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Introduction

Al-Mu'ayyad's memoirs lift the curtain on a scenery far remote from the two imperial cities of Cairo and Baghdad. There, in the two prosperous and splendid Muslim capitals of the age, historians and court chroniclers were eagerly recording and commenting on important political events, such as the coming and going of rulers, or matters of peace and warfare in the Islamic world or outside its borders in Central Asia and the realm of the Byzantine emperor. In contrast, al-Mu'ayyad's report of his mission at the Būyid court reveals a specific political scenario, one related on the level of individual experience. In the southern Iranian province of Fārs, where the events took place, the territorial and political interests pursued by the Abbasid and Fatimid empires met head to head, a clash of two different religious spheres that created an atmosphere of ideological strife and tension. Thus, despite its remoteness, Fārs was a microcosm of international Muslim politics and ideology in al-Mu'ayyad's time. Without his endeavour to record what he had done and witnessed, important political and human aspects of 5th/11th century history would have remained in the dark forever.

Al-Mu'ayyad's family and homeland

Al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī was born around the year 390/1000 into an Ismaili family in Fārs, probably in Shīrāz, the capital of the province. The city had been founded in the early period of the Arab conquest as a camping ground for soldiers. It was situated amidst a plain with several streams flowing into a lake a few leagues distant from the city. In summer the plain was dry and desert-like. The oldest mosque in Shīrāz was built in the latter half of the 3rd/9th century. Its north door was renowned for its beauty and was later called Bāb Ḥasan, 'the beautiful door.' In the 4th/10th century the city was described as being nearly a league across and having narrow but lively markets as well as eight gates. The great and cultivated Būyid ruler 'Aḍud al-Dawla (367–372/978–983) built a hospital (*bīmāristān*), a library and two palaces, one of them half a league south of the city. This palace with its extensive gardens was surrounded by a new town named Kard Fanā Khusraw where craftsmen such as wool-weavers and brocade-makers were brought to settle. The water supply of Shīrāz, comprising of several channels leading through the city, had already been organised by the early Būyids. In spring, torrents flowed down from nearby Mount Dārak.[1]

Al-Mu'ayyad's full name is Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh b. Mūsā b. Abī 'Imrān b. Dāwūd al-Shīrāzī. His honorific name (*laqab*), *al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn*, probably bestowed upon him when he was appointed chief *dā'ī* of Fārs, means 'The one aided (by God) in religion.' His other titles, *'Iṣmat al-Mu'minīn* (Succour of the Believers) and *Ṣafiyy amīr al-mu'minīn wa waliyyuhū* (The Chosen of the Commander of the Faithful and his Friend/Select), were conferred upon him later when he became the chief *dā'ī* of the Fatimid *da'wa* in Cairo in 450/1058.

Prior to al-Mu'ayyad's appointment, the position of chief *dā'ī* of Fārs was occupied by his father Mūsā b. Dāwūd in the service of the Fatimid Caliph-Imam al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (386–411/996–1021). Fārs was regarded as a *jazīra* (lit., 'island,' pl. *jazā'ir*) of the Fatimid *da'wa*, that is, one of the regions outside the Fatimid state where the Ismaili mission was active.

Sometime during the reign of the Caliph-Imam al-Ẓāhir (411–427/1021–1036), Mūsā's son Hibat Allāh was granted permission from Cairo to take over the *da'wa* office from his father.[2] The effective ruler of Fārs at this time was the Būyid general (*amīr*) Bahā' al-Dawla.

The Būyid military rule

The Būyids (or Buwayhids) were a powerful family of military leaders who originally came from Daylam, a mountainous region south of the Caspian Sea in northern Iran. After successfully establishing their sovereignty in the Iranian lands of the caliphate (Fārs, Kirmān and Khūzistān), one of the Būyid brothers, Mu'izz al-Dawla, took over military power in Baghdad in 334/945, under the title of *amīr al-umarā'* (Supreme Commander).[3]

The Būyid family reigned for 110 years in the central and eastern parts of the Muslim world. The Abbasid caliphs became puppets of the military, their power reduced to the symbolic function of representing the religious claim of Sunni Islam. Most of the Būyids, however, were Shi'is of the Twelver-Imami and Zaydī persuasions. Thanks to the politics and patronage of the Būyid ruling class, the Twelver Shi'a witnessed for the first time a flourishing of their religious and intellectual culture during the 4th/10th century.

