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The Ismaili *Da‘wa* outside the Fatimid *Dawla*

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The Ismailis separated from the rest of the Imâmi Shi‘îs on the death of the Imâm Ja‘far al-Sâdiq in 148/765. By the middle of the 3rd/9th century, the Ismailis had organized a secret, religio-political movement designated as *al-da‘wa* (the mission) or, more precisely, *al-da‘wa al-hâdiya* (the rightly guiding mission). The overall aim of this dynamic and centrally-directed movement of social protest was to uproot the ‘Abbâsids and install the ‘Alid imâm acknowledged by the Ismailis to the actual rule of the Islamic community (*umma*). The revolutionary message of the Ismaili *da‘wa* was systematically propagated by a network of *dâ‘îs* or religio-political missionaries in different parts of the Muslim world, from Transoxania to Yaman and North Africa.

The Ismaili *dâ‘îs* summoned the Muslims everywhere to accord their allegiance to the Ismaili imâm-Mahdi, who was expected to deliver the believers from the oppressive rule of the ‘Abbâsids and establish justice and a more equitable social order in the world. Thus, the Ismaili *da‘wa* also promised to restore the leadership of the Muslims to ‘Alids, members of the *ahl al-bayt* or the Prophet Muhammad’s family, whose legitimate rights to leadership had been successively usurped by the Umayyads and the ‘Abbâsids. The Ismaili *dâ‘îs* won an increasing number of converts among a multitude of discontented groups of diverse social backgrounds. Among such groups mention may be made of the landless peasantry and Bedouin tribesmen whose interests were set apart from those of the prospering urban classes. The *dâ‘îs* also capitalized on regional grievances. On the basis of a well-designed *da‘wa* strategy, the *dâ‘îs* were initially more successful in non-urban milieus, removed from the administrative centres of the ‘Abbâsid caliphate. This explains the early spread of Ismailism among rural inhabitants and Bedouin tribesmen of the Arab lands, notably in southern Iraq, eastern Arabia (Bahrayn) and Yaman. In contrast, in the Iranian lands, especially in the Jîbâl, Khurâsân and Transoxania, the *da‘wa* was primarily addressed to the ruling classes and the educated elite.

The early Ismaili *da‘wa* achieved particular success among those Imâmî Shi‘îs of Iraq, Persia and elsewhere, later designated as *Iltînî* ashariyya (Twelvers), who had been left in a state of disarray and confusion following the death of their eleventh imâm and the simultaneous disappearance of his infant son Muḥammad in 260/874. These Imâmîs shared the same early theological heritage with the Ismailis, especially the Imâmî doctrine of the imâmate. This doctrine, which provided the central teaching of the Twelver and Ismaili Shi‘îs, was based on the belief in the permanent need of mankind for a divinely guided, sinless and infallible (*ma‘ṣûm*) imâm who, after the Prophet Muḥammad, would act as the authoritative teacher and guide of men in all their spiritual affairs. This imâm was entitled to temporal leadership as much as to religious authority; his mandate,

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however, did not depend on his actual rule. The doctrine further taught that the Prophet himself had designated his cousin and son-in-law ʿAli b. Abi Ṭalib (d. 40/661), who was married to the Prophet’s daughter Fāṭima, as his successor under divine command; and that the imāmāt was to be transmitted from father to son among the descendants of ʿAli and Fāṭima, through their son al-Husayn (d. 61/680) until the end of time. This ʿAlid imām was in possession of a special knowledge or ‘ilm, and had perfect understanding of the exoteric (ẓahir) and esoteric (bātin) meanings of the Qur’ān and the commandments and prohibitions of the sharīʿa or the sacred law of Islam. Recognition of this imām, the sole legitimate imām at any time, and obedience to him were made the absolute duties of every believer.

By 286/899, when the Ismaʿilis themselves split into the loyal Fatimid Ismaʿilis and the dissident Qarmatian factions, significant Ismaʿilī communities had appeared in numerous regions of the Arab world and throughout the Iranian lands, as well as in North Africa where the Kutama and other Berber tribal confederations had responded to the summons of the Ismaʿilis daʿwa. The dissident Qarmatians did not acknowledge the imāmāt of ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī (the future founder of the Fatimid caliphate) and his predecessors, the central leaders of early Ismaʿilism, as well as his successors in the Fatimid dynasty. In the same eventful year 286/899, the Qarmatians founded a powerful state of their own in Bahrain, which survived in rivalry with the Fatimid state until 470/1077.1

The success of the early Ismaʿilis daʿwa was crowned in 297/909 by the establishment of the Fatimid state or dawla in North Africa, in Ifrīqiya (today’s Tunisia and eastern Algeria). The foundation of this Fatimid Ismaʿilī Shiʿi caliphate represented not only a great success for the Ismāʿiliyya, who now possessed for the first time a state under the leadership of their imām, but for the entire Shiʿa. Not since the time of ʿAli, had the Shiʿa witnessed the succession of an ʿAlid to the actual leadership of an important Islamic state. By acquiring political power, and then transforming the nascent Fatimid dawla into a flourishing empire, the Ismaʿilī imām presented his Shiʿa challenge to ʿAbbāsid hegemony and Sunni interpretations of Islam. Ismaʿilism, too, had now found its own place among the state-sponsored communities of interpretation in Islam. Henceforth, the Fatimid caliph-imām could claim to act as the spiritual spokesman of Shiʿi Islam in general, much like the ʿAbbāsid caliph was the mouthpiece of Sunni Islam.

On 20 Rabīʿ II 297/4 January 910, the Ismaʿili Imām ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī made his triumphant entry into Raqqāda, the Aḥlabid capital in Ifrīqiya, where he was acclaimed as caliph by the Kutama Berbers and the notables of the uprooted Aḥlabid state. On the following day, the khutba was pronounced for the first time in all the mosques of Qayrawān in the name of ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī. At the same time, a manifesto was read from the pulpits announcing that leadership had finally come to be vested in the ahl al-bayt. As one of the first acts of the new regime, the jurists of Ifrīqiya were instructed to give their legal opinions in accordance with the Shiʿi principles of jurisprudence. The new caliphate and dynasty came to be known as Fatimid (Fāṭimīyya), derived from the name of the Prophet’s daughter Fāṭima, to whom al-Mahdī and his successors traced their ancestry.

