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Title: Inclusive Governance: A Fatimid Illustration

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Publication: *A Companion to the Muslim World*, ed. Dr Aryn Sajoo. I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies; ISBN (Hardback): 9781848851931. Pub: 15 Aug 2009

Abstract: In establishing their sovereignty across the North African stretch of the Mediterranean, the Fatimids (909-1171 CE) faced an essential challenge: how was a Shi'i dynasty to enjoy political respect and legitimacy in an overwhelmingly Sunni setting. The Fatimid response was to adopt a model of governance that was broadly inclusive in letter and spirit, beginning with the Egyptian phase of their rule. What ensued was not merely a political compromise driven by the need for co-existence. Rather, the political stability, economic prosperity, intellectual energy and artistic grandeur of their two-century reign is widely regarded as a remarkable epoch in both Egyptian and Muslim history. 'Active engagement' marked it out in the vein of pluralist episodes in Muslim Andalusia, the Ottoman empire and Mughal India.¹

¹ See generally Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford, 2001).

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Fatimid governance appealed from the outset to the ideals of equity and social justice that were associated with Islam's founding statesman, Prophet Muhammad. It was from him that they asserted their genealogical pedigree and succession to the leadership of the *umma*. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad's city state in Medina was as much a minority aspiration in a non-Muslim setting as a Shi'a-led state was in Sunni and Khariji North Africa. As with the Charter of Medina issued by the Prophet, inclusion and just governance were hallmarks of the inaugural *Aman* or 'peace proclamation' which the Fatimids issued on entering Egypt.

The *Aman* provided the foundation for respecting the diversity of religious outlooks in a shared quest, inspired by the Qur'anic call, 'O humanity! Truly We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you might know each other. Truly the most honoured of you in the sight of God is the most God-conscious of you. Truly God is Knowing, Aware.' (Qur'an 49:13). The Fatimids created and sustained institutions and networks that enabled the flourishing of Muslims, Christians and Jews within the realm, mirroring the dynamic pluralism that epitomised Muslim Andalusia. This article will focus on the *Aman* as a critical document in the reign of the Fatimids — and an exemplar of pluralist governance as a basis for political legitimacy.

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The Fatimid invasion of Egypt in 969 CE during the reign of the fourth Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Muizz li-Din Allah (r. 953-975 CE) was a key event in the histories of Egypt, North Africa and the Mediterranean region. It is symbolised by the city that he founded, al-Qahira al-Muizziyya (the City Victorious of al-Muizz), a precursor of modern Cairo. Al-Qahira was to become the axis from which the ascent of the Fatimids would be projected across much of the Muslim world.

The *Aman* document, issued by the victorious Fatimid general, Jawhar al-Siqilli (c. 928-992 CE), guarantees the security and safe-conduct of the Egyptian populace and sets forth the principles on which Fatimid policies in Egypt would be based for their subsequent two-hundred year reign. Its notable features include the nature of the Fatimid mission, which is articulated in their understanding of a divinely designated duty of care and protection of the cosmopolitan Egyptian populace.

Accordingly, the *Aman* document underscores the Fatimid commitment to establish just governance for all their subjects including members of the *Ahl al-Kitab* (The People of the Book, meaning Jews and Christians), and their inclusive and tolerant attitude to all Muslim communities.

As this crucial document has received limited scholarly attention, its analysis followed by its translation forms the focus of this paper. The Fatimid quest for authority and legitimacy of their rule are integrally linked to the principles enshrined in the *Aman*; it is necessary to understand these principles before analysing the document.

Authority and Legitimacy

The Fatimid claim to spiritual and temporal authority was integrally linked to their lineage and status as descendants of Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband, the Prophet's paternal cousin, Ali b. Abi Talib.

In the Shi'i tradition, the Fatimids maintained that Prophet Muhammad designated Ali and his appointed progeny to succeed him, with the prerogative of legitimate leadership of the *umma* and of seeking their wellbeing and salvation. The Fatimid state was a practical means for the exercise of this supreme authority and responsibility.

