Lost and found: the *Sarguẕasht-i Sayyid-nā*. Facts and Fiction of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ's Travel to Egypt vis-à-vis the Political and Intellectual Life of 5th/11th century Fāṭimid Cairo.

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In the year AH 469/1076 CE, a still young and recently initiated to Ismailism Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ (d. AH 518/1124 CE) reportedly left the city of Rayy in Iran to embark on a journey that was to take him to the Fatimid capital, al-Qāhira. As with any enthusiastic *dā'ī*, his ultimate ambition must have been to meet personally the imam of the time, al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh (d. AH 487/1094 CE). As *nā'ib* (deputy) of 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Aṭṭāsh – the physician originally from Iṣfahān who converted him and on whose behalf he claimed to be travelling - Ḥasan's aim was to receive instructions for his mission in Iran from the headquarters of the Ismaili *da'wa* at the heart of the Fatimid regime. After encountering obstacles and taking detours during his journey, Ḥasan finally arrived in al-Qāhira in AH 471/August 1078 CE and was to stay there for just over two years before returning to Iran.

Ḥasan's experience in Egypt was one that eventually led him to change the course of Ismaili history and leave an indelible mark on medieval Islamic history as a whole. Indeed, it was upon returning to Iran from Egypt that Ḥasan took control of most of the Iranian Ismaili organization and launched a new course for an Ismaili *da'wa* that –from its headquarters in the fortress of Alamūt- was to become spiritually, organisationally and politically independent from al-Qāhira. By paying allegiance to Nizār (d. AH 488/1095 CE), whom the new *da'wa* in time came to recognise as the legitimate imam after the death of al-Mustanṣir, against the appointment of al-Mustanṣir's younger son, al-Musta'lī (d. AH 495/1101 CE), Nizārī Ismailism was born and the rest - as they say- is history.

Yet, Ḥasan's seemingly formative experience while in Egypt has received little to no attention from scholarship so far. M. Hodgson, in his seminal work on the history of Nizārī Ismailism, sums it up in one line by concluding that "[Ḥasan saw that] There was room [...] for the conception of a struggling faith, requiring fighting supporters".[1] F. Daftary, in what amounts to the most comprehensive coverage to date of the Ismailis, dedicates a short comment to Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ's time in Egypt

> Ḥasan seems to have learned important lessons in Egypt. By that time, the Persian Ismā'īlīs were already aware of the declining power of the Fāṭimid regime, and the shrewd Ḥasan had personally witnessed the difficulties of al-Mustanṣir at the very centre of the Fāṭimid state. He must have realised that the Fāṭimid regime, then under the effective control of Badr al-Jamālī, lacked both the means and the resolve to assist the Persian Ismā'īlīs in their struggle against the Saljūqs. It was in

[1] Hodgson, Marshall G.S. 1955: *The Order of the Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismā'īlīs against the Islamic World*. The Hague. p.46.

> recognition of these realities that Ḥasan eventually chartered an independent course of action.[2]

But what exactly were these important lessons? What were the difficulties that Ḥasan personally witnessed? In what way was the faith struggling to the point of needing militant supporters? In attempting to answer these questions, I will revisit what medieval sources reported about Ḥasan's time in Egypt, in light of my examination of previously unstudied manuscripts of Ḥasan' biography titled *Sarguẕasht-i Sayyid-nā*. I will then contextually analyse information provided in the accounts of Ḥasan's stay in Egypt against the backdrop of the political and intellectual climates that prevailed there at the time of his presence. This analysis will serve as the basis for consideration as to the motivations that might have moved Ḥasan to set up a new, independent Ismaili *da'wa* in Iran. More broadly Ḥasan's travelogue will serve me as a catalyst to illustrate aspects of the cross-culturalism that characterised life in Fatimid Egypt at the dawn of the new *da'wa*.

Very little is known about Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ's activities while in Egypt. Most of what we know is derived from Ḥasan's memoirs, reported in his biography titled *Sarguẕasht-i Sayyid-nā*; from the text of a letter sent in ca AH 483/1090 CE to the Saljuq Sultan Malikshāh (d. AH 485/1092 CE) attributed to Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ[3] and from a selection of medieval chronicles and historiographies dealing with Egypt during the Fatimid period. The *Sarguẕasht-i Sayyid-nā* has been known so far to exist in form of fragments quoted or paraphrased mainly by the historians 'Aṭā' Malik Juwaynī (d. AH 681/1283 CE) and Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allāh (d. AH 718/1318 CE).[4] In the Library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies

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[2] Daftary, Farhad 2007: *The Ismā'īlīs. Their History and Doctrines*. 2nd ed. Cambridge. p. 313.

[3] Ibn al-Jawzī mentions the exchange of correspondence between Malikshāh and Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ. See Ibn al-Jawzī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Ali 1359/1940: *al-Muntaẓam fī ta'rīkh al-muluk wa'l-umam*. Ed. F. Krenkow. Haydharabad, vol 9, p.121. This correspondence has enjoyed great attention on the part of scholars. The letters were first published in Mehmed Serefuddin Yaltkaya 1926: *Dār al-Funūn Ilāhīyāt Fākūltah-sí majmū'ah-sí* 7, pp. 38-44. Naṣr Allāh Falsafī published them in 1950: *Iṭṭilā'āt-i-mahana'* 3, pp. 12-16; 1951: *Hasht maqālah-i tārīkhī va adabī*. Tehran, rep. 1342/1963: *Chand Maqāle-yi Tārikhī wa Ādābī*. Tehran, pp. 415-25 -the edition used here - based on manuscripts in the Mahdī Bayānī and Mu'ayyad Sābitī collections (Mahdī Bayānī's is now in the National Libraries and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Tehran). The texts were included in Āzād, Sayf AH Sh.1341/1962 CE: *Tārīkh-i khulafā-i Khulafa-i-fāṭimī*. Tehran, pp.178-184 and Kashāwarz, Karīm AH Sh.1344/1965 CE: *Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ*, Tehran, pp. 133-144. The epistles have also been translated into Arabic. The authenticity of these letters has been questioned in Kafesoğlu, Ibrahim 1953: *Sultan Melikşah devirinde Büyü Selçuklu imparatorğulu.* Istanbul. pp.134-5.

