Introduction

1. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Fatimid Revolution

As the defeated Aghlabid state collapsed, its last ruler fled ignominiously in the direction of Egypt. Behind him a Kutāma Berber army swarmed towards the administrative city of Raqqāda. The victors in a long struggle for revolutionary change in the Maghrib, the army was led and directed by its 'lord' and chief, the Isma'ili missionary-*dā'ī* Abū 'Abdallāh called locally the 'Shi'i'. The end of Abū 'Abdallāh's struggle had come swiftly, so swiftly that his troops were not even close to Raqqāda when the Aghlabid Ziyādatallāh, seized by fear and wanting to carry away as much of his gold and other movable possessions as possible, loaded a caravan of pack animals and left. The populace in the vicinity, and from as far away as Qayrawan, a distance of some 9 kilometres, rushed out ahead of the advancing army to plunder and loot the palaces of the recently departed prince. For several days, no one interfered with their rampage. Finally, however, the first troop of calvary – the advance guard of the new power – reached Raqqāda and immediately brought order and calm. Not long afterwards, Abū 'Abdallāh arrived to take up residence in one of the old Aghlabid palaces where he launched a new government, and

with it a new era. A largely conservatively Sunni province of the once unified 'Abbasid caliphate almost overnight became Shi'i and would no longer pay allegiance in any form to the supreme ruler in Baghdad.[1]

The events just recalled occurred in early Rajab 296/late March 909. The victory which had brought Abū 'Abdallāh and his Berber army to power gave him instant dominion over the whole of Aghlabid territory, including the areas of modern Tunisia, Algeria, portions of Libya, and Sicily. In realizing this achievement, however, he was not acting for himself but on behalf of an Imam who was at that triumphant moment still under house arrest, two months' march away, in the distant Maghribi town of Sijilmāsa. The revolution wrought by the *dā'ī*, though at last in possession of a vast political domain with its attendant resources, was thus incomplete. Without its Imam it lacked the real reason for its existence; the appeal, the *da'wa*, on which it was based, and for which it was created, depended on the safe arrival of the Imam and the eventual proclamation of his caliphate and the right of his Fatimid ancestors and descendants to rule the Islamic world. But that was not to happen for almost another ten months. Only in late Rabī' II 297/January of 910, did the Imam finally reach Raqqāda where he was proclaimed caliph with the messianic regnal name of al-Mahdī.[2] The intervening months were, however, critically important for the new government. Abū 'Abdallāh, though long accustomed

1. For the broad general background to the Fatimid victory, see in particular Mohamed Talbi, *L'Emirat Aghlabide (184–296/800–909)* (Paris, 1966); Farhat Dachraoui, *Le Califat Fatimide au Maghreb, 296–362/909–973: histoire, politique et institutions* (Tunis, 1981), and most especially Heinz Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi: Der Aufstieg der Fatimiden (875–973)* (Munich, 1991), Eng. trans. M. Bonner, *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids* (Leiden, 1996).

2. The most recent general study of the beginning of the Ismaili movement and its relationship to the advent of al-Mahdī as imam-caliph is Halm's *Reich des Mahdi*, but see also the important article by W. Madelung, 'Das Imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre,' *Der Islam*, 37 (1961): 43–135, and Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), especially 91–143.

to lead, was without experience in the requirements for ruling cities and large territories. His previous career as a *dā'ī* was in the main limited to the Kutāma Berber tribes which had formed his immediate following and supplied his army. Now he had to create a government for an empire. But his most urgent task– a task he would entrust to no one else – was to assemble an expeditionary force to rescue the Imam.

Yet while he was absent from Raqqāda in pursuit of his mission, he needed to delegate the government of North Africa to a completely reliable person from among those loyal both to him and to the *da'wa* for which he worked. Fortunately for Abū 'Abdallāh and for his revolution, such a figure was available in the person of his own brother who, at the moment of Fatimid victory, was awaiting news of the outcome of Abū 'Abdallāh's struggle in Tripoli, to the east of Raqqāda. When Abu'l-'Abbās, whom he had not seen for almost eighteen years, during which the brothers had pursued separate careers in the *da'wa*, at last joined him, Abū 'Abdallāh appointed him to rule in tandem with the Kutāma leader Abū Zākī and set out for Sijilmāsa. Until the return of Abū 'Abdallāh in the retinue of the liberated Imam al-Mahdī, Abu'l-'Abbās was to all intents and purposes the ruler of the former Aghlabid, now Fatimid, state.

In contrast to the remoter regions, where Abū 'Abdallāh found an enthusiastic Berber following, the religious proclivities of the Arab elite of the North African cities were at the time dominated by scholars belonging to either the Mālikī or Ḥanafī legal schools, both of which were quite hostile to Shi'ism (the Ḥanafīs by and large less so than the Mālikīs). There were, nonetheless, some learned and moderately influential Shi'is in the major urban centre of Qayrawan who had in the past been forced to conceal their beliefs.

In the period before the Fatimid army launched its final drive toward Qayrawan and Raqqāda, the local *fuqahā'* were more concerned with their own, often quite intense, internal rivalries. The Ḥanafīs were generally pro-'Abbasid, while the Mālikīs were pro-Umayyad. Perhaps in accordance with these tendencies, the Aghlabid court, following the policies of the

caliphate on behalf of which it governed, tended to favour the Ḥanafīs, while the Arab populace favoured the Mālikīs. The advent of the Fatimids and the onset of a Shi'i revolution in their midst ohviously caused a severe dislocation and unsettling trauma for the Sunnis of North Africa.

Before the collapse of the Aghlahid state, friction aroused by the old conflict between the Mālikīs and the Ḥanafīs was often aggravated hy theological disputes between Mu'tazilī and Murji'ī Ḥanafīs and traditionalist Mālikīs. Despite evidence of a certain degree of respect and accord between various individual scholars of both sides, enmity and harsh disagreements could, and frequently did occur. In this situation, the *madhhab* of the qadi of Qayrawan became a crucial matter. The appointment of a Ḥanafī judge could signal a period of revenge against the other side, and certain of the Mālikīs who specialized in disputation were noted for their antagonism toward and deliberate baiting of the Ḥanafīs.

The task of the new rulers, even in the period before the arrival of the Imam, was thus complex and difficult, and neither Abū 'Abdallāh, nor Abu'l-'Abbās, nor most certainly any of the Kutāma leaders in their retinue were quite prepared for it. The measures they took and the events of the months between the military victory and the arrival of the Imam, nevertheless, form a key chapter in the story of the estahlishment of the Fatimid caliphate. Many aspects of how the new regime was to organize and present itself were determined during that period. When the Imam al-Mahdī who, like the brothers, had never governed a territorial state, nor ruled over subjects who were not already his sworn adherents, assumed full power, he tended to confirm the appointments and the policies they had initiated, although they were by then no longer themselves in charge.

Barely two days after his assumption of power, on Monday, 3 Rajab 296/27 March 909, Abū 'Abdallāh received a congratulatory visit from Ibn al-Haytham, a visit which was to bring this young scholar into the *da'wa* and membership of the movement behind the rise of the Fatimid caliphate. That moment was for

Abū 'Abdallāh important enough, but for Ibn al-Haytham it was obviously unforgettable and many years later he could still recall it in remarkable detail. This event marked the beginning of his own career with the Fatimids and it is also the starting point of his personal memoir of what happened to him over the next ten months.

The Career and Mission of Abū 'Abdallāh

Although to a casual observer the career of Abū 'Abdallāh may seem spectacularly successful and his rise to power swift and stunning, the process had in reality been slow and difficult.[3] When he received Ibn al-Haytham on the second night of his triumph and his residence in the old Aghlahid palace, Abū 'Abdallāh could complain of having spent almost eighteen years in the field. Over these long years he had patiently propagated his message and that of the *da'wa* among the Berbers of the Algerian hinterland. Indeed, two of his companions on that same night, the men who introduced Ibn al-Haytham to Abū 'Abdallāh, were the Kutāma chieftains Ahū Mūsā b. Yūnus al-Azāyī of the Masālta and Abū Zākī Tammām b. Mu'ārik of the Ijjāna,[4] whose association with the *da'wa* had begun far back with the arrival on Kutāma territory of the *dā'ī* on Thursday,

3. The main source for the career of Abū 'Abdallāh is Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa wa ibtidā' al-dawla*, ed. by Wadad Kadi (Beirut, 1970), and by Farhat Dachraoui (Tunis, 1975). For convenience in what follows references will be given only to Dachraoui's edition. Compare also Halm's reconstruction of these events in his *Reich des Mahdi*.

4. Abū Mūsā was known as the 'shaykh of shaykhs' (*shaykh al-mashā'ikh*) and obviously played an important part in the mission of Abū 'Abdallāh. The account of Ibn al-Haytham confirms this judgement. Nonetheless, there is remarkably little information abont him in the other sources, perhaps because of his later treason and execution. See Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, Dachraoui's introduction, p. 52 n. 2, 70–1, 132; paras 46, 109–10, 282; Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, *'Uyūn al-akhbār*, ed. M. al-Ya'lāwī as *Tā'rīkh al-khulafā' al-Fāṭimiyyīn bi'l-Maghrib: al-qism al-khāṣṣ min kitāb 'Uyūn al-akhbār* (Beirut, 1985), 89, 183–4; Abu'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Marrākushī Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa'l-*

15 Rajab I 280/June 893.

Upon meeting the young Ibn al-Haytham, Abū 'Abdallāh, as was clearly his long-standing habit, proceeded without hesitation to engage him in an elaborate interrogation about his religious views and attitudes. The *dā'ī* obviously realized the importance of winning the local Shi'is to the Fatimid cause and of expanding in this way the *da'wa* among the Arabs in the newly conquered urban populace.[5]

Abū 'Abdallāh's own recruitment and affiliation had begun long before in his native town of Kufa in the Arab east. There, in about 278/891, Abū 'Abdallāh, whose full name was al-Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā', was brought into the *da'wa* with his older brother, Abu'l-'Abbās Muḥammad,[6] by a *dā'ī* called Abū 'Alī in Fatimid sources, but known in Iraqi and 'Abbasid records as Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ, names which may both be assumed to have cloaked his secret and highly dangerous activities. This Abū 'Alī/Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ was then head of the *da'wa* in 'Iraq.[7] Fairly soon after their conver-

Maghrib. Vol. 1, ed. G. S. Colin and É. Lévi-Provençal (Beirut, 1948), 160; Abū Bakr al-Mālikī, *Kitāb Riyāḍ al-nufūs fī ṭabaqāt 'ulamā' al-Qayrawān wa-Ifrīqiya*, ed. Bashīr al-Bakkūsh (Beirut, 1981–83), II, 62–3; Halm, *Reich*, 152, 153f, 218, trans., 163, 165–7, 242. For Abū Zākī, the case is similar, even though he was nominally in charge of the government during Abū 'Abdallāh's absence. See Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 33, 53, 70, 92, 121, 125, 133, 134, 273–5, 312 (para. no. 286, on his execution); Idrīs, *'Uyūn*, 89, 110–11, 124, 156, 165–9, 184–6; Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 126, 152, 163; Halm, *Reich*, 122, 133f, 136, 153–5, 161, trans., 130, 141, 145, 165–6, 174. His uncle Abū Yūsuf Māknūn b. Ḍubāra was head of the Ijjāna tribe of the Kutāma and as such occupied a major place in the campaigns of the Fatimid army. Much later he was governor of Tripoli, at which time he was forced to execute his own nephew.

5. It is noteworthy, however, that he had apparently made no effort to do so prior to the final conquest.

6. For complete references to Abu'l-'Abbās in the sources, see below n. 72.

7. For the identity and career of this *dā'ī*, see Wilferd Madelung's recent study 'Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ and the Dā'ī Abū 'Alī,' *Proceedings of the 17th Congress of the UEAI* [Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants], (St. Petersburg, 1997), 115–24.

sion, he dispatched the two brothers to Egypt. In Egypt Abū 'Abdallāh joined the annual pilgrimage caravan to Mecca. From there he moved on again, accompanying Yemeni pilgrims returning to the Yemen where he joined the local *da'wa* of the famous Manṣūr al-Yaman, Ibn Ḥawshab, in early 279/April 892.[8] The Isma'ili *da'wa* was by that time spreading rapidly in numerous far flung directions, but of these the mission of Ibn Ḥawshab, begun in 267/881, was the most successful in terms of the acquisition of territory and power.[9] Not quite a full year later, the *da'wa* ordered Abū 'Abdallāh once again to join the Yemeni pilgrimage caravan and return to Mecca. For this assignment he was paired with another *dā'ī*, a certain 'Abdallāh b. Abi'l-Malāḥif, who was, in fact, subsequently to accompany him all the way to his eventual destination in Kutāma territory. Such joint missions were the preferred method for spreading the *da'wa*. In this case it caused extreme hardship for Ibn Abi'l-Malāḥif's daughter, who is reported to have lost her mind when her father disappeared. Out of pity and sympathy for her plight, Ibn Ḥawshab eventually sent a replacement so that Ibn Abi'l-Malāḥif could return to her.[10] That second *dā'ī* was Ibrāhīm b. Isḥāq al-Zabīdī, known in the Maghrib as the 'lesser lord' (*al-sayyid al-ṣaghīr*) because he was junior in rank to Abū 'Abdallāh who was called simply the 'lord' (*al-sayyid*).[11] This second *dā'ī* was still with Abū 'Abdallāh many years later in 296/909 when Ibn al-Haytham met him.

The point of noticing these details is the indication they provide of the careful planning and preparation that went into Abū 'Abdallāh's mission. The official account of it emphasises his astute exploitation of an incidental opportunity to win over some Kutāma pilgrims who he happened to meet in Mecca

8. On Ibn Ḥawshab in general see W. Madelung, 'Manṣūr al-Yamān,' in the *EI2*, and for his early activities also Halm, *Reich*, 38–44, 55–7, trans., 31–9, 51–3.

9. On the spread of the Ismaili *da'wa* in this period, see Halm's *Reich des Mahdī*, as well as Daftary's *The Ismā'īlīs*.

10. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, par. 31 (pp. 31–2).

