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Al-Maqrīzī and the Fatimids

The role of al-Maqrīzī in the historiography of the Fatimids is immense; he looms so large in fact that what he wrote often seems to overwhelm all other sources of information about them. Regardless of how one assesses his strengths and weaknesses as a historian in other respects, his contributions in this one area remain critical in any reconstruction or assessment of Fatimid history. Moreover, if he offered nothing other than the preservation of older sources, that would be enough. He provides a mass of material where little else exists.¹

And several sources not by him nevertheless depend on him. For the study of the Fatimids, where so few works survive, especially for Egypt, those that we know because of his efforts stand out. One prime example is what remains of the Egyptian historian Tāj al-Dīn Ibn Muyassar's *History of Egypt (Tārīkh Miṣr)*. Ibn Muyassar's dates are 628–77 and thus he precedes al-Maqrīzī by over a century and a half. Thought by many to have been the most important work on the Fatimid period before al-Maqrīzī, it has long been known that this chronicle was al-Maqrīzī's main source for the reconstruction of a major period—a fact easily demonstrated by comparing the surviving text of Ibn Muyassar with al-Maqrīzī's Fatimid history, the *Itti'āz*. But in fact, what we possess of Ibn Muyassar is merely a set of detailed notes taken from the original by al-Maqrīzī himself in the year 814. It is not in all likelihood a verbatim transcription. The surviving manuscript is, moreover, only a copy of those same notes.

There are other less dramatic examples. Only a small section of the massive history by al-Musabbihī (d. 420/1029)² has been recovered and it is now in the Escorial. On the title page of that manuscript is the signature of al-Maqrīzī, indicating apparently that he once possessed and/or used it.³ Similarly, al-Maqrīzī's name and seal are visible on the title page of the Vienna manuscript of Ibn

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¹On the historiography of the Fatimids see in general my *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and Its Sources* (London, 2002).

²The amir al-Mukhtār 'Izz al-Mulk Muḥammad al-Musabbihī's *History*, said to have comprised 13,000 folios in all, has for the most part all but disappeared. His life spanned the period 366–420 and his history the years 368–415.

³The same title page has the signature as well of al-Awḥadī. See the photograph of it reproduced in the edition by Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid and Thierry Bianquis, *Al-Juz' al-Arba'ūn min Akhbār Miṣr*, pt. 1 (historical section) (Cairo, 1978), plate 1 (transcribed on p. 1).



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al-Furāt.⁴ In two other cases, those of Ibn al-Ma'mūn and Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, much of what remains of their works are the sections that appear in the writings of al-Maqrīzī.

Several of al-Maqrīzī's own works concern the Fatimids in one way or another. The major ones are, first, the *Khiṭaṭ*, which is itself, at least in inspiration, a work on Fatimid Cairo and Fatimid institutions. A *khiṭṭah* (plural *khiṭaṭ*) is both a location or a building and as well an institution, such as a department of government. For al-Maqrīzī the office of chief *dā'ī*, the *dā'ī al-du'āh*, is such an institution, a *khiṭṭah*.⁵ Begun out of a sense of nostalgia for the city of his birth and boyhood and its antiquities, much of the *Khiṭaṭ* centers on the Fatimids, even though the final version came to encompass most of Egypt. Al-Maqrīzī's great biographical dictionary, *Al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr*, aspired to include all prominent individuals in the Islamic period who had lived in or visited Egypt. It is less obviously dedicated to the Fatimids. However, of the parts that survive, which contain some 3600 individual entries, I count over 500 related more or less to Fatimid history. Many are quite brief: Andalusians, for example, who passed through Egypt on the hajj; but a fair number of the entries are extensive. Several concern persons one might not expect: there is a biography of a Berber rebel who harried the Zirid rulers of North Africa in the period when they still recognized the suzerainty of the Fatimids in Egypt. After at last defeating and capturing this man, the Zirid ruler executed him and sent his head off to Cairo. And thus, comments al-Maqrīzī, this man merits inclusion in this book—at least his head came to Egypt. Among the longer and more noteworthy biographies are those of the first three Fatimid caliphs: al-Mahdī, al-Qā'im, and most peculiarly al-Manṣūr. Both al-Mahdī and al-Qā'im had lived in Egypt; al-Qā'im also twice led a Fatimid army into Egypt trying to capture it. But al-Manṣūr was born in the Maghrib and died there. His corpse, however, came with al-Mu'izz (along with the bodies of his grandfather and great grandfather) when the Fatimids moved their capital to Egypt. Thus he, too, fit al-Maqrīzī's requirement for the *Muqaffā*.

But, important as these two works are, al-Maqrīzī's major contribution was his *Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā' bi-Akhhbār al-A'immaḥ al-Fā'imīyīn al-Khulafā'* (Lessons for the true believers in the history of the Fatimid imams and caliphs), a single, large work devoted exclusively to the Fatimids. It was, it is true, only one of a series of three works on the history of Egypt from the Arab conquest until the

⁴As noted by Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid in the introduction to his edition of Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, *Nuzhat al-Muqlatayn fī Akhhbār al-Dawlatayn* (Beirut, 1992), 14*.

