hiding in Plain Sight: The Practical and Doctrinal Significance of Secrecy in Shi'ite Islam." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2006): 324-55.
- Déroche, François. "A Note on the Medieval Inventory of the Manuscripts Kept in the Great Mosque of Kairouan." In ed. Robert Kerr and Thomas Milo (eds.) *Writings and Writing: Investigations in Islamic Text and Script in Honour of Dr. Januarius Justus Witkam*. Cambridge, UK: Archetype, 2013, 67–86.
- Djelloul, Néji. "A propos d'un toponyme de la région de Sfax: Qaṣr Ziad." *La dynamique économique à Sfax entre le passé et le présent*. Sfax: Association de Sauvegarde de la Medina de Sfax, 1993, 9-45.
- Ducène, Jean-Charles. "Ibn Ḥawqal." *EL*3.
- Dutton, Yasin. *The Origins of Islamic Law: The Qur'an, the Muwaṭṭa' and Madinan 'Amal*. Richmond, Surrey, 1999.
- Ebstein, Michael. *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Ebstein, Michael. "Ibn Masarra," *EL*3.
- El Bahi, Ahmed. "Les Ribāṭs Aghlabides : Un Problème d'identification." In Anderson, et al, *The Aghlabids and Their Neighbors: Art and Material Culture in Ninth-Century North Africa*. Leiden: Brill, 2017.
- El Bahi, Ahmed. "Al-Maḥris fī al-ʿaṣr al-wasīṭ bayna al-Mashriq wa'l-Maghrib." *Revue Tunisienne d'Histoire Militaire* 3 (2011): 4–14.
- El Omari, Racha. "Kitāb al-Ḥayda: the Historical Significance of an Apocryphal Text." In Felisitas Orwis and David Reisman (eds.) *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture and Religion: Studies in Honour of Dimitri Gutas*. Leiden: Brill, 2011, 419-451.
- El Shamsy, Ahmed. *The Canonization of Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Goodwin, Jeff. "Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency." *American Journal of Sociology* 99, 11 (1994): 1411–54.
- Ephrat, Daphna. *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni 'Ulama' of Eleventh-Century Baghdad*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- Ernst, Carl W. "From Hagiography to Martyrology: Conflicting Testimonies to a Sufi Martyr of the Delhi Sultanate." *History of Religions* 24, 4 (May, 1985), 308-327.
- Fadel, Mohammad. "The Social Logic of *Taqlid* and the Rise of the *Mukhtasar*." *Islamic Law and Society* (1996): 193–233.

- de Felipe, Helena. "Berber Leadership and Genealogical Legitimacy." In Sarah B. Savant, (ed.) *Genealogy and Knowledge in Muslim Societies: Understanding the Past*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, 55-70.
- Fenwick, Corisande. "From Africa to Ifrīqiya: Settlement and Society in Early Medieval North Africa (650-800), *al-Masāq* 25: 1 (2013): 9-33.
- Fenwick, Corisande. "Leyendas árabes sobre el origen de los beréberes", *Al-Qantara*, 11:2 (1990), 379-396.
- Fierro, Maribel. "Why and How Do Religious Scholars Write about Themselves? The Case of the Islamic West in the Fourth/Tenth Century", *Mélanges de L'Université Saint-Joseph* LVIII (2005): 403-23.
- Fierro, Maribel. "The Almohads and the Fatimids." In Bruce D. Craig (ed.), *Ismaili and Fatimid Studies in honour of Paul E. Walker*. Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2010, 161-175
- Fierro, Maribel. "Codifying the Law: The Case of the Medieval Islamic West." In John Hudson and Ana Rodriguez (eds.), *Diverging Paths? The Shapes of Power and Institutions in Medieval Christendom and Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 2014, 99-118.
- Fierro, Maribel. "How Do We Know about the Circulation of Books in Al-Andalus? The Case of Al-Bakrī's *Kitāb Al-Anwār*." *Intellectual History of the Islamic World*, 4, 1-2 (2016): 152-169.
- Fierro, Maribel. "Sacrifice, Circumcision and the Ruler in the Medieval Islamic West: The Ismaili-Fatimid Legacy." In Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (ed.), *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2020, 147-70.
- Filali-Ansary, Abdou, and Gerhard Endress (eds.) *Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopaedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- Fowden, Garth. *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Fowden, Garth. *Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Gacek, Adam. *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies*, 2 vols. London: Islamic Publications, 1984-1985.
- Gaiser, Adam R. *Muslims, Scholars, Soldiers: The Origin and Elaboration of the Ibāḍī Imamate Traditions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- García-Arenal, Mercedes. *Messianism and Puritanical Reform: Mahdīs of the Muslim West*. Translated from Spanish, by Martin Beagles. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

