

# Fatimid Cosmopolitanism: History, Material Culture, Politics, and Religion

6–9 December 2021



Online Conference



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

**FATIMID COSMOPOLITANISM:  
HISTORY, MATERIAL CULTURE,  
POLITICS, AND RELIGION**

ONLINE CONFERENCE PROGRAMME  
6–9 December 2021, London



The Institute of Ismaili Studies  
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Susheel Gokarakonda  
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Dr Shainool Jiwa  
Naushin Shariff

**Cover image:** In this relief carved ivory plaque datable to the 5th-6th/11th-12th centuries, once part of a larger design scheme that enveloped a panel or portable object, the internationalism of the Fatimids is readily apparent. The figure with a canine, surrounded by scrolling vines and clover, offers a semblance of motion, while the detailed facial expression and sumptuous textile present an authentic individuality.

Both artistic elements, usually incorporated into Fatimid imagery and applied to various decorative arts media, became popular and highly prized in markets across the Islamic and Christian worlds. Moreover, the ivory itself, an expensive and exotic material acquired from sub-Saharan Africa, exemplifies the far-reaching trade routes of the Fatimids and the intercultural dialogue that ensued.

Image courtesy of the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.  
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## FATIMID COSMOPOLITANISM: HISTORY, MATERIAL CULTURE, POLITICS, AND RELIGION

We are delighted to welcome everyone to this online conference organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London (IIS). From its very inception, the IIS has undertaken research and published ground-breaking works on the Fatimid dynasty to increase awareness of the subject. We hope that all participants worldwide will benefit from the experts sharing their latest research and collaborating with others from diverse backgrounds.

Historical documentation and archaeological material have revealed that the Fatimids once presided over a diverse, multicultural state composed of Muslims, Christians, Jews, and people from other religious traditions, as well as from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. This diversity contributed to the formation of a vibrant environment that stimulated intercultural contact and exchange across the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean. These encounters would also profoundly influence Fatimid history, material culture, politics, and religion, among other areas.

The current trend in scholarship has been to discern interdependence among the peoples and cultures of the past in order to gain a better understanding of the context from these connections. This was reflected in scholarship at the 1998 ground-breaking conference *L'Égypte fatimide: son art et son histoire* held in Paris, where the focus was primarily on Fatimid artistic and historical associations in Egypt, rather than the entire span of Fatimid rule, and spheres of influence.

This international conference aims to progress the field of Fatimid studies by examining their artistic, cultural, economic, intellectual, political, and social interactions. The conference encourages participation from established, as well as early-career, scholars specialising in the Fatimid lands of Bilād al-Shām, Egypt, Ifrīqiya, Sicily, and other areas across the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean. The objective is to promote a broader and deeper understanding of how the cosmopolitan Fatimid milieu contributed to intercultural dialogue as well as to imperial contestations, and therefore, impacted the history, material culture, politics, and religions of the region through these nine panels:



- I Fatimid Historiography and Mediaeval Narratives
- II Fatimid Encounters with Contemporary Cultures
- III The Fatimid *Da'wa* and *Dā'īs* – Part 1
- IV The Fatimid *Da'wa* and *Dā'īs* – Part 2
- V Fatimid Decorative Arts and Archaeological Material – Part 1
- VI Fatimid Decorative Arts and Archaeological Material – Part 2
- VII The Fatimid State and Statecraft
- VIII Fatimid Architecture and the Ceremonial
- IX The Fatimid Legacy



**Day one: Monday, 6 December 2021, afternoon session**

**12:00 – 15:20 GMT**

12:00 – 12:10 Opening remarks

Drs Farhad Daftary, Shainool Jiwa and Gregory Bilotto

12:10 – 12:40 Keynote address (with questions)

Seventeen Years of Excavations in Fatimid Cairo: What We Really Know about the Ismaili Capital City

Professor Stéphane Pradines

**Panel I: FATIMID HISTORIOGRAPHY AND MEDIAEVAL NARRATIVES**

**Chair: Dr Sumaiya Hamdani**

12:40 – 13:00 A Cosmopolitan Historiography? Remembering and Re-remembering the Period of ‘*Shidda*’ in Cairo and Fustāṭ (454-466/1062-1073)

Dr Mathew Barber

13:00 – 13:20 Who Writes the Fatimids? The Travel and Transmission of Eyewitness Fatimid Accounts, and their Role in Fatimid (Self-representation in Later Historiography)

Dr Fozia Bora

13:20 – 13:40 Historiographical Approaches to the Reign of al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh

Dr Shainool Jiwa

13:40 – 14:00 Ibn al-‘Adīm of Aleppo (1192-1262) and the Fatimid 10th–11th Century Historiography

Professor Yaacov Lev

14:00 – 14:20 **Questions**

14.20 – 15.20 **Break**



**Day one: Monday, 6 December 2021, late afternoon session**

**15:20 – 17:00 GMT**

**Panel II: FATIMID ENCOUNTERS WITH CONTEMPORARY CULTURES**

**Chair: Dr Shainool Jiwa**

15:20 – 15:40 The Fatimids and the Indian Ocean: evidence from the *Book of Curiosities*

Professor Yossef Rapoport

15:40 – 16:00 The Geniza, the Indian Ocean Trade, and the Cosmopolitan Fatimid World: Highlights of the Published and Unpublished Sources

Professor Marina Rustow

16:00 – 16:20 “You will be beaten, you will be killed, and you will be released”: Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd al-Anṭākī on Fāṭimids, Sunnīs, and Christians in Palestine and Egypt

Dr Steven Gertz

16:20 – 16:40 Who was part of the Fatimid “Cosmopolis”?

Dr Shiraz Hajiani

16:40 – 17:00 **Questions**



**Day two: Tuesday, 7 December 2021, afternoon session**

**12:00 – 14:20 GMT**

**Panel III: THE FATIMID *DA'WA* AND *DĀ'ĪS* – Part 1**

**Chair: Dr Farhad Daftary**

12:00 – 12:20 The Death of Metaphor? Al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī's Position against Claiming *majāz* in the Qur'an

Dr Omar Alí-de-Unzaga

12:20 – 12:40 Nāṣir-i Khusraw and the Political Vectors of the Late Fatimid *Da'wa*

Dr Daniel Beben

12:40 – 13:00 Al-Kirmānī's Contribution to Intellectual Cosmopolitanism in the Fatimid Age

Dr Maria de Cillis

13:00 – 13:20 Textual Communities and Fatimid Cosmopolitanism

Dr Aslisho Qurboniev

13:20 – 13:40 **Questions**

13:40 – 14:20 **Break**





**Day two: Tuesday, 7 December 2021, late afternoon session**

**14:20 – 16:00 GMT**

**Panel IV: THE FATIMID *DA'WA* AND *DĀ'ĪS* – Part 2**

**Chair: Professor Paul Walker**

14:20 – 14:40 Revisiting Fatimid Textiles Cosmopolitanism: *ṭirāz* and the Ismaili *da'wa*

Dr Miriam Alí-de-Unzaga

14:40 – 15:00 To be Born... and Born Again: Exploring a Shared Symbol in Christianity and Islam

Professor Shafique Virani

15:00 – 15:20 Ismaili Neoplatonism as Esoteric Cosmopolitan Theology

Dr Khalil Andani

15:20 – 15:40 (Re)making Time, (Re)making Place: Preliminary Considerations on Cosmopolitanism and Sacred Space

Dr Jamel Velji

15:40 – 16:00 **Questions**



**Day three: Wednesday, 8 December 2021, afternoon session**

**12:00 – 15:00 GMT**

**Panel V: FATIMID DECORATIVE ARTS AND ARCHAEOLOGY – PART 1**

**Chair: Professor Stéphane Pradines**

12:00 – 12:20 The Casket of Ṣadaqa ibn Yūsuf and the Cosmopolitanism of Fatimid Metalwork

Professor Anna Contadini

12:20 – 12:40 The Joy of Six – Astral Symbolism and Solomonic Imagery in Fatimid Art

Professor Bernard O’Kane

12:40 – 13:00 The Fatimid Rock Crystal Ewers – Innovation or Variation?

Dr Marcus Pilz

13:00 – 13:20 What’s in a Name? The Fatimid Ceramics Workshop of Muslim ibn al-Dahhān

Dr Jennifer A Pruitt

13:20 – 13:40 A Fatimid City: Recent Discoveries from the Swiss-Egyptian Mission in Aswan

Dr Gregory Williams

13:40 – 14:10 **Questions**

14:10 – 15:00 **Break**



**Day three: Wednesday, 8 December 2021, late afternoon session**

**15:00 – 17:00 GMT**

**Panel VI: FATIMID DECORATIVE ARTS AND ARCHAEOLOGY – Part 2**

**Chair: Dr Simon O’Meara**

15:00 – 15:20 Reflecting on Ibn Al-Haytham’s Science and Aesthetics as  
Critical Tools for the Study of Islamic Art

Dr Valérie Gonzalez

15:20 – 15:40 Late Antiquity in Fatimid Art

Professor Doris Behrens-Abouseif

15:40 – 16:00 Fatimid Jewellery Hoards from Palestine

Dr Ayala Lester

16:00 – 16:20 Looking Eastward: Central Asian and Chinese Inspirations in  
Fatimid Art

Dr Fahmida Suleman

16:20 – 16:40 Back to Black: The Rediscovery of Black-ground – a Global Visual  
Phenomenon in the Age of the Fatimids?

Professor Avinoam Shalem

16:40 – 17:00 **Questions**



**Day four: Thursday, 9 December 2021, afternoon session**

**12:00 – 15:00 GMT**

**Panel VII: THE FATIMID STATE AND STATECRAFT**

**Chair: Professor Dr Verena Klemm**

12:00 – 12:20 Publishing Justifications of State Policy: The Fatimid *Kitāb al-Majālis wa'l-musāyarāt* as official responsa to internal controversy and external propaganda.

Dr Hasan al-Khoee

12:20 – 12:40 Fatimid Cosmopolitanism: Political Pragmatism and Ethical Sensibilities

Dr Daryoush Mohammad Poor

12:40 – 13:00 Fatimid Public Pronouncements: The Chancery as the Voice of a Shi'i Dynasty

Professor Paul E Walker

13:00 – 13:20 **Questions**

14:20 – 15:00 **Break**



**Day four: Thursday, 9 December 2021, late afternoon session**

**15:00 – 17:10 GMT**

**Panel VIII: FATIMID ARCHITECTURE AND THE CEREMONIAL**

**Chair: Dr Gregory Bilotto**

15:00 – 15:20 Cairo as a Centre of Fatimid Celebrations

Professor Ayman Fuad Sayyid

15:20 – 15:40 The Fatimid Crescent: Understanding a Complex Religious-Political Cosmos through Lunar Symbolism

Dr Ali Alibhai

15:40 – 16:00 The Fabric of Fatimid Ceremony

Professor Paula Sanders

16:00 – 16:20 Displaying the Hidden: Fatimid Public Texts in Floriated Kufic

Dr Yasser Tabbaa

16:20 – 16:40 **Questions**

16:40 – 17:10 **Break**



**Day four: Thursday, 9 December 2021, evening session**

**17:10 – 19:00 GMT**

**Panel IX: THE FATIMID LEGACY**

**Chair: Dr Anna McSweeney**

17:10 – 17:30 Wladimir Ivanow and Fatimid Studies

Dr Farhad Daftary

17:30 – 17:50 Neo-Fatimid Architecture in Egypt: Between Inspiration, Innovation and Hybridity

Dr Dina Bakhoun

17:50 – 18:10 A Dynasty for all Seasons: The Fatimids in Modern and Contemporary Cosmopolitanism Discourses

Dr Delia Cortese

18:10 – 18:30 The Bohras as Neo-Fatimids: Documentary Remains of a Fatimid Past in Gujarat

Dr Olly Akkerman

18:30 – 18:50 **Questions**

18:50 – 19:00 **Closing remarks**

Drs Shainool Jiwa and Gregory Bilotto



## ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

**DR OLLY AKKERMAN**

### **The Bohras as Neo-Fatimids: Documentary Remains of a Fatimid Past in Gujarat**

In this paper, I trace the remains of Fatimid chancery documents, and the writing practices that surround them, among the Bohras of Gujarat. As Shi'i Ismailis, the Bohras consider themselves heirs to the Fatimid Imamate (909–1171). Whereas other Ismaili communities claim a genealogical link to the Fatimids through the presence of a living Imam, the Bohras legitimize their 'Neo-Fatimid' identity through a living Arabic Ismaili manuscript culture. While the philological link between the Bohras and the Fatimids has hitherto been acknowledged through the mobility and preservation of these manuscripts, their use of documents, however, and their potential Fatimid influences, have thus far remained unexplored. Based on ethnographic observations and archival research among the 'Alawi Bohras of Baroda, I suggest that practices from the Fatimid chancery continued in Yemen and Gujarat in the post-Fatimid era, and continue to survive today in the Bohra community's documentary culture.