The ground for the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate in Ifrīqiya had been carefully prepared since 280/893 by the dāʿī Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shiʿi, who had been active among the Kutama Berbers of the Lesser Kabylia. It was from his base in the Maghrib that the dāʿī al-Shiʿi converted the bulk of the Kutama Berbers; and with the help of his Kutama armies he eventually seized all of Ifrīqiya. It is to be noted, however, that Shiʿi had never taken deep roots in North Africa,

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where the native Berbers generally adhered to diverse schools of Khārijism while Qayrawān, founded as a garrison town and inhabited by Arab warriors, remained the stronghold of Maliki Sunnism. Under such circumstances, the newly converted Berbers’ understanding of Ismailism, which at the time still lacked a distinctive school of law (madhhab), was rather superficial – a phenomenon that remained essentially unchanged in subsequent decades. The dā‘ī al-Shī‘ī personally taught the Kutāma initiates Ismaili tenets in regular lectures. These lectures were known as the “sessions of wisdom” (majālis al-hikma), as esoteric Ismaili doctrine was referred to as “wisdom” or hikma. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī instructed his subordinate dā‘īs to hold similar sessions in the areas under their jurisdiction.” Later, the dā‘ī al-Shī‘ī’s brother Abū l-‘Abbās, another learned dā‘ī of high intellectual calibre, held public disputations with the leading Maliki jurists of Qayrawān, expounding the Shi‘ī foundations of the new regime and the legitimate rights of the āhl al-bayt to the leadership of the Islamic community. The ground was thus rapidly laid also doctrinally for the establishment of the new Shi‘ī caliphate.

The Fatimid caliph-imām al-Mahdī (d. 322/934) and his next three successors, ruling from Ifriqiyya, encountered numerous difficulties while consolidating the pillars of their state. In addition to the continued animosity of the ‘Abbāsids, and the Umayyads of Spain, who as rival claimants to the caliphate entertained their own designs for North Africa, the early Fatimids had numerous military entanglements with the Byzantines. They also devoted much of their energy to subduing the rebellions of the Khārijī Berbers, especially those belonging to the Šāhīta confederation, and the hostilities of the Sunni inhabitants of the cities of Ifriqiyya led by their influential Maliki jurists. All this made it extremely difficult for the early Fatimids to secure control over any region of the Maghrib, beyond the heartland of Ifriqiyya, for any extended period. It also made the propagation of the Ismaili da‘wa rather impractical in the Maghrib. In fact, ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī and his immediate successors did not actively engage in the extension of their da‘wa in order to avoid hostile reactions of the majoritarian Khārijī and Sunni inhabitants of North Africa. Nevertheless, the Ismailis were now for the first time permitted to practise their faith openly and without fearing persecution within Fatimid dominions, while outside the boundaries of their state they were obliged, as before, to observe taqiyya or precautionary dissimulation of their true beliefs.

In line with their universal claims the Fatimid caliph-imāms had, however, not abandoned their da‘wa aspirations on assuming power. Claiming to possess sole legitimate religious authority, the Fatimids aimed to extend their authority and rule over the entire Muslim umma and even the regions of the world inhabited by non-Muslims. As a result, they retained the network of dā‘īs operating on their behalf both within and outside Fatimid dominions, although initially they effectively refrained from da‘wa activities within the Fatimid state. It took the Fatimids several decades to formally establish their rule in North Africa. Only the fourth Fatimid caliph-imām, al-Mu‘izz (341-365/953-975), was able to pursue successfully policies of war and diplomacy, also concerning himself specifically with the affairs of the Ismaili da‘wa. His overall aim was to extend the universal authority of the Fatimids at the expense of their major rivals, namely, the Umayyads of Spain, the Byzantines and above all, the ‘Abbāsids. The process of codifying Ismaili law, too, attained its climax under al-Mu‘izz mainly through the efforts of al-Qādi al-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974), the foremost Fatimid jurist. Al-Mu‘izz officially commissioned al-Nu‘mān, who headed the Fatimid judiciary from 337/948 in the reign of the third Fatimid caliph-imām al-Manṣūr, to promulgate an Ismaili madhhab. His efforts culminated in the compilation of the Da‘ā‘im al-Islām (The Pillars of Islam), which was endorsed by al-Mu‘izz as the official code of the Fatimid dawla. The Ismailis,
too, now possessed a system of law and jurisprudence as well as an Ismaili paradigm of governance.

As developed by al-Nu‘mān, Ismaili law accorded special importance to the central Shi‘ī doctrine of the imāmate. In fact, the opening chapter in the Da‘ī‘im al-Islām, which relates to wālīya, explains the necessity of acknowledging the rightful imām of the time, viz., the Fatimid caliph-imām, also providing Islamic legitimation for the ʿAlid state ruled by the Fatimids belonging to the Prophet’s family. In fact, the authority of the infallible Fatimid ʿAlid imām and his teachings were listed as the third principal source of Ismaili law, after the Qur’ān and the sunna of the Prophet which are accepted as the first two sources by all Muslims. In sum, it was al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān who elaborated in his legal compendia a doctrinal basis for the Fatimids’ legitimacy as ruling caliph-imāms, also lending support to their universal claims.

Al-Mu‘izz, as noted, was the first member of his dynasty to have concerned himself with the Ismaili da‘wa outside Fatimid dominions. In addition to preparing the ideological ground for Fatimid rule, his da‘wa strategy was based on a number of more specific religio-political considerations. The propaganda of the Qarmatīs of Bahrain, Iraq, Persia and elsewhere, who had continuously refused to recognize the imāmate of the Fatimids, generally undermined the Ismaili da‘wa and the activities of the Fatimid da‘īs in the same regions. It was, indeed, mainly due to the doctrines and practices of the Qarmatīs that the entire Ismaili movement was accused by the Sunnī polemicians and heresiographers of ilhād or deviation in religion, as these hostile sources did not distinguish between the dissident Qarmatīs and those Ismailis who acknowledged the Fatimid caliphs as their imāms. The anti-Ismaili literary campaign of the Sunni establishment, dating mainly to the foundation of Fatimid rule, was particularly intensified in the aftermath of the Qarmatīs’ sack of Mecca in 317/930. At any rate, al-Mu‘izz must have also recognized the military advantages of winning the support of the formidable Qarmatī armies, which would have significantly enhanced the chances of the Fatimids’ victory over the ʿAbbasids in the central Islamic lands. It was in line with these objectives that al-Mu‘izz made certain doctrinal adjustments, rooted in the teachings of the early Isma‘ilis and designed to prove appealing to the Qarmatīs. Perhaps as a concession to the Qarmatī camp, al-Mu‘izz and the Fatimid da‘wa also endorsed the Neoplatonized cosmology first propounded by the Qarmatī dā‘ī Muhammad al-Nasafi (d. 332/943) in his Kitāb al-mahṣūl (Book of the Yield) around 300/912. Henceforth, this new cosmology was generally advocated by the Fatimid da‘wa in preference to the mythological Kūn-Qādār cosmology of the early Isma‘ilis.

