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Title: Historical representations of a Fatimid Imam-caliph: Exploring al-Maqrizi's and Idris' writings on al-Mu'izz Li Din Allah

Author: Dr Shainool Jiwa

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Abstract: It is a happenstance of history that the two most comprehensive extant sources on the Fatimid era (909-1171 CE) were composed by two 15th Century scholars: Taqi al-Din Ahmad b. Ali al-Maqrizi (d.1449 CE) and 'Imad al-Din ldris (d.1468 CE). Although they composed their works almost three centuries after the Fatimid dynasty had waned, their writings assume primary source significance as, in constructing their narrative, they draw upon a spectrum of earlier North African, Egyptian and Iraqi, Sunni and Ismaili sources, which have not survived the vagaries of time and circumstance.

Though they were contemporaries and died within two decades of each other, both authors, the first an Egyptian Sunni Shafi'i jurist, the second a Yemeni, Tayyibi Ismaili Chief Da'i, have significantly different interests and motivations when writing about the Fatimid era. Their belief in the purpose of history, their methodology in using source material, the focus of their narratives as well as their target audience make their approaches to recording Fatimid history distinctive. This provides a relatively rare opportunity to study two discrete perspectives from which to understand and examine Fatimid historiography.

The reign of the fourth Imam-caliph, al-Mu'izz li Din Allah (953-975 CE), an exemplary sovereign in whose era Egypt is brought under Fatimid sway, thus transforming their North African state into a Mediterranean empire, has received focussed attention from both al-Maqrizi and Idris. Their respective works, the *Itti'az al-hunafa' bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa'* (Lessons for the Seekers of Truth on the History of the Fatimid Imams and Caliphs)[i] and the '*Uyun al-akhbar wa Funun al-Athar* (Sound Sources and Trustworthy Traditions)[ii] together provide comprehensive coverage of the life and times of al-Mu'izz, with both writers drawing from sources available to them but which, unfortunately, are no longer extant. An examination of their notions, purposes and expressions of history consequently forms the focus of this paper.

Historical representations of a Fatimid Imam-caliph: Exploring al-Maqrizi's and Idris' writings on al-Mu'izz Li Din Allah

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The Historians

Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi was an erudite Sunni polymath who dedicated much of his considerable scholarship to the study of Egypt. Born, bred and buried in Cairo, al-Maqrizi had a distinguished career in the public service of the Mamluk Administration. He had the privilege of growing up in a learned environment on both the paternal and maternal sides of his family.[iii] His maternal grandfather was an eminent Hanafi jurist, who held a number of important judicial posts and composed numerous treatises . His paternal grandfather was a Hanbali and an established *hadith* scholar who was in charge of a premier Damascene institution.[iv] Al-Maqrizi thus had the unusual advantage of being nurtured in a variety of Sunni *madhhab*s. Upon gaining certain stature in the learned circles of his time, al-Maqrizi chose to adopt the Shafi'i *madhhab*.

Al-Maqrizi's interest in the Fatimids stemmed from two principal factors. Firstly, he regarded them as the premier Muslim dynasty that made Egypt the nucleus of their empire, investing their attention and resources in the country and therefore contributing to its development. The second factor was genealogical: though he was a Shafi'i jurist, al-Maqrizi traced his ancestry to the Fatimids, considering himself a scion of the sixth Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Hakim bi 'Amr illah (996-1021 CE).[v]

Idris 'Imad al-Din's connection to the Fatimid house was more integrally tied to his very being than al-Maqrizi's was to his claimed pedigree. Born in 1392 CE at Shibam in the Mount Haraz region of Yemen, Idris belonged to the prominent al-Walid branch of a Yemeni Qurayshi Ismaili family, which had provided leadership of the Musta'li Tayyibi da'wa from the 13th century CE. Idris was invested with this responsibility by his uncle 'Ali b. 'Abd Allah in1428 CE , thus becoming the 19th *Da'i al-mutlaq* (Chief *da'i*) of the Yemeni Tayyibi tradition. As the Tayyibi imam was believed to be in concealment *(satr),* the chief *Da'i* assumed supreme responsibility for the material welfare and spiritual wellbeing of the believers, making him, in effect, the de facto ruler of the community.[vi] In his role as the Chief *da'i,* Idris had a vested interest in privileging the Ismaili *imamate* as the most deserving inheritors of the prophetic mantle.

Idris succeeded to the leadership of the Ismaili community in Yemen at a particularly turbulent time in its history when interactions between the various regional factions were strained and volatile. As relations between the contending Shi'i groups in the region, particularly the Zaydis[vii] and the Tayyibi Ismailis, had been historically intransigent, Idris sided with the Sunni Tahirid[viii] sultan to combat the Zaydis in northern Yemen. He established an upper hand over them by wresting several castles and citadels from them. Thus, in assuming the mantle of leadership, Idris became embroiled in the arduous political manoeuvring and the military jockeying for power with the competing regional groupings. He embraced this role and excelled at it such that over the forty years that spanned his

appointment, he developed a reputation for being an intrepid general and finally as a honed statesman.

