



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Mo'yyad fi'l-din Shirazi

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Mo'yyad fi'l-din Shirazi (ca. 1000 - 1087 CE), was an outstanding and multitalented representative of the Fatimid religious and political mission (*da'wa*) in the service of the Caliph/Imam Mustansir bi-Allah (r. 1036-94 CE). Mo'ayyad excelled as missionary-agent (*da'i*), statesman and scholar. In his theological and philosophical writings he brought the Isma'ili spiritual heritage to its pinnacle. As prose author and poet he shows a masterful command of Arabic literary style and rhetoric.

Born into an Isma'ili family in Shiraz, the capital of the Buyid province of Fars in south-western Persia, his full name was Abu Naser Hebat-Allah b. Musa b. Abi 'Emran b. Dawud al-Shirazi. The honorific name Mo'ayyad fi'l-Din ("The one aided" – by God – "in religion") was probably bestowed upon him when he was appointed to the highest rank of chief missionary (*da'i al-du'at*) in the central administration of the Fatimid *da'wa* in Cairo in 1059 CE.

Mo'ayyad is the author of a unique work of memoirs known as *Sirat al-Mo'ayyad fi'l-Din* (The life of Mo'ayyad fi'l-Din), a personal and thrilling work of history that mirrors, in the life and destiny of a *da'i*, the mutual relationship between Fatimids, Abbasids and Buyids under the growing pressure of the Turkmen invasion from Central Asia into the heart-lands of the Islamic world. Furthermore, the *Sira* is a rich source for the organisation and the norms of the clandestine network of the Isma'ili *da'wa*. The book covers, in three main parts, more than twenty years of Mo'ayyad's career. The first part is an account of his temporary successful, but lastly failed, missionary work in favour of the Fatimids at the court of the Buyid prince Abu Kalijar Marzoban (r. 1024-48 CE) of Fars.

Mo'ayyad further reports his experiences after his flight to Cairo, where envious and egoistic court-officials tried to direct the young Caliph/Imam Mustansir according to their own interests and tried to prevent the continuation of the ambitious arrivals' career. Against his own will, Mo'ayyad was sent as head of a diplomatic delegation to northern Syria in 1056-58 CE. There, at the fringes of the Fatimid Empire, he was to build up an alliance under Fatimid command between the rebellious Abbasid general, Abu'l-Haret Basasiri, and local Bedouin chiefs against the Turkmen Sunni Seljuks who had already made an end to Buyid rule and taken over power in the Abbasid capital in 1055 CE. In the epilogue of the *Sira*, Mo'ayyad celebrates the triumph of Basasiri who - without further support from the Fatimids - occupied Baghdad, exiled the Caliph and established the Friday prayer in the name of Caliph/Imam Mustansir bi-Allah for a year (1058-59 CE).

As a reward for his merits during his political mission in Syria, Mo'ayyad was appointed chief *da'i* after his return to the Fatimid capital. In that office, he was administering the affairs of the *da'wa*, teaching missionaries from both inside and outside the Fatimid empire, such as the philosopher-poet Nasir Khusraw of Badakhshan and Lamak b. Malek Hammadi, a high representative of the loyal Sulayhid state in Yemen. Mo'ayyad is also the author of eight hundred lectures (*Majalis al-hikma*, i.e. "sessions of wisdom") he held in front of the community of believers every Thursday in Cairo. These sermons, which are the largest collection of this genre in the literary heritage of the Isma'ilis, contain the essence of his religious and philosophical thinking.

In addition to the *Majalis*, Mo'ayyad is the author of religio-philosophical treatises, prayers and more than sixty Arabic *qasidas* (panegyrics) that contain a wide range of Fatimid theological and ideological motives. Mo'ayyad's poems still play a prominent role in the ritual liturgy of the Isma'ili Bohras in India today. Among them, he is still praised and respected today as a spiritual guide and leader.

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