



## FATIMIDS

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**FATIMIDS**, relations with Persia. A major Ismaʿili Shiʿite dynasty, the Fatimids founded their own caliphate, in rivalry with the ʿAbbasids, and ruled over different parts of the Islamic world, from North Africa and Sicily to Palestine and Syria. The Fatimid period was also the golden age of Ismaʿili thought and literature. Established in 297/909 in Efrīqīya, the seat of the Fatimids was later transferred to Egypt in 362/973, and the dynasty was finally overthrown by Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn (Saladin) in 567/1171, when the fourteenth and last Fatimid caliph, al-ʿĀzed (555-67/1160-71), lay dying in Cairo. The Fatimids, who traced their ancestry to the Prophet's daughter Fāṭema and her husband ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb, the first Shiʿite imam, were also acknowledged as the rightful imams by different Ismaʿili communities not only within their own dominions, where Ismaʿilism served as the state religion, but also in many other Muslim lands, including Persia and the adjacent regions (see Daftary, 1990, pp. 144-273, 615-59; Canard, "Fāṭimids," pp. 850-62). The Fatimids had diverse political relations with Persia and the major dynasties ruling there, which provide the focus of the present article.

The installment of the Ismaʿili imam to the Fatimid caliphate represented the crowning success of the early Ismaʿili mission (*daʿwa* lit. "call"), which had also penetrated different parts of Persia, especially Fārs, Kūzestān, the Jebāl, and Khorasan, where Ismaʿili *dāʿīs* or missionaries had been active at least from around 260/873 (see Stern, 1960, pp. 56-90, repr. in idem, 1983, pp. 189-233; Daftary, 1990, pp. 118-23, 607-10). When the central leader of the Ismaʿili movement and the future founder of the Fatimid dynasty, ʿAbd-Allāh (or



ʿObayd-Allāh) al-Mahdī, openly claimed the imamate of the Ismaʿilis in 286/899, his claim was accepted by many of the Ismaʿilis of the Iranian lands and elsewhere, now designated as Fatimid Ismaʿilis, and refused by others who henceforth became specifically known as the Qarāmeṭa or Carmatians (see Madelung, 1959, pp. 34 ff.; Daftary, 1993, pp. 123-39; idem, “Carmatians,” pp. 823 ff.). The Fatimid Ismaʿilis soon succeeded in founding an Ismaʿili government (*dawla*) in North Africa under the leadership of their imam. From early on, the Fatimids actively aspired to extend their hegemony over the central and eastern Muslim lands (see Canard, 1942-47, pp. 850-62). The desire of the Fatimids to reunite the Muslims under their own Ismaʿili Shiʿite caliphate provided one of the main guiding principles of the Fatimid state’s foreign policy; it also explains why the Fatimids, unlike the ʿAbbasids, did not discontinue their *daʿwa* activities after the establishment of their state, while continuing to refer to their missionary activities as *al-daʿwa al-hādīa*, or the rightly-guiding mission. It also explains the lasting religio-political conflicts and rivalries between the Fatimids and the ʿAbbasids, the spokesmen of Sunni Islam and their most obvious adversaries. It was under such circumstances that the Fatimid capital served as the central headquarters of an Ismaʿili movement extending from North Africa and Egypt to Transoxania and Sind—a movement that was naturally also opposed to all the regimes ruling over the Iranian lands in the name of the ʿAbbasids.

Indeed, as a reflection of their religio-political ideals, the Fatimids divided the world into twelve *jazāʿer* (singular: *jazīra*) for the purposes of their *daʿwa* activities; each *jazīra* representing a separate and somewhat independent region for the penetration of the Fatimid *daʿwa*. Deylam, standing for Persia, represented one of these twelve regions (see Qāzī Noʿmān, II, p. 74, III, pp. 48-49; Sejestānī, p. 172). It is also interesting to note that Ebn Ḥawqal (p. 310), who traveled through eastern Persia and Transoxania around 358/969 and may have been a crypto-Ismaʿili himself, mentions Khorasan as a *jazīra* of the Fatimid *daʿwa* (*daʿwat ahl al-Maḡreb*), further adding that the Ismaʿilis of Baluchistan belonged to that *jazīra*. At any rate, the Fatimid *dāʿīs* operated as secret envoys and agents of the Fatimid *daʿwa* in Persia and other eastern lands, summoning the Muslims there to the allegiance of the Fatimid caliph-imam (see Stern, 1972, pp. 446 ff., repr. in idem, 1983, 247 ff.; Daftary, 1990, pp. 224 ff.).

