

## The Fātimid 'Abbāsīd Conflict in India

Paper to be read at the XXVI International Congress  
of Orientalists, New Delhi (4th to 10th January  
1964)

Since time immemorial there were trade relations between the West and India in which Arabia and its merchant-seamen played an important role, as has been studied in the standard works of Heyd<sup>1</sup>, Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi<sup>2</sup> and Huzayyin<sup>3</sup>. With the rise of Islam Arabs extended their role as commercial intermediaries to the sphere of political initiative in religious penetration and military conquest. It is familiar history how during Prophet Muhammad's early mission, his companions travelled eastwards via Abyssinia to various places in the Indian ocean<sup>4</sup>; how in the early Caliphate Ceylon and the Maldiv Islands became the scene of first Muslim settlements; how in the South of India these settlements spread to Malabar and the Coromandel coast, and how finally Gujrat and Saurashtra became the homeland of the Arab Muslims.<sup>5</sup> In Northern India, expeditions had begun since the time of Caliph 'Umar at Daybul (near Modern Karachi), and the Makran coast had been occupied, till we come to the time of the Umayyad Caliph Walīd I when Ḥajjāj's lieutenant Muḥammad b. Qāsim conquered the province of Sind in 96 A.H.<sup>6</sup>

In the early 'Abbāsīd period, the Arabs retreated. The religious and political expansion was given up and the Arabs satisfied themselves with distant commerce or Arab settlement in a Hindu environment. In 258/871 the 'Abbāsīd Caliph Mu'tamid practically handed over Sind to the Saffārid leader Ya'aqūb b. Layth, who was responsible, in no small measure, to the spread of Shi'ism in the province. On the latter's death in 265/878 the Muslim territories in Sind were divided between two independant chiefs, those of Multān and Maṇṣūrah (Bahmanābād).<sup>7</sup>

At this time in the territories of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate a movement of great significance was brewing - namely the Fātimid-Isma'īlī movement, about which Bernard Lewis says: "With 'Alid legitimism as political programme a syncretist hotch-potch of all faiths and philosophies, with a strong undercurrent of pure rationalism, as doctrine, and social grievances and organisation as an important

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1. Heyd : Histoire du Commerce du Levant au Moyen-Age (Leipzig, 1885).
  2. Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi : 'Arab-o-Hind ke Ta'alluqāt, Allahabad, 1930.
  3. Huzayyin : Arabia and the Far-East, Ceiro 1942.
  4. S.G. Fatemi, New Light on the Muslim Migrations to Abyssinia, paper read at the Pakistan Historical Conference, Karachi, 1960.
  5. S. Sulayman Nadwi, op.cit., p.259 seq.
  6. Baladhuri : Ḥuṣṣ al-Bulād (trans. Wurgotten), p.209 seq.
  7. Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta : Advanced History of India (London 1953), p.275.

part of its activities, the movement stood a good chance of canalising the whole social and religious discontent that was rife in the Medieval Caliphate.<sup>1</sup> Even before this movement could succeed in establishing in 297/909 the first rival Caliphate against the 'Abbāsids in North Africa, it had sent its missions to far away India, via Yaman beginning from 270/883, under their DĀ'Ī al-Haytham.<sup>2</sup> Starting from Sind their influence spread to Multan and Gujrat. Ibn Hawqal<sup>3</sup> informs us that the authority of the Fāṭimid Caliph Mu'izz, (d.363) the founder of Cairo was recognised in Baluchistan.

