STUDI MAĠREBINI

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI "L'ORIENTALE"

DIPARTIMENTO ASIA, AFRICA E MEDITERRANEO
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STUDI MAĠREBINI

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LABOR LIMAE
Atti in onore di CARMELA BAFFIONI

Prefazione di
Wilferd MADELUNG

A cura di
Antonella STRAFACE - Carlo DE ANGELO - Andrea MANZO
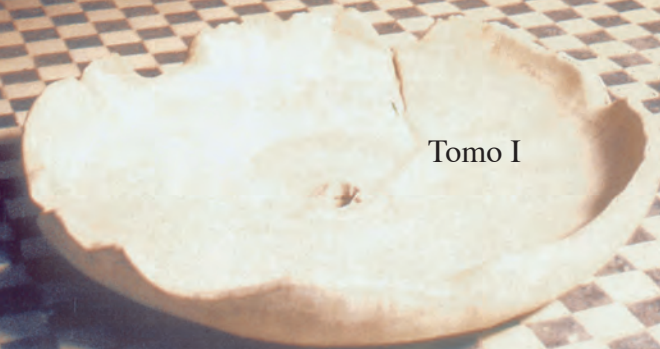
Tomo I

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Tomo I

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CENTRO DI STUDI MAĠREBINI

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INDICE

Historica – Philosophica - Scientifica

Upper Egypt:
a "Shia" powerhouse in the Fatimid period?*

Delia CORTESE

When arriving in Aswan, the visitor's attention cannot help being captured by the sighting of the most enchanting landmark to adorn the western bank of the Nile. At the top of a hill, a solemn yet simple domed mausoleum towers over the hustle and bustle of life on the river below. The landmark is the resting place of His Highness Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III (d. 1957), the 48th Ismaili Imam. Opposite to the mausoleum, on the east side of the Nile, another burial site reminds the visitor of the age-long association of Egypt with Ismaili history: the so-called "Fatimid cemetery", disfigured by a century-long toxic combination of misguided archaeological practices and adventurous urban planning. That the Ismaili Imam chose Aswan as the place where to return to "the land of his fathers,"[1] opposite the Fatimid necropolis - thus reinforcing through architecture - a sense of continuity between past and recent Ismaili history in Egypt is -at first sight- somewhat intriguing. What role did Upper Egypt play in Ismaili history that was so significant as to merit its choice as the Imam's resting place? Why is it that we find in Aswan -of all places- a necropolis that is the only landmark in the whole of Egypt that today formally features the term "Fatimid" in its nomenclature?

It is generally accepted that before, during and after the Fatimid rule in Egypt, the people in that country were and continued to remain pre-

[1] As stated in the epitaph on his tomb inside the mausoleum.

dominantly Sunni and that the Fatimids never actively or forcefully pursued a policy of mass conversion to Ismailism. Consequently, the impact of Shiism on Egypt's religious, cultural and social life has been assumed -with two notable exceptions- to have been negligible and therefore not worthy of in-depth investigation. Yaacov Lev was the first to challenge this assumption commenting on the Ismaili tenor and character of religious life in Fatimid Egypt and to draw our attention to aspects of Shii activism in the Fatimid capital. More recently Devin J. Stewart has provided a nuanced picture of the Shii presence in Egypt, by combining linguistic and historical evidence, which brings him to conclude that the extent of Shii influence in medieval Egypt has been under-estimated.[2] The limited attention paid so far to Shiism in Fatimid Egypt is partly due to a predominantly Cairo-centred scholarly approach to the study of Fatimid history.[3] If we consider instead tackling the history of this period as a "history of Egypt under the Fatimids" and thus looking at the "provinces" rather than the centre of government, one unlocks a complex picture in which "Shiism" -used broadly here to cover a spectrum identities ranging from varied forms of 'Alid affiliations to Ismaili adherence- emerges as having played a significant part in shaping the life of Egypt and the destiny of the dynasty. The seemingly limited impact that Shiism has had on past and present Egypt as a whole, renders the information given on Upper Egypt by the Medieval historian Ja'far b. Tha'lab al-Udfuwī (d. 748/1347), particularly relevant for this paper. He states that when Aswan was under the Fatimids, Shia prevailed among its people and that Shiism had

[2] See Y. Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, E.J. Brill, Leiden - New York 1990 and D.J. Stewart, "Popular Shiism in Medieval Egypt: Vestiges of Islamic Sectarian Polemics in Egyptian Arabic", in *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996), p. 36. See also D. De Smet, "Les fêtes chiites en Égypte fatimide", in *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 10 (1995-1996), pp. 190-193. At the time of writing, estimates of the Shia population of Egypt put its number to 800,000 up to two million. In recent time media coverage has highlighted the plight of this community as a discriminated and even persecuted minority. See for example E. Degli Esposti, "The plight of Egypt's forgotten Shia minority", *New Statesman* 3 July 2012, *http://www.newstates-man.com/blogs/world-affairs/2012/07/plightegypt%E2%80%99s-forgotten-shia-minority* and Z. El-Gundy, "The Shias: Egypt's forgotten Muslim minority", *Ahramonline* 18 Mar 2013, http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/67170.aspx.