The strictures of the battlefield did not limit Idris' interests only to the Yemeni landscape. He played an important role in maintaining linkages between the Tayyibi *da'wa* in Yemen and India. The trend of educating adherents to the Tayyibi *da'wa* from Gujarat was continued by Idris' successors until the eventual ascension of an Indian, Yusuf b. Sulayman, as the twenty-fourth *Da'i al-mutlaq* in 1539. This event facilitated the eventual transfer of the Tayyibi *da'wa* headquarters from Yemen to Gujarat in 1567 CE.[ix]

The Fatimid court wrangling over succession catalysed two succession crises that were to split the Ismaili *da'wa* following the death of the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mustansir in 1094 CE. The death of the Musta'lian Imam-caliph al-Amir in 1130 CE caused the second such split, whereby the succession of 'Abd al-Majid al-Hafiz was rejected by Queen 'Arwa of the Sulayhid dynasty (d. 1138 CE) in Yemen in favour of the infant Tayyib.[x] Maintaining the continuity of the Fatimid tradition became one of the hallmarks of the Tayyibi *da'wa*. It played a major role in ensuring the transference of the vast corpus of Fatimid literature from Egypt to Yemen where it was to find a safe haven.

As the *Da'i al-mutlaq*, Idris was the executive custodian of this intellectual and literary collection. However, Idris was not merely an avid bibliophile. He was a prolific writer who wrote in prose and verse on Ismaili history and doctrines. His works have withstood the test of time and continue to be studied within the Ismaili communities and by scholars of Ismaili studies.[xi] Over the course of time, the majority of the primary Ismaili and indigenous sources that he had drawn upon in crafting his narrative have been lost due to time and circumstance. Consequently, his works have gained the distinction of becoming one of the premier Ismaili sources for the Fatimid age, as they give voice to these otherwise silenced expressions. Moreover, because of Idris' native knowledge and engagement in the region, his writings form the bedrock of Yemeni Ismaili history and doctrine from the 11th century CE to the author's demise in 1468 CE.

Portrayal of the Fatimids

The Fatimids receive significant coverage in several of al-Maqrizi's compositions whose scope and range include the three main categories of medieval historiography: chronicles, topographies and biographical dictionaries. Moreover, the access that they provide to some vital, non-extant Egyptian as well as Fatimid primary sources, earn him a distinctive reputation in Fatimid historiography.[xii] The works that merit particular attention are: *Itti'az al-hunafa', Mawai'iz wa'l-i 'tibar fi dhikr al-khitat wa'l-athar* and *Kitab al-muqaffa' al-kabir.*[xiii] The *Khitat provides* unique insights into the topographical facets of Cairo, a city founded by al-Mu'izz in 969 CE, while the *Muqaffa* records invaluable biographical accounts of the prominent figures of Fatimid society.

The rarity of the *Itti'az* lies in the fact that it is al-Maqrizi's only chronicle that focuses exclusively on the two and a half century history of the Fatimids, from its inception in North Africa to its demise in Egypt. As comprehensive as al-Maqrizi's works are on the Fatimids, nonetheless, they need to be supplemented with other sources, particularly Ismaili writings.

The paucity of Ismaili historical works is well recognised. However, a unique work in this genre, and one which provides valuable information about the Fatimids from an Ismaili

viewpoint, is the multi-volume historical work '*Uyun al-akhbar wa funun al-athar* by ldris 'Imad al-Din. Composed circa 1434 CE, the text begins with the inception of Islam, noting the virtues of Prophet Muhammad and his cousin and son in law 'Ali b.Abi Talib and highlights the legitimacy of the latter's appointment as the premier successor to Prophet Muhammad. He then continues the chronological account of the life and times of the rest of the Ismaili imams, eventually validating the Mustali-Tayyibi branch of the *imamate*. He continued the narrative until his own demise in 1468 CE.[xiv]

One of the criticisms levelled at Idris' historical writings is that they have significant flaws and limitations. Husayn Hamdani,[xv] the leading Ismaili scholar to draw attention to Idris' scholarship, cautions that Idris' "books are not free of occasional partiality and prejudice, of either excessive devotion or fierce polemics, resulting not infrequently in distortions of what really happened and the omission of certain events".[xvi] Wladimir Ivanow,[xvii] the pioneering Russian scholar of Ismaili studies, was more scathing in his indictment stating that Idris " is hopelessly indiscriminate in mixing up Ismaili sources with anti-Ismaili, never specifying them, and thus often placing the reader into the position of helplessness in separating information which one may regard as authentic, from that which is often obvious fiction and insinuation of hostile propaganda. Similarly, he does not discriminate between history and legend, the events as they were in reality and as they should have been according to various religious schemes."[xviii] These perceived shortcomings raise a number of fundamental questions: What is Idris' view of history? What is his purpose in writing the '*Uyun?* Who is its principal audience?

