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“Fatimids”
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FATIMIDS, relations with Persia. A major Isma‘ili Shi‘ite dynasty, the Fatimids founded their own caliphate, in rivalry with the ‘Abbasids, and ruled over different parts of the Islamic world, from North Africa and Sicily to Palestine and Syria. Established in 297/909 in Tunisia, the seat of the Fatimids was later transferred to Egypt in 362/973, and the dynasty was finally overthrown by Salah-al-Din (Saladin) in 567/1171, when the fourteenth and last Fatimid caliph, al-‘Azed (555-67/1160-71), lay dying in Cairo. The Fatimids, who traced their ancestry to the Prophet’s daughter Fatima and her husband ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, the first Shi‘ite imam, were also acknowledged as the rightful imams by different Isma‘ili communities not only within their own dominions, where Isma‘ilism served as the state religion, but also in many other Muslim lands, including Persia and the adjacent regions (see Daftary, 1990, pp. 144-2.73, 615-59; Canard, “Fatimids,” pp. 850-62). The Fatimids had diverse political relations with Persia and the major dynasties ruling there, which provide the focus of the present article.

The installment of the Isma‘ili imam to the Fatimid caliphate represented the crowning success of the early Isma‘ili mission (da‘wa lit. “call”), which had also penetrated different parts of Persia, especially Fars, Kuzestan, the Jebal, and Khorasan, where Isma‘ili *da‘is* or missionaries had been active at least from around 260/873 (see Stern, 1960, pp. 56-90, repr. in idem, 1983, pp. 189-233; Daftary, 1990, pp. 118-23, 607-10). When the central leader of the Isma‘ilis and the future founder of the Fatimid dynasty, ‘Abd-Allah (or ‘Ubayd-Allah) al-Mahdi, openly claimed the imamate of the Isma‘ilis in 286/899, his claim was accepted by many of the Isma‘ilis of the Iranian lands and elsewhere, now designated as Fatimid Isma‘ilis, and refused by others who henceforth became specifically known as the Qarameta or Carmatians (see Madelung, 1959, pp. 34 ff.; Daftary, 1993, pp. 123-39; idem, “Carmatians,” pp. 823 ff.). The Fatimid Isma‘ilis soon succeeded in founding an Isma‘ili government (*dawla*) in North Africa under the leadership of their imam. From early on, the Fatimids actively aspired to extend their political power over the central and eastern Muslim lands (see Canard, 1942-47, pp. 850-62). The desire of the Fatimids to reunite the Muslims under their own Isma‘ili Shi‘ite caliphate provided one of the main guiding principles of the Fatimid state’s foreign policy; it also explains why the Fatimids, unlike the ‘Abbasids, did not discontinue their da‘wa activities after the establishment of their state, while continuing to refer to their missionary activities as *al-da‘wa al-hadia*, or the rightly-guiding mission. It also explains the lasting religio-political conflicts and rivalries between the Fatimids and the ‘Abbasids, the spokesmen of Sunni Islam and their most obvious adversaries. It was under such circumstances that the Fatimid capital served as the central headquarters of an Isma‘ili movement extending from North Africa and Egypt to

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Transoxania and Sind.

Indeed, as a reflection of their religio-political ideals, the Fatimids divided the world into twelve *jaza'er* (singular: *jazira*) for the purposes of their *da'wa* activities; each *jazira* representing a separate and somewhat independent region for the penetration of the Fatimid *da'wa*. Deylam, standing for Persia, represented one of these twelve regions (see Q521 Nu'man, II, p. 74, III, pp. 48-49; Sijistani, p. 172). It is also interesting to note that Ibn Hawqal (p. 310), who traveled through eastern Persia and Transoxania around 358/969 and may have been a crypto-Isma'ili himself, mentions Khorasan as a *jazira* of the Fatimid *da'wa* (*da'wat ahl al-Magreb*), further adding that the Isma'ilis of Baluchistan belonged to that *jazira*. At any rate, the Fatimid *da'is* operated as secret envoys and agents of the Fatimid *da'wa* in Persia and other eastern lands, summoning the Muslims there to the allegiance of the Fatimid caliph-imam (see Stern, 1972, pp. 446 ff., repr. in idem, 1983, 247 ff.; Daftary, 1990, pp. 224 ff.).