11. Ibid., par. 32 (p. 23).

and cleverly prompted to urge him to follow them back to their homeland. But the *da'wa* surely knew what it wanted him to accomplish and had some notion of how to go about it. Among the original party of Kutāma pilgrims, at least two were already Shi'i. There are, moreover, valid reasons to consider other instances of Shi'ism in the Maghrib prior to Abū 'Abdallāh's arrival there, particularly in regard to the mission of the obscure al-Ḥulwānī, mentioned in several places. Ibn al-Haytham refers to this person, who in Isma'ili sources is said to have been sent to North Africa by the Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq to spread Shi'ism there. However, these various accounts all name men who were converted by al-Ḥulwānī and yet who also met and supported Abū 'Abdallāh, which is chronologically impossible. Nevertheless, the Isma'ili *da'wa* is likely to have known a great deal ahout the situation and may have planned from the heginning to use it to its advantage.

Abū 'Abdallāh and bis party, in any case, travelled back through Egypt where his brother had remained and where Abu'l-'Abbās would continue to work as an operative and courier in direct contact with the headquarters of the *da'wa* as a whole in Salamiya in north-central Syria, the residence of the movement's supreme leader. Abū 'Ahdallāh himself reached the Kutāma controlled region of eastern Algeria in the mountains of the Lesser Kabylia in Rabī' 280/June 893. Thereafter hc established an 'abode of refuge' (*dār al-hijra*) in a barely inhabited rural area known as Īkjān[12] and began to proselytize by teaching and instructing any of the Berbers who would listen and accept him. Among his very first recruits were Abū Zākī and Abū Mūsā, the latter already a powerful clan chieftain, and the former the young nephew of another.

Despite some success in the recruitment of important adherents, the mission of Abū 'Abdallāh was not always and

12. The exact location of Īkjān is known only approximately, in part because no direct physical evidence has survived to our day from this one relatively brief period. However, it was east of, and perhaps fairly near, Setif and certainly west-northwest of Constantine in what is modern Algeria. See Halm, *Reich*, 47, n. 92, trans., 41.

everywhere accepted. But, because he pursued his activities in the mountains and away from major cities, at first the Aghlabids ignored him. Odd and dissident religious movements among the unsettled Berber tribes were common and the central state government could ill-afford to send an army to put down each of them. Furthermore, it preferred to expend its military energy in the lucrative war against the Christians of Sicily and the Italian mainland which produced a steady supply of gold, loot, and slaves. Internal opposition to Abū 'Abdallāh's mission among the Berber groups soon developed, however. Not all were Shi'i, since many tribes were then, and continued to remain, Kharijite and thus implacably opposed to the Isma'ili appeal. Abū 'Abdallāh also ran foul of clan rivalries and at one point had to move his whole operation from Īkjān to Tāzrūt.[13]

Not until some time after Rajab 289/June 902 – shortly after the coincidental departure of the Aghlabid ruler Ibrāhīm II for the holy war in Sicily – did Abū 'Abdallāh risk an attack on a significant town, in this case Mīla.[14] His occupation of this town provoked the first overt reaction on the part of the central government. An ill-timed military expedition was sent against him which became bogged down in winter snows and thus proved ineffective. The Isma'ili cause was therefore not permanently harmed or suppressed; but Abū 'Abdallāh still moved slowly and with great caution. His next major victory did not occur until the autumn of 292/905 when he defeated an Aghlabid army and reaped a large reward of booty.[15] In the following March, Aghlabid troops, who were being assembled to move against bim, revolted instead under their commander Mudlij b. Zakariyyā' and briefly occupied Qayrawan.[16]

13. These events have been recounted by Talbi, Halm, and others in greater detail, based primarily on Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Iftitāḥ*.

14. Mīla was a town in central-west Algeria, about a third of the way west from Constantine to Setif and thus in the middle of Kutāma territory.

15. He forwarded a portion of the booty to the Imam who was by then residing in Sijilmāsa. On this see below.

16. During this revolt they freed the inhabitants of the local prison – an event of special importance since one of the prisoners was Abu'l-

With the Aghlabid state showing signs of weakness and an inability to muster a strong resistance, the rebels began bolder operations. Ṭubna fell next in Dhu'l-ḥijja 293/Sept.–Oct. 906, followed by Bilizma. Bāghāya was taken in Sha'bān of 294/May-June of 907. These were important cities arrayed like steps on the route to Qayrawan and Raqqāda. But, despite such progress, the end was not in sight until a final confrontation took place at al-Urbus in the Spring of 296/909. When that last city fell to Abū 'Abdallāh on Sunday, 23 Jumādā II/19 March, Ziyādatallāh waited no longer but left Raqqāda himself on the same day. On Monday the looting of his palaces began and on Tuesday the only remaining Aghlabid general who might have opposed the Kutāma fled from his last refuge in Qayrawan. Upon learning of what had happened, Abū 'Abdallāh immediately dispatched Gazwiyya, one of his Berber commanders, with a detachment of 1,000 horses to scatter the looters and restore order as quickly as possible. Abū 'Abdallāh himself entered Raqqāda on Saturday, 1 Rajab 296/25 March 909.

The Coming of the Imam to North Africa

After the two brothers had been sent out on the respective missions assigned them, the supreme head of the Isma'ili movement died and was succ eeded by the man who was eventually to take the throne name al-Mahdī. In contrast to the policy of his predecessors, around 286/899 this new leader began to suggest in his official correspondence that he would soon publicly announce his claim to be the Imam.[17] His declaration

'Abbās, Abū 'Abdallāh's own brother. This event occurred in Jumādā II 293 (March 906). On the revolt of Mudlij, see Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 139. The information about Abu'l-'Abbās's escape comes from Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Sharḥ al-akhbār fī faḍā'il al-a'imma al-aṭhār*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī (Beirut, 1994), III, 430, and Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 260. See also Halm, *Reich*, 105, trans., 109, and 118, trans., 118; and Talbi, *Aghlabide*, 657ff.

17. On this development and its background see Madelung, 'Das

caused considerable consternation in many sections of the *da'wa*, particularly but not exclusively in the east, especially 'Iraq. Previous Isma'ili doctrine clearly held that the Imam was Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq who was then, according to the accepted teaching, in occultation and about to reappear as either Imam or Mahdi. What difference there might have been between this public expression of doctrine and a private, secret understanding on the part of the high ranking *dā'īs* is impossible to determine with any confidence. Nevertheless, there are obvious indications of a rejection of the new pronouncement on the part of some of them. What followed is fraught with confusion. *Dā'īs* such as the famous 'Abdān and his brother-in-law Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ (Abū 'Alī) at first denied the Imam's claim and broke off their activities on his behalf. Others, however, ostensibly remained loyal to him. Shortly afterwards 'Abdān was murdered by the loyalists and Ḥamdān disappeared, soon to re-emerge in Egypt using the name Abū 'Alī and once again firmly on the side of the new Imam.[18]

One result of the confusion, however, was the premature revolt in Syria of the *dā'ī* Zakarūya and his two sons, who were known in history as the Man with the She-camel (*ṣāḥib al-nāqa*) and the Man with the Mole (*ṣāḥib al-shāma*). The story of this revolt need not be repeated here.[19] Its importance in this context is that it constituted a dire threat to the position of the Imam in Salamiya and exposed him to 'Abbasid counter measures and potential arrest. Rather than chance a favourable outcome of the extremely risky venture of these *dā'īs*, whom he most certainly felt he could not trust, the Imam fled south just ahead of them to the Palestinian city of Ramla, there to await the result of their dubious adventure.

The climate within the *da'wa* as a whole, however, must have been one of turmoil, this revolt being but one sign of it. While

Imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre.' The details of this particular schism are summarized in Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 125–35, and Halm, *Reich*, 64–7, trans., 62–7.

18. Madelung, 'Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ and the Dā'ī Abū 'Alī,' 117.

19. For a full account see Halm, *Reich*, 67–86, trans., 66–88.

these unsettling events transpired in 'Iraq and Syria, the areas of Egypt, Yemen under Ibn Ḥawshab, and the Maghrib continued as before, still loyal to the central leadership. By 286/899 Abū 'Abdallāh had been in the field among the Kutāma for six years. Moreover, he was far from the conflict. Still, he was presumahly in constant communication with headquarters, quite possihly through his brother in Egypt. Ibn al-Haytham adds to our information about this contact a story – one told by Ahū 'Abdallāh himself – about a *dā'ī* named Abu'l-Ḥusayn who had come to him and stayed in the Kutāma region for several years before returning to the east. But Abū 'Ahdallāh had never personally met either the previous or the new Imam. By contrast Abu'l-'Abbās worked as a go-between and often visited Salamiya from his main post in Fusṭāṭ. Unlike Abū 'Abdallāh, he knew the leadership personally and from direct experience.[20]

The revolt in Syria and the Imam's flight to Ramla occurred in 289/902; he was definitely in Ramla during a meteor shower on 28 October 902 (Dhu'l-Qa'da 289).[21] At that moment Ahū 'Abdallāh, though hy then approaching his tenth year with the Kutāma, had still not undertaken any major military campaigns. By contrast the foolhardiness of an early revolt in the east was now becoming obvious. First the Man with the She-camel and then his brother, the Man with the Mole, fell to 'Abbasid forces. The consequence of both their actions, and those of the 'Abbasids in response, sorely disrupted an already fractious *da'wa* and put the Imam in serious jeopardy. He realized that he had little choice but to continue to move westward and away from his former base. In departing from Salamiya for Ramla he was accompanied by his son, by a major *dā'ī* who may have been his chief lieutenant – a person named Fīrūz – and by a number of servants or slaves, one of whom lived long enough both to become the chamberlain of the Fatimid court of his master and later to recount for posterity his experiences on

20. On this point see also below.
21. Halm, *Reich*, 76, trans., 75.

the Imam's flight to North Africa.[22]

When Ramla proved to be an insecure hiding place, the party moved to Fusṭāṭ in Egypt where the *da'wa* was in the capable hands of Abū 'Alī, who was then also the titular *bāb al-abwāb* ('gate of gates'), the highest rank in the organization except for that of Imam. The retinue of Abū 'Alī in Egypt also included Abu'l-'Ahbās. They arrived there in Rahī' I 291/January–February 904.

By this time, Ahū 'Ahdallāh's forces had claimed their first victory in the conquest of Mīla (289/902) and, although still in a precarious position vis-à-vis the Aghlabids, an eventual triumph was now conceivable. Clearly, moreover, the Imam in Egypt recognized the likelihood of that outcome. Meanwhile, the 'Abbasids had sent a military expedition to Egypt which reached Fusṭāṭ on 1 Rabī' 292/11 January 905 for the purpose of replacing the semi-independent governor there. The new one took over on 2 April 905 (3 Jumādā II 292). Although as yet undetected by the authorities in Egypt, the Imam's position was again in jeopardy and he knew he would soon have to leave. His immediate circle thought they would surely go on to the Yemen but he decided in favour of the Maghrib, evidently impressed hy what he had heard of Abū 'Abdallāh's growing strength and the possibility of complete victory there.

When the Imam announced his intention, Fīrūz absconded to Yemen on his own. Abū 'Alī implored the Imam to take him with the departing party hut, aside from slaves and servants, only Abu'l-'Abbās, an obvious choice, went with him. The chamberlain Ja'far, who is the source for these details, was dispatched back to Salamiya to retrieve as much gold and other of the Imam's possessions as he could still find there. The Imam and

22. The *Sīrat Ja'far al-Ḥājib* (Arabic text ed. by W. Ivanow, *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts*, University of Egypt, 4 (1936): 107–33, Eng. trans. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids* (London, etc., 1942), 184–223, French trans. by M. Canard, 'L'autobiographie d'un chambellan du Mahdī 'Obeidallâh le Fâṭimide,' in *Hespéris*, 39 (1952): 279–330 (reprinted in his *Miscellanea Orientalia*, London, 1973, no. V). On this work see further below.

the rest joined a caravan in Alexandria heading west.[23] Half way to Libya they were attacked by brigands and, in the ensuing melée, Abu'l-'Ahbās received a serious wound on the face for which he was thereafter called *al-Makhṭūm* (the Broken-nosed). Upon reaching Tripoli the Imam halted to await Ja'far.

But, to test the situation ahead of him, he ordered Abu'l-'Abhās to travel on to Qayrawan. Their collective disguise until then was a claim to be no more than a party of merchants, even though the unusual size and wealth of the group was apparently hard to ignore. The Aghlabid authorities must surely have harboured quite valid suspicions about these 'merchants.' Perhaps they also knew about their connection with Abū 'Abdallāh and the Berber rebellion to the west. In any case they promptly detained Abu'l-'Abbās and locked him up in the jail of Qayrawan. Apparently, though interrogated harshly, he simply continued to insist that he was nothing but a merchant from the east. That was mid-summer of 292/905. He was still in the Aghlabid prison when, in the spring of the following year, the revolt of Mudlij set him free.

Having been warned away from Aghlabid territory by the earlier arrest of Abu'l-'Abbās, the Imam was by this time long ensconced safely, more or less, in the distant town of Sijilmāsa. As soon as Ja'far had rejoined the Imam's party in Tripoli, he had moved on, well aware that attempting to travel directly through Aghlabid territory to Kutāma country would not succeed. Instead he went by a southern route arriving at Tūzur in the Qasṭīliya region of southern Tunisia on 1 Shawwāl 292/6 August 905. Fearing imminent capture, however, he did not linger there for very long but departed again along what was perhaps the only route open to him – that leading eventually to the Maghribi trading centre of Sijilmāsa some two months away. There, thanks to his wealth and noble status, he was accorded a fair measure of respect and for a long while was

23. The source for this portion of the Imam's journey is the *Istitār al-imām* by al-Naysābūrī (Arabic text ed. by W. Ivanow, *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts*, University of Egypt, 4 (1936): 93–107; Eng. trans. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 157–83).

unrestricted by the local ruler who himself began to benefit from the attention and largesse of this new resident.