[4] Other main primary sources containing biographical information on Ḥasan include works by Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Qāsim al-Qāshānī (d. ca AH 738/1337-8 CE), Ḥamd Allāh Mustawfī Qazwīni (d. after AH 740/1339-1340 CE) and Ḥāfiẓ Abrū (d. AH 833/1430 CE). Juwaynī,

(henceforth IIS) in London I was able to consult microfiche copies of two manuscripts of a work titled *Sarguẕasht-i Sayyid-nā* in an unpublished hand-list of Persian Ismaili manuscripts available in the Library**.** [5] Small but significant differences show that the two manuscripts – while sharing the same work - are not one the copy of the other and therefore are the result of separate strands of transmission of the text. Ismail K. Poonawala in his *Biobibliography of*

ʻAṭā Malik 1958: *The History of the World-Conqueror*, English trans. J. A. Boyle. Manchester. vol. 2, pp.668-9; Rashīd al-Dīn, Faḍl Allāh 1977: *Jāmiʻ al-Tawārīkh*, (Part of the Ismāʻīlīs History). ed. M. T. Dānesh-Pajūh and M. Modarresī. Tehran, pp. 77; 97-103. See also a brief mention in al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ʻAbd al-Karīm 1984: *[Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-nihal] Muslim Sects and Divisions. The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*, tr. A.K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn. London, p.168.

[5] Persian ms 162, n.d. (probably late 19th century), pp.1-11; 18-31 incomplete and ms 177, pp. 1-40 complete, dated Sunday 22 October 1916, copied in Bombay by 'Khwaja Mu'min'. Both copies feature the stamp of the Ismaili Society in Bombay on the first page of text. A. Berthels and M. Baqoev mention the existence of three early 20th century manuscript copies of a work titled *Qiṣṣa-yi Sarguẕasht-i ḥaẕrat-i Bābā Sayyid-nā,* produced in the Eastern Pamir region. In their catalogue entries they describe the work as spurious and draw attention to some similarities between this text and parts in Juwaynī's and Rashīd al-Dīn's histories. It is not possible at this stage to establish whether the Badakhshani copies of the *Sarguẕasht* are in any way related to the 'Indian' ones in the IIS library. Berthel's, A. and M. Baqoev 1967: *Alphabetic Catalogue of Manuscripts Found by 1959-1963 Expedition in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region.* Moscow, nos 175, 176, 177, p. 76. In his *Guide to Ismaili Literature* published in Bombay in 1933 Wladimir Ivanow has one entry (n. 639) for the *Sarguẕasht-i Sayyid-nā* where he claims to have been informed of the existence of copies of this work in Central Asia, but he clearly had no manuscripts of the work at his disposal. In his *Ismaili Literature, a Bibliographical Survey,* published in Tehran in 1963, W. Ivanow has a different entry (no. 741) for the *Sarguẕasht,* yet giving no clear indication as to whether he had access to a copy of the work or not. In his entry he links the text to those contained in collections and historical works of the Safavid period and describes the work as rather short, bearing no relations to the text used by Juwaynī's and Rashīd al-Dīn. It is interesting to note that W. Ivanow appears to have ignored the existence of what are now the IIS copies of the *Sarguẕasht* in spite of the fact that these two manuscripts were housed at the Ismaili Society in Bombay where Ivanow had worked. A possible explanation is that the manuscripts might have arrived at the Ismaili Society after 1959, the year when Ivanow left Bombay to live permanently in Tehran. Indeed the initial flyleaf of the IIS ms 177 features the number '1961' in Gujarai numbers and this could refer to the year of its accession. In this paper I have used primarily IIS ms 177 as it is complete, more clearly written and dated. I gratefully acknowledge the permission obtained at the Library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, to use and quote or paraphrase parts of the present manuscripts which are part of the Library's collection. In particular I wish to thank Mr Alnoor Merchant, Head of Library, for facilitating my access to the microfiches, procuring their print outs and alerting me to the entries in Berthels' catalogue.

Ismā'īlī Literature lists the existence of the manuscript of a work titled *Sarguẕasht-i Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ* in Tehran's Markazi Library. [6] The manuscript is in fact in Tehran's Library, Museum and Document Center of the Iranian Parliament and the text of the *Sarguẕasht* is included in a *majmū'a* dated 1089/1678.[7] Content-wise this version of Ḥasan's biography shares some similarities with parts of the text contained in Juwaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn's works and that of the two IIS manuscripts. However, its genre, style and order of contents differ too much from those of the IIS manuscripts to make it a third, earlier copy of the IIS's *Sarguẕasht* or the basis for the extracts found in Juwaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn.

Notwithstanding significant textual discrepancies, an initial analysis of the IIS manuscripts shows that the text they contain features strong similarities with the passages quoted and paraphrased by the already-mentioned historians as well as additional information. There is no doubt that the IIS text of the *Sarguẕasht* relates closely to the *Sarguẕasht* referred to by Juwaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn which makes its discovery all the more important. [8] The main similarities between the IIS *Sarguẕasht* and Juwaynī's passages[9] are : Ḥasan's *kunya* and the family transfer from Kufa to Rayy via Qum; his encounter with 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Aṭṭāsh; his travel and permanence in Egypt; the aversion shown against him by Badr al-Jamālī; his miraculous arrival in Syria; his arrival in Isfahan from Aleppo, via Baghdad and Khuzistan; the reference to Abū Muslim al-Rāzī as governor of Rayy; Ḥasan's penetration of the fortress of Alamūt and its takeover; the reference to *ra'īs* Muẓaffar and his payment of 3,000 *dīnār*s for the acquisition of the fortress; the story of Hasan's encounter in Isfahan with *ra'īs* Abu'l Faḍl and the latter's belief that Ḥasan had been affected by mental illness only to be proven wrong. In addition to the passages above that Rashīd al-Dīn shared with Juwainī[10], the main similarities between the IIS *Sarguẕasht* and Rashīd al-Dīn's

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[6] Poonawala, Ismail K. 1977: *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature*. Malibu. p. 253.

[7] *Majmū'a* no. 901, 54. Total leaves 387 (the *Sarguẕasht* runs from leaf 199 to 223, pp. 21-29). I am very grateful to Dr M. Mesbahi and Dr M. Samiei of The Islamic College, London, for their help in tracing this manuscript and in facilitating my access to it. This could be the version of the work W. Ivanow refers to in entry 741 of *Ismaili Literature.*

[8] As to the exact nature of the interrelation between these versions of the *Sarguẕasht*, it is tempting to suggest that the IIS text might have been the original narrative that formed the basis for the passages reported and interpolated by later historians. However, confirmation of such claim requires extensive critical and inter-textual analysis that should be the subject of a separate study. There is no question however that the IIS *Sarguẕasht* represents a previously unknown version, with continuous text, of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ's biography that -at the very least- testifies to the existence of a distinctive Ismaili transmission of this work that goes beyond the selective, bias and interpolated versions offered by both Juwaynī's and Rashīd al-Dīn'.