[3] The Fatimid presence in Upper Egypt in general remains an under-researched field of enquiry. For a rare study dedicated to this area see J.M. Bloom, "Five Fatimid Minarets in Upper Egypt", in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 43,2 (1984), pp. 162-167.

been there from a long time before. He claims that in his native town, Edfu, Shia was widespread and he goes as far as detailing that people were either Ismailis or Imamis. In Esna, he adds, Shiism and *rafḍ* were extensively present. The town of Afsun was renowned for its Shii population and many Shiis were in Armant too. Eventually - he states - Shiism declined in all these centres.[4] But even so, since Shiism made no significant inroads elsewhere in Egypt, the question remains: what made Fatimid Upper Egypt, of all places, become fertile ground for Shiism to the point of allegedly becoming -all be it briefly- the dominant Muslim denomination in Aswan?

The earliest association of Upper Egypt with 'Alid families goes back to the time of the conquests. The town of Qift, near Qus, had been donated as land grant to 'Alids since the caliphate of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.[5] Tomb stones from the Fatimid cemetery in Aswan, the earliest dating from middle of the 3rd Islamic century, point to the presence of 'Alids in Aswan. Epigraphic evidence also shows that a relatively growing number of 'Alids were buried in Aswan between the 4th and 6th Islamic centuries.[6] This is explained by the fact that over time many of the Arab tribes that came to settle in Upper Egypt had 'Alid ancestry. There is evidence that in a number of instances the Fatimids pursued a deliberate policy of "Alidisation" of the region by displacing tribes that had inhabited the area long before their arrival, to replace them with 'Alid clans of the Quraysh.[7] The measure was intended to secure the Fatimids' control over Aswan and the towns along the upper Nile valley, as they gained increasing commercial and administrative strategic importance for the life of the regime. In addition to the region being rich with gold and precious stones mines, these centres became entrepôts for the traffic of trade coming into Egypt from the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen in particular), India and East Africa.

[4] See Ja'far b. Tha'lab al-Udfuwī, *Al-ṭāli' al-sa'īd al-jāmi' li-asmā' al-fuḍalā' wa'l-ruwāt bi-a'lā al-Ṣa'īd*, al-Maṭba'a al-Jamāliyya, al-Qāhira 1332/1914, pp. 15-18.

[5] See 'A.M. Mājid, *Ẓuhūr khilāfat al-Fāṭimiyyīn wa suqūṭihā fī Miṣr: al-ta'rīkh al-siyāsī*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Iskandariyya 1968, p. 495.

[6] See M.M. al-Ḥuwayrī, *Aswān fī'l-'uṣūr al-wusṭā*, Dār al-Ma'ārif-al-Qāhira 1980, pp.159-163.

[7] See Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Al-bayān wa'l-i'rab 'ammā bi-arḍ Miṣr min al-'arab*, al-Maktaba al-Azharīya li'l-Turāth, al-Qāhira 2006, pp. 32, 34, 40, 121-122. About descendants from tribes of Ja'farite ascent whose resettlement in Egypt was favoured by the Fatimids that are still extant today in Manfalut, Samalut, Qus and Aswan, see in addition p. 159.

Ultimately, securing the allegiance of tribes with whom the Fatimids claimed to share their lineage was part of a broader anti-Abbasid strategy that had seen the Fatimids favouring Ḥasanid and Ḥusaynid tribes since the days of al-Mahdī in North Africa.[8] It is perhaps because of the strong 'Alid association with the region that, on the basis of local legends, the belief grew that illustrious descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad such as al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, Sayyida Nafīsa and the Shii Imam Zayn al-'Abidīn were buried in Aswan's necropolis.[9]

Our contemporary Egyptian scholar Maḥmūd al-Ḥuwayrī in his history of Medieval Aswan plays down the presence of Shiism in the town. He disputes al-Udfuwī's assertion on the basis of lack of substantial evidence from the town's burial site of an extensive number of Shii residents having inhabited the area before and during the Fatimid period. Instead, he argues, that what al-Udfuwī might have meant by *tashī'* was membership to families of 'Alid ascent and political, rather than religious, support of local vassals to the regime in Cairo.[10] As he rightly observes, 'Alids were not necessarily or automatically Shiis. The epigraphic data provided by al-Ḥuwayrī to sustain his claim would be conclusive, if it was not for the words of caution pronounced by Ugo Monneret de Villard- the first scholar to study systematically the Aswan necropolis -who, commenting on the level of disturbance the Fatimid cemetery site had suffered over decades, said: ''today it is no longer possible to write on firm basis the history of Muslim architecture of Aswan''.[11] Also, while one could suspend judgement on al-Udfuwī's accuracy in describing the people of Aswan, it would be highly unlikely of him to misrepresent the religious adherence of the people in his own town, Edfu, especially given that he had Shiis and even Ismailis in his own extended family and therefore had direct knowledge about Shiism in the region.[12] Also, al-Udfuwī's contemporary, Muḥammad b. Shākir al-Kutubī (d. 718/1318-19) appears to confirm al-Udfuwī's claim, by describing the population on the western side of the Nile valley (that is, in Esna, Edfu and Asfun) as belonging

[8] See the 7th/15th century Ismaili historian Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn in *The Founder of Cairo: the Fatimid imam-caliph al-Mu'izz and his era*, , I.B. Tauris, London 2013, (En. tr. by Shainool Jiwa) p. 263.