Despite their common Shi'i heritage, the Būyids' official relations with the Fatimids remained most of the time cool, if not hostile. With the exception of one single and short diplomatic exchange during the reign of the Būyid 'Aḍud al-Dawla, there is no evidence of any good neighbourly relations with the Fatimid empire.[4] The Būyids regarded the Fatimids as their political and religious rivals. But in Fārs they seem to have been on the whole tolerant of the Ismaili missionaries working in their territories as agents of the Fatimid caliphs. Al-Mu'ayyad's father was apparently held in high esteem by the powerful Būyid *wazīr* Fakhr al-Mulk, known for his open attitude and friendship towards the Shi'a in general. Al-Mu'ayyad reports in his

Sīra that, upon succeeding his father, he could conduct his religious activities openly. He was even able to care undisturbed for the spiritual welfare of the Daylamī soldiers serving the Būyid sovereign of Fārs and Kirmān, Abū Kālījār ʿImād al-Dīn Marzubān.[5]

The Daylamī mercenaries (*ispahsālāriyya*) were a national force supporting the Būyid family's claim to power. They accompanied the founders of the Būyid dynasty, the brothers ʿAlī, Ḥusayn and Aḥmad b. Būya (ʿImād al-Dawla, Rukn al-Dawla and Muʿizz al-Dawla), as infantrymen on their victorious march from the mountainous province of Daylam at the southern shores of the Caspian sea into the ʿAbbasid realm. They continued to be the backbone of the Būyid army in the Iranian parts of the Būyid power sphere, whereas regiments of Turkish cavalry constituted the majority of the Būyid military force in the ʿAbbasid heartlands. The relationship between the Daylamī and Turkish soldiers was marked by continuous rivalry. Whereas the Shiʿi Daylamīs supported a strong and independent Būyid policy, the Turkish soldiers as Sunnis backed the ʿAbbasid caliph's claims to power.

As becomes clear from the first part of al-Muʾayyad's *Sīra*, the Daylamīs included a strong and unified contingent of Ismaili soldiers. The unity of the Daylamīs, of which his report gives an impression, corresponds with historical and geographical sources, which mention the clan spirit (*ʿaṣabiyya*) of this group of patriotic militants.[6] Since the 2nd/8th century, Shiʿi communities had already existed in Daylam. Most of them were founded by missionaries of the Zaydī movement, whose founder Zayd b. ʿAlī – a rival of the early Shiʿi Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq – combined a militant policy with a moderate and compromising Shiʿi stance. In the 3rd/9th century, Zayd's followers founded states in Daylam aud Yemen. Daylamī provinces were thus also a fruitful field for the early Ismaili mission that was successfully introduced in this region by the theologian and philosopher Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, who succeeded in converting several Daylamī amīrs.[7]

In the course of the events recorded by al-Muʾayyad it

becomes clear that the religious tensions between Ismaili Daylamīs and the Sunnis of Fārs can be understood as a conflict between competing political interest groups. Abū Kālījār's politics alternated between two incompatible positions, whereas each interest group was backed by competing military forces. Thus, a Sunni and pro-ʿAbbasid policy of the ruler provoked the protest of the Daylamīs, whereas an Ismaili and autonomous Būyid policy aroused the anger of the Sunni opposition, that is, the religious orthodoxy of Fārs. The military force behind this lobby was the Turkish soldiers. As al-Mu'ayyad reports, the Sufis were also making common cause with the Sunni establishment in the country. The Sufis were followers of the various mystical orders, adhering mostly to the same guiding principles as the Sunnis, that is, the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet. The Sufi movement had already begun to 'render [itself] orthodox' during the 3rd/9th century.[8]