[9] Juwaynī 1958: pp.666-678.

[10] For a study of the relationship between Juwaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn's versions of the *Sarguẕasht* see Bowen, Harold 1931: "The *sar-gudhast-i sayyidnā*, the 'Tale of the Three Schoolfellows' and the *wasaya* of the Niẓam al-Mulk". *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.* pp.771-782.

version[11] are: greater details given in the account of Ḥasan's itinerary (though listing different places in different order) while on his way to Egypt; greater details on Ḥasan's permanence in Egypt; greater details on the question of the disputed appointment of al-Musta'lī as al-Mustanṣir's heir apparent ; the story of Ḥasan's incarceration in the tower of Dumyat and his miraculous escape; the story of the shipwreck and Ḥasan's success in converting his fellow travellers to Ismailism; the full version of the well-known, yet anachronistic, story of a solidarity pact agreed between Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, the Saljuq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk and the poet 'Umar Khayyām while in Nishapur under the tutelage of the imam Muwaffaq Nīshābūrī; the subsequent deception by Niẓām al-Mulk at Ḥasan's expense. [12] There are also major discrepancies between the IIS *Sarguẕasht* and the already mentioned more famous versions. Beside additional names of people as well as places and different sequences of events, some significant differences can be noted when comparing the text with Juwaynī's and Rashīd al-Dīn's accounts. For example, Ḥasan's lineage is traced back to the imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir; the residence of his youth, while in the Rayy district, is indicated as a place called Muḥammad Abād; the place of Ḥasan's meeting with 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Aṭṭāsh is given as Rudbār rather than Rayy; Ḥasan's relationship with him is described as one of *khidmat* (servitude) and not of *nayabāt* (deputy-ship), a position that -incidentally - never features in Ismaili *da'wa* hierarchies. The most striking discrepancy however is that only one date is given in the IIS *Sarguẕasht*: *Rajāb* AH 484, indicated as the year of Ḥasan's takeover of Alamūt, after seven years in the region.[13] The IIS *Sarguẕasht* ends with an anachronistic account of Ḥasan receiving news of al-Musta'li's usurpation of the throne in Egypt and the arrest of his elder brother Nizār.

The narrative of the IIS's version of the *Sarguẕasht* is complex in that it is interspersed with dream narratives, anecdotes, exaggerations, tropes and anachronisms, thus making it difficult to separate fact from fantasy. The author's purpose in retrospectively writing the Ḥasan's biography must have been to legitimise Ḥasan's role as the leading *dā'ī* of what would become the Nizārī *da'wa*. Here Ḥasan's credentials are forcedly traced back to Iranian *dā'ī*s of the past, to the Fatimid imam-caliph al-Mustanṣir and the famous AH 5th/11th century CE Persian *dā'ī* Nāṣir-i Khusraw via the narration of Ḥasan's oneiric encounters with them.[14] Bearing in mind the limitations that the use of a text such as this can pose for

[11] Rashīd al-Dīn 1977: 97-105; 110-114

[12] Beside the already mentioned versions, the story is also found in *Sarguẕasht Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ*, part of Persian ms *Majmū'a* no. 901, pp. 22-29 in the Library, Museum and Document Center of the Iranian Parliament, Tehran. For a study of this narration as in Juwaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn see Bowen: 1931.

[13] Persian ms 177, p.35. Juwaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn give the year AH 483. The *Sarguẕasht Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ*, part of Persian ms *Majmū'a* no. 901, p.29, gives the date AH 462 (in fact 482).

[14] Within the broader field of Islamic dream theory, instructions communicated via sleep visions are believed to be true because- according to a commonly accepted Islamic belief – they are ultimately inspired by God. The importance of the message conveyed in the dream is

historical reconstruction, I will share here some details from the IIS *Sarguẕasht* that complement information also found in the other sources that deal with Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ's presence in Egypt.

According to the IIS version of the *Sarguẕasht*, on a Tuesday Ḥasan headed for a village where he joined a caravan and stayed there for a few days. From there he headed south towards Alexandria, but, as there was nowhere to stay in that city, he left for Aleppo. Having left Aleppo by boat, he eventually arrived at a port from where, after three days of travelling through desert, he arrived in the city of Miṣr (that is al-Qahira/Fusṭāṭ). [15] He claimed to have stayed in Miṣr just over two years. Ḥasan states that for the first six months of his stay he was quite astonished by what he saw and ended up begging (*darvīzkarī*) and unable to go anywhere.[16] In the IIS *Sarguẕasht* Ḥasan's encounters with al-Mustanṣir are consistently presented in the context of a dream vision (*khiyāl-ḥairān*) thus lending support to what openly stated in the Juwaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn's versions of the text, that is, that he never actually met the imam-caliph in person.[17] In the dream narrative reported in the IIS *Sarguẕasht* Ḥasan enjoyed the favours of the imam, who instructed him to go to see a certain Abu'l-Qāsim in the town of Lāhīn[18] who would give him hospitality.[19] In the vision al-Mustanṣir showed Ḥasan hospitality and welcoming, instructed that one day he should go and work at the service of Nāṣir-i Khuṣraw and should perform the pilgrimage to Makka.[20] In the material world however Ḥasan was faced with the hostility of Badr al-Jamālī- the effective holder of the power at court by the time of Ḥasan's arrival. This, Ḥasan emphatically says 'was no dream' (*īn ḥaqīr-rā khiyālī na-būd*) .[21] In the IIS *Sarguẕasht*, like in Juwaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn's versions, Ḥasan –anachronistically- is reported to have imputed Badr al-

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proportional to the importance of the spiritual authority believed to have appeared in it. In turn, the dreamer could see his or her status enhanced on the basis of being 'chosen' as receiver of a sleep vision conveyed by a figure of authority. In the IIS *Sarguẕasht* Ḥasan's interlocutor is the Fatimid Caliph-Imam al-Mustanṣir in person. As a literary device, Toufy Fahd explains that 'The dream serves as a screen on which past history is projected, a history [that when the] chroniclers were unable to write [it]…they used the dream as a subterfuge for telling it'. Toufy Fahd 1966: 'The Dream in Medieval Islamic Society' in eds. Gustave E. Von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois. *The Dream and Human Society.* Berkley and Los Angeles, p.352.