**Olly Akkerman** (Institute of Islamic Studies, Freie Universität Berlin) is a specialist on Arabic manuscripts and Shi'i Islam. Her research examines the social life of manuscript repositories, and other forms of material culture among the Bohras in South Asia and the larger Western Indian Ocean region. Her publications include *The Bohra Manuscript Treasury as a Sacred Site of Philology: a Study in Social Codicology* and a monograph: *A Neo-Fatimid Treasury of Books. Arabic Manuscripts among the Alawi Bohras of South Asia* (EUP, forthcoming 2022).

**DR MIRIAM ALÍ-DE-UNZAGA**

### **Revisiting Fatimid textiles cosmopolitanism: *ṭirāz* and Ismaili *da'wa***

A huge quantity of textiles produced under the Fatimids has survived, mostly in museum collections. The study of Fatimid textiles emerged and developed between the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, when the emphasis was on documenting and translating the information preserved in the calligraphic bands of extant *ṭirāz* (inscribed) textiles. Since that time, a considerable number of prestigious scholarly publications have tended to focus on documenting the caliphal protocols and historical data (names, location of production and dates) provided by the textiles' inscriptions in order to establish appropriate dynastic classifications. On the other hand, the Fatimids are one of the best documented Muslim dynasties and this richness of information extends to Fatimid textile practices. While some scholars have merely mentioned these practices, others have used textual sources to uncover more about textile terminology, the organisation of *ṭirāz* institutions, production, trade, and the ceremonial, burial or economic value of textiles. However, even though



hundreds of textiles classified as Fatimid have been catalogued and many have been published, only rarely do we see studies that juxtapose and analyse information from the sources with information the textiles themselves tell us (such as the employment of materials, techniques, form and content of inscriptions, visual and stylistic elements, as well as the sensorial impact they may create on people; in short, their materiality). Moreover, the contention of this paper is that when we neglect the materiality of textiles, we miss out significant data about those who produced and/or used those textiles, which very often is not recorded in documentary sources.

This paper will cover a niche in scholarship that has not been satisfactorily explored, namely, the cosmopolitan character of Fatimid textiles and their role within the Ismaili *da'wa*, by critically analysing both textual and material evidence. I shall concentrate on a number of textiles produced in various regions which were directly or indirectly under the control of the Fatimid caliphate, including a group of overlooked pieces produced before the conquest of Egypt in 969 CE. I intend to offer a shift in the questions asked and to advance our understanding of the significance of those textiles and their mediation in cross-cultural encounters.

**Miriam Alí-de-Unzaga** is an anthropologist specialised on mediaeval material culture. She has an MPhil and DPhil from the University of Oxford, teaches and writes articles, book chapters, and museum catalogue entries, and has co-edited books on various aspects dealing with Andalusian and Fatimid textiles. She has been a Veronika Gervers fellow at The Royal Ontario Museum (2008), a Barakat Trust Postdoctoral Fellow at the Khalili Research Centre for the Art and Material Culture of the Middle East, Oxford (2008), and an Aga Khan Postdoctoral Fellow in Islamic Art, Harvard University (2009). She was a visiting scholar at the Papyrus Museum of the Austrian National library (2012-2016), where she produced a catalogue of Egyptian textiles of the Early Islamic period. Miriam has been awarded grants by the University of Oxford (2000-2003-2004), the Max-Planck Kunsthistorisches Institut (2010), Pasold Research Fund (2012-2013), the Textile Society of America (2012), the *Integrated Platform for the European Research Infrastructure on Cultural Heritage* at the Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural de España (2016), and the Institut Français d'Archéologie Oriental in Cairo (2018). She was academic adviser and content editor of the documentary film for the exhibition *The World of the Fatimids*, the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (March-July 2018); coordinator and curator of the Aga Khan Centre's Opening Exhibition (2018) *Gardens and Wellbeing: An Islamic Perspective*, organizer and conveyor of the international conference *Fatimids and Umayyads: Competing Caliphates* (2016) and co-editor together with Professor Maribel Fierro of the conference proceedings (forthcoming, 2022).





DR OMAR ALÍ-DE-UNZAGA

### The Death of Metaphor? Al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī's position against claiming *majāz* in the Qur'an.

The sermons of Hibat Allāh b. Mūsā (d. 470/1078), best known as al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (i.e., the Recipient of Divine Assistance, from the city of Shiraz), represent a window into the thought, philosophy and beliefs of the Ismailis during the Fatimid period. Possibly composed, delivered, compiled and published by al-Mu'ayyad himself, these sermons are available to us in a collection of 800, known as *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya* (al-Mu'ayyad's Sessions), in reference to the weekly sessions held at the Fatimid court in Cairo where they were read out.

The work reflects a very mature and developed theology, as it was composed over a long period of time (around two decades), after al-Mu'ayyad had had an eventful intellectual and political life: he produced it when he was in his sixties and seventies and held the position of *Dā'ī al-du'āt* (or Chief Summoner) at the service of the Imam-Caliph al-Mustanşir bi'llāh, who was some thirty years younger than him. In this regard, the *Majālis* are one of the most authoritative repositories of Ismaili Fatimid thought.

Most of the sermons are short and conform to a relatively fixed structure, each containing only a brief discussion that is enclosed by praises (of God), benedictions (on the Prophet, Ali and the Imams) and refutations (of opponents, questioners or correspondents) at the beginning of the sermon, and exhortations (to the audience) at the end. Yet, some underlying and pervading threads can be identified in the *Majālis*. One of the most seminal and pivotal threads is al-Mu'ayyad's rationalist hermeneutic, which materialises when he applies his thinking to various verses from the Qur'an.

This paper focuses on al-Mu'ayyad's passionate attack on those who claimed that the Qur'an contained *majāz*. His discussions on the subject are complex and need theological, historical and linguistic contextualisation. Although the term *majāz* may be rendered as metaphorical or figurative language, al-Mu'ayyad uses it as the opposite of *ḥaqīqa* (reality, or real meaning), thus making *majāz* synonymous with *imaginal* and *illusory* and therefore untrue, something that has no place in the Qur'an for him. In addition, he uses *majāz* and the related adjective *majāzī* to refer to this world's illusory, unreal character.

The aim of the paper is to revise the concept of Ismaili Fatimid *ta'wīl*, which was not a simplistic substitution of one term for another, but a holistic hermeneutic based on a legitimist (pro-Alid), rationalist theology which was equidistant from both Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī approaches to scripture and metaphysics.



**Omar Alí-de-Unzaga** (PhD Cambridge, 2005) is a Research Associate at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. He is also the Academic Coordinator of Qur'anic Studies at the IIS and the series editor of the Qur'anic Studies Series published by Oxford University Press in association with the IIS. His critical edition and translation of the *Epistle on Character Traits* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' is forthcoming. He has edited the volume *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary* (2011) and is finishing a monograph titled *A Philosophical Reading of Scripture: The Use of the Qur'an in the Epistles of the Pure Brethren*. He is currently working on a project called 'Compendium of Qur'anic citations in works by Ismaili Authors'.

## DR ALI ASGAR H ALIBHAI

### The Fatimid Crescent: Understanding a Complex Religio-Political Cosmos through Lunar Symbolism

On the day of 'Arafa, 362 AH/ 973 CE, the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz (d. 975) ordered that a *shamsa*, a royally commissioned drapery (*kiswa*) be showcased in the *iwān* of his palace at al-Manṣūriyya. Al-Mu'izz commissioned the textile as a devotional covering for the Ka'ba to be displayed during the Ḥajj, an established medieval Islamic tradition linked to represent sovereignty and legitimacy. While the object was called the *shamsa*, denoting the brilliant metallic embroideries that radiated from it like the sun, the Fatimid *shamsa*'s ornamentation was quite different. Ironically, it consisted of a series of embroidered crescent moons (sing. *hilāl*) ornamented with luminescent pearls. Al-Mu'izz's selection of crescent moons to ornament this textile, one meant to be seen and interpreted by a large number of Muslims from around the world, merits further investigation. This paper argues that the Fatimids' consideration of a crescent moon as an ornamental motif in several portable objects represents a deeper symbolic meaning, referenced across Fatimid *adab* literature, jurisprudential readings, hermeneutics, and religious praxis.

Specifically, this paper addresses the Fatimid jurisprudential viewpoint of *ru'yat al-hilāl*, the common Muslim practice of sighting the new moon to mark the beginning and ending of the fast in Ramadan. While the Fatimids were considerably pluralistic in their state policies, their implementation of strict regulations against the practice of *ru'yat al-hilāl* stood in stark contrast to the interpretation of this tradition by other Islamic legal schools of thought. The Fatimid prohibition of *ru'yat al-hilāl* is noteworthy, especially within a discussion of Fatimid cosmopolitanism and pluralism. As a result, this paper will offer new and challenging insights into historical readings of cosmopolitanism within the framework of Fatimid social history and art history.

**Ali Alibhai** holds a PhD from the Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations department at Harvard University (November 2018). He is a scholar of the histories and cultures of Muslim societies and focuses his research on the medieval Islamic world, specifically regions within



the Maghrib and Mediterranean worlds. He specializes in the histories and art and architecture of medieval Egypt, Tunisia, Sicily, Spain, and Morocco. Ali's academic work combines the study of textual and historical studies with art and architectural history to further understand the socio-cultural history and material culture of the medieval Islamic world. He is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor in Art History at the University of Texas at Dallas and the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History.