Multan which had been ruled by the Arab tribe of Banu Sām since 279 became the scene of Fāṭimid-Ismā'īlī activity about the year 347 A.H., when a DĀ'Ī of Mu'izz converted many majūs (for Multan was inhabited by Zoroastrians as well as Buddhists) to the Ismā'īlī faith.<sup>4</sup> In 354 A.H. he was replaced by another DĀ'Ī Jalām b. Shaybān who instituted his own dynastic rule.<sup>5</sup> The mixed Arab-Hindu society of the Multan Ismā'īlī state is described vividly by Muqaddasī who passed through the town in 375 A.H.<sup>6</sup> The destruction of its famous idol Aditya took place in 376 A.H. the last years of Jalām's rule.<sup>7</sup>

1. B. Lewis : Origins of Ismā'īlism, Cambridge, 1940, p.2.
2. Qāḍi'n-Nu'mān (d.383/974) chief Qāḍī of the Fāṭimid Caliph Mu'izz (d.365/976) mentions in his Kitāb Iftā'ih ad-Da'awa, ff.18-19 that the Fāṭimid DĀ'Ī in Yaman Ibn Hawhab Maṣūūr al-Yaman sent his nephew al-Haytham as dĀ'Ī (missionary) to Sind and that the Da'awa (Mission) spread to Sind. cf. Excerpts from Rashīd ad-Dīn in R. Levy : Ismā'īlī Doctrines in the Jāmī' at-Tawhīkh etc., J.R.A.S. (1930) pp.516, 518, 522; and Jūwaynī : Ta'ā'ikh Jahān Gushāi, G.M.S. (1937), vol.III, pp.248-249 (being a marginal note to p: 154, l.8.).
3. Masālik, ed. Kramers, vol.II, p.410, ll.7)12 (also see foot-notes). Cf. de Goeje : Mémoires sur les Carmathes, note on p.196.
4. Extracts from Qāḍi'n Nu'mān's Majālis edited in S.M. Stern's Heterodox Ismā'īlism at the time of al-Mu'izz B.S.O. A.S. XVII/1).
5. Detailed information about the Ismā'īlī State of Multan in my monograph : Beginnings of the Ismā'īlī-Da'awa in Northern India, Siropics. Cairo, 1956.
6. Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm (Leiden ed.) pp.481-82.
7. This famous idol is mentioned by many writers like Abu Zayd Hasan Sirānī (264 A.H.) Ibn Rusta (290 A.H.), Mas'ūdī (303 H.) Ibn Muḥallīl (331 A.H.) Iṣṭakhrī (340 A.H.) Ibn Hawqal (367 A.H.), Muqaddasī (375 A.H.), Bīrūnī (432 A.H.) and Qazwīnī who gives the detailed story of its destruction.

Ismā'īlī Multan served as a buffer-state between the rising Turkish power of Ghazna and the old Hindu rulers - the Imperial Pratiharās of Kanauj. The destruction of this state by the invasion of Mahmūd of Ghazna in 401 A.H. marks the beginning of the replacement of Arab Muslim rule in India by the Turkoman Muslim rule.

Another Ismā'īlī state that of Mansūrah<sup>1</sup> whose ruling Arab dynasty of Habbārī Qurayshids, ruling since 240 A.H., had accepted Ismā'īlism by 401 A.H.<sup>2</sup> was swept aside again by the invasion of Mahmūd of Ghazna in 416 A.H., while returning from his Somnath campaign.

Sind was entirely conquered by Mahmūd (d.421 A.H.) and included in his Ghaznawid Empire. It remained so during the time of his son Mās'ūd and his son 'Abd ar-Rashīd (d.444 H.). But now the Ghaznawids had become weak. Delhi and its environs were taken from them by the Ghorīs, and Sind became independent of them under the Sūmrās.

The Sūmrās were a local Sindhi Hindu tribe who had been converted to Islam right from the time of the first Arab conquest<sup>3</sup> and had considerably intermarried with Arab settlers; with the result that their names are mixed Arab-Hindu. Even after conversion they had retained many of their old Hindu customs, like having their meals exclusively among themselves and not with any outsiders.<sup>4</sup> They had marriage relations with big local Arab landowners and had thus acquired great influence and power.<sup>5</sup> In 443/1051 they revolted against the authority of the Ghaznawid 'Abd ar-Rashīd and set up their leader Sūmra at the head of a separate kingdom ruling from Thatta.<sup>6</sup> This Sūmra had been approached by the Ismā'īlī