Soon after his arrival in Sijilmāsa, the Imam received a delegation from Abū 'Ahdallāh hringing both news of a major victory over Aghlabid forces and a sizeable share of the booty gained in it, including many newly minted dinars of a type that had not previously appeared in Sijilmāsa. Over the period of his stay in the far west there is no doubt also that messages and letters passed frequently between the *dā'ī* and the Imam, despite the distance between them and the danger of having to travel through often hostile territory in the middle.[24] But, in contrast to letters that could be hidden and kept secret, the Imam's open use of the new dinars might have exposed him. One person who noticed their presence was a noble merchant from Qayrawan, himself a Muṭṭalibī and, thus, a close relative and by tradition an ally of the Prophet's own Hāshimite family. This man, Abu'l-Ḥasan Aḥmad al-Muṭṭalibī, along with his son Abu'l-Qāsim, first encountered the Imam en route to Sijilmāsa where they became acquainted. The Imam befriended al-Muṭṭalibī and, discovering his pro-Shi'i inclinations and sympathies, took him into the *da'wa*, according to the direct testimony of the manservant Ja'far who was certainly present when it happened.[25] Non-Isma'ili sources from North Africa confirm parts of this story. Apparently al-Muṭṭalibī often repeated the account of his meeting and friendship with the Imam in Sijilmāsa, his noticing the new dinars, and the Imam's approval and trust of him, and instructions to conceal their mutual accord and what he had learned about the mission of Abū 'Abdallāh, the source of the dinars. Later, when al-Muṭṭalibī came to leave Sijilmāsa for Qayrawan, the Imam wrote letters addressed to Abū 'Abdallāh as a reference for him in the eventuality of the final conquest.[26] Even prior to the

24. Al-Naysābūrī, *Istitār*, 106; Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, par. 126 and p. 124; Halm, *Reich*, 92, 102, trans., 95, 106.

25. *Sīrat Ja'far*, 119, Eng. trans. in *Rise*, 202, Canard trans., 302.

26. Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 139; *Sīrat Ja'far*, 121–5, 131, Eng. trans. in Ivanow, *Rise*, 205–12, 220, Canard traus., 305–9, 319.

arrival of the Imam in person, those same letters were to earn al-Muṭṭalibī great esteem and honour from the victors. Ibn al-Haytham recounts significant additional details to confirm the importance of this man and his role in these events and the role of the letters which carried the Imam's stamp and seal.

As Abū 'Abdallāh and his Berber army moved rather slowly towards their ultimate goal, the situation of the Imam in Sijilmāsa grew more precarious. The link between the two could not remain hidden for ever. Eventually, Ziyādatallāh informed al-Yasa' b. Midrār, the ruler of Sijilmāsa, exactly whom he was harbouring.[27] Al-Yasa' reacted by separating members of the Imam's party and placing them all under house arrest. The servants were tortured for information. Thus, Abū 'Abdallāh's rescue of the Imam became more and more imperative. By the time of his definitive victory, he well knew that the expedition to Sijilmāsa had become urgent. It is likely, nevertheless, that he also understood the danger inherent of leaving Qayrawan and Ifrīqiya unattended or merely governed by commanders untested in this kind of administration. He required a senior official who could represent the Isma'ili *da'wa* with great authority in the face of the local Arabs – a task evidently not within the capacities of his Kutāma followers. He therefore wrote to his brother Abu'l-'Abbās, who had retreated to Tripoli after his escape from Aghlabid detention three years earlier, requesting him to proceed to Raqqāda and sent with his letter 200 cavalry as an escort.[28]

Upon Abu'l-'Abbās's arrival, Abū 'Abdallāh had completed his preparations. He announced publicly that Abū Zākī, his long-time associate, would assume the regency. Abū Zākī's influence among and control over the Kutāma was essential, while Abu'l-'Abbās had no standing with them. But clearly it was understood that Abu'l-'Abbās, although reluctant in the beginning, would be the real power in crucial matters of

27. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, p. 165, 227; Halm, *Reich*, 121, trans., 129.

28. This information comes from the account of Ibn al-Haytham. See below pp. 107–9.

religious policy. Abū Mūsā, the other Berher chieftain closest to Abū 'Abdallāh, was ill at the time – a fact reported by Ibn al-Haytham – and had not been able to go with the army.

The army under Abū 'Abdallāh departed Raqqāda one Thursday in the middle of Ramaḍān 296/6 June 909 and arrived before Sijilmāsa on Saturday 6 Dhu'l-ḥijja/26 August 909.[29] Since Abū 'Abdallāh had never seen the Imam himself, he took with him the son of al-Muṭṭalibī who personally knew the Imam from the days he had spent in Sijilmāsa with his father. By then the city's ruler, al-Yasa', had become somewhat uncertain about the exact identity of the person sought by the advancing army and he at first sent out another merchant before whom Abū 'Abdallāh is reported to have dismounted in error. The problem was soon sorted out, however, and the Imam finally obtained his freedom. Ja'far the chamberlain, along with others of the Imam's retinue, were, however, still under arrest in the city. Ja'far's account provides precious details of the rescue in Sijilmāsa and of Abū 'Abdallāh's efforts to find and liberate the whole party, including most particularly the Imam's son, Abu'l-Qāsim. But, as Ja'far was himself not a witness to the actual liberation of the Imam since he was under detention, he repeats an account related to him by al-Muṭṭalibī's son, who had seen it all.[30]

Once freed, the Imam was soon publicly proclaimed caliph on 7 Dhu'l-ḥijja 296/27 August 909. Thereafter the army commenced a slow and careful march back to Raqqāda that was to take the better part of four months as they deliberately returned at leisure through Kutāma territory. As they moved they attended to various matters. When they finally reached the former

29. For these dates see Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 152 and 153; Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. 'Alī Ibn Ḥammād, *Histoire des Rois 'Obaidides (Akhbār mulūk banī 'Ubayd wa sīratuhum)*, ed. and trans. M. Vonderheyden (Algiers and Paris, 1927), 9; Halm, *Reich*, 125, trans., 135.

30. *Sīrat Ja'far*, 123–4, Eng. trans. in Ivanow, *Rise*, 209, and Halm, *Reich*, 125–6, trans., 134–5. In the letter given to al-Muṭṭalibī, the Imam had ordered Abū 'Abdallāh to bring with him the son for just such an eventuality, according to Ja'far.

enclave of Īkjān, the Imam insisted on receiving the funds that had been collected for him and were stored there. Some of the Kutāma chieftains who thought they had a right to a share in this fund resented his act. However, to those attuned to the practical requirements inherent to the imamate with respect to various dues and other financial obligations owed the Imam, his action would not have seemed inappropriate. As such monies belonged to the Imam and were to be disposed of as he, and he alone, determined.

Word eventually reached Abu'l-'Abbās that the party was on Kutāma lands and would soon be on its way toward the pass of Sabība some 90 kilometres southwest of Qayrawan. He and those around him decided to ride out to greet it there. Finally all met in a grand ceremony, after which the whole procession proceeded to Raqqāda reaching the city on 20 Rabī' II/4 January. The Imam settled into the palace formerly occupied by Abū 'Abdallāh and his son took over another. On the following day, a Friday, al-Mahdī's name and titles were proclaimed in the *khuṭba* for the first time in Qayrawan, Raqqāda, and the other areas of the old Aghlabid state. His triumph was complete.

The Religious Situation in Qayrawan Before the Fatimids

Nearly all the surviving evidence about the old conflict between Mālikīs and Ḥanafīs derives from authors who were ardently loyal to the Mālikī point of view. Moreover, the Maghrib itself became more and more exclusively Mālikī in the next century. Ibn al-Athīr notes that it was only with al-Mu'izz b. Bādīs, the fifth/eleventh century Zīrid ruler (407–454/1016–1062), that the Mālikī legal school was finally imposed on its people. He reports that earlier the Aghlabids had favoured the school of Abū Ḥanīfa.[31] Almost as if to confirm this trend, Mālikī *ṭabaqāt* works increasingly denied the validity or relevance of any other school in the Maghrib, and tended to erase any record of its

31. 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rīkh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg (Leiden, 1851–76, reprinted Beirut, 1965–67), 9: 257.

ever having been otherwise. Still, the earliest surviving sources, which are nonetheless preserved by Mālikī authors, reveal the clear presence of prominent and influential Ḥanafīs in Qayrawan. 'Arīb b. Sa'd's account in Ibn 'Idhārī's *al-Bayān al-mughrib*[32] alone indicates a fairly vigorous scholarly tradition of Ḥanafī learning in that city. Fortunately, his data about this is corroborated, though quite uncharacteristically for a Mālikī author, by al-Khushanī's *Ṭabaqāt* which, in contrast to most works of its kind, includes biographical entries on some of the leading Ḥanafīs among the Mālikīs who are its main subject.[33]

Almost nowhere, however, is there any information among these accounts about other figures who might have been, for example, Shi'i. To be sure, one highly important feature of al-Khushanī's work is a list he gives of those scholars of Qayrawan who converted or otherwise joined the Fatimids after they came to power. Obviously, in his mind such turncoats, many of whom were previously Ḥanafīs, were the worst sort of renegades and their motives for changing allegiances were most often suspect and highly immoral. In any case, because of the narrow, generally partisan focus of these sources, an accurate and complete description of the scholarly community in pre-Fatimid North Africa appears unobtainable.

Generally speaking, Isma'ili sources could hardly be expected to add much more since they were primarily concerned with the revolution itself – the new dispensation – and not the prior intellectual climate of the state they conquered. Still, some interesting details of the situation just before the victory of Abū 'Abdallāh are mentioned by Qāḍī al-Nu'mān. However, he was primarily interested in presenting the victory in terms of the Isma'ili *da'wa*'s mobilization of the Berbers and the collapse of the Aghlabids, thus giving almost no credit to any other participants. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān is much more apt to be silent about

32. The sections on the Aghlabids and earlier Fatimids in the *Bayān* are mostly by 'Arīb.

33. Al-Khushanī was born in or near Qayrawan, which he left only in 311/923 and thus he was an eyewitness to the Fatimid takeover. On him see Ch. Pellat, 'al-Khushanī' in the *EI2*.

the local situation in Qayrawan and events there after the victory.[34] Therefore, his information contributed little to an accurate assessment of what had happened or was to happen in Qayrawan itself just before and after the takeover.

From Mālikī sources by themselves, the picture of Fatimid rule is one of severe persecution and harsh repression. Al-Khushanī reports that many suffered, including the ordinary people.[35] Al-Mālikī's *Ṭabaqāt*, the *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, never fails to mention the punishments inflicted by Fatimid authorities on the local *fuqahā'* (Mālikīs). A double case of the martyrdom of two Mālikī scholars was given an ever more embellished prominence in subsequent accounts, leading, finally, to depictions of it that are pure hagiography and not history. Ibn al-Haytham also took note of the same incident which for him had the opposite meaning, that of heresy and of rebellion. It is true that the initial phase of Fatimid rule, even setting aside some exaggeration, was less kind and gentle on the Maghrib than it was much later on Egypt. But, despite the assertions of biased sources – or perhaps because of them – modern scholars have understood little about what actually happened in those first months and years and what was the local attitude, including what, if any, was the role in those events of the scholars of Qayrawan itself. It would have helped considerably to have available a source that spoke for the side of the local non-Mālikīs, possibly the Ḥanafīs but, of course, even better, for an indigenous Shi'i community. However, no such source was known to exist and the Ḥanafīs, having disappeared or gone over to the Fatimids after their triumph, ceased to be a presence and left no records of their own.

34. Based on the new information presented below, one might justifiably ask if Qāḍī al-Nu'mān did not purposely leave out what he knew about the role of those from Qayrawan who joined the *da'wa*.

35. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Khushanī, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt 'ulamā' Ifrīqiya*, ed. Mohammed Ben Cheneb in *Classes des savants de l'Ifrīqiya* (Paris, 1915), 232. Some further details are provided by the contemporary Mālikī scholar Abu'l-'Arab al-Tamīmī in his *Kitāb al-miḥan*, ed. Yaḥyā Wahīb al-Jubūrī (2nd ed. Beirut, 1988).

In the circles of a city like Qayrawan in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, the *madhāhib* of the *fuqahā'* were designated by the eastern city of their founder. Thus, the two main factions were called the 'Iraqis (*al-'Irāqiyyūn, ahl al-'Irāq*), or occasionally the Kufans (*al-Kūfiyyūn*),[36] which always meant Ḥanafīs, or the partisans of Madina (*al-Madaniyyūn, ahl al-Madīna*), which indicated the Mālikīs. On the periphery of the larger Islamic world, religious affiliation was thus tied to a base at a distant centre back in the east. Yet, somewhat ironically, but certainly in keeping with this trend, upon the arrival of Abū 'Abdallāh and the Isma'ili *da'wa* beginning in 280/893, the local North African term for him was the 'Easterner' (*al-mashriqī*) since he had come to Ifrīqiya from the east. Those who joined his movement were labelled the 'Easterners' (*al-mashāriqa*), although nearly all were at that point native Berbers of the Kutāma tribe. If someone were to convert or otherwise come to adhere to the Isma'ili *da'wa*, the verb used was *tasharraqa* ('to become an Easterner'). Abū 'Abdallāh himself was known for a long time also as al-Ṣan'ānī ('the man from Ṣan'ā') even though he had spent less than one year of his life in that Yemeni city and actually hailed from Kufa.[37]

In part this distinctive label for the Isma'ilis may have begun among the Kutāma themselves as a positive way of noting the transference of an allegiance from a purely local tribal affiliation to that of a widespread movement which had its roots in the all-important eastern centre of Islam itself. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, whose *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa* is the most important account of Abū 'Abdallāh's origin and early activities, reports this name for the Isma'ilis seemingly without embarrassment and perhaps with a touch of pride.[38] The use of the term in this way became common for all of the North African writers and it

36. 'Madhhab al-Kūfiyyīn,' al-Khushanī, 193.

37. Examples: Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 124, 137.

38. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, paras 49 (p. 52) and 71 (p. 79). The fact that Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn repeats this information in his history written in the fifteenth century (*'Uyūn al-akhbār*, ed. al-Ya'lāwī, 94 and also 273, 355) confirms this.

appears, for example, frequently in the Mālikī *ṭabaqāt* works. Al-Khushanī even devotes a chapter to 'A record of those scholars of Qayrawan who became Easterners (*man tasharraqa*).' For these Mālikīs who were entirely hostile witnesses, however, the terms must have been used to indicate a foreign innovation and heresy, one not acceptable to the local or traditional orthodoxy.[39] For the scholars of Qayrawan, to become an Easterner was not a good thing; the Isma'ilis were foreigners.