- George, Alain and Andrew Marsham (eds.). *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam: Perspectives on Umayyad Elites*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Gensburger, Sarah. "Halbwachs' Studies in Collective Memory: A Founding Text for Contemporary 'Memory Studies'?" *JCS* 16, 4 (November 2016): 396-413.
- Gilbert, Joan E. "The Ulama of Medieval Damascus and the International World of Islamic Scholarship." PhD Thesis. University of California, Berkeley, 1977.
- Gilbert, Joan E. "Institutionalization of Muslim Scholarship and Professionalization of the 'Ulama' in Medieval Damascus." *Studia Islamica* 52 (1980): 105-34.
- Gilliot, Claude (ed.) *Education and Learning in the Early Islamic World*. Surrey, 2012.
- Gleave, Robert. "Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh: The "Canonical" Imāmī Collections of Akhbār," *ILS* 8, 3, *Hadith and Fiqh* (2001): 350-382.
- Gleave, Robert. "Ja'far al-Sadeq ii. Teachings." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, XIV/4, 351-356, (Accessed on 24 November 2018). Available online: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jafar-al-sadeq-ii-teachings>
- Goodman, L. E. "Rāzī vs Rāzī – Philosophy in the Majlis." In *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, edited by Hawa Lazarus-Yafeh et. al. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999, 84-107.
- Granara, William. *Narrating Muslim Sicily: War and Peace in the Medieval Mediterranean World*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009.
- Gutas, Dimitri. *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Günther, Sebastian. "Assessing the Sources of Classical Arabic Compilations: The Issue of Categories and Methodologies." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 32, 1 (2005): 75-98.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *La mémoire collective*. 2nd ed. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968. English tr. Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter. *The Collective Memory*. New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1980.
- Haji, Hamid. "A Distinguished Slave Eunuch of the Early Fatimid Period." In Omar Alí-de-Unzaga (ed.), *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011, 261-274.
- Hallaq, Wael. *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

- Halm, Heinz. "The Ismā'īlī Oath of Allegiance (‘*ahd*) and the Sessions of Wisdom (*majālis al-ḥikma*) in Fatimid Times." In F. Daftary (ed.). *Medieval Isma'ili History and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 91-115.
- Halm, Heinz. *Das Reich des Mahdi. Der Aufstieg der Fatimiden (875-973)*. München: C. H. Beck, 1991. English translation by M. Bonner, *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Halm, Heinz. *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning*. London: I. B Tauris, 1997.
- Halm, Heinz. *Die Kalifen von Kairo: die Fatimiden in Ägypten 973-1074*. München: C. H. Beck, 2003.
- Hamdani, Abbas. "Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and the Brethren of Purity." *IJMES* (1978): 354-53.
- Hamdani, Abbas and François de Blois. "A Re-Examination of al-Mahdī's Letter to the Yemenites on the Genealogy of the Fatimid Caliphs." *The Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1983): 173-207.
- Hamdani, Abbas. "Brethren of Purity, a Secret Society for the Establishment of the Fāṭimid Caliphate: New Evidence for the Early Dating of their Encyclopaedia." In M. Barrucand (ed.), *L'Egypte Fatimide son art et son histoire*. Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999, 73-82.
- Hamdani, Sumaiya A. "From Da'wa to Dawla: al-Qadi al-Nu'man's Zāhirī Construction of Fatimid Legitimacy." PhD Thesis, Princeton University, 1995.
- Hamdani, Sumaiya A. "The Dialectic of Power: Sunnī-Shī'ī Debates in Tenth-Century North Africa." *Studia Islamica* 90 (2000): 5-21.
- Hamdani, Sumaiya A. *Between Revolution and State: The Path to Fatimid Statehood: Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and the Construction of Fatimid Legitimacy*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006.
- al-Hamdani, Husayn F. *On the Genealogy of Fatimid Caliphs (Statement on Mahdī's communication to the Yemen on the hidden and esoteric names of his predecessors)*. Cairo: Publication of the American University of Cairo, School of Oriental Studies, 1958.
- Hämeen-Anttila, Jaakko. "The Essay and Debate (Al-Risāla and Al-Munāzara)." In *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, edited by Roger Allen and D. S. Richards. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 134-44.
- Harari, Yuval Noah. *A Brief History of Humankind: Sapiens*. New York: Harper, 2015.
- Heck, Paul L. *The Construction of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization. Qudāma b. Ja'far and His Kitāb al-kharāj wa-sinā'at al-kitāba*. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Heck, Paul L. "The Hierarchy of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization." *Arabica* 49, 1 (2002): 27-54.
- Heffernan, Thomas J. *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988.

- Heine, Peter. "Nabīdh." *EI*2.
- Hentati, Najmeddine (ed.), *Dirāsāt fī tārikh al-Qayrawān*. Tunis: al-Maṭbaʿāt al-Rasmiyya li'l-Jumhūriyyat al-Tūnisiyya, 2009.
- Hentati, Najmeddine. *Ishāmāt al-Qayrawān al-ʿilmiyya wa'l-taqniyya*. Tunis: al-Maṭbaʿāt al-Rasmiyya li'l-Jumhūriyyat al-Tūnisiyya, 2011.
- Hentati, Najmeddine. *Dirāsāt ḥaḍārīyya ḥawla al-Qayrawān*, 2nd ed. Tunis: al-Maṭbaʿāt al-Rasmiyya li'l-Jumhūriyyat al-Tūnisiyya, 2015.
- Hinds, Martin. "Mihna." *EI*2.
- Hirschler, Konrad. *Medieval Arabic Historiography: Authors as Actors*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Hirschler, Konrad. *The Written World in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.
- Hirschler, Konrad. *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library: The Ashrāfiyya Library Catalogue*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.
- Hodgson, G. S. Marshall. *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilisation*, 3 vols. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Hodgson, G.S. Marshall. "Durūz." *EI*2.
- Hodgson, G.S. Marshall. "Djaʿfar al-Sādik." *EI*2.
- Hollenberg, David. "Interpretation after the End of Days: the Fatimid-Ismaʿili Taʿwil (Interpretation) of Jaʿfar ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 960). PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2006.
- Hollenberg, David. *Beyond the Quran: Early Ismaili Taʿwil and the Secrets of the Prophets*. Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2016.
- Humphreys, R. Stephen. *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*. Revised Edition. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Idris, Hady Roger. "Contribution à l'histoire de l'Ifrikiya: tableau de la vie intellectuelle et administrative à Kairouan sous les Aglabites et les Fatimites (4 premiers siècles de l'Hégire) d'après le *Riḡāḍ en Nufūs* de Abū Bakr El Mālīkī." *REI* 9 (1935): 105–78, 273–305; 10 (1936): 45–104.
- Idris, Hady Roger. *La Berbérie orientale sous les Zirides: Xème-XIIème siècles*, 2 vols. Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1962.
- Idris, Hady Roger. "Reflections on Malikism under the Umayyads of Spain." In Manuela Marín, Julio Samsó, and Isabel Fierro (eds.), *The Formation of al-Andalus: History and Society, Part II*. Surrey, 1998, 85–101.
- Idris, Hady Roger. "Ibn al-Djazzār." *EI*2.