[9] See U. Monneret de Villard, *La necropoli musulmana di Aswan*, Impr. de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Cairo 1930, p. 6.

[10] See Al-Ḥuwayrī, *Aswān fī'l-'uṣūr al-wusṭā*, cit., pp. 159-163.

[11] See U. Monneret de Villard, *La necropoli musulmana di Aswan*, cit., p. 3.

[12] See D.J. Stewart, "Popular Shiism in Medieval Egypt", cit., p. 61.

to the extreme Shia. He adds that this was the situation in Esna before the restoration of Sunnism. The situation was apparently similar in Qift.[13] Finally, another 6th/14th century local historian, Jamāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Isnawī (d. 772/1370), states that remnants of the *rafiḍa* and the Shia were to be found in Esna and other neighbouring towns. According to al-Isnawī, many of these people had not converted to Shia as a result of the Fatimid rule, due to the great distance between their region and Cairo and Fustat. He claims that many had adopted Shiism after the Fatimids' demise in 567/1171.[14]

Was there an extensive Shii presence in Upper Egypt at the time of the Fatimids? If so, why, when and how did Shiism appear in that region? What brand of Shiism might this be? Faced with the lack of material evidence, the contextualised analysis of information provided in a variety of literary sources, ranging from historiographies and chronicles to travelogues and documents, will be used as tools to address those questions.

The earliest reference in Ismaili historical sources to the transit of Shiis through Egypt, probably via its southern regions heading north - at the dawn of the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate- can be found in al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's 4th/10th century Ismaili historical work *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa*. According to his account, Manṣūr al-Yaman, the man in charge of the Ismaili *da'wa* in Yemen in the late 3rd/9th century, first sent his appointed successor in the *da'wa* Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās to preach in Egypt. Later Manṣūr al-Yaman dispatched Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī -the *dā'ī* who eventually masterminded the enthronement of al-Mahdī as the first Fatimid caliph in Raqqada- to preach in Egypt. Upon arriving in Egypt, 'Abd Allāh's intention was to remain there as instructed by his master, but was eventually persuaded by fellow Kutāma Shii travellers he had met in Makka, to head for the Maghrib on account of the fact that trade in Egypt was scarce.[15] We are not told about the route Abū 'Abd Allāh took but, coming

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[13] See J.C. Garçin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Egypte medievale: Qus*, Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, Cairo 1976, p. 309.

[14] See Jamāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Isnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya*, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Bayrūt 1987, 2 vols., vol. 2, pp. 168-9. See also for further details on evidence of Shia presence in Upper Egypt in the post-Fatimid period D.J. Stewart, "Popular Shiism in Medieval Egypt", cit., pp. 57-58.

[15] See al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *The Founding of the Fatimid State. The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire. An annotated English translation of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's Iftitāḥ al-Da'wa*, ed. and tr. H. Haji, I. B. Tauris, London, New York 2006, pp. 40, 48, 51-52.

from the Arabian Peninsula, he must have travelled along what was the then standard trade -pilgrimage route of sailing from Jedda to Qulzum- then inland and heading north to the delta, travelling up the Nile. Al-Nuʿmān's account is important here because it shows Egypt as the very first destination of choice for the expansion of the *da'wa* from the Yemeni outpost and points to a certain amount of pro-Shii/Ismaili preaching having taken place there in preparation for greater things to come.[16] That pro-Shii/Ismaili preaching in Upper Egypt had not been totally transitory and transient is indicated by the fact that the *da'wa* must have found there significant support since it was by sizing the Fayyum and the Ṣaʿīd, that the would-be second Fatimid Imam-caliph, al-Qāʾim -while in North Africa- had launched with the support of the Kutāma troops -the first serious Fatimid attempt to annex Egypt.[17]

In 358/969, led by the general Jawhar al-Ṣiqillī, the Fatimid army finally conquered Egypt. Since 359/970 Ǧawhar was conscious of the strategic potential of Upper Egypt as it was there that residual Ikhshidi resistance movements took shape. One of the earliest major diplomatic moves instructed by Jawhar was to send a man originally from Aswan, Ibn Salīm al-Aswānī, on a mission south to seal a trade pact with the King of the Nubians, to invite him to convert to Islam and demand payment of tributes to the new regime. As the ambassador chosen to represent formally the newly established Shii Ismaili regime in Cairo to Christian royalty, it is safe to assume that al-Aswānī must have been a Shii sympathiser at the very least. Al-Aswānī's mission must have started between 359/969-970 and 363/973 and continued well into the reign of the Imam-caliph al-ʿAzīz (365/975 - 386/996), since it was for him that al-Aswānī wrote his history of the Nubians.[18] Ǧawhar had placed Upper Egypt under the control of a member of the Banū Kilāb tribe, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Ahyaj (d. 362/973) who must have been an os-

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[16] ʿAbd Allāh, the future Imam-caliph al-Mahdī, hid in the guise of trader in Egypt while on his way to Sijilmāsa where the religious-political nature of his mission eventually would be fully revealed. He was escorted by Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī's brother Abū al-ʿAbbās. However, while in transit in Egypt, they kept to the northern part of the country and there is so far no indication of them having spent time in the south. See al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *The Founding of the Fatimid State*, cit., pp. 112-124.

