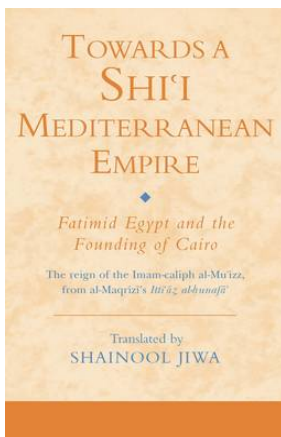




The Institute of Ismaili Studies



**Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire-Fatimid Egypt
and the Founding of Cairo
The reign of the Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz**

Annotated translation of al-Maqrizi's *Itti'az al-hunafa' bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa'* (Lessons for the Seekers of Truth in the History of Fatimid Imams and Caliphs)

Translated with an Introduction by Shainool Jiwa

A Reading Guide prepared by Bashir Ladha for the Department of Community Relations, 2011.

This English translation of a rare work by a fifteenth century Mamluk scholar Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi documents the founding of Egypt and provides one of the most comprehensive accounts of al-Mu'izz's reign. Imam-caliph al-Mu'izz founded the city of Cairo and transformed the Fatimid state to an impressive Mediterranean Empire. This translation is the only complete history of the Fatimids written by a medieval Sunni historian. Al-Maqrizi demonstrates a critical discernment regarding the value and limitations of his sources that is unusual amongst Muslim historians of the time. This makes a notable contribution to one of the most fascinating periods in Islamic history.



Figure 1: Al-Azhar Park, Cairo, Egypt © Archnet

Guiding questions

1. How did the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Muizz li Din Allah transform the Fatimid state from a North African dynasty to a vibrant Mediterranean Empire?
2. In what ways did al-Muizz's policies foster rapprochement with the Shia and the Sunnis in the region as well as with the neighbouring Mediterranean Empires?
3. This work has been composed by Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi, an erudite Sunni scholar. As such, it provides the most comprehensive account of the establishment of the Fatimids in Egypt. How does it contribute to our understanding of notions of religious pluralism as they were understood and practiced in the medieval Muslim world?
4. Mawlana Hazar Imam has often referenced facets of the Fatimid period of our history, noting that they provide precursors of attitudes which are pertinent for the 21st Century. Among these are notions of inclusive governance, the role of intellect, the promotion of knowledge and the cordiality of relations between the different tariqahs in Islam and the People of the Book, those with a scripture, such as, the Jews and

Christians. How does this work enable us to get a firsthand insight of how these notions were negotiated by Imam-caliph al-Muizz upon the establishment of Fatimid rule in Egypt?

5. What is the role and purpose of history in shaping and preserving our collective memory as well as in guiding our future?

Introduction

On 25th March 2005 Mawlana Hazar Imam inaugurated the 30- hectare (74 acres) Al-Azhar Park in Cairo, Egypt. Reflecting on the "journey" taken to create this monumental park, he said:

"... [I]t has been a long and interesting journey of discovery that has brought us to this evening. Many more projects continue and there are, no doubt, many surprises to come and many lessons to be learned. I look forward to that because this process has been particularly satisfying for me from a very personal perspective.

In our excavations and our historical investigations, I constantly have been reminded of my ancestors, the Fatimids, and the pluralistic history and intellectual profile of this city and this country to which they contributed so profoundly.



I am very humbled by the opportunity to return to Cairo, founded over a thousand years ago by the Fatimid Caliph Al-Muizz, to build on that history.”

The creation of the Al-Azhar Park, the excavation and extensive restoration of the adjoining 12th century Ayyubid (Muslim dynasty that ruled in Egypt from 1169–1250 and was succeeded by the Mamluks) wall and other projects attached to the Park and the old city of Cairo, is a poignant reminder of a glorious period of Ismaili history and the critical lessons it can teach us as we negotiate our identity and values in the contemporary world; particularly those of pluralism and intellectual quest. In this sense, the current work is an important contribution both for an understanding of the period as well as to serve as a pathway that can contribute to our understanding of the historical backdrop that has informed our contemporary contexts.

This Reading Guide is an introduction to the English translation by Dr Shainool Jiwa of a section of a rare work entitled *Itti'az al-hunafa' bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa'* (Lessons for the Seekers of Truth in the History of Fatimid Imams and Caliphs) by the 15th-century Sunni Mamluk scholar Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi (d. 1449). The translated section of the *Itti'az* refers to the reign of the Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (953 – 975) who succeeded his father al-Mansur bi'llah (946-953) in 953 at the age of 21. It was Imam al-Mu'izz himself who meticulously planned the city's layout, the foundations of which were laid by his trusted commander Jawhar al-Siqilli (d. 922).

The English translation of *Itti'az* is preceded by a comprehensive introduction which sets the scene to the translation and gives significant insights to both the establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate and the reign of Imam al-Mu'izz including the foundation of Cairo as well as a detailed account of the Qaramita, a splinter group in the Ismaili Da'wa, who had joined forces

with the Abbasids to oppose the Fatimids. The introduction also provides detailed annotations which form a useful background to this work. The translation is based on a manuscript of volume one found in Istanbul which was edited by Jamal al-Din Shayyal in 1967. The section appears on pages 93-235 of Shayyal's 1967 edition.