It was under such circumstances that the ʿAbbasids from early on launched their own religio-political and literary campaigns against the Fatimids, aiming



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

Meanwhile, the Fatimids' Isma'ili *da'wa* had continued to be propagated in Persia and other eastern lands of the 'Abbasid caliphate. The Fatimid *dā'īs* operating in Persia had begun to be particularly successful from the time of al-Mo'ezz (341-65/953-75), the fourth caliph-imam, who conquered Egypt for his dynasty, founded Cairo, and made serious efforts to gain the support of the dissident eastern Carmatians in order to re-establish ideological unity in the Isma'ili movement (Daftary, 1990, pp. 176 ff.). In particular, al-Mo'ezz succeeded in winning over Abū Ya'qūb Sejestānī (d. after 361/971), the famous *dā'ī* of Khorasan, who now endorsed the imamate of the Fatimids and propagated their cause in Khorasan, Sīstān, and Makrān, where numerous Isma'ilis rallied to the side of the Fatimid *da'wa*. The Fatimid *dā'īs* also succeeded around 347/958 in establishing a Fatimid vassal state centered in Moltān, in northern India, where the *koṭba* was now read in the name of the Fatimid caliphs, instead of their 'Abbasid rivals. This Isma'ili state survived until 396/1005-6 when sultan Maḥmūd of Ġazna invaded Moltān and made its last Isma'ili ruler, Abu'l-Fotūḥ Dāwūd b. Naṣr, a tributary. In 401/1010-11, Moltān was actually annexed to the Ghaznavid dominions, and the Isma'ilis of



Moltān were massacred (Gardīzī, pp. 278-80; Moqaddasī, pp. 481-2, 485; Jorbādaqānī, pp. 278-80).

The Fatimid *da'wa* was greatly expanded in Persia and Iraq in the time of al-Ḥākem, who also concerned himself with the organization of the Fatimid *da'wa* and the training of the *dā'īs* (Walker, 1993, pp. 161 ff.). A large number of *dā'īs* were assigned to these eastern territories, where they addressed their propaganda to various social strata in urban and rural areas. Foremost among the Fatimid *dā'īs* operating in Persia and Iraq during the reign of al-Ḥākem was Ḥamīd-al-Dīn Kermānī (d. after 411/1020), who for that reason bore the epithet of *ḥojjat al-'Erāqayn*. An eminent philosopher and perhaps the most learned Isma'ili theologian of the entire Fatimid period, Kermānī maintained close relations with the Fatimid *da'wa* headquarters in Cairo, and was summoned there in the early years of the 5th/11th century to argue against those extremist *dā'īs* who had begun to preach the divinity of Ḥākem, laying the foundations of the Druze religion. The activities of Kermānī and other Fatimid *dā'īs* soon bore fruit in Persia and Iraq, where the Shi'ites, being pressured by the 'Abbasids who were now acquiring a greater degree of independence from the tutelage of the Shi'ite Buyids, were more readily attracted to Fatimid Isma'ilism. Indeed, a number of local *amīrs* in Iraq now acknowledged the suzerainty of the Fatimids. Being alarmed by the success of the Fatimid *da'wa* so close to Baghdad itself, the 'Abbasid caliph al-Qāder (381-422/991-1031) launched his own anti-Fatimid campaign which culminated in 402/1011 in his sponsorship of a manifesto issued in Baghdad refuting the Fatimid ancestry of Ḥākem and his predecessors. Nevertheless, the Fatimid *da'wa* continued unabated in the east, and it is even reported that al-Ḥākem attempted in 403/1012-13, though without results, to win the allegiance of sultan Maḥmūd of Ġazna, who had three years earlier massacred the Isma'ilis of Moltān (Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 181; Jorbādaqānī, pp. 369-73, containing the fullest details of this Fatimid embassy sent to Maḥmūd). Maḥmūd was clearly more interested in maintaining friendly relations with the Fatimids' enemies, the 'Abbasids, who issued investiture patents and honorific titles to the Ghaznavids. This pro-'Abbasid policy was retained by Maḥmūd's successors; in 423/1032, sultan Mas'ūd tried and executed Ḥasanak, a former Ghaznavid vizier, who had earlier accepted a robe of honor from the Fatimid al-Zāher (411-27/1021-36), on charges of being an Isma'ili (Bayhaqī, pp. 71-72, 220-36; Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, pp. 196-97; Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 182-84). However, by the beginning of the 5th/11th century, most of the Carmatian communities of Persia had either embraced Fatimid Isma'ilism or had disintegrated, while



the Carmatians of Bahrain themselves had suffered damaging defeats from the Buyid armies and some local tribal chiefs.