[17] See *ibid.*, p. 228. Al-Qāʾim's Egyptian campaign is discussed in great details in H. Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi. The Rise of the Fatimids*, tr. M. Bonner, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1996, pp. 196-213.

[18] See G. Troupeau, "La description de la Nubie d'al-Aswani", in *Arabica* 1 (1954), pp. 276-288. On the Fatimid ambassador Ibn Salīm al-Aswānī see *ibid.*, pp. 278-279.

tensibly pro-Shii commander at first. However, in 362/973 this commander defected in favour of the Abbasid caliph al-Mutī' swaying his followers to uphold the authority of the caliphate in Baghdad. That this must have been a mass defection is indicated by the report that, to repress it, Jawhar sent a contingent of 40 ships on the Nile equipped with men and weapons, led by a Nubian military commander Bishāra. This military division was supported by a massive land army led by Tāzrūf, a commander who had distinguished himself in the Fatimid campaigns in Syria in ca 359/970. The operation succeeded: Upper Egypt was brought back under control, Ibn Ahyaj fled to Baghdad, his possessions were confiscated and the heads of the many dissenters paraded across Egypt as a sign of warning to others.[19]

More Shii presence in the region is attested in 363/973 in the shape of Qarmatian spies who arrived in the area. The Qarmatian 'Abd Allāh b. 'Ubayd Allāh, better known as Akhū Muslim, penetrated into the Ṣa'īd, all the way to the vicinity of Asyut and Akhmim. The Qarmatians ransacked properties and killed people, attacking particularly Maghribis whom the Fatimids had installed there as part of their demographic reworking of the region. The Imam-caliph al-Mu'izz intervened with a large army to repel Akhū Muslim, rounding up the youth of Ikhshidi stock within his army, to prevent them defecting for the Qarmatians. The Qarmatian rebellion was eventually quashed in 364/975.[20] During the reign of the Imam-caliph al-'Azīz, in 368/978, Jawhar al-Ṣiqillī had to crush another defection in Aswan, that of Hamza b. [lacuna] al-Kutāmī -the *mutawallī* of the town. The episode is interesting on two counts: because it shows Kutāmas- and therefore Shiis, probably Ismailis -in charge of what was at the time the most important centre in the region, and because it shows betrayal by a member of a closely allied tribe but one that felt that he had strong enough local support to assert his autonomy from his Cairo masters.[21]

The implementation of a pro-Shii tribal policy in Upper Egypt proved providential in the quashing of the pro-Umayyad revolt mounted against the Fatimid regime by the Sunni Andalusian Abū Rakwa in 395/1005. In the course of his venture, Abū Rakwa had taken refuge in the Upper

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[19] See Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, *The Founder of Cairo*, cit., p. 254.
[20] See Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āẓ al-ḥunafā' bi-akhbār al-a'imma al-fāṭimiyyīn al-khulafā'*, ed. J.D. Shayyāl - M.Ḥ.M Aḥmad, Lajnat iḥyā' al-turāth al-Islāmī, al-Qāhira, 1387-1393/1967-1973, 3 vols., vol. 1, pp. 150, 202.
[21] See *ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

Egypt where, for a while, he was able to assert his authority until he was overcome by the *amīr* of Aswan, Abū'l-Makārim Hibat Allāh. This *shaykh* was member of the Banū Rabī'a, whose control over the mines in the region had been consolidated by the Fatimids. In retribution for the loyalty shown to the dynasty in the Abū Rakwa affair the Imam-caliph al-Ḥākim proclaimed Abū'l-Makārim *kanz al-dawla*, a title that became hereditary within his family.[22] There is no evidence however that the Kanz embraced Shiism: tombstones of members of the Banū Kanz do not mention any association with Shia; no indication of their association with Shiism appears in the verses of their panegyrists and none of the eighty or so figures listed as friends of the Kanz in al-Udfuwī's biographical compendium are said to be of Shia persuasion.[23]

In the year 414/1023 a large contingent of soldiers from among the slaves, the Barqiyya and the Bāṭiliyya regiments in Cairo, were sent to Upper Egypt to support the local governor, Ḥaydara b. 'Aqiyābān, in his suppression of a revolt mounted by a Khariji activist who had managed to rally support from a confederation of tribes hostile to the Fatimid, particularly their arch-enemies, the Juhayna. As more sedition erupted in that same year, Ḥaydara proved his loyalty to the regime by capturing an insurgent from the Banū Ḥusayn tribe who was then charged with being the culprit of the Imam-caliph al-Ḥākim's murder.[24] It was perhaps as a result of this volatility that, around this time, diplomatic, administrative and commercial relations between the regime in Cairo and Upper Egypt appear to have intensified: a certain Ibn Makārim b. Abī Yazīd from al-Muḥadditha (a town north of Aswan) travelled by boat up the Nile to ingratiate himself to the Imam-caliph al-Ẓāhir by personally presenting him with a gift which included 20 horses, a number of black slaves, a "chita", Nubian sheep, birds, monkeys and elephant tusks. Dignitaries from Upper Egypt took firm-

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[22] See Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āẓ al-ḥunafā'*, cit., vol. 2, p. 316; Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, *'Uyūn al-akhbār wa funūn al-āthār*, ed. M. Fakhoury, Institute of Ismaili Studies, in association with the Institut français du Proche-Orient, Damascus, 2007, vols. 7, vol. 6, p. 381; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-bayān*, cit., pp. 124-125. According to Garçin, the assignation of this title was not necessarily related to their role in quashing of Abū Rakwa's revolt. See J.C. Garçin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Egypte medievale*, cit., pp.71-73, 75.