Teleological view of history

As the Chief Da'i in the Tayyibi Ismaili tradition, Idris' weltanschaung is informed by the teleological perspective which views events in human history as an unfolding of divine design and purpose. Consequently, occurrences in the world are understood and interpreted as reflections of the divine order and sequence. The distinctive esotericism derived from the eternal, unchangeable truths of religion *(haqa'iq)* and the allegorical exegesis of the scriptures *(ta'wil)*, which became cornerstones of Ismaili thought, thus fulfil the function of offering a comprehensive view of the universe and its manifestation in human history.

Adopting a semi-cyclical and semi-linear conception of time, the Ismailis developed a cyclical view of history according to which, "mankind is consummated in seven eras of various durations; each one inaugurated by a speaker-prophet or enunciator *(natiq)* of a revealed message, which in its exoteric aspect contains a religious law. The prophets of resolution *('ulul 'azm)*[xix] of the first six eras of this heiro-history were: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Each of these first six *natiq*s was succeeded by a spiritual legatee or executor *(wasi)*, also known as the foundation *(asas)* or silent one, who interpreted the inner, esoteric *(batin)* of the revealed message to the initiated. Each *wasi* was followed by *imam*s who were the completers of the message and guardians of the exoteric and esoteric meaning of the scriptures and the laws.

There were variances in the status, function and finality of these *imam*s during the formative centuries of Ismaili thought. In pre-Fatimid times, the seventh *imam* of the sixth era, Muhammad b. Isma'il, was considered to be the final *imam* whose messianic resurrection would reinstate piety and justice in the world. In Fatimid thought, this role was extended to each *imam*, all of whom fulfil the role through each cycle of time.[xx] Consequently, the initial,

predetermined, seven cycle cosmology was extended to countless cycles, "leading the sacred history of mankind from its origins to the Great Resurrection."[xxi]

Essentially, the Tayyibi *da'wa* maintained the Fatimid doctrinal stance, articulating facets of esoteric doctrine that gave Tayyibi gnosis its distinctive character. Notably, it attributed a soteriological purpose to the creation of the primordial universe. The redemption of the spiritual Adam and the salvation of the "celestial archetypes of the earthly proclaimers of the mystical *da'wa* became the posterity of the spiritual Adam."[xxii] The earthly representative of the spiritual Adam was the first, universal Adam who inaugurated the cycle of cycles: He was the first repository of the *imamate*, the primordial *imam*, who was the ultimate exegete of the scriptures. He also instituted the **terrestrial** *da'wa* hierarchy whose raison d'être was to imbibe and propagate the supremacy of the *imamate* and its interpreration of the faith so as to secure the salvation of the believers.

This *da'wa* hierarchy assumed paramount importance in the Tayyibi scheme. The *imamate* was considered to be in a period of concealment *(dawr al-satr),* thus delegating the prerogative of providing the temporal and spiritual leadership of the Tayyibi Ismailis to the Chief Da'i of the time. He was deemed to have unique access to the *imam.* As the 19th Chief Da'i within the Tayyibi tradition, 'Imad al-Din Idris diligently sought to execute this responsibility through all means available to him including his own scholarship. Expectedly, the most comprehensive doctrinal exposé of Tayyibi esotericism is his *Zahr al-Ma'an fi tawhid al-mubdi',* a text that continues to be among the primary sources of instruction on the *haqa'iq* in the Tayyibi communities to this day.

Similarly, Idris' primary motive in composing the *'Uyun al-akhbar,* his monumental treatise on the inception and key contours of Ismaili history up to his time, was to record for the *da'wa* and its followers the historical unfolding on the terrestrial plane of [what he considered to be] the divine plan that had been designated for the *imamate* and its *da'wa.* The fact that this work was written primarily for an internal audience, which then preserved it as a vital component of its *da'wa* heritage, may well have contributed to its fortuitous survival.

Al-Maqrizi's works have become part of the Muslim historical repertoire for, however, very different reasons, principal among them being the fact that he was an esteemed Shafi'i jurist and a renowned scholar of his age. Expectedly, his interest, purpose and approach to the Fatimids vary significantly from that of Idris.

Khaldunian approach to history

As an intellectual protégé of Ibn Khaldun (1332- 1406 CE), al-Maqrizi paid tribute to the pre-eminent philosopher of history in the Muslim world saying that he was, "the elite that the age brings only rarely."[xxiii] Among the many teachers, jurists and scholars that al-Maqrizi encountered in his quest for knowledge and learning, Ibn Khaldun's seminal scholarship played a formative role in shaping al-Maqrizi's intellectual consciousness and historical outlook.[xxiv] Al-Maqrizi's historical writing is permeated by Ibn Khaldun's philosophical premise articulated in the *Muqqadimah* that, "the inner meaning of history involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events. History, therefore, is firmly rooted in philosophy."[xxv] Consequently, al-Maqrizi concludes that it is, "unlike any other work, the essence of knowledge and science, and the product of sound intellect and understanding."[xxvi] Moreover, "it reveals the truth of things, events and news; it explains all

the state of the universe and reveals the origin of all beings in an admirable and plain style."[xxvii]