The Fatimid Caliphate was established in Ifriqiya (the medieval term for Tunisia and parts of eastern Algeria) in 909 CE, as an expression in particular of Ismaili Shi'ism. Over the course of a few decades it developed a significant cultural, economic and political presence in the medieval Mediterranean region. Ideologically, the Fatimids had to surmount the challenge of reigning over a populace that was predominantly Sunni and which had an enduring Kharijite presence.

Ethnically, the region was populated by ancient Berber tribal confederations with Arab influence mainly limited to towns and cities. Consequently, as Shi'i Imam-caliphs, the Fatimids developed a finely tuned balancing act in representing their status and authority as minority rulers. This experience strengthened them when they began casting their gaze eastwards to Egypt. No sooner had the first Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mahdi billah established himself in Ifriqiya, a Fatimid expedition was prepared and sent to subdue Egypt in 913 CE and again in 919 CE.

Subsequent Fatimid campaigns were undertaken in the country during the reign of the second Fatimid ruler, al-Qaim bi-AmrAllah (r. 934-946 CE) but resolute opposition by the Abbasids prevented Fatimid success. Although the Abbasids and their clients were able to halt Fatimid military advances until 969 CE, an integral feature of al-Muizz li-Din Allah's success in securing Egypt was the effective propagation of the Fatimid cause amongst its inhabitants.

Longstanding Ismaili *da'wa* activity in the country led many notables and government officials to support the Fatimid cause in seeking the restoration of stability. The *da'wa* also harnessed political insignia to assert Fatimid legitimacy. Examples of this have been recorded, such as coins minted in Egypt and issued in the Fatimid sovereign's name nearly two decades prior to the conquest of Egypt along with the circulation of banners and *tiraz* fabrics with Fatimid formulaic phrases. All these measures contributed to the largely peaceful conquest of Egypt in al-Muizz's reign, succeeding where previous Fatimid military interventions had failed.

The Invasion of Egypt

The swings in Egyptian politics that facilitated the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in the 10th century CE came to a head during the time of Kafur al-Labi (905-968 CE), the last of the Ikhshidid rulers of Egypt. Though renowned as a patron of culture and learning, his 22-year rule was rife with dissent and factional squabbling between the supporters of the dynasty in whose name he ruled (al-Ikhshididiya) and those with a personal affinity to Kafur himself (al-Kafuriya), whom he created as a military counterforce to the former to further his political ambitions.

During this period, major natural disasters such as famine led to severe droughts and endemic food shortages which were exacerbated by financial mismanagement. All these factors fuelled anti-Ikhshidid sentiment, thus facilitating the Ismaili mission to garner support for their Imam who claimed supreme authority over the Muslim lands, and promised to reverse the Abbasid and Ikhshidid wrongs.

Kafur's death in 968 CE caused a succession crisis, leading to further divisions within Egypt. Moreover, decades of Fatimid *da'wa* activity had paved the ground for the Fatimid claim of authority. Hence, significant elements among the Egyptian populace were amenable to the Fatimid presence (including stakeholders from among the Ikhshidids, Kafurids, Abbasids and others); the leading notables of the region invited al-Muizz to establish Fatimid rule over Egypt. He responded by beginning extensive preparations, which included the major mobilisation of men, money and armaments. The financial outlay was particularly expensive because al-Muizz insisted that, as this was a momentous event, it had to be funded through legal revenues even though he was acutely aware of the extraordinary strain on the Fatimid treasury, which he sought to alleviate by contributing 24 million dinars from his own resources.¹

Moreover, al-Muizz assumed an active role in the strategic planning of the campaign. He selected the veteran general Jawhar al-Siqilli to serve as the commander of the Fatimid campaign in Egypt. A protégé of the third Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mansur billah, Jawhar's

¹ As attested by the historians Taqi al-Din Ahmad al-Maqrizi (1364-1442) and Imad al-Din Idris (1392-1468), discussed below. Revenues were often generated by different Islamic dynasties through illegal levies. Despite such precedents in Egypt, Al-Muizz was stringent about not resorting to such levies on the general populace.

merit as military commander was confirmed when he had earlier led the Fatimid armies in reinstating their control over the North African region, extending it to the shores of the Atlantic.