Al Maqrizi and his *Itti'az al-hunafa' bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa'*

The *Itti'az* is one of the most comprehensive works which al-Maqrizi wrote on the Fatimids. His other works also contain important references to the Fatimids but the *Itti'az* is dedicated solely to the Fatimids and is therefore al-Maqrizi's most comprehensive rendition on them. This is a carefully compiled narrative from many sources that are no longer extant and includes official documents, letters and sermons preserved in their entirety thereby making it one of the most valuable sources of Fatimid History.

The word *hunafa'* in the title of this work is understood to refer to someone who is a "a believer in the original and true religion" (p. 38) and who steers clear from parochial and sectarian views in order to understand and judge the merit of the subject he is addressing. This illustrates the integrity with which al-Maqrizi addresses the subject. For instance, in all his major works he re-affirms the descent of the Fatimids from the first Shii Imam 'Ali, at times quoting in his support Ibn Khaldun (d.1406) (Born in Tunis, he is a historian and sociologist and is regarded as one of the most influential social historians of the medieval period. His most famous work is the *Muqaddiam* and he has been called by some scholars the 'Father of Sociology'). Al-Maqrizi's own views on writing history were clearly influenced by Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history. In describing his work, al-Maqrizi emphasises that he is driven by the "essence of knowledge and science" and that "it reveals the truth of things, events and news..." (p.44; fn. 126).



Figure 2: Al-Azhar Mosque, Cairo, Egypt

Several reasons can be attributed to al-Maqrizi's interest in writing about the Fatimids so profusely. The arrival of the Fatimids in Egypt and their building of Cairo brought both economic prosperity and political stability to the populace which had been preceded by turbulent events during the rule of Kafur al-Labi (905-968). As a patriotic Egyptian, al-Maqrizi, who was born in Cairo and lived his entire life in the city, must have felt a great sense of pride in Fatimid achievements in his homeland.

A second reason relates to his recognition and acknowledgement of the 'Alid genealogy of the Fatimids and therefore considering them as legitimate descendants of the Prophet. His affection for the *Ahl al Bayt* is evident in several of his other writings including a biography of the Prophet where he discusses the issue of succession to the Prophet and the rights of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. He suggests a very broad definition of the *Ahl al-Bayt* in one of his works to include the Banu Hashim and Banu Muttalib and not limiting it to the family of 'Ali and Fatima, while in another work he "aligns himself closely to the Shi'i

position regarding the favoured status of the progeny of 'Ali and Fatima as descendants of the Prophet (*dhurriyat* [successors]) and the guarantee of paradise assured by their blessed lineage." (p.34, fn. 89).

Another noteworthy reason attributed to al-Maqrizi's interest in the Fatimids is his supposed descent from the Fatimids. Many of his contemporaries refer to this when writing about him. His opponents mention him by derogatory epithets such as 'Ubaydi, a reference to the Fatimids by authors who deny the Alid descent of the Fatimids. While on the other hand, his sympathisers call him al-Tamimi a reference to his possible descent from the Fatimid prince whose identity was left undefined by the author himself. Describing his own genealogy, he almost always stops at his ancestor Tamim, who some historians have identified as Prince Tamim, the eldest son of Imam al-Mu'izz. Once at the mosque of al-Hakim, built by the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah who reigned from 996 to 1021, his father told him that the mosque belonged to his ancestors, perhaps referring to the eldest son of Imam-Caliph al-Mustansir bi'llah (1036-1094) also named Tamim. Al-Maqrizi does not appear to have publicised his Fatimid lineage for good reason. He would have been mindful to maintain his credentials as a veteran Sunni Shafi'i scholar in the Mamluk administration. (see pp. 41-44)

The Fatimids (909-1171)

The rise of the Fatimids in 296/909 was part of wave of the rise of several Shi'i dynasties across the Muslim world at that time, among which were the Buyids (860-1062) who originated from the Caspian region and who established themselves in Baghdad as *amirs* of the Sunni Abbasids.

The Fatimids claimed their legitimacy to both spiritual and temporal authority through their lineage and status as



descendants of Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the paternal cousin of the Prophet who is accepted by all the Shi'as as their first Imam. The Fatimids expressed their status as legitimate rulers by taking the designation of *Amir al-mu'minin wa Imam al-muslimin* (Commander of the Faithful and Imam of the Muslims).

By asserting their credentials as rightful successors to the Prophet, the Fatimids posed a direct challenge to the Abbasid Caliphs, who had established their rule in 132/750 with Baghdad as their capital. At the time of the ascendance of Fatimid power in Ifriqiya (the medieval term for Tunisia and parts of eastern Algeria), Abbasid power, particularly in distant territories such as Ifriqiya, was in decline. This was related to the weakening of their authority in Iraq itself. This helped the consolidation of the Ismaili *da'wa* that had begun during the *dawr al-satr* (period of concealment) which commenced after the death of the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq in 765.