[15] Persian ms 177, p. 22. The order of places differs in Rashīd al-Dīn's account, pp. 100-102.
[16] Persian ms 177, p. 22.
[17] Also, in the letter attributed to Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, addressed to Malikshāh, Ḥasan does not claim to have met al-Mustanṣir but simply to have gone to Miṣr to check the state of affairs of his caliphate and compare it with the 'Abbasids' one in Baghdad. Falsafī 1342/1063: 417.
[18] This is possibly the same as al-Lāhūn, a town in the Fayyum region south of Cairo.
[19] Persian ms 177, pp. 23-4.
[20] Persian ms 177, p. 24.
[21] Persian ms 177, p. 25.

Jamālī's hostility on his support for the succession of Nizār.[22] The IIS *Sarguẕasht* reports the story of al-Mustanṣir's revelation to Ḥasan that his elder son, Nizār, would be to be his true heir apparent, in charge of the *bāṭin* (esoteric) aspect of the Ismaili doctrine. As for his other son, Aḥmad, who would be known as al-Mustaʻlī , he would *only* be in charge of the *ẓāhir* (exoteric) part of the *daʻwa*.[23] An alternative explanation for Badr al-Jamālī's aversion to Ḥasan is found in Ḥasan's alleged letter to the Saljuq sultan Malikshāh. In that account Badr al-Jamālī's opposition to him had been instigated by the 'Abbasids who sent emissaries and money to the Armenian commander in return for his capture. In the letter it is stated that Badr al-Jamālī eventually dispatched Ḥasan out of Egypt to conduct the Ismaili *daʻwa* to the Byzantines and the Franks.[24] This episode is echoed, to varying degrees, in all the versions of the *Sarguẕasht* [25]where it is stated that Ḥasan was expelled by sea to the Maghreb with a group of Christians but that the ship run into trouble and was re-routed to Syria. At the pick of the dangerous journey, Ḥasan told his hopeless travel companions about his reliance on power of his imam to save him. The story goes that when the group finally reached safety, they converted *en mass* to Ismailism, having being convinced by Ḥasan's account of al-Mustanṣir's miraculous intervention.[26] According to the *Sarguẕasht*, before leaving Egypt for good, Ḥasan was kept under arrest in the tower of a fortress of Dumyat by order of Badr al-Jamālī. In the same account it is stated that – by miracle - one tower of the fortress collapsed after one week Ḥasan was incarcerated and that this is how he was subsequently placed on a boat to leave for good.[27]

Accounts about Ḥasan's presence in Egypt reported by medieval chronicles, biographical dictionaries and historiographies on Egypt add little yet significant details. Their respective passages are by and large anachronistic, hagiographical and anecdotal however, they are of value in that they show that their authors had had access to sources on Ḥasan other than the *Sarguẕasht*. Ibn al-Muyassar, Ibn al-Athīr and al-Maqrīzī give AH 479/1086-7 CE as

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[22] Persian ms 177, p. 29-30. Nizār's would-be rival, al-Mustaʻlī, was only 4 years old when Ḥasan arrived in Egypt and it is generally agreed that -at this stage- Nizār was the intended heir to the throne . There was therefore no rationale for supporting a 'Nizārī cause' given that disputes over al-Mustanṣir's succession emerged several years later.

[23] Persian ms 177, p. 30. It is interesting to note that a similar argument, but in reverse, is found in literature produced to defend the right to succession of al-Mustaʻlī. See [al-Āmir bi-aḥkām'llāh, attributed] 1938: *al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*. ed. and intro. A. A. A. Fyzee. London, New York, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, pp.16-17.

[24] Falsafī 1342: 418.

[25] Also *Sarguẕasht Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ*, part of Persian ms *Majmūʻa* no. 901 in the Library, Museum and Document Center of the Iranian Parliament, p. 25, dedicates four lines to Ḥasan's experience at the court of al-Mustanṣir. The enmity shown to him by Badr al-Jamālī is explained here as been caused by Badr's concern for the closeness that grew between Ḥasan and the imam-caliph.

[26] Juwaynī 1958: vol. 2. pp. 668-9; Persian ms 177, pp.31-32.

[27] Persian ms 177, p. 31; Rashīd al-Dīn 1977: 102.

the date of Hasan's arrival in Egypt.[28] Both Ibn al-Muyassar and al-Maqrīzī claim that Ḥasan was arrested by order of al-Mustanṣir.[29] They mention that Ḥasan had already met a group of Egyptian *dā'īs* while he was still in Rayy and indicate different or additional locations to his travel itinerary. All are quite rich in information on Ḥasan's scholarly and intellectual abilities.

The political climate

What was happening in Egypt in AH 471/1078-472/1079 CE that was so remarkable to make such a dramatic impression on Ḥasan? If we go by Ibn Muyassar's and al-Maqrīzī's accounts for those years, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ must have witnessed perhaps the dullest time in the medieval history of that region. Both historians – otherwise typically generous with information- dedicate only half a line to the events of AH 471, laconically stating that nothing big happened in that year. Not much more is given for the following year, with the most relevant news being that the king of Nubia went to Aswan to expand his church, was arrested and brought to al-Qahira. Greeted generously by Badr al-Jamālī, the king eventually died before being able to return to his kingdom.[30]

The general impression that we can infer from the vast majority of medieval sources covering this period is that the country was indeed enjoying a period of relative political,

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[28] While – on the basis of the dates reported by Juwaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn - AH 471/1078 CE is generally agreed to be the year of Ḥasan's arrival in Egypt, alternative dating found in a variety of sources have been the subject of scrutiny. David Durand-Guédy argues that the dates of 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Aṭṭāsh's arrival in Rayy and Ḥasan's departure for al-Qāhira had been deliberately brought closer to one another by the author of the *Sarguẕasht* (Juwaynī's version) to render more credible the handover of power from 'Abd al-Malik to Ḥasan, at the expense of 'Abd al-Malik's son, Aḥmad. See Durand-Guédy, David 2010: *Iranian Élites and Turkish Rulers: A History of Iṣfahān in the Saljūq Period*. London, New-York, p. 50. Given that the IIS *Sarguẕasht* does not feature dates, one should also consider the possibility of the dates relating to Ḥasan's travelogue could be the product of interpolation by Juwaynī, on the basis of other sources at his disposal, or the writer of the copy of the *Sarguẕasht* that he might have used, to serve varied agendas. I would also suggest that the postponement to 479/1086-7 as the year of Ḥasan's arrival in Egypt might have served Ibn Muyassar and the other historians the purpose of resolving the anachronism already discussed in note 14. In delaying by ten years Ḥasan's presence in Cairo they brought his arrival in Cairo closer to the emergence of disputes over the appointment of al-Mustanṣir's successor where Badr al-Jamālī favoured al-Musta'lī whom he married to his daughter.