1. At the present site of Dhālōr, 8 miles south-east of Shikōdpur, eastwards along the canal of Jamdas. Mansūrah was built by 'Amr, the son of Muhammad b. Qasim near the town of Bahmanabad built by the Persian King Bahman Ardeshir Cf. Mujmal al-Tawārikh ed. Teheran, pp.117-118, Salādhūrī : Futūh (tr. Murgotten) II, 221, N.A. Baloch's ed. of Chach-Nāma (Sindhi tran. 1954) note on 397-400, as well as Thomas Prinsep's Essays and Cousen's Antiquities of Sind.
2. For 'Alid influence in Mansūrah, see Mās'ūdī : Murūj, I, 377. Ibn Khaldūn : Tā'rikh (ed. Egypt) II, 327 says the town was taken from the Habbārids, and Ibn al-Athīr : Kāmil (ed. Leiden), IX, 243 says that it was taken from a Prince who had "renounced Islam". Accepting Ismā'īlism, in the opinion of Ibn al-Athīr would amount to renouncing Islam, and also would deserve Mahmūd of Ghazna's hostile attention. The name of the last Habbārīd Prince who may have accepted Ismā'īlism about 401 A.H., and who was swept aside by Mahmūd is given by the contemporary Persian poet Farrukhī in one of his poems as Khaffī (see Nāzim : Mahmūd of Ghazna, p.10).
3. Ibn Batūta : Travels (Egypt ed.), II, 4-6.
4. Ibid.
5. Mīr Ma'qūm : Tā'rikh-Sind (extract Elliot's Hist., vol.I., p.215).
6. Ibid (Bombay ed.1938), p.60.

Druze leader Muqtana in 425 when he wrote a letter to him (i.e. to Shaykh Sūmar Rājibāl) asking him to espouse the Druze cause, and also asking him to bring back to the Ismā'īlī fold the younger Dā'ūd a descendant of the Ismā'īlī ruler of Multan Abu'l-Futūh. The Sūmaras actually came under Fāṭimid influence and considered themselves 'Alids<sup>1</sup>. After the big Nizārī-Musta'alian split in the Fāṭimid Imamate, the Sūmaras seem to have retained an Ismā'īlism of their own, which kept them neutral from the Sunnī Islam brought by the Turkish conquerors and their Hindu environment. Their rule persisted in Sind for nearly three centuries, through the time of the Ghaznawids, the Ghoriids, the slave, the Khaljids and the Tughlāqids Sultāns of Delhi up to 752 A.H. when Muḥammad Tughlaq invaded the independent Sūmara Kingdom of Sind, but he fell ill and died. When his successor Fīrūzshāh returned after 10 years in 762 A.H., he found that Sūmaras had been replaced by a Sunnī dynasty of the Sammas.<sup>2</sup>

We had stated before that after having conquered Sind in the Umayyad period, the Arabs in the early 'Abbāsīd times had withdrawn from continuing these conquests and had actually settled in India and had been localised. By accepting the Fāṭimid cause the Arab rulers and communities of Multan, Mansūrah and the Sūmaras had not only showed their independence of the Central 'Abbāsīd Caliphate but of the rising Turkoman power of the Saljūqs and the Ghaznawids and then of the various Turkoman dynasties of Delhi. Thus we find that the Fāṭimid-'Abbāsīd conflict in India took the form of Arab-Turkoman struggle for influence-the Fāṭimids championing the Arab cause while the 'Abbāsīds being obliged to foster Turkoman interests. The Fāṭimid-Arab alliance tended to assimilate themselves in the cultural and social life of their Hindu environment while the 'Abbāsīd - Turkoman front trying to push forward with the force of arms, as is evidenced in the campaigns of Mahmūd of Ghazna and in the stamp of subjugation and proselytisation put on India by subsequent Turkoman dynasties. With them we do not find an assimilation with the Hindu way of life, but its gradual effacement, till the process is halted at the advent of the Great Moghuls.