## DR KHALIL ANDANI

### Ismaili Neoplatonism as Esoteric Cosmopolitan Theology

According to Dermot Moran, “Neoplatonism is the longest and most enduring intellectual tradition in the history of philosophy and yet perhaps the most neglected.” Modern scholars including Daftary, Madelung, and Hollenberg, have theorized the reasons why the Fatimid *da'wa* embraced Neoplatonic philosophy in relation to “winning over”, or responding to, eastern Ismaili communities. The question of “origins” aside, it is equally important to appreciate how Ismaili Neoplatonism actually functioned in *da'wa* teaching and why it had cosmopolitan appeal well beyond Ismaili circles. In this presentation, I argue that Ismaili Neoplatonism did not merely serve a missionizing purpose for the Fatimid *da'wa*; it provided the rational infrastructure for Ismaili theological, cosmological, and soteriological truth-claims as reflected in Fatimid *majālis* literature and *da'wa* texts produced outside Fatimid domains. I show that the Fatimid *dā'īs* “naturalized” and internalized the Neoplatonic worldview to ground Ismaili accounts of the *uṣūl al-dīn* — such as *tawḥīd*, Prophethood, Imamate, *ta'wīl*, and Resurrection. In other words, Neoplatonism constituted the esoteric substance of Ismaili teaching and not merely its outward “cosmetics.” This enabled Fatimid *dā'īs* to offer distinctively Ismaili responses to theological issues debated by other Muslims — such as the generation (*ḥudūth*) of the cosmos, Ibn Sīnā's necessary and contingent existence, God's attributes, and the ontology of the Quran. The cosmopolitan nature of Ismaili Neoplatonism is evidenced in how its core teachings were adapted by non-Ismaili thinkers — including al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153), Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240), and Jewish theologians such as al-Fayyūmī (d. 1165) and Maimonides (d. 1203). Finally, Ismaili Neoplatonism outlived the demise of the Fatimid Caliphate and continued in two traditions — the Ṭayyibī cosmology of Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmidī (d. 1162) and the Nizārī philosophy associated with al-Shahrastānī and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274).

**Khalil Andani** is an Assistant Professor of Religion at Augustana College (USA) and holds a PhD and two Master's degrees in Islamic Studies from Harvard University. His dissertation, “Revelation in Islam: Qur'anic, Sunni, and Shi'i Ismaili Perspectives”, won Best PhD Dissertation of the Year from the Foundation for Iranian Studies in 2020. Dr Andani's book project is an analytical and historical investigation of Islamic theologies of revelation in the classical period. He has published extensively on Ismaili history and thought in several



journals and volumes. Dr Andani also serves as Co-Chair of the Methodology and Hermeneutics Unit in the International Qur'anic Studies Association (IQSA).

## DR DINA ISHAK BAKHOUM

### Neo-Fatimid Architecture in Egypt: Between Inspiration, Innovation and Hybridity

Many of Egypt's nineteenth and twentieth century structures were designed by European and Egyptian architects in the neo-Islamic style, creating monumental as well as less monumental buildings that have become major landmarks of Egypt's modern heritage. And while the majority of these are based on Mamluk architectural and decorative styles, other examples show direct inspiration from Fatimid architecture.

A case in point is the 1929 façade of the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo, whose overall style is based on the façade of the Fatimid Mosque of al-Aqmar (1125) but with decorative details that reveal the selective use of specific patterns, the cancellation of others and the addition of Coptic style elements as well as inscriptions linked to the creation of this façade and the protagonists involved in the museum. The possible reasons for these choices will be discussed in this presentation, raising questions about the interaction and interchange between Fatimid and Coptic art and architecture in Egypt that led to the creation of innovative and hybrid styles that can be found in historic as well as modern architecture. Other present-day examples for the use of Fatimid style designs will be presented, analyzing the continuous adaptation of original architectural and decorative motifs to fit new purposes, functions and contexts.

**Dina Bakhoum** (PhD) is an engineer and art historian, specialising in cultural heritage conservation and management, who has long field experience on projects in Cairo and Upper Egypt. She has worked for the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (2004-2012) and the American Research Center in Egypt (2001-2004 and 2013-2018) and continues to collaborate with several Egyptian and international institutions in the field. Her research and publications deal with Egypt's Islamic and Coptic architecture, the *waqf* (endowment) as a maintenance system, and contemporary conservation issues. Her PhD (2021) analysed the restoration interventions of the Egyptian Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe between the 1880s and 1950s.



DR MATHEW BARBER

### A Cosmopolitan Historiography? Remembering and Re-remembering the Period of ‘*Shidda*’ in Cairo and Fuṣṭāṭ (454-466/1062-1073)

Few examples of Fatimid historiography survive, especially for many of the pivotal events of the eleventh century. However, works of history were certainly written, as is attested by the lengthy accounts of authors such as Ibn Muyassar (d. 677/1278), al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333), Ibn al-Furāt (d. 807/1405), al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) and al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), who all clearly used Fatimid sources, including histories. When using such texts as sources for Fatimid historiography, one must ask how the authors approached their sources, and if their accounts contain faithful transmissions of Fatimid histories. In this paper, I will investigate the extent to which Cairene authors copied faithfully from earlier Fatimid histories because they found that their content resonated with the Cairo of their own times (in a sense a multi-generational cosmopolitanism, expressed through history-writing).

I will take as a case study the period of famine and political upheaval, sometimes termed the *Shidda*. I will argue that highly traumatic contemporary accounts of the *Shidda* were circulated and retold by later generations of Cairenes, as they related them to their own experiences of political and economic turmoil (notably the events of 806/1403-4 that al-Maqrīzī lived through and emphasised in his *Khitāṭ*). Thus, while contemporary circumstances could (and did) threaten to alter Fatimid historiography (to make it better apply to a new context), they also provided an opportunity to revive and continue Fatimid histories, as part of a broader Cairene historiography.

**Mathew Barber** is a historian specialising in Egyptian historiography and in particular Fatimid history writing (c. 10th–12th centuries). He obtained a BA in history from the University of Oxford (2010–2013) before going on to study for an MSc in Arabic at the University of Edinburgh. He received his doctorate in 2021 from the University of Edinburgh with a thesis on the subject of Fatimid history writing entitled ‘Fatimid Historiography and Its Survival: A Case Study of the Vizierate of al-Yāzūrī (r. 442–450/1050–1058)’. In 2018–2019 he worked with the KITAB team in a partnership with the Qatar National Library to develop a prototype digital reading environment for exploring texts on the biography of the Prophet and data about those texts. He now works with the KITAB team exploring what KITAB’s text reuse data (alongside other data sets) can teach us about Fatimid historiography, its survival and history-writing practices in Egypt.’





DR DANIEL BEBEN

### Nāṣir-i Khusraw and the Political Vectors of the Late Fatimid Da'wa

The eleventh century marked a critical turning point in the history of the Ismaili *da'wa*. While the Fatimid *da'wa* temporarily met with great success in the major urban centers of Khurasān and Central Asia in the tenth century, leading to the conversion of many high-ranking officials in the Samanid administration, these efforts later suffered a violent reversal from Sunni opponents. By contrast, the regions of the eastern Islamic world where Ismailism persisted the longest from the eleventh century onwards were typically more peripheral and often highland regions, such as Daylam, Quhistān, and Badakhshān. The most common explanation for this pattern is that these regions offered Ismailis a greater degree of protection from persecution. While this is undoubtedly a key factor, in this paper I will examine another critical factor, namely the fact that many of these regions had a long history of resistance to central political authority that long predated the presence of Ismailism. In such contexts, Ismailism, with its commonly ascribed status as a “heterodox” religious tradition, may have facilitated assertions of political autonomy.

In this paper I will re-examine the *da'wa* career of the renowned Persian poet and Fatimid *dā'ī*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who is credited with the introduction of Ismailism to the mountainous Badakhshān region of Central Asia. By exploring the vicissitudes of the patronage he received from local rulers in the region, I demonstrate how his career illustrates a broader shift in the emphasis of the *da'wa* in the late Fatimid era towards more peripheral regions, where the political and social context offered better prospects for the *da'wa*, foreshadowing a critical development that reached its fruition in the early Nizārī era.

**Daniel Beben** received his PhD in History and Central Eurasian Studies at Indiana University and is currently Assistant Professor of History and Religious Studies at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. His research focuses on the history of Ismaili and Sufi communities in pre-modern Central Asia, Afghanistan and Iran. His recent publications include a Persian text edition and translation of the *'Ibrat-afzā*, the memoirs of the Ismaili Imam Hasan Ali Shah (Aga Khan I), co-authored with Daryoush Mohammad Poor (published by I.B. Tauris and the Institute of Ismail Studies in 2018). His current research projects include a monograph on the history of Ismailism in Central Asia and a co-authored book on genealogical traditions in the Badakhshan region.



## PROFESSOR DORIS BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF

### Late Antiquity in Fatimid Art

This paper discusses a rare motif carved on Fatimid marble slab representing a pair of mermaids. It will try to explain the origin of this odd subject and relate it to other traditions of Islamic and Mediterranean representations of fabulous creatures and with other motifs in Fatimid art.

**Doris Behrens-Abouseif** is Professor Emerita and former Nasser D Khalili Chair for Islamic Art and Archaeology at SOAS, University of London. She has been a visiting professor and fellow at several universities worldwide and is a member of the Academia Europaea. Her interests cover a wide range of subject of Islamic art and culture. Among her books: *Egypt's Adjustment to Ottoman Rule* (Leiden, New York, Cologne, 1994), *Beauty in Arabic Culture* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), *Cairo of the Mamluks* (London, Cairo, 2007), *The Minarets of Cairo* (London, Cairo, 2010), *Practicing Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate* (London 2014), *The Book in Mamluk Egypt and Syria (1250-1517)* (Leiden, 2019), *Scribes, Libraries and Market* (Leiden, Boston, 2018), and *Metalwork in the Arab World and the Mediterranean* (London 2021).

## DR GREGORY BILOTTO

**Gregory Bilotto**, an art historian and archaeologist, is currently a research consultant at the Institute of Ismaili Studies and an associate lecturer at Saint Mary's University, London. He has previously been awarded a PhD (2019) in mediaeval Islamic art and archaeology from SOAS, University of London, an MA (2020) in museum studies specialising in Islamic material culture from UCL, University of London, and another MA (2012) in mediaeval Islamic architecture and art from the American University in Cairo. His PhD thesis *Fatimid Metalwork 297-567/ 909-1171: Context, Identification, and Style in the Mediaeval Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean* is forthcoming (2022) with the American University in Cairo Press.

## DR FOZIA BORA

### Who Writes the Fatimids? The Travel and Transmission of Eyewitness Fatimid Accounts, and their Role in Fatimid (Self-)representation in Later Historiography

In this paper I explore the question of whether modern and medieval readings of the history of the Fatimid era can be said to be represented in their fullness via eyewitness accounts. Can later portrayals draw from accounts produced in the crucibles of text production within the Fatimid court and in Fatimid centres of learning: for specific pivotal moments such as succession crises, for the broader trajectory of a constitutive era of regional political and religious history, and for the contributions and conduct of key Fatimid figures, including caliphs, viziers and members of the royal household, female and male? I examine the routes of transmission of a range of both lesser- and more well-known Fatimid era historiographical texts, from named and anonymous authors both based in



and passing through Fatimid Egypt, writing from a range of confessional perspectives, from Ibn Abi 'l-Şalt (d. 1134) to al-Idrīsī (fl. 1160s) to Ibn Ṭuwayr (d. 1220). Finally, I draw broader conclusions about the prospects of Fatimid self-fashioning within the multi-genre corpus of Arabic historiography of the 10th to 15th centuries, as well the epistemological implications of these textual journeys of transmission, preservation and reinterpretation.

**Fozia Bora** is Associate Professor of Islamic History at the University of Leeds. She took her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at the University of Oxford, and worked as a journalist before returning to academic life. Her monograph *Writing History in the Medieval Islamic World – The Value of Chronicles as Archives* was published by I B Tauris in June 2019. Her previous article 'Did Şalāḥ al-Dīn Destroy the Fatimids' Books? An Historiographical Enquiry' was awarded the Royal Asiatic Society's Staunton Prize for 'outstanding work by an early career scholar'. Fozia is a contributor to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 3, incoming Chair of the British Association of Islamic Studies and tweets at Islamicate History (@FoziaBora).