From a Fatimid perspective, the critical nature of the conquest of Egypt is illustrated by the fact that the Fatimid sovereign, accompanied by his entire retinue, personally sent off the army, its commander-in chief entrusted with the sword of the ruler to accomplish this mission. Upon reaching Egypt, in 969 CE, Jawhar began the process of negotiation with the leading notables of Egypt that resulted in the proclamation of the *Aman*, an official document that guaranteed the safety and security of the Egyptian populace.

The Aman Document

The *Aman* has been recounted in full by the erudite and prolific Sunni Egyptian historian, Taqi al-Din Ahmad al-Maqrizi (1364-1442 CE).² Despite the fact that al-Maqrizi was a Mamluk historian, he sustained a unique interest in the Fatimids and systematically recorded multiple facets of their reign in many of his works. Similarly, the *Aman* has also been recorded in its entirety by the Tayyibi Ismaili historian Imad al-Din Idris (1392-1468 CE).³ Both these authors are in all likelihood quoting Ibn Zulaq (919-996 CE), a prominent historian and biographer, contemporary to the Fatimid invasion of Egypt, who wrote a biography on al-Muizz, which unfortunately is no longer extant.

The full reproduction of the *Aman* document in these sources is testimony to its authenticity as the two authors composed their works independently of each other and with significantly varied focus and interest in the Fatimids. It also underscores its importance in instituting Fatimid rule in Egypt as it represents the first constitution of the Fatimid state there, and is one of a series of covenants and guarantees issued by the Fatimid Imam-caliphs after the accession of al-Mahdi, enunciating the principles upon which the Fatimids were to govern their rising empire.

Politically, the *Aman* document represents the negotiation of authority and transfer of power between the existing Egyptian elite and the incumbent Fatimid sovereign. The backdrop to its proclamation and the events leading up to the meeting between the Egyptian notables and the Fatimid commander were therefore integral to this conciliatory handover. Equally, the composition of the leading members of the Egyptian delegation was designed to facilitate this rapprochement. Thus both al-Maqrizi and Imad al-Din Idris report at length on the selection of the five delegates who were to meet with the Fatimid commander Jawhar al-Siqilli upon his arrival in Egypt. Notably, three of these delegates mirrored the Fatimid claim to descent from the household of Prophet Muhammad; the fourth was the Chief Justice and the final one the resident Fatimid *da'i*.

The asserted sacredness of the Fatimid mission was rooted in the Shi'i notion of the Imamate, which espoused religious and temporal authority over and responsibility for the *umma* — mirrored in their self designation as the *Ahl al-Haqq* (People of the Truth) and their *da'wa* as

² Taqi al-Din Ahmad al-Maqrizi, *Kitab al-Muqaffa al-Kabir*, ed. M. al-Yalawi (Beirut, 1987), pp. 332-336; and *Ittiaz al-Hunafa bi-Akhbar al-Aimma al-Fatimiyyin al-Khulafa*, vol. 1, ed. Jamal al-Din al-Shayyal (Cairo, 1967-1973), pp. 103-107.

³ Imad al-Din Idris, *Uyun al-Akhbar*, ed. M. al-Yalawi as *Tarikh al-khulafa al-Fatimiyyun bi l-Maghrib: al-qism al-khass min Kitab Uyun al-Akhbar* (Beirut, 1985), pp. 673-678.

being the *Dawat al-Haqq* (the Call to Truth). This is reinforced in the *Aman* document, and is affirmed by the Egyptian notables in the selection of representatives from the Husaynid, Hasanid and Abbasid branches of Prophet Muhammad's family, 'so that the whole spectrum of the Prophet's lineage in Egypt' was symbolically represented in the reception committee of notables that met Jawhar at Taruja, south of Alexandria, where the latter had camped upon his arrival into Egypt.⁴

As the Fatimid armies advanced into Egypt, having taken possession of Alexandria, the Egyptian delegation left Fustat with a conciliatory message from the vizier to the commander Jawhar, seeking the guarantee of safety from him. The *Aman* that was subsequently issued contained the terms of agreement that were negotiated by the delegation, to which Jawhar acceded. The *Aman* document contained the blueprint of Fatimid rule in Egypt over the course of the next couple of centuries. On the one hand it spelled out all the advantages to be gained from submission — an electoral manifesto of sorts.