Ibn Khaldun's novel sociological analysis to account for the rise and fall of dynasties appears to have persuaded al-Maqrizi that his own period of Mamluk rule was one of decline and that it had been accelerated by societal, administrative and financial dysfunction. The Khaldunian notion of a symbiotic link between royal authority, justice and the maintenance of order in society formed the basis of al-Maqrizi's thesis that "the financial disarray of the early 15th century is solely a result of the injustice of the ruling class, which results in a corrupt appointment system, excessive taxes and the promotion of a bad currency. This linking of injustice with social trouble echoes Ibn Khaldun."[xxviii] Al-Maqrizi also undertook a systematic study of the development of the Muslim polity so as to delineate successful models of governance. It is evident that he regarded the Fatimid caliphate as one such viable model which had the additional advantage of being located in Egypt, his beloved homeland .

In writing about the Fatimids, al-Maqrizi's judicious approach to his sources is highly unusual and remarkable for his times. His discerning historical judgement is evident in this reflective critique of the relevance and authenticity of the sources:

> But reflect, may God have mercy on you, into the heart of reality, and weigh the [historical] reports just as you would weigh the good amongst the coins; avoid passion and desire and ascertain the truth. And what you will realise about the majority of the attacks against them [the Fatimids] is that the despicable reports, especially those pertaining to expelling them from the Muslim fold *(ahl al-Islam),* are seen only in the books of the easterners, of the Baghdadis and the Syrians, like the *Muntazam* of Ibn al-Jawzi, the *Kamil* of Ibn al-Athir, the *Tarikh Halab* of Ibn Abi Tayy, the *Tarikh al-'Imad* of Ibn Kathir, the work of Ibn Wasil al-Hamawi, the text of Ibn Shaddad, the writings of al-'Imad al-Isfahani and others like them. But in the books of the Egyptians, who were cautious in narrating their reports, you will not find anything similar. Let wisdom guide your intellect, and defeat the armies of prejudice, and recognise the truth, and you will be well guided if God most High wills it.[xxix]

In reviewing the reign of al-Mu'izz, al-Maqrizi candidly discusses the biases embedded in the reports of 'eastern historians'(i.e. from Iraq and Syria) and provides a reasoned argument for his views. He states:

> The author [al-Maqrizi], may God have mercy on him, says, the matter is not as Ibn al-Athir has mentioned , for the esteemed Egyptian legist and historian Abu'l Hasan b. Ibrahim b. Zulaq, may God have mercy upon him, has related in his work, *Kitab sirat al-Mu'izz,* and which I have read in his own hand writing, a day-to-day account from the time when al-Mu'izz entered Egypt until he passed away...
>
> Ibn Zulaq was better informed than Ibn al-Athir about events in Egypt, particularly those concerning al- Mu'izz, as he was present and witnessed them, being as he was among those who came into his [al- Mu'izz's] presence and greeted him... He narrates the events he witnessed and the matters reported to him by high-ranking and trustworthy members of the state as mentioned in it [the *Sira*] .
>
> Ibn al-Athir, on the other hand, has based his information on the Iraqi and Syrian historians. It is clear to those who have delved into the sciences of his day that the

latter are much prejudiced against the Fatimid caliphs and say abominable things about them, despite the fact that their knowledge of the conditions in Egypt is extremely limited. Often, I have seen them relating in their histories, events in Egypt, stories which are not accepted by intelligent scholars and rejected by those skilled and informed about the history of Egypt. The people of each region know best about their own events, and so the Egyptian historians know best about what took place there.[xxx]

Although al-Maqrizi's critique of his sources is extremely valuable, he does not use criticism as a pretext to circumvent or even marginalise those authors or their writings. Instead, he draws on the full range of sources mentioned above to present a comprehensive and balanced overview of al-Mu'izz's reign and character.

Al-Maqrizi's attitude is influenced by his eclectic upbringing which contributed to a marked affinity to the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the Family of the Prophet). Notably, he maintains a striking fluidity in his definition of the term, that transcends the normatised Sunni and Shi'i interpretations. His inclusion of the Fatimids in this category is evident in the first phrase of the title of his dedicated work to them, *Itti'az al-hunafa'*. A *hanif* (pl. *hunafa'*),[xxxi] as understood in medieval literature, is a sincere Muslim, a 'believer in the original and true religion, that is, someone who transcends the sectarian division that prompted the Sunnis to denigrate vehemently both Ismaili doctrine and the genealogical claim of the Fatimids.'[xxxii] Hence, in the very title used by al-Maqrizi to address his potential readers, he invites them to rise above the sectarian conflicts that abounded in his time , and which he self consciously chose to transcend, following in the footsteps of Ibn Khaldun.