- Inglis, John. *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: In Islam, Judaism and Christianity*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Ivanow, Wladimir. "The Organisation of the Fatimid Propaganda." *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 15 (1939), 1-35.
- Ivanow, Wladimir. *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*. London: Oxford University Press, 1942.
- Ivanow, Wladimir. *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey*. Tehran, 1963.
- Jadla, Ibrahim. "Les Fatimides et les Kutāma: une alliance stratégique ou un mal nécessaire?" *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen-Age*, tome 115, no. 1 (2003), 503-512.
- Jiwa, Shainool. "The Initial Destination of the Fatimid Caliphate: the Yemen or the Maghrib?." *BSMES* 13 (1986), 15-26.
- Jiwa, Shainool. *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire: Fatimid Egypt and the Founding of Cairo*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009.
- Jiwa, Shainool. "Inclusive Governance: A Fāṭimid Illustration." In Aryn B. Sajoo, *A Companion to the Muslim World*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2009, 157-75.
- Jiwa, Shainool. "The Baghdad Manifesto (402/1011): A Re-Examination of Fatimid-Abbasid Rivalry." In Farhad Daftary and Shainool Jiwa (eds.) *The Fatimid Caliphate: Diversity of Traditions*. London, 2018, 22-79.
- Kashima, Yoshihisa. "Culture Narrative and Human Motivation." In D. Munro et al (eds.) *Motivation and Culture*. London: Routledge, 1997, 16-30.
- Kennedy, Hugh (ed.). *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950-1800)*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
- Khalidi, Tarif. *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Khalidov, Anas B. "Ebn Ḥawqal, Abu'-Qāsem Moḥammad." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. VIII, Fasc. 1, 27-28. (Accessed: 14 September 2019). Available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ebn-hawqal>
- Khalifa, 'Alī Muḥammad al-Sayyid. *Fann al-munāẓara: dirāsa fī taṭawwur fann al-munāẓara ḥattā nihāya al-'aṣr al-'abbāsī al-awwal*. Al-Iskandariyya: Dār al-Wafā', 2013.
- Klemm, Verena. *Memoirs of a Mission: The Ismaili Scholar, Statesman and Poet al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shirāzī*. London and New York, 2003.
- Lalani, Arzina R. *Early Shī'ī Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.

- Lane, Edward W. *Arabic-English Lexicon*. Beirut, Librairie du Liban, 1963. Available online at <http://ejtaal.net/aa/#null>
- Lapidus, Ira M. *A History of Islamic Societies*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Lazarus-Yafeh, Hava, Cohen, R. Mark et. al. (eds.). *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999.
- Leary, Patrick J. *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Lecomte, G. "Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn." *El2*.
- Leiser, Gary La Viere. "The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisūn 495-67/1101-1249." PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1976.
- Leiser, Gary La Viere. "The Madrasa and the Islamization of the Middle East: The Case of Egypt." *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 22 (1985): 29–47.
- Leiser, Gary La Viere. "Notes on the Madrasa in Medieval Islamic Society." *Muslim World* 76, 1 (1986): 16-23.
- Leiser, Gary La Viere. "Muslims From al-Andalus in the Madrasas of Late Fāṭimid and Aiyūbid Egypt." *Al-Qantara* 20, 1 (1999): 132-59.
- Lenker, Michael. "The Importance of the Riḥla for the Islamization of Spain." PhD Thesis. University of Pennsylvania, 1982.
- Lev, Yaacov. "Army, Regime, and Society in Fatimid Egypt (358-487/968-1094)." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (Aug., 1987), 337-365
- Lev, Yaacov. "The Fāṭimid Imposition of Ismāʿīlism on Egypt (358-386/969-996)." *ZDMG* 138, no. 2 (1988), 313-325.
- Levtzion, Nehemia. "Aspects of Islamization: Weber's Observations on Islam Reconsidered." In Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schuchter (eds.), *Max Weber and Islam*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1999, 153-161.
- Lewicki, Tadeus. "al-Ibāḍiyya." *El2*.
- Lewicki, Tadeus. "al-Wisyānī." *El2*.
- Love, Paul Mitchell. "Writing a Network, Constructing a Tradition: Ibāḍī Prosopography in Medieval Northern Africa (11th-16th c.)." PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 2016.
- Lowry, Josef E. *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The Risāla of Muḥammad abn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