On the other it laid out the principles on which the new regime would be founded — a constitutional document, whose key features included establishing just governance, ensuring the socio-economic welfare of all subjects and guaranteeing their freedom of religious practice.

Establishing Just Governance

A salient feature of the *Aman* is the emphasis it places on the restoration of security and promotion of justice. Accordingly, its promise to enforce order by curbing the 'tyrant' heads the list of commitments stipulated in the document. The 'tyrant', as attested to in the document, refers to the Qarmati leader based in Bahrain, al-Hasan al-Asam (891-977 CE), who adopted a particularly aggressive posture during this period.

Though the Qaramita and the Fatimids had a shared Ismaili heritage, their interpretation regarding the central doctrines of the Imamate, and related issues of succession to authority, had rent them apart. Consequently, the Qaramita proved to be among the most aggressive opponents of the Fatimids, particularly after the latter's arrival in Egypt.

The evocative depiction of the terrified and humiliated populace of the eastern Islamic lands in the *Aman* document challenges Abbasid hegemony over the *umma*, because this entailed responsibility for safety and security of pilgrims to Mecca, which had been undermined due to Byzantine and Qarmati aggressions. The dire predicament of the eastern Muslims is starkly contrasted to the Fatimid-engendered prosperity of western Muslims in North Africa. The document rhetorically bemoans that their eastern brethren have no saviour to rescue them. Abbasid ineptitude and perceived indifference in restoring security to Egypt is juxtaposed with al-Muizz's competence, concern and prioritisation of this situation:

His eyes have wept for what has affected them, and he has been kept awake because of what has befallen them. He is our lord and master, the Commander of the Faithful, may God's blessing be upon him. He has hoped... to rescue those who have been constantly living in humiliation and in painful torture, and to make those who have been overwhelmed by terror feel safe, and to dispel the fear of those who have continually lived in dread. He wishes to

⁴ Al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az al-Hunafa*, vol. I, p.103.

restore the pilgrimage which has fallen into abeyance, and whose obligations and rights are neglected by the worshippers because of fear of the one who would seize them, as they could not safeguard themselves or their wealth, for they have been repeatedly vanquished, their blood shed and their wealth confiscated.⁵

In addition to restoring security, the *Aman* document highlights that the duty of care of the Muslim ruler to his subjects entailed the attention to the social and economic needs of the populace. Hence it promises to ‘scrutinise [their] living conditions, to offer protection to the inhabitants day and night so that they can strive freely to earn their living and can manage their affairs such that it would restore them to their feet’. Similarly, it reiterates that:

As has been his custom, al-Muizz will authorise the repair of roads. He will then prevent the offenders from committing crimes, so that people are able to walk on the roads feeling safe and secure, and will be provided with food and provisions. News has reached him... that Egypt's roads have been cut off because of the fear of the travel [caravan] leaders, since there has been neither a restraint nor a defence against the unjust aggressors. Then he will renew the coinage and adjust it to be of the same standard as the blessed, auspicious *mansuri* dinars. He will eliminate their metal impurities. These are the three characteristics that must be addressed by a Muslim ruler. He must exert all his time and effort in their achievement.⁶

Following the guarantee of safety and the alleviation of the socio-economic concerns of the Egyptians, the *Aman* document delineates the Fatimid sovereign’s strikingly tolerant and inclusive approach to the varied religious communities that inhabited Egypt.