Nonetheless, al-Maqrizi's primal interest in Egypt is strikingly evident as he devotes less than a tenth of his 140 page chapter in the *Itti'az* to al-Mu'izz's activities in North Africa, with the majority of the work focussing on the Fatimid preparations, arrival and establishment in Cairo. In fact, al-Mu'izz's 22 year reign reflects the exact opposite. He reigned almost 20 years in North Africa spending only the last few years in Cairo. Fortunately, Idris' work redresses this imbalance. North Africa remains the focus of two-thirds of his 216 page chapter in the *'Uyun* covering al-Mu'izz's life and times making it the most comprehensive extant source for that phase of al-Mu'izz's reign.

Al-Mu'izz: through the lens of the Itti'az and the 'Uyun

ldris begins his narrative on al-Mu'izz by praising God for the provision of the *imam*s as a means of salvation. He introduces him as a continuing link in the ongoing cycle of the *imamate*, establishing his spiritual pedigree through the progeny of various other prophets including Abraham as follows:

> He [al-Mu'izz] is the seventh of the second heptade of *imams* of the cycle[xxxiii] of Prophet Muhammad who rose after the legatee *(al-wasi),* the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali, and the fourth of four imams of the [period of] manifestation *(al-zuhur),* the first of whom was his grandfather Abu Muhammad the Imam al-Mahdi bi'llah...[xxxiv]

> In the time of the Prophet Ibrahim al-Khalil, there were four [prophets]: Ibrahim al-Khalil,[xxxv] the Prophet who was the Messenger of his cycle, to whom God sent the revelation and said: ' "I will make thee an Imam to the nations." He pleaded: "And also (Imams) from my offspring!" '[xxxvi] With him were Isma'il, Ishaq and Ya'qub.

Then at the time of Musa b.'Imran he had with him his brother Harun, Yusha' b. Nun and Finhas b. Harun.

Subsequently, during the time of Prophet Muhammad, the best of the prophets and their seal by whose prophethood and messengership God completed the messenger-prophets, He distinguished him among all His creation and made his law *(shari'a)*[xxxvii] immutable until the Day of Judgement. During his era there was his brother and helper, his supporter in establishing the religion of God and his aide, the father of the *imam*s of his progeny and his son-in-law, 'Ali, his legatee *(wasi),*the Commander of the Faithful and the seal of the legatees *(khatim al-wasiyyin,* and their two sons al-Hasan and al-Husayn.[xxxviii]

With Ja'far al-Sadiq were his sons Isma'il b. Ja'far and his grandson Muhammad b. Isma'il, three *imam*s in one era. That was also the case with al-Mahdi bi'llah, al-Qa'im bi Amrillah, al-Mansur bi'llah and al-Mu'izz li Din Allah .

Indeed, the *imama* can only reside with one [*imam*] after the other, with the one who is distinguished by its merits and is deserving of its exalted status. He indicates his successor and designates him *(yanussu 'alayhi*[xxxix]*)* and makes his successor evident to the adherents of his *da'wa* (mission), and surrenders the *imamate* to him. The virtues of al-Mu'izz li Din Allah were apparent and the worthiness of his succession to his pure ancestors was evident.

The chapter on al- Mu'izz thus commences with situating him in a pre-determined, primordial worldview concerning the nature and manifestation of the institution of the *Imamate*. The work continues in this vein until all the perceived essential qualities of the *imam* in the Ismaili Shi'i tradition as it had shaped by that time including his divine designation (*nass*), his inspiration, knowledge (*'ilm*) and his inherent enlightenment (*nur*) have been noted. Al-Maqrizi, on the other hand, expectedly begins with a factual, annalistic, biographical account, stating:

He succeeded his father at the end of Shawwal- it was also said on Friday, the 7 March 953 CE. He took over the administration of matters of state on 25 April 953 CE. Then he permitted the people to come unto him and sat in audience for them. They saluted him as their caliph. He was twenty-four years old at the time.

He was born in al-Mahdiyya at four hours and four-fifths on 18 October 929 CE and ruled for twenty-three years, five months and seventeen days.

This recounting of the beginning of the account of Mu'izz provides a tangible illustration of the contrasting perspectives on historical writing between al-Maqrizi and Idris. Similarly, as both texts progress in their narrative, marked differences are apparent in their approaches.

While both authors provide substantive chronological accounts of al-Mu'izz's reign, Idris regularly infuses his narrative with anecdotes that reinvigorate the eminent status and inimitable qualities that made al-Mu'izz the sole *imam*-caliph of his time. Many such anecdotes are similarly augmented with the precedents of similar stories from earlier *imam*s and prophets.