The da‘wa strategy of al-Mu‘izz won some success in the dissident camp outside the confines of the Fatimid State. The dā‘ī Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī, who had hitherto belonged to the Qarmatī faction, switched his allegiance to the Fatimid da‘wa. As a result, large numbers of the Qarmatīs of Khurāsān, Sīstān (Arabized, Siyāastān), Makrūn and Central Asia, where al-Sijistānī acted as chief dā‘ī in succession to al-Nasafi and his sons, also acknowledged the Fatimid Ismailī imām. Al-Sijistānī was executed as a heretic (mulhīd) not long after 361/971 on the order of Khalīf b. Ahmad, the Saffarīd amir of Sīstān, but Isma‘ilism survived in the eastern regions of the Iranian


world. Fatimid Ismāʿīlism also succeeded in acquiring a permanent stronghold in Sind, in northern India, where Ismaili communities have survived to modern times. Around 347/958, through the efforts of a Fatimid dāʿī who converted a local Hindu ruler, an Ismaili principality was established in Sind, with its seat in Multan (in present-day Pakistan). Large numbers of Hindus converted to Isma'ilism in that region of the Indian subcontinent, where the khitwa was read in the name of al-Mu'izz and the Fatimids. This Ismaili principality survived until 396/1005 when Sultan Mahmidd of Ghazna invaded Multan and persecuted the Ismailis. Despite the hostilities of the Ghaznawids and their successors, however, Ismailism survived in Sind and later received the protection of the Sūmras, who ruled independently from Thatta for almost three centuries starting in 443/1051. On the other hand, Qarmatīsm persisted in Daylam, Adharbāyjān and other parts of Persia, as well as in Iraq and Central Asia for almost a century after al-Mu'izz. Above all, al-Mu'izz failed to win the support of the Qarmatīs of Bahrain, who effectively frustrated the Fatimids' strategy of eastern expansion into Syria and other central Islamic lands.

Meanwhile, al-Mu'izz had made detailed plans for the conquest of Egypt, a vital Fatimid goal which the first two members of the dynasty had failed to achieve. To that end, the Fatimid da'wa was intensified in Egypt, then beset by numerous economic and political difficulties under disintegrating Ikhshīdid rule. Jawhar, the capable Fatimid commander who had pacified North Africa for al-Mu'izz, was selected to lead the Egyptian expedition. Having encountered only token resistance, Jawhar entered Fustāt, the capital of Ikhshīdīd Egypt, in Sha'ba'n 358/July 969. Jawhar behaved leniently towards Egyptians, declaring a general amnesty. Subsequently, the Fatimids introduced the Ismaili madhhab only gradually in Egypt, where Shi'ism had never acquired a stronghold. Fatimid Egypt remained primarily Sunni, of the Shāfī'ī madhhab, with an important community of Christian Copts. The Fatimids never attempted forced conversion of their subjects and the minoritarian status of the Shi'a remained unchanged in Egypt despite two centuries of Isma'ili Shi'i rule.

Jawhar camped his army to the north of Fustāt and immediately proceeded to build a new royal city there, the future Fatimid capital al-Qāhirah (Cairo). Al-Mu'izz had personally supervised the plan of Cairo with its al-Azhār mosque and Fatimid palace complex. Jawhar ruled over Egypt for four years until the arrival of al-Mu'izz. In line with the eastern strategy of the Fatimids, in 359/969 Jawhar dispatched the main body of the Fatimid armies for the conquest of Palestine and Syria. In the following year, the Fatimids were defeated near Damascus by a coalition of the Qarmatīs of Bahrain, Būyids and other powers. Later in 361/1971, the Qarmatīs of Bahrain advanced to the gates of Fustāt before being driven back. Henceforth, there occurred numerous military encounters between the Fatimids and the Qarmatīs of Bahrain, postponing the establishment of Fatimid rule over Syria for several decades.

In the meantime, al-Mu'izz had made meticulous preparations for the transference of the seat of the Fatimid state to Egypt. He appointed Bulāgūn b. Zīrī, the amīr of the loyal Sanhāja Berbers, as governor of Ibrīqiya. Bulāgūn, like his father, had faithfully defended the Fatimids against the Zanāta Berbers and other enemies in North Africa; and he was to found the Zirīd dynasty of the Maghrib (361-543/972-1148). Accompanied by the entire Fatimid family, Ismaili notables, Kutāma chieftains, as well as the Fatimid treasuries and the coffins of his predecessors, al-Mu'izz crossed the Nile and took possession of his new capital in Ramadān 362/June 973. In Egypt, al-Mu'izz was mainly preoccupied with the elaboration of Fatimid governance in addition to repelling further

9 The gradual establishment and decline of Fatimid rule in Syria is treated at length in Thierry Bianquis, Damas et la Syrie sous la domination fatimide, 359-468/969-1076 (Damascus, 1986-89), 2 vols.
Qarmatí incursions. Having transformed the Fatimid daʿwa from a regional power into an expanding and stable empire with a newly activated da’wa apparatus, al-Muʿizz died in 365/975.

Cairo served from early on as the central headquarters of the Fatimid Ismaʿili daʿwa organization that developed over time and reached its peak under the eighth Fatimid caliph-īmām al-Mustaṣrīr (427-487/1036-1094). The religio-political message of the daʿwa continued to be disseminated both within and outside the Fatimid state through an expanding network of daʿīs. The term daʿwa, it may be noted, referred to both the organization of the Ismaʿili mission, with its elaborate hierarchical ranks or ḥudūd, and the functioning of that organization, including especially the missionary activities of the daʿīs who were the representatives of the daʿwa in different regions.

The organization and functioning of the Ismaʿili daʿwa are among the most secretly guarded aspects of Fatimid Ismaʿilism. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Ismaʿili literature of the Fatimid period recovered in modern times has shed only limited light on this subject. Information is particularly meagre regarding the daʿwa and the activities of the daʿīs in hostile regions outside the Fatimid dawla, such as Iraq, Persia, Central Asia and India, where the daʿīs, fearful of persecution, were continuously obliged to observe taqiyya and secrecy in their operations. All this once again explains why Ismaʿili literature is generally so poor in historiographical details on the activities of the daʿīs—information that in Fatimid times may have been available only to the central headquarters of the Ismaʿili daʿwa, headed by the person of the īmām. However, modern scholarship in Ismaʿili studies, drawing on a variety of Ismaʿili and non-Ismaʿili sources, including histories of Egypt, has now finally succeeded to piece together a relatively reliable sketch of the Fatimid Ismaʿili daʿwa, with some of its major practices and institutions.