[29] Ibn Muyassar, Tāj al-Dīn 1981: *al-Muntaqā min akhbār Miṣr*, ed. A. Fu'ād. Sayyid. Cairo. pp.37-38; al-Maqrīzī, Ṭaqī al-Dīn 1387/1967: *Itti'āẓ al-ḥunafā' bi-aḫbār al-a'imma al-fāṭimiyyīn al-khulafā'*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn Shayyāl. Cairo. vol.2, account for the year 479.

[30] al-Maqrīzī 1387/1967: vol.2, pp. 319-320.

social and economic stability with the arrival of Badr al-Jamālī in AH 466/1074 CE. This was in the aftermath of the turbulent years of the economic, political and social collapse that hit Egypt during the reign of al-Mustanṣir, the *shidda al-mustanṣiriyya*. Unlike other years, even the flooding of the Nile had been good in AH 471/1078-472/1079 CE.[31] If we take these accounts at face value we should conclude that Ḥasan could have only been pleased with what he saw. As it turns out, he was not. Having presumably met a group of Egyptian *dā'īs* in Rayy in AH 469/1076 CE and left the city in that same year, we can safely assume that Ḥasan had planned –while in al-Qahira- to spend time with the then chief *dā'ī*, the fellow Persian al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī. However, by the time he arrived, not only did he find that al-Mu'ayyad had died the year before but also that the leadership of the *da'wa* was no longer in Ismaili hands. Two months before al-Mu'ayyad's death, Badr al-Jamālī had been given the title of Guide of the *dā'īs* of the believers. [32] In AH 470/1077 CE Badr also oversaw the Ismaili judiciary and had brokered agreements with the judges of the Sunni community.[33] By 471/1078, it was clear that Badr al-Jamālī held the reins of all aspects of power at the heart of the Fatimid regime and that al-Mustanṣir had been relegated to nominal rule. This state of affair was reflected on the city landscape for all to see: within a month of Ḥasan's arrival, in AH 470/1077 CE, Badr's name and titles were displayed on a plaque on the *ziyāda* (surrounding wall) of the mosque of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn which he had restored in that year.[34]

While pursuing a stabilising policy at home, outside Egypt the Fatimids had finally lost control of regions that –though precariously- had been part of their domains or under their sphere of influence. The 1070s CE saw the Saljuqs' advance westward, the Byzantines' shifting of alliances, the Crusaders' arrival in the Holy Land and, in the west, the Normans' conquest of Sicily. In AH 469/1076-77 CE Badr al-Jamālī had succeeded in rebuking the Saljuq invasion of Egypt but, by AH 471/1078 CE, Damascus had nevertheless become the capital of the new Saljuq principality of Syria and Palestine. In AH 472/1079 CE the *khuṭba* in Makka stopped to be proclaimed in name of al-Mustanṣir and was resumed in the name of the 'Abbasids.[35] Over the decade, these events resulted in a radical redirection as to the preferred regions where the Fatimid *da'wa* was to become more active. When Ḥasan appeared at the Fatimid court, Badr al-Jamālī was too busy consolidating the Fatimids' relations with their allies in Yemen, the Ṣulayḥids, to care about an uninvited *dā'ī* coming from Saljuq-infested lands. In AH 472/1079 CE it was to al-Mukarram Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-

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[31] al-Dawādārī, Abū Bakr b. 'Abd Allāh 1380/1961: *Kanz al-durar wa jāmi'al-ghurar*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid. Cairo. vol. 6, p.405.

[32] Kelmm, Verena 2003: *Memoirs of a Mission, The Ismā'īlī Scholar, Statesman and Poet al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī*. London, New York. p.104.

[33] al-Maqrīzī 1387/1967: vol.2, p. 319.

[34] Fu'ād Sayyid, Ayman 1998: *La capital de l'Égypte jusqu'à l'époque fatimide: al-Qāhira et al-Fusṭāṭ essay de reconstruction topographique*. Beirut. pp. 432-433.

[35] al-Maqrīzī 1387/1967: vol.2, p. 320.

Ṣulayḥī that Badr al-Jamālī introduced himself by letter as appointed head of the judiciary of the Muslims and the leader of the *da'wa* of the *mu'min*s.[36] The alliance between the Fatimids and the Ṣulayḥids dated back to AH 439/1047 CE, when the head of the somewhat dilapidated Yemeni *da'wa*,'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣulayḥī, (d. AH 459/1067 CE), rose from obscurity to become the founder of what was to be an important vassal dynasty of the Fatimids. 'Alī's efforts to re-launch the *da'wa* in his region were initially distractedly noticed by al-Mustanṣir.[37] It was only in AH 455/1063 CE, when 'Alī al-Ṣulayḥī brought the whole of Yemen south of Sanaa under Ṣulayḥid rule that the al-Qāhira establishment took real notice of him. This province was to become the last significant territorial hold of the Fatimids and an essential outpost for the revival and re-direction of the *da'wa* and its ancillary activities, primarily trade.

Throughout their reign the Ṣulayḥid rulers sent regularly *dā'īs* to al-Qāhira to be instructed by al-Mu'ayyad and arrange for a large number of manuscripts of Ismaili literature to be dispatched to Yemen.[38] Exchanges between the two courts did not end with the death of al-Mu'ayyad, as, until the end of the Ṣulayḥid dynasty, the delivery of correspondence between al-Qāhira and the Yemeni courts was mainly conducted via emissaries sent by the Ṣulayḥid monarchs. The rise to prominence of the Ṣulayḥids as darlings of the Fatimids had not gone unnoticed among Iranian *dā'īs*. It is noteworthy that the only Persian *dā'ī* of any note for this period to come to Egypt, prior to Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, was Shahriyār b. al-Ḥasan (d. second half of AH fifth/eleventh century CE). Initially the *dā'ī* for Fārs and Kirmān, he went to serve the Ṣulayḥids during the reign of 'Alī's son, al-Mukarram. From Yemen Shahriyār was sent to al-Qāhira to receive instruction form al-Mu'ayyad and eventually returned to the Ṣulayḥid court. He is known as the author of several treatises and a *qaṣīda*.[39]

Although we do not have any named Yemeni *dā'īs* known to have been at the Fatimid court during the years of Ḥasan's presence in Egypt, it is not unlikely that Ḥasan –himself of Yemeni origins - might have become aware of representatives of the Ṣulayḥid regime who were there at the time. Documentary evidence shows exchange of diplomatic correspondence over the period under discussion between the two courts which implies the presence of emissaries.