The 'Abbasids from early on launched their own religio-political and literary campaigns against the Fatimids, aiming to refute their 'Alid genealogy and discredit their teachings through attributing all sorts of heretical beliefs to them (Daftary, 1994, pp. 22 ff.). Amongst the numerous anti-Isma'ili polemical writings, Ghazali wrote one of the most famous ones known as the *Mostazheri*, named after the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mostazher who had commissioned it. At the same time, the 'Abbasids frustrated the Fatimids' policy of territorial expansion into the eastern Islamic lands beyond Syria. In the pursuit of their anti-Fatimid policies, the 'Abbasids were often effectively, though without collusion, helped by the Syrian military campaigns of the Carmatians (q.v.) of Bahrain against the Fatimids; the Carmatians had their own religio-political quarrels with the Fatimids and the hostilities between them led into open warfare after the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in 358/969. In 360/971, the Carmatians of Bahrain, aided by the Buyids and the Hamdanids, defeated a Fatimid army in Syria and seized Damascus. Soon afterwards, the Carmatians marched temporarily to the vicinity of Cairo itself. But there were no extended and direct military encounters between the Fatimids and the 'Abbasids (or the latter's overlords). By the time of al-Hakim (386-411/996-1021), the sixth Fatimid caliph-imam, the Fatimids had realized the difficulty of conquering the Muslim East; and, in effect, a stalemate had developed between the Fatimids and the Buyids, who were then the real masters of the 'Abbasid dominions in Iraq and Persia and who, although Shi'ites, were hostile towards the Fatimids.

Meanwhile, the Fatimids' Isma'ili *da'wa* had continued to be propagated in Persia and other eastern lands of the 'Abbasid caliphate. The Fatimid *da'is* operating in Persia had begun to be particularly successful from the time of al-Mu'iz (341-65/953-75), the fourth caliph-imam, who conquered Egypt for his dynasty, founded Cairo, and made serious efforts to gain the support of the dissident eastern Carmatians in order to re-establish ideological unity in the Isma'ili community (Daftary, 1990, pp. 176 ff.). In particular, al-Mu'iz succeeded in winning over Abu Ya'qub Sijistani (d. after 361/971), the famous *da'i* of Khorasan, who now endorsed the imamate of the Fatimids and propagated their cause in Khorasan, Sistan, and Makran, where numerous Isma'ilis rallied



to the side of the Fatimid *da'wa*. The Fatimid *da'is* also succeeded around 347/958 in establishing a Fatimid vassal state centered in Multan, in northern India, where the *khutba* was now read in the name of the Fatimid caliphs, instead of their 'Abbasid rivals. This Isma'ili state survived until 396/1005-6 when Sultan Mahmud of Gazna invaded Multan and made its last Isma'ili ruler, Abu'l-Fotuh Dawud b. Nasr, a tributary. In 401/1010-11, Multan was actually annexed to the Ghaznavid dominions, and the Isma'ilis of Multan were massacred (Gardizi, pp. 278-80; Moqaddasi, pp. 481-2, 485; Jorbadaqani, pp. 278-80).