The Fatimids, as noted, aspired to be recognized as rightful īmāms by the entire Muslim umma; they also aimed to extend their actual rule over all Muslim lands and beyond. These were, indeed, the central objectives of their daʿwa, which continued to be designated as al-daʿwa al-hādiyya, the rightly guiding summons to mankind to follow the Fatimid Ismaʿili īmām. The word daʿī, literally meaning “summoner,” was used by several Muslim groups and movements, including the early Shiʿī ghulāt, the “Abbāsids, the Muʿtazila, and the Zaydiyya, in reference to their religio-political missionaries. But the term acquired its widest application in connection with the Ismaʿiliyya, while the early Ismaʿilis and Qarmatis in Persia and elsewhere sometimes used other designations such as janāḥ (plural, ajniha) instead of daʿī. It should also be noted that at least from Fatimid times several categories of daʿīs existed in any region. Be that as it may, the term daʿī (plural, daʿāt) was applied generically to any authorized representative of the Fatimid daʿwa, a missionary responsible for propagating Ismaʿilism through winning new converts, and followers for the Ismaʿili īmām of the time. As the provision of instruction in Ismaʿili doctrine for the initiates was from early on an important responsibility of the daʿwa, the daʿī was also entrusted with the religious education of the new converts or mustajibs. Furthermore, the Ismaʿili daʿī served as the unofficial agent of the Fatimid dawla, and promoted secretly the Fatimid cause wherever he operated. The earliest record of this aspect of the daʿī’s activity is best exemplified in the achievements of the daʿī Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī (d. 298/911) in North Africa. Within Fatimid dominions, the Ismaʿili daʿwa was protected by the Fatimid dawla and doubtless some collaborative relationship must have existed between them as both were headed by the person of the caliph-īmām. 10

Despite his all-important role, however, very little seems to have been written on the daʿī by the Ismaʿili authors of Fatimid times. The prolific al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, head of the daʿwa for some time, devoted only a few pages to the virtues of an ideal daʿī. 11 He merely emphasizes that the


da‘wa was above all a teaching activity and that the da‘is were teachers who promoted their message also through their own exemplary knowledge and behaviour. A more detailed discussion of the attributes of an ideal da‘i is contained in the only known Ismaili work on the subject written by the da‘i—author Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nisābūrī, al-Nu‘mān’s younger contemporary.12 According to al-Nisābūrī, a da‘i could be appointed only by the imām’s permission (‘idhn). The da‘is, especially those operating in remote lands outside Fatimid dominions, seem to have enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, and they evidently received only their general directives from the central da‘wa headquarters. In these generally hostile regions, the da‘is operated very secretly, finding it rather difficult to establish frequent contacts with the da‘wa headquarters in Cairo.

Under these circumstances, only Ismailis of high educational qualifications combined with proper moral and intellectual attributes could become da‘is leading Ismaili communities in particular localities. The da‘is were expected to have sufficient knowledge of both the zāhīr and the bāṭīn dimensions of religion, or the apparent meanings of the Qur‘ān and the shari‘a and their Ismaili interpretation (ta‘wil). In non-Fatimid lands, the da‘i also acted as a judge in communal disputes and his decisions were binding for the members of the local Ismaili community. Thus, the da‘i was often trained in legal sciences as well. The da‘i was expected to be adequately familiar with the teachings of non-Muslim religions, in addition to knowing the languages and customs of the region in which hefunctioned. All these qualifications were required for the orderly performance of the da‘is duties. As a result, a great number of da‘is were highly learned and cultured scholars and made important contributions to Islamic thought. They also produced the bulk of the Ismaili literature of the Fatimid period in Arabic, dealing with a diversity of exoteric and esoteric subjects ranging from jurisprudence and theology to philosophy and esoteric exegesis.13 ʿNāṣir-i Khusraw was the only major Fatimid da‘i to have written his books in Persian.

Like other aspects of the da‘wa, few details are available on the actual methods used by the Fatimid da‘is for winning and educating new converts. Always avoiding mass proselytization, the da‘i had to be personally acquainted with the prospective initiates, who were selected with special regard to their intellectual abilities and talents. Many Sunni sources, influenced by anti-Islam polemical writings, mention a seven-stage process of initiation (halāgh) into Ismailism, and even provide different names for each stage in a process that allegedly led the novice to the ultimate stage of irreligiosity and unbelief.14 There is no evidence for any fixed graded system in the extant Ismaili literature, although a certain degree of gradualism in the initiation and education of converts must have been unavoidable. Indeed, al-Nisābūrī relates that the da‘i was expected to instruct the musta‘jīb in a gradual fashion, not divulging too much at any given time; the act of initiation itself was perceived by the Ismailis as the spiritual rebirth of the adept.

It was the duty of the da‘i to administer to the initiate an oath of allegiance (‘ahd or mithāq) to the Ismaili imām of the time. As part of this oath, the initiate also pledged to maintain secrecy in Ismaili doctrines taught to him by the da‘i. Only after this oath the da‘i began instructing the musta‘jīb, usually in regular “teaching sessions” held at his house for a number of such adepts. The funds required by the da‘i for the performance of his various duties were raised locally from the


13 For a comprehensive survey of this literature, see I. K. Poonawala, Biobibliography of Isma‘ili Literature (Malibu, Calif., 1977), p. 35-132.

members of his community. The dāʿī kept a portion of the funds collected on behalf of the imām, including the zakāt, the khums and certain Ismaili-specific dues like the najwa, to finance his local operations and send the remainder to the imām through reliable couriers. The latter, especially those going to Cairo from remote daʿwa regions, also brought back Ismaili books for the dāʿīs. The Fatimid dāʿīs were, thus, kept well informed on the intellectual developments within Isma'ilism, especially those endorsed by the daʿwa headquarters.