⁵See the *musawwadah*, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid (London, 1995), 94: "This institution (*al-khiṭṭah*), that is the office (*waẓīfah*) of the chief *dā'ī* I have not observed in any state other than that of the Fatimid caliphs, especially in Egypt. The institution is based on an appeal to the masses to accept what of the Ismaili *madhhab* they used to believe in." The Bulaq text ([1853], 391) is not the same.



year of al-Maqrīzī's own death. The first, his *'Iqd Jawāhir al-Asqāṭ min Akhbār Madīnat al-Fuṣṭāṭ*, went to the year 358.⁶ Next is the *Itti'āz*, his history of the Fatimids, and finally his *Al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, which covered the Ayyubids and Mamluks. The pattern of these histories thus suggests that the Fatimids were not accorded as much attention as might be supposed from the one work in isolation. Still, even if it is one of a series, it stands out. Excluding those that are merely a part of a broader history and a few that deal with limited portions of the Fatimid experience as a whole, the *Itti'āz* is the only medieval history of them we have.⁷

Al-Maqrīzī's lavish attentions to the Fatimids, his evident sympathy for them, and his well-known acceptance of their genealogical claim of descent from 'Alī and Fāṭimah—despite its rejection by most Sunni authorities—gained him special notice among his contemporaries, both those friendly to him and those who were not. But a typical reaction is that of an unknown writer who added a comment in the margin of the Gotha ms. (the autograph) of the *Itti'āz* immediately after al-Maqrīzī's section on Fatimid genealogy.⁸

The concern of the author with refuting what was said by the specialists in genealogy about the validity [of the claim of descent] of the Fatimids, and his attempt to vindicate them, his constant praise for them, and defense of their *madhhab* . . . is excused because he traced his own ancestry to them. He used to state, particularly in the beginning of a book and in his own hand, that his line went back to Tamīm [ibn al-Mu'izz].

As a descendant of the Fatimid caliphs he might well be expected both to support their position and to write a laudatory account of their reign. The view expressed in this comment was apparently shared by many others, as at least supplying a reason to explain al-Maqrīzī's interest in the Fatimids. Nearly all of his biographers mention it, for example. Some even, perhaps hoping to discredit him, hint at the possibility that he was personally attracted by Ismaili doctrine, that he was a

⁶This work is now lost.

⁷Remarkably, there is as yet no history of the Fatimids in a European language. The only modern example is Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Ḥasan's *Tārīkh al-Dawlah al-Fāṭimīyah fī al-Maghrib wa-Miṣr wa-Suriyā wa-Bilād al-'Arab* (2nd ed., Cairo, 1958; 3rd ed., Cairo, 1964). But the most important book on the Fatimids in Arabic is Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid's *Al-Dawlah al-Fāṭimīyah fī Miṣr: Tafṣīr Jadīd* (Cairo, 1992; 2nd ed., Cairo, 2000) which by its very nature does not cover the North African phase.

⁸Given in Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl's note in his edition of the text, *Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā' bi-Akhhbār al-A'imma al-Fāṭimīyīn al-Khulafā'* (Cairo, 1967–73), 1:54 n. 2.



crypto-Ismaili. These are, however, two separate problems: Was al-Maqrīzī, or did he think he was, a descendant of the Fatimids? And did he accept in any way Ismaili doctrines?

The question of his ancestry is immediately complicated by al-Maqrīzī's refusal in all his works, despite the evidence of the statement above, to admit his Fatimid descent or provide a full genealogy going back to the Fatimids—a fact already noted by contemporaries such as Ibn Ḥajar. In other words, al-Maqrīzī himself did not make such a claim in his written work, but extended his line back no more than ten generations. From where, then, does this widely cited fact come and on what sort of evidence is it based?

Ibn Taghrībirdī, al-Maqrīzī's own student, remarks in the *Nujūm al-Zāhirah* that al-Maqrīzī's ancestry could be extended back to 'Alī via the Fatimid caliphs, a fact he learned from al-Maqrīzī's nephew al-Nāṣirī Muḥammad, the son of his brother.⁹

Ibn Ḥajar, in the *Inbā' al-Ghumr*, offers two bits of evidence.¹⁰ A) The story of a Meccan scholar who read a work of al-Maqrīzī's with him on the front of which he had written a list of al-Maqrīzī's ancestors running back to Tamīm the son of al-Mu'izz, the Fatimid caliph who founded Cairo. But then al-Maqrīzī himself erased that same list and in his works he never (again?) extended the line that far back. B) Another story comes from al-Maqrīzī's brother who was curious to learn how they were related to the Fatimids. Al-Maqrīzī supposedly told him that he and his father entered the Mosque of al-Ḥākīm one day and the father told the son, "My son, this is the mosque of your ancestor."

