

**Towards a Shi`i Mediterranean Empire Fatimid Egypt
and the Founding of Cairo
The reign of the Imam Caliph al Mu`izz**

Annotated translation of al Maqrizi's *Itti`az al hunafa' bi
akhbar al a`imma al Fatimiyyin al khulafa'* (Lessons for
the Seekers of Truth in the History of Fatimid Imams and
Caliphs)

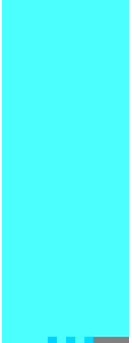
Translated with an Introduction by Shainool Jiwa



Guiding questions

1. How did the Fatimid Imam caliph al Mui'zz li Din Allah transform the Fatimid state from a North African dynasty to a vibrant Mediterranean Empire?
2. In what ways did al Mui'zz's policies foster rapprochement with the Shia and the Sunnis in the region as well as with the neighbouring Mediterranean Empires?
3. This work has been composed by Taqi al Din al Maqrizi, an erudite Sunn15k

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Several reasons can be attributed to al Maqrizi's interest in writing about the Fatimids so profusely. The arrival of the Fatimids in Egypt and their building of Cairo brought both economic prosperity and political stability to the populace which had been preceded by turbulent events during the rule of Kafur al Labi (905-968). As a patriotic Egyptian, al Maqrizi, who was born in Cairo and lived his entire life in the city, must have felt a great sense of pride in Fatimid achievements in his homeland.

A second reason relates to his recognition and acknowledgement of the `Alid genealogy of the Fatimids and therefore considering them as legitimate descendants of the Prophet. His affection for the *Ahl al Bayt* is evident in several of his other writings including a biography of the Prophet where he discusses the issue of succession to the Prophet and the rights of the *Ahl al Bayt*. He suggests a very broad definition of the *Ahl al Bayt* in one of his works to include the Banu Hashim and Banu Muttalib and not limiting it to the family of `Ali and Fatima, while in another work he "aligns himself closely to the Shi`i

position regarding the favoured status of the progeny of `Ali and Fatima as descendants of the Prophet (*dhurriyat* [successors]) and the guarantee of paradise assured by their blessed lineage." (p.34, fn. 89).

Another noteworthy reason attributed to al Maqrizi's interest in the Fatimids is his supposed descent from the Fatimids. Many of his contemporaries refer to this when writing about him. His opponents mention him by derogatory epithets such as `Ubaydi, a reference to the Fatimids by authors who deny the Alid descent of the Fatimids. While on the other hand, his sympathisers call him al Tamimi a reference to his possible descent from the Fatimid prince whose identity was left undefined by the author himself. Describing his own genealogy, he almost always stops at his ancestor Tamim, who some historians have identified as Prince Tamim, the eldest son of Imam caliph al Mu`izz. Once at the mosque of al Hakim, built by the Fatimid Caliph al Hakim bi Amr Allah who reigned from 996 to 1021, his father told him that the mosque belonged to his ancestors, perhaps referring to the eldest son of Imam Caliph al



descendants of Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband `Ali ibn Abi Talib, the paternal cousin of the Prophet who is accepted by all the Shi`as as their first Imam. The Fatimids expressed their status as legitimate rulers by taking the designation of *Amir al mu'minin wa Imam al muslimin* (Commander of the Faithful and Imam of the Muslims).

By asserting their credentials as rightful successors to the Prophet, the Fatimids posed a direct challenge to the Abbasid Caliphs, who had established their rule in 132/750 with Baghdad as their capital. At the time of the ascendance of Fatimid power in



year 931 in al Mahdiyya. He was around one year old when he was summoned by his great grandfather Imam al Mahd to a *majlis* (gathering) where Imam caliphs al Qa'im and al Mansur were already present. Al Maqrizi narrates this as follows (pp.104 105):

"Ahmad b. Ja'far related to me that one day al Qa'im bi Amr Allah, upon him be peace, was in his father al Mahdi's *majlis* (gathering), seated in front of him. His son, al Mansur, was standing in front of his grandfather, when al Mahdi said to him, 'Bring me your son', that is, al Mu'izz li Din Allah. So his nursemaid brought him. He was one year old or a little older. Al Mahdi took him on his lap and kissed him. Then he said to his son al Qa'im bi Amr Allah, 'O Abu'l Qasim, there is not a gathering more illustrious on earth on



geocentric position contributed to Fatimid interest in the region. Ruling Egypt enabled the Fatimids to secure control of trade routes through Egypt, Spain, North Africa, parts of Europe and India. For the Umayyads and their successors the Abbasids, Egypt had been one of the regions of their empire. Under the Fatimids, Egypt became the centre of the Fatimid Empire. Fatimid Egypt was made up of a multi and a multi



according to the command of God and His Book and in accordance with the instructions of His Prophet, may God bless him and grant him salvation, in his *sunna* and the *dhimmis* (non Muslims) will be treated according to previous custom." (p. 18 of the introduction and p. 71 of the translation)

The Document became the basis of inclusion and just governance reflecting the principles of the Constitution of Medina drawn by the Prophet when he entered Medina in 622. Like the Prophet's venture in Medina, Fatimid rule in Egypt was a minority project. The *aman* document became the basis of Fatimid policies for their subsequent two century rule in Egypt.

The Founding of Cairo and the Arrival of Imam al



As soon as the initial formalities of establishing Fatimid authority and rule were in place, Jawhar laid the foundation of the new city and capital of the Fatimid Empire. Al Maqrizi recalls the story attached to the foundation laying (p.78) and notes that initially the city was called al Mansuriyya but when Imam caliph al Mu`izz approached the city, Jawhar renamed it al Qahira al Mu`izziyya (the Victorious city of al Mu`izz). The city was meticulously planned by Imam caliph al Mu`izz himself. The city housed the royal palace, the mosque of al Azhar, which became a centre of learning under Imam caliph al `Aziz bi`llah. and designated open grounds (*musalla*) for recitation of `id prayers. Imam caliph al Mu`izz arrived in Cairo on 7 Ramadan, 10th June 973 along with his family and his state dignitaries. The Qaramita were among the serious Imam

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evident from the anecdotes that abound in his biographies. He is noted to have contributed to the invention of the fountain pen and is also known to have spent long periods of time in the palace library, which was regarded to be among the best stocked repositories of its kind in that age. He also commissioned the creation of a map of the known world, which came to be considered a landmark in the art of mapping at the time.

The transition of Ismailis from a religio political movement during the *dawr al satr* to an empire necessitated the Fatimids to restate their legal and doctrinal corpus. This was to a great extent achieved under the direct guidance and supervision of the Imam by the illustrious *da'i* and jurist al Qadi al Nu`man (d.363/974). Al Nu`man entered the service of the Fatimids during the time of Imam caliph al-Mu`izz li-Din Allah (d.368/975).