The scholarly qualifications required of the dāʿīs and the Fatimids' high esteem for learning resulted in a number of distinctive traditions and institutions under the Fatimids. The daʿwa wa was, as noted, concerned with the religious education of converts, who had to be duly instructed in Isma'ilī esoteric doctrine or hikma. For that purpose, a variety of "teaching sessions", generally designated as majālis (singular, majlis), were organized. These sessions, addressed to different audiences, were formalized by the time of the Fatimid caliph-imām al-Hākim (386-411/996-1021). The lectures on Isma'ilī doctrine, the majālis al-hikma, as noted, were initiated by the dāʿī Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī, and then systematized by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān. In the Fatimid state, from early on, the private majālis al-hikma, organized for the exclusive benefit of the Isma'ilī initiates, were held separately for men and women. These lectures, delivered by the chief dāʿī (dāʿī al-duʿāt) who was often also the chief qāḍī (qāḍī al-qudūr) of the Fatimid state, required the prior approval of the Fatimid caliph-imām. There were also public lectures on Isma'ilī law. The legal doctrines of the Isma'ilī madhhabs, adopted as the official system of religious law in the Fatimid state, were applied by the Fatimid judiciary, headed by the chief qāḍī. But the Isma'ilī legal code, governing the juridical basis of the daily life of the Muslim subjects of the Fatimid state, was new and its precepts had to be explained to Isma'ilī as well as non-Ismailis Muslims. As a result, public sessions on the sharīʿa as interpreted by Isma'ilī jurisprudence, were held by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān and his successors as chief qādis, after the Friday midday prayers, in the Fatimid capital. In Cairo, the public sessions on Isma'ilī law were held at al-Azhar and other great mosques there. On these occasions, excerpts from al-Nu'mān's Daʾāʾim al-ʾIslām and other legal works were read to large audiences.

On the other hand, the private majālis al-hikma continued to be held in the Fatimid palace in Cairo for the Isma'ilī initiates who had already taken the oath of allegiance and secrecy. Many of these majālis, normally prepared by or for the chief dāʿī, were in time collected in writing. This distinctive Fatimid tradition of learning found its culmination in the Majālis of al-Muʿayyad fiʾl-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078), chief dāʿī for almost twenty years under al-Muṣṭanṣīr. Fatimid dāʿīs working outside Fatimid dominions seem to have held similar "teaching sessions" for the education of the Isma'ilī initiates. In non-Fatimid territories, the Isma'ilis observed the law of the land wherever they lived, while taking their personal disputes to local Isma'ilī dāʿīs. The Fatimids paid particular attention to the training of their dāʿīs, including those operating outside the confines of the Fatimid state. Among the Fatimid institutions of learning mention should be made of the Dār al-ʾIlm (House of Knowledge), founded in 395/1005 by al-Hākim in Cairo. A wide variety of religious and non-religious sciences were taught at this institution which was also equipped with a major library. Many Fatimid dāʿīs received at least part of their education at the Dār al-ʾIlm. By later Fatimid times, the Dār al-ʾIlm more closely served the needs of the daʿwa wa.

The Fatimid daʿwa wa was organized hierarchically under the overall guidance of the Isma'ilī imām, who authorized its general policies. It should be noted that the daʿwa hierarchy or hudūd mentioned in various Fatimid texts seems to have had reference to a utopian situation, when the Isma'ilī imām

would rule the entire world. Consequently, the da'wa ranks mentioned in these sources were not actually filled at all times; some of them were probably never filled at all. The chief da'i (da'i al-
dawāt) acted as the administrative head of the da'wa organization. He appointed the provincial da'is of the Fatimid state, who were stationed in the main cities of the Fatimid provinces, including Damascus, Tyre, Acre, Ascalon, and Ramla, as well as in some rural areas. These da'is represented the da'wa and the chief da'i, operating alongside the provincial qādi who represented the Fatimid qādi al-quadāt. The chief da'i also played a part in selecting the da'is of non-Fatimid territories. Not much else is known about the functions of the chief da'i, who was closely supervised by the imām. As noted, he was also responsible for organizing the majālis al-hikma; and in Fatimid ceremonial, he ranked second after the chief qādi, if both positions were not held by the same person.77

The title of da'i al-da'wat itself, used in non-Fatimid sources, rarely appears in the Isma'ili texts of the Fatimid period which, instead, usually use the term bāb (or bāb al-abwāb), implying gateway to the imām's "wisdom", in reference to the administrative head of the da'wa organization. The da'i Hamid al-Din al-Kirmānī makes particular allusions to the position of bāb and his closeness to the imām. 78

The organization of the Fatimid da'wa, with its hierarchy of ranks, developed over time and reached its full elaboration under the caliph-imām al-Mustansir.79 There are different references to the da'wa ranks (huddād) after the imām and his bāb. According to the idealized scheme, the world, specifically the regions outside Fatimid dominions, was divided into twelve jaziras or "islands" for da'wa purposes; each jazira representing a separate da'wa region. Delineated on the basis of a combination of geographic and ethnographic considerations, the "islands", collectively designated as the "islands of the earth" (jazā'ir al-ard), included Rūm (Byzantine), Daylam, standing for Persia, Hind (India), Shin (China), and the regions inhabited by Arabs, Nubians, Khazars, Slavs (Śaqaliba), Berbers, Africans (Zanj), and Abyssinians (Ḥabash).80 Other classifications of the "islands", too, seem to have been observed in practice. For instance, Nāṣir Khusrav refers to Kurarsān as a jazira under his own jurisdiction; and this claim is corroborated by the well-informed Ibn Ḥawqal, who further adds that Balūchistān, in eastern Persia, belonged to that jazira.81 In this sense, Kurarsān seems to have included neighbouring regions in today's Afghanistan and Central Asia. Among other regions functioning as jaziras of the Fatimid da'wa, mention may be made of Yaman as well as Iraq and western Persia, for a time headed by the da'i al-Kirmānī.

Each jazira was placed under the overall charge of a high ranking da'i known specifically as hujja (proof, guarantor), also called naqib, lahiq or yad (hand) in early Fatimid times. The hujja was the highest representative of the da'wa in any "island", and he was assisted by a number of subordinate da'is of different ranks operating in the localities under his jurisdiction. These included da'i al-balāgh, al-da'i al-mu'laq, and al-da'i al-mahdīd (or al-mahšūr). There may have been as many as thirty such da'is in some jaziras.82 The particular responsibilities of different da'is are not

clarified in the meagre sources. It seems, however, that dāʾī al-balāgh acted as liaison between the central daʿwa headquarters in the Fatimid capital and the hujjaʿs headquarters in his jazira, and al-dāʾī al-muṭlaq evidently became the chief functionary of the daʿwa, operating with absolute authority in the absence of the hujja and his dāʾī al-balāgh. The regional dāʾīs, in turn, had their assistants, entitled al-maʿdīhan, the licentiate. The sources mention at least two categories of this rank, namely, al-maʿdīhan al-muṭlaq, and al-maʿdīhan al-maḥdīād (or al-maḥšūr), eventually called al-mukāṣir. The maʿdīhan al-muṭlaq often became a dāʾī himself; he was authorized as the chief licentiate to administer the oath of initiation and explain the rules and policies of the daʿwa to the initiatives, while the mukāṣir (literally, breaker) was mainly responsible for attracting prospective converts and breaking their attachments to other religions. The ordinary Ismaili initiates, the mustaṣibs or respondents who referred to themselves as the awliyāʾ Allāh or “friends of God”, did not occupy a rank (ḥadd) at the bottom of the daʿwa hierarchy. Belonging to the ahl al-daʿwa (people of the mission), they represented the elite, the khawāṣṣ, as compared to the common Muslims, designated as the āmmat al-Muslinān or the āwānm. The ranks of the Fatimid daʿwa, numbering to seven from bāb (or dāʾī al-duʿāʾī) to mukāṣir, together with their idealized functions and their corresponding celestial hierarchy, are elaborated by the dāʾī al-Kīrmānī.23