The Fatimid *da'wa* was greatly expanded in Persia and Iraq in the time of al-Hakim, who also concerned himself with the organization of the Fatimid *da'wa* and the training of the *da'is* (Walker, 1993, pp. 161 ff.). A large number of *da'is* were assigned to these eastern territories, where they addressed their message to various social strata in urban and rural areas. Foremost among the Fatimid *da'is* operating in Persia and Iraq during the reign of al-Hakim was Hamid al-Din Kirmani (d. after 411/1020), who for that reason bore the epithet of *hujjat al-'Iraqayn*. An eminent philosopher and perhaps the most learned Isma'ili theologian of the entire Fatimid period, Kirmani maintained close relations with the Fatimid *da'wa* headquarters in Cairo, and was summoned there in the early years of the 5th/11th century to argue against those extremist *dais* who had begun to preach the divinity of al-Hakim, laying the foundations of the Druze religion. The activities of Kirmani and other Fatimid *da'is* soon bore fruit in Persia and Iraq, where the Shi'ites, being pressured by the 'Abbasids who were now acquiring a greater degree of independence from the tutelage of the Shi'ite Buyids, were more readily attracted to Fatimid Isma'ilism. Indeed, a number of local *amirs* in Iraq now acknowledged the suzerainty of the Fatimids. Being alarmed by the success of the Fatimid *da'wa* so close to Baghdad itself, the 'Abbasid caliph al-Qadir (381-422/991-1031) launched his own anti-Fatimid campaign which culminated in 402/1011 in his sponsorship of a manifesto issued in Baghdad refuting the Fatimid ancestry of al-Hakim and his predecessors. Nevertheless, the Fatimid *da'wa* continued unabated in the east, and it is even reported that al-Hakim attempted in 403/1012-13, though without results, to win the allegiance of Sultan Mahmud of Gazna, who had three years earlier massacred the Isma'ilis of Multan (Gardizi, ed. Habibi, p. 181; Jorbadaqani, pp. 369-73, containing the fullest details of this Fatimid embassy sent to Mahmud). Mahmud was clearly more interested in maintaining friendly relations with the Fatimids' enemies, the 'Abbasids, who issued investiture patents and honorific titles to the Ghaznavids. This pro-'Abbasid policy was retained by Mahmud's successors; in 423/1032, Sultan Mas'ud tried and executed Hasanak, a former Ghaznavid vizier, who had earlier accepted a robe of honour from the Fatimid al-Zahir (411-27/1021-36), on charges of being an Isma'ili (Bayhaqi, pp. 71-72, 220-36; Gardizi, ed. Habibi, pp. 196-97; Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 18284). However, by the beginning of the 5th/11th century, most of the Carmatian communities of Persia had either embraced Fatimid Isma'ilism or had distintegrated, while the Carmatians of Bahrain themselves had suffered damaging defeats from the Buyid armies and some local tribal chiefs.

In the long reign of the eighth Fatimid caliph al Mustansir (427-87/1036-94), the



Fatimid state embarked on its rapid decline, while the *da'wa* activities outside the Fatimid dominions reached their peak. Like many other Muslim dynasties, the Fatimids now faced the growing menace of the Saljuq Turks, who were rapidly establishing their own supremacy over Persia and other eastern lands, replacing the Buyids as the real masters of the 'Abbasid caliphate. Soon after Tugril entered Baghdad in 447/1055, he indeed announced his intention of sending an expedition against the Fatimids in Syria and Egypt. However, dissent within the Saljuq camp and the pro-Fatimid activities of Arslan Basasiri in Iraq prevented the founder of the Saljuq sultanate from implementing his campaign against the Fatimids, whose cause now achieved an unprecedented though short-lived success in Iraq. Receiving financial and military assistance from the Fatimids, and benefiting from the success of the Fatimid *da'wa* in Iraq, Basasiri won the support of various local *amirs* and, in 448/1056-57, the *khutba* was read in the name of Mustansir in Mosul, Waset, Kufa, and elsewhere in Iraq. In 450/1058, Basasiri entered Baghdad itself, where the *khutba* was pronounced in the name of the Fatimid al-Mustansir for a whole year; however, the 'Abbasid caliph al-Qa'im was retained in Baghdad to the great disappointment of al-Mustansir, who had expected to receive him in Cairo. Subsequently, Basasiri failed to seize Kuzestan for the Fatimids; and the political success of the Fatimids in Iraq was brought to an end when Basasiri was defeated and killed by the forces of Tugril in Du'1-qa'da 451/December 1059 (see Zahir-al-Din Nishaburi, pp. 19-20; Ravandi, pp. 107-10; Bondari, pp. 12-18; Ibn Tagriberdi, V, pp. 5-12). It has now become evident that the renowned Fatimid *da'i* al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din Shirazi had played a major role in the success of the Basasiri episode in Iraq (see Mu'ayyad, pp. 94-184).