The proclamation as the first Fatimid Imam-Caliph of Imam 'Abd Allah who took the regal title of *al-Mahdi bi'llah* – 'the one rightly guided by God' – in the former Aghlabid capital of Raqqada (near Qayrawan in present day Tunisia) marks the beginning of Fatimid rule. He established his authority in the region which continued with the next two Imams – al-Qa'im bi-Amr Allah (934-946) and al-Mansur bi'llah (1036-1094).

As a minority Shi'i ruling dynasty in a majority Sunni and Khariji (an early Muslim community, meaning 'seceders', who withdrew their allegiance from 'Ali b. Abi Talib) region, who were resentful of their authority and introduction of Shi'i law and rituals, the Fatimid Imams had to deal with care and caution. A particular threat to the Fatimids in their North African phase was the revolt of the Khariji Abu Yazid al-Nukkar which began in 943 and ended with his defeat in

947. Over the course of time, the Fatimids developed an inclusive and tolerant policy which allowed other interpretations of Islam to be practiced alongside the official Shi'i Ismaili interpretation. This became a hallmark of Fatimid policy which is evident during the time of Imam al-Mu'izz.

During their sixty years of rule in Ifriqiya, the Fatimids founded a strong base that ensured effective control of the regions between Morocco and the western borders of Egypt. During the reign of al-Mahdi, they established a strong naval fleet that challenged the two other regional powers: the Umayyads of Spain and the Byzantines (the late medieval Roman Empire which ruled large

Textbox 1:

Dawr al-satr—Literally 'period of concealment'. Qadi Nu'man (d. 974) uses the term *dawr al-satr* to refer to the period of around 150 years in which the Isma'ili imams were hidden from public knowledge, and which ended with the appearance of 'Abdallah (or 'Ubaydallah) 'al-Mahdi', who in Nu'man's terminology started the period of disclosure (*dawr al-kashf*). According to Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani (d. after 971), *dawr al-satr* refers to the period when truth is concealed from the senses, that is, the period that started with Adam and which he expected to end upon the return of Muhammad b. Ismail as the Mahdi. Later, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274) speaks of periods of concealment that can take place when the imam's true spiritual reality is not manifested, even if he is physically available.

parts of Southern Europe and the Middle East from its capital Constantinople (present-day Istanbul, conquered by the Turks in 1453) who had political, military and economic interests in the region. However, from the beginning, the Fatimids had the conquest of Egypt as their primary political goal for which two previous attempts had been made in the years 913-915 and 919-921. This was finally accomplished during the reign of Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz.

Imam Abu Tamim Ma'add al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah

Imam Abu Tamim Ma'add was born in the



year 931 in al-Mahdiyya. He was around one year old when he was summoned by his great grandfather Imam al-Mahd to a *majlis* (gathering) where Imams al-Qa'im and al-Mansur were already present. Al Maqrizi narrates this as follows (pp.104-105):

"Ahmad b. Ja'far related to me that one day al-Qa'im bi-Amr Allah, upon him be peace, was in his father al-Mahdi's *majlis* (gathering), seated in front of him. His son, al-Mansur, was standing in front of his grandfather, when al-Mahdi said to him, 'Bring me your son', that is, al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah. So his nursemaid brought him. He was one year old or a little older. Al-Mahdi took him on his lap and kissed him. Then he said to his son al-Qa'im bi-Amr Allah, 'O Abu'l-Qasim, there is not a gathering more illustrious on earth than this one, as four imams are gathered here', that is, al-Mahdi himself, his son al-Qa'im, his grandson al-Mansur, and his great-grandson al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah.

Additionally, the parasol bearer (*sahib al-mizalla*), Abu'l-Fadl Raydan, told me that al-Mahdi gathered them in a cloak and said, 'The Prophet of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, gathered in his garment three imams, in addition to himself, but in this cloak there are four imams.'

Abu Tamim Ma'add became Imam in the year 953 at the age of twenty-one and adopted the regal title of *al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah* ('the one who strengthens the religion of God'). His first task was to subjugate the rebellious tribes and in the following two years at the hands of his trusted general Jawhar al-Siqilli (d. 922), he brought all the lands between the Atlantic and the western borders of Egypt under Fatimid rule (pp. 54-56).

The Fatimids were also contested by the Umayyads of Spain and the Byzantines. However, after challenging both these powers at sea, the Umayyads and the

Byzantines were compelled to sign treaties with the Fatimids. Imam al-Mu'izz continued to strengthen the Fatimid navy by creating a formidable fleet. In diplomacy, the Fatimids secured success through winning over the leaders of the religiously prestigious cities of Mecca and Medina to recognise Fatimid authority by proclaiming Imam al-Mu'izz's name as their rightful caliph in their Friday *khutba* (sermon).

Textbox 2:

Dynasties

Umayyads-The Umayyads, famous as 'the first dynasty', ruled in Damascus from 661 to 750, deriving their names from the Quraysh clan of Banu Umayya. The dynasty came to power when Mu'awiyya (d. 680), governor of Syria and nephew of Uthman Ibn Affan, challenged 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib's claim to the Caliphate. It was during the Umayyad period that Islam expanded west into Europe and east towards India. The dynasty ruled through fourteen caliphs until it was overthrown by the Abbasids, who moved the capital of the Caliphate to Baghdad.