The Fatimid Ismaili *daʿwa*

Fārs, where al-Mu'ayyad grew up and began his activities, was only one of many Fatimid *jazīra*s spread all over the Muslim world as nuclei of the Ismaili *daʿwa* network. The Arabic term *daʿwa* means 'summons' or 'calling.' The 'summons to the truth' (*daʿwat al-ḥaqq*) or the 'rightly guiding summons' (*al-daʿwa al-hādiya*) were the vehicles for propagating the Ismaili religious teachings and ideals. Since the Imams of the Fatimid dynasty considered themselves true heirs of the Prophet Muḥammad, the religious aim of their *daʿwa* was always linked with political ideals. As legitimate rulers of the Islamic community, they refused to acknowledge the authority of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad whom they considered to be usurpers. Since the ultimate goal of the Ismailis was an absolute religious and political reformation of society, the *daʿwa* had to operate secretly or – as in the case of the *dāʿī* al-Mu'ayyad – in semi-secrecy and, at the very least, with great caution. It could only afford to be open and public *after* it had gained success. This was the situation inside the borders of the Fatimid empire

which at its height included North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Yemen and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. In these areas the *da'wa* was an official institution for religious learning and education with its administrative centre at the Dār al-'Ilm, the 'House of Knowledge' (also called Dār al-Ḥikma), in the capital Cairo.[9] But in a hostile, especially Sunni environment, the *da'wa* had to remain hidden from the eyes of government officials for whom it represented a dangerous and subversive vehicle of political and religious agitation. For some Sunni authors, the Fatimid *da'wa* came to be veiled in an aura of conspiracy and heresy, and thus a suitable target for anti-Ismaili polemics and propaganda.

In common with the Twelver Shi'is, the Ismailis claim that their Imams are descended from Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, and his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī. The line of Shi'i Imams continued until the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, upon whose death in 148/765 there occurred a major schism among his followers regarding his rightful successor.[10] Ja'far had originally designated his eldest son Ismā'īl to succeed him in the imamate, but the latter is alleged to have died or disappeared mysteriously during his father's lifetime. The disputes between various groups about the true heir led to several divisions in the Imāmī Shi'i community after Ja'far's death. The majority of the Shi'is finally acknowledged Ja'far's son Mūsā al-Kāẓim as their seventh Imam, and they later came to be known as the Ithnā'ashariyya or 'Twelvers' because of their belief in a line of twelve Imams. But the followers of Ismā'īl refused to accept this outcome which, they maintained, was contrary to the the will of the Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.

According to early Shi'i sources, two proto-Ismaili groups emerged from that split. One group maintained that Ismā'īl had not died and was believed to be in concealment (*ghayba*) for reasons of security, since the Abbasids were seeking to arrest him, but that he would return one day as the *mahdī* (the rightly guided) or *qā'im* (the one who arises). The Shi'i heresiographers al-Qummī and al-Nawbakhtī (writing shortly before 286/899), refer to this group as 'the pure Ismailiyya'

(*al-Ismāʿīliyya al-khāliṣa*). Another group, called al-Mubārakiyya after Ismāʿīl's epithet *al-Mubārak* (the blessed one), held that the line of Imams continued through Ismāʿīl's eldest son Muḥammad. These two groups appeared to have coalesced into a single movement from which arose the Ismaili *daʿwa* a century later.

Historically, little is known about Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl. As far as we know, he was born around 120/738 and, following the death of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, he emigrated from his native Medina to the East, where he hid from the persecution of the Abbasids. Among his followers, therefore, he acquired the name *al-Maktūm* (the hidden one). He died some years after 179/795 in Khūzistān in south-western Iran.

Thus, for the earliest history of the Ismailis we only possess a confusing picture of succession disputes and sectarian divisions. Around the middle of the 3rd/9th century, however, a strong and unified Ismaili movement came into being. This was the achievement of the early Ismaili *daʿwa*, which did not cease to propagate the religious and messianic claims of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl as the true Imam and *mahdī*, who would return imminently to establish a reign of universal peace and justice on earth until the Day of Judgement.