The value of the ‘*Uyun* as a primary historical text also stems from the fact that Idris was the head of the Tayyibi *da‘wa* .The stewardship of the corpus of Fatimid literary texts that were transferred to Yemen in the 11th century CE meant that Idris was able to draw upon an array of sources whose content is only accessible to us through the prism of the ‘*Uyun*. Several accounts in the ‘*Uyun* from the *Sirat al-Kutama* are a prime example of this. This Fatimid text, which is no longer extant, was written by Haydara b. Muhammad b. Ibrahim[xl] who lived during the reign of the Fatimid *Imam*-caliph Al-Hakim bi ‘Amr illah (966-1021CE). In reporting on the life and times of al-Mu‘izz, for instance, Idris quotes extensively from the *Sirat al-Kutama* to provide the most comprehensively annotated bio-bibliography[xli] of the erudite Fatimid jurist, al-Qadi al-Nu‘man b. Muhammad al-Tamimi (d.973 CE) , who is credited with establishing the foundations of Fatimid law.[xlii]

In recounting the key events during al-Mu‘izz’s reign, Idris extensively refers to al-Nu‘man's *Kitab al-majalis wa’l-musayarat*[xliii] (Book of Audiences and Gatherings) which provides a first-hand rendition of events as they unfold in the Fatimid court, particularly during the time of al-Mu‘izz. The fortuitous survival of this text provides an instructive opportunity to review how Idris systematically utilises a range of sources to weave a coherent historical narrative . It also illustrates how he synthesises his material to maintain what he perceives to be the authentic Fatimid literary tradition.

Concluding remarks

Al-Maqrizi and Idris’ rendering of the life and times of al-Mu‘izz provides an instructive case-study of the focus, scope, purpose and perimeters of what constitutes historical narratives in Fatimid historiography. Al-Maqrizi strives to present what he considers to be an accurate account, through a reasoned examination of the source materials available to him. Adopting what would today be considered an empiricist, Rankean approach; he notes an expressed preference for sources that are in close spatial and geographic proximity to the events they are describing.

For ‘Imad al-Din Idris the purpose of recording terrestrial history is to faithfully understand and record the unfolding of a primordial divine purpose in the Tayyibi Ismaili doctrinal and cosmological structure of the universe. So, while the recording of human engagements is necessary and important, essentially it serves a larger, symbolic ethos and function. Hence, for Idris the defining paradigm of the acceptability of a source was whether it resonated with this worldview, regardless of its eastern or western, Sunni or Shi‘i provenance. Consequently, the *Itti‘az* and the ‘*Uyun* complement and supplement each other in providing as historically accurate and as symbolically representative a rendering of the Fatimid weltenschaung as is possible within our current purview of primary sources.

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[i] Vol.1.ed. Jamal al-Din al-Shayyal (Cairo. 1967); vols. 2-3, ed. Muhammad Hilmi, Muhammad Ahmad (Cairo, 1967-1973). I am currently preparing an annotated translation of the chapter on al-Mu‘izz from the *Itti‘az* which is to be published as *Towards a Shi‘i Mediterranean empire: Al-Mu‘izz Fatimid Egypt and the Founding Of Cairo* (London, 2009). Editor’s note: This book was published by The Institute of Ismaili Studies in association with I.B. Tauris in 2009. For more info click here: http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=110527

[ii] ‘Imad al-Din Idris, *‘Uyun al-Akhbar wa Funun al-Athar*, ed. M. al-Ya‘lawi as *Ta‘rikh al-Khulafa’ al-Fatimiyyun Bi’l-Maghrib: al-Qism al-Khass min Kitab ‘Uyun al-Akhbar* (Beirut, 1985). I am working on an annotated translation of the chapter on al-Mu‘izz from the *‘Uyun.*

iii His curriculum consisted of Qur'anic studies, Hadith, Arabic grammar, literature and *fiqh* - a standard curriculum for boys born with his background. See Franz Rosenthal's article on 'al-Makrizi', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, reprint of first edition, ed. M. T. Houtsma et al. (Leiden,1987)*,* vol. 6, pp. 193-4.

iv See N. Rabbat, 'Who Was al-Maqrizi? A Biographical Sketch', *Mamluk Studies 7/2,* 2003.

v In the abundant biographical references to al-Maqrizi by his contemporaries, friends and foe alike mention an enigmatic facet of his lineage, that of his descent from the Fatimid caliphs. The climate during his Sunni Mamluk era meant any open claim to descent from the Fatimid imam-caliphs would have been detrimental to al-Maqrizi. For a fuller discussion of al-Maqrizi's lineage see S. Jiwa, introduction in *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire* (London, 2009) as well as P. Walker, 'Al-Maqrizi and the Fatimids', *Mamluk Studies 7/2,* 2003, pp. 88-97 and N. Rabbat, 'Who Was al-Maqrizi?' (2003).

vi The rise to power of Abbasids in 750 CE drove a number of Shi'i groups underground, including the Ismailis whose *Imam*s were concealed from public view as they clandestinely opposed Abbasid rule in a period known as the *Dawr al-Satr* (period of concealment). The concealment of the *Imam*s became a marked feature of Ismaili cosmology. The Tayyibi *da'wa* maintained that *Imam* Tayyib initiated a new period of concealment upon his disappearance thus rendering the authority of his representative, the *Da'i al-mutlaq,* absolute. On the *dawr al-satr* see F. Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 2nd revised ed., 2007), pp. 87-128.