Abbasids-Muslim dynasty whose period of rule, in varying degrees of dominance, lasted from 750 to 1258. They came to power claiming descent through an uncle of Prophet Muhammad, al-'Abbas. After claiming that the then ruling dynasty, the Umayyads, had become unjust and decadent, the leaders of the movement seized power through a series of battles in Persia and Syria, promising a return to justice and legitimate rule. One of the Abbasid caliphs, al-Mansur (754-775), built the city of Baghdad, which became the capital of the dynasty.

Buyids- Muslim dynasty that ruled in Baghdad (945-1062), and was succeeded by the Saljuqs. They controlled lands still nominally under Abbasid sovereignty. However, while recognising the Abbasid caliphs, they styled themselves sultans, taking on extravagant titles to indicate their power. Generally regarded as Shia in orientation, the Buyids created a major alternative sphere of political and intellectual influence.

Egypt - its conquest and the proclamation of *Aman* (Peace Document)

Egypt's strategic location and its



geocentric position contributed to Fatimid interest in the region. Ruling Egypt enabled the Fatimids to secure control of trade routes through Egypt, Spain, North Africa, parts of Europe and India. For the Umayyads and their successors the Abbasids, Egypt had been one of the regions of their empire. Under the Fatimids, Egypt became the centre of the Fatimid Empire. Fatimid Egypt was made up of a multi-ethnic and a multi-religious populace. This included Arabs, Turks, Greeks, Berbers, Armenians and Sudanese and an array of religious persuasions including Sunni Muslims, Twelver Shi'i, Ismaili Shi'i and also Christian denominations such as the Copts, Melkites and Nestorians as well as a substantial Jewish presence.

Imam al-Mu'izz had made elaborate preparations for the conquest of Egypt. He had wells dug and citadels built on the way to Egypt. He spent a large amount of money, some 24 million dinars, on a campaign which was then entrusted to his commander Jawhar al-Siqilli. The Fatimid *da'wa* was instrumental in ensuring that the Egyptian notables and populace were aligned to Fatimid rule in Egypt. Fatimid coins, which had 'Ali and Fatima inscribed on them, were already in circulation two decades before their actual occupation, demonstrating their influence prior to their arrival in Egypt. The occupation of Egypt was achieved peacefully through a combination of strategic planning and diplomacy.

Such elaborate preparations made Jawhar's entry in the Nile Delta in 969 relatively easy. The local notables and leadership with the senior Fatimid-Ismaili *da'i*, Abu Ja'far Ahmad b. Nasr, set out to meet Jawhar and negotiate a peace treaty. Jawhar readily agreed to this and subsequently issued the *aman* (guarantee of security or peace proclamation) on behalf of Imam al-Mu'izz. This document is preserved in its entirety in the *Itti'az* (pp. 67-73). On behalf of the Imam, the Document

guaranteed the following:

"I guarantee you God's complete and universal safety, eternal and continuous, inclusive and perfect, renewed and confirmed through the days and recurring through the years, for your lives, your property, your families, your livestock, your estates and your quarters, and whatever you possess, be it modest or significant." (p. 17 of the introduction and p. 71 of the translation)

The Document also provided freedom of worship to Egypt's religiously and ethnically diverse populace according to their individual *madhhab* (Arabic word with a range of meanings including 'doctrine', 'movement' and 'creed'; a system or school of religious law in Islam):

"You shall continue in your *madhhab*. You shall be permitted to perform your obligations according to religious scholarship, and to gather for it in your congregational and other mosques, and to remain steadfast in the beliefs of the worthy ancestors from the Companions of the Prophet, may God be pleased with them, and those who succeeded them, the jurists of the cities who have pronounced judgements according to their *madhhab* and *fatwas* (formal legal opinions).' The call to prayer and its performance, the fasting in the month of Ramadan, the breaking of the fast and the celebration of its nights, the [payment of] the alms tax, [the performance of the] pilgrimage and undertaking of *jihad* will be maintained according to the command of God and His

Textbox 3:

Jawhar al-Siqilli (d. 922)-Abu'l-Husayn Jawhar al-Siqilli, originally from Sicily, was a military general and administrator who played a major role in extending Fatimid rule to Egypt. He began his service in 950 as *katib* (secretary) to the Caliph al-Mansur. He was selected by al-Mu'izz to head his campaigns in North Africa and later, having proven his talents in battle, was appointed commander of the Fatimid expedition to Egypt.



Book and in accordance with the instructions of His Prophet, may God bless him and grant him salvation, in his *sunna* and the *dhimmis* (non-Muslims) will be treated according to previous custom.” (p. 18 of the introduction and p. 71 of the translation)

The Document became the basis of inclusion and just governance reflecting the principles of the Constitution of Medina drawn by the Prophet when he entered Medina in 622. Like the Prophet's venture in Medina, Fatimid rule in Egypt was a minority project. The *aman* document became the basis of Fatimid policies for their subsequent two-century rule in Egypt.