From *daʿwa* to empire

When al-Muʾayyad was active as the head of the Fatimid mission in Fārs, the *daʿwa* had already passed through 200 years of history. Already around the middle of the 3rd/9th century its international and flexible character was clearly evident. Ismaili *dāʿīs* were working, for example, in remote rural areas of southern Iraq as well as in urban centres such as the ancient town of Rayy (Rhages) in northern Iran. They were sent out by a mysterious master called ʿAbd Allāh, who was probably the organiser of the early Ismaili network. In the Fatimid tradition his name is cited as ʿAbd Allāh al-Akbar, that is, "Abd Allāh the Elder' – probably to distinguish him from ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī, the later founder of the Fatimid dynasty. ʿAbd Allāh al-Akbar

was the ancestor of the Fatimid Imams. He was a rich merchant in ʿAskar Mukram, a prosperous city situated on the river Dujayl in the region of Khūzistān, north of the Persian Gulf, not far from Ahwāz, the capital of the region. Even today ʿAbd Allāh's identity is a matter of dispute. In the tradition related in the polemical anti-Ismaili tract of Ibn Rizām, our oldest source,[11] his enemies consider him to be the son of a certain non-ʿAlid Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ. Recent research characterises this record as anti-Ismaili slander. After carefully comparing and analysing several more serious sources of information, Heinz Halm suggests that ʿAbd Allāh might have been a descendant of ʿAqīl b. Abī Ṭālih, who was a brother of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.

According to the Ismaili tradition, however, ʿAbd Allāh was a son of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, a version espoused by the Fatimids. In fact, ʿAbd Allāh was given protection in a family, clients of the ʿAqīl clan, in Baṣra after he was forced to flee from ʿAskar Mukram. There he had presented himself as a messenger and living 'proof' (*ḥujja*) of the hidden Imam Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, who had lived more than half a century earlier. ʿAbd Allāh claimed that the *mahdī* was waiting for his glorious return in a hiding place outside the grasp of the Abbasid caliphs. ʿAbd Allāh claimed that as his *ḥujja,* he was the only one in contact with him. After ʿAbd Allāh's authority became more and more accepted and his *dāʿīs* began to win converts amongst the population of the region, he was finally driven out of town by his Sunni enemies, who even destroyed his two houses. As fate would have it, he was soon also driven out of Baṣra for the same reasons. In the company of his *dāʿī* Ḥusayn al-Ahwāzī and others, ʿAbd Allāh left for Syria where he settled down as a merchant in the town of Salamiyya, this time keeping the secret of his identity and his message to himself and a few confidants. He acquired a house near the market, became prosperous and founded a family.

Meanwhile, his *dāʿīs* were eagerly extending their activities to various regions in the Muslim world. Thanks to their work, Ismaili communities were established in the area of the Iranian

town of Rayy as well as to the north in the Daylam region on the south-western shore of the Caspian Sea, including the provinces of Gīlān, Ṭabāristān and Gurgān. A secret centre of the *daʿwa* was established in Nīshāpūr (Arabic, Naysābūr) in Khurāsān. From this base the Ismaili *daʿwa* reached Afghanistan and even Transoxania in Central Asia with its headquarters at Bukhārā (in present-day Uzbekistan). Ḥusayn al-Ahwāzī was sent to southern Mesopotamia where he was able to win over the villagers in the Sawād of Kūfa to the Ismaili cause. According to Ibn Rizām, this must have occurred in 261/875 or 264/878.[12] From this base in the remote region of the Sawād of Kūfa, the *daʿwa* spread further into the Iranian and Arab countries east and west of the Persian Gulf and their hinterland. It reached Kirmān and Fārs, the eastern parts of the Arab peninsula and then extended further to the south-west, namely to the Yemen (where Ismaili communities have survived to the present day).