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In its early days the Fāṭimid Caliphate concentrated on trade with the West, whereas the 'Abbāsīds had retained the monopoly of Eastern trade. We hear from Nāṣir-i-Khusraw<sup>3</sup> that

1. Maulvi 'Ubayd Allah Shā'iq Sūmara : Dawlat-i-'Alawiyya; also Sayyid Sulaiman Nadvi, op.cit. p.352 seq., and my Beginnings of Ismā'īlism in N. India, p.9.
2. 'Alī Shīr Qānī in his Tuhfat al-Kirām gives the whole list of Sūmara rulers about the end of Sūmara rule see Fiaz al-Islām's article : The Rise of the Sammas in Sind, Islamic Culture (1948).
3. Safar-Nāma, pp.17-18 : trans. pp.41-42.

Egypt maintained a merchant-navy at Tripoli for trade with Greece, Spain and France. He also informs us of the Egyptian control over Sicily and the trade in cotton with that country.<sup>1</sup> Egyptian Empire in North Africa, its friendly relations with the Byzantines and its sphere of influence on the Syrian coast, helped its trade with Europe. Though the Fātimids had their Da'was in countries like Yaman and Sind, instituted from the early days of Saḥr, they were neglected because they were not needed to bolster up any considerable trade. The Fātimids were careful not to enter into a thick rivalry with the 'Abbāsid trade. They had the satisfaction of having a sympathetic régime at the 'Abbāsid capital - that of the Buwayhids, who were not suspected of trying to overthrow the Fātimids. Though the Egyptian trade with India and China existed right from the days of Ibn Khudazbeh<sup>2</sup> (3rd/9th century) through the Red Sea, no great emphasis was paid on it. In fact the essential base of Aden had not yet grown to be a big town of importance<sup>3</sup> as it did later on. The 'Abbāsid trade with the East through the Persian Gulf was therefore safe and unmolested.<sup>4</sup>

With the appearance of the Saljūqs on the political horizon, things changed. They had united the land-mass in the East and through their sister Turkoman states could reach northern India. They had destroyed the Shiite Buwayhid power and instituted a thorough-going orthodoxy under the 'Abbāsid Caliphate. A massacre of Ismā'īlīs was carried out in Transoxiana in 486 A.H.<sup>5</sup> Mahmūd of Ghazna destroyed the last remnants of an Ismā'īlī dynasty in Multān (Sind) and persecuted the Ismā'īlī community there.<sup>6</sup> Then the Saljūqs aimed at diminishing the Fātimid influence in the West. The petty chiefs of Syria under Egyptian Sovereignty were incited to revolt.<sup>7</sup> Mu'izz b. Bādīs in North Africa was encouraged to change the Fātimid Khutba for the 'Abbāsid, which he did in 441 A.H. Saljūq negotiations with Byzantium resulted in the latter stopping grain-supplies to Egypt.<sup>8</sup> In short a Turkoman Saljūq encirclement of the

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1. Safar-Nāma, p.58; transr p.122.
  2. Al-Masālik (ed. Leiden) pp.153-154 Cf. Wiet : Précis de l'Histoire d'Égypte, II, pp.145-146.
  3. Ibn Ḥawqal (d.391 A.H.): K. Sūrat Al-Ard (ed. Kramers) I, 37.
  4. For the detailed route from Basra, Sīrāf and Port Obollah on the Persian Gulf to Daybul (Karachi), Cambay, Broach, Safāra (near Surat), Saymūr (near Bombay), the Malabar coast in India to Canton in China, see Heyd : Histoire du Commerce du Levant au Moyen-Âge (Leipzig, 1885) I, pp.29-34 on the authority of Sulayman Tāji-Ibn Khurdabeh, Mas'ūdī and Iṣṭakhrī.
  5. Ibn Al-Athīr, IX, 358.
  6. Baghdādī (d.429/1037), Al-Farq (Cairo ed.) pp.277 Cf. B. Lewis : Ismā'īlī Notes, B.S.O.A.S. XII, 1948 p.600.
  7. Dā'ī Muayyad fi'd-Dīn Ash-Shirāzī (d.470 H.) Sīra, p.93 see
  8. Maqrīzī : Khitat, I, 266, and Muayyad: op.cit, pp.94-95.