Protection of Religious Communities

Over half a century of Fatimid experience in reigning over the religiously and ethnically diverse populace in North Africa enabled them to develop an ideologically grounded and pragmatic religious policy in Egypt. Demographically, in the early 10th century Egypt was on the cusp of Islamisation, with Muslims beginning to form a majority among numerically substantive and well-established Christian and Jewish populations.

Furthermore, each of these religious communities had their own demarcated sub-divisions which had formed into defined communal groups. For the Shi‘i Fatimid Imam-caliphs to claim sovereignty over such a religiously and ethnically diverse populace required a creative rationale which drew upon the broadest shared religious repertoire of the region. To the Muslims of Egypt, the *Aman* document stressed the common and generic roots of the community by emphasising that ‘Islam consists of one *Sunna* and a Shari‘a followed by all’. It then guarantees the freedom to practise the faith to each Muslim according to his/her creed by testifying:

You shall continue in your *madhhab* (school). You shall be permitted to perform your obligations according to religious scholarship, and to gather for it in your congregational and other mosques, and to remain steadfast in the

⁵ Al-Maqrizi, *Ittiaz al-Hunafa*, vol. I, p. 104

⁶ Al-Maqrizi, *Ittiaz al-Hunafa*, vol. I, p. 104.

beliefs of the worthy ancestors from the Companions of the Prophet, may God be pleased with them, and those who succeeded them, the jurists of the cities who have pronounced judgements according to their *madhhabs* and *fatwas* (formal legal opinions).

The call to prayer and its performance, the fasting in the month of Ramadan, the breaking of the fast and the celebration of its nights, the [payment of] the alms tax, [the performance of the] pilgrimage and the undertaking of jihad will be maintained according to the command of God and His Book and in accordance with the instruction of His Prophet... in his *Sunna*, and the *dhimmi*s will be treated according to previous custom.⁷

Once the Fatimids had secured control of the official Egyptian legal and ritual frameworks, they proactively promoted an inclusive attitude towards other Muslim communities. A case in point is the official decree issued by the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (985-1021 CE) permitting Muslims of different persuasions to use their own preferred method of establishing the beginning of Ramadan and the concomitant celebrations of Id al-Fitr. Basing his edict on the Qur'anic principle that there is no compulsion in religion (2:256), al-Hakim ensured that in the Fatimid state Sunni and Shi'i Muslims were able to celebrate this annual Muslim festival in peace and harmony, dispelling the acrimonious wrangling that to this day accompanies these celebrations in many Muslim countries.

Similarly, on the Fatimid legal scene, while Fatimid law prevailed as the official statute, on matters of family law Muslims could seek legal judgement according to their own legal tradition through the state-funded judicial infrastructure which remunerated judges from various Sunni and Shi'i legal schools. Having affirmed the shared foundational beliefs of all Muslims, regardless of their theological interpretations and legal leanings, and guaranteeing their practice according to their belief and custom, the *Aman* document further pledges to:

Undertake the repair of your mosques and adorn them with carpets and lighting. I will give those who call to prayers, the administrators [of mosques] and those who lead the prayers, their allowance. It will be given abundantly to them and not be withdrawn from them. I will only pay them from the treasury and not by draft on tax collectors.⁸

The Covenant

The Medina Charter issued by Prophet Muhammad provides the bedrock for the constitutional framework articulated in the *Aman* document. Consequently, the Fatimids interpret their role as the legitimate protectors of the *dhimma* of God: as caretakers of Muslims of all persuasions as well as of the *Ahl al-Kitab*. Hence the only direct reference to the *Ahl al-Dhimma* — Egypt's Christian and Jewish communities — may be understood as inclusive in 'accord with custom'.

The interpretation of custom here is Fatimid Shi'i and harkens to the Prophetic example, self-consciously bypassing its various other political and theological expressions over the course of centuries, some of which were less favourable to these communities. In doing so, the

⁷ Al-Maqrizi, *Ittiaz al-Hunafa*, vol. I, p. 105.

⁸ Al-Maqrizi, *Ittiaz al-Hunafa*, vol. I, p. 105.