In the same author's *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*¹¹ he comments that al-Maqrīzī used to say that his father mentioned to him that he was a descendant of Tamīm ibn al-Mu'izz, the builder of Cairo, but that he should not reveal this fact to anyone he could not trust.

Al-Maqrīzī's neighbor, friend, and fellow historian, al-Awḥadī, composed lines of verse in which he states rather directly, "Boast among the people, Taqī al-Dīn, with full pride in a noble Fatimid ancestry; when you related something good about them and face opposition, trace it back to the Ḥākīmī [al-Ḥākīm]."¹²

⁹See, under the year 845, his obituary for al-Maqrīzī: Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Maḥāsīn Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1929–49; 1963–71), 15:490. There is, however, no detail given of such a genealogy. In Ibn Taghrībirdī's *Al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi wa-al-Mustawfā ba'da al-Wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo, 1984) there is a biography of al-Maqrīzī (1:415–20) but again no genealogy (nor any claim for it).

¹⁰*Inbā' al-Ghumr bi-Abnā' al-'Umr* (Hyderabad, 1976) under the year 845, 9:172.

¹¹*Al-Durar al-Kāminah* (Cairo, 1966), 3:5.

¹²As far as I know Nasser Rabbat was the first to notice these lines, which appear in al-Maqrīzī's biography of al-Awḥadī in the *Durar al-'Uqūd al-Faridah fī Tarājim al-'A'yān al-Mufīdah*, ed.



There is in all this still no specific genealogy. Al-Sakhāwī in his *Al-Daw' al-Lāmi'* also gives none, although he does repeat disparagingly what Ibn Ḥajar had said, adding a nasty comment about al-Maqrīzī's reliance on an untrustworthy genealogist.¹³ Nevertheless in his *Al-Tibr al-Masbūk* he provides a complete genealogy going back, not merely to al-Mu'izz, but from him to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.¹⁴ This is the only complete genealogy for al-Maqrīzī that I know of.¹⁵

What can we make of all this? Obviously someone wanted to be descended from the founder of Cairo. Tamīm, al-Mu'izz's oldest son, was the link. But Tamīm, born in 337, although the oldest, was passed over in the succession in the mid-350s when it was learned that he would never produce offspring (*lammā ra'ā an lā yu'qib*). We don't know exactly why: impotence or another physical defect. A Shi'i imam, however, must produce an heir, otherwise he cannot be the imam. But the point here is that Tamīm also cannot have been al-Maqrīzī's ancestor; or to put it another way, al-Maqrīzī was not his descendant. Whoever was originally responsible for this claim had made the wrong choice of a Fatimid.¹⁶ Most importantly al-Maqrīzī knew about the impotence of Tamīm, or at least, he came to know of it. But in his *Itti'āz* he does not mention this fact, although it might be expected there. Nevertheless, in his biographical entry for Tamīm in the *Muqaffā*, he is quite clear about it.

Another fact worth repeating here also comes from al-Maqrīzī. When Saladin put an end to the caliphate he rounded up all the Fatimids and detained them where they could not procreate and thus produce more Fatimids. Thirty years later in 608, sixty were still held; in 623, forty remained. We have their names thanks to al-Maqrīzī. If sixty-three were still in custody after 30 years, there must have been many, many more in 558: possibly as many as 200? 300? Saladin was quite

'Adnān Darwīsh and Muḥammad al-Miṣrī (Damascus, 1995), 2:239. He quite rightly saw their significance as well. For this reference and some others I benefited from an unpublished earlier version of his paper in this volume which he kindly provided to me.

¹³Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Daw' al-Lāmi' li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi'* (Cairo, 1934–36), 2:21–26.

¹⁴Did al-Sakhāwī possibly accept as genuine the genealogy he gives for the line from al-Mahdī to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq: "al-Mahdī. . .ibn Majīd ibn Ja'far, ibn Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl ibn Ja'far. . .?"

¹⁵As printed: Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Dhayl al-Sulūk* (Bulaq, 1896), 21–24; however, there are problems: the key segment runs: ". . . Tamīm ibn 'Alī ibn 'Ubayd ibn Amīr al-Mu'minīn al-Mu'izz . . ." which cannot be correct. Al-Mu'izz had four sons: Tamīm, 'Abd Allāh, Nizār (al-'Azīz), and 'Aqīl. See my "Succession to Rule in the Shiite Caliphate" (*Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 32 [1995]: 239–64), 246.