[23] See al-Ḥuwayrī, *Aswān fī'l-'uṣūr al-wusṭā*, cit., pp. 159-163.

[24] See Muḥammad b. 'Ubayd Allāh al-Musabbiḥī, *Akhbār Miṣr fī sanatayn (414-415 H.)*, ed. W.J. Milward, al-Hay'a al-Miṣrīya al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, al-Qāhira 1980, pp. 41, 48, 252.

er charge of the *Dīwān* of the Kutāma: one was a certain Sā'id b. Mas'ūd and the other was the Jewish merchant Ṣadaqa b. Yūsuf al-Fallāḥī. [25] This latter had arrived in Cairo from an earlier posting in Upper Egypt, only to be met with the hostility of Raṣad, the Abyssini-an (or Sudanese) woman who became wife of Imam-caliph al-Ẓāhir and mother of his successor, al-Mustanṣir. Her role in reshaping the demographic composition of the Fatimid army -by privileging black elements over Turkish ones- was to have lasting repercussions on the fate of the dynasty. Eventually, the Fatimid caliph al-Āmir entered in-to alliance with a tribe of Upper Egypt by marring 'Alam who came from that region.

In 441/1050 that we have further evidence of a Shii presence in the Upper Egypt, with the testimony of the Ismaili missionary and poet, Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw, who travelled to that region in that year on his way to Makka. In his travelogue, Nāṣir-i Khusraw describes his encounter in Aswan with a local savant and merchant, Abū 'Ubayd Allāh Muḥammad b. Falīj. This man gave Nāṣir-i Khusraw a promissory note to hand to one of his agents in the port of 'Aydhāb, should Nāṣir need money (which he eventually did). The note, quoted in the travelogue, ended with the praise of *amīr al-mu'minīn 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalib*, a typical Shii for-mula, thus indicating that Nāṣir-i Khusraw must have moved within a network of Shiis in Aswan and 'Aydhāb. That Shii individuals in 'Aydhāb were not just a random occurrence may be inferred by Nāṣir-i Khusraw's claim that when he arrived at the port - from where he was to set sail three month later to reach the Arabian coast- the people asked him to deliver the *khuṭba*. He took the office for the whole length of his stay and, as an Ismaili missionary he must have delivered a *ḫuṭba* in the name of the Fatimids at the request of like-minded people.[26]

By the time of Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw's travel through Upper Egypt and in the decade that followed, Qulzum had long been abandoned as the port of choice to cross the Red Sea, in favour of the 'Aydhāb-Aswan or 'Aydhāb-Qus routes. The privileging of these routes grew with the establishment of the Ismaili Ṣulayḥids and other sub-groups, as vassal

[25] See al-Musabbiḥī, *Akhbār Miṣr*, cit., pp. 31, 173 and al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āẓ*, cit., vol. 2, p. 134.

[26] See Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Sefer nameh; relation du voyage de Nassiri Khosrau en Syrie, en Palestine, en Égypte, en Arabie et en Perse, pendant les années de l'hégire 437-444 (A.D. 1045-1052)*, , Philo Press, Amsterdam 1970², (Publié, Traduit et Annoté par Charles Schefer), pp. 176-181.

dynasties of the Fatimids in Yemen. In time, the loss of their promi-
nence as military and commercial players in the Mediterranean region
was to force the Fatimids to re-direct *da'wa* and trading activities
southwards, with Yemen becoming a vital outpost through which
commerce with the Indian Ocean ports could be maintained. This shift
of interest made it imperative to secure the flow of *da'wa* and commer-
cial traffic between the Egyptian and Yemeni regimes and, as a result,
the strategic importance of Upper Egypt as distribution centre for the
Fatimids increased further. With that, however, so also grew the poten-
tial for stakeholders in the region to hold the Cairo regime at ransom. It
was indeed in Aswan that the tension in the Fatimid army caused by
Raṣad's patronage of Black troops at the expense of the Turks had esca-
lated into full confrontation. Around 454/1062, the Ṣulayḥid ruler of
Yemen 'Alī b. Muḥammad reportedly had dispatched his envoys to es-
cort the delivery an elaborate gift for al-Mustanṣir. In Aswan, and sub-
sequently in Asyut, the gift was impounded as a troop of some 30,000
Turks and the Blacks begun to fight about what faction had the privi-
lege of overseeing its shipment to Cairo.[27] Eventually the conflict be-
tween Black and Turks was to escalate to the point of being regarded as
one of the factors that eventually sparked the *shidda al-mustanṣiriyya*
(457-64/1065-72) the turbulent years of the economic, political and so-
cial collapse that hit Egypt during the reign of al-Mustanṣir.