The Intellectual Climate

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[36] Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn 2002: *The Fāṭimids and their Successors in Yaman, The History of an Islamic Community*. *Arabic Edition and English Summary of Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn's 'Uyūn al-akhbār, vol.7*, ed. A. Fu'ād Sayyid in collaboration with P.E. Walker and M A. Pomerantz. London, New York. p. 182 Arabic.

[37] Cf. Cortese, Delia 2011: ' A Deam Come True: Empowerment Through Dreams Reflecting Fatimid-Ṣulayḥid Relations' in Omar Alí-de-Unzaga (ed.): *Fortress of the Intellect. Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*. London. pp. 393-396.

[38] Kelmm 2003: 102.

[39] Poonawala 1977: 319-20.

Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ must have found quite dismal the Ismaili intellectual scene in al-Qāhira. With his death in AH 470/1077 CE, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī had become the last of the great *dā'īs* and Ismaili scholars at the service of the Fatimid regime. The other great Persian *dā'ī*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. AH 481/1088-9 ? CE), who had visited al-Qāhira some twenty years before Ḥasan, was by this time living in exile in remote Badakhshan. Badr al-Jamālī's takeover of the headship of the *da'wa* had no doubt a stultifying effect on the already declining Ismaili intellectual output. Only three names of Ismaili scholars of some significance are recorded for this period. Beside the already mentioned Shahriyār b. al-Ḥasan, we have a Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb, a poet who lived during the reign of al-Mustanṣir and composed a *dīwān* eulogising him as well as other Fatimid and 'Alid imams. The third figure is Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ḥasan al-Ṣūrī (d.487/1094). Born in Ṣūr, he went to Tarabulus and travelled to al-Qāhira during the reign of al-Mustanṣir. He died while conducting the Ismaili *da'wa* in Syria in Jabal Summāq, after meeting the imam al-Mustanṣir.[40]

By contrast, the Sunni intellectual scene of al-Qāhira was lively. A conspicuous number of figures impacted on Egypt's Sunni intellectual life around the time of Ḥasan's visit. Several medieval sources agree that Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ passed himself as trader while in Egypt[41]and it plausible that he might have had some form of interaction with the circles of savant merchants who were the main vehicles for the transmission and exchange of knowledge in the cities where reportedly he spent a substantial amount of time: al-Qāhira, Alexandria and Dumyāṭ. The picture of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ that we derive from the sources is that of a man with great intellectual curiosity and versatility. A man prone to debate, he would hardly be a person who would have not taken advantage of being in one of the most intellectually stimulating environments of his time. Both in the *Sarguẕasht* as well as in his letter to Malikshāh, it is stated that Ḥasan mastered in his youth the traditional Islamic disciplines, in particular qur'anic and *ḥadīth* studies.[42] Even anti-Ismaili polemists depicted Ḥasan as a shrewd, clever man of great learning, versed in engineering, geometry, maths, astronomy as well as astrology and magic.[43] The Mamluk historian Ibn al-Dawādārī went as far as calling him a companion of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī in the reading of certain sciences.[44] While still in Rayy, Ḥasan (still a twelver Shi'i at this stage) is reported to have frequented Sunni circles as scribe to a certain Ra'īs 'Abd al-Razzāq b. Barhām and was associated with the chief of the city, Abū Muslim, also mentioned in the IIS manuscript version of the

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[40] Poonawala 1977: 45, 110. On al-Ṣūrī see also al-Ṣūrī, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ḥasan 1955: *Risāla ismā'īliyya waḥīda: al-qaṣīda al-Ṣūriyya*, ed 'Ā. Tāmir. Damascus. pp.16-17.

[41] Ibn al-Muyassar, Ibn al-Athīr and al-Maqrīzī. Also Rashīd al-Dīn 1977: 77.

[42] Persian ms 177; Tehran MS.; Rashīd al-Dīn 1977: 99. Falsafi 1342: 417.

[43] al-Qalqashandī, Abu'l-'Abbās :*Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī ṣinā'at al-inshā*, vol. 13, p. 237; al-Ṭiqṭaqā, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ṭabāṭabā 1990: *al-Fakhri: on the system of government and the Moslem dynasties*, trans. C.E.J. Whitting. London. p. 290; al-Maqrīzī, Ṭaqī al-Dīn 1991: *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr,* ed. M. Ya'lāwī. Beirut. vol.3, no.1160.

[44] al-Dawādārī 1380/1961: vol. 6, p. 494.

Sarguẕasht.[45] By Ḥasan's own admission, while in Rayy, he fell afoul of the authorities of that city[46] thus indicating that he was visibly engaged in debates, challenging the predominant views held by his contemporaries there. During his journey to Egypt, he stopped in and was subsequently expelled from Mayyāfāriqīn in AH 469/1076 CE, having engaged in theological disputes with Shāfi'ī jurists where he defended the exclusive right of the imam to interpret religion, thus denying the authority of the Sunni *'ulamā'*s.[47] In Egypt, Shāfi'ism was the dominant *madhhab* prevailing at the time of his visit. Beside his engagement in debates in Mayyāfāriqīn, Ḥasan claimed in his letter to Malikshāh to be familiar with this school due to the fact that his own father was a Shāfi'ī and that he himself had studied al-Shāfi'ī works in his youth.[48] Reports that Ḥasan was opposed by Badr al-Jamālī, imprisoned and subsequently expelled from Egypt indicates that he must have been 'vocal' or somewhat openly involved in activism that brought him in contact (and contrast) with his contemporaries in Egypt during his stay.