## PROFESSOR ANNA CONTADINI

### The Casket of Şadaqa ibn Yūsuf and the Cosmopolitanism of Fatimid Metalwork

My lecture will focus on an extraordinary casket in silver gilt and niello, with three hinges and clasps, in the Museo de San Isidoro, León, one of the Fatimid silver objects that have still not been studied exhaustively as a class. Around the base of the casket's lid is a beautifully produced inscription which is of great documentary importance, as it tells us that it was made for the treasury of Şadaqa ibn Yūsuf. An Iraqi Jew who converted to Islam, Şadaqa was a vizier of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustaşir bi-llāh from 1044 until 1047. The inscription thus establishes that the casket does not form part of the caliphal Spanish tradition of metalwork, as was assumed in earlier literature when the inscription had not yet been read. So, the casket has changed identity: its Fatimid connections are now undeniable, and it may be surmised that it was produced while Şadaqa ibn Yūsuf was in office and that it later took its place among the costly metal objects in the Fatimid royal treasuries described by the qāḏī Ibn al-Zubayr. I shall consider the routes through which the casket came to Spain within the wider context of Fatimid cosmopolitanism of trade and exchanges with the whole of the Mediterranean and specifically with Spain. Further, I shall consider aspects that have not yet been explored, such as its metallurgy and its stylistic affiliations.

**Anna Contadini** is Professor (full) of the History of Islamic Art at SOAS, University of London. Her areas of research are Arabic and Persian illustrated manuscripts; material culture of the Islamic world; and the artistic and cultural connections between the Middle East and Europe.

Professor Contadini has won several prizes and honours, and serves in numerous international Peer-Reviewing bodies and Editorial, Scientific and Advisory Boards. She





teaches on a variety of aspects of Islamic art, and supervises MA and PhD students. Her current projects include the metalwork production of the medieval Mediterranean; the illustrated manuscripts of the western Islamic world; and the collections of Islamic art in Italy, in particular Bologna.

Her recent publications include: “Wondrous Animals: Zoomorphic Metal Figures from al-Andalus”. In: Olchawa, Joanna, ed., *Löwe, Wölfin, Greif: Monumentale Tierbronzen im Mittelalter*. (De Gruyter: Berlin, 2020), pp 213-236; and, ed. and author, *The Pisa Griffin and the Mari-Cha Lion. Metalwork, Art, and Technology in the Medieval Islamicate Mediterranean* (Pisa: Pacini Editore, 2018).

## DR DELIA CORTESE

### A Dynasty for all Seasons. The Fatimids in Modern and Contemporary Cosmopolitanism Discourses

Focusing on the potency conveyed by the suffix *-ism* added to the words ‘cosmopolitan’ in this paper I will survey instances where we find ‘the Fatimids’ caught up in discourses and in the service of ‘cosmopolitanism’ agendas as voiced by varied actors. The paper starts with a critique of the nineteenth-century colonial construct of ‘Mediaeval Cairo’ that saw the Fatimids excluded from its representation, in the context of a western-centred push of universalistic ideals. In contrast, the Fatimids feature resoundingly in post-9/11 Muslim cosmopolitanism discourses as beacons of tolerance, pluralism, learning, arts and, indeed, as the ultimate cosmopolitan Islamic dynasty. In these discourses ‘the Fatimids’ serve as a propaganda tool in the contemporary Middle Eastern political arena. Alternatively, they are fitted into some specific cultural agendas in conceptual art, fiction, digital games and dedicated YouTube ‘documentaries’. Either way the Fatimid era emerges as an age which many view as a resource from the past that can be usefully deployed to construct positive narratives about a ‘global Islam’.

In this paper I seek to address the following research questions: How do those actors who have an investment in projecting their cosmopolitan orientations go about displaying it? Which strategies do they use in order to meet their agendas? How do or don’t ‘the Fatimids’ fit in these discourses? To what extent and in what way is the analysis of this use of ‘the Fatimids’ a useful tool for the understanding of new expressions of Islamic cosmopolitanism?

**Delia Cortese** (PhD, SOAS) is Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies, Middlesex University, London. Her main areas of research are mediaeval Islam, particularly Ismaili, Fatimid and Nizari studies as well as Ismaili codicology. Her work focuses on a range of domains in the field of medieval Islamic social history on topics ranging from the interrogation of gender issues in Ismaili history to the transmission and dissemination of knowledge. She has published articles on Sunnism as well as aspects of environmental history in Fatimid Egypt. Her publications include *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam* (with S. Calderini)



(Edinburgh, 2006), *Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts: The Zāhid ‘Alī Collection* (London, 2003) and *Ismaili and Other Arabic Manuscripts* (London, 2000).

## DR FARHAD DAFTARY

### Wladimir Ivanow and Fatimid Studies

Until the initiation of modern scholarship in Ismaili studies, the Ismailis were almost exclusively studied and evaluated on the basis of evidence collected, or fabricated, by their detractors. As a result, they were totally misrepresented with a host of myths and legends circulating about Ismaili teachings and practices.

Modern progress in Ismaili studies commenced in the 1930s. The breakthrough in the field was made possible by the recovery and study of genuine Ismaili texts on a large scale. Ivanow played a key role in modern Ismaili as well as Fatimid studies not only through recovering numerous Ismaili texts but also making these resources available to numerous scholars. In 1933 Ivanow published his *Guide to Ismaili Literature*, informing scholars worldwide for the first time of the richness and diversity of the Ismaili literary heritage, including the texts produced under the Fatimids. By the time he published a revised and enlarged catalogue of such texts in 1963, many more titles had been identified, attesting to the diversity of Ismaili intellectual traditions under the Fatimids. In his earlier works, Ivanow also studied the background to the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate, also editing for the first time a number of texts on the subject. At the same time, Ivanow deconstructed the myth of Ibn al-Qaddāḥ as the founder of Ismailism and the progenitor of the Fatimids — a myth fabricated by Sunni polemicists to defame the Fatimids. Ivanow also identified the “Iranian school of philosophical Ismailism” in Fatimid times. This paper takes stock of Ivanow’s main contributions to the study of the Fatimids, not only in terms of identifying sources but also in producing valuable studies that prepared the ground for modern scholarship on the Fatimids and their Ismaili teachings and intellectual traditions.

**Farhad Daftary** is the Co-Director of The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, and Head of its Department of Academic Research and Publications (DARP). As well as serving on various editorial boards, Dr Daftary is co-editor (with Wilferd Madelung) of the *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, and general editor of several series of publications. An authority on Ismaili studies, he has written and edited more than 20 books, including *The Ismā‘īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (1990; 2nd ed., 2007), *The Assassin Legends* (1994), *Ismaili Literature* (2004), *A History of Shi‘i Islam* (2013), *Fifty Years in the East: The Memoirs of Wladimir Ivanow* (2015) and *The Ismaili Imams: A Biographical History* (2020). Dr Daftary’s books have been translated into numerous languages.



**DR MARIA DE CILLIS**

### **Al-Kirmānī's Contribution to Intellectual Cosmopolitanism in the Fatimid Age**

The Fatimid Age is justifiably famed for its cosmopolitan character: it was undeniably a period of intense intellectual fervour and powerful cross-cultural interactions. As one of the most renowned Ismaili *dā'īs* of the time, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020), succeeded in creating a complex system of thought. This blended inherited Ismaili traditions — including gnostic cosmological elements — and Greek philosophical strands, mainly drawn from Aristotelianism and Fārābian Neoplatonism. Achieving prominence during the reign of the Imam-caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 386-411/996-1021), al-Kirmānī set for himself, among other things, the task of intervening in a doctrinal controversy which had erupted amongst the foremost representatives of the so-called Iranian School of Ismaili philosophical theology: Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934), Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 332/943) and Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. c. 361/971). Focusing on the concept of Nature, and looking at the hierarchy of the intellectual Pleroma, the notions of prime matter and of potentiality/actuality, this study will highlight how the metaphysical and esoteric correspondences employed by al-Kirmānī in his theoretical schema aimed at providing a very Fatimid answer to several contemporaneous Islamic as well as non-Islamic intellectual conundrums.

**Maria De Cillis** is a Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, where she is also the Managing Editor of the Shi'i Heritage Series. She has authored *Salvation and Destiny in Islam: The Shi'i Ismaili Perspective of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī* (2018), *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghazālī and Ibn 'Arabī* (2014) and has co-edited *L'ésotérisme shi'ite, ses racines et ses prolongements/Shi'i Esotericism: Its Roots and Developments* (2016) as well as writing a number of journal articles and encyclopaedia entries. She has taught on the Qur'an at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and on medieval Islamic philosophy and speculative theology at Birkbeck College, University of London. At the IIS, she continues to teach on Shi'i Islam and Islamic intellectual history. Her research interests include Islamic metaphysics, Sufism, Shi'i esotericism and Ismaili philosophy.

**DR STEVEN GERTZ**

### **“You will be beaten, You will be killed, and You will be released”: Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd al-Anṭākī on Fatimids, Sunnīs, and Christians in Palestine and Egypt**

This paper explores Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd al-Anṭākī's (980–1066) *Kitāb ta'rīkh al-dhayl* (Sequel History), the most important Christian Melkite study on 4th/10th- and 5th/11h-century Fatimid Palestine, as a continuation of the earlier historical work of Sa'īd ibn al-Biṭrīq (known as Eutychius, 877–940). It asks how the Fatimid conflict with the Abbasids impacted the Fatimids' treatment of Christians in Palestine and Egypt during the caliphates of al-'Azīz bi-llāh (r. 365–



386/975–996), al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 386–411/996–1021), and al-Zāhir li-ʿIzāz Dīn Allāh (r. 411–427 / 1021–1036). While Yaḥyā does not make a direct link between sectarianism and Muslim-Christian relations in his text, he nevertheless offers evidence of anti-Sunni sentiment among the Fatimid caliphs, directed not only at the far-off Abbasids but also toward Sunnis inside the Fatimid realms. He also gives us a fuller picture of how Fatimid relations with Christian Byzantium impacted Christian *dhimmi*s living under Fatimid rule. Moreover, he shows how, contrary to the notion that *dhimmi*s were mere pawns in the hands of the caliphs, Christians could and did show agency in their dealings with the caliphs as well as with fellow Muslim subjects.

**Steven Gertz** recently completed his PhD at Georgetown University in Theological and Religious Studies, focusing on the question as to how sectarianism in Islam impacts Muslim relationships with Christians. He particularly examined Muslim-Christian relations in Fatimid Palestine and Egypt during the 5th/11th century, prior to the Crusaders' conquest of Palestine. He is now teaching as an adjunct lecturer at Georgetown, and has a contract with Gorgias Press to turn his doctoral thesis into a book.

## DR VALÉRIE GONZALEZ

### Reflecting on Ibn Al-Haytham's Science and Aesthetics as Critical Tools for the Study of Islamic Art

This paper will discuss Ibn al-Haytham's famous *Kitāb al-Manāẓir* (Book of Optics), a medieval Islamic product of the meeting of diverse intellectual specialisms as cultivated at the Fatimid court. The specialisms discussed in this case are the science of optics, aesthetic philosophy and phenomenology. *Kitāb al-Manāẓir* has received much scholarly attention and hence its content is well known. However, there still remains the question of its significance and impact on the rich system of Islamic thought, values and cultural practices in the period of the treatise's production and thereafter. As such, this question can be addressed in many ways and may lead to many new reflections.