Fatimids assert a doctrinal stance which is rooted in the paradigm established by Ali b. Abi Talib of referencing the Qur'an and the *Sunna* of Prophet Muhammad as their foundational sources, followed by the example of his descendents whom they considered to be the *ulil amr*, the legitimate holders of authority as defined by the Qur'anic verse: 'O you who believe, obey God, and obey the Messenger and holders of authority amongst you' (Qur'an 4:59). Thus, they instituted their own custom and practice which was distinct from the *ulama*-based Sunni model that had developed over the course of time.

The *Aman* solicited the witnessing of an all-embracing and abiding commitment to 'total and perpetual obedience to the representative of God on earth, who was equally committed to their welfare'.⁹ In this context, it was also re-invoking the *ahd* (covenant) which the first Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mahdi had issued to the people of Ifriqiya upon his accession as the legitimate invoker of the covenant between God and mankind.¹⁰

A range of terms are employed in the *Aman* document to reference this covenant, the one most frequently used being *dhimma* (duty of care and protection). This is inferred in its Qur'anic sense and is reflected in the Prophetic tradition in what came to be called the Charter of Medina where it refers to divine protection of the community of the faithful and the universalist claim that the '*dhimma* of the Muslims is one and the same'. The *Aman* can therefore be viewed as one of a series of public proclamations issuing from the Fatimid Imam-caliphs regarding the nature of their rule and their responsibilities as rulers.

The Aman (translation)

The premier Fatimid public statement in Egypt begins thus:

'In the name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful. This is a letter by Jawhar al-Katib — the servant of the Commander of the Faithful, al-Muizz li-Din Allah, may God's blessings be upon him¹¹, to all the people living in Misr, Egyptians and others. The delegates, whom you had asked to correspond and meet with me, have arrived. They are:

Abu Jafar Muslim al-Sharif, may God lengthen his life;
 Abu Ismail al-Rassi, may God help him;
 Abul-Tayyib al-Hashim, may God help him;
 Abu Jafar Ahmad b. Nasr, may God strengthen him; and
 The qadi, may God strengthen him.

They have mentioned, on your behalf, that you seek a guarantee of *aman* (safety) for yourselves, your wealth, your lands and all your matters. You are already aware of the magnanimity of our master and lord, the Commander of the Faithful, towards you.

⁹ Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids: The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Tenth Century CE* (Leiden, 2001), p. 301.

¹⁰ The *Ahd* document is preserved in full by Qadi al-Numan in his *Daaim al-Islam*. See the translation in Ismail K. Poonawala, *The Pillars of Islam* (Oxford and New York, 2002), pp. 436-456 and Wadad Al-Qadi, 'An Early Fatimid Political Document', *Studia Islamica*, No. 48, (1978), pp. 71-108.

¹¹ According to academic convention, the salutations following the name of God, Prophet Muhammad and the Imams are translated only at their first mention but assumed thereafter.

So praise God for what he, the Commander of the Faithful, has bestowed upon you and thank Him for his protection of you. Persevere in adhering to what is incumbent upon you and hasten to the obedience of him who protects you from error and leads you to safety and happiness, for he has sent the victorious troops and triumphant armies only so as to strengthen and protect you, and to wage jihad on your behalf as hands have grabbed you. The tyrant has behaved arrogantly towards you, coveting possession of your lands in this year; [he wants] to conquer it and take prisoners from it and hankers after the possession of your wealth and property, as he has already done to those like you in the east.

His determination has been reinforced and his temerity strengthened and so the Commander of the Faithful, our lord and master, has pre-empted him by sending out his victorious armies and instructing his glorious troops to fight him and wage jihad against him, on your behalf, and on behalf of all the Muslims in the east who have been disgraced and have been unduly humbled and engulfed by disasters and continuous calamities. The sobbing and yelling of those who have been continually frightened has become progressively louder and they have beseeched succor over and over again.