In the long reign of the eighth Fatimid caliph al-Mostaṣṣer (427-87/1036-94), the Fatimid state embarked on its rapid decline, while the *da'wa* activities outside the Fatimid dominions reached their peak. Like many other Muslim dynasties, the Fatimids now faced the growing menace of the Saljuq Turks, who were rapidly establishing their own supremacy over Persia and other eastern lands, replacing the Buyids as the real masters of the 'Abbasid caliphate. Soon after Ṭoḡrīl entered Baghdad in 447/1055, he indeed announced his intention of sending an expedition against the Fatimids in Syria and Egypt. However, dissent within the Saljuq camp and the pro-Fatimid activities of Arslān Basāsīrī in Iraq prevented the founder of the Saljuq sultanate from implementing his campaign against the Fatimids, whose cause now achieved an unprecedented though short-lived success in Iraq. Receiving financial and military assistance from the Fatimids, and benefiting from the success of the Fatimid *da'wa* in Iraq, Basāsīrī won the support of various local *amīrs* and, in 448/1056-57, the *koṭba* was read in the name of Mostaṣṣer in Mosul, Wāseṭ, Kūfa, and elsewhere in Iraq. In 450/1058, Basāsīrī entered Baghdad itself, where the *koṭba* was pronounced in the name of the Fatimid al-Mostaṣṣer for a whole year; however, the 'Abbasid caliph al-Qā'em was retained in Baghdad to the great disappointment of al-Mostaṣṣer, who had expected to receive him in Cairo. Subsequently, Basāsīrī failed to seize Kūzestān for the Fatimids; and the political success of the Fatimids in Iraq was brought to an end when Basāsīrī was defeated and killed by the forces of Ṭoḡrīl in Ḍu'l-qa'da 451/December 1059 (see Ṣahīr-al-Dīn Nīšābūrī, pp. 19-20; Rāvandī, pp. 107-10; Bondārī, pp. 12-18; Ebn Taḡrīberrī, V, pp. 5-12). It has now become evident that the renowned Fatimid *dā'ī* al-Mo'ayyad fi'l-Dīn Šīrāzī had played a major role in the success of the Basāsīrī episode in Iraq (see Mo'ayyad, pp. 94-184).

The most prominent *dā'ī* of al-Mostaṣṣer's time, Mo'ayyad was born in Shiraz into a Deylamī Isma'īli family; his father Abū 'Emrān Mūsā was himself a prominent *dā'ī* with some influence in the Buyid circles of Fārs. Mo'ayyad succeeded his father as the leader of the *da'wa* in Fārs and in 429/1037-38 he entered the service of the Buyid Abū Kālījār Marzbān (see 'EMĀD-AL-DĪN MARZBĀN), who ruled over various Buyid territories from his capital at Shiraz. Mo'ayyad succeeded in converting Abū Kālījār and many of his Deylamī troops to Fatimid Isma'īlism and now began to propagate the Fatimid



doctrines openly, but he was eventually obliged to flee from Persia to avoid 'Abbasid persecution. Mo'ayyad arrived in Cairo in 438/1046 and thereupon began to participate in the affairs of the Fatimid *dawla* and *da'wa*. In 450/1058, Mo'ayyad was appointed *dā'ī-al-do'āt*, and with the exception of a brief period in 453/1061, he held that highest post in the Fatimid *da'wa* hierarchy until shortly before his death in 470/1077.

The Fatimid *da'wa* activities outside of the Fatimid empire reached their peak in al-Mostaṣfer's time. The *da'wa* was now particularly active in Iraq and various parts of Persia, notably Fārs; Isfahan; Ray, where Ḥasan-e Šabbāḥ (q.v.), the future leader of the Nezārī Isma'īlis, was converted; Khorasan; Badaḳšān; and other eastern Iranian lands. The Fatimid *da'wa* had continued to exist also in Transoxania, where Isma'īlism had secret followers under the later Samanids and in subsequent times. Among its adherents, mention may be made of the father and brother of Ebn Sīnā (Avicenna; q.v.). In 436/1044-45, a large number of Isma'īlis who acknowledged the imamate of al-Mostaṣfer were massacred in Bukhara and elsewhere in Transoxania on the orders of the local Qarakhanid ruler Boḡrā Khan. But Isma'īlism survived in Central Asia, and later in 488/1095, Aḥmad b. Kezr, another Qarakhanid ruler there, was accused by the local Sunni '*ulamā'* of having converted to Isma'īlism and was executed (Maqrīzī, II, pp. 191-92; Barthold, *Turkestan*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 251, 304-5, 316-18). Nāṣer-e Qosrow, the eminent philosopher, poet and traveler, was the most prominent Fatimid *dā'ī* of the eastern Iranian lands in al-Mostaṣfer's time. In many of his poems, he openly eulogizes the imam al-Mostaṣfer and the *dā'ī* Mo'ayyad Šīrāzī. Nāṣer, too, went to Cairo in 439/1047, and stayed there for three years to further his Isma'īli education; during that period he saw al-Mostaṣfer and also established a close relationship with Mo'ayyad. From the time of his return to Balḵ in 444/1052, Nāṣer began to propagate Fatimid Isma'īlism as a *dā'ī*, or, according to himself (Nāṣer-e Qosrow, *Zād al-mosāferīn*, p. 397; idem, *Jāme' al-ḥekmatayn*, pp. 15, 16-17), as the *hojja* of Khorasan. Sometime before 453/1061, Nāṣer was obliged to take refuge in the valley of Yomgān, his permanent abode of exile, from where he maintained his correspondence, like other *dā'īs* of the Iranian lands, with the headquarters of the Fatimid *da'wa* in Cairo. Nāṣer-e Qosrow continued to propagate Isma'īlism throughout Badaḳšān and died in Yomgān at an unknown date after 465/1072-73.