On the eve of Fatimid victory, the religious culture of the Aghlabid domain was, thus, controlled by scholars of either the Mālikī or the Ḥanafī legal schools. There were significant representatives of both traditions in the major cities. Although these were each respected Sunni schools, often the doctrines that separated them were the subject of fairly intense rivalry and enmity, particularly in those cases where the Ḥanafī authority also happened to espouse a Mu'tazilī theological position. The sources usually note this tendency by announcing that the person in question advocated the 'createdness of the Qur'an.' At the beginning of the third/ninth century the problem of opposing views of the law was solved by appointing two qadis for Ifrīqiya (i.e. Qayrawan), one Asad b. al-Furāt, who had studied with Mālik,[40] and the other Abū Muḥriz, who was considered an orthodox Ḥanafī. Later, with the appointment of the eminent Saḥnūn, the position of the Mālikīs hardened and the relationship between the schools grew far less fluid. Saḥnūn and his teachings, in fact, came to define the later Mālikī doctrine.

As mentioned, the Aghlabid court, unlike much of the common populace, tended to favour the Ḥanafīs and even the Mu'tazila. During the early reign of Ibrāhīm II (from 275/888) the grand qadi was Ibn 'Abdūn, a Ḥanafī, noted for his

39. Some examples: al-Qāḍī Abu'l-Faḍl 'Iyāḍ, *Tarājim Aghlabiyya mustakhraja min Madārik al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ṭālibī, (Tunis, 1968), 283, 284, 369, 383, 390–1, 394.

40. He had also studied in 'Iraq with disciples of Abū Ḥanīfa and thus he was well qualified in both schools, although the distinction was in his time less strict than it became after the arrival of Saḥnūn.

severity against the Mālikīs.[41] In 280/893 he was replaced by the equally harsh Mālikī 'Īsā b. Miskīn, who persisted until near the end of this reign.[42] When Ibrāhīm II departed in 289/902 for the jihad in Sicily,[43] Muḥammad b. Aswad b. Shu'ayb al-Ṣadīnī was appointed as the new qadi. Al-Ṣadīnī was both Ḥanafī and Mu'tazilī and his policies were decidedly antagonistic to the traditionalist Mālikīs, some of whom suffered harshly as a result. This situation, however, did not last long, in part because of the animosity of the populace and in part because of the accession several months later of Ziyādatallāh III who, upon coming to power, chose to placate his Mālikī subjects with the appointment in 290/903 of Ḥimās b. Marwān b. Simāk al-Hamdānī, who had been a student of Saḥnūn.[44] But to satisfy the court itself a Ḥanafī, Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Jīmāl, was made qadi of Raqqāda in 293/905, to the eventual annoyance of Ḥimās who threatened to, and then finally did, quit his post in either 294/906 or 295/907.

These were serious conflicts which in many ways dominated the intellectual life of North African cities, especially Qayrawan and Raqqāda. The men just mentioned played an important part in the early life of Ibn al-Haytham who grew up in the midst of the controversy between the two sides and had met and knew personally many of these scholars and judges. Ibn 'Abdūn, al-Ṣadīnī, Ḥimās, and Ibn Jīmāl were still alive when the Fatimids took over, and they, together with many of the other local *fuqahā'*, were immediately confronted by the incoming government and subjected to its new religious policies.

41. Talbi, *Aghlabide*, 275, 697.

42. Ibid., 274–7.

43. Ibrāhīm II left for Sicily in Rajab 289/June 902 and died there in Dhu'l-Qa'da 289/23 Oct. 902. See Halm, *Reich*, 103–4, trans., 106–8.

44. On Ḥimās (222/837–303/915–16) in addition to the citations given below, see Talbi, *Aghlabide*, 549–51.

The Shi'is of Qayrawan

Less than six weeks after assuming power, Abū 'Abdallāh appointed a local figure, Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Marwadhī, as qadi of Qayrawan.[45] Information previously available strongly hinted at this man's prior affiliation with Shi'ism but since, aside from this one case, almost no other evidence suggested that there were Shi'is in Qayrawan, it was quite possible, even reasonable, to doubt such a connection. Ibn al-Haytham, however, not only admits to the Zaydism of his own family but names several others among his circle who were clearly Shi'is of one kind or another. In fact the leading authority among them was this very al-Marwadhī. Ibn al-Haytham was a schoolmate of the same man's son. Other Shi'is included Muḥammad b. Khalaf, Ibrāhīm b. Ma'shar,[46] and Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Muṭṭalibī. Some time after his father's death, Ibn al-Haytham had, as one of his teachers, a certain Muḥammad al-Kūfī, then lately arrived from Sicily.[47] This man taught him Shi'ism, not of the vague and extremely moderate kind of his own Zaydi father,[48] but evidently of a much more radical form. He also maintained close contacts with other local Shi'is. Later he was appointed *khaṭīb* and imam of the congregational mosque by Abū 'Abdallāh.

From the new information alone, however, it would be difficult to estimate the number of Shi'is in Qayrawan or the extent of their influence. Certainly they were not many and they had always to conceal their true beliefs lest they lose the protection of the law. Ibn al-Haytham recounts how he was nearly deprived

45. Mid-Sha'bān 296/April 909.

46. This man, a resident of Qayrawan, was the owner of a work called *Kitāb yawm wa layla.* On one such book with this title, see W. Madelung, 'The Sources of Ismā'īlī Law,' *Journal of Near Eastern Studies,* 35 (1976): 29–40, on pp. 39–40.

47. The date is likely to fall somewhere between 285 and 290/898–903.

48. The father died in 285/898 and thus did not live to supervise his son's education beyond elementary reading of the Qur'an and other basic texts.

of his legitimate inheritance because the Mālikī qadi Ḥimās suspected his orthodoxy. Nonetheless, it is significant that there were some Shi'is, and that they were participants in elite scholarly circles. These Shi'is, for example, frequented the teaching sessions of the leading Ḥanafīs with whom they obviously shared a degree of mutual respect. When Ibn 'Abdūn, the most esteemed of the Ḥanafīs, died, al-Marwadhī, the Fatimid-appointed (and now an Isma'ili) judge said prayers over him. They were, in fact, old friends and colleagues. Ibn al-Haytham also confirms Fatimid regard for Ibn 'Abdūn even though he never converted (as did many other Ḥanafīs). Still, it is evident from Ibn al-Haytham's account that these Shi'is studied with the Ḥanafīs in large measure because they were not allowed either to teach or to study their own Shi'i law in public. Significantly, once he began to study Shi'i *fiqh* under al-Kūfī, Ibn al-Haytham ceased to attend and hear the sessions devoted to Ḥanafī law.

The presence of Shi'is in Qayrawan before the Fatimid takeover raises questions about other instances of Shi'ism in the Maghrib, particularly about the mission of the obscure al-Ḥulwānī mentioned in several places (among them Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa*). Ibn al-Haytham also refers to this man who, in Isma'ili sources, is said to have been sent to the Maghrib by the Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. However, these various accounts all name people who were converted by al-Ḥulwānī and yet who also met and supported Abū 'Abdallāh. The list is fairly substantial, including Ismā'īl b. Naṣr al-Ma'ādī, Ibn Ḥayyūn Abu'l-Mufattish, Abu'l-Qāsim al-Warfajūmī, Abū 'Abdallāh al-Andalusī,[49] the *dā'ī* and judge Aflaḥ al-Malūsī, and most significantly Ḥurayth al-Jīmalī and Mūsā b. Makārim, two members of the very party of Kutāmīs who first encountered Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shī'ī in Mecca and urged him to return with them to their homeland.[50] All these men were Shi'is *before* the

49. The latter three men are cited in par. 38 (p. 40) of the *Iftitāḥ* where Qāḍī al-Nu'mān states explicitly that *'kāna hā'ulā'i shī'a'*.

50. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, par. 168.

arrival of any form of the Fatimid Isma'ili *da'wa*, having been already converted by al-Ḥulwānī.[51] But, if so, al-Ḥulwānī cannot have been sent by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who died some 130 years earlier, but must have arrived much later.[52] It may be that the Fatimid authors, when they came to mention the influence of al-Ḥulwānī, preferred to credit Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, an Imam they recognized, with having sent him on this mission.

Religious Measures and Debates

The appointment of al-Marwadhī as qadi gave him the power to impose fairly strict adherence to Shi'i ritual and law, and the measures he took were known previously from various historical sources. It is now clear, however, that they were in line with his own previous Shi'i inclinations and not due solely to a policy brought and instigated by the Fatimids. Still, these changes of al-Marwadhī were supported by the two brothers and later confirmed by al-Mahdī at the beginning of 910 (297). Ibn al-Haytham provides an interesting description of the precise moment when the appointment of the new qadi was arranged in Sha'bān/April of the year before. He reports that the matter began with al-Muṭṭalibī's asking Abū 'Abdallāh on behalf of the people of Qayrawan that a qadi be appointed to supervise their affairs. Al-Muṭṭalibī had earlier met the future al-Mahdī and was close to him. The Imam's letters, which he carried with him and was to use when Abū 'Abdallāh's campaign finally succeeded, ensured him high status with the new government. Thus, al-Muṭṭalibī's request for a qadi was not to be ignored, despite the fact that the Isma'ili *da'wa* had never needed one before. According to Ibn al-Haytham, Abū 'Abdallāh first pointed to him as the most suitable candidate,

51. See, for example, Ibid., paras 38 (p. 40) and 168.

52. This Imam died in 148/765 and Abū 'Abdallāh, the vanguard of the Ismaili *da'wa*, reached Kutāma territory in 280/893. Even allowing that all those on this list except al-Malūsī were dead by the time of the Fatimid victory, al-Mahdī was still able to appoint al-Malūsī to a judgeship. Admittedly he was old by then, but not that old!

but Ibn al-Haytham proposed al-Marwadhī as the senior Shi'i scholar. Abū 'Abdallāh accepted this proposal without much thought but warned al-Marwadhī to forget any grudges lingering from former times. He rightly anticipated that, in his implementation of Shi'i law, al-Marwadhī would be subject to an urge for revenge against those responsible for the previous repression of the Shi'is in the city. Abū Mūsā, the Kutāma leader, protested this decision. He evidently resented the interference of an independent judge in his own authority over the town.

Over the following months, Shi'i rituals and institutions were increasingly imposed on everyone. The *adhān* was changed; the Shi'i phrase 'Come to the best of works' was inserted in place of 'Prayer is better than sleep.' The *tarāwīḥ* prayers led by an imam during Ramaḍān were forbidden. The Shi'a regard this practice as a reprehensible innovation of the second caliph 'Umar and thus not to be allowed. It is, however, considered sunna in Mālikī law.[53] In the new *khuṭba*, a prayer was added for 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib immediately following that for the Prophet. Thereafter came benedictions for Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn. In general the new qadi decreed that the practices of 'Umar and other Companions not confirmed by 'Alī and the family of the Prophet were unacceptable.[54] The implementation of these and other[55] changes and the suppression of Sunni practices by the newly appointed local Shi'i qadi with the eager support of the local Shi'is aroused much popular Sunni resentment against him personally. They were, however, fully in accord with the previous practice of Abū 'Abdallāh among the Kutāma Isma'ilis and with early Fatimid religious policy.

53. See Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 137; Halm, *Reich*, 120, trans., 127–8; al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, II, 55–6; A. J. Wensinck 'Tarāwīḥ' in the *EI2*.

54. On these changes see Halm, *Reich*, 219–20, trans., 243–4; al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, II, 55–6 (and notes); Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 151–2.

55. Such as the abolition of the *qunūt* prayers and the *qiyām al-layl*, as well as loud mourning. In general see Halm, *Reich*, 215–22 (particularly p. 219); trans., 239–47 (p. 243).

In addition to these changes, which would have been readily and immediately obvious to the general public, questions of law and the Shi'i religious interpretation of them were soon hotly debated among the scholars of Qayrawan. Abū 'Abdallāh saw to that almost from the moment of his arrival and his brother continued the practice. One record of the various 'debates' (also signified by the term *munāẓarāt*) between the brothers and the local (Mālikī) *fuqahā'* has long been available. That version comes from al-Khushanī and appears in his biography of Abū 'Uthmān Sa'īd b. al-Ḥaddād who is presented there as the courageous champion of orthodoxy against the heretics. It later became a part of Mālikī legend and proved how, in the face of an obvious mortal threat, Ibn al-Ḥaddād had upheld the truth.

In the new material supplied by Ibn al-Haytham, however, the picture changes considerably. Abū 'Abdallāh and his brother were fond of disputation and they indulged in it almost relentlessly. It was the principal means they used for teaching and propagating doctrine. Abū 'Abdallāh held such sessions with many individuals and groups: Ibn al-Haytham, the local Shi'is and Ḥanafīs, as well as the Mālikīs. The latter were not singled out, nor, it would seem, coerced into them. But what is striking about Ibn al-Haytham's report is his own role in these debates. With the permission and commission of the brothers, it was often he who confronted his fellow scholars of Qayrawan; he was thus acting for them and the Fatimids as well as for the Shi'i side in these public controversies.[56]

In the end, he says, Ibn al-Ḥaddād, who was obviously the main opponent in many of the debates, wrote what Ibn al-Haytham claims was an embellished account of them, and by lying about them made them seem what they were not.[57] Ibn

56. He specifically recounts his role in one debate mainly with Ḥanafīs on the inheritance of women and another with Ibn al-Ḥaddād about the meaning of the Prophet's declaration at Ghadīr Khumm.

57. A version of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's account is preserved in al-Khushanī, 148, 198–212; al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, II, 57–115; 'Iyāḍ, *Madārik*, 351–63. See also Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 269–70.

al-Haytham also reports that he himself wrote a refutation of what Ibn al-Ḥaddād had put in his book.[58] He states clearly, moreover, that he was personally present at all of the debates this man had with either of the two brothers.

Despite the tone of scholarly respect and courtesy evident in some accounts of these debates, as the year wore on, the suppression of both Ḥanafī and Mālikī jurisprudence grew increasingly complete. Finally, it was forbidden to issue a ruling on the basis of the works of either Mālik or Abū Ḥanīfa. Ibn al-Haytham notes with pride that their books were soon all but worthless, and were sold for use in pharmacies to wrap prescriptions or exported to Andalus. The zeal of the local Shi'is was obviously not restrained but rather supported by Abu'l-'Abbās; they were thus willing instigators of a new mandate on behalf of their recently victorious Isma'ili rulers.