The Founding of Cairo and the Arrival of Imam al-Mu'izz

Jawhar reached Fustat on the 17 Sha'ban, 6th July 969. The Abbasid Caliph's name was replaced with that of the Fatimid Imam-caliph in the *khutba* which now included an invocation of benediction upon the Fatimids and their *Ahl al-Bayt*:

“O God, shower Your blessings on Muhammad, the chosen one, on 'Ali the approved one, on Fatima, the pure, and on al-Hasan and al-Husayn, the two grandsons of the Prophet, from whom You have removed all impurity and have sanctified. O God, bless the rightly-guided imams, the ancestors of the Commander of the Faithful, those who guide and are rightly guided.” (p. 84)

Genealogical tables and lists

The Fātimid Ismā'īlī caliph-imams

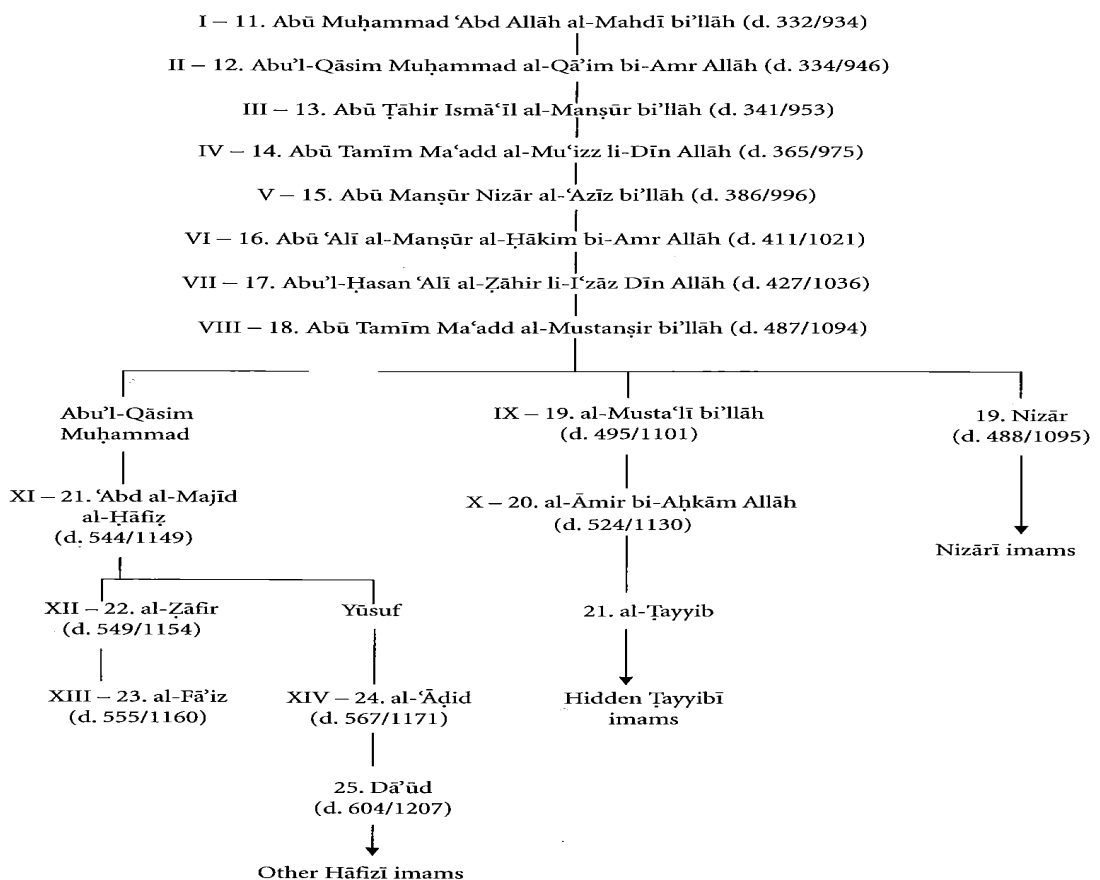


Figure 3: Genealogical Table of Fatimid Imams



Such invocations, while being primarily an expression of religious piety, were also politically significant for they were a “powerful congregational medium for the assertion of Fatimid authority, as it drew upon the collective memory of the believers concerning the lofty status of the Prophet and his family...” (p.20).

As soon as the initial formalities of establishing Fatimid authority and rule were in place, Jawhar laid the foundation of the new city and capital of the Fatimid Empire. Al-Maqrizi recalls the story attached to the foundation laying (p.78) and notes that initially the city was called al-Mansuriyya but when Imam al-Mu'izz approached the city, Jawhar renamed it al-Qahira al-Mu'izziyya (the Victorious city of al-Mu'izz). The city was meticulously planned by Imam al-Mu'izz himself. The city housed the royal palace, the mosque of al-Azhar, which became a centre of learning under Imam-caliph al-'Aziz bi'llah. and designated open grounds (*musalla*) for recitation of 'id prayers. Imam al-Mu'izz arrived in Cairo on 7 Ramadan, 10th June 973 along with his family and his state dignitaries.