No one has been able to come to their rescue except for him who has been sickened by their suffering and has suffered from their affliction. His eyes have wept for what has affected them, and he has been kept awake because of what has befallen them. He is our lord and master, the Commander of the Faithful. He has hoped, by the grace and benevolence of God — that God has always bestowed upon him, to rescue those who have been constantly living in humiliation and in painful torture, and to make those who have been overwhelmed by terror to feel safe, and to dispel the fear of those who have continually lived in dread.

He wishes to restore the pilgrimage which has fallen into abeyance, and whose obligations and rights are neglected by the worshippers because of fear of the one who would seize them, as they could not safeguard themselves or their wealth, for they have been repeatedly vanquished, their blood shed and their wealth confiscated.

As has been his custom, al-Muizz will authorise the repair of roads. He will then prevent the offenders from committing crimes, so that people are able to walk on the roads feeling safe and secure, and will be provided with food and provisions. News has reached him that Egypt's roads have been cut off because of the fear of the travel [caravan] leaders, since there has been neither a restraint nor a defence against the unjust aggressors.

Then he will renew the coinage and adjust it to be of the same standard as the blessed, auspicious *mansuri* dinars. He will eliminate their metal impurities. These are the three characteristics that must be addressed by a Muslim ruler. He must exert all his time and effort in their achievement.

Our lord and master, the Commander of the Faithful, has advised his servant to extend equity and justice and to dispel injustice, to temper aggression, to eradicate transgression, to increase aid, to uphold what is just and to strengthen the oppressed through compassion and beneficence, to supervise fairly, to be generous in companionship, to be kind in associations, to scrutinise living conditions, to offer

protection to the inhabitants day and night so that they can strive freely to earn their living and can manage their affairs such that it would restore them.

[He has also advised his servant to] establish support for them so that their minds are assuaged, their hearts are in harmony and their words are in unison in obedience to the *wali* (friend) of God, our lord and master, the Commander of the Faithful. His *mawla* [master] has ordered him to annul the unjust taxes that he disapproves of from being levied upon you.

He has instructed me to administer your inheritance according to the Book of God and the *Sunna* of the Prophet. I will discontinue the deduction of money that used to be withheld from your legacies for the public treasury, and sent there without that being stipulated in your wills, for the treasury does not have a lawful claim over it.

He has instructed me to undertake the repair of your mosques and adorn them with carpets and lighting. I will give those who call to prayers, the administrators [of mosques] and those who lead the prayers their allowance. It will be given abundantly to them and not be withdrawn from them. I will only pay them from the treasury and not by draft on tax collectors.

Apart from what our lord and master, the Commander of the Faithful, has mentioned in this letter of his, there is what the delegates who have been sent on your behalf (may God support them, and keep you all safe through your obedience to our lord and master, the Commander of the Faithful) have mentioned concerning the inclusion of matters that you have requested be mentioned in the *Aman*. In response to your request and as an assurance to you, I have included these in the *Aman*.

It would otherwise be meaningless to mention them and of no benefit to announce them, for Islam consists of one *Sunna* and a Shari'a followed [by all]. You shall continue in your *madhhab*. You shall be permitted to perform your obligations according to religious scholarship, and to gather for it in your congregational and other mosques, and to remain steadfast in the beliefs of the worthy ancestors from the Companions of the Prophet and those who succeeded them, the jurists of the cities who have pronounced judgements according to their *madhhabs* and *fatwas* (formal legal opinions).

The call to prayer and its performance, the fasting in the month of Ramadan, the breaking of the fast and the celebration of its nights, the [payment of] the alms tax, [the performance of the] pilgrimage and the undertaking of jihad will be maintained according to the command of God and His Book and in accordance with the instruction of His Prophet in his *Sunna*, and the *dhimmi*s will be treated according to previous custom.

I guarantee you God's complete and universal safety, eternal and continuous, inclusive and perfect, renewed and confirmed through the days, and recurring through the years, for your lives, your property, your families, your livestock, your estates and your quarters, and whatever you possess, be it modest or significant. There shall be no opponent opposing you, no harasser harassing you and no pursuer pursuing you.