The most prominent *da'i* of al-Mustansir's time, Mu'ayyad was born in Shiraz into a Deylami Isma'ili family; his father Abu 'Imran Musa was himself a prominent *da'i* with some influence in the Buyid circles of Fars. Mu'ayyad succeeded his father as the leader of the *da'wa* in Fars and in 429/1037-38 he entered the service of the Buyid Abu Kalijar Marzban (See 'IMAD-AL-DIN MARZBAN), who ruled over various Buyid territories from his capital at Shiraz. Mu'ayyad succeeded in converting Abu Kalijar and many of his Deylami troops to Fatimid Isma'ilism and now began to spread the Fatimid doctrines openly, but he was eventually obliged to flee from Persia to avoid 'Abbasid persecution. Mu'ayyad arrived in Cairo in 438/1046 and thereupon began to participate in the affairs of the Fatimid *dawla* and *da'wa*. In 450/1058, Mu'ayyad was appointed *da'i-al-du'at*, and with the exception of a brief period in 453/1061, he held that highest post in the Fatimid *da'wa* hierarchy until shortly before his death in 470/1077.

The Fatimid *da'wa* activities outside of the Fatimid empire reached their peak in al-Mustansir's time. The *da'wa* was now particularly active in Iraq and various parts of Persia, notably Fars; Isfahan; Ray, where Hasan-i Sabbah (q.v.), the future leader of the Nizari Isma'ilis, was converted; Khorasan; Badakhshan; and other eastern Iranian lands. The Fatimid *da'wa* had continued to exist also in Transoxania, where Isma'ilism had secret followers under the later Samanids and in subsequent times. Among its adherents, mention may be made of the father and brother of Ibn Sina (Avicenna; q.v.). In 436/1044-45, a large number of Isma'ilis who acknowledged the



imamate of al-Mustansir were massacred in Bukhara and elsewhere in Transoxania on the orders of the local Qarakhanid ruler Boghra Khan. But Isma‘ilism survived in Central Asia, and later in 488/1095, Ahmad b. Kezr, another Qarakhanid ruler there, was accused by the local Sunni ‘*Ulama*’ of having converted to Isma‘ilism and was executed (Maqrizi, II, pp. 191-92; Barthold, *Turkestan*, pp. 251, 304-5, 316-18). Nasir-i Khusraw, the eminent philosopher, poet and traveler, was the most prominent Fatimid *da‘i* of the eastern Iranian lands in al-Mustansir’s time. In many of his poems, he openly eulogizes the imam al-Mustansir and the *da‘i* Mu‘ayyad Shirazi. Nasir, too, went to Cairo in 439/1047, and stayed there for three years to further his Isma‘ili education; during that period he saw al-Mustansir and also established a close relationship with Mu‘ayyad. From the time of his return to Balk in 444/1052, Nasir began to propagate Fatimid Isma‘ilism as a *da‘i*, or, according to himself (Nasir-i Khusraw, *Zad al-mosaferin*, p. 397; idem, *Jame‘ al-hekmatayn*, pp. 15, 16-17), as the *hujjat* of Khorasan. Sometime before 453/1061, Nasir was obliged to take refuge in the valley of Yumgan, his permanent abode of exile, from where he maintained his correspondence, like other *da‘is* of the Iranian lands, with the headquarters of the Fatimid *da‘wa* in Cairo. Nasir-i Khusraw continued to propagate Isma‘ilism throughout Badaksan and died in Yumgan at an unknown date after 465/1072-73.