vii The Zaydis are a branch of the Shi'a who backed the revolt of Zayd b. 'Ali b. al-Husayn in 740 CE. They formed a distinct community over time who rejected the *Imami* notions of *nass* [authorative designation] and *'ilm* [authoritative knowledge] as integral to the position of a legitimate *Imam*. The Zaydi state in Yemen was founded by al-Hadi ila al-Haqq in 897 CE and continued in various forms until the 20th century. Though sharing a common Shi'a heritage the Zaydi and Tayyibi communities of Yemen would become inextricable enemies over time. See W. Madelung, Zaydiyya, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden, 1960–2004).

viii F. Daftary, *The Ismailis,* pp. 189-90.

ix F. Daftary, *The Ismailis,* p. 279.

x The Sulayhids were an Ismaili dynasty that ruled over parts of Yemen from 1047-1138 CE. Established by Ali b. Muhammad al-Sulayhi [d. 1066 or 1080 CE] the dynasty's most famous regent was Queen Arwa bt. Ahmad [d. 1138 CE] who maintained that Tayyib was the legitimate heir of al-Amir and appointed the first Da'i-al-Mutlaq as his representative. See Daftary, *The Ismailis,* pp. 261-276 and G.R. Smith, Sulayhids, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden, 1960–2004), Vol.9, pp. 815.

xi To the present day Bohra students of the Tayyibi *da'wa* in the Jami'a al-Sayfiyya (Sayfi College) in Surat, India are required to produce a copy of the *'Uyun* transcribed from a primary handwritten copy which is checked by the college professors and then kept in the college library. A. F. Sayyid, *The Fatimids and their Successors in Yaman* (London, 2002), p. 12.

xii Al-Maqrizi quotes from non-extant sources such as the *Ta'rikh misr* of Ibn al-Muyassar (d. 1278-9 CE) as well as the eyewitness accounts of many distinguished Fatimid court historians including Ibn Zulaq (d.996 CE), al-Musabbihi (d.1029 CE) and Ibn al-Tuwayr (d.1220 CE) which survive only as excerpted quotes in al-Maqrizi's works.

xiii al-Maqrizi's *Kitab al-muqaffa' al-kabir,* ed. M. al-Ya'lawi (Beirut, 1981).

xiv In his subsequent historical texts titled *Nuzhat al-afkar wa rawdat al-akhbar* (The Pleasure of Thoughts and the Garden of Information) and the *Rawdat al-Akhbar wa nuzhat al-asmar* (A Garden of Information and Diverting Conversations), Idris pursues a more specific focus, namely, to relate the history of the Ismaili *da'wa* in Yemen from its commencement in the 8th Century CE until his own time. The latter is also particularly valuable in furnishing biographical information about Idris and shedding light on his contribution to the Tayyibi *da'wa* in Yemen. For full biographical details see A.F. Sayyid, *The Fatimids and their Successors in Yaman,* pp. 12-13 also see H. Hamdani, The doctrines and rustory of the Isma'ili da'wat in Yemen as based on the da'i Idris 'Imad al-Din's *Kitab zahr al-ma'ani* and other works, Unpublished PhD Thesis, p. 23.

xv Husayn Hamdani (1901-1962) was a pioneering scholar in Ismaili studies whose primary contribution was working on a collection of manuscripts preserved by his family in Surat, India, that contributed greatly to a truer understanding of Ismaili history.

xvi A.F. Sayyid, *The Fatimids and their successors in Yaman,* p. 14.

xvii Wladimir Ivanow (1886-1970) emigrated to India in the early 1920s where he was provided access to Ismaili manuscripts by the Nizari Imam, Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III (1885-1957) and where he authored numerous studies and edited several primary Ismaili texts laying the foundations for modern studies in Ismaili history.

xviiiF. Daftary, *Ismaili Literature: A bibliography of sources and studies* (London, 2004), p. 7.

xixThe Qur'anic phrase *'ulul 'azm* is mentioned in 46:35 where it states, "Therefore patiently persevere, as did (all) apostles of absolute resolution".

xxThis caused a major rupture in the Ismaili fold with those who challenged this shift and clung to what they considered to be the original doctrine coalescing into a movement which came to be called the Qaramita.

xxi F. Daftary, *lsmailis,* p. 291.

xxii F. Daftary, *lsmailis,* p. 293.

xxiii Mahmud al-Jalili, "Tarjamat Ibn Khaldun lil-Maqrizi," *Majallat al-Majma' al-'Ilmi al-'Iraqi* 13 (1966) p.220 as cited in Anne F. Broadbridge, *Royal Authority, Justice, and Order in Society: The Influence of Ibn Khaldun on the Writings of al-Maqrizi and Ibn Taghribirdi*, Mamluk Studies, 7/2 (2003), p. 234 .

xxiv After arriving in Cairo in 1382 CE, Ibn Khaldun taught courses at the Al-Azhar and then other *madrasa*s where he attracted numerous students, one of whom would be al-Maqrizi who was aged 18 at the time. A plethora of literature exists pertaining to his life and works, as enumerated in M. Talbi, 'Ibn Khaldun', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden, 1960–2004)*,* vol. 4, pp. 825-831.