The establishment of the Ismaili dynasties in Yemen must have *de facto*
increased the transit of Shiis and Ismailis in Upper Egypt.[28] Beside the
episode mentioned earlier testifying to the presence of Ṣulayḥid envoys

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[27] See [Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn], *The Fatimids and their successors in Yaman: the his-
tory of an Islamic community: Arabic edition and English summary of Idrīs 'Imād
al-Dīn's 'Uyūn al-akhbār, vol. 7*, ed. A. F. Sayyid, I.B. Tauris, London 2002, p. 86
ff. Arabic text. Idrīs is the only source known so far to refer to this gift and the
events that followed.

[28] In a broader regional context, it is worth mentioning the presence in the 4th/10th
century of several Shii communities on the shores of Fars. See [Shams al-Dīn al-
Muqaddasī], *The best divisions for knowledge of the regions: a translation of Aḥasan
al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm*, Garnet Publishing, Reading 2001, (En. tr. by Basil
Anthony Collins), pp. 356-357. It should be noted that Sīrāf, once one of the major
ports of the Islamic world, on the Fars coast, declined severely due to earthquake
with its citizen reported to have migrated to the Yemeni coast cities around
500/1105-7. Also 'Alid dynasties that were established in Yamama since 3rd/9th cen-
tury continued to prosper until the early 440s/1050s. See B.I. Beshir, *The Fatimid
Caliphate 386-487 A.H./996-1094 A.D.*, School of Oriental and African Studies,
London 1970, PhD thesis, pp. 105, 116.

in Aswan and Asyut, indirect evidence of Ismaili presence in that region is provided by the extensive epistolary correspondence between Fatimids and Ṣulayḥids brought by emissaries in commercial caravans as well as information on the traffic of *dāʿī*s travelling back and forth between Yemen and Cairo. Given that unfavourable travel conditions and distances could impose a permanence in the Upper Egypt of some three months and often much longer, these Shiis and Ismailis had plenty of time to leave their mark, if not necessarily doctrinally, certainly commercially. The importance for Fatimids and Ṣulayḥids of ensuring stability in the Upper Egypt for mutual benefit is reflected in letters sent by al-Mustanṣir to the Ṣulayḥid sovereign of Yemen to reassure him about of the pacification of that region which, he says, had totally escaped the control of Cairo and about new efforts to maintain order there.[29] In the aftermath of the *shidda*, tribes and local rulers, some of whom had shown longstanding loyalty to the Fatimid regime, tried to assert themselves as autonomous powers. In 469/1076 Kanz al-Dawla Muḥammad revolted in Aswan; near Akhmim the tribes of Ǧuhayna, Thaʿāliba and Jaʿāfira formed an anti-Fatimid coalition and Black troops that had been chased by the Turks to Upper Egypt continued to cause havoc. Badr al-Jamālī, the Armenian general who had been summoned to Cairo in 466/1074 to restore order in the Fatimid domains, was then dispatched to Upper Egypt to quash these seditions and bring the region back under Fatimid authority.[30] It is from Qus that in 513/1119 a Fatimid expedition was assigned with the task of helping establish order in the Ṣulayḥid domains.[31] In the meantime caliphal correspondence continued to show the Fatimids' attentiveness in keeping the Ṣulayḥids informed about the situation in Upper Egypt.[32]

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[29] See *al-Sijillāt al-Mustanṣiriyya sijillāt wa tawqīʿāt wa kutub li-Mawlānā al-Imām al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh Amīr al-Muʾminīn, ṣalawāt Allāh ʿalayhi, ilā duʿāt al-Yaman wa ghayrihim quddisa Allāh arwāḥ jamīʿ al-muʾminīn*, ed. ʿA.M. Mājid, Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, al-Qāhira 1954, nos. 56, 57.

[30] See al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ*, cit., vol. 2, p. 316; Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *The Fatimids*, cit., p. 180 Arabic text; Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Muyassar, *Annales d'Égypte: Les Khalifes Fâtimides*, ed. H. Massé, Institut Français, Le Caire 1919, pp. 24-25. Upper Egypt served also as a basis for Badr al-Jamālī to engage in diplomatic missions with the Nubians. See B.I. Beshir, *The Fatimid Caliphate*, cit., p. 87.

[31] See J.C. Garçin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Egypte medievale*, cit., p. 105; F. Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs. Their History and Doctrines*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007², p. 258.

[32] See *al-Sijillāt*, cit., nos. 64, 66.

The Ṣulayḥids were not the only Shii Ismaili dynasty in Yemen and the relevance of Upper Egypt to Yemeni Shii Ismaili dynasties did not end with their demise in 532/1138. In Aden there were the Zurayʿid princes (473-569/1080-1173) -originally sub-vassals of the Ṣulayḥids -who were openly pro-Shia, had adopted the title of *dāʿīs* as propagators of ʿAlid doctrines, and recognised the legitimacy and the authority of the Fatimids of Egypt. In 534/1139 Muḥammad b. Saba' b. Abī'l-Suʿūd b. Zurayʿ al-Yamī al-Hamdānī (d. ca 550/1155) took over the leadership of the dynasty from his father who had prospered from the flourishing trade between Fatimid Egypt and India that passed through the Red Sea.[33] He was designated *dāʿī*, a title confirmed by a decree of investiture brought from Cairo, in the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ. To deliver the investiture, in 539/1144 al-Ḥāfiẓ appointed as his envoy a man from the Upper Egypt: al-Qāḍī al-Rashīd Aḥmad b. al-Zubayr,[34] member of one of the most distinguished scholarly families of Aswan. There is no evidence however that he ever embraced Shiism, let alone Ismailism.