¹⁶Admittedly there is some confusion in the data presented to us. Tamīm ibn al-Mu'izz was the uncle of al-Ḥākim and therefore, even if he had produced offspring, he and al-Ḥākim belong to different lines.



thorough; there were to be no descendants at all!¹⁷

At this point it is obvious that the evidence is hardly unambiguous and it is therefore difficult to explain all these claims with a simple solution. However, it appears that the basic assertion of Fatimid descent in the case of al-Maqrīzī is a family myth or legend. Note in particular the role of the father and the brother. The neighbor al-Awḥadī may have learned what he knew from the same source. At any rate al-Awḥadī died in 811, thirty-four years before al-Maqrīzī. His lines of verse therefore belong to the first half of al-Maqrīzī's life, quite possibly before he discovered how unlikely the family legend was. When he did, he simply stopped making the claim on his own behalf; but he could not—and perhaps saw no harm in not—prevent others (such as his own brother) from repeating it.

But what about those who saw him as a sympathizer, a Shiite, or even a crypto-Ismaili? His acceptance of the Fatimid claim of a valid descent from 'Alī, despite its rejection by most Sunnis, his generally soft-hearted attitude to the Hashimids and the Alids (the Ashrāf, i.e., descendants of either Ḥasan ibn 'Alī or Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī), and his obvious tolerance for Shiite doctrines were well known. But do they indicate something deeper and more profound?

Here there are three separate questions to consider. The first involves his support of the Fatimid genealogy. The second is his attitude toward the public doctrines of the Ismailis as applied by the Fatimids. The third concerns his reaction to the secret esoteric doctrines of the Ismaili *da'wah*. But did he even know about the last and if he did, in what manner and based on what sources? Sunni denunciation of Ismaili doctrine occurred regularly but rarely was it directed at authentic pronouncements by the Ismailis themselves.

The problem of Fatimid genealogy is interesting. Al-Maqrīzī was one of only a handful of the later Sunni writers to accept it. But his argument is curious.¹⁸ According to him, it is plausible, which means that he could find specialists in the genealogy of the Alids who assured him that descent from Ja'far through Ismā'īl and his son Muḥammad might well continue to al-Mahdī, the founder of the caliphate. Moreover, the main detractors, namely Akhū Muḥsin and Ibn al-Rizām, were obviously out-of-line and clearly consumed by bias. As were the Abbasids, who did not denounce it until they had lost a huge share of territory and were threatened directly and immediately, and even then they had to resort to force in

¹⁷It should be recognized that these facts by themselves do not exclude all lines of descent. Several sons of al-Mustanṣir fled Egypt during the dispute over the succession of al-Musta'li and they are not all accounted for, nor their offspring. On this see "Succession to Rule in the Shiite Caliphate," 248–56.

¹⁸His comments occur in at least three places: *Itti'āz*, 1:15–54 (esp. 52–54); *Khiṭaṭ* (Bulaq), 1:348–51; *Kitāb al-Muqaffá al-Kabīr*, ed. M. al-Ya'lāwī (Beirut, 1991), 4:523–70 (bio. of al-Mahdī, no. 1528).



order to convince the Ashrāf to sign on to their proclamation of the denunciation.¹⁹ Had the Fatimids been liars, al-Maqrīzī continues, God would never have allowed them the tremendous successes they in fact achieved. (This latter argument is admittedly extremely weak, as al-Maqrīzī's contemporaries obviously realized.) But finally, and much more importantly, he observes that the major Egyptian historians accepted its validity, among them Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir,²⁰ Ibn al-Ṭuwayr,²¹ and Ibn Khaldūn.²² Those who rejected it were most often non-Egyptians, for example, the Syrians or the Baghdadis.

Al-Maqrīzī's accounts of public doctrines for the better part also down-play the differences between Shiite practice and that of the Sunnis. The Fatimids, in his view, simply followed the practice of 'Alī and of the Ahl al-Bayt; it was their *madhhab*. To cite but one example, when al-Mu'izz's uncle died, the caliph allowed seven repetitions of the *tabbīr* instead of the expected five. 'Alī himself had approved, al-Maqrīzī notes, an adjustment of the number in accord with the rank of the deceased.²³ Al-Maqrīzī sees in this aspect of Fatimid doctrine, as with other examples of the kind, nothing denoting unacceptable heresy. Mild preference for 'Alī (*tafḍīl 'Alī*) apparently did not threaten him.

What about theology and the secret doctrines of the *da'wah*? Did al-Maqrīzī really understand the true nature of Ismailism? This is an important question. He certainly had read anti-Ismaili tracts and refutations, many quite scurrilous and hostile. He knew therefore of the standard accusation leveled against them of antinomianism, that is, of having rejected the outward observance of legal rites and rituals in favor of esoteric knowledge. But did he actually know about the content of genuine Ismaili writings and of their actual doctrines?

Here it is useful to quote at length his assessment of the problem as reflected in the concluding pages of the *Itti'āz*. There he says the following:²⁴

What They May Be Faulted For (Or Not)

There is no disputing the fact that this group was Shi'i and that they maintained the superiority of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib over the rest

¹⁹The date of this famous proclamation issued in Baghdad by the Abbasids is 402.