The Fatimid daʿwa was propagated openly throughout the Fatimid state enjoying the protection of the government apparatus. But the success of the daʿwa within Fatimid dominions was both limited and transitory, with the major exception of Syria where different Shiʿī traditions had deep roots. During the North African phase of the Fatimid caliphate, Ismailism retained its minoritarian status in Ifriqiya and other Fatimid territories in the Maghrib, where the spread of the daʿwa was effectively checked by Mālikī Sunnism and Khārijism. By 440/1048, Ismailism had virtually disappeared from the former Fatimid dominions in North Africa, where the Ismailis were severely persecuted after the departure of the Fatimids. In Fatimid Egypt, too, the Ismailis always remained a minority community. It was outside the Fatimid state, in the jaziras, that the Fatimid Ismaili daʿwa achieved its greatest and most lasting success. Many of these “islands” in the Islamic world, scattered from Yemen to Transoxania, were well acquainted with a diversity of Shiʿī traditions, including Ismailism, and large numbers in these regions responded to the summons of the Ismaili dāʾīs. By the time of the Fatimid caliph-imām al-Muṣṭaṃṣir, significant Ismaili communities representing a united movement had appeared in many of the jaziras. By then, the dissident Qarmats had either disintegrated or joined the dynamic Fatimid daʿwa.

In Iraq and Persia, the Fatimid dāʾīs had systematically intensified their activities from the time of the sixth Fatimid caliph-imām al-Hākim. Aiming to undermine the ʿAbbāsids, they concentrated their efforts on a number of influential tribal amīrs in Iraq, at the very centre of ʿAbbāsīd power. Foremost among the dāʾīs of al-Hākim’s reign was Ḥamdī al-Dīn al-Kīrmānī (d. after 411/1020), perhaps the most learned Ismaili scholar of the entire Fatimid period. Designated as the hujjaʿat al-ʿIrāqayn, as he spent a good part of his life as a chief dāʾī in both the Arab Iraq and the western parts of Persia, al-Kīrmānī succeeded in converting several local chieftains in Iraq, including the ʿUqaylid amīr of Kūfah and several other towns who acknowledged Fatimid suzerainty. It was in reaction to the success of the daʿwa in Iraq that the ʿAbbāsīd caliph al-Qādir (381-422/991-1031) launched a series of military campaigns against the refractors as well as an anti-Fatimid literary campaign, culminating in the Baghdad manifesto of 402/1011 denouncing the Fatimids and refuting their ʿAlid genealogy.24 This manifesto was read from the pulpits throughout the

"Abbasid caliphate. It was also the learned dāʾī al-Kirmânī who was invited to Cairo to refute, on behalf of the daʿwa headquarters, the extremist doctrines then being expounded by the founders of the Druze movement.

The daʿwa continued to be propounded successfully in Iraq, Persia, and other eastern lands even after the ardent Sunni Saljuqs had replaced the Shiʿi Būyids as the real masters of the "Abbasid caliphate in 447/1055. Important Ismaili communities were now in existence in Fars, Kirmān, Isfahān and many other parts of Persia. In Fars, the daʿwa had achieved particular success through the efforts of dāʾī al-Muʿayyad fī Ṭ-Dīn al-Shirāzī, who had penetrated the ruling Būyid circles. After converting AbūKālijār Marzubān (415-440/1024-1048), the Būyid amīr of Fars and Khūzistān, and many of his courtiers, however, al-Muʿayyad was advised to flee in order to escape "Abbasid persecution. Subsequently, he settled in Cairo, where he played an active part in the affairs of the Fatimid daʿwā as well as the Ismaʿilī daʿwa which he headed for twenty years from 450/1058 until shortly before his death in 470/1078. As revealed in his autobiography, al-Muʿayyad played a crucial role as an intermediary between the Fatimid regime and the Turkish commander al-Basāṣīrī who championed the Fatimid cause in Iraq against the Saljuqs and the "Abbasids. In fact, al-Basāṣīrī, with Fatimid help and al-Muʿayyad's strategic guidance, seized several towns in Iraq and entered Baghdad itself at the end of 450/1058. In the "Abbasid capital the khuṭba was now pronounced for al-Mustansīr until al-Basāṣīrī was defeated a year later. That Fatimid suzerainty was recognized in "Abbasid Iraq-albeit for only one year-attests to the success of the dāʾī al-Muʿayyad and the daʿwa activities there. Al-Muʿayyad established close relations between the daʿwa headquarters in Cairo and the local headquarters in several jazirās, especially those located in Yaman and the Iranian lands.

In Persia proper, the Ismaʿilī daʿwa had continued to spread in the midst of Saljuq dominions. By the 460's/1070's, the Persian Ismaʿilīs were under the overall leadership of a chief dāʾī, ʿAbd al-Malīk b. ʿAttāsh, who established his secret headquarters in Isfahān, the main Saljuq capital. A religious scholar of renown and a capable organizer in his own right, ʿAbd al-Malīk was also responsible for launching the career of Hasan Sabbāh, his future successor and the founder of the independent Nizārī Ismaʿilī daʿwa and state. Further east, in certain parts of Khurāsān, Badakhshān and adjacent areas in Transoxania, the daʿwa continued to be active with various degrees of success after the downfall of the Sāmānids in 395/1005. Despite incessant persecutions of the Ghaznavids and other Turkish dynasties ruling over those regions of the Iranian world, Nāṣir Khusrāw and other dāʾīs managed to win the allegiance of an increasing number to the Fatimid Ismaʿilī imām.