By the final decades of al-Mustansir’s imamate, the Isma‘ilis of Persia and the adjacent lands in the Muslim East had rallied to the side of the Fatimid *da‘wa*, centrally directed from Cairo, and acknowledged the Fatimid al-Mustansir as the rightful imam of the time. At least by the early 460s/1070s, the Persian Isma‘ilis in the Saljuq territories seem to have acknowledged the authority of a single chief *da‘i* who had his secret headquarters at Isfahan, the main Saljuq capital. The chief *da‘i* in Persia at this time was ‘Abd-al-Malek b. ‘Attas, who was responsible for launching the career of Hasan-i Sabbah. In 464/1072, Hasan, who had then recently converted to Fatimid Isma‘ilism, was brought to the attention of Ibn ‘Attas, who appointed the talented Hasan to a post in the *da‘wa* organization. In 469/1076-77, when Mu‘ayyad was still the *da‘i-al-du‘at* in Cairo, Hasan set off for Egypt, on Ibn ‘Attas’s suggestion, to further his training as a Fatimid *da‘i*. Hasan stayed in Cairo and Alexandria for about three years, returning to Isfahan in 473/1081. During the next nine years, Hasan, who was then clearly aware of the declining power of the Fatimids, traveled extensively in Persia, searching for an ideal site to establish the headquarters of his *da‘wa*. Hasan, who was eventually appointed as the *da‘i* of Deylam, now greatly invigorated the Fatimid Isma‘ili cause in Persia; and his seizure of the mountain fortress of Alamut (q.v.), in 483/1090, marked the effective foundation of what was to become the Nizari Isma‘ili state of Persia.

In the meantime, the Saljuq Sultanate had been consolidated under Alp Arslan and his son and successor Malekshah, who both depended greatly on the administrative talents of their learned vizier Nizam-al-Mulk. Hasan-i Sabbah and the Persian Isma‘ilis now found an ardent enemy in the person of Nizam al-Mulk, who from early on despatched Saljuq expeditions against Alamut and other Isma‘ili strongholds in Rudbar and Quhistan; he also devoted a large section in his *Siasat-nama* (text pp. 282-305, tr. pp. 208-26) to



the condemnation of the Isma‘ilis, reflecting his anxiety over their growing importance in Persia. The Isma‘ilis of Persia found a brief respite when Nizam al-Mulk was assassinated in 485/1092 and Malekshah died soon after in the same year. The Persian Isma‘ilis now consolidated and extended their position in a number of scattered territories, seizing or building more mountain fortresses in inaccessible places. The activities of the Persian Isma‘ilis were spreading successfully when the Fatimid al-Mustansir died in 487/1094 and the unified Fatimid Isma‘ili *da‘wa* was rent by its greatest internal conflict, the Nizari-Musta‘li schism. Nizar, al-Mustansir's heir designate, was brutally deprived of his succession rights, while his much younger brother al-Musta‘li was installed to the Fatimid caliphate by the all-powerful Fatimid vizier Afzal. Al-Musta‘li was at the same time acknowledged as his father’s successor to the imamate by the Egyptian Isma‘ilis, a good portion of the Syrian Isma‘ilis, as well as the Isma‘ili communities of Yemen and western India; these Isma‘ilis, who were now under the direct influence of the Fatimid regime, became known as Musta‘liya, recognizing al-Musta‘li and the later Fatimid caliphs as their imams. On the other hand, the Isma‘ilis of the Saljuq dominions, notably those of Persia and Iraq and a fraction of the Syrian Isma‘ilis, acknowledged Nizar and his descendents as their imams and became designated as Nizariya.

The Persian Isma‘ilis, then under the overall leadership of Hasan-i Sabbah who was already pursuing an independent policy, completely severed their relations with the Fatimid (al-Musta‘li) *da‘wa* headquarters in Cairo. The Isma‘ilis of Persia and other eastern lands had now in effect founded the independent Nizari *da‘wa*.

Further investigation of the turbulent encounters taking place subsequently between the Nizari state, centered in Alamut, and the Saljuqs, who by 471/1078 had already uprooted the Fatimids from Syria, and other dynasties ruling over Persia is beyond the scope of this article. It should be noted, however, that in the aftermath of the Nizari-Musta‘li schism in the Isma‘ili community, relations ceased between Persia and the later Fatimids, who ruled for another 77 years as mere puppets in the hands of their viziers and who were acknowledged as imams by different branches of Musta‘lian Isma‘ilism (Daftary, 1990, pp. 261-74, 654-60); the Fatimids were now greatly menaced also by the Crusaders who had appeared in the Near East. On the other hand, an intense hostility henceforth developed between the Nizari Isma‘ilis of Persia and Syria and the Musta‘lian Isma‘ilis, who were officially supported by the Fatimid regime.

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