You shall be safeguarded, protected and defended. Your [enemies] will be repelled from you and will be proscribed from [harming] you and you will not be opposed. No one will hasten to attack you, or to disdain your mighty ones, let alone your downtrodden ones.

I shall continue to exert effort in whatever extends goodness to you, is beneficial to all of you, brings bounty to you, lets you experience blessings and through which you can rejoice in obeying our lord and master, the Commander of the Faithful.

I promise to fulfil what I have pledged to you, in the name of God's sacred covenant and protection, and by the covenant of His prophets and messengers and by the covenant of the Imams, our masters, the Commanders of the Faithful, and by the covenant of our lord and master, the Commander of the Faithful, al-Muizz li-Din Allah. So proclaim and announce [the covenant] by fulfilling the commitment. Come out to meet and greet me and stand before me when I cross the bridge and camp at the blessed halting place. Persevere in your allegiance and hasten to fulfil its obligations. Do not forsake any friend of our master, the Commander of the Faithful, and abide by what you are ordered. May God guide you all on the straight path.'

The commander Jawhar wrote the *Aman* in his own hand in Shaban of the year 358 AH [June–July 969 CE]: 'Blessings of God be upon our master Muhammad and his righteous, pure and best progeny'.

Implications

The *Aman* was instrumental in proclaiming the Fatimid claim to be the legitimate heirs to the spiritual and temporal authority of Prophet Muhammad. They considered it their prerogative to ensure the wellbeing of the *umma* which they, following the example of Prophet Muhammad, defined broadly to include the *Ahl al-Kitab*.

The *Aman* document guaranteed the protection of all communities as well as their land and resources, to be implemented by state officials under the authority of al-Muizz. Importantly, the Fatimids sought a rapprochement among all Muslims by affirming that, while they may follow different *madhhabs*, all share in their common faith and fraternity of Islam.

The inclusive spirit of the *Aman* formed the bedrock upon which the Fatimids founded their institutional network in ethnically and religiously diverse Egypt. In the realm of political governance, competent administrators from varying socio-economic, religious and ethnic backgrounds, ranging from Yaqub b. Killis and Isa b. Nestorius to Badr al-Jamali, rose to the most senior positions within the Fatimid vizierate.

As such, they contributed significantly to the enduring socio-economic vitality of the Fatimid Empire. Again, as noted, the Fatimid judiciary developed a state sponsored legal framework through which each segment of the Egyptian populace could seek judgements based on their own legal tradition in matters of family law. Fatimid inheritance law followed the Shi'i precedent and stipulated women's right to inherit, own property and estates, as well as to bequeath their possessions to their female descendants. Intellectually, the Fatimids invested in the creation of institutions of learning that fostered an inclusive outlook. This included offering 'sessions of wisdom' for women of the Fatimid court as well as of the *da'wa*,

enabling leading Fatimid women, such as Sitt al-Mulk (970- 1023 CE) and Sulayhid queen, Arwa (1048- 1138 CE), to achieve prominent rank within the Fatimid *da'wa*.

The *Dar al-Hikma* established in 1005 CE is a case in point. Modelled on the Abbasid *Bayt al-Hikma*, the Fatimid academy of sciences provided a state-funded forum where scholars from a variety of intellectual backgrounds, geographical regions and legal traditions gained access and contributed to the development of the natural and religious sciences.

This pluralist ethos in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire was not without its challenges. One example was the recurring conflict between key stakeholders in the Fatimid court, notably the *maghariba* (western Berber troops) and the *mashariqa* (eastern Turkish soldiers). Not surprisingly, this factionalism came in the way of effective governance. It was to contribute to the eventual dissipation of Fatimid sovereignty, which yielded in 1171 CE to the Ayyubid dynasty, with its less inclusive ways of governance. Yet the cosmopolitan culture that was engendered during the quarter-millennial reign of the Fatimids fed a vibrant social and intellectual discourse which echoed long after across the Mediterranean and beyond.

Further Reading

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