Fātimids was effected and the latter were deprived of its Western possessions.

This resulted in the only course the Fātimids could take - that is to accept the challenge and ~~resume~~ offensive. In 450 A.H. on behalf of the Fātimids, Basāsiri occupied Baghdad for one year, till the return of the Saljūq Sulṭān Tuḡrīl to the scene.<sup>1</sup> On the commercial front the Fātimids, who had hitherto left the Eastern trade in the hands of the 'Abbāsids opened up the Red-Sea trade route to India. They strengthened their bases at 'Aydhab<sup>2</sup> and Aden<sup>3</sup> and brought Yaman<sup>4</sup> and Hijaz<sup>5</sup> under their suzerainty. And from Yaman and Aden the destination namely the Gujrat coast of India - was not far.

The Yaman Embassy of Dā'ī Lamak b. Mālik to Cairo from 454-459 H.<sup>6</sup> resulted in the sending of a Yamani Dā'ī 'Abd Allah to Cambay in Gujrat in 460 A.H.<sup>7</sup> And he is reported to have converted Rāja Siddharāj Jaysingh Solankhi and his ministers Bhāmal and Tarmāl.<sup>8</sup> Missions were also established near Aurangābād in Deccan.<sup>9</sup> This Embassy of Dā'ī Lamak to Cairo also resulted in the transfer from Egypt to Yaman of the great heritage of Fātimid literature,<sup>10</sup> and this literature ultimately found its way to Gujarat in India, when in 944 A.H. at the advent of Ottoman occupation in Yaman, the Headquarters of the Yamani Fātimid Mission were transferred to Gujrat, and there they still remain.

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1. For the whole Basāsiri incident, see Muayyad's Shra cited above.
  2. Minorsky in a note on p.474 of his edition of Hudūd al-'Alam (G.M.S.1937): "According to Istākhrī, 54, 'Aydhab was reckoned to Abyssinia inspite of the fact that its inhabitants were Rāja. 'Aydhab is identified with Aidip lying on the sea-coast opposite Jidda at N. Lat.22, 19'47". Cf. C.H. Becker, 'Aidhab, in E.I.
  3. Conquered by the pro-Fātimid Sulayhids from Banu Ma'an in 453 A.H.
  4. The Sulayhid dynasty established in the whole of Yaman a strong Fātimid-Ismā'ili state in 439 A.H. See H.C. Kay : Yaman (London)1892, p.25.
  5. The Sherifs of Mecca at this stage are consistently loyal to the Fātimids. See Snouk Hurgronje: Mekka, I, 54 seq.
  6. Idris 'Imād ad-Dīn : 'Uyūn al-Akhhār, vol.II ff.102-104 on the authority of Ḥatīm b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamīdī (d.596/1199).
  7. Khwaj b. Mālik, Majmū' ar-Rasā'il (Gujrati trans.) p.10.
  8. Zheveri: A Legendary History of the Bohoras (J. Bom. B.R.A.S., 1933) p.38 esq.
  9. Khwaj b. Mālik, op.cit., p.13.
  10. Hamdani H.F.: "Some Unknown Ismā'ili Authors and their Works", J.R.A.S. (1933) p.362.