The Qaramita were among the serious contenders of power to the Fatimid presence in Egypt. Al-Maqrizi devotes a number of pages (pp.122-195) to the origin and exploits of the Qaramita in the region. He also provides a detailed account of the grave challenges they posed to the Fatimids, including their besieging of Cairo a number of times. He also reproduces, in full, the letter of Imam al-Mu'izz (pp.168-180) to the Qarmati leader, al-Hasan b. Ahmad. The letter contains a number of allusions to the Qur'an which appeal to religious sentiments in order to dissuade the Qarmatis from plundering their regime. However, the letter achieved limited success. The Qarmatis were eventually defeated, first in Egypt then in Syria and finally in Iraq.

Achievements and the Death of Imam al-Mu'izz li Din Allah

Imam al-Mu'izz reigned from 953 to 975 of which only the last two years were spent in Egypt. The economic reforms which he initiated in Egypt became instrumental in changing the declining economic and political fortunes of Egypt. He made Egypt

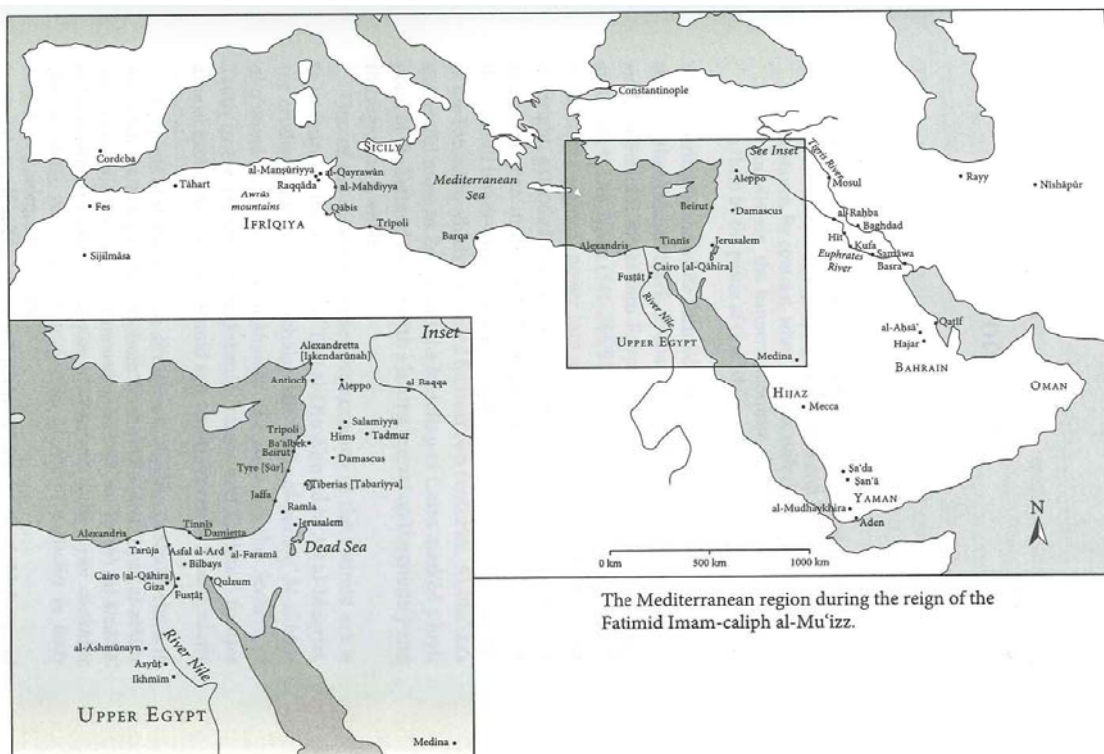


Figure 4: Map of the region during the reign of the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mu'izz.



the centre of his Mediterranean empire bringing to it political stability as well as social and economic prosperity. Pivotal to this strategy was the founding of Cairo as a vibrant city, a thriving inland port and an intellectual and cultural centre that was unrivalled in the Mediterranean. He was also an accomplished intellectual as is evident from the anecdotes that abound in his biographies. He is noted to have contributed to the invention of the fountain pen and is also known to have spent long periods of time in the palace library, which was regarded to be among the best stocked repositories of its kind in that age. He also commissioned the creation of a map of the known world, which came to be considered a landmark in the art of mapping at the time.

The transition of Ismailis from a religio-political movement during the *dawr al-satr* to an empire necessitated the Fatimids to restate their legal and doctrinal corpus. This was to a great extent achieved under the direct guidance and supervision of the Imam by the illustrious *da'i* and jurist al-Qadi al-Nu'man (d.363/974). Al-Nu'man entered the service of the Fatimids during the time of Imam Mahdi but it was under the patronage of Imam al-Mu'izz that he accomplished his seminal work on Shi'i Ismaili jurisprudence, the *Da'a'im al-Islam*.

The Ismaili *da'wa* also flourished in many parts of the world at this time, including Yemen, Central Asia and Sind where Ismaili rule was established for half a century enabling the roots for future *da'wa* work to be continued.