xxv Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah,* trans. F. Rosenthal as *Prolegomena* (New York, 1958) p. 6.

xxvi As cited in Broadbridge, 'Royal Authority, Justice, and Order in Society', p. 234.

xxvii Al-Maqrizi, *Durar al-'uqad,* p. 224.

xxviii Broadbridge, 'Royal Authority, Justice, and Order in Society', p. 238.

xxix *Itti'az,* vol. 3, pp. 345-6

xxx *Itti'az,* vol. 1, p. 232 . As was the practice among medieval Muslim writers, al-Maqrizi completes this critique with the Qur'anic phrase, 'But over all endued with knowledge is One, the All-Knowing' (12:76).

xxxi Originally this meant those who had deviated from their forefathers. In that sense Prophet Muhammad was referred to in early life as a *hanif.* See W. Montgomery Watt, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden, 1960–2004)*,* vol. 3, pp. 165-6, 'hanif'.

xxxii Rabbat, 'A Biographical Sketch', p. 9.

xxxiii For the Ismaili cyclical view of the religious history of mankind, its premises and aspirations, including the initiation and closure of the final era, see Daftary, *A Short History,* pp. 53-5.

xxxivFirst Fatimid Imam-Caliph; reigned 909-934 CE. The principal sources on him include: Qadi al-Nu'man, *lftitah al-da'wa,* ed. F. Dachraoui (Tunis. 1970); trans. Hamid Haji, *The Founding of the Fatimid State: the rise of an early Islamic Empire* (London, 2006); Ja'far al-Hajib, *Sira;* trans. Marius Canard , L'autobiographie d'un chambellan du Mahdi 'Obeidallah le Fatimide", *Hespéris* (1952), 279-324, reproin *Miscellanea orientalia ,* London 1973; and ldris, *'Uyun,* ed. Ya'lawi, vol. IV, pp. 25-24 1. See F. Daftary, *The lsmailis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990);W. Madelung, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden, 1960–2004)*,* vol. 4, '*Isma'iliyya*', pp. 198-206, and vol. V, 'al-Mahdi', pp. 1230-40.

xxxv Biblical Abraham, mentioned several times in the Qur'an. For his role in Muslim tradition see R. Paret, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden, 1960–2004)*,* vol.3, p. 980, 'Ibrahim'.

xxxvi Qur'an 2:124.

xxxvii Lit. 'the path to be followed'; the standard term used for Muslim law; the totality of the Islamic way of life.

xxxviii Al-Hasan b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib (c.625-669 CE) and al-Husayn b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib (c. 626-680)were grandsons of Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima. Supported by the people of Iraq, al-Husayn fought Mu'awiya's son,Yazid, at Karbala, where he along with several members of his family and seventy-two of his companions, were massacred, an event that is annually commemorated by the Shi'a to this day. L. Veccia Vagileri, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden, 1960–2004)*,*vol.III, pp. 240-3, 'Hasan b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib': L. Veccia Vaglieri , *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden, 1960–2004)*,*vol. III, pp. 607-615.

xxxix *Nass* (pl. *nusus*), from which the verb *nassa* derives, is a technical term for the particular text in the Qur'an or *hadith* that justifies a ruling and is also used to indicate the *matn* (text of the Qur'an), as opposed to the *isnad* (chain of transmission in *hadith*). In Shi'i tradition *nass* refers specifically to the imam's designation, based on divine knowledge, of his successor. For the conceptual and historical origins of the term see *nass:* M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism,* trans. David Streight (Albany, NY.: SUNY,1994); M. Bar Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shi'ism* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1999); S. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (London and New York: Longman, 1979); Arzina Lalani, 'Nass', *The Qur'an: an Encvclopaedia ,* ed. Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 488-51.

xl On Haydura b.Muhammad see P. Walker, *Sources,* pp.142 and 193; Poonawala, *Biobibliography,* pp. 93-4.

[xli] This has been translated by S Jiwa in *An Anthology of lsmaili Literature*, ed. H Landolt, et.al (London, 2008), pp 59-66.

[xlii] In this regard see his well-known work *Da'a'im al-lslam* which became the source-book for future jurists of the Fatimid state, ed. Asaf A.A. Fyzee (Cairo. 1951-60); revised and annotated by I.K. Poonawala (Oxford and New York, 2002). On his writings see *Bibliography of lsmaili Literature* (Malibu, 1977), pp. 51-68. In *Wafayat al-A'yan* (Beirut, 1968). Ibn Khallikan gives a comprehensive account of the Nu'man family based on al-Musabbihi and Ibn Zulaq, see De Slane's translation. *Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary,* Paris, 1842-71, vol. 3, pp. 565-74.

[xliii] Al-Nu'man b. Muhammad al-Tamimi al-Qadi, *Kitab al-majalis wa'l-musayarat,* ed., al-Habib al-Faqi, Ibrahim Shabbuh and Muhammad al-Ya'lawi (Tunis, 1978).