- Madelung, Wilferd. "Das Imamāt in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre," *Der Islam* 37 (1961), 43-135; translated into English by P. Crone, "The Imamate in Early Ismaili Doctrine." *SSR* 2 (2018), 62-155.
- Madelung, Wilferd. "Some Notes on the non-Ismaʿīlī Shiism in the Maghrib." *SI* 44 (1976): 87-97.
- Madelung, Wilferd. *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, (Reprints). London, 1985.
- Madelung, Wilferd. "The Religious Policy of the Fāṭimids toward Their Sunnī Subjects in the Maghrib." In M. Barrucand (ed.) *L'Egypte Fatimide son art et son histoire*. Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999, 97-104.
- Madelung, Wilferd. "A Treatise on the Imamate of the Fāṭimid Caliph al-Manṣūr bi-Allāh." In Chase. F. Robinson (ed.), *Texts, Documents and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D. S. Richards*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, 69-78.
- Madelung, Wilferd. "The Theology of the Founder Imam of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'." *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread*, Conference Proceedings, organised by Orkhan Mir-Kasymov, Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 19-21 October 2016 (forthcoming).
- Madelung, Wilferd. "Ḥamdān Karmāṭ." *EI2*
- Madelung, Wilferd. "al-Mahdī." *EI2*.
- Mahfoudh, Faouzi. "Qaṣr al-Ṭūb: un ribāṭ du Sahel tunisien, cadre géographique ethistorique." *Africa* 17 (1999): 97-127.
- Makdisi, George. "Muslim Institutions of Learning in Eleventh-Century Baghdad." *BSOAS* (1961): 1-56.
- Makdisi, George. "The Scholastic Method in Medieval Education: An Inquiry into Its Origins in Law and Theology." *Speculum* 49, 4 (1974): 640-61.
- Makdisi, George. "Ṣuḥba Et Riyāsa Dans L'Enseignement Médiéval." In *Recherches D'Islamologie*, Louvain, 1978.
- Makdisi, George. *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981.
- Makdisi, George. *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West: With Special Reference to Scholasticism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990.
- Makdisi, George. "'Ṭabaqāt' – Biography: Law and Orthodoxy in Classical Islam." *Islamic Studies* 32, 4 (1993): 371-96.
- Makdisi, George. *Ibn 'Aqil: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

- Makdisi, George. "Universities, Past and Present", in F. Daftary and J. W. Meri (eds.) In *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Professor Wilferd Madelung*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003, 43-63.
- Mamour, Prince P. H. *Polemics on the Origin of the Fatimi Caliphs*. Karachi, Indus Publications, 1934; Reprinted, 1979.
- Manzano, Eduardo M. "The Iberian Peninsula and North Africa." In Chase Robinson (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of Islam Volume 1: The Western Islamic World Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 581-622.
- Marçais, Georges. *La Berbérie musulmane et l'Orient au moyen âge*. Casablanca, Afrique Orient, 1991.
- Marín, Manuela, Samsó, Julio and Fierro, Ma. Isabel (eds.). *The Formation of Al-Andalus: History and Society, Part 1*. Surrey: Routledge, 1998.
- Marín, Manuela. "Ifriqiya Et Al-Andalus, À Propos De La Transmission Des Sciences Islamiques Aux Premiers Siècles De l'Islam." *Revue De l'Occident Musulman Et De La Méditerranée* 40, 1 (1985): 45-53.
- Marsham, Andrew. *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
- Martínez Enamorado, Virgilio. "Fatimid Ambassadors in Bobastro: Changing Religious and Political Allegiances in the Islamic West." *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 52, 2 (2009), 267-300.
- Mattingly, David and Martin Sterry. "Zuwila and Fazzan in the Seventh to Tenth Centuries: The Emergence of a New Trading Center." In Glaire Anderson, D., Corisande Fenwick, and Mariam Rosser-Owen (eds.). *The Aghlabids and Their Neighbors*. Leiden: Brill, 2017, 551-72.
- Melchert, Christopher. *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law: 9th-10th Centuries C.E.* Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- Melchert, Christopher. "al-Bukhārī." *EI*3.
- Meouak, Mohamed. *La langue berbère au Maghreb médiéval: textes, contextes, analyses*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Metcalf, Alex. *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
- Miquel, André. "Ibn Ḥawḳal." *EI*2.
- Miller, Larry Benjamin. "Islamic Disputation Theory: A Study of the Development of Dialectic in Islam From the Tenth Through the Fourteenth Centuries." PhD Thesis, Princeton University, 1984.
- Mingana, Alphonse (ed.) and J. Rendel Harris. *Woodbrooke studies: Christian documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni*, vol. 2. Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1928.