Yemen was to become one of the most important and effective Ismaili centres. From here the first expeditions to the Indus valley and to north-west India would soon start.[13] Even earlier, in the year 278/892, Yemen was the springboard for the *dāʿī* Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad al-Shīʿī to establish extremely promising contacts with northern Africa. A native of Kūfa, he was committed to the *daʿwa* in Yemen at the side of Ibn Ḥawshab, also known as Manṣūr al-Yaman, 'the Conqueror of Yemen,' who had started his secret mission in south-west Arabia in the seaport and trading city of ʿAdan (Aden) ten years earlier.[14] During the pilgrim festivities of the *ḥajj* in Mecca, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī initiated contact with pilgrims from amongst the Kutāma, a Berber tribe from the region of Quṣṭanṭīna (Constantine), located in the west of what is today Algeria. Soon after, he was invited to visit the region and to settle down there. Together with his elder brother Abu'l-ʿAbbās, he founded a new base from where the Fatimid state would arise just a few decades later.[15]

In the decentralised network of the Ismaili *daʿwa*, important centres for logistics and communication were located in

the cities of Ṭāliqān (in Daylam), Cairo, Kūfa and in Yemen. Towards the end of the 3rd/9th century, the *daʿwa* had even created political enclaves in southern Iraq, northern Africa, Baḥrayn and Yemen, all openly declaring themselves to be independent of Abbasid hegemony. There, local supporters of the hidden Imam were ready to take up arms whenever an order from him or his representative was received. The centre of this expanding organisation was, however, in Salamiyya, where ʿAbd Allāh was secretly receiving *dāʿīs* and couriers from the *jazīras* and sending instructions to his helpers abroad in the same inconspicuous manner. For reasons of security, in Salamiyya itself no efforts were made to win over the population of the town. The centre of the international activities of the *daʿwa* in ʿAbd Allāh's splendid and castle-like residence stayed completely under cover.

ʿAbd Allāh must have died soon after the middle of the 3rd/9th century. His two sons carried on his secret activities in Salamiyya. One of them became the central leader of the *daʿwa*. The situation remained unchanged for a further generation. The next central leader of the *daʿwa* Saʿīd b. al-Ḥusayn, born in 260/874, was to become the founder of the Fatimid caliphate in North Africa in 297/909, under the name of ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī. While still in Salamiyya, Saʿīd b. al-Ḥusayn decided to inform his supporters that *he himself* was a descendant of the hidden Imam Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl and therefore their true Imam and *mahdī*. This historical statement opened a new era in the history of the Ismailis and led to the establishment of the Fatimid state soon after. The period of concealment (*dawr al-satr*) of the Imams had finally come to an end.

A first consequence of ʿAbd Allāh's revolutionary step was the splitting of the Ismaili movement: the communities in Iraq and Baḥrayn, named after their first leader, the *dāʿī* Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ refused to acknowledge the new leader as their Imam and continued the *daʿwa* for the hidden Imam, becoming known to history as the Qarmaṭīs. Most of the other *dāʿīs*, however, remained loyal to the leadership in Salamiyya. In the Palmyrene, the desert region east of Damascus, the fervent and

impatient followers of the Banū Kalb bedouins rebelled against the Abbasid governor of the town in the name of al-Mahdī. As police forces moved towards Salamiyya, ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī was finally forced to leave. After a long and adventurous flight westwards, he was given a warm welcome and protection in the *daʿwa* base in northern Africa. The arrival of their spiritual leader provoked a rebellion of the Kutāma Berbers, led by the *dāʿī* Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī, against the Aghlabid governors in northern Africa. The fall of the Aghlabids marked the end of Abbasid sovereignty in the western parts of the Muslim world. As the first Fatimid Caliph-Imam, al-Mahdī took up residence in the palace city of Raqqāda near the Aghlabid capital of Qayrawān in 297/909. Such were the circumstances in which the Fatimid empire came into being.[16] For the next 250 years, the Abbasid caliphs would have serious and powerful rivals, inspired by a religious ideal that aimed to win over still further territories to the Fatimid state.