This paper will interrogate the *Kitāb* specifically as a critical tool for understanding artistic creation and its reception in medieval Islam both within and outside the particular Fatimid context. For example, the *Kitāb* has been used, in a literal manner, for the analysis of the meaning and creative processes underpinning the architectural decoration of the Alhambra. The endeavour raises key issues of methodology related to the exact nature of the relationship between medieval theoretical texts with an aesthetic content and art-making. Thus, the paper's double goal is to answer the question of whether or not Ibn al-Haytham's scientific work informed Islamic art-making, and to unravel what the *Kitāb* tells us about aesthetics at the levels of both theory and practice as well as about the nature of the Muslim viewer's artistic experience and expectations.



**Valérie Gonzalez** is Research Associate at SOAS, University of London. She is a specialist of Islamic art history, aesthetics and visual culture. She obtained a PhD. in Islamic Studies, University of Provence Aix-Marseille, and a Master of Fine Arts, School of Fine Arts, Marseille-Luminy. She has been awarded fellowships from The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture in MIT, and the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. Among her books are *Aesthetic Hybridity in Mughal Painting, 1526-1658* (2015), and *Beauty and Islam, Aesthetics of Islamic Art and Architecture* (2001) (also translated into Bosnian and Turkish).

## DR SHIRAZ HAJIANI

### Who was part of the Fatimid “Cosmopolis”?

To label an event, entity, era or even an ethic as “cosmopolitan” or anything else, for that matter, is a retrospective judgement often encumbered with an array of pre-commitments and when applied contemporaneously or prospectively, is marked by audacity or at least the claim of power to govern or define the character of human interactions and worldviews.

Using doctrinal and historical texts and treatises of the Fatimid era (909–1171), this paper will examine whether the notion of cosmopolitanism can be discerned among those we might consider to be part of a Fatimid “cosmopolis”. The nature and bounds of belonging will be scrutinised along with how such cosmopolitanism might be gauged. This research will focus, in particular, on the Ismailis in Iran who might be construed as being within the immediate circle of affiliation of a Fatimid “cosmopolis”.

Given that religious communities with truth claims and pronounced soteriologies define not only belonging but also divide and demarcate humanity into the saved elite and the damned rest—with the Ismailis being no exception to this before, during and after the Fatimid era—this paper will challenge the validity of the interpretation of the Fatimids as “cosmopolitan” and will probe what this interpretation says about such constructions.

**Shiraz Hajiani** completed his doctoral research at the University of Chicago, *Reconstructing Alamut: New Approaches to the Study of the Qiyāma and the Nizari Polity in Iran*, an examination of aspects of the histories and thought of the Nizari Ismailis and their polity in Iran (1090–1256 CE). Using multi-disciplinary approaches of historical, textual and narrative analyses as well as digital humanities, he has recovered subdued voices and traces of non-extant Nizari texts fragmentarily embedded in Persian historical chronicles. Shiraz has edited and translated a number of doctrinal treatises which shed new light on early Nizari Ismaili history and doctrines. He is presently working on *The Life and Times our Master: A study of the biography of Ḥasan-i Šabbāh and the origins of Nizari Ismailism* and is completing his annotated translation of the section on the Ismailis in the *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh* of Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allāh completed in 1314 CE.

In 2017, he commenced a multi-year second research project supported by a Fulbright Research Fellowship to explore religion in Central Asia before, during and after the Soviet





Period. Shiraz also holds a Masters of Theological Studies from Harvard University. In 2014, along with Michael Bechtel, Shiraz founded the Ismaili Studies Conference at the University of Chicago.

### DR SUMAIYA HAMDANI

**Sumaiya Hamdani** received her BA from Georgetown University, and her MA and PhD from the Near Eastern Studies Dept. at Princeton in Islamic history. She is Associate Professor of History at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA, where she teaches courses on Islamic, and Middle East and North African history. She is the author of *Between Revolution and State: The Construction of Fatimid Legitimacy* (IB Tauris 2006), and of articles in the field of Fatimid history and Shi'i thought. Most recently her research has focused on the construction of identity in Muslim minority communities in Yemen and South Asia during the colonial and post-colonial periods. She founded and was director of the Islamic Studies program at George Mason University from 2003-2008.

### DR SHAINOOL JIWA

#### Historiographical Approaches to the Reign of al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh

The study of the reign of the fifth Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 386-441/996-1021) is replete with challenges across several fronts that are well recognised in scholarship. Among these is the status and proclivity of the extant sources pertaining to al-Ḥākim's rule, from contemporary accounts to the extensive body of Mamluk chronicles through which significant historical information on al-Ḥākim is conveyed.

While scholarship has progressed on examining the various strands of existing historiographical traditions concerning al-Ḥākim, one area with significant potential for further consideration is the genre of medieval Ismaili historiography. Notwithstanding their inherent biases, works of this genre provide perspectives that texture and broaden our understanding from the currently dominant Mamluk Sunni annalistic tradition.

Building on recent scholarship, this paper focusses on the historiography of two specific episodes in the reign of al-Ḥākim which concern the nature of inter-Muslim confessional relations during the Fatimid period as well as the internal dynamics of the Fatimid elite. The first pertains to the widely-discussed events concerning the public display of curses against the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad in 395/1004, and the subsequent erasure of these public inscriptions in 397/1007. Through a close reading of Christian, Sunni and Ismaili sources, the paper deciphers the distinct features of the curse inscriptions, in order to ascertain the role of the Imam-caliph in their promulgation.

The second case-study examines the fate of al-Ḥusayn b. Jawhar and 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān, two scions of famed Fatimid households and leading figures of the *dawla* who were reputedly executed by al-Ḥākim in



401/1011. It showcases how distinct narratives regarding their treatment in the extant sources reflect the varied interests of medieval Ismaili and Mamluk Sunni chroniclers. The paper concludes by arguing for a review of the impact of pro-Abbasid chroniclers on current historiographical approaches to the reign of al-Ḥākim.

**Shainool Jiwa** is a specialist in Fatimid studies and a Senior Research Fellow at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. Dr Jiwa's latest publication, *The Fatimids: The Rise of a Muslim Empire* (2018) is a World of Islam series title, for which she also serves as the series General Editor. She is also the co-editor of *The Shi'i World: Pathways in Tradition and Modernity* (2015), and *The Fatimid Caliphate: Diversity of Traditions* (2017). Dr Jiwa has edited and translated key medieval Arabic texts relating to Fatimid history, including *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire* (2009) and *The Founder of Cairo* (2013).

## DR HASAN AL-KHOEE

### Publishing Justifications of State Policy: The Fatimid *Kitāb al-Majālis wa'l-musāyarāt* as official *responsa* to internal controversy and external propaganda

This paper seeks to situate the *Kitāb al-Majālis wa'l-Musāyarāt* of Qāḍī Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān (d. 363/973) within the broader genres of 4th/10th century Arabic literary writing, through a focus on the work's distinct function of seeking to convey 'official' and religiously-authoritative responses, from the fourth Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh, to the swathe of internal controversies affecting the Fatimid state and external accusations from rival caliphates.

The responses posited in the *Majālis* indicate an awareness within the Caliphal court of negative 'publicity' and polemics directed against the Fatimids from rivals, and an overall conception of public perception concerning the rule of Fatimids. The responses further reflect a tension distinct to the Fatimid state that arose from its position as an salvific polity. Notwithstanding, the Fatimid state manifested a political order that necessitated pragmatic shifts between successive caliphal reigns. This paper focusses on the strategies and rhetoric of legitimisation that the Fatimid *da'wa* sought to deploy in dealing with particular controversies, and will interrogate where the *Kitāb al-Majālis* sits within the broader genres of 4th/10th century literature, indicating its congruence within the broader *kalām*-type theological treatises of the 3rd-4th/9th-10th centuries that aimed at providing theologically-based discourses in response to contemporary polemics regarding the legitimacy of rule.

**Hasan Al-Khoe** is a Research Associate in the Constituency Studies Unit at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, where he also lectures on the graduate programs. His current research focusses on Arabic historical writing in the Umayyad era, the history of the formative era of Shi'ism, and Fatimid historical literature in the 4th-5th/10th-11th centuries.



He recently completed his doctorate on early Arabic historiography and political oratory at SOAS, University of London.

## PROFESSOR DR VERENA KLEMM

**Verena Klemm** holds the chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies of University of Leipzig. She is the principal investigator of the long-term project “Bibliotheca Arabica. Towards a New History of Arabic Literature” at the Saxon Academy of Sciences. She initiated several research projects to research and digitize the collection of Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman manuscripts at the University of Leipzig, among them the 18th/19th century private library *al-Rifāʿiyya* from Damascus. Her publications include the history and literature of the Fatimid *daʿwa*, Islamic manuscripts in a cultural-historical context, and modern Arabic literature and literary debate.

## DR AYALA LESTER

### Fatimid Jewellery Hoards from Palestine

Seven jewellery hoards were found in excavations which took place between 1961 and 2005 in Jerusalem, Ramla, Caesarea and Tiberias. The caches include anklets, bracelets, earrings and finger rings fabricated from gold and silver together with pearls and various beads such as rock crystal, amber, lapis-lazuli, glass, and other semi-precious stones.

In addition to discussing the material evidence, I have made a cautious attempt to connect these jewellery pieces with written testimonies from the Geniza documents published by S.D. Goitein in his monumental work *Mediterranean Society*. The discussion is based on trousseau lists of brides from Jerusalem and Fustāṭ, dated between 1028 and 1156. Included are documents referring to affluent women from the Jewish communities as well as to a woman of modest resources from Jerusalem.

The last part of the lecture deals with the hoard found at Caesarea in 1961, with its splendid jewellery pieces made from gold sheet, filigree and granulation with apple- and cherry-shaped beads as described by Goitein. The items in the cache are compatible with descriptions in the dowries of wealthy brides found in the Geniza.

**Ayala Lester** served as curator of Islamic Materials at the Repositories of the Israel Antiquities Authority between 1988 and 2018. Her dissertation dealt with metalware of the Fatimid period based on a metal cache found at Caesarea in 1995. Dr Lester has specialized in Early Islamic glass, metalware and jewellery and has published a large number of articles on these topics. Currently she is researching the connection between Geniza documents, dealt with in S.D. Goitein’s corpus of *Mediterranean Society*, and the material culture of these periods.





## PROFESSOR YAACOV LEV

### Ibn al-‘Adīm of Aleppo (1192-1262) and the Fatimid 10th–11th Century Historiography

The writings of al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442) are the principal source of information concerning the historical works of Ibn Zūlāq (919–996) and al-Musabbiḥī (977–1029). Ibn al-‘Adīm’s dictionary of people who played a role in the history of Aleppo contains extensive references to the works of both Ibn Zūlāq and al-Musabbiḥī. The goal of this presentation is to list these references and quotes and to evaluate their significance. Usually, Ibn Zūlāq’s history of Egypt is referred to as the *Tarīkh Miṣr*. Ibn al-‘Adīm also refers to and quotes from Ibn Zūlāq’s biographies of Egypt’s rulers such as Aḥmad Ibn Ṭulūn, Khumārawayh, and Muḥammad ibn Ṭughj al-Ikhshīd. *Tarīkh Miṣr* has not survived and the format of the work remains unknown. These quotes, however, indicate that the work quoted by al-Maqrīzī as *Sīrat al-Mu‘izz* was not unique. Apparently, these biographies were part of *Tārīkh Miṣr* and were also circulated independently.