One incident, previously mentioned here, provides a useful way of illustrating the complex interactions of all these scholars and of the way older sentiments played a role in the new situation. It involves the two Mālikī *faqīh*s, cited earlier, who were arrested in Qayrawan, reportedly for slandering the Fatimids, and were subsequently put to death by the authorities. This case later became a highly celebrated example of martyrdom. What really happened is not, of course, quite so simple. The principal victim was a man known by the name Ibn al-Birdhawn. He had a reputation as a zealous agitator against the Ḥanafīs, having once been a student of Ibn al-Ḥaddād and, thus, a specialist in disputation. As early as 290/903, during that fairly brief period of Ḥanafī ascendancy when the qadi was one of their party, Ibn al-Birdhawn was detained and officially flogged. Apparently that punishment achieved little and when, soon after, the Mālikīs gained the upper hand again, he reverted to his old habits. But, when finally the Fatimids came to power and the Mālikīs were out, several leading Ḥanafīs –

58. That very account appears to be what Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī alludes to in his *Kitāb al-imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasa*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad al-Zayn (Beirut, n.d.), III, 195, referring there to Ibn al-Haytham and a *munāẓara* about the imamate.

the two named are Ibn Ẓafar and al-Kalā'ī – took their revenge by reporting to the authorities that Ibn al-Birdhawn used to praise Mu'āwiya and disparage 'Alī. Ibn al-Hudbayl, the second of the two men, was accused of a similar crime. As a consequence, Ibn al-Birdhawn was sentenced to 500 lashes and then to die; the other man was sentenced to death alone. After their execution, carried out on the orders of the new governor of Qayrawan, Ibn Abī Khinzīr, they were publicly exposed and crucified. The execution took place in Ṣafar of 297/October–November 909 and provided the first martyrs for the Mālikīs who later made as much out of the event as possible.[59] Ibn al-Haytham also mentions the same incident and supplies the details concerning what these men were accused of, i.e. asserting publicly that 'Alī had no right to claim the imamate and should not, therefore, have waged war against Mu'āwiya. This claim, which was distinctly at variance with orthodox Sunni doctrine predominant in the eastern Muslim world, reflected the strong pro-Umayyad sentiments among the Mālikīs in the Maghrib. Significantly, both the Ḥanafīs who had brought this affair to a head soon converted and joined the Fatimids.

It is now clear that the Fatimid revolution in the Maghrib and the local reaction to it was more complex than previously thought. Not only were some of the Kutāma already dedicated Shi'is, even prior to the advent of the Isma'ili *da'wa* among them, but also some members of the elite in Qayrawan were either Zaydi or Imami. To be sure, these latter Shi'is seem to have attached themselves to local Ḥanafī teachers since, in part, they were forced to hide their true religious attitudes. But those Ḥanafīs who later joined the Fatimids appear to have been naturally sympathetic to them for a variety of reasons, many

59. In the later *ṭabaqāt* works, both Ibn al-Birdhawn and Ibn al-Hudhayl receive generous amounts of attention. Ignoring historical impossibilities, the martyrdom was recast in dramatic form like a stage play. Brought before the Fatimid caliph al-Mahdī, who sits on his throne flanked by the brothers al-Shī'ī, the two Mālikīs must confess that al-Mahdī is himself the apostle of God, which they refuse to do and righteously accept death instead.

based on doctrinal affinities but others connected to their shared animosity toward the Mālikīs. What is not clear is to what extent the Ḥanafīs were aware of the Shi'ism of these associates of theirs. Nevertheless, the purely venal motives for their various conversions, attributed to them by al-Khushanī, are suspect; he was definitely not an unbiased ohserver. Forced conversion, certainly, was never at issue, despite a Fatimid policy from the beginning of insisting on Shi'i practices and norms in public life. But the assumption of power in its initial phase – that is, before the arrival of the Imam – brought with it an *ad hoc* policy in regard to the gradual imposition of Shi'i rules and regulations. The local Shi'is, once assured of a Fatimid victory and general support for their positions, seized the opportunity both for revenge against their previous oppressors and for a long sought ascendancy of their own. To a certain extent, the Ḥanafīs, particularly those with Mu'tazilī leanings, likewise used the Fatimid revolution to get back at the Mālikīs and gain their own advantage. For them, of course, conversion was ultimately the only avenue that remained open, although many were converted willingly. Not to participate fully with the new government would have left them in a difficult limbo since they evidently had no broad popular base in the Maghrib. Without government support and permission to practise law, they, like the Mālikīs who were themselves to suffer considerably over the ensuing decades, would have lost out completely. This is, in fact, what happened to them. But many, as with the local Shi'is, welcomed the Fatimids and were happy, at least initially, to support them and did so avidly and enthusiastically.

The Fall and Execution of the Brothers

Sadly, the *da'wa* that put the Fatimids in power suffered a major blow soon after its victory. Abū 'Abdallāh, his brother, and their two closest Kutāma allies, Abū Zākī and Abū Mūsā, were accused of conspiracy and disloyalty.[60] Less than fourteen

60. For a complete review of the information about this event see Halm, *Reich*, 148–56, trans., 159–68.

months from the euphoria of al-Mahdī's arrival and assumption of power, he ordered that the four be executed for treason, first Abū Mūsā, and then in rapid succession Abū Zākī, followed by the two brothers on Monday 15 Jumādā II 298/18 February 911.[61] The story of what actually happened, however, was, for different reasons, subject to exaggeration for polemical purposes, depending on the particular viewpoint of the source that related or preserved various accounts and explanations of the incident.

Moreover, the repercussions of this event, despite a degree of immediate serious unrest and some acts of open rebellion among the Kutāma Berbers, were relatively inconsequential given the previous importance and obvious centrality of those who were put to death. But the Imam must certainly have risked a great deal in moving so decisively against these men; they had been the architects of his triumph, and many of his Berber followers were beholden to them long before they had accepted him. To warrant such a drastic step, the threat to him and his rule must therefore have constituted a real and present danger.

One reason for the weak response from some members of the *da'wa* who might have felt the most disquiet over the execution of the brothers was al-Mahdī's deliberate policy of reassigning and thus dispersing his *dā'īs*. To cite an example, Abū 'Alī was finally allowed to leave Egypt to join the Imam at his new headquarters in Raqqāda, but was almost immediately sent off again on yet another mission to, of all places, Constantinople where he was taken prisoner by the Byzantines and detained for the next five years.[62] Ibn al-Haytham, the author of the memoir that reveals so much about the brothers and their stewardship of Fatimid government just after the initial

61. This is the date given by Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (*Iftitāḥ*, 316). 'Arīb (Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 164) prefers Tuesday, 1 Dhu'l-ḥijja 298/31 July 911.

62. This information comes from an obituary for Abū 'Alī included by Idrīs in his *'Uyūn al-akhbār* (as edited by al-Ya'lāwī, 236–38, but for some reason omitted from the earlier edition of M. Ghālib). See Madelung, 'Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ and the Dā'ī Abū 'Alī.'

takeover, who was clearly quite devoted to them personally, was dispatched to Spain as an ambassador to the famous Andalusian renegade 'Umar b. Ḥafṣūn, who had just recognized al-Mahdī as the caliph in his domains.[63] Neither of these key figures, therefore, were present when the blow occurred.

The accounts given in the sources leave the precise cause of the tragedy obscure. Fatimid tradition suggests that it was Abu'l-'Abbās, portrayed as Abū 'Abdallāh's evil older brother, who instigated the troubles that resulted in the executions by convincing his brother that he had more of a right to lead than the Imam. According to this version, Abu'l-'Abbās resented his own and his brother's demotion, and he was able to instill a similar attitude in the mind of Abū 'Abdallāh and of his Berber companions. Thus, although Abū 'Abdallāh went along with the plot against the Imam and deserved his own death, he was not himself the principal culprit or the primary cause of his own misfortune.[64]

Another explanation appears in both Fatimid and anti-Fatimid sources. According to these, the Berber leaders, disgruntled by their loss of power and the relative neglect of their interests on the part of the new caliph who, to cite but one of their grievances, often passed over them and re-employed officials of the previous regime in his new government, began to question his right to the imamate. Abū Mūsā, the supreme chief of the Kutāma, in particular, is said to have voiced doubts about whether or not al-Mahdī was, in fact, the Mahdi and to have demanded that he produce a miracle to prove his title. In one anti-Fatimid version Abū 'Abdallāh advises his Berber followers to demand that the Imam show them the sign that should be written on his back between his shoulder blades

63. Ibn al-Haytham alludes to his own participation in this embassy. The event itself was recorded in Ibn al-Khaṭīb's *Kitāb a'māl al-a'lām*, ed. E. Lévi-Provençal (Beirut, 1956), 32. See also Halm, *Reich*, 250, trans., 280.

64. This is certainly the case as it is presented by Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, paras 278–88 (pp. 306–19), which is the main official Isma'ili explanation for the background and cause of this event.

if he were really the Mahdi.[65] In one way or another this story appears, not only in the blatantly polemical context of the writings of the anti-Isma'ili Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār,[66] but also in Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Iftitāḥ*, which probably serves in this instance as an officially sanctioned account of what happened and why.

The case against Abu'l-'Abbās seems implausible on the surface. As the depiction of him by Ibn al-Haytham clearly reveals, the older brother, though admittedly more scholarly and, thus, the beneficiary of a wider and broader education than Abū 'Abdallāh, was equally devoted to the Isma'ili *da'wa* and its cause. Moreover, and most importantly, Abu'l-'Abbās had substantial personal knowledge of al-Mahdī, whom he had known both in Syria and in Egypt, as well as on the journey across North Africa. Like his brother he had spent over twenty years in the service of the *da'wa* whose Imam and supreme leader was al-Mahdī. Where Abū 'Abdallāh and his Kutāma companions spoke about abstractions they had never seen, Abu'l-'Abbās must have been rather familiar with the actual qualities of the man for whom they all worked.

Quite different is the case of Abū Mūsā. There is evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with the conduct of al-Mahdī among the Kutāma from the very beginning. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān reports that when the Imam, on his way from Sijilmāsa to Raqqāda, passed through Īkjān, he ordered that the money gathered by the Kutāma *dā'īs* and shaykhs in support of the Isma'ili cause be surrendered and carried off with him. According to al-Nu'mān this aroused considerable resentment.[67] At the same time the Imam ordered the faithful Kutāma supporters of the *da'wa* to move with him to the capital. Many of them may have expected that the Imam would reside among them, his most loyal supporters, as Abū 'Abdallāh had done.

65. Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 161–2.

66. 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, ed. 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthmān (Beirut, 1966), 380–91. A version also appears in Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 161–2.

67. See Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 288–9; Halm, *Reich*, 135–6, trans., 144.

Al-Mahdī's common reliance on Arab officials and on slave servants, the Kutāma's own relegation to a lower rank and status, as well as his caliphal lifestyle, added to the discontent and soon led to charges that he did not fulfil the expectations connected with the advent of the promised Mahdi.

Abū Mūsā, as the chief of the Kutāma, could not have been indifferent to such dissatisfaction even though al-Mahdī kept him as the chief of his Berber army. He appears in Ibn al-Haytham's account as a proud man who jealously guarded his own power, a person who did not hesitate to censure Abū 'Abdallāh openly when the latter appointed an independent judge in Qayrawan who would interfere with his own government. It is therefore not unreasonable to think that Abū Mūsā would have dared to confront al-Mahdī, giving vent to the misgivings among his tribesmen, without realizing that the Imam was much less dependent on his support than Abū 'Abdallāh had been. Although the open confrontation seems to indicate that a concrete scheme of revolt did not exist at the time, the Imam acted to deprive any Kutāma rebellion of its potential leadership.

While Abū Mūsā may well have come to regret al-Mahdī's assumption of power and may have contemplated a revolt against him, Abu'l-'Abbās's role in the plot looks more as if it was based on a calculated smear. Perhaps because he had entered the local scene only in the final phase of the Fatimid takeover and, thus, had no immediate following there, it was easier to lay blame on him as an outsider than on his brother, who was revered by the Kutāma with whom he had lived as teacher and leader for over eighteen years. Significantly, in his reaction to the deaths of the two brothers, al-Mahdī is reported to have expressed regret over that of Abū 'Abdallāh, whom he continued to praise for his efforts on behalf of the *da'wa*. But in the case of Abu'l-'Abbās he merely offered condemnation and reproach. The story of his reaction may be largely accurate and the sentiments expressed by the Imam genuine, but it also served a purpose in publicly assigning blame for what happened while at the same time preserving the link to Abū

'Abdallāh's original mission and his personal success with it.[68] Although now, as then, it is impossible to read Ibn al-Haytham's memoirs without pondering the loss of the two men he describes with such reverent awe and personal respect, he himself does not allude directly or, possibly, even indirectly to the tragedy itself. And this judgment applies most strikingly in the case of Abu'l-'Abbās, the putative villain of subsequent events.

In yet another passage of Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's account of Abū 'Abdallāh's seditious activity, he quotes at length the latter's rather pointed advice to the Imam not to corrupt the Kutāma by offering them riches, by appointing them to lucrative positions, and not to order them, as he had done, to wear pompous official dress and ornament.[69] Abū 'Abdallāh, thus, warned the caliph about his very style of rule. But it is obvious that the plain ascetic demeanour and simple habits that Abū 'Abdallāh acquired from long years of work in the field among the tribesmen were not those of al-Mahdī, who as Fatimid caliph adopted the trappings of power and majesty and kept a distance between himself and them. Ibn al-Haytham remarks on these qualities of Abū 'Abdallāh who, it seemed, no amount of wealth and power could change. Abū 'Abdallāh, who knew the Berbers as well as any outsider, saw what troubles lay ahead,[70] but his advice could easily be taken as a ploy for his own return to command. According to Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, Abū 'Abdallāh had in fact suggested to the Imam that he leave the command of the Kutāma to him, in which case al-Mahdī would have been able to live at ease in his palace without being troubled by any of them.

It may be significant that Abū 'Alī, the old *dā'ī* who had

68. Al-Mahdī's words in this instance are quoted not only by Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, where they might be expected most, but by the anti-Fatimid 'Arīb (Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 164–5) as well.

69. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, par. 279 (p. 308), quoted in full by Halm, *Reich*, 150, trans., 161.

70. The Berber disapproval of material wealth was also reflected in the revolt of the Kharijite Abū Yazīd, who took pride in his ascetic life style and castigated the Fatimid caliphs for amassing riches.

recruited the brothers and knew them well, was not nearby when the crisis occurred. As previously noted he had already been dispatched by al-Mahdī on a mission to Constantinople where the authorities detected his true purpose and put him in prison. However, when he was eventually released, he returned to North Africa and is reported to have commented that, had he been present, he could have prevented the tragedy. He used to say, 'Our Lord, the Commander of the Faithful, is like the sun whose light is bright and blinding such that, if it were not followed by the moon to moderate and cool its effects, no plant could develop properly on earth and the heat would overpower it.'[71] But whatever al-Mahdī actually believed or had been told about the matter, and whether or not it was entirely accurate, he regarded it as treason and acted accordingly.

The Role and Character of Abu'l-'Abbās

Given the effort to blacken his name and blame him for the corruption and downfall of his brother, the role of Abu'l-'Abbās deserves special attention here because it contrasts so completely with the picture that emerges from Ibn al-Haytham's account of him.[72] Clearly, despite his secondary position with

71. Quoted by Madelung in his article 'Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ and the Dā'ī Abū 'Alī' (p. 120) from the obituary of Abū 'Alī as preserved in the *'Uyūn al-akhbār* (ed. al-Ya'lāwī, p. 237).

72. For the known facts about Abu'l-'Abbās, see the following: al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*, ed. M. al-Ya'lāwī (Beirut, 1991), vol. 5, 264–7; Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 150–2; al-Naysābūrī, *Istitār al-imām*, in Ivanow, *Rise*, 182; *Sīrat Ja'far*, 116, 121–2, 123, Eng. trans. in *Rise*, 198, 206, 209, Canard trans., 295–305 (especially 298 n. 2); Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, pp. 162, 260–3, 269–70, 275, 306–20; Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb al-Majālis wa'l-musāyarāt*, ed. al-Ḥabīb al-Faqī, Ibrāhīm Shabbūḥ and Muḥammad al-Ya'lāwī (Tunis, 1978), 183f; Idrīs, *'Uyūn*, ms. (as given by al-Yalāwī) pp. 112–13, 117, 132–3, 147–9, 161, 163–4, 167–8, 223; al-Khushanī, 199–210, trans., 288–304; Halm, *Reich*, 44, 61, 74, 89, 105, 117–20, 122, 133, 136, 151–6, 217, 332, trans., 39, 58, 73, 91, 109, 124–8, 130, 141, 145, 162, 165–8, 240, 375; and 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 380–91.

respect to the mission of Abū 'Abdallāh, Abu'l-'Abbās was an important figure and, from as far back as 278/891, was intimately linked to the central activities of the *da'wa*. There are, moreover, references to Abū 'Abdallāh's almost reverential regard for his older brother, whom he treated as his senior in more than chronological age. He is said, for example, to have stood up for Abu'l-'Abbās whenever they were together, and to have remained standing until his brother granted him permission to sit. Of the two, Abu'l-'Abbās was obviously the better educated.[73] Fatimid sources, such as the *Iftitāḥ*, agree on this, and the new account by Ibn al-Haytham bears ample witness to it. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān readily admits that Abu'l-'Abbās had a keener intellect and sharper wit and was more learned in the sciences than his brother.[74] Moreover, Abu'l-'Abbās seems to have read widely, not only in religious sciences, but also in a full range of classical Greek sciences and theories.

Ibn al-Haytham was quite convinced of his great merit. He says of him, 'I had not seen his like before, nor do I expect that I will meet another the equal of him, who combined in himself all the sciences, who had read through the doctrines of every school, who had investigated the doctrine of those who differ and fully comprehended the statements of both ally and opponent.' And in another place he remarks, 'This man has an even greater eminence than his brother. In terms of rank, he surpasses his brother in knowledge. He exceeds him in the excellence of his company, the nobility of his character and his civility ... .'

He was, moreover, deeply impressed with Abu'l-'Abbās's masterful stewardship of the new government during the more than seven months of his rule. Yet Ibn al-Haytham's portrait of Abu'l-'Abbās presents him as a reluctant leader, a person less at ease with public responsibilities than his brother. He, for example, at first insisted that he would not meet with or receive

73. See, for example, the comments of Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, par. 243 (pp. 269–70); Halm, *Reich*, 118–19, trans., 126.

74. *Iftitāḥ*, 269–70. However, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān also notes that Abū 'Abdallāh was sounder in his judgement and the more pious of the two.

the visits of others until the Imam and his brother returned. Later he accepted only under pressure to host a general audience at the feast marking the end of Ramaḍān. Many, if not most, of his sessions with Ibn al-Haytham occurred in private with few other than servants in attendance.

It is interesting also that Abu'l-'Abbās, once freed from Aghlabid detention in 293/906, chose to retreat to Tripoli. For three years he remained there and did not attempt to reach either his hrother or the Imam. Perhaps he had been ordered to do exactly that or knew well that it might be too difficult and even impossible to journey into the mountains where Abū 'Abdallāh and the Kutāma were. If he had been apprehended a second time en route to the west, it would have appeared a sure proof of his complicity. He might, however, have contemplated travelling on to Sijilmāsa but did not. Even when the final victory came, Abu'l-'Abbās did not set out immediately.

It is true that the fleeing Aghlabids blocked the path for a time although they soon enough reached Tripoli. There Ziyādatallāh confronted Abu'l-'Abbās for one last time. For most of those three years a party of Fatimids had waited in the city. Among them were the mother and sisters of the Imam under the care and protection of al-Khazarī, another *dā'ī* like Abu'l-'Abbās. The two *dā'ī*s, in fact, often debated with each other in the mosque pretending to support the doctrines and opinions of opposite sides so as to deflect suspicion of any collusion between them. When Ziyādatallāh attempted in that last encounter to force a confession from Abu'l-'Abbās about his connection to Abū 'Abdallāh, the brother could argue that, if he had been related to the leader of the Berber rebellion, he would have gone over to them instead of travelling to Tripoli and, in any case, would have already proceeded to Raqqāda.[75]

But was he ordered to remain in Tripoli until granted explicit permission to join Abū 'Abdallāh, which he received only in time for him to arrive just before his brother's departure for

75. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, paras 235–7 (pp. 260–3); Halm, *Reich*, 117–18, trans., 125.

Sijilmāsa?[76] The chronology of the events as implied by the *Iftitāḥ*[77] does not accord with the observations of Ibn al-Haytham, who seems to indicate that Abu'l-'Abbās did not reach Raqqāda until just before his brother's departure. Even then his role evidently had not been clearly delineated by Abū 'Abdallāh, who may not have had much time to arrange matters of that sort, and his assumption of what authority he inherited began slowly and hesitantly.

Thus, the picture of Abu'l-'Abbās painted by the sources is of an urbane scholarly intellectual, more at ease in private social exchanges than with public responsibilities, and less inclined to take on an arduous missionary venture of the kind his brother pursued. In contrast to Abū 'Abdallāh, he took evident delight in the pleasures of a sumptuous meal. Obviously, fine living held an appeal for him. It may well have been indicative of his character that he remained in Egypt when his brother went first to the Yemen and then to the Maghrib. In this he was not unlike Ibn al-Haytham, whose scholarly interests were much the same, and who, despite great sympathy for the cause of Abū 'Abdallāh, had not left the urban security of his home in Qayrawan for the rugged existence of the rebels in the mountains – a point not lost on Abū 'Abdallāh who raised it against him early in their first meeting together. It seems, therefore, unlikely that Abu'l-'Abbās would have been moved by personal political ambition. At most he may have encouraged his brother in the aim of preserving his effective control over the Kutāma and, thus, have exposed himself to the suspicion

76. The distance between Raqqāda and Tripoli is somewhat over 600 kilometres or about fourteen stages. Therefore, although pigeons could swiftly deliver a note from one place to the other, a journey on land would have required about a month for a round trip. Abū 'Abdallāh cannot have sent for his brother until some time in Rajab 296/April 909 at the earliest and it could well have been later. That Abu'l-'Abbās did not reach Raqqāda before Ramaḍān (May–June), perhaps not until early June, is thus reasonable and likely. This explains why Ibn al-Haytham, who was frequently in attendance with Abū 'Abdallāh, did not meet Abu'l-'Abbās until after the former's departure in mid-Ramaḍān (6 June).

77. Pp. 269–70.

that he wanted to remove the Imam from political power.

2. IBN AL-HAYTHAM AND THE HISTORICAL SOURCES

The Sources Previously Known

An unusual array of surviving sources cover various aspects of the advent of the Fatimids in North Africa. Of those known previously, two provide a view of it from outside and two from inside. Yet all four, at least in origin, were contemporary or come from sources contemporary to the events in question or nearly so. Most importantly they represent separate accounts not dependent on each other. They are the history of Ibn 'Idhārī entitled *al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār mulūk al-Andalus wa'l-Maghrib*, the biographies collected by al-Khushanī in his *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt 'ulamā' Ifrīqiya*, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's official history of the founding of the Fatimid state, his *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa wa ibtidā' al-dawla*, and finally the memoirs of al-Mahdī's chamberlain Ja'far. In addition there is a fair amount of information in other works that add to and complement what these four record. Moreover, quite significantly, and uncharacteristically for the Fatimids over the long run of their reign, the two inside accounts derived ultimately from the inner circles of the Isma'ili organization. Later periods of Fatimid history were, to be sure, similarly chronicled or otherwise documented by witnesses, but these writings have all too frequently not survived. It is also true to a certain extent that, with the possible exception of al-Khushanī's text, the information in the other three primary sources comes to us second hand.

Abu'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Idhārī al-Marrākushī lived long after the Fatimids.[78] He was active in the second half of the seventh/thirteenth and early eighth/fourteenth century. His *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, however, was based on and thus contains a good deal of valuable information from older

78. On him see J. Bosch-Vilá, 'Ibn 'Idhārī' in the *EI2*.

chronicles, most notably, for the coming of the Fatimids, the chronicle of 'Arīb b. Sa'd. An Andalusian native, 'Arīb, who died about 370/980, wrote his own history of the Maghrib for the Umayyad court in Cordova and his basic outlook was thus pro-Umayyad. Nevertheless, like al-Khushanī, of whom he was a younger contemporary, he relied in all likelihood for a good part of his information concerning the Maghrib on Mālikī refugees who had fled from there to Spain. In any case, because of the insertion in it of whole passages from 'Arīb,[79] the work of Ibn 'Idhārī is now the major source for the history of the later Aghlabids and the North African Fatimids. No other source provides as much information over the whole of the relevant time frame or as wide a geographical range.[80]

Quite separate from Ibn 'Idhārī, the Mālikī *Ṭabaqāt* of Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. al-Ḥārith al-Khushanī, who was born near Qayrawan where he was educated prior to departing in 311/923, offer a near contemporary eyewitness account of the lives and activities of many of the figures he thought fit to

79. From p. 134 of the edition the text is, in fact, based on the Gotha manuscript of a fragment of 'Arīb's chronicle in addition to the two manuscripts of Ibn 'Idhārī. There are quite long and important texts marked by square brackets in the edition which are found only in the 'Arīb manuscript and which were evidently omitted by Ibn 'Idhārī. Words or passages found only in the Ibn 'Idhārī mss. are enclosed in parentheses in the edition, but they are, with a few exceptions, quite insignificant. Since the 'Arīb manuscript contains only a fragment of his chronicle, it is likely that most of the text up to p. 134 also goes back to 'Arīb. He should therefore be given full credit in quotations from the *Bayān* in the sections on Aghlabid and early Fatimid rule, especially those marked by square brackets.

80. Though not for the period in question here, one other important source for Ibn 'Idhārī was the *History* (*Ta'rīkh Ifrīqiya wa'l-Maghrib*) of Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm al-Qayrawānī, usually called simply Ibn al-Raqīq, which is itself apparently lost. Ibn al-Raqīq, who died after 418/1027–8, worked for the Zīrids at a time when they were still ostensibly loyal and subservient to the Fatimids. He is thought to have visited Cairo during the reign of al-Ḥākim and to have been pro-Shi'i. Ibn al-Raqīq likely had access to some Fatimid works, quite possibly those of Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, but perhaps others. See M. Talbi, 'Ibn al-Raḳīḳ' in the *EI2*.

include in it. Although al-Khushanī eventually moved to Spain (where he died in 371/981) and to service there under the Umayyads, early in his life he had witnessed the Fatimid assumption of power and had seen the measures taken by them. Most importantly, in contrast to the *ṭabaqāt* works of the other Mālikī authorities, which naturally focus almost exclusively on the scholars and notables of this *madhhab*, al-Khushanī added to his own various sections on the Ḥanafīs, as well as accounts of those *fuqahā'* of Qayrawan who converted to the Isma'ili cause and also a special list of the scholars who were persecuted by the government.

Later Maghribi *ṭabaqāt* compilations, which were all Mālikī, never failed, of course, to point out the repression of their own by the Fatimids. The most important of these works, al-Mālikī's *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* and Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ's *Madārik*,[81] although rich in information about what happened to the members of this particular school under the Fatimids, both tend toward exaggeration and hagiography[82] and, regardless, depend on al-Khushanī for the details of the earliest encounters with the Isma'ilis as well as for the biographies of any of the scholars from Qayrawan under the last Aghlabids. Therefore, al-Khushanī's work has a historical value that is not always characteristic of items in the *ṭabaqāt* genre. He was certainly not unbiased but, nevertheless, he provides a viewpoint not given by 'Arīb or by the Isma'ili sources. Therefore he cannot be ignored. Still, because of his anti-Fatimid bias, most of the information he gives needs to be treated with caution. All along it would have helped immensely to have available some

81. Abū Bakr 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad al-Mālikī, a native of Qayrawan, died about 460/1068 (according to Bakkūsh, the editor of his *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*) and the Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ b. Mūsā al-Sabtī (from Ceuta) died in 544/1149. On the latter see the article by M. Talbi in the *EI2*.