Al-Maqrizi provides a profile of Imam al-Mu'izz based on the testimony of a variety of scholars. He lists the achievements of the Imam and concludes that Imam al-Mu'izz's reign was the most noteworthy of the three Fatimid rulers who preceded him. He quotes the historians Ibn al-Athir (d.630/1233) and Ibn Zulaq (d.386/996) in his tribute to this pioneering Fatimid Imam. Imam al-Mu'izz passed away in 365/975

after a short illness. His Imamate lasted for twenty-two years.

Conclusion

Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire provides readers, who are interested in Ismaili history as well as in medieval Islamic history more broadly, an insight into a momentous time in the Fatimid era. Reading through the Introduction and translation one learns about the Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz whose vision and leadership shaped the making of the Fatimid Empire. He transformed the regional Fatimid state into an influential and impressive Mediterranean empire extending from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. The Fatimids provide the first sustained experience of a Shi'i empire whose doctrinal foundations drew upon the Shi'i interpretation of Islam.

Passages of Interest

Theme: Diversity and Tolerance

"You shall continue in your *madhhab*. You shall be permitted to perform your obligations according to religious scholarship, and to gather for it in your congregational and other mosques, and to remain steadfast in the beliefs of the worthy ancestors from the Companions of the Prophet, may God be pleased with them, and those who succeeded them, the jurists of the cities who have pronounced judgements according to their *madhhabs* and *fatwas* (formal legal opinions)." (p. 71)

"Thus, he among you who neglects or forgets or goes astray or transgresses, let him reflect upon the first scriptures and the revealed scrolls, contemplate the verses of the Qur'an and the explanation contained in it, and ask the people of remembrance if they do not know." (p.170)

Questions

1. Considering the nature of the populace



- of Cairo at the time, why was the recognition of the diverse nature of society important for stability and progress? How did the Fatimids respond to any challenges which may have arisen?
2. In his acceptance remarks at the University of Evora Honorary Doctorate in February 2006, Mawlana Hazar Imam said "Lest it be forgotten, the society of their times was richly pluralistic when the Quranic notion of the Ahl al-Kitab – the People of the Book – and of one humanity were the driving force for tolerance and respect for difference". How did this flourish during the time of Imam al-Muizz?
 3. Many countries today are made up of multi-religious and multi-cultural population. How have global leaders embraced this and what policies and structures have been put in place to build on this diversity? How has the work of the AKDN and the Global Centre for Pluralism contributed to this ethic of pluralism?

Discussion

Fatimid Cairo was a cosmopolitan city consisting of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious population. In their governance of Cairo, of Egypt and of their empire, the Fatimids sought their inspiration from the paradigm of an inclusive society founded by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. The nascent Muslim community in Medina were a minority just as the Ismailis in Cairo. Similar to the Constitution of Medina that was written during the time of the Prophet, the *Aman* document became critical in providing stability and progress by both acknowledging diversity and building on it. In the current context, these features are at times lacking in some Muslim societies as well as among the migrant settlers in the West. Lessons learnt from both the Prophetic and Fatimid models can be used as a platform for addressing some of the challenges that we face today.

Theme: Leadership and Governance

"...Even if you neglect all the counsel I have given you, do not neglect three things: beware of alleviating the Bedouins of taxes; do not lift your sword off the Berbers; and do not appoint as governors any of your brothers or cousins, for they will consider themselves more worthy of governing than you. Be good to the townsfolk" (p.65)

"My concern with the pleasures of the world lies solely in what protects your lives, makes your lands prosper, vanquishes your enemies and subdues your opponents." (p.58)

"No one has been able to come to their rescue except for him who has been sickened by their suffering and has suffered from their affliction. His eyes have wept for what has affected them and he has been kept awake because of what has befallen them." (p.69)

"He has hoped, by the grace and benevolence that God has always bestowed upon him, to rescue those who have been constantly living in humiliation and in painful torture, and to make those who have been overwhelmed by terror feel safe, and to dispel the fear of those who have continually lived in dread." (p.69)

Questions

1. Imam al-Mu'izz's reign was guided by the values of good governance, sound leadership, honesty and justice. How are these values reflected in the work of the Imam today? The AKDN mandate states "The central emphasis of Islam's ethical ideal is enablement of each person to live up to his exalted status as vicegerent of God on earth, in whom God has breathed His own spirit and to whom He has made whatever is in the heavens and the earth, an object of trust and quest." How do these principles informed by and resonate with the model of governance that



- existed during the time of Imam al-Mu'izz?
2. How is the role of a religious leader different from the role of a secular leader? How has Mawlana Hazar Imam, as a modern day Muslim leader, fulfilled this role in light of his words to the Tutzing Evangelical Academy upon receiving the *Tolerance Award* in May 2006, "...they often describe it either as philanthropy or entrepreneurship. What is not understood is that this work is for us a part of our institutional responsibility -- it flows from the mandate of the office of Imam to improve the quality of worldly life for the concerned communities." How does Mawlana Hazar Imam view and undertake his role as a Muslim leader?