During the reign of the last Fatimid caliphs, Upper Egypt was theatre of extensive internal turmoil and acts of dissent against the central government. Meanwhile, at the Fatimid headquarters in Cairo, Ismailism had become spent force, having maintained only nominally its recognition as state religion in the person of the caliph. In 543/1148, the caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ sent troops to Upper Egypt to fight against a man from the progeny of Nizār -the eldest son of al-Mustanṣir-[35] who had gathered followers as rightful claimant to the throne. According to the 7th/15th century historian Ibn Taghrībirdī the conflict resulted in many deaths on both sides, thus indicating the presence of large, if counter-opposed, pro-Ismaili factions.[36] As for the Shii presence in the Ṣaʿīd under the reign of al-Fā'iẓ, we note the appointment of the Imami Shii al-Awḥad b. Tamīm as the governor of Asyut and Akhmim. He had been dispatched

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[33] See F. Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, cit., p. 256.

[34] See H. Derenbourg, *'Oumâra du Yémen, sa vie et son œuvre*, E. Leroux, Paris 1897-1909, 2 tomes in 3 vols., p. 60; J.C. Garçin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Egypte medievale,* cit., p. 106. In 551/1156 al-Qāḍī al-Rashīd was again in Aden.

[35] At the death of al-Mustanṣir in 591/1094, rather than Nizār, it was his younger brother, al-Mustaʿlī that came to be installed on the Fatimid throne. The supporters of Nizār's right to the imamate came to form the Nizārī branch of Ismailism, primarily based in Iran and Syria.

[36] See Abū'l-Maḥāsin Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-ẓāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa'l-Qāhira*, Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa'l-irshād al-qawmī, al-Qāhira 1963-1972, vols. 16, vol. 5, p. 282.

there by the Imami vizier al-Ṣāliḥ Ṭalā'i' b. Ruzzīk, who had been *wālī* of Qūṣ, Aswan and Upper Egypt[37], to avert al-Awḥad's presumed closeness to the caliph. Once in Upper Egypt, al-Awḥad took the allegiance of the local rulers and imposed a tax on every *wilāya* under his control for a period of six month, causing the remonstration of the people.[38]

With the Ayyubid take-over of Egypt in 567/1171 and the restoration of Sunnism as state religion, the Shiis, who were once on the winners' side as long as the Fatimid rule lasted, took refuge in Upper Egypt. Once again the Ṣaʿīd served as a launch pad for subversive action against the dominant regime. It is in relation to a series of pro-Fatimid revolts staged in the Ṣaʿīd after 567/1171 that we have the strongest evidence yet of a substantial Shii population in that region. In 570/1174, the Fatimid general and *wālī* of Aswan, Kanz al-Dawla, conspired against the Ayyubids. Two years later revolt returned, this time in Qift. There was there one of the early *dāʿīs* from among the 'Abd al-Qawiyy tribe, who managed to gather around him a substantial number of people supporting the restoration of the Fatimid caliphate. About 3,000 people were killed in the course of the Ayyubids' quashing of the rising. In 577/1181 two men from Esna appeared in the Upper Egypt who called for the return of the Fatimids.[39]As late as 697/1297-98, long after the fall of the Fatimids, a certain Dā'ūd who had claimed in Upper Egypt to be a descendant of the last Fatimid caliph al-'Āḍid, failed in his campaign to re-establish Fatimid rule.[40]

Over the course of the two centuries of Fatimid rule in Egypt, there was ample opportunity for Shiism of various strands to grow among the population of Upper Egypt. During the first Fatimid century, "Shiis" in Upper Egypt consisted of people who transited in the region for trading and religious reasons; 'Alids who might have been also Shiis to reinforce their bond with the dynasty that patron them; Kutāmas and Maghribis who had been relocated in that region according to the regime's tribal policy; pro-Shii local rulers and administrators; Shiis activists who did not recognise the authority of the Fatimid imams; opportunist Shia sympathisers who changed allegiances as convenient. During the second Fatimid century, the growing presence of Shiis in

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[37] See *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 292.

[38] See al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āẓ,*cit., vol. 3, p. 222.

[39] See 'A.M. Mājid, *Ẓuhūr khilāfat al-Fāṭimiyyīn wa suqūṭihā fī Miṣr,* cit., pp. 493-495.