The new layout of al-Qāhira greatly facilitated interaction among its residents and its visitors. By AH 471/1078 CE al-Qāhira had undergone a radical urban transformation. Until before the *shidda al-mustanṣiriyya*, the bulk of commercial and non-Ismaili-related activities were taking place in Fusṭāṭ while anyone who had close links to the Fatimid court and its affairs would gravitate in al-Qāhira. After his arrival, Badr al-Jamālī brought about significant demographic and urban changes to the Fatimid capital that effectively blurred the distinctions between the northern and southern zones of al-Qāhira and Fusṭāṭ. By the time of Ḥasan's arrival, al-Qāhira was no longer an Ismaili royal enclosure. Badr al-Jamālī's demographic reforms had opened al-Qāhira to the whole society, blending the populations in one whole urban area. The central street that linked the north to the south of the city was extended, opening the city quarters into each other. In this changed urban context, the street

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[45] al-Maqrīzī 1387/1967: vol.2, entry for the year 479; al-Maqrīzī 1991: vol.3, no. 1160; Ibn al-Jawzī 1359/1940: vol. 9, p. 121; Ibn al-Athīr, 'Izz al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan 1399/1979: *al-Kāmil fi 'l-ta'rīkh*, Beirut. vol. 10, pp.316-17; Persian ms 177, p. 2. See also ms *Majmū'a* no 901, p. 21 in the Library, Museum and Document Center of the Iranian Parliament.

[46] Falsafī 1342/1963: 417.

[47] Rashīd al-Dīn 1977: 99. See also Lewis, Bernard 1967: *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam.* London, pp. 40-41.

[48] Falsafī 1342: 417. In the Juwaynī's version of the *Sarguẕasht* Ḥasan is quoted saying that his father was a twelver Shi'i. In the IIS manuscript version of the *Sarguẕasht* Ḥasan is quoted saying that his father was an Ismaili. Persian MS 177, p. 2. In *Sarguẕasht Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ*, part of Persian ms *Majmū'a* no. 901, p.21 he is said to have been a supporter of *madhhab-i khabīth al-'aqīda* (the wretched creed). The statement betrays the anti-Ismaili stance of the author of this version of Ḥasan's biography and the statement can be understood to refer to Ismailism. The discrepancies across the sources are indicative of the varied authors' biases and interpolations that depended on the intended audience to which the narratives were addressed.

and its surrounding alleys became the main area along which merchants, civilians, dignitaries, ruling élites and official processions transited.[49]

Who were the figures that most distinguished themselves in the intellectual landscape of Egypt whom Ḥasan might have encountered or heard of during his sojourn? The jurist al-Naḥḥās (d. after AH 485/1092 CE) was imam of the Jāmi' al-'Atīq.[50] Aḥmad b. Hamza b. Aḥmad Abu'l-Ḥasan al-'Irāqī (b. AH 402/1011- d.? CE) was a highly distinguished grammarian, qur'an reciter, *ḥadīth* transmitter and savant. When he came to Egypt from Syria, his reputation reached Badr al-Jamālī who employed him as his deputy in decision making, a position he held until his death in Alexandria.[51] In Alexandria - where Ḥasan spent seven months according to Rāshid al-Dīn - Muḥammad b. 'Ammār (d. AH 488/1095 CE) was *qāḍī* of the city and a judge in charge of the port authority. He was eventually killed by Badr al-Jamālī's son and successor, al-Afḍal, having been accused of Nizārī leanings.[52] Ibn al-Ḥammāmī (d. after AH 488/1095 CE), an Egyptian silk seller, became a Shāfi'ī jurist and had a reputation as *ḥadīth* collector and transmitter in al-Qāhira, Alexandria and Baghdad.[53] Among the most distinguished jurists of this time we have Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. AH 493/1099 CE).Originally from Rayy, he settled in Alexandria where he collected *ḥadīth*s from many authoritative informants and taught several other personalities. Among his writings there was the *ta'wīl* of the two verses on killing in the *Sūrat al-nisā'*.[54] Also from Alexandria were Muḥammad b. Manṣūr al-Ḥadramī (b. AH 422/ d. 510 CE) who wrote several works on Shāfi'ī jurisprudence, *ḥadīth*s and *uṣūl*[55] and al-Ḥasan b. Khalf al-Qayrawānī (b. AH 427/d.514 CE). The latter was a specialist in qur'an recitation and composed *Takhlīf al-'ibadāt* on the subject.[56]

But the figure who dominated the Egyptian intellectual scene and that is virtually impossible for Ḥasan-is Ṣabbāḥ to have ignored was Ibrāhīm b. Sa'īd al-Ḥabbāl (b. AH 391-482/1000-1089 CE). A Shāfi'ī, connected to the Ismaili élite as a descendant or *mawla* of a member of the al-Nu'mān family, he was rated as one of the greatest savants of his time having learned from some 300 *shaykh*s. Many notable scholars of his time listed him as one of their informants and several travelled to al-Qāhira to receive their *ijāza* from him. He is known as the author of several collections of *ḥadīth*s, but he is best remembered for *Wafayāt al-miṣriyyīn.* The work is an annotated lists of obituary entries, which constitute the most systematically compiled directory to date of AH 4th-5th/10th-11th century CE Sunni scholars

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[49] Bierman, Irene. A. 1998: *Writing Signs The Fatimid Public Text*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, pp. 100-101.

[50] al-Maqrīzī 1991: vol.7, no. 3426.

[51] al-Maqrīzī 1991: vol.1, no. 436.

[52] al-Maqrīzī 1991: vol.6, no. 2881.

[53] al-Maqrīzī 1991: vol.6, no. 2841.

[54] al-Maqrīzī 1991: vol. 5, no.1623.

[55] al-Maqrīzī 1991: vol.7, no. 3375.

[56] al-Maqrīzī 1991: vol.3, no.1183.

active in Egypt, written by a contemporary. [57] His fame, and the influence that came with it, must have generated anxiety within the Fatimid establishment given that al-Ḥabbāl became the target of a rare case of scholarly censorship during the Fatimid period. Towards the end of his life the Fatimid regime forbade him from transmitting *ḥadīth*s, threatened him and controlled his movements. The reason for these restrictions is not known. His importance as a figure at the core of the international network of exchange of learning and practical circulation of knowledge during this period lies also in his reputation as having been one of the greatest booksellers and bibliophiles of his time. It is reported that his stock amounted to over 500 *qinṭār*s[58] of books which he sold on average at 100 *dīnārs* per 20 *qinṭārs*. According to an anecdote, when some 500 *dīnārs* worth of his books became spoiled by rain, he was advised to build a special *khizāna* (repository) to contain his stock. He replied that should he build a *khizāna*, it would have to be of the size of the ʻAmr mosque![59] Al-Ḥabbāl's ability to accumulate such a large stock of books must have had its roots in the plundering and consequent dispersal of the Fatimid caliphal libraries that took place in 460/1067-8. In that year, at the apex of the political, economic and social crisis that hit Egypt during al-Mustanṣir's reign, angered unpaid soldiers and officials of the Fatimid army ransacked the palaces and the institutions of the regime. It is estimated that at least 18,000 volumes on ancient sciences and 2,400 Qur'ans with gold and silver illuminations were taken.[60] According to the Mamlūk historian of the Fatimids, al-Maqrīzī, in one day only at least 25 camels loaded with books were seen heading to the houses of the vizier Abu'l-Farāj Muḥammad b. Jaʻfar and the dignitary al-Khaṭīr b. al-Muwaffaq. Many books came in possession of a certain ʻImād al-Dawla Abu'l-Faḍl b. al-Muḥtariq in Alexandria. Many of his books were eventually taken to the Maghrib. Berbers tribes acquired many of them either by purchase or robbery. Some of the book covers were turned into sandals for women and slaves while books believed to contain Ismaili material were burned. Many books were thrown in rivers but several also reached the great cities of other countries.[61]