A learned theologian and philosopher, and one of the foremost poets of the Persian language, Nāṣir Khusrāw spread the daʿwa throughout Khurāsān from around 444/1052, after returning from his well-documented voyage to Fatimid Egypt. As the hujiyā of Khurāsān, he originally established his secret base of operations in his native Balkh (near today’s Mazār-i Sharif in northern Afghanistan). A few years later, Sunni hostilities obliged him to take permanent refuge in the valley of Yumgān in Badakhshān. There, enjoying the protection of a local Ismaʿilī amīr, Nāṣir spent the rest of his life in the service of the daʿwa. It is interesting to note that even from his exile in the midst of the remote Pamirs, Nāṣir maintained his contacts with the daʿwa headquarters in Cairo, still headed by the chief dāʾī al-Muʿayyad. In fact, the lifelong friendship between al-Muʿayyad and Nāṣir Khusrāw dates to 439/1047 when both of these distinguished Persian Ismaʿilīs arrived in the Fatimid capital. On that occasion, Nāṣir stayed in Cairo for three years furthering

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his Ismaili education. It was evidently Nāṣīr Khusrwā who extended the daʿwa in Badakhšān, now divided by the Oxus between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. At any rate, the modern-day Ismailis of Badakhšān, and their offshoot communities in Hunza and other northern areas of Pakistan, all regard Nāṣīr Khusrwā as the founder of their Ismaili communities. Nāṣīr Khusrwā died not long after 462/1070, and his mausoleum is still preserved near Fayḍābād, the capital of Afghan Badakhšān.

Nāṣīr Khusrwā was also the last major proponent of “philosophical Ismailism”, a distinctive intellectual tradition elaborated by the dāʿīs of the Iranian lands during the Fatimid period. Influenced by the pseudo-Aristotelian texts circulating in the Muslim world, these dāʿīs elaborated complex metaphysical systems harmonizing Ismaili Shiʿī theology with a diversity of philosophical traditions, notably Neoplatonism. The dāʿīs of the Iranian lands, perhaps in reflection of their daʿwa policy, wrote for the educated strata of society, aiming to appeal intellectually to the ruling elite. This may explain why these dāʿīs, starting with al-Nasafi, expressed their theology in terms of the then most fashionable philosophical themes. This tradition has only recently been studied by modern scholars mainly on the basis of the numerous extant works of al-Sijistānī, while Nāṣīr Khusrwā’s contributions still remain largely unexplored. Be that as it may, these dāʿīs of the Iranian lands elaborated the earliest tradition of philosophical theology in Shiʿī Islam without actually compromising the essence of their message which revolved around the Shiʿī doctrine of the imāmāte.

The Ismaili daʿwa achieved one of its major successes of the Fatimid times in Yaman, where Ismailism had survived in a subdued form after the initial efforts of the dāʿīs Ibn Hawshab Mansūr al-Yaman (d. 302/914) and Ibn al-Faḍl (d. 303/915). By the time of al-Mustanshir, the leadership of the daʿwa in Yaman had come to be vested in the dāʿī ʿAlī b. Muhammad al-Ṣulayḥī, a chieftain of the influential Banū Ḥamdān. In 429/1038, “ʿAlī rose in the mountainous region of Ḥarāz marking the foundation of the Ṣulayḥid state. The Ṣulayḥids recognized the suzerainty of the Fatimids and ruled over various parts of Yaman for more than a century. ʿAlī al-Ṣulayḥī headed the Ismaili daʿwa as well as the Ṣulayḥid state in Yaman, an arrangement that underwent several changes in subsequent times. By 455/1063, he had subjugated almost all of Yaman, enabling the daʿwa to be propagated openly in his dominions. The Ṣulayḥids established close relations with the Fatimid daʿwa headquarters in Cairo, when al-Muʿayyad was the chief dāʿī there. After ʿAlī, who was murdered in a tribal vendetta in 459/1067, his son Ahmad al-Mukarram succeeded as sultan to the leadership of the Ṣulayḥid state, while the dāʿī Lamak b. Mālik al-Ḥarmādī (d. 491/1098) acted as the executive head of the Yamanī daʿwa.


29 The earliest Ismaili accounts of the Ṣulayḥids, and the contemporary daʿwa in Yaman, are contained in the dāʿī Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn b. al-Ḥasan’s Uṣūn al-akhbār, vol. 1, and his Nazhat al-aqḥār, which are still in manuscript forms. The best modern study here is Husayn F. al-Ḥamānī’s al-Ṣulayḥiyā yā waʾ l-ḥaraka al-Fatāniyya fī l-Yaman (Cairo, 1955), especially p. 62-231.
From the latter part of Ahmad al-Mukarram’s reign (459-477/1067-1084), when the Šūlayhid lost much of northern Yemen to Zaydis, effective authority in the Šūlayhid state was exercised by his consort, al-Malika al-Sayyida Ḥurra, a most remarkable queen and Ismaili leader.30 She played an increasingly important role in the affairs of the Yamani da’wa culminating in her appointment as the hujja of Yaman by al-Mustanṣir. This represented the first application of a high rank in the da’wa hierarchy to a woman. Al-Mustanṣir also charged her with the affairs of the da’wa in western India. The Šūlayhid played a major part in the renewed efforts of the Fatimids to spread Ismailism on the Indian subcontinent, an objective related to the Fatimid trade interests. At any rate, from around 460/1067, Yamani da’is were dispatched to Gujarāt under the close supervision of the Šūlayhids. These da’is founded a new Ismaili community in Gujarāt which in time grew into the present Tayyibi Bohra community.

By the early decades of al-Mustanṣir’s long reign (427-487/1036-1094), the Fatimid caliphate had already embarked on its political decline. In rapid succession, the Fatimids now lost almost all of their possessions outside Egypt proper, with the exception of a few coastal towns in the Levant. Al-Mustanṣir’s death in 487/1094 and the ensuing dispute over his succession led to a major schism in the Ismaili da’wa as well, aggravating the deteriorating situation of the Fatimid regime. Al-Mustanṣir’s eldest surviving son and heir designate, Nizār, was deprived of his succession rights by the scheming and ambitious al-Afdal, who a few months earlier had succeeded his own father Badr al-Jamāli (d. 487/1094) as the all-powerful Fatimid vizier and “commander of the armies” (amīr al-jayyash). Al-Afdal installed Nizār’s much younger half-brother Ahmad to the Fatimid caliphate with the title of al-Musta’li bi’llāh, and he immediately obtained for him the allegiance of the da’wa leaders in Cairo. In protest, Nizār rose in revolt in Alexandria, but was defeated and executed soon afterwards in 488/1095. These events permanently split the Ismaili da’wa and community into two rival factions, designated as Musta’liyya and Nizāriyya after al-Mustanṣir’s sons who had claimed his heritage. The imāmate of al-Musta’li, who had actually succeeded his father on the Fatimid throne, was recognized by the da’wa organization in Cairo, henceforth serving as central headquarters of the Musta’li Ismaili da’wa, and by the Ismailis of Egypt, Yaman and western India, who depended on the Fatimid establishment. In Syria, too, the bulk of the Ismailis seem to have initially joined the Musta’li camp. The situation was drastically different in the eastern Islamic lands where the Fatimids no longer exercised any political influence after the Basāsiri episode.