Fragments of al-Musabbiḥī’s *Akḥbār Miṣr*, for the years 1024-1025, have survived and the format of the work is known. The chronicle was divided into years, months, and days and included extensive sections of obituaries and poetry. Based on Ibn al-‘Adīm’s quotes, one is inclined to believe that this format was also kept in the pre-Fatimid sections of the chronicle. This may explain the length of the work (13,000 folios) but one must wonder whether al-Musabbiḥī was able to offer the same detailed coverage of the pre-Fatimid periods as he provided for the Fatimid period.

The paper will show that the fragments preserved in Ibn al-‘Adīm’s biographical dictionary considerably expand our knowledge of Egypt’s history during the pre-Fatimid and Fatimid period.

**Yaacov Lev** is professor (emeritus) of mediaeval Islamic history, Bar Ilan University. His most recent publication is *The Administration of Justice in Mediaeval Egypt: From the Seventh to the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh, 2020).

## DR ANNA MCSWEENEY

**Anna McSweeney** is a lecturer in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at Trinity College, Dublin. A specialist in the western Mediterranean Islamic world, her publications include *From Granada to Berlin: the Alhambra Cupola* (Dortmund, 2020). She is co-investigator with the V&A Museum of the British Academy-funded project *Crafting Medieval Spain: the Torrijos Ceiling in the Global Museum* (2021-2). She has worked as a research fellow at the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin and as a research fellow at the Warburg Institute, London. She received her PhD in Islamic art history from SOAS, University of London in 2012.



## PROFESSOR BERNARD O’KANE

### The Joy of Six — Astral Symbolism and Solomonian Imagery in Fatimid Art

The use of astral symbolism by the Fatimids has been explored previously, most notably by James Allan in his article entitled “My Father is a Sun, and I am the Star’: Fatimid Symbols in Ayyubid and Mamluk metalwork.” I propose to take some of the ideas further in this article, exploring in particular the reasons for the predilection of the six-pointed star as a Fatimid decorative motif, especially in woodwork. Related to this is the hexagram, the form of the six-pointed star as two intertwined triangles that was associated from the early Islamic period with the seal of Solomon, who was lauded in the Qur’an and other early Islamic sources as a paragon of the ideal ruler.

The astral imagery can also be related to the Prophet Muhammad, the possessor of a divine light (the *nūr Muḥammad*) that can lead Muslims toward enlightenment, as seen in one of its earliest manifestations, the epigraphic medallion in the form of a hexagram at the apex of the dome of the *mashhad* of al-Juyushi in Cairo, where it is also associated with ‘Ali.

The six-pointed star became a staple of woodwork designs, being the focal point of the geometric patterns of such key state-sponsored pieces as the *minbars* at Asqalon and Qus, the cenotaph of Sayyidnā al-Ḥusayn, and the portable mihrabs of Sayyida Nafīsa and Sayyida Ruqayya. The hexagram is found in some Fatimid examples intertwined with a polylobed rosette, as on some metalwork and on the Bāb al-Akhḍar (now attached to the mosque of al-Ḥusayn) in Cairo. This rosette in turn may be intimately connected with one of the most common metaphors for the Prophet Muhammad, the rose, an expression of his supernatural beauty familiar from the *ḥilya* and other texts.

The paper will explore the symbolisms of these motifs and their associated overlapping connotations.

**Bernard O’Kane** is Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture at the American University in Cairo, where he has been teaching since 1980. He has also been a visiting professor at Harvard University and the University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of eleven books, among the most recent being *Studies in Persian Architecture* (2021) and *Mosques: the 100 Most Iconic Islamic Houses of Worship* (2019).

## DR SIMON O’MEARA

**Simon O’Meara** is a Senior Lecturer in the History of Architecture & Archaeology of the Islamic Middle East, in the Department of History of Art and Archaeology, School of Arts, SOAS, University of London. His most recent book is entitled *The Ka’ba Orientations: Readings in Islam’s Ancient House* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).



## DR MARCUS PILZ

### The Fatimid Rock Crystal Ewers – Innovation or Variation?

The Medieval Islamic rock crystal industry is often seen as a synonym for the highly sophisticated artistic production of the Fatimid period. This results from the exclusive attribution of these objects to Fatimid Cairo, an attribution repeated in most publications for the last one hundred years. But the medieval sources appear to contradict this assumption as they are silent about any developed industry such as one would expect as the source of such masterpieces. This is even more surprising, considering the staggering amounts of pieces mentioned in the context of the looting of the Fatimid treasury in the mid-11th century. Therefore, the written sources as well as the rock crystal objects themselves deserve reconsideration.

The absolute masterpieces of medieval Islamic production are seven surviving ewers and about ten more thin-walled vessels. In their astonishing variety of designs and motives, they tell a far more complex story, reaching far beyond the Fatimid period to which they were all assigned at a point. The paper analyses these pieces as keys for the understanding of their history and technical as well as iconographical development.

**Marcus Pilz**, after training as a professional gilder and conservator, studied the history of art, German philology, and theology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, where he finished his PhD in 2017. His recently published thesis was the first comprehensive study on the history and stylistic development of medieval Islamic rock crystal objects. After a year at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as the Hanns Swarzenski and Brigitte Horney Swarzenski Fellow for Medieval Art, he joined the Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum in Braunschweig. In 2020 he was appointed curator of the arms and armour department at the Veste Coburg Art Collections.

Marcus Pilz has published works on cultural and artistic exchanges between Europe and the Islamic Mediterranean, most notably on the history of Ottoman objects in Western collections, as well as European decorative arts from the Middle Ages to the early modern period.

## DR DARYOUSH MOHAMMAD POOR

### Fatimid Cosmopolitanism: Political Pragmatism and Ethical Sensibilities

Being aware of the historical background of modernity and remaining conscious of dangers of anachronism, one can make a valid case for the practice of pluralism in the Fatimid state, which in turn led to a reasonable degree of cosmopolitanism. This paper proposes a theory as to why cosmopolitanism, hospitality and openness to the other was an integral aspect of the Fatimid state.



Among the reasons for this quality in the rule of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs was the diversity in Ismaili communities who had already spread to different corners of the Muslim territories. This diversity, which can be seen in the operation of the Fatimid *da'wa*, is reflected in the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds of major Fatimid *dā'īs*. Yet, this only forms a small part of the Fatimid state which had to do with faith matters. The broader context of this diversity can be seen in numerous offices held by non-Ismailis and even non-Muslims in running the affairs of the state.

Why did the Fatimids not feel the need to switch to a monist style of governance rather than this openness? The theory proposed in this paper is that this was mainly due to the primary constituency of the Fatimids claimed their rule to be legitimate rule as their leaders were the successors of the Prophet. A combination of pragmatic political leadership and ethical sensibilities, which becomes clear through an examination of primary sources, is what led to a cosmopolitan style of governance.

**Daryoush Mohammad Poor** is a Senior Research Associate in the Department of Academic Research and Publications at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, and a lecturer for the Department of Graduate Studies. His first monograph, *Authority without Territory: The Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili Imamate* (2014) is a fresh theoretical engagement with contemporary institutions of the Ismaili imamate. His most recent book, *Command and Creation: A Shi'i Cosmological Treatise*, is a Persian edition and English translation of Muḥammad al-Shahrastānī's *Majlis-i maktūb* (2021). He is also a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy in the UK.

## PROFESSOR STÉPHANE PRADINES

### Seventeen Years of Excavations in Fatimid Cairo: What We Really Know about the Ismaili Capital City

Most of what we know about Fatimid material culture comes in fact from Fustāṭ. From 969 to 1171, Fustāṭ, the first Islamic capital city of Egypt, remained the economic engine and hub of the Fatimid caliphate. Fustāṭ was the city of the people, whereas al-Qāhira was the city of the Fatimid caliphal family, princes, nobles, and the army. After the plague epidemic and economic crisis of the early Mamluk period, Fustāṭ was progressively abandoned in favour of areas between the mosque of Ibn Ṭulūn and Bāb Zuwayla, but also the banks of the river Nile, especially the area of Būlāq. In the 19th century, with the arrival of Europeans travellers during the British protectorate and even later, it was common to go to Fustāṭ, which had by that time become a pile of ruins, hills of debris, or *koms* in Egyptian, to collect some pieces of pottery and other objects. Many artefacts followed this route into the collections of national museums abroad, such as the Louvre, the V&A and the Ashmolean.



Scientific archaeological excavations were also organised in Fuṣṭāṭ by Albert Gabriel and Aly Bahgat in the early 20th century. Later, the ruins of Fuṣṭāṭ were investigated by archaeologists such as George Scanlon (1964-1980), Mutsuo Kawatoko (1978-1985) and Roland-Pierre Gayraud in Iṣṭabl ‘Antar (1985-2003). Unfortunately, until we started our project, the archaeological history of al-Qāhira was still a mystery. From 2000 to 2016, our excavations were the first large-scale archaeological excavation in open area done in Fatimid Cairo. We were able to uncover archaeological layers and stratigraphy that provided a historical context to Fatimid objects such as ceramics, metalwork, ivory, bone, wood, and glass. We discovered a small Fatimid garden and a fountain, the first Fatimid rammed-earth fortifications made by Jawhar al-Ṣiqillī in 969, and we exhumed the Fatimid mud brick wall built by Badr al-Jamālī in 1087. Through our research, it is now possible to give new information on the Fatimid walls inter alia, but more importantly, our discoveries have enabled us to re-vision the Fatimid city, its perimeter, main roads and urbanization.

**Stéphane Pradines** is an archaeologist and Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture at the Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC) in London. He was the director of the excavations of the walls of Cairo (Egypt) and many other excavations in the Indian Ocean (Maldives) and East Africa (Gedi in Kenya, Kilwa, and Mafia in Tanzania, Mayotte in Comoros). He is now in charge of the excavations on the fort of Lahore, Pakistan (AKTC-SP). Professor Pradines specialises in Islamic archaeology in sub-Saharan Africa, Indian Ocean mediaeval trade, and the Muslim material culture of war (military architecture and weapons). He is the founding editor of the *Journal of Material Cultures in the Muslim World* (MCMW), an academic journal in full open access published by Brill in partnership with the Aga Khan University and the Aga Khan Museum. His latest work is entitled *Historic Mosques in sub-Saharan Africa, from Timbuktu to Zanzibar*.

## DR JENNIFER A PRUITT

### What's in a Name? The Fatimid Ceramics Workshop of Muslim ibn al-Dahhān

This paper investigates a corpus of medieval lustre-painted objects that bear the inscription Muslim. Scholars of Islamic art have placed this corpus within the context of a Fatimid ceramics workshop, associated with the artist Muslim ibn al-Dahhān. Historically, Islamic art historians, such as Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar, have focused on the painted figuration of these diverse objects. Although the study of ceramics has increasingly (and admirably) taken a material turn, the painted subject matter of these objects has not been addressed recently.

In earlier discussions of these objects, Ettinghausen and Grabar relied on lustre in particular to trace artistic innovations and argue for a distinct ‘Fatimid style’. In this paper, I will problematize the generally accepted model of a linear stylistic development under the Fatimids, demonstrating that a diversity of





styles existed concurrently within a single workshop, representing a variety of tastes, influences, and choices made by medieval artists and/or patrons.

In the discussion of ‘Fatimid style’, scholars have offered opposing views on the context of lustreware production. Some have considered this as an imperial privilege while others have argued on the influence of an urban middle class. I contextualize the production of these works within a broader system of urbanism which transcended the boundaries of class, religion, and ethnicity in medieval Cairo. I argue that it was this system that allowed for the artistic innovations and variety found in Fatimid art.