Beside al-Ḥabbāl, other prominent Egyptian booksellers of the late AH 5th/11th-early 12th centuries CE were the Alexandrian *muḥaddith* ʻAlī b. al-Musharraf al-Anmatī (d. AH 518/1124 CE) and, in al-Qāhira, Abū Ṭāhir al-Muhadhdhab and Ibn al-Mawqifī. They were instrumental in supplying the books that came to form the vast private library of the greatest

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[57] al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad 1410/1990: *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*. chief ed. Shuʻayb al-Arna ūṭ. Beirut, vol.18, pp.496-501; Ibn al-ʻImād, ʻAbd al-Ḥayy 1350/1982: *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār min dhahab*. Beirut, vol.3, p. 366; al-Maqrīzī 1991: vol.1, no. 147. See also the introduction to al-Ḥabbāl 1408 [1987]: *Wafayāt al-miṣriyyīn (375-456)*. ed. Abū ʻAbd Allāh Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaddād. Riyad.

[58] One *qinṭār* in Egypt corresponded to 44.93 kg.

[59] al-Dhahabī 1410/1990: vol.18, pp.496-501; Ibn al-ʻImād 1350/1982:vol.3, p. 366; al-Ḥabbāl1408 [1987]: introduction, pp. 9-10.

[60] Halm 1997: 77.

[61] al-Maqrīzī 1387/1967: vol. 2, pp.295-5.

Shāfi'ī scholar of the late Fatimid period, the Alexandria-based Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī (d. AH 576/1180 CE).[62]

Among Shi'is, one intellectual of note for this period in Egypt was Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Abū Manṣūr (b. AH 417 or 18/1026-7 CE; d. AH 510/1116 CE). He served at some stage as librarian of the Dār al-'ilm, the academy founded by the imam-caliph al-Ḥākim, which was however inactive at the time of Ḥasan's journey.[63]

Conclusions

Was Ḥasan's travel to Egypt a failure? If we were to take at face value what his expectations might have been as to the original intended outcome of his journey, the answer can only be a resounding yes. The narrative of the IIS *Sarguẕasht* situates in dreams the best aspects of Ḥasan's experience in Egypt, while his worst episodes are solidly located in the material world. But would his career as arguably the most famous Ismaili *dā'ī* in Islamic history have taken off without his disappointing experience at the Fatimid court? Probably not. If not directly from Ḥasan's biography, the contextualised analysis of the period Ḥasan spent in Egypt make us infer that he did indeed learn important lessons while there. Politically, he learned that it was not impossible to overturn the plight of a *da'wa* organisation in disarray, despite the remoteness and the indifference of the caliphal power. The case of the Ṣulayḥids was an example. There are several similarities that can be drawn between Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ and 'Alī al-Ṣulayḥī of Yemen. Both were *dā'ī*s that rose from obscurity to restore the glory of their respective *da'wa* organizations. Both failed to meet the imam al-Mustanṣir in person. In biographical accounts of their respective feats, both are shown to have received the imam-caliph's al-Mustanṣir's endorsement for their action via dreams. Both suffered varying degrees of indifference of the part of the Fatimid regime. Both took castles (Jabal Masar, for 'Alī al-Ṣulayḥī and Alamūt, in the case of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ) as strongholds to direct their militant campaigns and coordinate their respective *da'wa*s. Both were to establish ruling élites: monarchs in Yemen and lords in Iran. Both prepared the ground for eventually channelling allegiances to hidden imams among their respective supporters. In short, both saw the major geopolitical changes and redirections that affected the Fatimid regime in the second half of the $5^{th}/11^{th}$ century as an opportunity for personal advancement. But while the Ṣulayḥids' efforts finally resulted in the endorsement and support of the Fatimids, Ḥasan was not rewarded with such recognition for his gains in Iran. In time it was the allegiance to Nizār and his progeny that gave Ḥasan's *da'wa* its spiritual and operational *raison d'être*, independently from al-Qahira. Intellectually, Ḥasan learned that, at the Fatimid court, theological and philosophical speculations on the necessity of an

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[62] Leiser, Gary La Viere 1976: *The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisūn 495-647/1101-1249*. PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania., p. 176, based on Zaman, Sh., *Abū Ṭāhir Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Silafī al-Isbahānī, his Life and Works, with an Analytical Study of his Mu'jam al-safar*, Diss. Harvard, 1968.

[63] Ibn al-Qifṭī, Jamāl al-Dīn 1950-1973: *Ibānat al-ruwā' 'alā inbāh al-naḥḥā*. Cairo, p. 48.

ever-present infallible imam to guide humanity had faded in favour of panegyrics chanting the necessary presence of Badr al-Jamālī to guide the Egyptian population through difficult times. Against this background, Ḥasan, in need of a doctrinal basis to sustain the imamate he endorsed, re-ignited impetus in the doctrine of *ta'līm* (authoritative instruction by the imam). His Ismaili reformulation of this Shi'i teaching was to have long lasting consequences for the establishment, survival and continuation of the Nizārī imamate. Culturally speaking, Ḥasan, as a man of great learning, might have appreciated –despite the hardship he is reported to have experienced- the thriving intellectual exchanges that took place in the homes, streets, mosques and markets of al-Qāhira, Alexandria and Dumyat.

All in all many aspects of Ḥasan's life in Egypt still remain mysterious. However, the discovery of a previously unknown 'complete' version of *Sarguẕasht-Sayyd-nā* , will allow us to complement the hostile stances of Juwaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn, on which most of our knowledge of Ḥasan's biography has been mainly based so far, with an important Ismaili voice. To some, Ḥasan's feats were the stuff of nightmares, to others they were the stuff of dreams.

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