By the final decades of al-Mostaṣfer's imamate, the Isma'īlis of Persia and the adjacent lands in the Muslim East had rallied to the side of the Fatimid *da'wa*,



centrally directed from Cairo, and acknowledged the Fatimid al-Mostanşer as the rightful imam of the time. At least by the early 460s/1070s, the Persian Isma'ilis in the Saljuq territories seem to have owned the authority of a single chief *dā'ī* who had his secret headquarters at Isfahan, the main Saljuq capital. The chief *dā'ī* in Persia at this time was 'Abd-al-Malek b. 'Aṭṭāš, who was responsible for launching the career of Ḥasan-e Şabbāḥ. In 464/1072, Ḥasan, who had then recently converted to Fatimid Isma'ilism, was brought to the attention of Ebn 'Aṭṭāš, who appointed the talented Ḥasan to a post in the *da'wa* organization. In 469/1076-77, when Mo'ayyad was still the *dā'ī-al-do'āt* in Cairo, Ḥasan set off for Egypt, on Ebn 'Aṭṭāš's suggestion, to further his training as a Fatimid *dā'ī*. Ḥasan stayed in Cairo and Alexandria for about three years, returning to Isfahan in 473/1081. During the next nine years, Ḥasan, who was then clearly aware of the declining power of the Fatimids while contemplating the launching of an armed revolt against the Saljuq Turks, traveled extensively in Persia, searching for an ideal site to establish the headquarters of his anti-Saljuq revolutionary movement. Ḥasan, who was eventually appointed as the *dā'ī* of Deylam, now greatly invigorated the Fatimid Isma'ili cause in Persia; and his seizure of the mountain fortress of Alamūt (q.v.), in 483/1090, marked the effective foundation of what was to become the Nezārī Isma'ili state of Persia, also initiating the open revolt of the Persian Isma'ilis against the Saljuqs.

In the meantime, the Saljuq sultanate had been consolidated under Alp Arslān and his son and successor Malekšāh, who both depended greatly on the administrative talents of their learned vizier Neẓām-al-Molk. Ḥasan-e Şabbāḥ and the Persian Isma'ilis now found an ardent enemy in the person of Neẓām-al-Molk, who from early on despatched Saljuq expeditions against Alamūt and other Isma'ili strongholds in Rūdbār and Qohestān; he also devoted a large section in his *Sīāsāt-nāma* (text pp. 282-305, tr. pp. 208-26) to the condemnation of the Isma'ilis, reflecting his anxiety over their growing importance in Persia. The Isma'ilis of Persia found a brief respite when Neẓām-al-Molk was assassinated in 485/1092 and Malekšāh died soon after in the same year. The Persian Isma'ilis now consolidated and extended their position in a number of scattered territories, seizing or building more mountain fortresses in inaccessible places. The anti-Saljuq revolutionary activities of the Persian Isma'ilis were spreading successfully when the Fatimid al-Mostanşer died in 487/1094 and the unified Fatimid Isma'ili movement was rent by its greatest internal conflict, the Nezārī-Mosta'li schism. Nezār, al-Mostanşer's heir-designate, was brutally deprived of his succession rights, while his much



younger brother al-Mostaʿlī was installed to the Fatimid caliphate by the all-powerful Fatimid vizier Afzal. Al-Mostaʿlī was at the same time acknowledged as his father's successor to the imamate by the Egyptian Ismaʿilis, a good portion of the Syrian Ismaʿilis, as well as the Ismaʿili communities of Yemen and western India; these Ismaʿilis, who were now under the direct influence of the Fatimid regime, became known as Mostaʿliya, recognizing al-Mostaʿlī and the later Fatimid caliphs as their imams. On the other hand, the Ismaʿilis of the Saljuq dominions, notably those of Persia and Iraq and a fraction of the Syrian Ismaʿilis, acknowledged Nezār and his descendents as their imams and became designated as Nezārīya.

The Persian Ismaʿilis, then under the overall leadership of Ḥasan-e Šabbāḥ who was already pursuing an independent policy, completely severed their relations with the Fatimid (al-Mostaʿlī) *daʿwa* headquarters in Cairo. The Ismaʿilis of Persia and other eastern lands had now in effect founded the independent Nezārī *daʿwa*.

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



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