²⁰*Al-Rawḍah al-Bahīyah al-Zāhirah fī Khīṭaṭ al-Mu'izzīyah al-Qāhirah*, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid (Cairo, 1996), 6–7.

²¹Ibn al-Ṭuwayr's acceptance is reported by Ibn al-Zayyāt (*Al-Kawākib al-Sayyārah fī Tartīb al-Ziyārah*, 176) as noted by Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid in his introduction to Ibn al-Ṭuwayr's *Nuzhat al-Muqlatayn*, 14*.

²²Whether or not Ibn Khaldūn counts as an Egyptian, when al-Maqrīzī knew him, he did live in Cairo.

²³*Itti'āz*, 1:146.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 3:345–46.



of the Companions and that, out of the various *madhhabs* of the Shi‘ah, they adhered to that of the Ismā‘īlīyah, who affirm the imamate of Ismā‘īl ibn Ja‘far al-Şādiq and trace the continuation of it in offspring of his among imams that were hidden up to ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī, the first of those who ruled in the Maghrib. The remainder of the Shi‘ah do not recognize the imamate of Ismā‘īl and, in direct opposition to them, deny it vehemently.

Along with their deviation from the general *madhhab* of Shiism they were excessive in terms of *rafḍ* [i.e., refusal to accept the authority of others, ‘Umar and other Companions], although those who came earlier were more concerned to safeguard themselves from the kind of perversions engaged in by the later ones. Then al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh went even further in meddling with doctrine. But he was hardly consistent in this and was quick to change his mind. When he leaned to one doctrine, he proclaimed it and imposed it on the people. But soon thereafter he reverted to something else and expected the populace to abandon what he had imposed on them and turn to what he had now come up with. A man known as al-Labbād al-Zawzanī [Ḥamzah]²⁵ joined him and this man now professed openly the *madhhab* of the Bāṭinīyah.²⁶ There had been some of this among the earliest of them. However, the people rejected this *madhhab* in so far as it comprised things not known among the earlier imams and their successors, and also what in it contradicted the shari‘ah.

Next, in the time of al-Mustaṣfir, al-Ḥasan ibn al-Şabbāḥ²⁷ came to see him. He spread this *madhhab* in various regions, summoning the masses to it. He also permitted the killing of those who opposed him. Accordingly, disapproval [of them] intensified and the outcry against them increased in every direction up to the point that they were excluded from Islam and the community of believers.

When the Abbasids were overcome with hatred for them

²⁵This Ḥamzah, who was originally a *dā‘ī* in Egypt under al-Ḥākim, became the founder of the Druze.

²⁶Al-Maqrīzī apparently means by this term those who subscribe to the inner *bāṭinī* understanding of the law and scripture to the exclusion of its outward *ẓāhirī* aspects. In other words they deny the physical reality of the law itself and no longer observe its strictures.

²⁷Ḥasan-i Şabbāḥ created and led the Nizārī Ismailis who became legendary, if not notorious, for use of assassination to control their enemies, hence the common name for his followers, the Assassins.



[the Fatimids] and were reeling from the hurt of their having captured from them the territories of Qayrawan, the regions of Egypt, Syria, the Hijaz, the Yemen, and ultimately even Baghdad, the Abbasids found a special way to denigrate them. They repudiated any genealogical link of theirs to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and insisted instead that they were the descendants of a Jew. The Abbasids procured spokesmen who would say this and the latter filled the books of history with it.

Later the Ghuzz arrived and from their number Asad al-Dīn Shīrkūh and his nephew Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn were appointed viziers of the Fatimids. These men were creatures of the Abbasid regime. They had been raised on its doorstep, nurtured by its favors; they were steeped in the doctrine of its supporters and in hostility toward its enemies. Their closeness to the Fatimid regime only increased their aversion to it and its favor to them filled them with nothing but ill-will and animosity, until having benefited from it, they attained enough power to bring about its end and do away with it completely.

However, the foundations of Fatimid rule were firmly grounded within proper limits; their eminence ascended higher than the stars; their followers and loyalists were too numerous to count; their supporters and backers had filled every region and territory. Wanting to obliterate their light, to replace their very lighthouses, the Abbasids attempted to smear them with charges of depravity and abomination. This is how an enemy acts, and is obviously in accord with the condition of his being an enemy.