By 487/1094, Ḥasan Šabbāb, a most capable strategist and organizer, had emerged as chief da’i of the Ismailis of Persia and, probably, of all Saljūq territories. Earlier, Hasan had spent three years in Egypt, furthering his Ismaili education and closely observing the difficulties of the Fatimid state. On his return to Persia in 473/1081, Hasan operated as a Fatimid da’i in different Persian provinces while developing his own ideas for organizing an open revolt against the Saljūqs. The revolt was launched in 483/1090 by Hasan’s seizure of the mountain fortress of Alamūt in northern Persia, which henceforth served as his headquarters. At the time of al-Mustanṣir’s succession dispute Hasan was already following an independent revolutionary policy; and he did not hesitate to uphold Nizār’s rights and break off his relations with the Fatimid establishment and the da’wa headquarters in Cairo. This decision, fully supported by the entire Ismaili communities of Persia and Iraq, in fact marked the foundation of the independent Nizāri Ismaili da’wa on behalf of the Nizārī imām who was then inaccessible. Hasan Šabbāb also succeeded in creating a state, centred at Alamūt, with vast territories and an intricate network of fortresses scattered in different parts of Persia as well as in Syria. Hasan Šabbāb (d. 518/1124) and his next two successors at Alamūt, Kiyā Buzurg-Umid and his son Muḥammad, ruled as da’is and hujjas representing the absent Nizārī imām.

559/1164, the Nizārī imāms themselves emerged openly at Alamūt and took charge of the affairs of their da’wa and state.  

The Nizārī state lasted for some 166 years until it too was uprooted by the Mongol hordes in 654/1256. However, the Nizārī Isma'ilis da’wa and community survived the Mongol catastrophe. The Nizārī Isma'ilis, who currently recognize the Aga Khan as their imām, are today found in more than twenty-five countries of Asia, Africa, Europe and North America.

In the meantime, Musta’īli Isma'ilism had witnessed an internal schism of its own with seminal consequences. On al-Musta’īli’s premature death in 495/1101, all Musta’īli Isma'ilis recognized al-Āmir, his son and successor to the Fatimid caliphate, as their imām. Due to the close relations then still existing between Şülayhīd Yaman and Fatimid Egypt, the queen al-Sayyida, too, acknowledged al-Āmir’s imāmate. The assassination of al-Āmir in 524/1130 confronted the Musta’īli da’wa and communities with a major crisis. By then, the Fatimid caliphate was disintegrating rapidly, while the Şülayhīd state was beset by its own mounting difficulties. It was under such circumstances that on al-Āmir’s death power was assumed as regent in the Fatimid state by his cousin ‘Abd al-Majīd, while al-Āmir’s infant son and designated successor al-Ţayyib had disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Shortly afterwards in 526/1132, ‘Abd al-Majīd successfully claimed the Fatimid caliphate as well as the imāmate of the Musta’īli Isma'ilis with the title of al-Ḥāfiz li-Din Allāh. The irregular accession of al-Ḥāfiz was endorsed, as in the case of al-Musta’īli, by the da’wa headquarters in Cairo; and, therefore, it also received the support of the Musta’īli communities of Egypt and Syria, who were dependent on the Fatimids. These Musta’īli Isma'ilis, recognizing al-Ḥāfiz (d. 544/1149) and the later Fatimid caliphs as their imāms, became known as Ḥāfiziyā.

In Yaman, too, some Musta’īlis, led by the Zura'yīds of ‘Adān who had won their independence from the Şülayhīds, supported the Ḥāfizī da’wa. On the other hand, the aged Şülayhīd queen al-Sayyida who had already drifted apart from the Fatimid regime, upheld the rights of al-Ţayyib and recognized him as al-Āmir’s successor to the imāmate. Consequentially, she severed her ties with Fatimid Cairo, much in the same way as her contemporary Hasan Šabbāh had done a few decades earlier on al-Mustanṣir’s death. Her decision was fully endorsed by the Musta’īli community of Gujarāt. The Şülayhīd queen herself continued to take care of the Yamanī da’wa supporting al-Ţayyib’s imāmate, later designated as Ţayyibiyā. Until her death in 532/1138, al-Sayyida worked systematically for the consolidation of the Ţayyibī da’wa. In fact, soon after 526/1132 she appointed al-Dhu’ayb b. Mūsā al-Wādīʾī (d. 546/1151) as al-dāʾī al-matlaq, or the dāʾī with absolute authority over the affairs of the Yamanī da’wa. This marked the foundation of the independent Ţayyibī Musta’īli da’wa on behalf of al-Ţayyib and his successors to the Ţayyibī imāmate, all of whom have remained inaccessible.  

The Ţayyibī da’wa was, thus, made independent of the Fatimids as well as the Şülayhīds; and as such, it survived the downfall of both dynasties. The Ţayyibī da’wa was initially led for several centuries from Yaman by al-Dhu’ayb’s successors as dāʾīs. In subsequent times, the stronghold of Ţayyibī Isma'ilism was transferred to the Indian subcontinent and the community subdivided into several groups; the two major (Dāʾūdī-Sulaymānī) groups still possess the authorities of their separate lines of dāʾī matlaqs while awaiting the emer-

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gence of their imām. The Ṭayyibi Ismailis have also preserved a good share of the Ismaili literature of the Fatimid period.

On 7 Muharram 567/10 September 1171, Saladin, ironically the last Fatimid vizier, formally ended Fatimid rule by instituting the khorba in Cairo in the name of the reigning ʿAbbāsid caliph. At the time, al-ʿĀdid, destined to be the seal of the Fatimid dynasty, lay dying in his palace. The Fatimid dawla collapsed uneventfully after 262 years amidst the complete apathy of the Egyptian populace. Saladin, the champion of Sunnī "orthodoxy" and the future founder of the Ayyūbid dynasty, then adopted swift measures to persecute the Ismailis of Egypt and suppress their daʿwa and rituals, all representing the Ḥāfizī form of Ismailism. Indeed, Ismailism soon disappeared completely and irrevocably from Egypt, where it had enjoyed the protection of the Fatimid dawla. In Yaman, too, the Ḥāfizī daʿwa did not survive the Fatimid caliphate on which it was dependent. On the other hand, by 567/1171 Nizārī and Ṭayyibi daʿwas and communities had acquired permanent strongholds in Persia, Syria, Yaman and Gujrat. Later, all Central Asian Ismailis as well as an important Khoja community in India also acknowleged the Nizārī daʿwa. That Ismailism survived at all the downfall of the Fatimid dynasty was, thus, mainly due to the astonishing record of success achieved by the Ismaili daʿwa of Fatimid times outside the confines of the Fatimid dawla.