An obvious step in this direction was the Fatimid conquest of Egypt, a further highpoint in the history of Fatimid political success. With the establishment of their capital in Cairo – ruled until then by vassals of the Abbasids – the Fatimids enjoyed sovereign rule from the Atlantic coast to the eastern Mediterranean. For many decades to follow, Cairo became the capital of an ever expanding empire. The city was occupied in 358/969 during the reign of the fourth Caliph-Imam al-Muʿizz (341–65/953–75). Al-Qāhira, as is the city's Arabic name, became the seat of the Fatimid state and its administrative and religio-political institutions. It comprised of the royal palaces as well as a number of ministries, dealing with finance (*dīwān al-amwāl*), the army (*dīwān al-jaysh*) and the chancery of the state (*dīwān al-inshāʾ*). Under the Fatimids, Cairo became a flourishing city of legal, philosophical and religious scholarship as well as of the sciences, art and literature. It became the centre of the international network of their *daʿwa*, whose complex hierarchy was headed by the chief *dāʿī* (*dāʿī al-duʿāt*).[17] His ministry included the college of al-Azhar and the academy of Dār al-ʿIlm, which attracted gifted individuals from the

provinces of the empire or from beyond its borders, in particular from Iranian lands, for personal training and instruction. Some of them stayed for years or even for the rest of their lives in the city, where they continued their careers and were active as authors of the growing corpus of Fatimid religious and philosophical literature.

Fatimid policy towards the Sunni majority of the country, as well as other religious communities like Jews and Christians, was on the whole tolerant and sought their integration within society. For their elites, the way was open for splendid careers in administrative, political and military offices. Also, members of diverse ethnic communities, such as the Berbers, Turks, Africans, Daylamīs and Arabs, were all in service of the state, in particular the army. Only later was the multi-ethnic character of the army to become a constant source of tension and unrest. But when this became manifest, it certainly was one of the main reasons for the violent factionalism and increasing disintegration of the state in the second half of the reign of the Caliph-Imam al-Mustanṣir (427–487/1036–1094), whose very long reign marked at once the apogee and the beginning of the downfall of the Fatimid empire.

Shortly after their glorious entry into Cairo, the Fatimids succeeded in winning over the local rulers of the holy Islamic cities of Mecca and Medina. Now at last, the Abbasid rulers in Baghdad must have realised that this expansion was more than a political challenge: from now on the most sacred sites of the Islamic faith had become centres for the summons of the Fatimid *daʿwa*.

Soon after, Fatimid governors established themselves in the coastal towns of Palestine, extending as far as Ṭarābulus (Tripoli). The occupation of central and northern Syria turned out to be more difficult, but continued nevertheless. Again and again Damascus was attacked or occupied by Fatimid military forces. Aleppo was finally conquered in the reign of the Fatimid Caliph-Imam al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (386–411/996–1021), during the lifetime of al-Mu'ayyad's father. During these years even the ally of the Abbasids in northern Iraq,

the ʿUqaylid leader Qirwāsh b. Muqallad, acknowledged temporarily the Ismaili Imam. It was in the reign of al-Ḥakim that Fatimid sovereignty finally reached the gates of Baghdad. Fatimid agents became active in the capital and even in the palace of the Abbasid caliph. In the Shiʿi quarter of al-Karkh, often a centre of opposition and unrest, one could often hear the slogan supporting the Fatimid Imam ring out: '*Ya Ḥākim, yā Manṣūr*' ('O victorious Ḥākim!').[18]

Confronted with the continuous challenge posed by their religious and political rival, Būyid police forces reacted with harsh political measures against the activitists of the Fatimid *daʿwa* in Iraq. The hostility also provoked an anti-Ismaili reaction among supporters of the caliph and his Būyid masters in Baghdad. There, Sunni and Twelver Shiʿi theologians and legal scholars launched a series of polemics denouncing the Fatimids and their claims to be the descendants of the Prophet.