But ponder, may God have mercy on you, the secrets of existence and distinguish among historical reports as you would distinguish between good and bad coins. Discover, by avoiding passions, the real truth. What you will discern in the great numbers of attacks on them is that those accounts of repulsive acts, especially those leading to their expulsion from the community of Islam, are found almost exclusively in the books by easterners, that is, among the Baghdadis and Syrians, as for example in the *Muntaẓam* of Ibn al-Jawzī, the *Kāmil* of Ibn al-Athīr,²⁸ the *History of Aleppo* of Ibn Abī Ṭayy, the *Tārīkh al-‘Imād* of Ibn Kathīr, the books by Ibn Wāṣil al-Ḥamawī, Ibn Shaddād, and al-‘Imād al-Iṣfahānī, and others

²⁸For his judgment of Ibn al-Athīr, see also *Itti‘āz*, 1:232. Ibn al-Athīr, he says, relied on Iraqi and Syrian historians who did not know Egypt well. Al-Maqrīzī prefers the Egyptian Ibn Zūlāq, for example.



like these. Books by Egyptians, who took great care in recording what they report, contain almost nothing of the kind at all. So judge according to reason and vanquish the forces of prejudice, give everything its proper due, and be rightly-guided.

In the preceding passage al-Maqrīzī appears to minimize the heretical nature of Ismaili doctrine, except in the two cases of extremists, Ḥamzah and the Druze, and the Assassins after Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ. The former group rejected Islamic law and the latter advocated the killing of those who opposed them. Both are clearly unacceptable and are intolerable in his mind. But al-Maqrīzī seems to be separating carefully these obviously heretical transgressions from what are, in his view, otherwise doctrines that remain within the bounds of Islam. It is more than likely that he personally did not subscribe to the Shiism of the Fatimids but he refused nonetheless to condemn it. He also will have nothing to do with what he sees as the flagrantly inaccurate and trumped-up charges against them put in circulation by the Abbasids and their hired guns. Moreover, he tends to reject the authority of any non-Egyptian, as the list he has just given well illustrates.²⁹

But surely he knew more that he is not saying. Or, possibly, there are issues involved—subjects pertaining to the work of the Ismaili *da‘wah*—that al-Maqrīzī had either ignored or had not yet discovered. As to this latter category, his remarks in the *Khiṭaṭ* introducing his discussion of the *da‘wah* seem particularly to the point (statement from the *musawwadah*³⁰):

Most people of our time are ignorant of their beliefs and thus, as a way of disavowing it, I want to explain their doctrines here based on what I discovered in the books they themselves composed for that purpose (i.e., for the *da‘wah*).

What did he “discover” in their books and when? What books?

Prior to dealing with these questions it is useful to return to some historiographical issues about what he wrote, when, and in what order.

MAIN WORKS RECONSIDERED FOR HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ORDER

The *Khiṭaṭ*, which was the first to enter modern scholarship, is well known and widely used despite the faulty Bulaq edition of 1853. Having now two versions of

²⁹For a similar rejection of Ibn Abī Ṭayy whose bias he claims is not shared by any of the Egyptian historians, see *Itti‘āz*, 2:119. Note also *Itti‘āz*, 1:232 (and the comments of the editor al-Shayyāl, 1:30).

³⁰P. 94.



it, a *musawwadah* and a final draft, allows the study of its development. The *Itti'āz* (also badly edited) by contrast is known only from a partial *musawwadah* and a copy of the whole that has been taken from what is likely the same original *musawwadah*. In other words, no final draft exists. And, in all probability, none was ever made.

Thanks to the recent investigations of Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid³¹ and Frédéric Bauden³² on al-Maqrīzī's methods, we are fairly sure that he employed his first drafts as a kind of working file to which he either added marginal additions or inserted bits of paper with new material between the pages. Apparently he planned to return to produce a final version at some future time.

As with the *Itti'āz*, the portions of the *Muqaffá* that survive represent an unfinished draft, a *musawwadah*. The *Itti'āz* was published in its entirety only in 1973; the latter in 1991. Neither one is as well known or as thoroughly studied as the *Khiṭaṭ*. In fact the *Muqaffá* is even now often ignored although it contains a great deal of information not in the other two.³³

Given that two of these major works exist only as a first draft, it is quite reasonable to assume that al-Maqrīzī kept all three projects active simultaneously, adding from one to the others as he came upon new material. It is certainly essential for modern scholars to consult all three. Al-Maqrīzī often identifies his source in one but not in the others; presumably, therefore, the former is more likely to contain a verbatim quotation of the source and the others merely paraphrases or some other reworking of the same material. However, as Bauden's discoveries have shown, what might look like a quotation may already represent a paraphrase and thus not the original text. Accordingly, for example, the work now attributed to Ibn Muyassar and which is in reality a set of al-Maqrīzī's notes from it, may owe as much to al-Maqrīzī as to Ibn Muyassar.

It remains to be seen whether we can find a basis for arranging these three works of al-Maqrīzī in some chronological order. Here the differences among them in the presentation of facts or, more significantly, what is missing from one as opposed to another may help. Also there is a suggestive passage at the end of

³¹Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid's contribution to the study of al-Maqrīzī is extensive. See, for example, his introduction to his edition of the *Khiṭaṭ Musawwadah* as well as the following "Early Methods of Book Composition: al-Maqrīzī's Draft of the Kitāb al-Khiṭaṭ," in *The Codicology of Islamic Manuscripts, Proceedings of the Second Conference of Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1993* (London, 1995), 93–101, and "Remarques sur la composition des *Ḥiṭaṭ* de Maqrīzī d'après un manuscrit autographe," in *Hommages à la mémoire de Serge Sauneron, vol. 2, Egypte Post-Pharaonique* (Cairo, 1979), 231–58 + plates.