- Moore, Robert. "The Role of Madrasah and the Structure of Islamic Legal Education in Mamluk Egypt (1250-1517)." PhD Thesis. Emory University, 2000.
- Monès, Hussein. "Le Malikisme et l'echec des Fatimides en Ifrīqiya." *Les Études d'orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal*. 2 vols. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962, 197-220.
- Monroe, T. James. *The Art of Badī' az-Zamān al-Hamadhānī as Picaresque Narrative*. Beirut: The American University of Beirut Press, 1983.
- Mottahedeh, Roy. "Richard W. Bulliet, The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History" [Review article]. *JAOS* 95 (1975): 491-495.
- Mottahedeh, Roy. "The Transmission of Knowledge: The Role of the Islamic Northeast." In Marc Gaborieau and Nicole Grandin (eds.), *Madrasa: LA Transmission Du Savoir Dans Le Monde Musulman*. Paris: Arguments, 1997, 63-72.
- Mottahedeh, Roy. *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, 2nd ed. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001.
- Mulder, Stephanie. *The Shrines of the 'Alids in Medieval Syria: Sunnis, Shi'is and the Architecture of Coexistence*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.
- Munro, Donald, Schumaker, John F. and Carr, Stuart C. *Motivation and Culture*. New York and London, Routledge, 1997.
- Muranyi, Miklos. *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Hadit- und Rechtsgelehrsamkeit der Mālikīyya in Nordafrika bis zum 5. Jh. d.H.: bio-bibliographische Notizen aus der Moscheebibliothek von Qairawan*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997. Revised Arabic tr. Maḥmūd Fu'ād Na'nā', *al-Maktaba al-'atīqa bi'l-Qayrawān*. Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-islāmiyya, 2018.
- Muranyi, Miklos. "Geniza or Ḥubus: Some Observations on the Library of the Great Mosque in Qayrawān," *JSAI* 42 (2015): 183–200.
- Muranyi, Miklos. *Die Rechtsbücher Des Qairawāners Sahnūn b. Sa'īd: Entstehungsgeschichte Und Werküberlieferung*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999.
- Muranyi, Miklos. *Materialen zur mālikischen Rechtsliteratur*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1984.
- Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24.
- Nora, Pierre, and Lawrence D. Kritzman (eds.). *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, 3 vols. English tr. Arthur Goldhammer. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Norris, Harry T. "Yemenis in Western Sahara", *The Journal of African History* 3, 2, Third Conference on African History and Archaeology: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 3- 7 July 1961 (1962): 317-322

- Novikoff, Alex J. *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Science and Civilization in Islam*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "The Islamic Philosophers' Views on Education." *MEQ* 2/4 (1984): 5–16.
- al-Nayyāl, Muḥammad al-Bahālī. *al-Maktabah al-'athariyya bi'l-Qayrawān*. Tunis: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1963.
- Nef, Annliese. "La délégation politique dans l'Occident fatimide avant 973," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* [Online], 139 (2016). (Accessed June 11, 2019). Available online <http://journals.openedition.org/remmm/9441>
- Palacios, Miguel Asín. *Abenmasarra y su escuela. Origenes de la filosofía hispano-musulmana*. Madrid: Imprenta Ibérica, 1914; English translation: *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Masarra and his Followers*, tr. Elmer H. Douglas and Howard W. Yoder. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978.
- Petry, F. Carl. *Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Picard, Christophe. *Sea of the Caliphs: The Mediterranean in the Medieval Islamic World*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Poonawala, Ismail. K. *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature*. Malibu: Undena Press, 1977.
- Poonawala, Ismail. K. "Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and Ismā'īlī Jurisprudence." In F. Daftary (ed.), *Medieval Isma'ili History and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 117-143.
- Poonawala, Ismail. K. "Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and Ismā'īlī Jurisprudence." In F. Daftary (ed.), *Medieval Isma'ili History and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 117-143.
- Poonawala, Ismail. K. "The Evolution of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's Theory of Ismaili Jurisprudence as Reflected in the Chronology of his Works on Jurisprudence." In F. Daftary and G. Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi'i Islam: History, Theology and Law*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014, 295-351.
- Poonawala, Ismail. K. "The Chronology of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's Works," *Arabica* 65 (2018): 84-162.
- Prevost, Virginie. "La révolte de Bāḡāya (358/969): le dernier soulèvement des ibāḍites maghrébins." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 65, 3 (2006): 197-206.
- al-Qadi, Wadad. "Biographical Dictionaries as the Scholars' Alternative History of the Muslim Community." In Gerhard Endress (ed.), *Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopaedic Activities in Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World*. Leiden: Brill, 2006, 23-75.
- al-Qāḍī, Khālīd b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān. *al-Ḥayāt al-'ilmiyya fī Miṣr al-Fāṭimiyya*. Beirut: al-Dār al-'Arabiyya l-il-Mawsū'āt, 2008.
- Qutbuddin, Husain. "Fāṭimid Legal Exegesis of the Qur'an: The Interpretive Strategies Used by al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) in His "Da'ā'im al-Islām." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*. 12 (2010): 109-146.