**Jennifer Pruitt** is the Howard and Ellen Louise Schwartz Associate Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her primary research pursuits are in the mediaeval Islamic world, with a particular focus on the Fatimid dynasty (909-1171). Her book, *Building the Caliphate: Construction, Destruction, and Sectarian Identity in Early Fatimid Architecture* was published by Yale University Press in 2020. She is currently working on a monograph, in which she explores the re-imagining of the “mediaeval” in contemporary arts in the Middle East, with a particular focus on the Arabian Gulf.

## DR ASLISHO QURBONIEV

### Textual Communities and Fatimid Cosmopolitanism

This paper aims to provide a perspective into Fatimid cosmopolitanism through the textual heritage produced under the Fatimid caliphate, including those works produced by agents of the Fatimid *da‘wa*, with special attention given to the provenance and networks of Fatimid authors. At the same time, the paper aims to situate Fatimid texts and authors within the wider Islamic textual world, for which we have a much larger corpus and metadata available for computational analysis. I have prepared a growing collection of machine-readable texts from the Fatimid period, including texts such as the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*, whose connection to Ismaili thought in general and to the Fatimid *da‘wa* in particular needs further investigation. I ask how Fatimid authors incorporated ideas and narratives from other religious and intellectual traditions to shape their own system of thought and which genres, traditions, formats they accepted or rejected.

Methodologically, the paper is a first ever attempt at distant reading, i.e. computational reading of a corpus of Fatimid texts (more than 3.5 million words) with the aim of discerning patterns and relationships which are not obvious to the naked eye. This method will complement and guide my close reading of Fatimid texts, as well as that of other scholars.

**Dr Aslisho Qurboniev** is a historian of the Middle East and North Africa region with a strong interest in Central Asian and Persianate studies and cultures. He read Oriental Studies at Khorog State University, Tajikistan, and is an IIS alumnus (GPISH 2013). Aslisho has an MPhil in Oriental Studies from Oxford University and a PhD in Middle Eastern Studies from the



University of Cambridge for his thesis entitled “Traditions of Learning in Fāṭimid Ifrīqiya (296-362/909-973): Networks, Practices, and Institutions.” Aslisho is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the KITAB project at AKU-ISMC. His primary area of research is the Islamic West, including the Maghrib, al-Andalus, and Sicily. In addition to his contribution to the Open-ITI corpus, Aslisho also works on subjects related to the Islamic East, premodern education, and book culture.

## PROFESSOR YOSSEF RAPOPORT

### The Fatimids and the Indian Ocean: evidence from the *Book of Curiosities*

The maps of the anonymous eleventh-century *Book of Curiosities* demonstrate the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean to the global ambitions of the Fatimid empire. The maps also contribute to the history of global communications at the turn of the previous millennium, as they highlight a route to China that passed through northern India and Tibet.

This talk will examine three separate maps of East and Central Asia: a map of the Indian Ocean, a map of the River Oxus, and a map of the Indus which also shows localities along the Ganges. This third map of the Indian river systems uniquely depicts an overland itinerary from Muslim Sind, then under Fatimid control, through northern India and then probably through Tibet, to China.

The map of the Indian Ocean in the *Book of Curiosities* also shows the Gulf of Aden as a gateway to the ports and islands of East Africa, whose relations with the Fatimids are rarely documented. This recently-discovered cosmography allows us to visualize the Indian Ocean from a Fatimid viewpoint, with Sind and the Yemen as crucial Ismaili anchors for further political, religious and economic penetration.

**Yossef Rapoport** is a professor in Islamic History at Queen Mary University, London, with research focus on the social, cultural and legal history the Middle East, 1100-1500. His publications include *Lost Maps of the Caliphs: Drawing the World in Eleventh-Century Cairo*, co-authored with Emilie Savage-Smith (University of Chicago Press, 2018), and *Islamic Maps* (Bodleian Library, 2019).



## PROFESSOR MARINA RUSTOW

### The Geniza, the Indian Ocean Trade and the Cosmopolitan Fatimid World: Highlights of the Published and Unpublished Sources

The Cairo Geniza, the storeroom for discarded texts in a mediaeval-era synagogue in Cairo, has yielded about 30,000 documents to date, most of them dating to the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods. Several hundred documents come from the archives of Indian Ocean traders, a coherent network connecting Egypt, Yemen and western India. In this lecture, I will map the routes this network plied, which extended even farther than previously acknowledged, well into southeast Asia, and I will revisit the longstanding question of the trade routes connecting the Islamic world with China.

**Marina Rustow** is a social historian of the mediaeval Middle East. She focuses on documents from the Cairo Geniza and other mediaeval manuscript caches, especially letters, legal deeds and Fatimid and Ayyubid state records. She is the Khedouri A. Zilkha Professor of Jewish Civilization in the Near East, Professor of Near Eastern Studies, and Professor of History at Princeton University. She directs the Princeton Geniza Lab, where students and specialists work collaboratively to decipher and digitize Geniza documents, and she is a co-founder of the Princeton Manuscript, Rare Book and Archive Studies Initiative. Her books include *The Lost Archive: Traces of a Caliphate in a Cairo Synagogue and Heresy* and *The Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate*. In 2015, she was named a MacArthur Fellow.

## PROFESSOR PAULA SANDERS

### The Fabric of Fatimid Ceremony

This paper brings together literary and historical, documentary, and art historical analyses to answer the question: “How did textiles convey meaning in Fatimid ceremonies?” Lisa Golombek’s 1980 article, ‘The Draped Universe of Islam’ laid out the critical role of textiles in the material and symbolic life of medieval Muslims. She reminds us that doorways were hung with curtains, bare walls covered with elaborate draperies, floors covered with carpets, and furnishings for sitting and sleeping were largely cushions and mats covered with textiles. Some forty years later, we are in a much better position to elaborate on the questions she first posed, particularly for the Fatimid period in Egypt. Much more work has been done on the Cairo Geniza documents, and our understanding of trade, production, diplomacy, and the circulation of material goods, combined with more recent studies on the ceremonial and architecture of the Fatimids and their contemporaries, allows us to consider the complicated ways in which textiles of different kinds conveyed meaning.

I hope to demonstrate in this presentation how the production and circulation of textiles through gift-giving by the caliph as well as through the marketplace





(not only luxury clothing, but also fabrics used in making tents, furnishings, and the various drapes in mosques and the palaces, all of which are described in historical sources) together conveyed messages to the court, the army, the population, and diplomatic visitors about the power and authority of the Fatimid dynasty.

**Paula Sanders** is Joseph and Joanna Nazro Mullen Professor in Humanities and Professor of History at Rice University in Houston, Texas. She writes about the history and historiography of the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt, the history of Cairo, and the history of medieval Jewish communities in the lands of Islam. She is currently engaged in a project on the history of material culture in the Fatimid period.

## PROFESSOR AYMAN FUAD SAYYID

### Cairo as a Centre of Fatimid Celebrations

The conquest of Egypt was the Fatimids' most important achievement—one that guaranteed them a special place in Islamic history. Their conquest was in effect a far-reaching religious, cultural and social upheaval accompanied by a shift in the system of governance. For the first time in Islamic history, Egypt was governed as a state that showed not the slightest loyalty to Baghdad. Under the Fatimids, Egypt's role in the Islamic world was transformed in the most essential manner. The Fatimids led a great religious, philosophical and social movement whose aim was the transformation and renewal of Islam. They saw their Imams as the most deserving to govern the Islamic world. Their arrival in Egypt in the middle of the fourth century AH/tenth century CE meant that for the first time there had arisen real competition for the governance of the Islamic world with two caliphates vying for control: the Sunni caliphate in Baghdad and a second Shi'i caliphate in Cairo.

Even though the Fatimids failed to win the entire Islamic world over to their ranks, due to their adherence to their ideological challenges which set them outside the general consensus of the Muslims, history would record Cairo's leading role in keeping foreign influence out of the Islamic world after the fall of Baghdad, starting from the Crusades through the Mongol invasion and up to modern times.

It had not been the intention of the Fatimid general Jawhar al-Ṣaqlabī, or his lord, the Imam al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh, to found a city in the accepted meaning of the word. Al-Maqrīzī notes that Cairo had been built to as a residence for the caliph, his wives, soldiers and intimates, as a fortified stronghold and place of refuge. He adds that Cairo continued to be the abode of the caliphate, the locus of rule and a stronghold occupied only by the caliph, his military and the intimates he honoured with his presence.



Thus, in its first period Cairo was a fortress that comprised a great palace, barracks for soldiers, and the seat of governance. It was planned to be the administrative and military capital of the Fatimid system and a centre for the religious and cultural propagation of Ismailism, known as the *da'wa*, although Fustāṭ, which had reached its apogee in the early years of the fifth century AH/11th century CE, was the country's commercial and economic metropolis.

Throughout the Fatimid era, Cairo was the theatre of the processional celebrations headed by the Fatimid Imams, and the centre of the Ismaili *da'wa* in the Islamic world as represented by the teaching sessions (*majālis al-ḥikma*) led by the Fatimid *dā'ī*-in-chief in the "Cairo mosque" which came to be known as al-Azhar.

**Ayman Fuad Sayyid** studied history at Cairo University, receiving his Masters in 1980. He gained his doctorate from the University of Paris, with his thesis: *La Capitale de l'Egypt jusqu'à l'époque fatimide* (Beirut, 1998). From 1977-1980 he worked for the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) in Cairo. He has also worked at the Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO), Cairo, and al-Azhar University. He was named a visiting professor at the University of Paris (2000 and 2002), Tokyo (2000), Kuwait (2007) and the King Saud University in Riyadh (2012).

His works published in Arabic include *Maṣādir tārīkh al-Yaman fī al-ʿaṣr al-islāmī* (1974) and *al-Dawla al-Fāṭimiyya fī Miṣr – tafsīr jadīd* (1992). He has published critical editions of manuscripts dealing with the Islamic and Christian history of Egypt by writers such as Ibn Muyassar, Ibn al-Ma'mūn, al-Maqrīzī and the Fatimid *dā'ī* Imād al-Dīn Idrīs, translated other titles into Arabic, and written works on the topography of Cairo and the history of the Mamluk sultans.

Between 1983 and 2013, he was awarded the following: Egyptian state prize for history, the Jordanian 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Shūmān prize, the Egyptian prize for social sciences, the Iranian international book prize, and the Egyptian 1<sup>st</sup> class medal for the sciences and arts. In addition, he is the president of the Egyptian Association for Historical Studies in Cairo.

## PROFESSOR AVINOAM SHALEM

### Back to Black: The Rediscovery of Black-ground – a global visual phenomenon at the age of the Fatimids?

Dark-coloured, namely black, ceramic figure was one of the famous styles of Greek art. At its core was the aesthetic decision to use dark pigment for highlighting and accentuating the contours of figures and objects drawn on dark surfaces. This specific style contributed to the emergence of line as an expressive and even dramatic feature in art. Around the year 1000, woven Arabic inscriptions in white and bright colours started to appear on black background. The strong visual effect achieved by contrasting dark and light colours was evident. The Arabic inscriptions became more visible and powerful and enhanced the dramatic quality of the woven artifacts. Similar to the 19th-century nocturne paintings, in which 'the night' became so evocative, haunting and full of opportunities, the medieval artistic rediscovery of darkness as an



aesthetic form, especially in Fatimid Mediterranean, should be analyzed and rethought.

Yet, what were the forerunners for the emergence of this specific visual phenomenon around 1000? Can one suggest a global aesthetic notion for this artistic urge? Can one speak about medieval melanomania (craze for black)?