82. These later Mālikī writers, beginning with al-Mālikī's *Ṭabaqāt*, were evidently under moral pressure to justify the horrible massacres of Ismaili communities throughout the Maghrib instigated by the Mālikī *'ulamā'*. This may explain why they quote at length lurid and obviously fictitious tales about Fatimid atrocities and about Ismaili heresy and atheism.

balancing record giving the opposing view.

In contrast to the non-Isma'ili accounts of the rise of the Fatimids and the reaction to them that may be extracted from sources such as those just mentioned, Isma'ili and thus Fatimid records largely, if not entirely, disappeared from North Africa and later even from Egypt. They were preserved almost exclusively by that Yemeni branch of the post-Fatimid Isma'ili *da'wa* known as the Ṭayyibīs. Even now most copies derive from Indian Ṭayyibī libraries where the majority of such texts have been copied and preserved. But, while the history of Ibn 'Idhārī appeared in print as long ago as 1848–51[83] and the Arabic text of al-Khushanī in 1915, Isma'ili works have been slow to reach historians because of their relative inaccessibility. Thus, a balanced account of Fatimid achievements could not be contemplated until recently. Finally, in 1936, the Arabic text of Ja'far's *Sīra* was published (with an English translation in 1942; French 1952). Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa,* however, though available to some scholars in manuscript earlier – it was put to good use, for example, by Mohamed Talbi in his *L'Emirat Aghlabide* (1966) – ultimately came out only in 1970, edited by Wadad Kadi (Dachraoui's edition in 1975).

However, even these two extremely valuable sources, rich as they are in detail, do not provide significant information needed for the whole picture. For example, for reasons not ohvious in the text, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, although quite thorough in his writing on the mission of Abū 'Abdallāh and its background, is less meticulous in his account from the point of his triumph onward. While he provides additional information, sometimes of great importance, such as the copies he includes of official decrees and other court proclamations from the earliest period of the new government, he is less attentive to events that took place in Raqqāda and Qayrawan for the period from Abū 'Abdallāh's assumption of power to the time when al-Mahdī

83. First edited by R. Dozy in his *Histoire de l'Afrique et de l'Éspagne* (Leiden, 1948–51), an edition that was superseded in 1948–51 by tbat of Colin and Lévi-Provençal.

took over. Perhaps, given that he provides such a wealth of information about other matters both before and after, his relative neglect of events in Qayrawan is not noteworthy. But did he also know about the memoirs of Ibn al-Haytham which certainly fill this gap amply? Or was he deliberately avoiding a discussion of the activities of Abu'l-'Abbās whom he overtly blames for corrupting Abū 'Abdallāh and causing tbe downfall of both as well as their Berber colleagues? Significantly, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and his works were accorded an official status and were personally approved by the Imams al-Manṣūr and al-Mu'izz.

The *Sīra* of Ja'far represents a uniquely personal document, though not one written by the person who related the story but by a later author, Muḥammad h. Muḥammad al-Yamānī from the reign of the Fatimid caliph al-'Azīz who, nevertheless, offers it as a first-person memoir. However, if Ja'far, who was born within months of his master al-Mahdī in 260/874, had still been alive in the time of al-'Azīz (365–386/975–996), he would have then exceeded the age of one hundred. Even granted its authenticity in general, there are details in it that Ja'far could not recall precisely, as he admitted himself. Significantly, despite his later role as chamberlain, he was originally simply a servant and, thus, did not necessarily have accurate knowledge about sensitive matters as, for example, those connected to the workings of the *da'wa*. Still, he did personally witness major events or was present on important occasions.

Ibn al-Haytham and the Value of his Work

The *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt* both provides an unexpected abundance of new information ahout a critically important period and at the same time fills in a chapter largely missing from the other sources. But recognition of its significance was delayed in part because the text did not survive on its own. Also, when it was first quoted in Isma'ili literature, it was not cited by a title but merely by author. Therefore, the true nature of the work in question remained unknown and became the subject

of speculation. Accordingly, when S. M. Stern noticed the passages from it as they appear in Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn's history of the Isma'ili Imams, the *'Uyūn al-akhbār*, he knew them only by the author without any way to recognize what work they might have come from.[84] It is now clear, however, that the three quotations given by Idrīs in the name of Ibn al-Aswad or Ibn al-Haytham all come from the *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*.

Idrīs, who lived from 794/1392 until 872/1468, was the nineteenth chief *dā'ī* of the Ṭayyibī Isma'ilis in the Yemen.[85] His son al-Ḥasan became the twentieth *dā'ī* and was also the teacher of Ḥasan b. Nūḥ b. Yūsuf b. Muḥammad b. Ādam al-Hindī al-Bharūchī (d. 939/1533), the author of the extensive compilation of Isma'ili texts called by him the *Azhār*. Born in India, he travelled to the Yemen to study with the leading Ṭayyibī authorities, most of whom continued to reside there.[86] He began the *Azhār* in 931/1524 and completed it after 935/1528. Fortunately, in the sixth part of the *Azhār*, al-Bharūchī, as he was wont to do with other works, simply copied Ibn al-Haytham's *Munāẓarāt* verbatim, even though only the beginning of it was germane to the subject he claimed to want to illustrate, namely the imamate of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. However, he stated clearly that the text contains an account of the discussions (the *munāẓarāt*) of Ibn al-Haytham with Abū 'Abdallāh. This fact was thus known to anyone with access to the *Azhār* and it appears appropriately and correctly in Poonawala's

84. Stern, who was trying to identify material in the *'Uyūn al-akhbār* that did not appear in any other known source, collected these quotations along with a number of others and they were eventually published together in his posthumous *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism* (Jerusalem, 1983), 100–4. H. Halm subsequently offered the speculation that all of these items were from the same work, a lost *Sīrat al-Mahdī*, which he then ascribed to Ibn al-Haytham. See his 'Zwei fatimidische Quellen aus der Zeit des Kalifen al-Mahdī (909–934),' *Die Welt des Orients*, 19 (1988): 102–117.

85. On him see Ismail K. Poonawala's *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature* (Malibu, Calif., 1977), 169–75, and 'Idrīs b. al-Ḥasan' also by Poonawala in the *EI2*, *Supplement*.

86. On him see Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 178–83.

Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature.[87]

However, while the text and its author were known in this manner and copies of the *Azhār* existed, the work itself received little or no serious scrutiny, perhaps because its potential historical value was masked by its bland title which, in the absence of careful inspection, appeared to promise no more than yet another discussion of doctrine. In his record of these debates, interrogations and discussions, Ibn al-Haytham in fact reveals a great deal more than simple items of doctrine; but from the title alone this was hardly obvious and it has thus proved to be an unexpected benefit of the complete manuscript. Perhaps the most interesting of all the *Munāẓarāt*'s new material are the details it provides of the author's own background and his upbringing among the elite of Qayrawan, of his education and career, and of his impressions of the two brothers who played so pivotal a role in the Fatimid revolution. These are not the normal elements of a *munāẓara*, which is usually simply a work of disputation.

Moreover, while it ostensibly covers only the author's conversations with Abū 'Abdallāh and Abu'l-'Abbās, much of Ibn al-Haytham's *Munāẓarāt* consists of stories that he told them about himself and about things that had happened to him. Thus, while these stories are in fact a part of various 'discussions' (the *munāẓarāt* of the title), they constitute at the same time elements of the author's own autobiography. In truth the narrative contains less of either of the two brothers than it does of Ibn al-Haytham. Many, if not the majority, of the passages in it record the words and statements the author made to someone else, not those of the men with whom he was conversing.

Thus, ultimately, the circumstances that prompted Ibn al-Haytham to write this work may reflect more than his desire to extol the virtues of the two brothers. From comments in it, moreover, it is clear that he cannot have written this work before the year 334/946, some thirty-seven years after the events he describes. By then he was about sixty years old and evidently

87. Ibid., pp. 34–5.

a well respected senior *dā'ī* of long standing and much service to the Isma'ili *da'wa* and the Imams. The year in question happens to coincide with the most dangerous and intense period of Abū Yazīd's revolt against the Fatimids. This Khariji rebel had taken Qayrawan that year and threatened the coastal capital city of al-Mahdiyya. In the same year, the Imam al-Qā'im died and his son succeeded, although, to avoid giving aid to the rebels, no public announcement of this fact was made for a while. The son quickly took to the field and began a long series of clashes with the enemy in which he was almost always victorious. He retook Qayrawan that same year (after Shawwāl 334/28 May 946).

Ibn al-Haytham mentions Abū Yazīd whom he, like all Fatimid writers, calls the Dajjāl ('the apocalyptic deceiver'). He also proudly notes that the 'son of the Imam' has taken the field against him. Surely, whether or not he personally knew that al-Qā'im had died, he could not put that fact in writing and therefore in these circumstances he used the officially allowed designation of his successor. Perhaps he did not know about it. Al-Manṣūr was not called by his eventual throne name until 336/947 after he had achieved total victory over Abū Yazīd.

One more item in Ibn al-Haytham's account has a bearing on the question of the date and circumstances of writing, namely his comment about the letter that Abu'l-'Abbās had written to the qadi al-Marwadhī, admonishing him to deal with members of the *da'wa* with special care. Ibn al-Haytham says that he once owned the letter but had lost it among other possessions taken from him during the revolt of Abū Yazīd. Evidently he must refer to things that were in his own house in Qayrawan from which he had obviously had to flee. The house, which was known to belong to him, an Isma'ili *dā'ī*, was without doubt ransacked by the invading forces (or possibly even the local population many of whom seized the occupation as an occasion for revenge). But Ibn al-Haytham could not have been sure of his specific losses before the re-entry of the Fatimid army at the end of May.

Why then did he decide at that moment to write the story of his first encounter with Abū 'Abdallāh and Abu'l-'Abbās? From the context it appears that he may have realized that the previous Imam was dead and that a new era under the son was about to begin. He obviously wanted to insure his place and position in the new *da'wa*, perhaps even to claim a higher rank. Thus, it was important in his view to rehearse for his reader, namely, the person to whom the work is addressed, who was probably above him in terms of influence among members of the innermost circle, including possibly the new Imam, his own credentials and his early membership and service in the *da'wa*. A subtext in his writing is the recurring theme of the high respect and regard due the *dā'īs* and their efforts which he hoped would be an inherent part of the next Imam's policies. Surely he hoped to benefit from it. If so, however, there is no sign that it worked in his favour. Al-Manṣūr and later al-Mu'izz gave preference to Qāḍī al-Nu'mān who may well have been a rival of Ibn al-Haytham.

The text of Ibn al-Haytham's memoir is, nonetheless, of inestimable significance, both for the history of the rise of the Fatimids in the Maghrib and for how the Isma'ili *da'wa* functioned in the first months following the victory of Abū 'Abdallāh. Incidental, but with almost equal claim to attention, is its depiction of the intellectual life of Qayrawan, the author's hometown, and that of his father and immediate ancestors.

One result of Ibn al-Haytham's extended discussion with Abū 'Abdallāh was his own conversion to the Isma'ili cause and his entry into the service of the *da'wa* as a *dā'ī*. Although the proselytizing role of the *da'wa* and its members is relatively clear from other accounts, none are as personal and direct. Here is perhaps the earliest account of what led one Isma'ili *dā'ī* to his own conversion, of what message he responded to, and how the senior *dā'ī* – in this case the masterful Abū 'Abdallāh, whose record of success as a missionary was, quite possibly, unsurpassed – convinced him to offer a pledge of total allegiance. The very act of making this covenant, although well known in the abstract, is here described in detail with its religious and

doctrinal justification fully outlined by Abū 'Abdallāh himself.[88] To be sure, the interrogation by Abū 'Abdallāh of Ibn al-Haytham reveals more about the author's prior religious knowledge and opinions than the teachings of the *da'wa* to which he was being summoned. Still, the method of Abū 'Abdallāh and what questions he used in order to elicit from Ibn al-Haytham the answers he wanted is itself instructive and provides a unique window to the activities of these *dā'īs*.

The work also presents a carefully drawn portrait of Abu'l-'Abbās. Assuming that, in his discussions with Ibn al-Haytham, he, too, in part intended to further the Isma'ili cause rather than merely entertain his new protégé, Abu'l-'Abbās's methods in many ways constitute a striking contrast to those of his brother. The older brother was obviously erudite in matters that Abū 'Abdallāh had either never studied, or preferred to ignore. The education of the discussants in the second half of the text is a noteworthy feature of it: they had each read Aristotle, for example, and could, as they did, discuss fine points of his logic or his treatises on animals. They each knew Hippocrates, Dioscurides, and other ancient sages, as well as the Epistles of Paul and other books. It is, on the one hand, interesting to find such learning in the provincal city of Qayrawan already by the end of the third/ninth century, but it is possibly of even more significance, on the other hand, to discover this level of erudition in key figures of the *da'wa* of that time and place.

Another highly important fund of new information in this text is its account of the Shi'is of Qayrawan. However few and isolated they were, their existence was not previously known and could hardly have been suspected from other sources. Ibn al-Haytham was born into a Zaydi family and, although he himself admits that he left the Zaydis for the Shi'ism of the Imamis,

88. For what was known previously about the Ismaili practice of taking an oath from those who converted, see H. Halm's 'The Isma'ili Oath of Allegiance (*'ahd*) and the 'Sessions of Wisdom' (*majālis al-ḥikma*) in Fatimid Times' in F. Daftary ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought*, 91–115.

who were also represented in Qayrawan, he continued his links to a variety of Shi'i schools. When he finally met Abū 'Abdallāh, he had also departed from strict Imami doctrine by remaining undecided about the correct line of the Imams after Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. He was thus not a Twelver, as he carefully explained to Abū 'Abdallāh. Still, at a critical point in his life Ibn al-Haytham was almost deprived of his inheritance by a Mālikī judge. Had he not concealed his beliefs and books and sought the intervention of a powerful friend of his father, his troubles might have multiplied. The Shi'is living under Sunni rule, even those who came from a wealthy, noble background, as in the case of Ibn al-Haytham, possessed neither security from religiously motivated persecution nor open and free access to others of like mind. Nonetheless, he was close to al-Marwadhī, whom he personally recommended for the judgeship of Qayrawan, to the latter's son, to a few other Shi'is, and to yet others who were later to convert to Isma'ilism, among them prominent Ḥanafīs, a substantial number of whom soon became Isma'ilis. Ibn al-Haytham's personal encounters with, and depiction of individual scholars from Qayrawan, which he related to the two brothers, are unusually valuable and provide an inside view of the elite of that city on the eve of a dramatic change.