³²See his article in this volume.

³³As but one example, note that it has a long biography of al-Yāzūrī which is not cited at all in the recent *Encyclopaedia of Islam* article on him.



the *Itti'āz* in which al-Maqrīzī comments:³⁴

In an account of the *khīṭaṭ* of Cairo, *in shā' Allāh*, I will describe the relics of their rule and review the management of their state so that, in regard to matters of this world, you will come to understand the extent of their achievement and the insignificance of those who came after them.

It appears therefore that when he finished this draft of the *Itti'āz*—which is the only one known to have existed—he had not yet written the *Khīṭaṭ*; the latter was then only a project in his mind (but perhaps one he was just about to begin). If so, all subsequent revisions of it also come after the *Itti'āz*. What he learned while gathering material for the *Khīṭaṭ* thus may or may not have found its way back also to the *Itti'āz*. And the *Muqaffá* is quite likely later still. We are quite sure in this latter case that he never completed it.³⁵

Vis-à-vis the *Itti'āz*, the *Muqaffá* contains significant new information that ought to have been included in the former but is not to be found there. The *Itti'āz*, for example, contains four pages on the reign of al-Manṣūr (plus at most four additional pages on the pursuit of Abū Yazīd included at the end of the section on al-Qa'im). By contrast the *Muqaffá* has fifty-two pages on al-Manṣūr with quite valuable new information. It provides, for example, the details of how and why, with a fairly precise date for when, al-Manṣūr brought Qāḍī al-Nu'mān from his post in Tripoli to al-Manṣūriyah—a date nearer the end of his reign and later than most scholars have supposed.³⁶ In the biography of Tamīm ibn al-Mu'izz we are given the reason, cited earlier, for his having been passed over. In a biography of the chief qadi Ibn Abī al-'Awwām, who was appointed by al-Hākim in 405, al-Maqrīzī makes clear he was a Hanafī (a fact that is surely correct). Ibn Ḥajar had claimed he was a Hanbali.³⁷ There is a biography of Ḥamzah ibn 'Alī, the founder of the Druze, which gives the date and details of his death.³⁸ For the later

³⁴3:344.

³⁵According to information supplied by al-Sakhāwī. See his *Al-Tibr al-Masbūk*, 23 and *Al-Ḍaw'*, 2:22.

³⁶*Muqaffá*, bio. no. 780.

³⁷*Ibid.*, bio. no. 584. On the Hanafī affiliation of this qadi see Gary Leiser, "Hanbalism in Egypt before the Mamlūks" (*Studia Islamica* 54 [1981]: 155–81), 159–60.

³⁸On this information and its meaning see Heinz Halm, "Der Tod Ḥamzas, des Begründers der drusischen Religion," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, ed. U. Vermeulen and D. De Smet (Leuven, 1995–2001), 2:105–13.



vizier al-Ma'mūn, new information reveals that he was Imami Shi'i.³⁹ And, in one more case, the biography of al-Musta'lī explains a simple conspiracy of al-Afḍal with a sister of al-Mustaṣfir to throw the succession to this caliph (rather than, say, Nizār) with a tacit understanding that they, the sister and the vizier, would thereafter share power: he in public and she within the palace.⁴⁰ The point is that this is not what is reported in the *Itti'āz*.

All this suggests that al-Maqrīzī wrote the *Muqaffá* well after the *Itti'āz* and that he included in it a great deal of information that he had come upon in the meantime. Moreover, he did not bother to add it to the older *Itti'āz*. It seems likely as well that the *Khiṭaṭ* did not benefit from much of this material, it also being earlier, even in its final draft.⁴¹

Returning to the question of al-Maqrīzī's knowledge of authentic Ismaili works, we may now be in a position to see a chronological progression in his knowledge of the secret works of the *da'wah*. What he says in the *musawwadah* of the *Khiṭaṭ* in one place (as quoted above), and repeated in the Bulaq edition in different places, establishes that, according to his own account, he found genuine Ismaili books and treatises and learned from them. He speaks repeatedly in the latter of their books: ". . . matters stipulated in their books,"⁴² "what is accepted in their books an account of which this book cannot include because of its length,"⁴³ ". . . and things of this sort are found in their books; the source of it is the writings of the Philosophers . . . they go on at great length with other expressions . . . this book cannot contain the full extent of the statements of this kind."⁴⁴ "They uphold the doctrine that God is neither eternal nor temporally created but rather what is eternal is His command (*amr*) and word (*kalimah*) and what is temporally produced is His creation as explained at length in their books."⁴⁵ Near the end of this section on the Ismaili *da'wah* he says: "It is dealt with in extenso in their books and all this constitutes the knowledge of the *dā'ī*. They have many books composed for that purpose from which I have taken the summary just given."⁴⁶

His summary of esoteric Ismaili doctrine, i.e., the *da'wah*, is, moreover, despite some relatively unimportant problems, reasonably accurate and accords well with

³⁹ *Muqaffá*, bio. no. 2999.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, bio. no. 638.