[40] See D.J. Stewart, "Popular Shiism in Medieval Egypt", cit., p. 57.

that region was the result of the increased strategic and commercial relevance of Upper Egypt as *trait d'union* area between the Shii Is-maili Fatimids and their Shii Ismaili vassal dynasties in Yemen. In keeping with standard trading practices typical of the area at the time, the securing of a continuous and safe flow of communication between the two regimes rested on the presence of trustworthy residents who would act as agents, brokers and safe keepers. With the demise of Is-maili dynasties in Yemen first and the end of Fatimid rule later, Shiis who once benefitted from friendly regimes, either took refuge or found themselves stuck in Upper Egypt. Far from being only political allies of Shii regimes -as argued by al-Ḥuwayrī- the Shiis of Upper Egypt were mostly ordinary and trading people who came to settle there in waves and under different affiliations for mundane reasons, with practical interests to protect and further. The Shiis of Upper Egypt of the Fatimid period left no evidence of a significant intellec-tual tradition behind them. This does not necessarily mean that Shii scholarship was absent but rather that there was no local incentive or specific demand in recording it for posterity. If obscure as individuals, as a community, the Shiis of Upper Egypt made nevertheless a mean-ingful enough impact to deserve a place in the history of the region under the Fatimids.

ABSTRACTS

Under Fatimid rule the population of Egypt had remained Sunni. The Up-per Egypt region, however, is distinctive in that it constitutes an exception since Shiism (though not necessarily the Ismaili brand) enjoyed growing popularity and -for a short period- even became the majority denomination in cities like Aswan. The aim of my paper is to (a) explore the influence that Fatimid governance had in shaping the cultural, religious and intellec-tual life of the region and (b) appraise the reasons that caused Shiism to rise. From the reign of the imam-caliph al-Mustanṣir until the mid of the 12th century, Upper Egypt came to occupy a strategic role as the nerve cen-tre of a flourishing international community of traders, scholars and pil-grims, following the Fatimids' establishment of *da'wa*, political and trad-ing alliances with their Ismaili vassals in Yemen, the Ṣulayḥids. I will ar-gue that the favour that Shiism enjoyed in Upper Egypt in the period under discussion was not due to doctrinal preferences among locals resulting from *da'wa* activities but was rather "imported" through the traffic of peo-ple who converged in the region for mundane/practical reasons. Beside the

most widely used primary sources used for the study of the Fatimids I will base my research on biographical dictionaries compiled at a time close to the period under discussion.

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Sous le pouvoir des fatimides la population de l'Egypte était restée sunnite. La région de la Haute-Egypte, cependant, était remarquable en ce qu'elle constituait une exception car le chiisme (mais pas nécessairement Ismaelien) connut une popularité croissante et -pour une courte période- même était devenue la dénomination de la majorité dans des villes comme Assouan. Le but de mon article est (a) d'étudier l'influence que la gouvernance fatimide eut dans l'élaboration de la vie culturelle, religieuse et intellectuelle de la région et (b) d'apprécier les raisons qui ont amené le chiisme à accroître son influence. Depuis le règne de l'imam-calife al-Mustanṣir jusqu'au milieu du 12ème siècle, la Haute-Egypte était venue à occuper un rôle stratégique comme centre névralgique d'une communauté internationale prospère de commerçants, savants et pèlerins, suite à la mise en place par les fatimides de la *da'wa*, alliances politiques et commerciales avec leurs vassaux Ismaeliens au Yémen, les ṣulayḥides. Je soutiens que la faveur dont le chiisme a joui en Haute-Egypte dans la période à l'étude n'était pas due à des préférences doctrinales parmi les habitants issus des activités de la *da'wa* mais a été plutôt "importé" par le mouvement de personnes qui ont convergé dans la région pour des raisons pratiques. Outre les principales sources les plus largement utilisés pour l'étude des fatimides je fonde mes recherches sur les dictionnaires biographiques compilés durant la période examinée.

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Durante il periodo fatimide, la popolazione musulmana egiziana rimase sunnita, con l'eccezione dell'Alto Egitto. Qui, infatti, lo sciismo (non necessariamente ismailita) godette di una popolarità crescente e, per un breve periodo, divenne addirittura la religione maggioritaria in città come Aswan. Scopo del presente contributo sarà quello di esaminare: a) in che modo l'amministrazione fatimide influenzò la vita culturale, religiosa e intellettuale della regione, e b) quali furono le ragioni che determinarono la popolarità dello sciismo in quella regione. Le alleanze politiche e commerciali che i fatimidi strinsero con i Ṣulayḥidi, loro vassalli ismailiti in Yemen, unitamente all'attività di propaganda, fecero dell'Alto Egitto, dal regno dell'imam-califfo al-Mustanṣir fino alla metà del XII secolo, il centro nevralgico di una fiorente comunità cosmopolita di mercanti, dotti e pellegrini. Il lavoro cercherà anche di dimostrare che la popolarità di cui godette lo sciismo in Alto Egitto, durante il periodo esaminato, fu determinata non tanto da scelte dottrinali, conseguenza dell'attività di propaganda condotta tra la popolazione locale, quanto piuttosto dal traffico di persone che, confluendo nella regione per motivi di ordine pratico, vi "importarono" anche il loro credo sciita. Il

presente contributo si basa, oltre che sulle principali fonti primarie general-
mente utilizzate nello studio sui fatimidi, anche su dizionari bibliografici re-
datti in un periodo contemporaneo, o quasi, a quello qui trattato.