Al-Muʾayyad's lifetime

A few decades later, the Fatimid expansion had come to a standstill and the struggle with the Abbasids reached a stalemate. In Baghdad, the political and religious centre of the Sunni caliphate, new problems had become virulent: Turkish and Daylamī soldiers were in permanent strife, the Būyid leaders became more and more disunited, and their territories split. Thus, the addressee of al-Muʾayyad's *daʿwa*, Abū Kālījār, who had been ruler of Fārs, Kirmān, Khūzistān and ʿUmān since 415/1024, was embroiled in constant rivalry with his uncle Jalāl al-Dawla, the supreme amir in the capital of the caliph. There, in Baghdad, discontent and protest against Būyid military tutelage had emerged and was being expressed openly. Followers of the caliph protested against the Būyids' degradation of the Sunni head of Islam and their tolerance of the Shiʿa and the rationalist theological school of Muʿtazila.

Taking advantage of this growing opposition against the Būyids, the Abbasid caliphs al-Qādir (381–422/991–1031) and al-Qāʾim (422–467/1031–1075) succeeded in restoring at least

a part of their political status and power. In 409/1018, al-Qādir published a famous manifesto which proclaimed the religious, political and legal programme of the Sunni Ḥanbalī school to be the official orientation for the caliphate. This manifesto, very traditionalist and anti-Shi'i in outlook, was read in front of a large assembly of dignitaries and officials. The phase of the so-called restoration of the Sunni ideology, an enforced revival of 'orthodox' tradition accompanied by an outburst of anti-Shi'i polemics and emotions, had begun.[19] The 'creed of al-Qādir' (*al-i'tiqād al-Qādirī*) was again proclaimed in 433/1042 during the reign of al-Qā'im. Its strongest influence could be felt in Baghdad, but, as al-Mu'ayyad himself was to witness, the sparks it ignited were also alighting elsewhere in the Abbasid empire.

Thus, a scenario marked by a number of different polarisations forms the field of tension in which al-Mu'ayyad lived and worked in Fārs. As we shall see, his destiny was influenced by the difficult and tense relationship between the Fatimids and Abbasids, two imperial powers with a long history of mutual religious hostility, ideological infiltration and political opposition. Al-Mu'ayyad's biography was also influenced by the intensifying power struggle between the caliphate and the Būyid military sovereigns inside the Abbasid realm. Already during al-Mu'ayyad's early career this struggle was characterised by the growing religious and ideological polarisation of the Sunni restoration as the forces of the traditionalist and orthodox persuasion gained the upper hand over Shi'i rationalist and other theological groups and trends. The political unrest resulting from this confrontation was aggravated by a power struggle inside the Būyid family as well as rivalry between the local Būyid rulers and the Būyid supreme commander in the capital Baghdad.

But this was not all. A further tension would influence the course of al-Mu'ayyad's life: the invasion of the Turkish Oghuz tribal peoples, also called Turkomans, who, from their territories in Central Asia, were continuously moving towards the central Islamic lands, proving unstoppable in their advance.

Under the leadership of the Saljūq clan, they crossed the river Amū Daryā (Oxus) with their horses and livestock in the year 426/1035. Only a few years later they attacked and conquered the eastern Iranian lands belonging to the imposing Sunni Ghaznavid empire. During al-Mu'ayyad's activity in Fārs, the Saljūqs were already a menacing shadow on the eastern horizon of his world. As he arrived in Egypt in 436/1045 or 437/1046, Abū Kālījār's allies, the Kākūyids of Hamadān in western Iran, were soon to fall. This opened the way for the Saljūqs to Baghdad. Ten years later, in 447/1055, Ṭoghril Beg entered the capital, claiming to free the Abbasid caliph from Būyid tutelage. His arrival was warmly welcomed by the city's Sunni population. The line of the Būyids was soon to be extinguished. But before the city was officially given over to the Saljūqs, the Turkish rebel al-Basāsīrī managed to enter it briefly in the name of the Fatimids. In this audacious venture, he was probably secretly encouraged and supported by al-Mu'ayyad himself (as we shall see in a later chapter). Between Dhu'l-Qa'da 450/November 1058 and Dhu'l-Qa'da 451/January 1060, the Friday sermon in Baghdad was delivered in the name of the Fatimid Imam al-Mustanṣir who became, at least for a year, the political head of the Muslim world.