- Rabbat, Nasser. "Al-Maqrizi's Connection to the Fāṭimid." In F. Daftary and G. Miskinzoda, *The Study of Shi'i Islam: History, Theology and Law*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014, 67-75.
- _____ with J. Chabbi. "Ribāṭ." *EI2*.
- Rahman, Sayeed S. "The Legal and Theological Thought of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (310-386 A.H./922-996 C.E.)." PhD Thesis, Yale University, 2009.
- Rammaḥ, Mourad. "Maktaba al-Qayrawān al-ʿatīqa wa subul ṣiyānatuhā." *MMA* 41 (May, 1997), 291-312.
- Rapoport, Yosseff and Emilie Savage-Smith. *An Eleventh-Century Egyptian Guide to the Universe: The Book of Curiosity*. Edition and English translation of *Kitāb Gharāʾib al-funūn wa mulāḥ al-ʿuyūn*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Rapoport, Yosseff and Emilie Savage-Smith. *Lost Maps of the Caliphs: Drawing the World in Eleventh-Century Cairo*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Richards, Donald Sidney D., and Chase F. Robinson (eds.) *Texts, Documents, and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D.S. Richards*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- Robinson, Francis. "Education." Robert Irwin (ed.) *Islamic Cultures and Societies to the End of the Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Roggema, Barbara. "The Disputation between a monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab notable." In David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1 (600-1500). Leiden: Brill, 2009, 268-73;
- Roggema, Barbara. "The Debate between Patriarch John and an emir of the Mhaggrāyē: A Reconsideration of the earliest Christian-Muslim Debate." In Martin Tamcke (ed.), *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Age*. Würzburg: Ergon, 2007, 21-39.
- Romanov, Maxim. "Computational Reading of Arabic Biographical Collections with Special Reference to Preaching in the Sunnī World (661-1300 CE)." PhD Thesis, The University of Michigan, 2013.
- Romanov, Maxim & Masoumeh Seydi. *OpenITI: a Machine-Readable Corpus of Islamicate Texts* (Version 2019.1.1) [Data set]. Zenodo, 2019.
- <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3082464>
- Rosenthal, Franz, and Dimitri Gutas. *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- Saif, Liana. "Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's Religious Reform and Magic: Beyond the Ismaʿīli Hypothesis." *JIS* (2018): 1-38.
- Salem, Feryal. *The Emergence of Early Sufi Piety and Sunnī Scholasticism: ʿAbdallāh b. Al-Mubārak and the Formation of Sunni Identity in the Second Islamic Century*. Leiden: Brill, 2016.
- Sanagustin, Floréal. "Ustādh." *EI2*.

- Sanders, Paula. *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Safi, Omid. "Power and Politics of Knowledge: Negotiating Political Ideology and Religious Orthodoxy in Seljūq Iran." PhD Thesis, Duke University, 2000.
- Safi, Omid. *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Sahner, Christian. "The Monasticism of My Community Is Jiha': A Debate on Asceticism, Sex, and Warfare in Early Islam." *Arabica* 64 (2017): 149-183.
- Sahner, Christian. "A Zoroastrian Dispute in the Caliph's Court: The *Gizistag Abāliš* in its Early Islamic Context, *Iranian Studies* 52: 1-2 (2019): 61-83.
- Savage, Elizabeth. "Survival through Alliance: The Establishment of the Ibadiyya." *BSMESB* 17, 1 (1990): 5-15.
- Savant, Sarah Bowen (ed.) *Genealogy and Knowledge in Muslim Societies: Understanding the Past*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.
- Sayyid, Ayman Fuad. "Reconstructing Lost Ancient Texts – Sources of Egyptian History as Examples." *Editing Islamic Manuscripts on Social Sciences and Humanities*. Conference Series by Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation. London: Al-Furqān, 2017, 348-373.
- Schacht, Joseph. "Mālik b. Anas." EI2.
- Schacht, Joseph. "On Some Manuscripts in the Libraries of Kairouan and Tunis." *Arabica* 14, Fasc. 3 (October, 1967): 225-258.
- Schwarb, Gregor. "Mu'tazilism in the Age of Averroes." *Warburg Institute Colloquia* 16 (2011): 251-282.
- Seleznyov, Nikolai N. "Seven Sessions or Just a Letter? Observations on the Structure of the Disputations between Elias, Metropolitan of Nisibis, and the Vizier Abū l-Qāsim al-Maghribī." *Scrinium* 14 (2018): 434-445.
- Shalaby, Aḥmad. *History of Islamic Education*. Beirut: Dar-al-Kashshaf, 1954.
- Shatzmiller, Maya. *The Berbers and the Islamic State: The Marinid Experience in Pre-Protectorate Morocco*. Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2000.
- Sizgorich, Thomas. "Sanctified Violence: Monotheist Militancy as the Tie That Bound Christian Rome and Islam." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, 4 (2009): 895-921.
- Sizgorich, Thomas. *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- Snijders, Tjamke. "Communal Learning and Communal Identities in Medieval Studies: Consensus, Conflict, and the Community of Practice." In Long Micol, Tjamke Snijders, and Steven