⁴¹ I have not compared enough of the specific Fatimid material in these two for a sound judgment about how it relates precisely from one to the other.

⁴² Bulaq ed., 1:393.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 395.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*



what we know from the writings of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī⁴⁷ and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī,⁴⁸ to cite but two of the main Fatimid-era Ismaili authorities. Here is a key point: at the final stage of the initiation of an Ismaili, the candidate is taught that the prophet’s miracle is the law, which is expressed on the one hand by “symbols a person of intellect will comprehend and on the other by an open declaration recognizable by everyone.”⁴⁹ “Revelation is the delivering of God’s word [to the prophet], following upon which the prophet embodies it [i.e., makes it incarnate, *yujassiduhu*] and then presents it to the people.”⁵⁰

But what “books” exactly? We have no way of knowing precisely except in one case. Bauden has now discovered in one of al-Maqrīzī’s notebooks a passage from al-Kirmānī’s *Rāḥat al-‘Aql*. Clearly then al-Maqrīzī was able to find a copy of this one work and to use it.⁵¹ Most probably he located more and thus when he says he derives his understanding of Ismaili doctrine from their books, that is in fact true.⁵²

Is it possible to say when this happened, even relatively? If the chronology suggested above reflects reality, then it appears likely that al-Maqrīzī’s work on the *Itti‘āz*, which is his most sympathetic portrayal of the Fatimids and is a defense of them, and which closely follows in the appropriate sections what he gleaned from Ibn Muyassar, must belong to a period not long after 814, when he took his notes from this source. Why would he excerpt Ibn Muyassar after he had written the *Itti‘āz*? It must be the other way around: the *Itti‘āz* came later. Subsequently—i.e., after 814—he composed a first draft of the *Khīṭaṭ* and then reworked it at least once. And it contains an account of the secret doctrines of the Ismaili *da‘wah* that is not in the *Itti‘āz*, nor even alluded to there.

⁴⁷On this fourth century *dā‘ī* see the following studies of mine: *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī* (Cambridge, 1993); *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī’s Kitāb al-Yanābī‘* (Salt Lake City, 1994); and *Abu Ya‘qub al-Sijistani: Intellectual Missionary* (London, 1996).

⁴⁸On al-Kirmānī, see Daniel De Smet, *La Quiétude de l’Intellect: Néoplatonisme et gnose ismaélienne dans l’oeuvre de Ḥamīd ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī (Xe/XIe s.)* (Leuven, 1995), and Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Ḥākīm* (London, 1999).

⁴⁹Bulaq ed., 1:395. This doctrine implies a double *bāṭinī/zāhirī* form of the truth (in the manner, for example, advocated by the philosopher Ibn Rushd).

⁵⁰*Musawwadah*, 105. Note that, according to this doctrine, the Prophet is the author of the written form of the revelation. He is the lawgiver, the *shārī‘*. On this in the thought of al-Sijistānī, see my *Early Philosophical Shiism*, ch. 11 (pp. 114–23), *Intellectual Missionary*, 49–50, and *Wellsprings*, 8–10.

⁵¹Personal communication.

⁵²Knowledge of and/or the citation of genuine Ismaili works by non-Ismailis was extremely rare.



Conclusion: Just as al-Maqrīzī eventually discovered that he could not have descended from the Fatimid caliphs, he also learned more and more about their secret doctrine, not from malicious detractors like Ibn al-Jawzī or Ibn al-Nadīm or the others he mentioned in the statement taken earlier from the *Itti'āz*, nor as revealed by the renegade Druze, the erratic and unstable al-Ḥākīm, or the Assassins after Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ, but from their own writings, the authentic works of true Ismaili *dā'īs*. He then realized that the Ismaili *da'wah* was far more sophisticated yet also therefore dangerously alien to his own religious outlook than if it had been merely a *madhhab* of the Ahl al-Bayt. Subsequently, his former enthusiasm for the Fatimids abated.⁵³ He never went back to finish the *Itti'āz* and he expanded the *Khīṭaṭ* far beyond its original narrow focus on the Fatimid capital and governing institutions, until ultimately it encompassed all of Egypt and its history.

⁵³That he lost his enthusiasm for the Fatimids does not mean also that he lost interest in the details of the history of their period since he obviously continued to collect such material. And I think, for example, it is quite obvious from his biography of al-Manṣūr that on a personal basis he deeply admired this one caliph (if not others).