Discussion

Imam al-Mu'izz's reign as the Imam-Caliph is considered by various authors, including al-Maqrizi, as the most noteworthy of the three Fatimid rulers before him. The military expansion, economic prosperity and policies for an inclusive society which respected and acknowledged various interpretations of Islam and presence of other faiths were all underpinned by the ethics of care and compassion that the Imam personally showed for the welfare of his subjects (as is evident in his conversation with the Kutama elders – p. 29). In his vision of a just and progressive society, among the most important consideration was the accommodation of the array of religious interpretations that were present in the Empire. This became one of the most critical success factors that ensured stability and good governance. Moreover, the proclamation of the *Aman* document which emphasised "the restoration of security and promotion of justice" (*A Companion to the Muslim World*, p. 163) demonstrated Fatimid commitment to just governance and leadership. Additionally, the *Aman* document was instrumental in the Fatimid claim to legitimate spiritual and temporal authority of the *ahl al-bayt* of 'Ali and Fatima. The inclusive attitude

found in the *Aman* document "formed the bedrock upon which the Fatimids founded their institutional network" (*A Companion to the Muslim World* p. 173) and the basis of their governing principles.

Theme: History and Historical Thinking

"In dealing with the sources on the Fatimids, however, al-Maqrizi's critique of his sources is extremely valuable, for he does not use it as a pretext to circumvent or even marginalise those authors or their writings. Instead, he draws on all the sources mentioned above to present a comprehensive and balanced overview of al-Mu'izz's reign and character. Al-Maqrizi's sagacious approach to these sources bears the hallmarks of a competent historian." (p.46)

"...the inner meaning of history involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events." (p. 44)

"...al-Maqrizi concludes that his is 'unlike any other work, the essence of knowledge and science, and the product of sound intellect and understanding.'" (p.44)

Questions

1. In reading history, why is understanding the context of the author and his time important? How do these inform the way in which we read and interpret history?
2. How is your perception of this work influenced when you learn that al-Maqrizi was a Sunni Mamluk?
3. At the Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony of the Aga Khan Academy, Dhaka May 2008, Mawlana Hazar Imam said "The roots we inherit from our history – linking us to a particular past – are a great source of strength and joy and inspiration." How do you think different understandings of history and



purposes of historical writing enable us to develop a better understanding of our heritage?

Discussion

Writing history is an art that al-Maqrizi considered not just an intellectual or academic pursuit. It was a way and a responsibility to ascertain truth (as is evident in the term *hunafa* employed in the title of this work). He drew his inspiration from his mentor Ibn Khaldun (d.808/1406) who affirmed that “the inner meaning of history involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events. History, therefore, is firmly rooted in philosophy”. Consequently, al-Maqrizi concludes that this is “unlike any other work, the essence of knowledge and science, and the product of sound intellect and understanding” (p. 44). At the core of al-Maqrizi’s exploration of Fatimid history was his determination to know the truth by objectively considering the evidence available to him. He therefore uses both what he calls the ‘eastern’ Syrian and Iraqi sources, which are not always sympathetic to the Fatimids and the ‘western’, North African and Egyptian ones whose proximity to the Fatimid court gave them a clearer perspective of the events of the time. It is vital therefore to remember that history is a set of facts plus the interpretation of the historian. This interpretation is therefore influenced by the context in which the historian is living as the historian is a product of his time. Historical thinking can also shape the way we think today and in the future. Understanding history can tell

us not only about a certain period but also about the writer. History enables us to observe “how men in the past harnessed the resources of their environment, and the energies in their soul in order to master challenges and create civilisations,” and it can help us to “... obtain useful clues in coming to grips with present problems and realising a vision for the future”. (Esmail, Aziz. “Why History” http://www.iis.ac.uk/SiteAssets/pdf/Esmail_why_history.pdf (accessed 3-12-10))

Further Reading List

Daftary, Farhad, ed. *Medieval Ismaili History and Thought*. Cambridge, 1996.

Halm, Heinz. *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning*. London, 1997.

Hamdani, Sumaiya A. *Between Revolution and State: The Path to Fatimid Statehood, Qadi al-Nu'man and the Construction of Fatimid Legitimacy*. London, 2006.

Jiwa, Shainool. ‘Inclusive Governance: A Fatimid Illustration’, in Aryn B. Sajoo, ed., *A Companion to the Muslim World*. London, 2009.

Walker, Paul. *Exploring and Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*. London, 2002.

Jiwa’s annotated translation of al-Maqrizi’s master work focuses on the reign of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mu’izz li-Din Allah, during whose reign Egypt was conquered and the city of Cairo, which became the Fatimid capital, was built. She provides a detailed yet accessible introduction to both the Fatimids, the reign of al-Mu’izz li-Din Allah, and al-Maqrizi, one that is essential to read before tackling her highly readable translation...Her efforts have provided readers interested in medieval Islamic history, particularly those who cannot read the original Arabic text, access to a key source. *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire* would be a useful addition to graduate student and academic reading lists on Middle East history and medieval Islamic civilisations.

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