- Vanderputten (eds.), *Horizontal Learning in the High Middle Ages: Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Transfer in Religious Communities*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2019, 42-43.
- Soffer, Yossef. "The Theological *Majlis* and Religious Otherness in Medieval Islam," in Katell Berthelot et al (eds.), *The Quest for a Common Humanity: Human Dignity and Otherness in the Religious Traditions of the Mediterranean*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, 219-35.
- Spectorsky, Susan A. "Tābi'ūn." *EI2*.
- Stanković, Isidora. "Spaces of memory – 'The Presence of Absence': Cultural Memory and Oblivion Mechanisms." *Kulmya/Culture* 8 (2014): 87-94.
- Steenbergen, Jo Van, Wing, Patrick and D'hulster, Kristof. "The Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate? State Formation and the History of Fifteenth Century Egypt and Syria: Part I — Old Problems and New Trends", *History Compass* 14, no. 11 (2016): 549–59.
- Steenbergen, Jo Van, Wing, Patrick and D'hulster, Kristof. "The Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate? State Formation and the History of Fifteenth Century Egypt and Syria: Part II – Comparative Solutions and a New Research Agenda." *History Compass* 14, no. 11 (2016): 560–69.
- Stern, Samuel M. "The 'Book of the Highest Initiation' and Other Anti-Ismā'īlī Travesties." *Studies in Early Ismā'ilism*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983, 56-83.
- Stern, Samuel M. "Fāṭimid Propaganda Among Jews." *Studies in Early Ismā'ilism*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983, 84-95.
- Stern, Samuel M. "Abd al-Djabbār." *EI2*.
- Stern, Samuel M. "Abū Yazīd Makhḷad b. Kaydād al-Nukkārī," *EI2*.
- Stewart, Devin J. "Doctorate of Islamic Law in Mamluk Egypt and Syria." In Lowry Joseph, Devin Stewart and Shawkat Toorawa (eds.), *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of George Makdisi*. Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004, 45-90.
- Stewart, Devin J. Review of *Education and Learning in the Early Islamic World*, ed. by Claude Gilliot, Surrey and Burlington, 2012, in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 25, 2 (2014): 239-41.
- Stewart, Devin J. "Introduction." In idem (ed.) *Disagreements of the Jurists: A Manual of Islamic Legal Theory*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2015.
- Stewart, Devin J. "The Maqāma." In *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, edited by Roger Allen and D. S. Richards. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 45–58.
- Stroumsa, Sarah. "Ibn Rāwandī's sū ādāb al-mujādala: the Role of Bad Manners in Medieval Disputations." In *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, edited by Hawa Lazarus-Yafeh et. al. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999, 66–83.

- Stroumsa, Sarah. "Ibn Masarra and the Beginning of Mystical Thought in al-Andalus," in Peter Schäfer (ed.), *Mystical approaches to God. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. München: Oldenbourg, 2006, 97–112.
- Stroumsa, Sarah. "Early Muslim and Jewish Kalām: The Enterprise of Reasoned Discourse." In Christoph Marksches and Yohanan Friedmann (eds.), *Rationalisation of Religion: Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. Jerusalem and Berlin: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and de Gruyter, 2019, 202–223.
- Stromsa, Sarah and Sivri Sara. "The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra and His *Epistle on Contemplation*", *JSAI* 36 (2009), 201–53.
- Szilágyi, Krisztina. "The Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias." In Samuel Noble and Alexander Treiger (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World (700–1700): An Anthology of Sources*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014, 90–111
- Szilágyi, Krisztina. "Christian Learning about Islam in the Early 'Abbāsīd Caliphate: The Muslim Sources of the Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias." In Jens Scheiner and Damien Janos (ed.), *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdad, 750–1000 C.E.* Princeton: Darwin Press, Inc., 2014, 267–342.
- Szpociński, Andrzej. "Sites and Non-Sites of Memory." *Teksty drugie: Memory and Place* 1, Special Issue, English edition (2016): 245–54,
- Talbi, Mohamed. *L'Émirat Aghlabide, 184–296, 800–909, Histoire Politique*. Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1966.
- Talbi, Mohamed. "Theological Polemics at Qayrawān during the 3rd/9th Century." *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* T. XLIII (1984): 151–60.
- Talbi, Mohamed. *al-Şirā' al-lāhūtī bi'l-Qayrawān ayām Aghālība (184–296/800–909): taḥqīq thalātha makḥṭūṭāt min maktabaṭ al-Qayrawān al-athariyya*. Tunis: Sotumedias, 2017.
- Talbi, Mohamed. "Kairawān." *EI*2.
- Talbi, Mohamed. "Saḥnūn." *EI*2.
- Talbi, Mohamed. "Şabra or al-Manşūriyya." *EI*2
- Talmon-Heller, Daniella. *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques, Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyūbids (1146–1260)*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Tibawi, Abdul Latif. "Origin and Character of 'Al-Madrasah'." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25/1 (1962): 225–38.
- Tibawi, Abdul Latif. *Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems*. London: Luzac, 1972.

- Tibi, Amin. "Umar b. Ḥafṣūn." *EI2*.
- Toorawa, Shawkat. "Travel in the Medieval Islamic World: The Importance of Patronage as Illustrated By 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (and Other Littérateurs)." In Rosamund Allen (ed.), *Eastward Bound: Medieval Travel and Travellers 1050–1500*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012.
- le Tourneau, Roger. "North Africa to the Sixteenth Century." In P. M Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Islam*, v. II. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, 214–15.
- Treiger, Alexander. "Origins of Kalām," in S. Schmidtke, *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ch. 2. Published online, 2014; doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199696703.013.001.
- Turner, John P. *Inquisition in Early Islam: The Competition for Political and Religious Authority in the Abbasid Empire*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013.
- Vajda, Georges. *Les Certificats De Lecture Et De Transmission Dans Les Manuscrits Arabes De La Bibliothèque Nationale De Paris*. Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1956.
- Vajda, Georges. "The Oral Transmission of Knowledge in Traditional Islam." In *Education and Learning in the Early Islamic World*, ed. C. Gilliot. Surrey: Ashgate Variorum, 2012, 163–71.
- Valérian, Dominique (ed.). *Islamisation et arabisation de l'Occident musulman médiéval (vii-xiie siècle)*. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2011. [Online] (Accessed 1 September 2019). Available at <https://books.openedition.org/psorbonne/2498>
- Van Ess, Josef. *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991-1997. English translation by John O'Kane and Gwendolin Goldbloom, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2017.
- Van Ess, Josef. "Tolerance and Pluralism in Islam," *Kleine Schriften by Josef van Ess*. edited by Hinrich Biesterfeldt, vol. 1. Leiden: Brill, 2018, 472-99.
- Van Ess, Josef. "Ibādī Identity and Imperial Politics in Early Islam," *Kleine Schriften by Josef van Ess*, ed. by Hinrich Biesterfeldt, vol. 1. Leiden: Brill, 2018, 2056-70.
- Velji, Jamel A. *An Apocalyptic History of the Early Fatimid Empire*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.
- Vikør, Knut S. "Zawāla." *EI2*.
- Wagner, Ewald. "Munāẓara." *EI2*.

- Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 2 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- Widigdo, Mohammad S. A. "Aristotelian Dialectic, Medieval *Jadal*, and Medieval Scholastic Disputation." *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 35, no. 4 (October 2018): 1–24.
- Walker, Paul E. "To What Degree Was Classical Ismaili Esotericism Based on Reason as Opposed to Authority?" In *Esoterisme Shi'ite, ses racines et ses prolongements*, ed. by Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali et al. Turnhout: Brepols, 2016.
- Walker, Paul E. "Fatimid Institutions of Learning." *Journal of American Research Center in Egypt* 34 (1997): 179–200.
- Walker, Paul E. *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2002.
- Walker, Paul E. *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Ḥākim*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1999.
- Walker, Paul E. "Introduction" to al-Maqrīzī's *Itti'āz al-ḥunafā'*, ed. by Ayman Fu'ad Sayyid, vol. 1. Amman, 2010, 5–16.
- Walker, Paul E. "Libraries, Book Collection and the Production of Texts by the Fatimids," *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 4, 1–2 (2016): 7–21.
- Walker, Paul E. "Ismaili Polemics Against Opponents in the Early Fatimid Period." In *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread*, edited by Orkhan Mir-Kasimov. London: I.B. Tauris, 2020, 27–50.
- Walker, Paul E. and Bruce D. Craig (eds.) *Ismaili and Fatimid Studies in Honor of Paul E. Walker*. Chicago, 2010.
- al-Wanīsī, Belqasem. *Juhūd 'ulamā' al-Mālikiyya fī nashr al-madhhab al-Ash'arī bi-Tūnis*. Tunis: Sadim, 2016.
- Wansbrough, John. "On Recomposing the Islamic History of North Africa: A Review Article." *JRAS* 2 (1969): 161–70.
- Wasserstein, David J. "A Jonah Theme in the Biography of Ibn Tūmart." In Josef W. Meri and Farhad Daftary (eds.), *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003, 232–49.
- Wenger, Etienne. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Yalaoui, Mohamed. (Muḥammad al-Ya'lāwī). *al-Adab bi Ifrīqiya fī al-'ahd al-Fāṭimī*, (296–365)=*La littérature en Ifriqiya sous les Fatimides* (296—365/909—976). Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1976.

- Yalaoui, Mohamed. *Un poète chi'ite d'Occident au IV^e/X^e siècle, Ibn Hâni al-Andalusî*. Tunis: Publications de l'Université de Tunis, 1976.
- Yaldiz, Yunus. "The Afterlife in Mind: Piety and Renunciatory Practice in the 2nd/8th- and early 3rd/9th-Century Books of Renunciation (*Kutub al-Zuhd*).” PhD Thesis, Utrecht University, 2016.
- Yarbrough, Luke. *The Sword of Ambition: Bureaucratic Rivalry in Medieval Egypt*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016.
- Yarbrough, Luke. "The Madrasa and the Non-Muslims of Thirteenth-Century Egypt: A Reassessment.” In Elisheva Baumgarten, Ruth Mazo Karras, and Katelyn Mesler (eds.), *Entangled Histories: Knowledge, Authority, and Jewish Culture in the Thirteenth Century*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, 93-112.
- Young, Walter E. *The Dialectical Forge: Juridical Disputation and the Evolution of Islamic Law*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017.
- Zaghrūt, Fathī. *al-‘Alāqāt bayn al-Umawīyyīn wa’l-Fāṭimīyyīn fī’l-Andalus wa’l-shimāl al-Ifriqī 300-350h*. Cairo: Dār al-Tawāzī‘ wa’l-Nashr al-Islāmiyya, 2006.
- al-Zaidan, Abdullah Ali. "The People of Qayrawan: The Demographic and Social Composition of the Population of a Maghribi City during the First 250 Years of Its Existence, on the Basis of Medieval Arabic Chronicles and Inscriptions.” PhD Thesis, University of Leeds, 1978.

Online Resources and Software

Al-Maktabat al-Shamela: <http://www.shamela.ws/>

Elkirtasse: <http://elkirtasse.sourceforge.net/>

IslamiCity. Hijri-Gregorian Converter: <https://www.islamicity.org/hijri-gregorian-converter/>

Open Islamicate Text Initiative (Open ITI) by M. Romanov and M. Seydi:

<https://zenodo.org/record/3082464#.Xe-oDJP7SRv>

Prosopografía de los ulemas de al-Andalus (PUA) by María Luisa Ávila et al. Available at

<https://www.eea.csic.es/pua/index.php>

Network Analysis software: ORA-Lite for academic use by CASOS

<http://www.casos.cs.cmu.edu/projects/ora/software.php>