The Education and Career of Ibn al-Haytham

In answer to a series of questions put to him by Abū 'Abdallāh, Ibn al-Haytham recounts the details of his heritage. His family traced their lineage to Kufa and to noble northern Arab blood. He was descended from Qays b. 'Āṣim b. Sinān b. Khālid b. Minqar of the tribe of Tamīm. An ancestor, the grandfather of his grandfather's father, al-Haytham b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān, had first come to Qayrawan in the service of the 'Abbasid governor Yazīd b. Ḥātim. Yazīd's brother and successor in the governorship of the Maghrib, Rawḥ b. Ḥātim, released him from service and sent him home with 10,000 dinars. Soon, however, having raised an even larger sum and having obtained a commission

from the 'Abbasid caliph al-Hādī (or al-Rashīd), he returned and began to acquire estates and build houses. He constructed one of these on the Simāṭ al-A'ẓam, the main street of Qayrawan. As late as the reign of al-Mu'izz this same house, obviously still identified with the author of these memoirs, is mentioned in passing in a Mālikī *ṭabaqāt* work as 'the house of the *dā'ī* Ibn Aswad.'[89]

Ibn al-Haytham's father died, he reports, in 285/898 when he was not yet at puberty, although he had by then read the Qur'an several times as well as other books on language, rare words, disputation, and legal reasoning. One would thus surmise that he was about eleven or twelve at this time, which places his birth in 273/886 or 274/887. After his father's death, he continued to study religious subjects, including Ḥanafī law, and began also to take an interest in the books of the ancients, copies of which he possessed in his library, among them the works of Plato and Aristotle. At one point, in order to master logic, he engaged a Jew named Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Khurāsānī to teach him. Later, he received instruction from another teacher who was to stimulate his interest in the imamate and thus the scholarly investigation of Shi'i literature and doctrine.

Thus, when he met Abū 'Abdallāh, he was well versed in Shi'ism, as well as the sciences of the ancients that were to be of more concern to the latter's brother Abu'l-'Abbās. The brothers were obviously pleased to discover both the rich learning of Ibn al-Haytham and his eager devotion to the Shi'i cause which they quickly determined to harness. He was drawn into service almost at once, one aspect of which involved his role in the frequent debates the two brothers set up with the local *fuqahā'*, both the Ḥanafīs and the Mālikīs. Ibn al-Haytham acted as the champion of the Shi'i side in many of these encounters.

Later still, at the end of the period of his memoir, the author provides a strikingly vivid picture of the arrival of the Imam. Ibn al-Haytham's motive in doing so is, of course, partly to show how he was himself honoured on that occasion when he first

89. Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, II, 487–8.

met al-Mahdī. Finally, he adds a few notes about his association with prominent *dā'īs* of the time such as Aflaḥ b. Hārūn al-Malūsī, a leading authority among the Kutāma who apparently impressed the author highly.

What Ibn al-Haytham does not state directly but only alludes to is his service not long after the coming of al-Mahdī as an ambassador – one of two *dā'īs* – who were sent to Andalus to the famous rebel 'Umar b. Ḥafṣūn. This 'Umar held out in opposition to the Umayyad rulers for a long time and is reported to have converted back to the Christianity of his ancestors late in life. Nevertheless, when al-Mahdī declared his caliphate in the Maghrib, Ibn Ḥafṣūn recognized him as the caliph of the Muslims in his domain and had him cited in the *khuṭba* accordingly. Al-Mahdī sent a delegation to him consisting of two Isma'ilis with robes of honour (*khil'āt*) and they stayed with Ibn Ḥafṣūn for some time, even attending some of his battles against the Umayyads. Finally, the Andalusian sent them back with gifts for their master in return.[90] Evidently Ibn al-Haytham was one of the two delegates, as he himself suggests at the beginning of his memoir.

Another incident he mentions occurred subsequently when he was dispatched as a *dā'ī* to the western Maghrib. Bitterly, he casts blame on the Berber prince of Tāhart, Maṣāla, and his sister for what happened there. Maṣāla b. Ḥabūs ostensibly supported the Fatimids. However, 'Arīb[91] reports an incident in the year 309/921 when several *dā'īs* were killed by the local people in Wansharīsh, an area under Maṣāla's control. Shortly thereafter, al-Mahdī cracked down hard on a large number of *dā'īs*, many of whom were rounded up and imprisoned on the charge of having advocated antinomianism. This matter obviously caused great concern in the *da'wa* at the time and, even many years later, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān was forced to recall and discuss the incident when al-Manṣūr asked him about it, as he

90. These details are contained in the report of Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Kitāb a'māl al-a'lām*, ed. E. Lévi-Provençal, p. 32.

91. Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, I, 185–6.

recorded in his *al-Majālis wa'l-musāyarāt*.[92] Although any suggestion that Ibn al-Haytham might have preached a disregard for the law of Islam appears totally unwarranted from the information about him in his own memoir,[93] he seems to have suffered himself in this purge and presumably held Maṣāla and his sister ultimately responsible for what had happened and believed that, despite their nominal recognition of the Fatimids, they were acting out of purely regional and personal motives to rid themselves of the *da'wa* and its influence in their territory. Thus, in his view, both the initial killings of the *dā'īs* in Wansharīsh and al-Mahdī's subsequent severe repression of additional *dā'īs* was caused by some plot or intimation set in motion by Maṣāla. It is significant that, when al-Manṣūr restored Fatimid rule in Tāhart in 336/947 following the rebellion of Abū Yazīd, the bodies of both Maṣāla, who had died long before in 312/924, and his brother Yaṣal, also long dead (d. 319/931), were exhumed and publicly burned.[94] The sister is apparently not mentioned in any other source.

Ibn al-Haytham in non-Isma'ili Sources

It would appear that there are only three known references to the author in non-Isma'ili sources, two under the name Ibn al-Aswad and one as Ibn al-Haytham. Evidently, he was known locally mainly by the former name and in other places by the latter, or by both as also in later Isma'ili literature, such as the *'Uyūn al-akhbār* of Idrīs. Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī in his *al-Imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasa* comments about a debate on the subject of the imamate that allegedly had taken place between Ibn al-Haytham and Ibn al-Ḥaddād.[95] His information is second hand and not

92. See Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *al-Majālis*, pp. 499–500.

93. Against this, it may be noted that Ibn al-Haytham, with obvious approval, reports the angry reaction of Abu'l-'Abbās to the punishment by the qadi al-Marwadhī of two *dā'īs* who were accused of antinominian conduct.

94. On the latter incident see Halm, *Reich*, 287–8, trans., 323.

95. *Al-Imtā'*, III, 195. In the text of the *Imtā'*, the name of Abū

quite precise, but is nonetheless undoubtedly based either on his having seen, or his informant's having seen, the account of these *munāẓarāt* that Ibn al-Haytham himself issued. The other two references were located by Muḥammad al-Ya'lāwī and were noted in the apparatus to his edition of the relevant portion of the *'Uyūn al-akhbār*.[96] One of these consists of a line in a poem composed by the Maghribi poet Abu'l-Qāsim al-Fazārī in ridicule of the Fatimids.[97] The other involves a story within the biography of a Mālikī shaykh and famous ascetic, whose student was forced by circumstances to travel home one night through the streets and quarters of Qayrawan after curfew. Miraculously, the prayers of the shaykh were so powerful that they protected the student; no dogs barked at him and the security patrols did not spot him even though he passed right in front of 'the house of the *dā'ī* Ibn Aswad.' This incident occurred in the reign of al-Mu'izz and is related in the *ṭabaqāt* of al-Mālikī.[98]

3. THE EDITION OF THE ARABIC TEXT

The present edition of the Arabic text of the *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt* is based on three manuscript copies. These were taken from complete copies of volume six (*al-juz' al-sādis*) of al-Bharūchī's *Kitāb al-Azhār*. In each case we obtained and worked from a photocopy of the original and have not examined either the original manuscript itself or the rest of the volume. The text of the edition, however, retains the compiler's introduction and concluding comments.

The manuscripts are the following:

1. A manuscript of ninety-three pages, eighteen lines to a page,

'Uthmān Ibn al-Ḥaddād is deformed and appears as 'Uthmān b. Khālid.

96. P. 157, no. 16. Halm, *Reich*, trans., 243, 248–9 and his n. 381.

97. The full text of the poem appears in al-Mālikī's *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, II, 494, and al-Ya'lāwī's *al-Adab bi-Ifrīqiya fī'l-'ahd al-Fāṭimī*, 219–20. On al-Fazārī himself see al-Ya'lāwī, 'al-Fazārī' in the *EI2*, *Supplement*.

98. Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, II, 487–8 (the biography of Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad al-Sibā'ī al-Muta'abbid who died in 356/967).

belonging to Professor Abbas Hamdani, copied in 1307/1889–90, by 'Īsā b. Dā'ūd b. 'Abd al-'Alī b. Ibrāhīm, and designated in the Arabic apparatus as *hā'*. This manuscript was assigned page numbers (not folio numbers) by the copyist and they have been retained in the edition, noted after an / in the text.

2. One of two manuscripts belonging to The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London. Containing forty-seven folios, sixteen lines to a page, it was copied in Shawwāl 1342/1924 and was formerly in the Chotu Lakhani Collection, Bombay. It is designated by a *lām* in the Arabic apparatus.
3. A manuscript of fifty-eight folios, between sixteen and nineteen lines per page, formerly belonging to the Isma'ili Society of Bombay, now in The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, from the eleventh/seventeenth century (according to A. Gacek, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies*, vol. 1, p. 40). It is designated by an *alif* in the Arabic apparatus.

In all these manuscripts, which are quite recent in date, the salutary benedictions, such as *ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi wa ālihi* and *'alayhi al-salām*, generally appear as abbreviations but they have been spelled out completely in this edition. The spelling of words that have retained an older, archaic form in these copies has also been modernized.

Three short passages from this text were quoted by Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn in his *'Uyūn al-akhbār*. These have been noted where appropriate and the texts as published in S. M. Stern's *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism* and in al-Ya'lāwī's edition of the relevant portion of the *'Uyūn al-akhbār* have been compared.

4. THE TRANSLATION AND NOTES

The translation that follows is my work and thus I bear primary responsibility for it. Professor Wilferd Madelung, however, not only read and corrected my draft but provided any number of suggestions and annotations, many of which were subsequently

incorporated in the notes and introduction. A full translation of Ibn al-Haytham's *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt* not only allows it to be consulted by readers who have no access to the Arabic text but also serves as a vehicle for the numerous annotations and explanatory commentary it requires. Parts of the work cover quite obscure items that were, however, apparently well known to the original discussants and the person or persons for whom it was written some forty years afterward. By then, of course, a majority of the individuals mentioned in it were long dead; many of them, in fact, were leading figures – the most prominent of the local *fuqahā'*, for example – of the intellectual scene in Qayrawan at the end of the Aghlabid period. Moreover, the four men of greatest importance to the cause of the Fatimids were by then not only dead but were considered traitors whose end was hardly to be recalled with honour. Thus, the persons cited by Ibn al-Haytham might have presented a serious problem of identification. Fortunately, that did not prove to be the case. Most, but especially the Ḥanafīs and the Mālikīs, merited biographies in the *ṭabaqāt* works of al-Khushanī and other, later authorities.

Many other details in the text require explanations that are given here in the notes. A number of passages present special difficulties, particularly for the discussions between Abu'l-'Abbās and Ibn al-Haytham about the details of scientific, philosophical, or logical matters. For these, and especially for items of logic, we were able to draw on the expert assistance of several colleagues, most notably Dr. F. Zimmermann and Professor E. Rowson.

A point of special interest in the work is its title and consequently the meaning of the term *munāẓara*. I have translated it by the vague English term 'discussions' although that hardly indicates what is in it or what it is about. A *munāẓara* (plural *munāẓarāt*) is a debate or a disputation most often undertaken between two persons or parties in a formal setting. Its subject was often an issue or issues of scientific, juridical, or theological importance, and the outcome could be expected to result in the conversion of the losing side to that of the winner

(if there was, in fact, a clear winner). These 'debates' also feature in a special genre of literature which either recorded an actual confrontation of this kind – frequently reconstructed for the benefit of the party that gained from it – or were simply created for that purpose in written form even though no real dispute had taken place. Eventually also the literary form became quite stylized.[99]

For Ibn al-Haytham his title points first of all to his several encounters with the brothers Abū 'Abdallāh and Abu'l-'Abbās. The very first of these begins, in fact, as a kind of 'debate' in which Abū 'Abdallāh assumes the role of questioner. Ibn al-Haytham is the respondent and he has the burden of taking responsibility for what he says, whereas his interrogator merely poses hypothetical queries designed to elicit from him information and eventually a commitment to a particular doctrine. In fact from that first debate we learn little about Abū 'Abdallāh's position. Subsequently, however, the form and content of the various debates between either brother and Ibn al-Haytham change and they become far less confrontational. Many are rather true discussions and exchanges of information without the pressure of urgency. Besides these, the author reports and comments on a variety of *munāẓarāt* of a slightly different character that occurred between the Fatimid authorities, including himself acting for them, and respresentatives of the local *fuqahā'*, both Ḥanafīs and Mālikīs. These encounters are also covered by the title of the work and by the term *munāẓarāt*, although many of them are not simple 'discussions' but instead formal 'debates.'

Note: In the translation we have preferred to follow the original text fairly closely, even literally, with one significant exception. At each mention of the Prophet, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib,

99. It also served a literary purpose as a device for the display of erudition and wit as in cases where two objects or two animals are made to vie with each other to establish which of them is the better. For a general discussion of the concept and use of *munāẓarāt* in Arabic literature, see E. Wagner, 'Munāẓara' in the *EI2*.

and other revered figures such as Jesus, Moses, and the former prophets and the imams and their most distinguished adherents, Ibn al-Haytham added a pious benediction which we have retained in the edition throughout but in the translation only for the first instance of it, or when the sense requires it, and thereafter omitted them in order not to impede the flow of the narrative unduly.

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