This lecture reflects on the appearance of woven Arabic inscriptions on black ground and aims at suggesting some rationalizations for this aesthetic phenomenon.

**Avinoam Shalem** is an art historian. He holds the Riggio Professorship for the Arts of Islam at Columbia University in New York. Before joining Columbia University in 2013, he was Professor for the Arts of Islam at Munich University. His main field of interest is in medieval artistic interactions in the Mediterranean, medieval aesthetics and the historiography of the field.

## **DR FAHMIDA SULEMAN**

### **Looking Eastward: Central Asian and Chinese Inspirations in Fatimid Art**

The Fatimid dynasty not only set up a rival caliphate in Egypt from 969–1171 CE to pose a direct challenge to the political and religious authority of the Abbasids of Baghdad, but the urban cities within the Fatimid domains also became renowned centres of artistic and cultural exchange that soon outpaced Abbasid cultural domination. The Fatimid dynasty's economic and diplomatic policies fostered artistic and cultural exchange within the broader Mediterranean region and beyond. The Fatimids' inclination towards the East is attested from its establishment of, and control over, a vast network of trade between the Mediterranean world and India, Central Asia and China. Egypt's political and economic stability attracted artisans and performers from various parts of the Islamic world to the capital, Cairo, resulting in works of art that fused many aesthetic traditions. The ruling elite also encouraged their societies to adopt foreign fashions and tastes by presenting themselves as public advocates of a distinctive cosmopolitan architectural, artistic, and ceremonial style.

This was the context in which a Central Asian dance, described as 'sleeve-dancing', burst into popularity in medieval Cairo. The iconography of the Central Asian sleeve-dancer appears in both courtly and urban contexts in this period, from palace decoration and ivory carvings, to the more widely distributed ceramics painted with lustre pigments. This paper examines both literary and material evidence on the origin and spread of sleeve-dancing in the medieval Islamic world and brings to light a hitherto unexplored aspect of



Central Asian and Chinese inspirations on the arts of Fatimid Egypt both in the courtly and urban spheres.

**Fahmida Suleman** is Curator of the Islamic World collections at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, and teaches courses on Islamic art at the University of Toronto. Prior to this, Fahmida was a curator at the British Museum for ten years. For her Doctoral thesis at Oxford University, she analysed the iconography of lustre ceramics produced in Fatimid Egypt using visual and literary sources. Her most recent publication on this topic is, 'Reaching New Heights: Material Culture, Ceremonial and Diplomacy in Fatimid Egypt,' in *Made For the Eye of One Who Sees: Canadian Contributions to the Study of Islamic Art and Archaeology*, eds. M. Milwright and E. Baboula (2022, forthcoming).

## DR YASSER TABBAA

### Displaying the Hidden: Fatimid Public Texts in Floriated Kufic

Fatimid architecture is generally thought to be the earliest style of Islamic architecture to display a street façade, first tentatively in terms of projecting portals and then quite assertively by means of portals, minarets, and long *ṭirāz*-like inscriptions. But the highly ambiguous nature of the newly developed floriated Kufic in which the inscriptions were carved suggests that these Fatimid public texts display as much as they conceal. They publically display, often at eye level, lengthy Qur'anic verses and pious invocations but embed them in an ambiguous script that could only have been read by those who already knew the texts and understood their deeper meaning.

This paper argues that the use of the ambiguous floriated Kufic style in nearly all Fatimid public texts embodies one of the fundamental tenets of the Ismaili doctrine — the distinction between the external or exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the internal or esoteric (*bāṭin*) aspects of religious texts. The paper further argues that the switch from floriated Kufic to easily legible *thuluth* inscriptions not only declares the end of the Fatimid epoch and the beginning of a new era but also shatters the cherished duality of meaning implicit in Fatimid inscriptions. Subsuming the mystical within the informational and the *bāṭin* within the *ẓāhir*, the new public inscriptions embodied and propagated the exoteric and encompassing tendencies of the Sunni revival.

**Yasser Tabbaa** has written primarily on the architecture, calligraphy, and ornament of the medieval Islamic world, with occasional forays into contemporary religious architecture. In addition to his numerous articles, Tabbaa has published four books: *Constructions of Power and Piety in Medieval Aleppo* (Penn State Press, 1996); *The Transformation of Islamic Art During the Sunni Revival* (University of Washington Press, 2001, 2002); *Najaf: The Gate of Wisdom* (Paris, 2016); and most recently *The Production of Meaning in Islamic Architecture and Ornament* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021). Yasser Tabbaa has taught Islamic art, architecture, and urbanism at several US and Middle Eastern universities, including the University Texas-Austin, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University Michigan, Oberlin College, and NYU-Abu Dhabi.



**DR JAMEL VELJI**

**(Re)making Time, (Re)making Place: Preliminary Considerations on Cosmopolitanism and Sacred Space**

What can an analysis of space tell us about early Fatimid religion? Religion, so contemporary theorists tell us, is an inherently social phenomenon that is foundationally expressed in various spaces, from the architectural to the eschatological, from the hierarchical to the ritual. Through a spatial analysis of early writings on the *da'wa*, this paper seeks to show how the production of selected esoteric discourses can be seen as operating in relation to cosmopolitan space, a physical space in which most subjects were not Ismaili. As some of my examples will address the movement from the *ẓāhir* to the *bāṭin*, it is also hoped that this paper will begin to address a central question in Fatimid studies: how and why *ta'wīl* continued as the Fatimids transitioned from politico-religious movement to state.

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**PROFESSOR SHAFIQUE N VIRANI**

**To be Born... and Born Again: Exploring a Shared Symbol in Christianity and Islam**

The Gospel of John reports an intriguing conversation between Jesus and the Pharisee, Nicodemus:

*Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit." (John 3:3-5)*

The Fatimid savant Ja'far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 346/957) alludes directly to this exchange in his *Esoteric Interpretation of the Purifying Tribute (Ta'wīl al-zakāt)* and writes of the second birth in terms of "establishing knowledge of reality and spreading wisdom." His engagement with pre-Islamic scriptures and his efforts to adduce their spiritual meaning were to remain significant activities for the Fatimid luminaries who followed him. Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī





(d. after 411/1020), for example, quoted directly from the Torah in Hebrew and the Gospels in Syriac. This paper will explore the esoteric interpretation of birth and being born again in the writings of Fatimid authors including those of Ja'far ibn Manṣūr (d. ca. 346/957), al-Qādī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974), Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020), al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078), and Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 462/1070).

**Shafique N Virani** (PhD, Harvard University) was appointed Distinguished Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto and founded the Centre for South Asian Civilizations. His research focusses on Ismaili and Twelver Shi'ism, Quranic studies, Sufism, and Arabic, Persian, and South Asian Muslim literatures. Translated into over 20 languages, his work has received awards and recognition from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the American Academy of Religion, and the Middle East Studies Association, and UNESCO among others.

## PROFESSOR PAUL E WALKER

### Fatimid Public Pronouncements: the Chancery as the Voice of a Shiite Dynasty

The great Mamluk era expert on chancery practice and the author of the monumental *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī ṣinā'at al-inshā'*, al-Qalqashandī (d. 1418), comments favourably on the Fatimid chancery, noting that it was one of the earliest in Islam. He obviously knew of others before it but appears to mean here that the Fatimids were the first to create a formal bureau of government precisely for this purpose. “[T]hey devoted an extreme amount of attention to the chancery (*dīwān al-inshā'*) and its clerks (*kuttāb*). Its value greatly increased because of them and its repute spread far and wide. The chancery was staffed by them with a collection of the most talented and eloquent of clerks, including among them both Muslims and Dhimmis” (*Ṣubḥ*, 1: 96)

Although a history of the Fatimid chancery has as yet not been written, the material for it is abundant. Its work is often mentioned explicitly in the historic chronicles, perhaps more often in fact than any other single bureau of government. Two treatises by members of the *dīwān al-inshā'* —Ibn Khalaf's *Mawādd al-bayān* and al-Ṣayrafī's *al-Qānūn fī dīwān al-rasā'il* — survive (the former in part only). The names of heads of the bureau are often given in the sources, frequently in association with this or that decree which the person in question composed. Examples of a full range of chancery products exist, many copied by al-Qalqashandī himself as illustrations of how to write a particular type of document (for examples: letters to a foreign power or decrees of appointment to office). In all we have perhaps as many as 300 examples.

Prominent experts working in the Fatimid chancery were often not Ismaili, and more than a few not even Muslim. Yet seemingly any of them could at will draft a text that conformed to the religious doctrines supporting the Ismaili imamate, that expressed the wishes and policies of the Fatimid state, and yet that sounded



fairly normal and uncontroversial, thus avoiding arousing enmity needlessly. In short the skill of the clerks was impressively adaptive to the needs of both politics and religion.

**Paul E Walker** (PhD, University of Chicago, 1974) was director of the American Research Center in Cairo for over ten years (1976-86). He is currently Deputy Director for Academic Programs, Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago. He has published numerous papers and over a dozen books, among them *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī* (Cambridge, 1993); *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shi‘i Witness* (with Wilferd Madelung) (London, 2000); *Exploring an Islamic Empire* (London, 2002); *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs* (London, 2009), *Caliph of Cairo: al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, 996-1021* (Cairo, 2009), and *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, by Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī, critical edition of the Arabic text (with Wilferd Madelung) (Tehran, 2016), and most recently *Affirming the Imamate: Early Fatimid Teachings in the Islamic West, An Arabic critical edition and English translation of works attributed to Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī and His Brother Abu’l-‘Abbās* (with W. Madelung) (London, 2021). His current research focuses on popular ritual, social elites, governing institutions, and Ismaili doctrine in the Fatimid and Alamut periods.

## DR GREGORY WILLIAMS

### A Fatimid City: Recent Discoveries from the Swiss-Egyptian Mission in Aswan

Mediaeval Aswan was often identified as the frontier town at the boundary between Islamic Egypt and Christian Nubia. The area is well known for its cemeteries, with impressive Fatimid mausoleums and the numerous funerary stelae found there. But medieval Aswan was a substantial urban centre. At times it was a provincial capital, a military garrison and an important point along trade and pilgrimage routes to the Red Sea or the gold and emerald mines of the Eastern Desert.

Over the course of the last twenty years, the joint Swiss-Egyptian Mission in Syene/Old Aswan have carried out rescue excavations which have critically expanded our knowledge of the city. Medieval Aswan outgrew the Roman and Late Antique town, likely reaching its greatest extent and largest population, until modern times, during the Fatimid period. Architectural and material finds in and around the city, along with a variety of other sources, speak to the remarkable religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity of Fatimid Aswan and its hinterlands. The excavations within Aswan have helped to uncover evidence of one of the most important urban centres in the region during this period, including the limits and layout of the city and its significant local industries. While connections have been drawn between Aswan and other parts of the Islamic world during the Fatimid period, excavations within the city have also illuminated important links to medieval Nubia and the Eastern Desert of Egypt and Sudan, regions which were contemporaneously experiencing significant economic growth and dynamic social transformations of their own.



**Gregory Williams** teaches courses on Islamic art, architecture and archaeology. He completed his MA in the Arab and Islamic Civilizations department at the American University in Cairo and carried out his doctoral studies at the University of Bonn's research unit for Islamic Archaeology. His research is involved with the documentation and interpretation of the materiality of the mediaeval Islamic world, particularly in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. He has participated in archaeological excavations and survey projects of mediaeval and Islamic sites in Israel, Jordan, Palestine, and Spain, and currently participates in the joint Swiss-Egyptian mission in Aswan, Egypt.