We had noticed above the Turkoman invasions of Sind. As a continuation to that were the Turkoman invasions of Gujrat - namely that of Mahmūd of Ghazna in 416/1024, Shihābuddīn Ghōrī in 574/1178. Qutbuddīn Aybak in 592/1195 and finally of 'Alāuddīn Khiljī in 697/1297. For a century Gujrat remained a province of the Delhi Sultanate, but the governor Zafar Khān appointed in 794/1391 declared his independence of Delhi in 803/1401 Gujrat now independant under a new dynasty of Muslim Kings found its inspiration less and less from Turkoman tradition. Although Sunni orthodox by religion, the question of loyalty to 'Abbāsīd Caliphate did not arise, as it was now already a thing of the past. With strong Rājput family relationship and an influx of Arab settlers and Scholars from Yaman and Hadramawt,<sup>1</sup> the Muslim Kingdom of Gujrat became an Arab-Hindu state in its outlook as is evidenced in its beautiful architecture<sup>2</sup>. Again, although the Fātimīd Caliphate was also a thing of the past, its mission had remained alive and active in Yaman. With close association with Gujrat during this period<sup>3</sup> as we have seen above. This mission was protected<sup>4</sup> and it became possible, at the advent of Ottoman Turkish occupations of Yaman, to transfer its headquarters from Yaman to Gujrat in 944/1537. A strong Fātimīd-Ismā'īlī community developed in Gujrat and increased to such an extent that inspite of later severe persecutions for example under Aurangzeb<sup>5</sup>, they survived, and at present are the largest single Ismā'īlī group in the world, with a distinct Arab-Hindu culture about them. In the North, however, all traces of Fātimīd or Ismā'īlī influence were wiped out. The latest survivals were the Sūfīs who ended their rule sometime after 752/1351. The Nizārī Ismā'īlī pockets of Chitrāl and Gilgit in Kashmir are later revivals in British times and so do the Khojas of Karachi belong to later migrations from Gujrat. The North never came out of its Turkoman influence and thus never lost the rigour of its orthodoxy. It lost all contacts with Arab culture, and veered towards the Persian which was the culture even of the Turkomans.

P.T.O.

1. This aspect has been ably studied in the doctoral thesis of the late Professor Bāqir'ullī Tirmidhī entitled: "The Contributions of the scholars of Gujrat to Arabic language and Literature". This thesis was accepted by the Bombay University in 1947, but has not been published. See Ch.II, pp.31-57.
2. See Burgess : "Muhammadian Architecture in Gujrat," 1896 (A.S. W.I, vol.vi) and his "Muhammadian Architecture of Ahmadabad," Pt.I (1900) & Pt.II (1905) (A.S.W.I vols. vii & viii).
3. Dā'ī Idrīs 'Imād ad-Dīn (d.872 H.): K. Nuzhat al-afkār (MS.) vol.II (A Yamani MS. of the Maktabat al-Muhammadiyya of Surat in Gujrat). And also his K. Rawdat al-Akhhār (MS. Leiden).
4. Khwaj b. Mūlik (d.1021/1610 of Kaparwanj, Gujrat: Kawkab al-Falak)(written in Gujrāti language and Arabic Script) Sections 1 and 4.
5. See note 1 on page 8.

In summarizing the above discussion, we can state that the conflict of the two great medieval Muslim Caliphates - that of the 'Abbāsids ruling from Baghdad and the Fātimids ruling from Cairo, tended to become an Arab - Turkoman conflict in India within the complex of commerce and racial, religious and cultural influences.

A comparison between the rule of the Ghaznawid and the Ghōrid dynasties and the Sultāns of Delhi on the one hand and of the Fātimid pockets of Multān, Maṣūrah and the Sūmra dynasty of Sind on the other and a comparison between the centralised Turkoman rule from Delhi and the movements of local independence in the provinces such as Sind and Gujrāt substantiates the above statement.

The role of two areas stands out prominently in this drama of Fātimid-'Abbāsid conflict in India - that of Yaman in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gujrāt province in India, both facing each other, both epitomising a larger conflict in the life of their small and seemingly insignificant territories and becoming the homes of a strange co-existence of conflicting trends.

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Tuesday, 31st December 1963.

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- L. Gujrāt was conquered by the Moghal Emperor Akbar in 980/1572. Akbar's own policy of assimilation of Islam and Hinduism was reversed by Aurangzeb in whose time (1069/1659 to 1118/1707) Gujrāt fared very badly because of its having supported Aurangzeb's brother Murād Baksh for the Imperial throne, and because of the rigid orthodoxy of the 'Alamgir. See also Muḥammad 'Alī : Mawsamī Bahār (Bombay 1311/1893).